

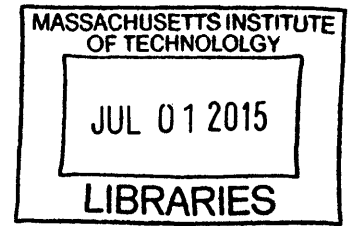
**Developing Experience: Alexander Dorner's Exhibitions, from Weimar Republic
Germany to the Cold War United States**

by

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**Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture: History and Theory of Art**

**At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology
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Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Abstract:

Following the work of German-American curator Alexander Dorner (1893-1957) from his early curatorial career in Niedersachsen to professorships in New England, this dissertation explores the intersections of Euro-American modernism and developing ideations of experience within aesthetic philosophy. Dorner's work was formulated in deep engagement with (and often intentional contradiction to) the art theory being incubated in contemporaneous art institutions, pedagogies, and practices. His written texts and museum praxis responded to emerging notions of subjectivity, restoration, and perception in the aesthetic theory of Alois Riegl and Erwin Panofsky, art restoration mandates advocated by German museum leaders such as Max Sauerlandt and Kurt Karl Eberlein, and the artistic productions of El Lissitzky and Herbert Bayer. Against shifting expressions of democracy in Weimar Germany and the mid-century United States, Dorner's polemical focus on museum experience was, in effect, an attempt to train citizens for collective but heterogeneous social life.

Thesis Supervisor: Caroline A. Jones
Title: Professor of the History of Art

A note on translations:

All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted. Simon Cowper offered editorial assistance with the majority of the translations.

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Introduction

The Evolution of Alexander Dorner

Reviewing the Hanover Provinzialmuseum in *Der Cicerone* in 1929, Sigfried Giedion celebrated the triumph of artist El Lissitzky's masterwork of exhibition design, the *Abstract Cabinet*, and praised the daring of overseeing curator Alexander Dorner in commissioning a permanent installation of a type of room otherwise seen only in temporary exhibitions. Giedion compared Dorner's museum, in its support of contemporary art and display devices, to an "experimental laboratory" ("Versuchslaboratorium") willing to be an active host to the most pressing discussions in art of the moment. He lauded Dorner's break with a previous generation of museum directors, whose universalist presentations of art enforced an "eternity viewpoint" ("Ewigkeitsstandpunkt") or a position of *sub speciae aeternitatis*.¹

Contrastingly, against the grain of what he saw as an obsolete universalism, Dorner embraced a historicist version of presenting and interpreting art history. Dorner's galleries were arranged chronologically, making an argument for shifts in style connected to both material and cultural influences. Throughout the galleries and his written texts about them, Dorner used the trope of advancing compositional perspective to evince a progressive development of art history. In this, he echoed the ideas of the artist he ultimately tapped to represent the acceleration of dimensional perspective into a

¹ Sigfried Giedion, "Lebendiges Museum," *Der Cicerone* 21, no. 4 (1929): 103.

contemporary world of abstract, relative space: El Lissitzky. Lissitzky's own text published two years earlier, "A. and Pangeometry," had argued that "perspectival space" was imprisoned in a "constant three-dimensional state . . . fitt[ing] the world into a cube" where orthogonal lines were used to represent endless recession but were in fact completely finite, bound to the world of Euclidean geometry.² Pioneering the advance beyond this impasse, Lissitzky boldly announced, he and his artistic cohort had found ways to construct "imaginary space" using material and technology that gave a sense of changing form relative to the viewing activities of a beholder (exemplified by a rotating line that yielded the impression of greater mass when moving at high velocity).³ Dorner's gallery trajectory chronicled just such a through line of evolving compositional representation, presenting art through its evolving historical styles, materials, geographical and religious contexts, and terms of viewer reception.

"Developing Experience: Alexander Dorner's Exhibitions, from Weimar Republic Germany to the Cold War United States" chronicles Dorner's advocacy for the evolution of epochal differentiation as it responded to emerging categories of "experience" in contemporaneous formulations across the spectrum of critical theory—about structures of perception, the politics of *Sachlichkeit*, and the currency of Pragmatism. As more recent

² El Lissitzky, "A. and Pangeometry," trans. Helene Aldwinckle, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, ed. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1968), 349. Originally published in *Europa-Almanach* (Potsdam, 1925).

³ *Ibid.*, 352-353. Erwin Panofsky's response to this claim, in a footnote in his "Perspective as Symbolic Form," opposed the notion that Euclidian geometry did not apply to objects in motion, but he heralded Lissitzky's essay as exemplifying a longer legacy of artistic rejection of mathematical perspective for its incommensurability with the "true being" of the world and the subjectivity surrounding human perception of it. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, ed. and trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 71-72, 153-54, note 73. Linda Dalrymple Henderson elaborates Lissitzky's shifting interpretation of relativity theory as recorded in this essay, and the embrace of a temporal "dimension" in his artwork, in her masterful overview *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013), 428-434. First published 1984.

art historical scholarship has come to take greater interest in the legacy of the exhibitionary apparatus, Dorner has been conjured from history to speak for a “pre-contemporary” legacy of participation, interactivity, experimentalism, and avant-garde design—disciplinary concerns so new that they have not yet been fully historicized. Scholars since the 1990s have looked to Dorner as an early advocate for artists’ “environments” (seen as precursors of installation art) as in Claire Bishop’s recent essay on the reconstruction of historical exhibitions, and as a historical reference for pioneering “participation” in the museum in larger volumes on the history of museum display by Mary Anne Staniszewski and Charlotte Klonk.⁴ Notably, all of these texts treat Dorner’s commissioning of the *Abstract Cabinet*. For Dorner, writing in his time, Lissitzky’s constructivist abstraction expanded on conventional perspectival composition, demonstrating an evolution of art now opening out to a fourth dimension of durational, experienced time, and Dorner made allusions to film and relativity theory alike when writing about Lissitzky’s space in his galleries.

The first chapter of this dissertation elaborates these claims, considering them in relation to Dorner’s responses to broader art historical discourses about *Kunstwollen*, perspective, and abstraction. Describing Dorner’s work at the Provinzialmuseum in Hanover, that chapter is indebted to two excellent German-language dissertations that

⁴ Each of these scholars refers to Dorner’s commissioning of Lissitzky’s *Abstract Cabinet*. Claire Bishop, “Reconstruction Era: The Anachronic Time(s) of Installation Art” in Germano Celant, ed., *Revisiting When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, Ca’ Corner della Regina, 2013), 429–430, accessed February 21, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/7881356/Reconstruction_Era_The_Anachronic_Time_s_of_Installation_Art; Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 17–18; Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 16-21.

painstakingly historicize Dorner's reorganization of the *Kunstsammlung*: Ines Katenhusen's 1998 *Kunst und Politik: Hannovers Auseinandersetzungen mit der Moderne in der Weimarer Republik* and Monika Flacke-Knoch's *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik: Die Tätigkeit Alexander Dorners im Provinzialmuseum Hannover*, published 1985. Both of these works situate Dorner's work in Hanover within the complex political landscape of (art) institutional change that characterized Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵

"Developing Experience" expands on this research by contextualizing these developments within specific period discourses in the realm of art theory. Dorner's claims about the evolution of artistic theory—juxtaposed on the pages of this dissertation to both period ideations of evolutionary genetic theory and the lineage of artistic volition alike—also reveal the multifaceted tensions of his modernist moment: we witness Dorner attempting to evaluate the construction of identity through epochal change, as well as the merits of abstraction and pitfalls of expressionism. By reading these issues through a lens of geometric change, what he called the "march of the dimensions," Dorner attempted to circumvent the trappings of *Geist* or more romantic visions of modernity.

Dorner's work with artists in Hanover has been explored in the work of art historians including Maria Gough, Kai-Uwe Hemken, and Noam Elcott.⁶ These scholars have each contributed to disentangling the unique ideas and works by Dorner's best-known collaborating modern artists, El Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy, from the

⁵ Ines Katenhusen, *Kunst und Politik: Hannovers Auseinandersetzungen mit der Moderne in der Weimarer Republik* (Hanover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1998); Monika Flacke-Knoch, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik: Die Tätigkeit Alexander Dorners im Provinzialmuseum Hannover* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag für Kunst und Literatur, 1985). See bibliography for additional work on Dorner by these scholars.

⁶ See bibliography.

architectural and interpretive framing apparatuses of Dorner's curatorial container. This important work helps to make clear where Dorner's curatorial enterprise was separate or divergent from that of the artists' and where it—for better or worse—continues to haunt the historical reception of these artists' works. In some ways, this dissertation takes the opposite approach of minimizing artistic intent and de-privileging instances of collaboration: attempting primarily to understand the material and intellectual circumstances surrounding Dorner's curatorial approach, in order to better understand the structures of historicization that have come to convey the artists he worked with into our present understanding.

Dorner's work, while idiosyncratic, is symptomatic of broader discursive milieus; the curator was keen to participate in a range of critical debates formulated in Weimar Germany that echoed into the National Socialist context and were later taken up in circuits of post-war United States émigrés. For example, the circumstances surrounding Dorner's foray into the "Facsimile Debate" explored in the second chapter of this dissertation, in which he took the polemical position that the public good of a work of art resides in its achieving an effective experience (and not in its material authenticity), reveals period concerns that extended far beyond art restoration theory. Indeed, the positions put forward in this debate cut to core anxieties over deeply modernist tensions between truth and falsity, objecthood and perceptual experience in the construction of the aesthetic, and the nature of subjectivity writ large—ideas encountered repeatedly over the course of Dorner's career as it intersected with the ideas of others ranging from Hausenstein to Lukács, from Heidegger to Dewey. Prior work by art historians Michael Diers, Charles W. Haxthausen, and Megan Luke, as well as philosopher György Márkus,

have made connections between ideas of auratic authenticity and photographic representation inherent to these debates, linking them to Walter Benjamin's well-known "Work of Art" essay.⁷ "Developing Experience" elaborates on the foundational premises put forth by these contemporary scholars, demonstrating that the Weimar discussions about reproduction of artworks owed as much to exhibitionary concerns as they did to new modes of mechanical rendering. This is intended as well to recast the stakes of Benjamin's essay, contextualizing it in relation to Dorner's energetic contributions to the facsimile debate.

The relationship between the subjectively perceiving individual and the environmental truths/material things/broader society that surrounded him were key matters of concern for Dorner and his German contemporaries. This dissertation shows how Dorner further explored such matters after his move to the United States, making them manifest in the elaborate designs surrounding collection artifacts in the Museum of Art of the Rhode Island School of Design (R.I.S.D.), allowing them to underpin his dismissal of "art" in favor of the transactions of everyday life in his traveling exhibition with Herbert Bayer, and maintaining their reverberations in his treatises about "eternal" versus "self-changing" truth propositions. Dorner's peculiar conjecture that the non-absolute individual *Erlebnis* (lived experience) could be steered away from a type of

⁷ Michael Diers, "Kunst und Reproduktion: Der Hamburger Faksimile-Streit. Zum Wiederabdruck eines unbekannt gebliebenen Panofsky-Aufsatzes von 1930," in *IDEA: Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle* 5 (1986): 125–37; Charles W. Haxthausen, "'Abstract with Memories': Klee's 'Auratic' Pictures," in *Paul Klee. Philosophical Vision: From Nature to Art*, ed. John Sallis (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2012); Megan Luke, "The Photographic Reproduction of Space: Wölfflin, Panofsky, Kracauer," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58 (Spring/Autumn 2010): 339–43; György Markus, "Walter Benjamin and the German 'Reproduction Debate,'" in *Moderne begreifen*, ed. Christine Magerski, Robert Savage, and Christiane Weller (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2007).

cultural fixity that he relegated to the past, and could be produced in composite as a modern heterogeneous democracy, found new resonance within the post-war United States context.⁸

Few historians have dedicated attention to Dorner's post-emigration work; of those who have, Curt Germundson and Ines Katzenhusen focus on his tenure at R.I.S.D., considering Dorner's continued endeavors to produce "experiential" space (forecasting his interest in John Dewey), and his aspirations to produce a more populist museum through school outreach initiatives and radio addresses, as well as the inability to assimilate to society politics that contributed to his dismissal.⁹ Joan Ockman's 1997 essay "The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way Beyond Art" handles the full extent of Dorner's career, from Germany to the United States, with a lengthy exposition of his book on Herbert Bayer as well as a description of Dorner's later proposals for theoretical museums that were never built. Noting the omission of Bayer from later editions of Dorner's *The way beyond 'art,'* Ockman postulates that László Moholy-Nagy would have ostensibly been a better choice of subject for the original monographic section of Dorner's book given that he had "the closest philosophical, if not personal, affinities with Dorner," while Bayer's professional "pragmatics" were of a different ilk than the pragmatist philosophy that Dorner pursued.¹⁰

⁸ For more on the postwar United States efforts to reconcile the ideal of "unity-in-diversity," see Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2103), 157 ff.

⁹ A forthcoming German-language biography by Ines Katzenhusen will present an extended life history of Dorner, continuing through his U.S.-years to his death while traveling in Europe.

¹⁰ Joan Ockman, "The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way beyond Art," in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, ed. R. E. Somol (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 102. Notably, the 2001 German translation of this essay is edited to focus on the Bayer-

Ockman makes a persuasive case for Moholy-Nagy as a more apposite subject for Dorner, post-emigration. However, it is worth noting that while El Lissitzky, the third artist in the triangulation of artists set up by Ockman, had already adapted the socialist realism of the Stalinist state and subsequently passed away before Dorner began to write this manuscript, an earlier version of Lissitzky might have been the most compelling subject for Dorner's treatment. In fact, Lissitzky's short essay "Overcoming Art," published in a Warsaw literary journal in 1922 under the title "Die Überwindung der Kunst" (the same title later coined for the German translation of Dorner's *Way beyond 'art,'*) forecasts the argumentation of Dorner's later book. In his essay, Lissitzky appraises the efficacies of art in alignment with modern science and technology, sketches out a movement of art taking a "road from the Gothic to infinity [while creating] its golden banner: Renaissance, perspective, Impressionism, vibrating flecks of color," and ends with a discussion of Proun constructions that render composition as a "discussion on a given plane with many variations.... We do not need the individual but the universal."¹¹ The Lissitzky who penned this essay is much nearer to the artist that Dorner labors to read in the Bayer of his book's conclusion, one he interprets to be working in "active cooperation with the physiological and psychological activities of the visitor," producing

Dorner relationship, and was published under the title "Pragmatist oder Pragmatiker: Alexander Dorner und Herbert Bayer" *Arch+* 156 (May 2001): 90–97.

Samuel Cauman's extensive English-language biography of Alexander Dorner is also broad in its historical scope; that book is evidently the result of a collaborative manuscript co-authored by Dorner, and this dissertation treats it as an autobiographical text. Samuel Cauman, *The Living Museum. Experiences of an Art Historian and Museum Director: Alexander Dorner* (New York: New York University Press, 1958).

¹¹ El Lissitzky, "Overcoming Art," trans. Steven Lindberg, in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács, eds., *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2002), 185–186. Originally published as "Die Überwindung der Kunst," *Ring* no. 10 (1922).

modern design reflecting an “intensified drive for unification of our world” that led “to the dissolution of its three-dimensional static oneness,” allowing “the energies of modern communication [to] determine what is left of space.”¹² Where these statements seem like stretches in application to Bayer’s commercial endeavors, they approximate the earlier ambitions of Lissitzky, with whom Dorner worked so closely in his formative professional days.

Aside from Ockman, there are few contemporary treatments of Dorner that refer to his one major English-language publication and make note of the strange inclusion and subsequent omission of Herbert Bayer. And none interpret this publication in terms of its original function as a catalogue for the traveling exhibition of Herbert Bayer’s work, as is explored in the third chapter of this dissertation. Nevertheless, the book is often cited in relation to an art history that seeks to situate Dorner as a central to its pre-history of “the contemporary.”¹³ In these treatments, produced by curators and curatorial theorists as often as historians, Dorner’s developmental conjectures that comprise his book’s second and third chapters as well as a large part of the conclusion, and the exposition of Herbert

¹² Alexander Dorner, *The way beyond ‘art’: the work of Herbert Bayer* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947), 210.

¹³ An attempt to define the contemporary in art has been an ongoing endeavor of recent scholarship, reflected, for example, in a grouping of nearly simultaneous published roundtables on this theme in 2009: see Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, eds., e-flux “What is Contemporary Art?” Issues One (2009) and Two (2010), both accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/what-is-contemporary-art-issue-one/> and <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/what-is-contemporary-art-issue-two/>; Rasheed Araeen, “Art: A Vision of the Future: Call for Papers,” *Third Text* 23, no. 5 (September, 2009), 499-502, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://libproxy.mit.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=44460751&site=ehost-live>; Hal Foster, et. al., “Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary,’” *October* 130 (Fall, 2009) 3–124, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40368571>; Isabel Graw, Stefanie Kleefeld, and André Rottman, “Preface” to “13 Theses on Contemporary Art,” *Texte Zur Kunst* vol. 19, no. 74 (June 2009): 90–91.

Bayer's work of the fourth chapter, are largely ignored in favor of the preface and latter part of the conclusion in which Dorner ruminates on the purpose and activities of the museum. Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist opens his preface to the 2006 volume *Did Someone Say Participate?* with the acronym "ESWAD" (Everything Started with Alexander Dorner), relaying a personal story about encountering *The way beyond 'art'* in a used bookstore. Obrist describes becoming fascinated by Dorner's ideation of the museum as a *Kraftwerk* or energy plant (Dorner writes about the "new type" of museum as a "powerhouse, a producer of new energies" on the penultimate page of his book).¹⁴ Curator and researcher Claire Doherty refers to this quote when deeming Dorner a "new institutionalist hero," while simultaneously relaying her skepticism about the claims of new institutionalism (a movement to paradoxically support, within the museum, the kind of active and participatory production that Brian Holmes later called the "third phase" of institutional critique, one that extends its assemblages beyond the circuits of art and its institutions).¹⁵ Doherty (writing in 2004): "Dorner's words resonate in the rhetoric of our newly refurbished, post-industrial sites of artistic presentation and production in the UK such as BALTIC, which declared itself an 'art factory', despite (to date) the predominance of presentation spaces rather than spaces of overt active process or production."¹⁶ Whether his museums or exhibitions actually permitted experimentation outside of his

¹⁴ Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Preface: Participation Lasts Forever," in Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar, eds., *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 14; Dorner, *The way beyond 'art'*, 232 (see fn. 12).

¹⁵ Brian Holmes, "Extradisciplinary Investigations. Towards a New Critique of Institutions" (January, 2007). Accessed February 20, 2015, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/holmes/en>.

¹⁶ Claire Doherty, "The institution is dead! Long live the institution! Contemporary Art and New Institutionalism," in *Engage Review Art of Encounter*, Issue 15 (Summer 2004), 3, accessed February 20, 2015, http://engage.org/readmore/..%5Cdownloads%5C152E25D29_15.%20Claire%20Doherty.pdf.

own developmental philosophy (or even, per his own philosophy, “beyond ‘art’”), Dorner has come to represent a lost history of the museum as laboratory, as foretold by Giedion in his 1929 review. This dissertation explores just why ‘art’ was put in quotes in this, Dorner’s summation of his career, and recontextualizes the laboratory notions that contemporary museum theory of the 21st century has sought so actively to recuperate. The following chapters also examine what the experimental subject of this laboratory / powerhouse was held to be, by placing Dorner back into his historical context and revealing the bases for his curatorial claims about the development of art, and lived experience, in the galleries of a museum.

“Evolutionary Principles”: Dorner and the Rearrangement of Art History

That such a dead-house [as the museum] had to be rearranged was clear. The problem was how to do it, according to which philosophy of art history? . . . [T]o him art history – and correspondingly art museums – had already begun to be instruments for conveying a coherent picture of evolutionary growth.¹⁷

These words were written by curator Alexander Dorner in autobiographical notes (written in the third person) under the title “History of Art History.” Looking back upon his curatorial work in Hanover, Germany, Dorner described his search for a philosophy of stylistic volition characterized by “evolutionary growth.” Dorner aspired to rearrange the museum, to give its visitors a carefully constructed experience of this “evolution.”

Dorner’s galleries in Hanover were among many museum spaces that underwent radical

¹⁷ Draft manuscript (presumed for “Apprenticeship” section of *The Living Museum*), n.d., 27, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 919, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. The manuscripts in this series are undated, but file 918 contains a letter from Dorner to Samuel Cauman, with detailed corrections dated December 25, 1956. There is strong evidence that for the book *The Living Museum* (see fn. 10), Cauman served as the official writer of and collaborator on an autobiography that was clearly partially authored by Dorner himself. The text revisions for the manuscript were heavily appended in Dorner’s hand, consisting of multiple files in the Busch-Reisinger collection/Harvard Art Museum archives. The first page of the files titled “History of Art History – part of Axel’s entwurf für [*sic*] the living museum” bears the note: “Axel + Sam’s original copy. Throw away after publication” (Axel referring to Alexander Dorner, Sam referring to Samuel Cauman). See Alexander Dorner Papers, file 917, Harvard Art Museums Archives. A letter from Dorner’s widow, Lydia, to Isa Gropius, post publication, states that she was receiving 7 percent royalties on sales, over twice the 3 percent paid to the official author, Cauman. See Lydia Dorner to Isa Gropius, letter, December 16, 1958, Gropius Archives, MS Ger 208 (656), Houghton Library, Harvard University. This dissertation will refer to the volume under Cauman’s name as author, except in cases where Dorner’s voice is particularly strong or other evidence points to his authorship.

redesign during the Weimar Republic era; resulting from a search for a new “philosophy of art history,” Dorner’s rearrangement merits comparison with the work of leading art historians and theorists of the day. Making his argument in the galleries, as much as on the page, Dorner’s work posited an alternative to emerging formalist art history, one that embraced both Riegl’s *Kunstwollen* and a contextualist basis for art historical evaluation. Ultimately, Dorner’s “evolutionary growth” aspired to nothing short of building a civilization, as is borne out by his statement: “The Art Museum has to convey by all available means the evolutionary direction which runs from past movements into our own movements and beyond them.” Dorner’s notes, annotated and underlined in multiple pens, continued: “This alone makes a museum productive: promoting the future by the past.”¹⁸ Dorner believed that his “evolutionary” art history did not end at the completion of the gallery tour but continued in the psyches of his audience.

The reinstallation of the Hanover galleries that occurred under Dorner’s tenure took years, occurring primarily between 1922 and 1927. In addition to simplifying the previously stacked arrangement of artworks into a single line conveying a stylistic trajectory (**figure 1**), Dorner focused on creating architectural effects, coloring gallery walls and envisaging other stylized fixtures and features, such as dark lighting for the Medieval rooms to emulate the dark interiors of churches. (**figure 2**) In his gallery depiction of the evolution of artistic volition, Dorner did not attempt to reproduce an accurate, true-to-scale replica of a given period environment. Rather, the curator began to establish evocative “atmospheres” – thus embarking on his career-long dedication to

¹⁸ Handwritten notes by Alexander Dorner, dated “c.1934/5,” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 61, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; underlining in the original.

promoting the museum as a platform for engaging a “lived experience or feeling” (das Erlebnis oder das Gefühl) of art that was connected to material historical developments.¹⁹ Dorner’s emphasis on the experiencing audience represented a prioritization of the act of beholding in the production of aesthetics that was formulated in relationship – and often contradiction – to period discussions about subjectivity, pedagogy, materiality, and the range of the sensorial register to be addressed in an exhibition. This dissertation explores Dorner’s theorization of subjectivity as an emergent and historically specific proposition, which he ultimately felt was his responsibility to cultivate in his capacity as a curator.

The evolutionary overview seen in his gallery arrangement, leading from visions of the past to proposals for the future, was put to the page in Dorner’s three-part *Amtlicher Führer durch die Kunstsammlungen des Provinzial-Museums Hannover* (Official Guide to the Art Collection of the Provinzial Museum in Hanover), published circa 1927. There, the curator suggested – both explicitly and implicitly – that his galleries were intended to convey a vision of evolutionary stylistic development bound to period-specific means of seeing and understanding the world. These developments could

¹⁹ Typed speech to the Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, labeled in pencil “1923?” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 984, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. While this language was penned in a lecture on El Lissitzky, in reference to the triumph of Lissitzky’s artwork as “a harbinger of the desired unity of our new culture” (ein Vorbote zur ersehnten Einheit unserer neuen Kultur), it readily encapsulates Dorner’s advocacy of visitor experience, evocation of feeling, and connection to lived realities as tendencies of the most advanced art, which his museum sought to emulate (crowning Lissitzky as the spokesperson for the avant-garde present, and thus the lens through which all preceding art movements should be viewed). The differentiation between the “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*) invoked by Dorner and the conscious experience begot by wisdom implied by the German term *Erfahrung* frame Martin Jay’s 2005 study of the philosophy of “experience,” an intellectual history that I am indebted to in the formulation of this project – see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005). Dorner’s use of *Erlebnis* implies a discrete conscious or subjective experience in the galleries, one that would contribute to a subject’s longer process of learning and discovery of the kind implied by *Erfahrung* (which also translates to English as “experience”).

be traced, in Dorner's curatorial argument, through changes in stylistic tendencies that Dorner clearly read through the filter of his present. He focused on progressive changes in the ways that artists envisaged space, particularly through evolving depictions of dimensionality through perspective, leading to the abstraction of the picture plane. Although he addressed his gallery presentations to some conception of a subjective individual *viewer* of art, Dorner questioned *artistic* tendencies toward subjective interpretation of lived experience, represented to a social collective comprised of individuals other than the artist. For Dorner, along with some contemporaries, a skepticism about poetic renditions of personal experience bolstered concern about the virtues of expressionism, or the abandonment of naturalism in art movements more generally. Ultimately, Dorner brought his viewers through a development of style that led to present-day innovations in art and reevaluations of art theory.

Amtlicher Führer durch die Kunstsammlungen: An Official Guide

Why are the Middle Ages and its art so foreign to us? Because its life had a unilateral configuration, because, under the sway of religious beliefs, all its utterances were subordinated to a strict system. And art too, as was the case in every area of life, suppressed all stirrings of personal freedom and was inspired by a transpersonal abstract spirit. However, since the Renaissance, personal freedom has been the air we breathe, without which we could not live, and the unilateral rigidity of culture, which views the individual as inconsequential and religious ideas as the be-all and end-all, seems as a result incomprehensible to us, even hostile.²⁰

²⁰ Warum ist uns das Mittelalter und seine Kunst so fremd? Weil sein ganzes Leben einseitig eingestellt ist, weil unter der Herrschaft religiöser Vorstellungen dessen ganze Äußerungen einem

Thus began the gallery guide for the newly reinstalled Hanover Provinzialmuseum art galleries, published in three parts by the collection curator and director, Alexander Dorner.²¹ This opening statement previewed the major concerns of his gallery arrangements to follow: about the perils of artistic or cultural fixity in denying free subjective development and the role of the individual as being consequential indeed in comprising a collective contemporary society. This first section of the three-volume *Amtlicher Führer*, focusing on work of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, took viewers from room number 1, the Romanesque room (romanischer Saal) through room 7, featuring the work of late Middle Ages sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider. **(figures 3 and 4)** Dorner's guide argued for a stylistic development in art bound in large part to representations of depth and space – from the Middle Ages, which showed no interest in faithfully reproducing lifelike forms (kein Interesse, natürliche Formen naturgetreu

strengen System untergeordnet sind. Wie alles, so unterdrückt auch die Kunst alle Regungen persönlicher Freiheit und atmet einen überpersönlichen abstrakten Geist. Die Freiheit der Person aber ist seit der Renaissance unsere Luft, ohne die wir nicht leben können, und die einseitige Starrheit einer Kultur, der die Person nichts, eine religiöse Idee aber alles ist, erscheint uns daher unverständlich, ja fiendlich.

Alexander Dorner, *Amtlicher Führer durch die Kunstsammlungen des Provinzial-Museums Hannover. Erster Teil: Mittelalter und Renaissance* (Berlin: Julius Bard Verlag, n.d., c.1927), 1.

²¹ The Provinzialmuseum was renamed “Landesmuseum” in 1933, during Dorner's tenure, through the recommendation of a special committee, which proposed adopting the prefix “Landes” (State) before a number of institutions including hospitals, transportation agencies, and other civic institutions. See memorandum, July 20, 1933, Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Hannover (NLA HA), Hann. 151, 183. This dissertation will use the museum name associated with the period under discussion interchangeably, or use Provinzialmuseum/Landesmuseum when referring to the institution as a general entity during Dorner's tenure, which saw the museum holding both official titles. Dorner himself had already dispensed with the name Provinzial-Museum as being too “provincial” and wrote of the museum under the title “Museum für Kunst und Landesgeschichte” in official documents. See memorandum, n.d., NLA HA, Hann. 151, 183. Many thanks to Ines Katenhusen for this citation and clarification, as per interview via email, August 29, 2014.

wiederzugeben) and preferring the stylized ornamentation that Dorner characterized as “abstrakt”—to the more exacting geometries of the Renaissance, wherein “the problem of the correct representation of space was solved through the discovery of perspective” ([m]an hatte das Problem richtiger Raumdarstellung durch Erfindung der Perspektive gelöst).²² On the first section of the tour, viewers would encounter the “Goldene Tafel” altarpiece, a Gothic work originally installed in a church in Lüneburg. (**figure 5**) The work was placed by Dorner in a room with deep-purple walls and a black-stained floor, intending to convey the original conditions for encountering the work in a dimly lit church environment, and to make artifacts “stand out . . . as the focal points of display.”²³ By comparison, for Dorner, the perspectival threshold of the Renaissance, and the precedent path of stylistic development that led to it through the Middle Ages, established a “fixed, absolute point of view” (festen, absoluten Standpunkt) not unlike the dogma and antiquation of religion so disparaged by the Official Guide.²⁴ Dorner fashioned the Renaissance rooms in white and gray tones that outlined and emphasized the actual perspectival lines of the gallery architecture surrounding the artistic renderings of

²² Dorner, *Amtlicher Führer: Erster Teil*, 2, 7 (see fn. 20).

²³ Samuel Cauman, *The Living Museum*. 88 (see fn. 10). On the painted walls described in the Hanover galleries of medieval art, it is important to clarify that these would not have accurately reproduced period aesthetics – purple being a rare and costly color at that time. Instead, Dorner’s intention was to give a sensibility about the feeling or atmosphere of vision in the period, with orientation toward a contemporary viewing subject. In this case, the altarpiece was emphasized as a focal point in the room, as it would have been in an environment in which it served as an object of worship.

²⁴ Alexander Dorner, “Zur Raumvorstellung der Romantik,” a lecture held at the fourth Congress on Aesthetics in Hamburg, October 7–9, 1930, published in *Beilagenheft zur Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 25 (Stuttgart, 1931): 134. As quoted and interpreted in Monika Flacke, “Die Neuordnung der deutschen Museen in der Weimarer Republik,” in *Überwindung der Kunst: Zum 100. Geburtstag des Kunsthistorikers Alexander Dorner* (Hanover: Alexander Dorner Kreis e.V., 1993), 50. Flacke published this essay under this name and her *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik* under the name Flacke-Knoch (see fn. 5); this dissertation will refer to this scholar alternately by the name under which each work was authored.

recessional space in Renaissance artworks. This was just one of many ways in which Dorner's galleries evinced a type of access to a cultural epochal vision. Such a vision changed throughout the "evolution" of history but, conveyed in Dorner's galleries by means of design, could be suggested to a (more developed) contemporary eye. Dorner's galleries invoked the past primarily to prove that the present was superior. Reducing the artistic movements of the Renaissance to one representational strategy, Dorner's wall-paint tribute to one-point perspective flattened out history, both figuratively and literally.

The full first section of the tour shepherded by Dorner's gallery guide was characterized by its commitment to using color, line, lighting, framing and décor to situate the artworks on display. The Renaissance room was painted to emphasize the recession of the room architecture, with its analogue in the compositional perspective in Renaissance painting, where a baroque gallery mounted floor-to-ceiling tapestries flanked by period furniture. **(figures 6 and 7)**, A Rococo room featured "pale grayish-yellow walls" against the "light gray and gold of the wooden parts." Furthermore, the "light gray linoleum floor" of such a room would better befit a painting style characterized by "lighter" colors, a "more elegant" posture, and "more cheerful" countenance. Dorner selected the works on view in the rooms representing this era, especially those selected to illustrate the guidebook, to illustrate these characteristics – as in a brightly colored portrait (one half of a double portrait) by Alessandro Longhi, son of the rococo painter Pietro Longhi. **(figure 8)** The black linoleum used in other rooms of the museum had the

advantage of being “the best foil, in most cases, for the eye in absorbing the spirit of another period.”²⁵

The second volume of the *Amtlicher Führer* took viewers from the Renaissance to the year 1800, in galleries 10–21 of the museum, and emphasized the continuing importance of compositional perspective in the service of convincing representation of dimensional space, and thus of reality itself. The Italian Renaissance, Dorner reiterated, brought with it perspective, making representation of “things on the earth’s surface and the space between them, in their full dimensions and in correct relationship to one other, believable to the eye.”²⁶ The second installment of the guide traced this phenomenon from the Italian room, gallery number 10 (accompanied by Dorner’s written lamentation about the museum’s lack of examples of Quattrocento paintings) to the early nineteenth century landscape painting of Hanoverian Johann Heinrich Ramberg, in room 21.

The third section of the Official Guide led visitors through the nineteenth and twentieth century galleries, beginning in the “Klassizisten-Saal,” room number 22 (a neoclassical room with “greenish light gray-blue” walls, white frames, and marble statues in niches).²⁷ Dorner opened the final book in this three-volume series assuring his reader that, while these galleries (and commonly received histories) suggested that a “new spirit has been blowing through Europe since the French Revolution, which makes itself felt in the visual arts” this does not mean a cleavage in artistic development; rather, “the

²⁵ Gallery descriptions: Alexander Dorner, “What Can Art Museums Do Today?” lecture at Harvard, January 27, 1938, 13, in Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 471 Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Descriptions of Rococo stylistic shifts: Dorner, *Amtlicher Führer durch die Kunstsammlungen des Provinzial-Museums Hannover. Zweiter Teil: Von der Renaissance bis zum Jahre 1800* (Berlin: Julius Bard Verlag, n.d.), 14.

²⁶ Dorner, *Amtlicher Führer: Zweiter Teil*, 1 (see fn. 25).

²⁷ Dorner, “What Can Art Museums Do Today?” 13 (see fn. 25).

connection to the past remains preserved and the flow of development uninterrupted.”²⁸

Dorner’s guide led the visitor to the impressionist rooms by way of the work of Louis Kolitz and the Hanover-born portraitist Friedrich August von Kaulbach. Romanticism was “buried once and for all” (endgültig begraben) in a transition to a more mechanistically optical, less subjective or emotional, engagement with light: “The artist only has eyes, but of a sensitivity like never before. He sees colors, where before there seemed to be none, the shadow is no longer gray, there are no solid lines anywhere, all bodies are dissolved, and only the colored reflections of their surfaces remain.

... Pointillism, which resolves each spot of color into the atoms of its primary colors, has achieved this ideal.”²⁹ For Dorner, the “primitive” strategies of Klee and Chagall, which flatten perspective as a mere “obstacle,” constitute neither historical nor psychological regression (as would soon be implicit in the National Socialist propagandandistic assignation of “degenerate”), but rather a movement forward into abstraction – a politically and intellectually complex category that would be debated by Dorner’s contemporaries, as this chapter will later show. From these movements, yielding

²⁸ “Zwar weht seit der französischen Revolution ein neuer Geist durch Europa, der sich auch in der bildenden Kunst bemerkbar macht, aber die Verbindung nach rückwärts bleibt doch gewahrt und der Fluß der Entwicklung wird nicht unterbrochen.” *Amtlicher Führer durch die Kunstsammlungen des Provinzial-Museums Hannover. Dritter Teil: XIX und XX Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Julius Bard Verlag, n.d.), 1.

²⁹

Beim reinen pleine air ist alle Romantik endgültig begraben. In dem Geflimmer von farbigen Licht, das auf den Oberflächen der Dinge und in der Luft spielt, ist kein Platz für seelische Stimmungen. Der Künstler hat nur noch Augen: diese allerdings sind von einer Empfindlichkeit wie nie zuvor. Er sieht Farben, wo bisher keine zu sein schienen, der Schatten ist nicht mehr grau, nirgends sind feste Linien, alle Körper sind aufgelöst, von ihnen bleiben nur die farbigen Lichtreflexe ihrer Oberflächen. Diese schwimmen mit denen der Luft zusammen, und so wird das ideale impressionistische Bild gleichsam ein Vorhang von Farbflecken, der die Illusion einer schrankenlosen Einheit von Masse und Raum erzeugt. Der Pointillismus, der jeden Farbfleck in die Atome seiner Grundfarben auflöst, hat dieses Ideal erreicht.

Ibid., 16.

abstraction out of the optical, expressive, and otherwise internal subjectivities of artists as individuals, the guide led to the expressionist movement, which “seeks expression rather than impression” (den Ausdruck sucht statt des Eindrucks).³⁰ Both on the page and in the gallery arrangement of comparative works, Dorner draws a comparison between this stylistic maneuver and cubism, “which smashes the old picture of perspective in cubic form and compiles [the pieces] anew” through “internal” ordering.³¹ Although it is not apparent that Dorner’s galleries attempted any form of cubist construction in their architectural compartment, the galleries quickly moved into a radical design shift toward abstracted space in their concluding design plans, as Dorner turned triumphantly toward the next phase of artistic development: constructivism, shepherded by El Lissitzky. Dorner thus threaded the “frantic pace of the development toward abstraction” (rasende Tempo dieser Entwicklung zum Abstrakten) from the past into art movements of the present day (verism, *Neue Sachlichkeit*).³²

El Lissitzky’s work, installed in the room that already bore the heading “Abstrakte Kunst” in the 1925 gallery map, was the capstone of Dorner’s galleries. (**figure 9**) The *Abstract Cabinet* commissioned from the avant-gardist undid the conventions of perspectival rendering that preceded it in the art history tale told in Dorner’s galleries – as the guide explained: “Volume and line hold each other in balance, penetrating each other. No longer does perspective hold these elements . . . in order. . . .” (Körper und Linie halten sich gegenseitig in der Schweben, durchdringen sich gegenseitig. Keine Perspektive hält sie

³⁰ Ibid., 17.

³¹ “So entsteht hier der Kubismus, der das alte perspektivische Bild in kubische Formen zerschlägt und diese neu zusammenstellt, und zwar nach einem Prinzip, das die Ordnung der einzelnen Formen nicht wie bisher von außen her, sondern von innen heraus bestimmt, nach der inneren Kraftverbindung, die zwischen den einzelnen Teilen besteht.” Ibid., 19.

³² Ibid., 17.

mehr . . . in Ordnung. . . .)³³ – making temporal exchange a key arbiter of non-“fixed” space. Walls appeared to change color as the audience moved through the room, owing to striated metal bands painted black, white and gray on each of the three visible sides (a device that also contributed to the so-called “optical dynamic” [*optische Dynamik*] that Lissitzky innovated for his related 1926 *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* in Dresden, the visit to which prompted Dorner to commission the Hanover project).³⁴ The effect also anecdotally earned the room the nickname “pleated cubbyhole” (Plisseekämmerchen).³⁵ A design for the room shows its three-dimensional contours represented in a flat picture plane – an isometric rendering, to be unfolded and refolded by the viewer’s eye – characteristic of the flattened and interpretive representation of dimensionality that Dorner equated with abstraction and modernity more generally. (**figure 10**)

Just as the traced contours of the Renaissance rooms emphasized orthogonally composed perspective of that epochal art (per Dorner), Lissitzky’s Cabinet gave the

³³ Ibid., 20.

³⁴ Maria Gough, “Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky’s Dresden and Hannover *Demonstrationsräume*,” in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2003), 78. Writing about the colorful “play of the walls,” Lissitzky asserted that the optical dynamic would “make the spectator active.” Lissitzky to Sophie Küppers, March 23, 1926, El Lissitzky: Letters and Photographs, 1911-1941, Getty Research Institute, acc. No 950076 (box 1, folder 4) as quoted and cited in *ibid.*, 101. Gough objects to the characterization of this room as a collaboration with Dorner, as well as to interpretations that read the *Cabinet* as a culmination of Dorner’s highly stylized galleries. She instead prioritizes Lissitzky’s own claims that this room was a standard demonstration room – preceded in every respect by his 1926 Dresden work – that differentiates the works within it, while insightfully characterizing Dorner’s “atmosphere” rooms as showing undifferentiated groupings suggestive of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This dissertation does not pursue authorship attributions but instead considers galleries such as Lissitzky’s in order to better understand Dorner’s art theory and his gallery rearrangements in relationship to period discussions about art historical evolution – namely through the tropes of expressionism and perspective. Dorner himself positioned the *Abstract Cabinet* as an example of contemporary “perspective,” as he understood it, germane to the development of the culturally inflected vision suggested by the gallery environments preceding it. Gough attributes the metal used in this construction as stainless steel; where Ines Katzenhusen describes it as pewter. Ines Katzenhusen, “Kabinett der Abstraktion/Abstract Cabinet,” *PLOT: Creative Spaces* 4 (October 2009): 98.

³⁵ Ibid., 96, 98.

illusion of dematerialized space, organizing its composition relative to viewer perception. Sigfried Giedion would describe Lissitzky's work in Dorner's galleries (with reference to the Dresden installation that was its precedent) in terms of its successes in producing spatial "intangibility" and an "indeterminate atmosphere." Writing favorably about Dorner's galleries as a "laboratory" in a 1929 review in *Der Cicerone*, Giedion described Lissitzky's triumph at some length:

For the establishment of the "Abstract Room" in the museum Alexander Dorner called El Lissitzky to Hanover. . . . As early as 1926, at the international painting exhibition in Dresden, Lissitzky had attempted to create a space for abstract images, albeit with simpler means.

The wall surface seems to dissolve, and in front of it appears paneling made of vertical iron slats in closely packed ranks (in Dresden there were thin wooden slats) standing perpendicular to the wall. These slats, about 5 cm wide, throw vertical furrows of shadow and dematerialize the wall to the point of complete intangibility. Today, one can still see in many farmhouses in Catholic areas images of saints composed of painted glass slats that coalesce and then disintegrate by turns for the passing viewer. Lissitzky assimilates – perhaps unconsciously – the baroque tradition and translates it into abstraction. On this irrational surface there now hang compositions by Lissitzky or Moholy, which can only unfold the life within them in this indeterminate atmosphere.³⁶

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Für die Einrichtung des „Abstrakten Raumes“ im Museum zu Hannover hat Alexander Dorner El Lissitzky berufen. . . . Bereits in der internationalen Gemäldeausstellung Dresden 1926 hatte Lissitzky, allerdings mit einfacheren Mitteln, einen Versuch gemacht, einen Raum für abstrakte Bilder zu gestalten.

Die Wandfläche erscheint aufgelöst, vor sie tritt eine Verkleidung aus enggereihten vertikalen Eisenlammeln (in Dresden waren es schütterere Holzlatten), die senkrecht zur Wand stehen. Diese Lamellen, ungefähr 5 cm breit, werfen nun vertikale Schattenrinnen und entmaterialisieren die Wand bis zur völligen Ungreifbarkeit. Man kann heute noch in katholischen Gegenden an vielen Bauernhäusern Heiligenbilder aus bemalten gläsernen Lamellen sehen, die sich für den vorübergehenden Beschauer abwechselnd zusammenfügen und zersetzen. Lissitzky nimmt –

In later reflections, Dorner would claim coauthorship of the *Cabinet* and showed no compunction about asserting the virtues of an overpowering curatorial framing. As early as 1924, in an article on his gallery reinstatement, “Die neue Hannoversche Galerie,” Dorner professed his belief that curatorial design could better induce a viewer’s appreciation of historical sensibility than artistic objects alone. Dorner held his galleries described in the first volume of the *Amtlicher Führer* as exemplary:

The organization of the gallery and the installing of art works pursues a new goal in so far that here for the first time it has been attempted to color the rooms in such a way that the hue of the walls not only matches the paintings in appearance, but is also supposed to convey the atmosphere and spirit of the particular artistic period. The Feuerbach-room currently represents this goal the best. This way the art museum gives up its previous tendency to register works in an objective and historical fashion. It now conveys to the visitor an experience of artistic development, by having him go from one room to another, as it were from one mood into another. The museum itself becomes active; the color-tone of the rooms is now comparable to stage scenery, which supports the mood of the dramatic scene. This is how the museum strengthens the experience of the individual artwork, by mediating and reviving emotionally the concept of the development of art.³⁷

vielleicht unbewußt – die barocke Tradition auf und übersetzt sie ins Abstrakte. Vor der irrationalen Fläche hängen nun die Kompositionen Lissitzkys oder Moholys, die erst in dieser schwebenden Atmosphäre das Leben entfalten können, das in ihnen steckt.

Sigfried Giedion, “Lebendiges Museum,” 105 (see fn. 1).

³⁷ Dorner, “Die neue Hannoversche Galerie,” *Hannoverscher Kurier*, April 27, 1924. As cited by and translated in Curt Germundson, “Kurt Schwitters in Hanover: Investigation of a Cultural Environment” (PhD thesis, Graduate College of the University of Iowa, May 2001), 123.

Here, in the service of teaching the public about the development of art, Dorner claims to be producing an emotional “revival” of period spirit. He champions the museum and its curator as key agents in “mediating” – and thus “strengthening” the effects of art works. In contrast to any high modernist position of allowing an artwork to speak alone, Dorner expended significant effort in transforming the galleries to suit his interpretive vision, and was proud to claim authorship of their “mediations and emotional revivals.”

Hired to work at a museum that appeared, in the recollection of secretary Bianca Claus, like a “junk room” (Rumpelkammer) with paintings stacked high one above the other, Dorner had edited, recontextualized, and reinterpreted with a heavy hand.³⁸ His effort was generally well received. Fritz Wedekind, writing for the *Internationale Sammlerzeitung* (1924), favored the experiential attributes of Dorner’s *Neuordnung* (reorganization) as revolutionary for its time, stating: “Dorner has consciously arrived at a new type of art museum. Rejecting the generally applied passive attitude, he created for the first time active, intuitive rooms that express the mood of whole complexes of phases in history . . . [which] has an overwhelming effect on the visitor.”³⁹ A reviewer in the 1929 *Hannoverscher Kurier* saw the success of the galleries in their educational aspirations: “Professor Dorner’s way of regrouping and displaying the collections transformed a warehouse into . . . a model of modern museum organization. . . . We have the deepest admiration for the sensitive and educational treatment of the works of art.”⁴⁰ Reviewer Alfred Kuhn admired the initiative to “fertilize” the public by means of an institute of “nurturing” (Erziehung), “education” (Bildung), and “entertainment”

³⁸ Flacke, “Neuordnung,” 50 (see fn. 24).

³⁹ Cauman, *Living Museum*, 42 (see fn. 10).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

(Unterhaltung). He also approved of Dorner's "worldview" conveyed through color, writing:

To produce three major emphases, he painted the Middle Ages with deep tones pressing down from above, the following periods with lighter colors and strong tones (the ceilings white, the walls colored all the way to the top) and the nineteenth century in a refined style, yet left as free as possible from the top down (the walls only colored to three-quarter height, the dado and one quarter of the wall white). This is highly subjective, and one may not agree in all cases. But ultimately one must concede the right of subjectivity to a director who has shown so much initiative, energy, and personal taste.⁴¹

Here Kuhn celebrates Dorner's interpretive display, produced as an expression of the personal taste of the curator. Kuhn seems to affirm the curator's "right of subjectivity" to, as Dorner had outlined earlier, "mediate" and "emotionally revive" the sensibility of artistic development, and thus "strengthen the experience of the individual artwork" (the approach that Dorner had claimed as his guiding principle in his 1924 article, written during his reinstallation of the collection).

Outside of the galleries, Dorner also proselytized his methodology, advancing an exhibitionary approach that positioned the subjective interpretation of the curator as the

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Um drei große Akzente zu bekommen, hat er das Mittelalter mit von oben gedrückten tiefen Tönen, die folgenden Perioden heller mit kräftigen Tönen (die Decken weiß, die Wände bis oben farbig) und das 19. Jahrhundert differenziert, aber von oben her möglichst befreit (die Wände nur bis Dreiviertelhöhe farbig, die Dede und ein Viertel der Wand weiß) gestrichen. Dies ist höchst subjektiv, und man wird in allen Fällen nicht beipflichten können. Aber im Grunde muß man einem Direktor, der so viel Initiative, Tatkraft und persönlichen Geschmack gezeigt hat, das Recht auf Subjektivität zugestehen.

Alfred Kuhn, "Das verwandelte Provinzialmuseum in Hannover." *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 9, 1926..

best means for addressing the public and encouraging cultural developments. A number of museum directors had an opportunity to view his work when the Deutscher Museumsbund (DMB, the German Museums Association) held its meeting in Hanover in October of 1927, on the occasion of the museum's anniversary.⁴² There, Dorner spoke to the assembled guests about his aspirations in a lecture titled "How to make use of Museums of Historical Art?" encouraging his audience of museum directors to be active interpretive agents in relationship to the histories and other period ideas conveyed by their galleries:

No great 'science' of the past has stopped at accumulating simple facts. They always had the courage to make use of it by giving them a creative interpretation. This interpretation was the source of a faith everybody could understand – even if he was unable to know the way which led to it.

There is no creative activity without subjectivity. This alone is able to produce the badly needed cultural unity.

. . . Under the overwhelming impact of Alois Riegl . . . who is the first art historian to prove that in art history too we can arrive at concepts which undergo an expanding development in the course of evolution – I have tried several years ago in the Art Historical Society of Berlin to lay out a coherent line of development of architecture, in which . . . one period builds up upon the other. . . . Today I am certain that a parallel development can be proven in sculpture and painting which never lost their contact with building.⁴³

⁴² Planning materials of the DMB, Zentralarchiv, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III/DMB 241.

⁴³ English translation by Dorner and original capitalization of title and underlining in text left intact. See "How to Make Use of Museums of Historical Art?" meeting of German Museum

Dorner makes a number of justification claims in this passage. He promotes curatorial mediation as a precursor to “cultural unity.” He defends work done in his student years . This talk also marks one of many instances in which Dorner would invoke the name of Alois Riegl in explaining the evolutionary aspects of his gallery ambitions. But, in keeping with his subjective liberties, Dorner’s interpretation of Riegl – as implemented in his gallery “atmospheres” – was a creative and personal assessment, one that would later be staked out in contradistinction to other curators and art theorists of the day. As this chapter will later explore, Dorner’s view of *Kunstwollen* was materialist instead of purely cultural, and his galleries similarly attempted to become contextual means of understanding artistic production. Thus artistic evolution was conveyed not only through label texts or juxtapositions of artworks but also in rooms that Dorner believed could produce in the viewer the *vision* of a period – “mystical” in Medieval times, “fixed” in the perspective of the Renaissance, and dynamic and prone to change in the modern era.⁴⁴

Evolutionary Overhauls

Dorner arrived in Hanover just after graduating from the University of Berlin; his biographical collaborator, Samuel Cauman, expends no subtlety in associating Dorner’s emergence into professional life with the birth of the democratic Weimar Republic,

Association, October 27, 1927, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 447, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁴ While it is tempting to make an analogy between Dorner’s ideas and Baxandall’s “period eye,” there is no evidence, in historical terms, suggesting anything beyond a speculative link. Dorner’s ideas as set down on paper would only suffer in comparison to Baxendall’s, as Dorner never wrote a full textual theory of period vision, instead making this argument suggestively through his gallery authorship.

writing that “on the day [in 1919] that he defended his doctor’s thesis at Berlin University, wearing the customary white tie, tails, and topper, he ran for his life across Unter den Linden into the University gate, in order to avoid crossfire between soldiers and Spartacists.”⁴⁵ Dorner defended on March 27, 1919, shortly after the bloody suppression of the general strike in Berlin. Yet despite being heavy-handed, Cauman’s metaphor is apt – positioning the birth of Dorner as a scholar dedicated to cultivating the contemporary subjective individual alongside the difficult birth of a Republic that would be characterized by tensions around communitarian relationships between new democratic subjects.

The stakes could not have been higher: to reinstall museum galleries to better convey a lineage of style and emotional tenor from ancient times to the present was a decisive maneuver in the contemporaneous landscapes of museum development and art theory. The new German constitution of 1919 legislated the freedom of art, science, and education as well as the public institutions in which these disciplines would be incubated. A number of discussions ensued amongst museum workers about the responsibility to serve the public, for example by presenting works of art of “objective” good quality.⁴⁶ The Deutscher Museumsbund (DMB), which was founded in 1917, also responded to the concerns of the moment with a compendium of essays in 1919 evaluating how museums could best serve the public interest. Gustav Pauli, a founder of the DMB, suggested that museum curators should focus on educational initiatives, and proposed that smaller museums were even more important for reaching a wide public than the major venues

⁴⁵ Cauman, *Living Museum*, 14 (see fn. 10).

⁴⁶ For example, in statements from Max Sauerlandt or Gustav Hartlaub. See Flacke, “Neuordnung,” 32 (see fn. 24).

such as those on Berlin's Museum Island, which he rather disparagingly called *Prunkmuseen*. Pauli suggested that such "museums of pomp" were obsolete in a political environment that enabled the sharing of collections between institutions, writing that "here the federal character of Germany will turn out to be a blessing."⁴⁷

Curators at many German museums of the period, from the large Nationalgalerie in Berlin to smaller museums such as the Folkwang in Essen, were moved to significantly redesign and reinstall their collections: de-tiering and decluttering the hang of paintings, recoloring the walls, and generally overhauling the order and arrangement of objects for a modern age, much as Dorner had done at the Hanover museum.⁴⁸ Ludwig Justi, the successor to Hugo von Tschudi at the Berlin Nationalgalerie, created "intimate" viewing spaces in rooms with dropped ceilings, against rich décor intended to draw out the "spirit" of German art, according to art historian Charlotte Klonk. The arrangement evoked "an empathic projection of Germany's innermost character in color and form."⁴⁹ Ernst Gosebruch, the director of Essen's Folkwang Museum, hired a Bauhaus-sourced "Meister [Hinnerk] Scheper" to design the wall colors for the museum; he also boldly placed works of Asiatic origin on view alongside European works, eschewing conventions that typically distinguished between geographic centers of production (namely, between East and West).⁵⁰ (**figures 11 and 12**) Where these endeavors

⁴⁷ "Hier wird sich der bundesstaatliche Charakter Deutschlands als segensreich erweisen." Gustav Pauli, "Das Kunstmuseum der Zukunft," in *Die Kunstmuseen und das Deutsche Volk* (Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1919), 12.

⁴⁸ See "Die Museumslandschaft der 20er Jahre," chap. 2 in Monika Flacke-Knoch, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik*, 11–36 (see fn. 5).

⁴⁹ Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience*, 55, 67 ff., here: 70 (see fn. 4).

⁵⁰ Scheper, who taught the science of interior color design as head of the Bauhaus Mural-Painting Workshop and who was a visiting professor at Moscow's VKhUTEIN, prioritized the functional aspects of color over evocative or expressionistic design. See Alla G. Vroskaya, "The Productive Unconscious: Architecture, Experimental Psychology and Techniques of Subjectivity in Soviet

primarily manifested as design functionalism or comparative arrangements making a visual argument, Dorner's galleries were unique in their attempts to actually suggest and even coerce a type of culturally-inflected period vision, alluding to works of the past through the framing of gallery environments designed in the present.

Hanover and its Provinzialmuseum/Landesmuseum saw a number of renovations during Dorner's 1919–37 tenure. In addition to reorganizing and redesigning his gallery presentation, Dorner augmented the collection's holdings significantly. He collected broadly, purchasing work by Hans Holbein, Lucas Cranach the Elder, Peter Paul Rubens, and Pietro Perugino; he also took risks in acquiring contemporary works by Emil Nolde, Erich Heckel, Oskar Schlemmer, Piet Mondrian, and other modernists. Some 240 of these works were later seized from the museum by the state in 1937 as "degenerate art" (Entartete Kunst).⁵¹ (figure 13) Indeed modern art was, as Frank G. Kurzhals notes, the main focus (*Schwerpunkt*) of Dorner's purchases.⁵² Under Dorner's stewardship,

Russia, 1919–1935" (PhD thesis, MIT Department of Architecture, September 2014), 198 ff. Dorner would later allude, via his spokesman, Samuel Cauman, to Gosebruch's galleries as an example of the (poor) tendency to equivocate taste and style as universal, ahistorical phenomena:

The one element of certainty amid the flood of styles was the persistent mythological belief in art as the symbol of man's eternal spirit. Hence the cult of the 'original' work of art, the inspired product of an individual artist. . . . Another result of the new approach was the finding of equivalence in works of widely separated times and cultures. Expressionistic paintings were juxtaposed with medieval altar hangings or with primitive masks which they seemed to echo. These were supposed to express a shared human attitude and to bring home the unity of mankind. An example of this policy was the Folkwang Museum in Essen.

Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 75, 81 (see fn. 10).

⁵¹ See Frank G. Kurzhals, "Die Entfernung der bildenden Kunst aus Hannover: Das Landesmuseum in Hannover," and Ines Katzenhusen, "Kunstblüte oder Kulturverfall? Facetten des Zeitgeistes der Weimarer Republik am Beispiel Hannover," both in *Kulturaustreibung: Die Einflußnahme des Nationalsozialismus auf Kunst und Kultur in Niedersachsen. Eine Dokumentation zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung*, ed. Hinrich Bergmeier and Günter Katzenberger (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 1993).

⁵² Frank G. Kurzhals, "Die politische Blindheit des Bildungsbürgers: Alexander Dorner (1893–1957)," in *Kulturaustreibung*, 94 (see fn. 51). Both Kurzhals and Flacke (in "Neuordnung," 47–54

Hanover's art collection and interpretive gallery display became a draw to international visitors including Albert Barnes, Philip Johnson, and Alfred Barr.⁵³

Museum galleries were not the only artistic undertakings undergoing reevaluation and overhaul during Hanover's Weimar Republic years. In the 1920s, Hanover was a thriving venue for avant-garde art in all media. Particularly influential in this respect was the Kestnergesellschaft art society over which Dorner presided as director from 1923 to 1924 and as "first president of the society" (1. Vorsitzender der Gesellschaft) from 1925 to 1933.⁵⁴ In addition to showing more established historical work, the society hosted exhibitions of work by modernists Wassily Kandinsky (1923), Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1923), Theo van Doesburg (1924), the Bauhaus Dessau (1926), Emil Nolde (1928), and Käthe Kollwitz (1929). The institution additionally sponsored a range of avant-garde programming: off-site screenings of art films (by Eggeling, Leger, and Picabia, for example, in 1925), a lecture by Rudolf von Laban on "Dance in America" (1927), and an experimental projection and lecture by Dziga Vertov (1929). The Kestnergesellschaft did not limit its offerings to art, but also hosted interdisciplinary discussions – including a series on "Das Neue Weltbild" (The New World Picture) that saw Dorner and a local physics expert present back-to-back discussions of "Die neue Raumvorstellung" (The New Conception of Space) in their respective disciplines (November 14, 1930).⁵⁵

[see fn. 24]) point in particular to Dorner's acquisition of Meister Bertram's *Passionsaltar* or the Bertram Altarpiece that Dorner acquired for the museum in the early 1930s.

⁵³ Cf. Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 105 (see fn. 10).

⁵⁴ Veit Görner et al., *Kestnerchronik* (Hanover: Kestnergesellschaft, 2006), 167.

⁵⁵ This list is compiled from a variety of sources including: *ibid*; NLA HA, Dep. 100, no. 212; Gough, "Constructivism Disoriented," 81 (see fn. 34); Kestnergesellschaft archives, courtesy of Veit Görner, 2012. Dorner's *Raumvorstellung* essay dealt primarily with the evolution of pictorial perspective in art. Martin Heidegger's 1938 lecture possessed a similar title, "The Age of the World Picture"; in it, Heidegger posited a modern age that introduced a kind of individualism and subjectivism (and anxiety over how this relates to a broader collective objectivity). An assessment

Hanover was simultaneously home to the studios of artists such as Kurt Schwitters (who erected his famed *Merzbau* in his Hanover home) and constructivist El Lissitzky.⁵⁶

Dorner was interested in advances in both the visual and performing arts occurring in the city. Indeed, reflecting back on his time in Hanover after his emigration to the United States, he called the Lower Saxony capital “one of the few centers for modern dance,” and elaborated on all of the cross-disciplinary artistic endeavors taking place there:

Mary Wigman was born here and Harold Kreutzberg of Hanover’s Opera was her most brilliant successor. Here lived and performed Walter Giesecking. Here lived and worked the pioneer in the documentary film, Wilfried Basse, who founded in Hanover his own “Kulturfilmbuehne” (stage for cultural films). Here lived one of the first genuine collectors of Modern art, Herbert von Gargens, and Kurt Schwitters, one of the seven founders of Dadaism.⁵⁷

In the Provinzialmuseum, Dorner quickly rose from his assistant position (as *wissenschaftlicher Hilfsarbeiter für die kunsthistorischen Abteilungen*) to replace the retired director of the Kunstsammlung, Wilhelm Behncke, in 1922. It was in this role that Dorner overhauled the arrangement and display of the art collection, which constituted a significant share of the museum’s holdings, along with materials of natural and civic history. The final installation reflected Dorner’s desire to understand and present material,

of this consanguinity is beyond the scope of this project but remains to be explored in future research; the value of subjective representation or aesthetic reception as debated in art criticism surrounding Dorner and his work is examined later in this chapter.

⁵⁶ The widow of Kestnergesellschaft founding director Paul Erich Küppers, Sophie (née Schneider), became involved with Lissitzky, whom she met in Hanover in 1922. Dorner recalls Lissitzky living on the top floor of the Kestnergesellschaft building from 1925 on. In Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 34 (see fn. 10).

⁵⁷ Manuscript draft in original English for *The Living Museum*, n.d. (presumed ca. 1956), 17, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 919, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

epistemological, and interpretive shifts that underlay changes in artistic style, achieved not only through the rearrangement of artworks but also through updated designs and didactics.⁵⁸ Dorner had no qualms about elevating built-environmental or contextual affect to the same level as pedagogical labeling in the service of communicating cultural development, writing in 1924 to the museum's minister of finance that the goal of the art museum was – in an order that does not seem accidental – “*first* to bring an art experience and *secondly* evolutionary ideas on the subject [emphases added].”⁵⁹

The Provinzialmuseum of the 1920s was in the course of reevaluating the relationship between its three collections that were combined and opened to the public in 1902 upon its founding: the Naturhistorische Gesellschaft (Natural History Society), the Historische Verein für Niedersachsen (Historical Association for Lower Saxony), and the Verein für die öffentliche Kunstsammlung (Public Art Association); these discussions were part of larger debates about the best ways to update the museum.⁶⁰ Renovations and recontextualizations of the collections continued into the 1930s when labels and displayed objects shifted with political conservatism. Hanover cultural historian Ines

⁵⁸ Bencke had initially suggested separating the “heterogenous” departments by moving the art collections to a separate floor from the ethnographic and other artifacts in a proposal of 1911, which was accepted by the Provinzialmuseum director Karl Herman Jacob-Friesen. But the exhibition plan within the Gemäldegalerie “then followed the views of Dorner” (folgte dann aber den Auffassungen Dorners), according to Monika Flacke-Knoch, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik*, 38 (see fn. 5).

⁵⁹ In der Debatte um den „Zweck des Kunstmuseums“ dürfte sich in den frühen 20er Jahren auch Dorners Theorie zur „Entwicklungsgeschichte“ gefestigt haben, so daß er 1924 selbstbewußt an den Finanzverwalter des Museums, Schatzrat Hartmann, schreiben konnte, daß das Kunstmuseum „1. das Kunsterlebnis . . . und 2. den entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Gedanken zum Ausdruck“ bringen müsse.

Flacke, “Neuordnung,” 50 (see fn. 24).

⁶⁰ Heide Grape-Albers et al., *Das Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover: 150 Jahre Museum in Hannover, 100 Jahre Gebäude am Marschpark* (Hanover: Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover, 2002).

Katenhusen further chronicles the Natural History collection, overseen by Hugo Weigold beginning in 1924. The “evolutionary principles” espoused by National Socialist sympathizer Weigold were of a quite different sort than the artistic “evolution” upon which Dorner predicated his arrangement. Weigold’s department of Man and Human Phylogeny (*Mensch und Menschwerdung*) thematized “racial science and eugenics” with examples ranging from the “lowest” to the most evolved forms of human beings.⁶¹ Amid controversies about his displays and labels with their racist and jingoistic sentiments, Weigold – not unlike his colleague Dorner in the art department – considered himself a true museum expert, one who served popular education.⁶² In a 1936 article on his own updates to the Hanover museum display, Weigold took advantage of the platform to advocate for national museum-leadership training, using the nationalist parlance of the growing political majority:

We have in Germany – unlike the United States, unfortunately – no career and no school for museum professionals. This is a tremendous oversight in our otherwise overbred culture. There is no opportunity to learn the “museum profession” or to be tested in it. And if one does find the way as a volunteer at one of the few modern museums, one has no chance of ever making use of this training, because the vacancies at natural history museums are sadly not filled according to whether or not one is a museum specialist. It seems to be generally enough that one be a

⁶¹ In 1933, a Provincial Office for Population Studies and Racial Hygiene was also “affiliated to the museum as a separate body” attached to the department of Prehistory and Ethnography overseen by Karl Hermann Jacob-Friesen. See Ines Katenhusen, “150 Jahre Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover,” in *ibid.*, 37. Katenhusen describes exhibits of “racial science” ranging from exhibits of mixed races and genetic defects to the “pinnacle of human development, which is to be found in Lower Saxony (the home of the Landesmuseum).” *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 37. Katenhusen cites Weigold’s 1926 written suggestion that the department should be “popular, generally intelligible, and engaging and inspiring by virtue of stimulating people’s curiosity” (*volkstümlich, allgemein verständlich und durch Reizung der Schaulust fesselnd und anregend*). “Naturkundeabteilung,” *Jahrbuch Neue Folge* 1 (1926), 22.

zoologist, botanist or biology teacher. Although only one in a thousand biology graduates is a born educator of the people and qualified to use visual media as a means of instruction, today we must clamor for him to become a museum director.⁶³

Weigold, like Dorner, was a strong believer in the virtues of didactic labeling. His article instructed the leaders of natural history collections to provide the same information in labels as would be given on tours. Dorner's art galleries similarly made use of extensive informational labels and later a profusion of gallery guides on benches. Dorner believed in trenchant didactic content, writing, "To confine the label to an enumeration of facts about date, place of origin, etc [*sic*] is like piling up bricks without building."⁶⁴ For Dorner, the opportunity to educate was of primary importance –thus, he hoped, the cultural evolution tracked by his labels would continue to develop, off the page, in the lives of his viewers. When Dr. Franz Oelmann of the Landesmuseum Bonn

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Wir haben in Deutschland – im Gegensatz zu den Vereinigten Staaten, ja leider keine Laufbahn und keine Schule für Museumsfachleute. Das ist ein ungeheuer Fehler in unserer sonst überzüchteten Kultur. Weder gibt es eine Gelegenheit, den "Museumsberuf" zu erlernen, noch darin geprüft zu werden. Und wenn doch einmal einer den Weg als Volontär an einem der wenigen neuzeitlichen Museen findet, so hat er keinerlei Aussicht, jemals von dieser Schulung Gebrauch zu machen, denn die Stellen an Naturkundes Museen werden leider nicht danach besetzt, ob man Museumsfachmann ist. Es scheint allgemein zu genügen, daß man Zoologe, Botaniker oder Studienrat mit biologischen Fächern ist. Obgleich doch erst einer unter 1000 Biologie-Doktoranden ein geborener Volkserzieher und Praktiker im Anschauungsunterricht ist, wie wir ihn heute als Museumsleiter verlangen müssen.

Hugo Weigold, "Sind wir deutschen Naturmuseumsleiter wirklich rückständig?" in *Der Biologe: Monatschrift des Deutschen Biologen-Verbandes, des Sachgebietes Biologie des N.S.L.B. und der Rfa. Biologie der Reichsführung der Deutschen Studentschaft* 5 (December 1936): 427.

⁶⁴ "Re: Labelling [*sic*] in Art Museums." Alexander Dorner, handwritten notes, dated "c.1934/5," Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 61, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

took a 1931 survey of art museums, he cited Hanover as having the most pedagogical labeling, the abundance of which was in his mind “controversial” (umstritten).⁶⁵

Weigold’s article on his collection was accompanied by photographs of his modernized galleries, characterized by a feeling of spaciousness as well as copious educational text. (**figures 14 and 15**) He argued that work that did not fit into the contents of the primary exhibition themes (i.e., biology, evolutionary theory, race theory, nature conservancy) should remain in storage as part of a study collection, in order to afford the display-worthy specimens as much space as possible. Weigold’s minimalist gallery displays had, in this sense, an “atmospheric” intention with quite the opposite effect of Dorner’s large-scale environments. Weigold’s space was managed in such a way as to emphasize the visibility and affect of its individual specimens, while Dorner’s design determinism threatened to overshadow the works on view.

Dorner’s championing of evolutionary change in his galleries proceeded with no indication of self-consciousness regarding the perils of the evolutionary episteme as curated into the “Eugenics” exhibition in Weigold’s galleries directly below. Not that Dorner was entirely politically neutral – the curator had applied for inclusion in the NSDAP on April 1, 1933, but was denied entry without reason.⁶⁶ This may have been a strategic careerist maneuver; the director of the museum, Karl Hermann Jacob-Friesen, acting Chairman of the Joint Association of the DMB (Vorsitzende des Gesamtverbandes

⁶⁵ “Reichlicher ist die Beschriftung nur in Hannover, doch ist das dort befolgte system bezüglich seines pädagogischen Wertes sehr umstritten und lässt sich auch nur in Museen wie Hannover durchführen. . . .” Dr. Franz Oelmann to the governor (Landeshauptmann) of Bonn, letter, June 19, 1931, Archiv des Landschaftsverbands Rheinland 11266, Bl. 239–248; reprinted in Bettina Bouresh, *Die Neuordnung des Rheinischen Landesmuseums Bonn 1930–1939: Zur nationalsozialistischen Kulturpolitik der Rheinprovinz* (Cologne: Rheinland Verlag, 1996), 244.

⁶⁶ Katenhusen, “150 Jahre,” 39 (see fn. 60).

DMB) noted in a letter of the following year that the leadership of the Nazi Party had asked him to appoint contact persons to act as intermediaries between the DMB and themselves, preferably members of the NSDAP (Jacob-Friesen had appointed himself to be one of these, based on the “leader principle” (*Führerprinzip*). To be a party member was a means to achieve greater career stability.⁶⁷ It may also have simply been a gesture of self-preservation – Dorner’s application coincided with the *Judenboycott*, a state-organized boycott of Jewish businesses that marked the intensifying campaign of violence against Jews and those sympathetic to non-party politics. Many citizens of Germany had enlisted in the party in the period leading up to this date.⁶⁸

Art History In and Outside of the Museum

While revising their sense of public purpose in accordance with the complex politics of the day, museums of the Weimar Republic also responded to a reevaluation of

⁶⁷ Jacob-Friesen to (presumably Carl) Zimmer, letter, June 9, 1934, in Zentralarchiv: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III DMB 004. This was likely not a maneuver on Dorner’s part to ascend to Jacob-Friesen’s stature in the DMB or Hanover museum so much as a means of self-preservation. Ines Katenhusen describes the “atmosphere of constant discord” between Dorner and the “nominal” director Jacob-Friesen; the latter sent letters to the authorities undermining Dorner’s “political and moral integrity,” with Dorner in turn making every effort to continue his activities “as long as possible.” See Ines Katenhusen, “Ein Museumsdirektor auf und zwischen den Stühlen. Alexander Dorner (1893–1957) in Hannover,” in *Kunstgeschichte im “Dritten Reich”: Theorien, Methoden, Praktiken* ed. Ruth Heftrig et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), 162. In a forthcoming film project, and in an interview with the author, Katenhusen has suggested that Dorner’s attempt to gain party membership was a means of preserving not only his own job but also modernist artwork overall – only in the position of curator could he defend the works in his collection. Interview with the author, December 11, 2014.

⁶⁸ Many thanks to Patrick Gilner for this clarification. The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, passed on April 7 of that year, unseated a number of museum directors, including Carl Georg Heise, Ludwig Justi, Gustav Pauli, and Max Sauerlandt. See Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16.

the nature of stylistic change in art history within academic circles. Art historian Michael Ann Holly traces one such conversation in Heinrich Wölfflin's 1915 treatise on the distinctions between Renaissance and baroque art – moving, through changes in period vision, from linear to painterly, planar to possessing recessional depth, closed to open, composite to uniform, and absolute to relative – and Erwin Panofsky's rebuttal that these changes in form were accompanied by changes in an interpreting (not just passively viewing) receiver.⁶⁹ Wilhelm Worringer's 1919 "Critical Thoughts on the New Art" similarly looked to historical antecedents to explain the contemporary expressionistic tendency, finding precedent in spiritual, collectivist work that predated the Renaissance. It was such a tendency to look to the past for an analogue to help evaluate meaning in present-day style that Dorner rejected in his later notes for a manuscript that were the epigraph for this chapter: a diatribe against a "philosophy of timeless coexistence, when applied to a new arrangement, say, of Greek art, [that claimed the ability to] 'bring the Greeks closer to us.'" In other words, the attributes of the present, for Dorner, were always new: they drew from past style without connoting a resurgence of historical tendencies (formal, philosophical, political, or material.) The course of civilization was a progressive, not cyclical development.

Just as the manuscript by Dorner that opened this chapter reflected the motivation of museum practitioners to search art philosophy of the day for a guiding rubric for arranging art galleries (Dorner asked, "According to which philosophy of art history?" finally alighting upon a variation of Riegl's), it is tempting to speculate that the

⁶⁹ Holly elaborates that these polar categories, introduced in Wölfflin's 1915 *Kunstgeschichtische Grundbegriffe*, were later schematized in these terms in the 1933 edition. See Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 202, note 12; 60 ff.

theoretical reevaluations of stylistic orders of *Kunstwissenschaft* were mutually informed by new museum endeavors, bringing the chain of influence full circle. Alois Riegl's notion of *Kunstwollen* as conveyed through his *Stilfragen* (published in 1893) and his *Spätromanische Kunstindustrie* (1901) offered a synoptic theory of changing style that positioned tendencies such as abstraction, perspective, and particularities of ornament as ebbing and transitioning typologies. It is well known that the ornamental styles evaluated in his *Stilfragen* were drawn from his experiences as a curator of textiles in Vienna.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ It is also notable that Riegl's reconsideration of ancient periods, from Assyrian to Mesopotamian to Hellenistic to Early Islamic, against stylistic production of the Middle Ages and High Renaissance, coincided with a museal confrontation of styles stemming from the acquisition of major works from antiquity by Germanic collections. To art historians evaluating these works, the pendulum swing between abstract and representational styles appeared to have historical precedent stemming from ancient history. Historian Alina Payne thus suggests that, following the initial "rehabilitation of the Baroque" that began in the mid-nineteenth century, "perhaps the most immediate call to a revision of prejudices" regarding the baroque "had been the momentous arrival of the Hellenistic Pergamon altar in Berlin starting in 1879." Alina Payne, "Beyond *Kunstwollen*: Alois Riegl and the Baroque," in Alois Riegl, *The Beginnings of the Baroque in Rome*, ed. and trans. Andrew Hopkins and Arnold Witte (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 6. Articles reflecting on the *malerisch* or painterly quality of this "ancient Baroque" work followed, forming the context for Wölfflin's consideration of the style change (*Stilwandlung*) from the Renaissance to the baroque in his 1888 *Renaissance und Barock* and Riegl's assertion that the German preference for classical and Renaissance work was related to it being more alien (than the baroque style). See *ibid.*, 8–16. In an adjacent series of maneuvers, described by historian Suzanne Marchand, Wilhelmine trade agreements and colonial expansion led to a greater influx of Orientalist artifacts into the Berlin Museums not long thereafter, most significantly in the Berlin Ethnography Museum, founded in 1886. The "jumbled" collection, as Marchand describes, offended "connoisseurs of oriental arts, who wanted to accord them aesthetic status equal to that of European forms." Moreover, the "jumbled category" of the Orient overall was "defined by what it was not: classical or modern European art." Through this negation, it is clear that Orientalism existed as a contested constituent within the category of art overall. See Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 394. This made Wilhelm von Bode's advocacy for including Islamic works in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, opened in 1904, such an important declaration of support; Bode installed the major Mshatta Gate in the lower rooms of the museum in a maneuver to get around a prohibition against founding an Islamic collection. Bode was forbidden by his superiors to open an Islamic museum, but ultimately succeeded by "acquiring something so big and impressive (the Mshatta Gate) that it could not be put in the storehouse and by getting Friedrich Sarre to agree to be the unpaid director of the new department, and to put his own collections on display." *Ibid.*, 398.

Riegl's comparisons between works of art from different geographic origins emulated, in book form, a phenomenon also enabled by the museum.⁷¹ It is unsurprising that this method would appeal to Berlin art-history students such as Dorner and his cohort in the decades that followed, seeing a radical reevaluation of the comparisons made between collection works in area museums, such as the Essen Folkwang museum, comparing works from vastly different geographical and temporal origins. (figure 12)

Dorner found Riegl particularly useful in his search for an alternative vision of *Kunstwissenschaft* that did not posit universal values in art history. Rather, Riegl conceived of an artistic will, or *Kunstwollen*, that evolved over time from internal motivations in art, operating in tension with external shifts in historical context. The art theorist elaborated on the concept as follows:

A teleological approach according to which I saw in the work of art the result of a specific and consciously purposeful artistic will (*Kunstwollen*) that comes through in a battle against function, raw material and technique. In this theory, the latter three factors no longer have the positive creative role that the so-called Semperian

⁷¹ For example, Riegl's analysis of the motif of the Arabesque explicitly compared Oriental ornamentation from Persia with its Roman Empire antecedents and Medieval recuperation, stating by way of elaboration that "it seems unquestionable, as already indicated, that the later ornament must somehow have depended genetically on what preceded it, despite its different properties. . . . This is why I find it exasperating – and explicable only as one of the many unfortunate consequences of the materialist theory of art – that even highly experienced specialists still blithely dismiss any possibility of a relationship between the Oriental Arabesque and classical antiquity just as there can be no relation between fire and ice." Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 239. Originally published as *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Georg Siemens Verlag, 1893).

theory gave them, but rather a limiting, negative one. They constitute, as it were, the co-efficients of friction within the whole.⁷²

Such a “teleological change” in artistic expression, which for Riegl occurred against – but in spite of – the shifting backdrop of technological and other contextual problematics, would become influential for Dorner both as an art historian and also as a museum curator. It was in the galleries that Dorner would produce “feelings” and “experiences” intended to convey stylistic change as an outcome of both material and epistemological evolution. Dorner’s elaboration of *Kunstwollen* was thus entrenched in material as well as cultural development, and his labels pointed to “material” influence. Style, for Dorner, was best understood as both responsive to and informing of its historical and cultural context, not divorced from religious, political, or technological context, and not plausible as a universal category:

Hence modern works of art could never become the sole interest . . . [n]or could the rearrangement express the assumption . . . that the styles of past and present had only been accidental “dated” variations of an “undated” art. . . . [My] understanding – and experiencing – of historical art could only start from Riegl’s philosophy, because Riegl had proven the essential transformations in man’s faculties to think, to see and to act. . . . [My] post-university experiences could . . . deepen and widen Riegl’s picture of growth in art in a direction which

⁷² Alois Riegl, *Spätromanische Kunstindustrie* (1901), 9. As translated and excerpted in Jás Elsner, “The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901,” *Art History* 25, no.3 (June 2002): 362

moved constantly farther and farther away from the stasis of Riegl's dialectic absolutism.⁷³

Given the task of arranging the Hanover art collection, Dorner seized the opportunity to produce a physical history of representation and perception, one that sought to extend Riegl's aesthetic theory. His gallery plan intended to reveal *Kunstwollen*, a premise reduced by Dorner to the shorthand of tracing artists' shifting deployment of abstraction and dimensionality over time (rather than representing these as "timeless" tendencies that resurfaced throughout art history i.e. bringing the Ancients "closer.") For Dorner, history was specific and progressive, leading to a future of ever-opening perspective. This ultimately led Dorner, and the audience experiencing his galleries, into the "dimension" of actively experienced time.

Building a Perspective

Nearly contemporaneous with the completion of Dorner's galleries and gallery guide, Erwin Panofsky's "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'" (published 1927, from lectures given in 1924/25) also departed from prior canonical readings of Renaissance perspective as a merely objective depiction of depth of field. Rather, Panofsky argued, the changing system of geometrical perspective reflects shifting cultural identities, observable through developing strategies of depiction and modes of interpretation. Panofsky tied the artistic development of geometrical or perspectival form to the cultural development of

⁷³ Draft (presumed for "Apprenticeship" section) of *The Living Museum*, n.d. (presumed c. 1956), 27–27a, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 919, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

beholding, itself inflected by epistemic change over time. Dorner's galleries also addressed a shift in the representation of perspective over time, similarly emphasizing the viewer's perceptual experience in his endeavor to connect vision to artistic expression and thus period-specific contexts of production and reception. But Dorner leaves Panofsky at the gate when he attempts to bring in the fourth dimension of time through film, here in his own, informal English-language notes:

After Abstract art has found its goal in modern, massless, architecture we have no other means of representing our new reality which gives us the new actuality we see. It seems very doubtful to me whether to our modern mind which conceives only moved realities as "real" traditional sculpture and painting will ever be able to give us the intensified rational and emotional relations we have learned to consider real. Has not the film rather the new qualities we need for our life? The new moving space is the container of content of a new reality. That the means of photography and film are technical does by no means speak against them. The means of all art in the past have been technical within the technical abilities of its different ages.⁷⁴

Indeed, in another contemporaneous guidebook authored at the Hanover museum, Dorner stated even more explicitly that his galleries were intended to demonstrate an advance from the two-dimensional perspectival reflection of other modern movements like cubism, by activating the experiential dimensions of space and time.⁷⁵ The short booklet entitled *Erklärung des Raums* literalized this progression, illustrated with a two-

⁷⁴ Alexander Dorner, "The End of Art?" typed English translation and personal notes, dated 1929 (presumably referring to an original publication date in Lübeck paper), Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 447, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁷⁵ Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 983, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

dimensional rectangle, followed by a cube. The text in between these diagrams reads, “Space materializes when two dimensions become three”; the following page hosts a one-point-perspectival schematic of a street lined by trees and buildings, with a streetcar moving toward the viewer. (**figures 16 and 17**) The text above and below this illustration reads: “Viewed from without, the objects in this stage-like picture [of earlier illustrative styles] are ordered and held by their perspectival construction. The abstract movement [in contrast] seeks to free them from this external ordering and hold them in relation to one another through the tension of their inner qualities, so that they float freely in infinite space.”⁷⁶ When abstraction abandoned the conventional pictorial depiction of depth using traditional perspective, it participated, Dorner believed, in a more relativistic set of associations approximating the developments of modern science. Because both technical and perceptual development went hand in hand, for Dorner, he assessed that this advancement in the arts had a relationship to scientific advances without either being necessarily the outcome of the other. His gallery labels continued this exegesis, offering lengthy comparisons between abstract art and atomic science and relativity theory (only partially translated and transcribed here):

The abstract art movement is of general interest. For it serves no other purpose than to push out beyond previous image constructions to a new spatial design. So it is the obvious duty of every educated person to inform himself about it, just as

⁷⁶ “Der Raum kommt zustande, indem zu diesen zwei Dimensionen die dritte kommt . . . Die Gegenstände des bühnenartigen Bildes sind von aussen her durch die perspektivische Konstruktion geordnet und festgehalten. Die abstrakte Bewegung will sie von dieser äussern Ordnung befreien und sie durch die Spannung ihrer inneren Werte untereinander halten, so dass sie frei in unendlichen Raum schweben.” Dorner, “Erklärung des Raums,” n.d., 1–2, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 983, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; underlining in the original.

he would update himself on the new events in science. The abstract art movement has surprisingly close parallels to the new phenomena in science, the most famous being the theory of relativity and atomic theory. This is all the more surprising as these two phenomena in art and science have emerged completely independent of one other.

Atomic theory teaches:

Everything that surrounds us is a tremendous multipartite and complicated system of energies that crisscross each other and are held together by various tensions. The smallest unit, the atom, is a complicated system – just as the planets revolve around the sun, so too do the electrons revolve around the sun [*sic*]. Thus, the old concept of heavy, impenetrable mass is replaced in the new way of thinking by the notion of agglomerated energies.

Abstract art seeks to express intuitively:

Abstract art has nullified the separation of space and heavy, impenetrable mass and put in its place a system of interpenetrating, massless and freely juxtaposed floating surfaces, lines and points.

The theory of relativity:

has abandoned an absolute reference system. There is only the relative interrelationship of the dimensions in space-time. As a result, one can no longer speak of an absolute space independent of time, but only of a temporal continuum (space + time), i.e. time is added as a fourth dimension, as it were, to the hitherto self-animating third dimension.

Abstract art

has abandoned perspectival construction, which has for 500 years been the means to represent the space surrounding us. The perspectivist picture is, so to speak, a view from the window, the window frame corresponding to the frame of the artwork. The image itself is a view of a more or less large area of the earth's

surface. The order in this space, along with all that it contains, is created by the perspective that generates the illusion of space through a mathematical system. The perspectival construction induces in the eye (by a process of deception) the idea of space on the two-dimensional surface of a picture canvas. It creates a visual stage.

Abstract painting, however, has abandoned this fixed viewpoint. It is replaced by the mutual – i.e. the relative – interrelationship of the individual surfaces and lines and their mutual connection to the cosmos. (Cf. the system that holds together our firmament.)

As a result, one can no longer speak of a three-dimensional space that as a spatial stage = perspective can only render a fixed and limited section of that space but rather of a so-called four-dimensional space, manifest in the ceaseless movement of space-defining parts (planes and lines) among themselves: the experience of time is added as a new component of the spatial experience.

What abstract painting to some extent seeks to represent in the straitjacket of the image surface, film has given shape to in liberated form.⁷⁷

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Die abstrakte Kunstrichtung ist von allgemeinem Interesse. Denn sie hat keinen anderen Sinn, als über den bisherigen Bildaufbau hinaus zu einer neuen Raumgestaltung vorzustossen. So ist es die selbstverständliche Pflicht eines jeden Gebildeten, sich über sie ebenso zu orientieren, wie er sich über die neuen Ereignisse in der Wissenschaft orientiert. Die abstrakte Kunstrichtung weist erstaunlich nahe Parallelen auf zu den neuen Erscheinungen in der Wissenschaft, deren bekannteste die Relativitätstheorie und die Atomtheorie sind. Dies ist umso erstaunlicher, als beide Erscheinungen in der Kunst und Wissenschaft in völliger Unabhängigkeit von einander entstanden sind.

Die Atomtheorie lehrt:

Alles, was uns umgibt, ist ein ungeheuer vielteiliges und kompliziertes System von Energien, die sich durchkreuzen und durch Spannungen zusammengehalten werden. Die kleinste Einheit, das Atom, ist ein kompliziertes System, wie die Planeten um die Sonne, so kreisen die Elektronen um die Sonne. Damit wird der bisherige Begriff der schweren, undurchdringlichen Masse im neuen Sinn ersetzt durch die Vorstellung zusammengeballter Energien.

Die abstrakte Kunst sucht gefühlsmässig auszudrücken:

In Dorner's galleries, El Lissitzky's work represented "breaking out of the straitjacket": exemplifying disintegrating space achieved through visitor experience unfolding temporally. Following its construction, and throughout Dorner's developing plans to include a room presenting the "liberated form" of film, Dorner would also continue to grapple with the relationship between space-time and representational dimensionality in arguments on the page. Papers from Dorner on this topic included "Unser neues Raumgefühl und seine Entstehung in der Kunst der letzten 50 Jahre" (Our

Die abstrakte Kunst hat die Trennung von Raum und Schwerer, undurchdringlicher Masse aufgehoben und an die Stelle ein System sich durchdringender, massenlosen und freiebeneinander schwebender Flächen, Linien und Punkte gesetzt.

Die Relativitätstheorie:

hat das absolute Bezugssystem aufgegeben. Es gibt nur noch die relative Beziehung der Raum-Zeitgrößen zu einander. Infolgedessen kann man nicht mehr von einem absoluten, von der Zeit abhängigen Raum sprechen, sondern nur von einem Zeit-Kontinuum (Raum + Zeit), d.h. zu der bisher allein belebenden dritten Dimension kommt gewissermassen als vierte Dimension die Zeit.

Die abstrakte Kunst

hat die perspektivische Konstruktion aufgegeben, die seit ca. 500 Jahren das Mittel war, den uns umgeben den Raum darzustellen. Das perspektivische Bild gibt gleichsam einen Ausblick aus dem Fenster, wobei der Fensterrahmen dem Rahmen des Bildes entspricht. Das Bild selbst ist ein Ausblick über ein mehr oder minder grosses Stück der Erdoberfläche. Die Ordnung in diesem Raum mit allem, was darin steht, ist durch die Perspektive geschaffen, die durch ein mathematisches System die Illusion des Raumes erzeugt. Die perspektivische Konstruktion erzeugt im Auge (durch eine Täuschung) auf der zweidimensionalen Fläche der Bildleinwand die Vorstellung eines Raumes. Sie schafft die Bildbühne.

Die abstrakte Malerei dagegen hat diesen festen Augpunkt aufgegeben, An seine Stelle tritt die gegenseitige – d.h. die relative – Beziehung der einzelnen Flächen und Linien zu einander und ihre gegenseitige Bindung zu einem Kosmos. (vgl. wieder das System, das unsere Sternwelt zusammenhält.)

Infolgedessen kann man nicht mehr von einem dreidimensionalen Raum sprechen, der als Raumbühne = Perspektive nur einen starren und begrenzten Ausschnitt geben kann, sondern von einem sog. Vierdimensionalen, in der unaufhörlichen Bewegung der raumbildenden Teile (Flächen und Linien) untereinander: das Zeiterlebnis kommt als neuer Bestandteil des Raumerlebnisses hinzu.

Was die abstrakte Malerei gewissermassen in der Zwangsjacke der Bildfläche darzustellen sucht, hat der Film in erlöster Form gebracht."

Gallery didactics, n.d., Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 61, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; underlining in the original.

New Feeling of Space and Its Evolution in the Art of the Last Fifty Years) presented in Essen, in 1930, and an article on “Die neue Raumvorstellung in der bildenden Kunst” (The New Conception of Space in the Visual Arts) in the journal *Museum der Gegenwart* in 1931. Dorner’s series of treatments of the “conceptualization of space” and “the feeling of space” in these excursus was always readily tied to the teleological progression of dimensionality proposed in his galleries, to which all other artistic formal or stylistic developments were subordinated. “The abstract form is but a means to an end, not the end in itself, and not the most essential,” he wrote, in a line that appeared in at least two instantiations of this paper.⁷⁸ A memo on a proposed book with the same title – “Die neue Raumvorstellung in der bildenden Kunst” (ca. 1931) – notes that an evaluation of knowledge as understood through “developmental history” would contextualize an understanding of space in relation to periodicity. “This [is] a new basis for the teaching of history and a new type of museum,” Dorner surmised.⁷⁹ Architectural historian Joan Ockman suggests that the section of Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture* entitled “The New Space Conception: Space Time” was indeed influenced by (an unattributed) Dorner; she refers to a 1932 article by Giedion noting his familiarity with Dorner’s talk on “a fourth dimension, time” at the 1930 International Congress for Aesthetics.⁸⁰ This

⁷⁸ “Die abstrakte Form aber ist nur Mittel zum Zweck, nicht Selbstzweck und nicht das Wesentlichste.” This sentence appears in his draft for “Die neue Raumvorstellung in der bildenden Kunst,” *Museum der Gegenwart* 2, no. 1 (1932); Monika Flacke (“Neuordnung,” 54, note 27 [see fn. 24]) – also notes that this sentence appeared in the Essen presentation as published in *Zeitschrift für Asthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 25 (1931).

⁷⁹ “Dies als neue Grundlage für den Geschichtsunterricht und für einen neuen Typus von Museum.” Notes on “Die Neue Raumvorstellung in der bildenden Kunst,” typescript, dated in pen “1931(?),” 1–2, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 451, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁸⁰ Ockman, “The Road Not Taken,” 90 (see fn. 10).

might explain Dorner's vitriol toward Giedion, as expressed in an extensive footnote to a 1947 treatise on the work of Herbert Bayer (explored in Chapter 3):

How dangerous that gap [between innovations and precedents] is, and how misleading an analysis of modern and historical art movements can be when it contains the dilemma of a semi-static philosophy, is clear in Giedion's *Time, Space and Architecture* (Cambridge, 1941) [*sic*]. Giedion sticks to timeless Adam [*sic*] faculties, as for instance "Space." So modern architecture and painting still represent the eternal human desire to express "movement in space." . . . The consequence of this semi-absolutistic philosophy is a bleeding of the real creative force behind all modern movements. . . . With good instinct Giedion is fighting the split-personality of the day, yet he does not realize that his own philosophy is still a typical split-philosophy that tries to preserve timeless elements in a world of change. According to Giedion's analysis, modern architecture lives still in the Newtonian world. Small wonder that the conclusion has been drawn from this book that modern architecture and art are far behind the natural and economic sciences and of very little help in solving our vital problems. We would not make an exception to the policy of our study and go into this criticism of an otherwise very useful book by one of the few pioneers in the history of modern architecture, were it not for showing how dangerous to future progress any semi-static philosophy of art and history must be.⁸¹

Dorner believed that art was an evolutionary process best characterized by changes in perspectival representation – a collective process, and one that implied social self-determinism, and he felt it to be his obligation to explain new theories of space-time in the sciences that would suggest a fourth dimension expanding on the traditional perspectival rubric. He grounded these theories, which forayed into the scientific realm, within art

⁸¹ Dorner, *The way beyond 'art'*, 230 (see fn. 12).

history. In a talk drawn from his 1930 Hamburg presentation, given in his first year after emigrating to the United States at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New Bauhaus in Chicago, Dorner described the revolution away from traditional perspectival depiction through German Romanticism, an “expression of a new nature-religion, which cannot be depicted by the traditional means”⁸² A comparison between Franz Pforr and Rafael’s depictions of *Saint George and the Dragon* (**figure 18**) sparked this analysis:

Wherever the Renaissance picture shows diagonal forms and overlappings, the romantic painting has parallel surfaces and avoids all overlapping. The dragon’s head lies alongside the horse’s leg. The elbow just touches the horse’s neck, while the knee of the praying maiden and the tree just touch its back.

I should like to call this a “super-perspective contact”. There are lines, connected with one-another, although they actually have nothing to do with one-another in space. . . . The effect is a certain hovering character, which goes beyond the actual perspective space conception.⁸³

Dorner concluded the lecture by moving into contemporary theories of space-time:

“Modern art once more has become the fulfillment of the romantic dream. Once more it has been the abandonment of massiveness, which has made a four-dimensional arrangement of space possible.”⁸⁴ Dorner explained these changes not only representationally, but experientially. He discussed the movement from observing an

⁸² “English and German Romanticism,” typescript with pen annotation describing the venues of this presentation as “new york, metropolitan museum april 27 1938 and Chicago new Bauhaus may 23, 1938,” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 312, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁸³ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

English garden from a single point from the exterior (as does the viewer of a one-point-perspective painting) to navigating a Romantic garden from the interior. The moving picture, and its antecedent, the Panorama, also charted the same trajectory:

The basic idea was the same as in the romantic garden, shown here. The belt path-plan was obviously intended to extend the French stage-garden into the limitless horizon. The panorama repeats this thought even more distinctly.

You are no longer a member of an audience in a theater, seated before a stage, but are situated right in the middle, surrounded on all sides by space, as if you were atop a mountain, looking around you onto the Gulf of Naples or Palermo. This definitely replaces perspective narrowness with universal space. But technically this can only be done by connecting, in circular form, four perspective views.

. . . In essence it means that the old perspective picture and stage were an illusion of reality that did not have sufficient mobility to bring the new universality of time and space into our sphere.

A relative vantage-point was sought in lieu of a fixed one. In all these early attempts it was a deception that could never be convincing.

However, a sound picture taken from an airplane, circling the Rocky Mountains, is an example of our four-dimensional feeling, which can only be improved upon by the stereoptical effect now being perfected. The film can sum up and multiply optical, mental and emotional experience in a manner always denied to the stage. For instance in this extract from a Russian movie by Dziga Wertoff you see the expression of the man's eye as he visualizes the content of his daily life – his sick wife and the dreary long road to and from his work. Here we have again fulfilled

that for which the Romanticists groped in their gardening, painting and other expressions mentioned: the superperspective enlargement of experience.

All optical art should create the illusion of reality or its symbol in the most effective way possible. Modern sound pictures do this.⁸⁵

For Dorner, the addition of a fourth dimension through a panoramic surround, a relativistic navigational agency, or immersion in an “illusion of reality” were all the outcomes of advancements in artistic depictions of dimensionality. Film was the ultimate means by which to break out of the “straitjacket” of the picture plane, through the additional dimension of time. In his advocacy for film as an avant-garde artistic format, as well as his reading of atomic theory and relativity theory, Dorner found a way to resuscitate the status of abstraction, and to make it strictly contemporary. As Dorner’s assessment of both abstraction and relativity theory conveyed, contemporary life was non-absolute, interdependent, and always changing.

Dorner’s Abstraction and the Troubles with Expressionism

Dorner had been impressed by Lissitzky’s abstraction during a meeting early during his gallery renovations. In a later reflection, Dorner described the encounter:

A personal experience with Lissitzky’s art might help to clarify that important achievement of abstract art: In the spring of 1923 when working in Berlin, Lissitzky visited Hanover where he lived in the house of a common friend, Paul

⁸⁵ Ibid., 17 ff.; underlining in the original.

Kueppers. There I was looking over his shoulder one day when he was sitting on the floor drawing. In this way I participated in the birth of an Abstract design, watching and judging it with mental tools which at that time – I am ashamed to say – were still shaping the so-called impacts from outside in the traditional manner. In other words I expected Lissitzky to erect one more variation of the basic theme that the Renaissance had established for the western mind and which Expressionism – then the latent child of Romanticism – had only distorted. I expected him to erect a visible symbol of space to subdue the restless uncertainty of ever changing appearances and engage them in a balanced three-dimensional framework. I expected him to confirm visually once more our traditional source of comfort and security, an essentially never changing truth, goodness, and beauty. So when I followed the lines of his pen I instinctively expected the lines to join in a system of not changing, identical relations.

But Lissitzky did just the opposite. He arranged the lines, planes and cubes in such a way that they had not only one meaning but two or even more. A line did not have one direction into depth but had two contradictory directions at the same time that made it move constantly and so change its essential identity. The whole composition became one self-changing field of Abstract signs which were no longer symbols of an inner identity, victorious over all forces of change, but became symbols of an explosive field of energetic processes which were only held together by their change-creating interpenetration. To crown this breach into a new substratum Lissitzky inserted pieces of actual texture in his composition and thus jumped out of the spatial framework with its illusionistic surfaces and accomplished a direct contact with the observer. The picture ceased to be a “picture.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ From Dorner’s text for exhibition brochure “El Lissitzky: thru October 1949 [*sic*],” The Pinacotheca, 40 East 68th Street, New York, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 984, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

For Dorner, El Lissitzky's work comprised a form of non-expressive abstraction, one that left behind the emotional and symbolic legacies of Romanticism. This interpretation was initiated in Dorner's first didactic texts on Lissitzky for his *Official Guide*, where Dorner expanded upon the theme of spatial abstraction intersecting with time-based experience: "The phrase 'the fourth dimension' is an important one in this context. Constructivism is actually architecture that is painted and freed from the shackles of purpose. It is no coincidence that its main representative, the Russian El Lissitzky, is also an architect."⁸⁷ The construction of a "fourth dimension" as an object of perceptual interpretation was tantamount to the representation of reality as being a fluid, non-static proposition.

Lissitzky's work seemed, to Dorner, to best represent the most current evolutionary state of subjectivity, dimensionality, and technology. His work thus represented an ideal form of contemporary, non-representational art that did not possess the pitfalls of expressionism – a response to period anxieties that can only be schematized here. Charles W. Haxthausen traces the term "expressionism" between 1911 and 1920, used by critics as an umbrella synonym for the avant-garde (a term which was not used by Germanic art criticism of the time), defined across the spectrum as a means of overcoming the "estrangement" and alienation" that separated artists from society while also being positioned as anti-representational, non-"empathic," ultimately questioned for its

⁸⁷ Alexander Dorner, *Amtlicher Führer: Dritter Teil*, 20 (see fn. 28) The author consulted three editions of this guide in three libraries, attributed n.d., 1927, and 1928, all seemingly identical. While it cannot be certain that the completion of Lissitzky's *Abstract Cabinet* was complete before the writing of his guide, it is at least likely that the guide was produced with the eventual completion of the room in mind. In the guidebook, Lissitzky is positioned as one of the final statements in artistic development, with a c.1919–22 *Proun* work being the last illustration in the book.

inefficacies and lack of cohesion, and, later, condemned for its incommensurability with the critics' visions for the movement, including its "plurality" and even "individualism."⁸⁸

Debates over expressionism and its potential for alienating the citizenry reigned in Hanover before Dorner's arrival; a 1916 lecture by a "Professor Haupt" at the Kestnengesellschaft, where Dorner would eventually become president, criticized the foreign and obtuse influence of impressionism and expressionism:

He noted that in the field of visual arts, which indeed represented the finest flowering of human culture, foreign influences were painfully strong. German art patrons would often prefer Impressionist and Expressionist products from abroad to our German art and might ultimately be led astray and bewildered by this "trend." It was, admittedly, not possible to comprehend with a healthy sensibility that something should be beautiful that appeared ugly to us, and yet we bowed the knee before these foreign tin gods. Thus, although at times it caused art lovers real sorrow and heartache, hopes were still cherished that German art would recover, as it was unthinkable that the gifts of an Erwin von Steinbach, a Dürer or a Holbein should be denied to our people now. In the wake of the war, our people are in a position to call for the emergence of a new German art, an art that not only three hundred compatriots can understand but sixty million, as is the case with the folk song (Volksleid), which is rooted in our entire being.⁸⁹

In his initial reinstallation of the collection, Dorner positioned the "new" abstraction in art not as a dangerous resurgence of a prior expressive or receptive

⁸⁸ Charles W. Haxthausen, "A Critical Illusion: 'Expressionism' in the Writings of Wilhelm Hausenstein," in *The Ideological Crisis of Expressionism: The Literary and Artistic German War Colony in Belgium 1914–1918*, ed. Rainer Rumold and O. K. Werckmeister (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1990), 170-72, 183-86.

⁸⁹ Review article by "rd," "Die Parzivalsage in Bildern," *Hannoverscher Kurier*, 9 October 1916. I originally encountered an excerpt of this article in the thesis of Curt Robert Germundson, "Kurt Schwitters in Hanover: Investigation of a Cultural Environment" (Graduate College of the University of Iowa, May 2001), 13; this translation is updated and expanded.

precursor nor as a strictly foreign influence, but as a hallmark of innovation. In fact, Dorner positioned expressionism as a natural outcome of artistic development: Dorner believed that art historical movements seeded each other. In this sense, he remained nearer to Wölfflin's *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* than he might be inclined to concede. For Wölfflin, "the change in style from Renaissance to baroque is a classic example of how a new *Zeitgeist* inevitably gives rise to new form."⁹⁰ Echoing this, out of the proportional compositions and mass of the Renaissance, Dorner wrote, baroque art "made use of the same formal system, but it no longer focused on something perfected and complete but rather on the process of moving and becoming – not the limited and tangible, but the unlimited and colossal."⁹¹ Dorner's gallery guides described baroque art as "exuberant, subsuming all individual forms" (*Großzügigen, alle Einzelformen Zusammenfassenden*).⁹² Still, the perspectival field of the baroque drew on the methods of earlier periods – an essay by Dorner probably written some years later described this device as presenting the picture categorically as a "view out of a window; the frame represents the window frame; the segment of space lies before us like a stage, viewed from a fixed vantage point. This principle does not fundamentally change in the Baroque or the following periods. . . . Expressionism is the concluding stage of romantic development; it ends with the complete dissolution of the old image form."⁹³

⁹⁰ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der Neueren Kunst*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Hugo Bruckmann, 1917), 9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹² Dorner, *Amtlicher Führer, Zweiter Teil*, 6–7 (see fn. 25).

⁹³ Dorner, "Die neue Raumvorstellung" (see fn. 78). The essay is filed in Dorner's papers with another set of pages by the same title, with a handwritten date attribution of "1931(?)" added in Dorner's hand.

As Haxthausen shows, the term expressionism and its progressive aspirations shifted rapidly in the critical sphere.⁹⁴ By the year 1920, critic Wilhelm Hausenstein pronounced that “Expressionism is dead” in his essay *Die Kunst in diesem Augenblick*:

The objectlessness of expressionism was ultimately no accident. The thing disappeared from painting as it disappeared from the world, and the subjugation of the object wanted to make a virtue of necessity. As long as things exist, art has no reason to ignore or subjugate them. But precisely this was fate, was – put most emphatically – the misery of the epoch, that it possessed neither people nor things. That painting is wrong because the gentleman depicted grew his eyes on his mouth, his ears on his nose? The objection – oh, he comes from a time when there were still faces. But take a look at how they have been growing for years now: crooked all around, horribly deformed, cross-eyed, loutish, mangled, sick, displaced. The painters only represented what was. There is no reason to reproach them. They painted their time. . . . The destruction of horizontal perspective by the airplane was the ideal precondition of expressionist painting in a moment when no concrete detail yet fortified this transformation individually in particular relationships. . . . The issue today is art or cinema. Expressionism, in its last bursts of speed, its last spasms and contortions, had already assumed the fragmented and flat profile of cinematography. Socialism, which once promised salvation, has entered into bankruptcy with the revolution. The proletariat is losing its nobility. Is there nothing more than individuals? Than islands? Is there no end to the misery of being an island?⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Haxthausen, “A Critical Illusion,” 184 (see fn. 88). In his “Paul Klee, Wilhelm Hausenstein and ‘The Problem of Style’” (*Kritische Berichte* 1 [2014]: 48; 55 ff.), Haxthausen elaborates: “Like many critics of his generation who had forged the concept of Expressionism, Hausenstein had believed that with the new art modern Europe was at last on the threshold of a unified period style, a collective style [expressionism]. But by the end of the War, for him and others who shared this hope, the dream of such a unified, collective style had collapsed, leaving in its wake a deep cultural pessimism.” Haxthausen suggests that Wölfflin’s systematic rubric for interpreting art as well as Oswald Spengler’s suggestion that “The Problem of Style” was that it vanished with diminishing civilization, influenced Hausenstein’s eventual critique of Klee’s stylistic regression into abstraction and subjectivity.

Hausenstein's appraisal of the end of expressionism reveals an anxiety over the relationship between a thing and its historical perceiving agent. Nonrealistic or objectless representation was a symptom, in this line of criticism, of a period in which objectivity and perspective – in all permutations of both terms – had been rendered destabilized. Furthermore, the expressionist tendency had resulted in a fragmentation into individual islands, dissociated from any revolutionary potential.⁹⁶

In its adherence to Worringer's claim that *Kunstwollen* would trump "the subjectively arbitrary and the individually conditioned," Haxthausen argues that expressionism as a premise "manifested a faith in an intelligible teleological coherence within history, and of a longing for a restoration of a unified, integrated culture."⁹⁷

Dorner attempted to understand a teleologically derived unified culture as a facet of materialist and subjectivist principles; still, Dorner's "evolution" of artistic style possesses elements of Worringer's rubric: Abstraction – aligned with expressionism, primitivism, spirituality, tendencies from Egypt and the Middle Ages – was juxtaposed with empathy, which was connected with more naturalistic representation, classical Greek and Renaissance tendencies, and a means of suture with the social collective. As Worringer states, "The fact that the need for empathy as a point of departure for aesthetic experience also represents, fundamentally, an impulse of self-alienation is all the less

⁹⁵ Wilhelm Hausenstein, "Art at this Moment," in *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 481. Originally published as "Die Kunst in diesem Augenblick," *Der neue Merkur* (1919–1920).

⁹⁶ Some fifteen years later, the National Socialists would also find fault in the "degenerate" nature of expressionism. Max Sauerlandt's book *Die Kunst der letzten 30 Jahre* (Art of the Last Thirty Years) was thus banned, among other infractions, for suggesting that "Expressionism [was] the art form of the war generation." See memorandum, October 3, 1935, on the banning of Sauerlandt's book, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Bestandsignatur R 58, Archivnummer 897, 88.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 174, 171.

likely to dawn upon us the more clearly the formula rings in our ears: ‘Aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment.’ For this implies that the process of empathy represents a self-affirmation, an affirmation of the general will to activity that is in us.”⁹⁸

For Worringer, the nature of the perceptual relationship between the experiencing limner and his object of analysis – whether empathic or abstract – was thus embedded into period-based shifts in representational style. Critical theorists of the time were similarly occupied with understanding the precise nature of perception of an object of analysis – including an empathic relationship with it – as it bore on art interpretation. Mark Jarzombek shows how Heinrich Wölfflin’s “objective reality of a work of art” was, perhaps surprisingly, tied to theorizations of *Einfühlung*.⁹⁹ Panofsky, in his original 1920 article *Begriff des Kunstwollens* (to which Dorner would respond in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*), invoked Theodor Lipps’s distinction between “psychological” and “normative” aesthetics, wherein “an empirical subject’s impressionistic experience which is conditioned by taste, education, milieu, movements of the day – or that of a majority of empirical subjects” might alienate a modern beholder from the *Kunstwollen* of an historical object or artist’s intention.¹⁰⁰ In the same article, Panofsky took issue with the “inadequacy” of Worringer’s polar positioning of real or

⁹⁸ William Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (1908; repr., Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 24.

⁹⁹ “De-scribing the Language of Looking: Wölfflin and the History of Aesthetic Experientialism” in *Assemblage* 23 (April 1994): 28-69.

¹⁰⁰ Erwin Panofsky, “The Concept of Artistic Volition,” trans. Kenneth J. Northcott and Joel Snyder, *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 17–33. Originally published in *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1922): 328–29.

unreal / natural or unnatural depictions – a position which only “eternalizes this old antithesis.”¹⁰¹

Worringer looked to earlier movements of artistic abstraction, namely the Gothic, in order to predict the transition from a subjective and individualistic society into a more spiritual, anonymous culture characterized by new objectivity.¹⁰² The art movement that would take the title of *Neue Sachlichkeit* indeed pivoted away from expressionism to champion a “representative,” “civilized” art of “pure objectification” as forwarded by critic Franz Roh (1925).¹⁰³ The ideal perceiving agent – both artist and spectator of art alike – would therefore not be an abstracting, expressive individual but a willingly “empathic” participant in the social commons.¹⁰⁴

The works on view in the *Abstract Cabinet* were often selected to uphold Dorner’s favored attributes of planar ambiguity, allowing primarily for works whose compositional elements were not dominated by expressionistic content or tendencies. The display included work by Picasso, Léger, Mondrian, Moholy-Nagy, Gabo, and Kandinsky.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy* (see fn. 98).

¹⁰² See Charles W. Haxthausen, “Modern Art After ‘The End of Expressionism’: Worringer in the 1920s,” in *Invisible Cathedrals: The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer*, ed. Neil H. Donahue (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1995), 123 ff.

¹⁰³ Wilhelm Hausenstein, “Art at this Moment,” originally published as “Die Kunst in diesem Augenblick” in *Der neue Merkur* (1919–1920): 11–127, and Franz Roh, “Post-Expressionist Schema,” originally published in *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1925), 119. Both reproduced in *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 480 and 493 respectively (see fn. 95). *Neue Sachlichkeit* was hardly a unified term, its multivalent history is outlined by Steve Plumb in *Neue Sachlichkeit 1918–33: Unity and Diversity of an Art Movement* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Charles W. Haxthausen has elaborated the politicized religious stakes of this cultural transition for Hausenstein in particular in his “A Critical Illusion,” 179–80 (see fn. 88).

¹⁰⁵ Landesmuseum Hannover, Landesgalerie/ Archiv, File I.3.2.a (“Museumsreform. ‘Entartete Kunst’/ Buch über ‘entartete Kunst’/ Beschlagnahme 1937”).

Dorner added educational elements to the display in a cabinet below the window.¹⁰⁶ By 1933, these included National Socialist propaganda and comparisons between stationery of the National Socialist party and Kurt Schwitters's letterhead designs for the Hanoverian State – with politically neutral (and politically avoidant) label commentary noting advances in typography (as reproduced in Frank G. Kurzhal's suggestively titled essay "The Political Blindness of the Educated Class: Alexander Dorner").¹⁰⁷ Under the title "Die Auswirkung der abstrakten Kunst in den Dingen des tägl. Lebens" (The Effects of Abstract Art on the Things of Daily Life) Dorner marked the two pieces of stationery with the same interpretive commentary, noting the clarity and intensity of their compositions. **(figures 19 and 20)**

The inclusion of Schwitters's stationery in this vitrine – as opposed to a selection of his artistic work – is also reflective of Dorner's philosophy of art history: the individualistic expression of Schwitters's *Merz*, for example, would seem too retrograde to be part of the contemporary movement. Of the *Merzbau*, Dorner (with Cauman, in the third person) wrote:

[A] shock came to him [Dorner] when the Surrealist Schwitters took him for the first time down to the cellar of his house to admire the "Merz tree" made of garbage packed in plaster. Here, [Dorner] felt, free expression of the socially uncontrolled and unconnected self had already entered into the area of the mental asylum and he avoided to enter this cellar ever again.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Kai-Uwe Hemken, "Cultural Signatures: László Moholy-Nagy and the 'Room of Today,'" in *László Moholy-Nagy*, ed. Ingrid Pfeiffer and Max Hollein (Munich: Prestel, 2009), 168–71.

¹⁰⁷ Kurzhal, "Die politische Blindheit" (see fn. 52).

¹⁰⁸ Undated manuscript for *The Living Museum*, 19 (see fn. 17). It is notable that Dorner did collect work by Schwitters for the collection, and plausible that his encounter with the *Merzbau* was during its earlier, more chaotic formal years. Isabel Schulz interview with the author,

In other words, Schwitters's expressive, Dadaist work was self-alienated to the point of insanity, earning him the (not celebratory) moniker of "Surrealist" in Dorner's assessment. Where Dorner permitted himself a degree of impressionistic/interpretive filter to access the past, the sheer and unfettered personal expression for expressivity's sake was untenable to Dorner, who called Schwitters's work too "socially uncontrolled" to be included in a gallery celebrating the advancements of abstraction as a collective spatial and/or durational projection (in contradistinction with Worringer's positioning of abstraction as an anti-empathic direction). Dorner's affinities for contemporary work were delimited to those which reinforced his teleology – an historical progression that manifested through advances in perspective. Dada and politically active art were almost entirely absent from Dorner's curatorial scheme; surrealism and any other form of individually expressive work were always labeled retrograde. In this instance, by including the Lower Saxony state stationery and typography, Dorner found a way to allow

December 10, 2014. There is evidence that a collage by Schwitters may have been in an early rotation of the Abstract Cabinet. A text by Dorner in the Sprengel Museum archives dated "ca. 1926," and labeled "text for the Abstract Cabinet" ("Text zum Abstrakten Kabinett") refers to an assemblage by Schwitters as "an attempt to create forms and material (which is divested of the space of perspectival illusion, hence tram tickets, etc.) as a super-perspectival floating cosmos." (als ein Bestreben, Formen und Material [das dem perspektivischen Illusionsraum entzogen ist, daher Strassenbahnbillette u.s.w.] als überperspektivisch schwebenden Kosmos zu gestalten.) (Sprengel Museum, Alexander Dorner Papers, file 1.1.6.1). Lissitzky's Abstract Cabinet was not completed until the year following, however other comments in the text refer to design elements of and works on view in his room. At any rate, it is notable that the work was framed and praised in terms of its flat "super-perspectival floating cosmos" without reference to other merits of the assemblage components or composition, and in this sense Dorner continues to withhold attention from Schwitters's expressive tendencies.

Schwitters to participate with a contribution that managed to avoid these pitfalls and could instead be characterized as socially organizational in its “principle of uniformity.”¹⁰⁹

Beyond Lissitzky’s *Cabinet* in Dorner’s museum was a planned *Raum der Gegenwart* (room of the present) by László Moholy-Nagy, in development at the time that Dorner went into exile. This room, based on his “Room 2” for the 1930 Paris Werkbund exhibition, would have included temporal elements such as film and kinetic light projection. It would also have served as the capstone to a gallery lineage arguing that the legacy of expressionism yielded the productive innovations of daily life – a list of materials and thematics, written in Dorner’s hand, on one version of the design plan for the room includes “painting, sculpture, architecture, film (photo), placards, fabric, carpets, furniture, tableware . . . stage theater, dance, sport movement, tech. buildings, cars, and airplanes,” followed by a note on the wall text: ““Parallels in the natural sciences, literature, music, economics, scholarship.”¹¹⁰ A current research project into this room’s plans by Kai-Uwe Hemken and Jakob Gebert, ongoing since 2007, concludes that contemporary technology and industry were both the content and the media conceived for this display: “Art and architecture, design, technology and sports within the modern industrial society were to be visualized through a multitude of reproductive devices such as pictures, films, slides, a kinetic wall of pictures and the lightprop [Moholy-Nagy’s kinetic sculpture and prop for film, *Lichtrequisit einer elektrischen Bühne / Light Prop for*

¹⁰⁹ Werner Heine and Annette Haxton, “‘Futura’ without a Future: Kurt Schwitters’ Typography for Hanover Town Council, 1929–1934” in *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 129.

¹¹⁰ “Malerei, Plastik, Architektur, Film (Photo), Plakate, Stoffe, Tapeten, Möbel, Geschirr . . . Bühne Theater, Tanz, Sport bewegung [*sic*], Techn. Bauten, Autos + Flugzeuge” with the wall text “Parallelen i.d. Naturwissenschaften, Literatur, Musik, Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft.” Undated, unsigned carbon of design plan for the *Raum der Gegenwart* with pencil notes. Some of the notes are illegible and are omitted or presented as the author can best surmise. See NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 39.

an Electric Stage, c.1930].”¹¹¹ (figure 21) The use of photomontage in this planned room was connected to Dorner’s advocacy for photoreproductive media (as will be examined in the next chapter).

The work was also, as Devin Fore has argued, Moholy’s means of suggesting an alternative to “linear one-point perspective,” without fully subscribing to the “avant-garde’s negation of illusionistic depth, that was motivated by the impossible fantasy of achieving some kind of absence of perspective – a truly subjectless mode of perception.”¹¹² From the outset, Dorner eschewed the “romantic” individualistic aspect of expressionism. His gallery guide’s distinction between the mechanistic “sensitive” eye of impressionism and the individualistic abstraction of expressionism spoke to period concerns over the distinctions between a subjective, interiorizing citizenry versus an empathic collective able to experience a socially delimited form of *Einfühlung* (aesthetic empathy, projected onto an object by the perceiver). Like Dorner, Moholy attempted to defy and expand traditional renditions of perspective without forfeiting the centrality of an individual subject / gallery beholder.

While expressionism may have been a “concluding stage” of artistic development in Dorner’s early gallery construction, as political and cultural tendencies became more

¹¹¹ Draft of “Übersetzung ‘Dossier – Room of our Time,’” emailed from Kai-Uwe Hemken to author on August 5, 2012 (collaborative translation by Hemken and the author). The *Light Prop for an Electric Stage* by Moholy-Nagy is also frequently titled *Light-Space Modulator* and occasionally attributed to the years 1923–30.

¹¹² Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 26. Noam Elcott has extended this argument, describing this room as an exploration of the very premise of contemporary space, an “archaeology of the interwar imagination of time and space; that is, an account of the rise of a certain, ‘mediatised’ conception of time and space, constructed through photography, film, and architecture, as these are presented in the museum.” Elcott, “Rooms of our time: László Moholy-Nagy and the stillbirth of multi-media museums,” in *Screen/Space: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 26.

conservative, Dorner was cautious to distinguish between expressionism that was too romantic/individualistic to be understood by the culture at large and the “positive” tendency of expressionism that could be a force of national culture, as he conveyed in the wall text for the “Expressionist Room” in the museum galleries:

German art of the Middle Ages (cf., for example, the miniatures in Hall 1) had not previously shrunk from making faces bright purple and distorting hands to grotesque proportions to enhance their expressiveness. This period of German art is often therefore used as a parallel.

This comparison is wrong on that score, because the content of medieval art was the common property of the people and because the artists of the time were almost indistinguishable from the nation as a whole, while the Expressionist period comes at the end of the age of liberal individualism: therefore both the artists themselves and the representational content of their art were exposed to the danger of complete isolation.

One must draw a clear dividing line within Expressionist art and put on the positive side those artworks where content and form are generally understandable – i.e., where the artistic vision is still connected to the nation as a whole. Here Expressionist art undoubtedly represents a powerful internalization and deepening of the artistic experience and a positive and bracing force in the cultural life of the nation as a whole.¹¹³

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Die deutsche Kunst des Mittelalters (vgl. z.B. die Miniaturen in Saal 1) hat nicht davor zurückgeschreckt, Gesichter hell violett zu machen und Hände ins Riesenhafte zu verzerren, um eine verstärkte Ausdruckskraft zu erreichen. Darum wird diese Zeit der deutschen Kunst sehr oft als Parallele herangezogen.

Dieser Vergleich ist deshalb schief, weil der Inhalt der mittelalterlichen Kunst Allgemeinbesitz des Volkes war und weil die damaligen Künstler ganz eng mit dem Volksganzen verwaschen waren; während die expressionistische Periode am Ende des liberalistischen Individualismus

Interpretive texts from 1933 filed with internal memos in the museum's files, and likely authored by Dorner, were even more explicit about the perilous roots of romantic subjectivity in expressionist art. These labels condemned expressionism, which “seeks to express the emotional experience of the artist” (sucht das seelische Erlebnis des Künstlers auszudrücken), threatening to supplant “the so-called objective shapes and colors with unnatural shapes and colors determined solely by the subjective feelings of the artist” (sog-objektiven [*sic*] Formen und Farben unnatürliche Formen und Farben, die allein durch das subjektive Empfinden des Künstlers bestimmt werden). Expressionism was thus “an exaggeration of individualism” (eine[r] Übersteigerung des Individualismus), “incomprehensible to the public” (unverständlich[er] für die Allgemeinheit), “a typical product of liberal individualism in its final stage” (ein typisches Produkt des liberalistischen Individualismus in seinem letzten Stadium).¹¹⁴

steht: daher ist sowohl der Künstler selbst als auch der gegenständliche Inhalt seiner Kunstwerke der Gefahr völliger Isolierung ausgesetzt.

Man muss einen klaren Trennungsstrich innerhalb der expressionistischen Kunst ziehen und auf die positive Seite die Kunstwerke setzen, wo Inhalte und Form allgemein verständlich sind, wo also die künstlerische Vision noch die Bindung zum Volksganzen hat. Da bedeutet die expressionistische Kunst zweifellos eine starke Verinnerlichung und Vertiefung des künstlerischen Erlebnisses und eine positive Kraft und eine Stärkung im Kulturleben des Volksganzen.

“Raum des Expressionismus,” dated 1933, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 61, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹¹⁴ “Raum des Expressionismus,” memorandum, n.d. (presumed 1933), NLA HA, Hann. 151, 183. Both items underlined in the original. By comparison, another memo in the series on the “abstract movement” (abstrakte[n] Bewegung) championed the “new additional vision” (das neue weitere Sehen) that – while complicated for a general public – was integrating into the daily life of the *polis* through film: “The same public that rejects these artworks as paintings and sculptures has completely accepted the formal ideas that underpin them into the object world of their daily lives, in film above all. It is proof that a new basis is possible. . . . This is the way to a new German folk art in the making.” (Dieselbe Allgemeinheit, die diese Kunstwerke als Bilder und Plastiken ablehnt, hat die ihnen zugrunde liegenden Formideen in den Dingen des täglichen

Dorner’s increasingly extreme refutation of expressionism’s “exaggeration of individualism” can be read as a response to political judgments against cultural outliers that alienated or threatened the compliant *demos* of the mass contemporary subject.¹¹⁵ Dorner declined to make overtly political statements but participated in the stylistic discussion regarding the evolutionary positioning of abstraction – with its political undertones. In this conversation, Dorner leaned on a theorization of perspective that opened out to the possibility of an improved future civilization. He justified the display of all these movements by claiming that his galleries conveyed the changing *epistemes* of the past – through stylistic progressions of abstraction, expressionism, and perspective, in order to train individual viewers to better understand their productive relationship to their collective present and future.

Lebens und vor allem im Film restlos angenommen. Es ist der Beweis dafür, dass die neue Basis lebensfähig ist. . . . Dies ist der Weg zu der neuen deutschen Volkskunst, die im Werden ist.)

¹¹⁵ The debates over the radicality of expressionism and its meaning for social alignments continued through the Weimar Republic’s demise, seeding the polarized lines drawn in the 1938 debates between Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch over expressionism and political commitment: Lukács insisted that the indulgent subjectivism of expressionism could offer only “escapist” “pseudo-opposition” (at best), or (at worst) a useful “heritage” for Fascism; Bloch responded that Lukács had failed to engage with art and artists, and posed the objections: “But what if Lukács’s reality – a coherent, infinitely mediated totality – is not so objective after all? What if his conception of reality has failed to liberate itself completely from Classical systems? What if authentic reality is also discontinuity?” Ernst Bloch, “Discussing Expressionism,” in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: NLB, 1977), 22 – for an overview of the debate, see “Presentation I,” 9–15; Ernst Bloch, “Discussing Expressionism,” 16–27; Georg Lukács, “Realism in the Balance,” 28–59. Here we see a repeat of the debate positioning expressionism either as a means of liberation from Fascism or its reinforcement, as well as a challenge to the proposition asserting expressionism as an evolutionary end wrought of a classical lineage of art theory. Haxthausen indeed attributes as provocation to the “now celebrated ‘Expressionism debates’ of the thirties” an essay by Lukács that opens with explicit recourse to Worringer’s “funeral oration” over the movement of expressionism (the essay is cited in Bloch’s rebuttal). See “Modern Art After ‘The End of Expressionism,’” 119 (see fn. 102).

On Kunstwollen

Alois Riegl's foundation of *Kunstwollen* as an expression of progressive cultural change was a convenient buttress for Dorner's claims, and Dorner's creative interpretation of the concept was expressed at length in published debates with Erwin Panofsky. Dorner began his fascination with Riegl's *Kunstwollen* as a student (alongside Panofsky), and recalled that the impact of Riegl's work upon his cohort was tremendous. Looking back on his Berlin University days shortly before his death, Dorner remembered being one of a cohort along with Erwin Panofsky who aspired to study art as a subject indicative of broader social and epistemic developments:

I soon belonged to a group of "smart" boys and girls who represented the refractory element in Adolph Goldschmidt's seminar in art history. I remember Erwin Panofsky, Hans Huth, [Eberhard] Schenk von Schweinsberg and Ida Ledermann as being among my co-rebels. What made us so unruly was the familiar lack of connection between life and knowledge. True, *Papa* Goldschmidt did not live in the spiritual heaven of rational speculations; on the contrary, he hated them to such a degree that his face turned red whenever he was confronted with an instance. They seemed to him no less evasive and unscientific than a personal expression of likes or dislikes. He treated art history as a social science which demanded careful comparative analyses and exact definitions of differences in style and subject matter. He was right in rejecting Woefflin's famous sets of dualistic opposites, which as so-called "laws" were held to determine the course of history. All this was quite sound and healthy; but was it really all that art history could contribute to life? Goldschmidt said it was, while the recalcitrants insisted that one must look behind the carefully analysed surface of changing styles for the forces which cause the change. This alone would draw

from the past something which might reach up into our own day, give meaning and direction to life as we lived it.¹¹⁶

Like Dorner, Panofsky was also deeply invested in interpreting and expanding upon Riegl's theories to find the underlying causes of stylistic change. In a response to Riegl in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1920, published under the title "The Concept of Artistic Volition" (Der Begriff des Kunstwollens), Panofsky championed Riegl's "important" work "securing the autonomy of artistic creation – something which had to be presupposed but was not recognized in his time – against numerous theories of dependence and above all against the material-technological view of Gottfried Semper."¹¹⁷ Panofsky sought to clarify that the notion of "intention" (Absicht)—as in the term "volition" (Wollen, as in the *Kunstwollen* of Riegl's theory)¹¹⁸ – might suggest a biographical/psychological interpretive necessity, reliant upon a number of unreliable objects of analysis: assumptions about artistic intent, documents

¹¹⁶ Francis Golfing, "Professor Alexander Dorner (January 19, 1883 – November 2, 1957)," *The Art Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1958): 318. I am grateful to Ines Katenhusen for this citation, as quoted in her "Alexander Dorner, Ein Schüler Adolph Goldschmidts," in Gunnar Brands and Heinrich Dilly, *Adolph Goldschmidt (1863–1944): Normal Art History im 20. Jahrhundert* (Weimar: VDG, 2007). The text nearly exactly echoes an early manuscript for (Dorner and Cauman's *Living Museum*, dating from 1958. In that text, the paragraph that follows suggests that "the great Viennese art historian, Alois Riegl" found a more apposite mode of artistic analysis, using "his demonstrations to prove that there existed an inner drive. This drive transformed the classical ideal of individual form-units into the supra individualistic 'mass' of the Middle Ages and this again into the space-concepts of Renaissance and Baroque. That Riegl's directing force was still based on the two allegedly eternal poles of matter and spirit which Western tradition had erected could not be disturbing to students who were never given a chance to look beyond the fence of classical antiquity. Alois Riegl gave an inner coherence and a direction which proved valid to the stretch of history which earnest art historians considered worth examining and so his philosophy brought a healthy tension to Berlin's art historical seminar." See manuscript, n.d., 3–5, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 917, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹¹⁷ Translated as "The Concept of Artistic Volition," by Kenneth J. Northcott and Joel Snyder. *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 20.

¹¹⁸ From original German publication of Panofsky's "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (1920): 324.

outside of the artworks, errors in reimagining an original form “if objective changes have come about in it,” and, most perilous, changing signifiers that modify the reception of formal effects by later beholders.¹¹⁹ In this sense, the subjectivity of the producer and the analyst were both problems of *Kunstwollen*’s interpretation. Methodologically, Panofsky suggests “seeking an immanent meaning in the phenomenon [of encountering the artwork] (since artistic volition can only be comprehended by fundamental concepts which are deduced a priori). . . . [A]rt is not a subjective expression of feelings or the confirmation of the existence of certain individuals; it is a discussion, aimed at the achievement of valid results, that objectifies and realizes a formative force, using material which has to be mastered.”¹²⁰

Dorner’s rebuttal, published in the same journal two years later, objected to Panofsky’s narrative on two significant counts. Firstly, Dorner was committed to pursuing understanding of a stylistic development of art that was indeed connected to a contextual and materialist read – but one that did not succumb to the pitfalls of Wölfflin’s categories, which he would later describe as “absolute.” Secondly, and relatedly, with regard to Panofsky’s claim that the principles of art were to be deduced *a priori*, Dorner critiqued this as being a deterministic and overly categorical methodology, writing, “Panofsky makes the mistake of seeking to establish this objective basis for

¹¹⁹ Panofsky does not use the semiotic term, but makes an analogy between artistic form and linguistics: “Just as a particular word can have changed its meaning because of a change in artistic uses and thus have changed the whole tenor of the linguistic proposition, so, too, within the total artistic organism any detail at all can be interpreted in the present completely differently from what it was in the past and so have a completely erroneous formal effect upon us. We can think, for example, of a plastic work which was originally connected in a particular place with a particular building but which is today conceived as a separate work.” Panofsky, “The Concept of Artistic Volition,” 32–33 (see fn. 117). A later art-historical discussion (in which Panofsky participated) about the changes in meaning that result from damages or changes in the object, and its displacement from its original context, follows in the next chapter.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

understanding artistic volition by means of fundamental principles that have been deduced *a priori*, consequent, in his view, upon the fact that there is a preexisting governing necessity that is determined by the *Wollen*.”¹²¹ Dorner, on the contrary preferred to think about shifts in artistic production that possessed none of the “a priori” inherence he saw in his idiosyncratic read of Panofsky. He wrote:

The fact that the single object as it occurs in the history of art, i.e. the individual artwork, does not constitute an act but rather an outcome from an art historical standpoint provides no basis for placing it in relationship with *a priori* knowledge of a purely analytical or an *a priori* synthetic nature (like the propositions of pure mathematics). On the basis of Kantian principles, one can doubtless determine the *a priori* conditions for the existence of the artwork *per se* in formal analytical terms, standing outside time as a purely rational concept, but one can never use this abstractly formal concept to explain as a historical necessity the individual emergence of a single practical occurrence of a historical artwork contingent on time. The sequential view of the history of art is of a different species entirely and calls for a different method than that of the purely historical approach. The single artwork is history inasmuch as it is bound in time, and creation inasmuch as it is fixed for all time. And in merging and uniting these two properties within itself, it necessarily demands its own particular approach.¹²²

¹²¹ “Daß aber Panofsky diese objective Basis für die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens durch *a priori* deduzierte Grundbegriffe schaffen will, da es eine vorher bestimmende Notwendigkeit gäbe, die das Wollen bestimmte, ist ein Fehltritt.” Alexander Dorner, “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens durch die Kunstgeschichte,” *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16 (1922): 216. Many thanks to Simon Cowper for his assistance with translation of this essay.

¹²²

Damit, daß das kunstgeschichtliche Einzelobjekt, das einzelne Kunstwerk, vom kunsthistorischen Standpunkt aus keine Handlung, sondern ein Ergebnis ist, ist keinerlei Grund gegeben, es in Wesensverwandtschaft mit den a priorischen Erkenntnissen rein analytischer Art oder a priorisch-synthetischer Art (wie die Sätze der reinen Mathematik) zu setzen. Auf Kantischer Grundlage fußend, kann man zweifellos die a priorischen Existenzbedingungen des Kunstwerks an sich, formal analytisch, zeitlos als reinen Verstandesbegriff festlegen, man kann aber niemals die jeweilige Entstehung der praktischen Einzelercheinung eines zeitlich bedingten, geschichtlichen

Dorner's artwork was created within history, and he alleged that Panofsky's was not.

Panofsky's dualisms (illustrated handily by Dorner in a chart, **figure 22**) were floating in space, detached from history. And to retroactively integrate these categories into history was no more productive, Dorner continued:

If I search further in the past for concepts that can contain all artistic phenomena, I inevitably arrive at the abstract definition of artistic creation *per se*, where there can be absolutely no doubt that it has nothing at all to do with art history as a practical phenomenon. Both this last step and the previous one of dualistic opposition belong in the transverse plane of pure thought. By connecting an intellectual exercise of this kind to a practical instance in art history and, as it were, dissecting the matter on the transverse level of pure thought, I have done nothing to shed light on this instance. This lies in a completely different plane, namely the longitudinal plane of time, in which a sequence can also be seen in the series of artistic volitions, a sequence of sensorial ideas. If, however, I merge the products of these two planes, or if, in other words, I move the transverse concepts with their abstract formalism to the longitudinal plane of what is, in effect, historical content, I enter into an intellectual misalliance and the monstrosities that are born of it swim around in the plane of time, cast adrift as specters devoid of any content or meaning.¹²³

Kunstwerks aus diesen abstrakt formalen Begriffen heraus, als historisch notwendig erklären. Die Betrachtungsweise der kunstgeschichtlichen Abfolge verlangt aus der Andersartigkeit der Gattung eine andere Methode, als die der reinen Geschichte. Das einzelne Kunstwerk ist Geschichte insofern, als es zeitlich gebunden ist, Schöpfung insofern es eine Festlegung für alle Zeiten ist. Und indem es diese beiden Eigenschaften in sich zu einer Einheit verschmilzt, verlangt es notwendig seine eigene Betrachtungsweise.

Ibid., 217.

¹²³

Suche ich aber weiter zurück nach Begriffen, die alle künstlerischen Erscheinungen in sich fassen können, so ende ich notwendig bei der abstrakten Begriffsdefinition des Kunstschaffens an sich,

Panofsky's categories could not be integrated into a rigorous historical analysis, Dorner wrote, because they were not universal categories.

If I develop its *a priori* character to its full extent, I must then put the basic formal scheme of artistic creation *per se* at the beginning of this development, as it were. If I take, for example, spirit and matter as the primary antitheses of existence, two possibilities arise from this reciprocal relationship – the transcendental-realistic style of art on the one hand and, on the other, the idealist-naturalistic style. If I now move this dualistic opposition into the third dimension of chronological depth, it can only find expression there through a rigid crisscrossing that follows a process of self-differentiation *ad infinitum*. Added to that is the fact that it is essential that the basis of this framework, once determined, be maintained and everything that comes before it chronologically speaking – or, so to speak, beneath it – goes by the board. If I see, for example, the two basic schemata in the Classical and Gothic periods, I am at a loss when it comes to the art of the Egyptians and the whole ancient Orient. Let us suppose that I could precisely adapt this infinitely complicated framework to the art historical development that was previously known to me – then every new art historical discovery would be

bei der vollends kein Zweifel herrschen kann, daß sie mit der praktischen Kunstgeschichte überhaupt nichts zu tun hat. Sowohl diese letzte Stufe, als die vorhergehende des dualistischen Gegensatzes gehören in die Querschnittsebene des reinen Denkens. Damit, daß ich an einen praktischen kunsthistorischen Fall ein solches Denkexerzitzium anschließe, die Materie gleichsam zerlege auf der Querschnittsebene des reinen Denkens, habe ich für die Klärung dieses Falles nichts getan. Dieser liegt in einer ganz anderen, nämlich in der Längsschnittsebene der Zeit, in der auch bei der Reihe der Kunstwollen eine Abfolge zu sehen ist, und zwar eine Abfolge von sinnlichen Vorstellungsinhalten. Verschmelze ich aber die Produkte dieser beiden Ebenen, d.h. versetze ich die abstrakt formalen Querschnittsbegriffe in die Längsschnittsebene der praktisch historischen Inhalte, so begehe ich eine geistige Mesalliance, und die daraus entstehenden Mißgeburten schwimmen in der Ebene der Zeit als inhaltslose Schemen und haltlos umher.

Ibid., 217.

capable of bringing about its collapse. The greater consistency of this second method is, therefore, connected with a greater degree of risk.¹²⁴

Dorner feared that the “twin” threads of interpretation – the transcendental realist interpretation of things as they appear, intersecting a read of artistic representation along a scale of *Weltanschauung* ranging from idealism to naturalism – would come at the expense of understanding “the actual historical producing of ever new and different works of art,” as described in a later reflection on this treatise.¹²⁵ In the published article, Dorner cautioned, “A further consideration is that these concepts have no special prerogative for treating artworks. One could use them to address human history with

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Entfalte ich ihren a-priorischen Charakter in seiner ganzen Tiefe, so muß ich das formale Grundschema des Kunstschaffens an sich gleichsam an den Anfang der Entwicklung stellen. Nehme ich z.B. den Geist und die Materie als die Grundgegensätze des Daseins an, so ergeben sich aus ihrem gegenseitigen Verhalten die zwei Möglichkeiten der transzendental-realistischen Kunstweise einerseits und der idealistisch-naturalistischen andererseits). Versetze ich nun diesen dualistischen Gegensatz in die dritte Dimension der zeitlichen Tiefe, so kann derselbe sich dort gar nicht anders entfalten, als durch eine starre, sich ins Unendliche differenzierende Durchkreuzung. Dazu kommt, daß die einmal festgelegte Grundlage dieses Gerüsts notwendig beibehalten werden muß, und alles was zeitlich vor ihr, also gleichsam unter ihr, liegt, unter den Tisch fällt. Sehe ich z.B. in der Antike und der Gotik die zwei Grundschemas, so bin ich schon der ägyptischen und der ganzen altorientalischen Kunst gegenüber ratlos. Gesetzt aber den Fall, ich hätte dieses unendlich komplizierte Gerüst genau an die mir bisher bekannt gewordene kunstgeschichtliche Entwicklung anpassen können, so könnte jede kunstgeschichtliche Neuentdeckung es zum Zusammenbruch bringen. Dieses zweite Verfahren ist demnach, weil folgerichtiger, mit einem größeren Risiko verbunden.

Ibid., 218–19.

¹²⁵ Dorner’s English-language notes on “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwillens durch die Kunstgeschichte,” n.d. (labeled 1922, likely in reference to original publication date). These notes translate the title of this essay as “How can we understand (grasp) through the History of Art the art-forming will behind it?” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 499, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

exactly the same entitlement and impose them on its vivid phenomena too, without understanding the actual historical content, even of entire epochs.¹²⁶ (figure 23)

The “timelessness” of Panofsky’s categories stood in direct contradiction to Dorner’s galleries – built to show that the very nature of vision changed over the course of time, and it was only within such an expressive context that artworks could be sensorially realized to the fullest extent. In his later text reflecting on the article, Dorner also noted that his objection to the “timeless dualistic opposites” of “objectivistic and subjectivistic” came from a sense that these categories “deprived the works of art of their sensual qualities” and his certitude that “these dualistic twin concepts had not a value for all times.”¹²⁷ Dorner was interested not only in understanding the *a priori* drive to produce art as such but in assessing the particular historical conditions that produced a specific work of art. Furthermore, for Dorner, only a “rigid framework” could read the same dualistic antagonisms in “Antiquity and the Gothic” as in “Egyptian and Ancient Orientalist art.”¹²⁸ His primary frustration was the tendency to view form and its perception hermetically and without explicit connection to historical context. In his later reflection upon this debate, Dorner continued the dispute – one of many responses to Erwin Panofsky that he would publish in his lifetime: “The work of art was a hybrid product and . . . Panofsky overlooked [this] when he split the historical work of art in two

¹²⁶ “Dazu kommt, daß diese Begriffe gar kein Sondervorrecht der Betrachtung an Kunstwerken sind. Man könnte mit genau demselben Recht die Menschheitsgeschichte nach ihnen behandeln und auch deren lebendigen Erscheinungen aufzwingen, ohne damit den eigentlichen geschichtlichen Inhalt, auch ganzer Perioden, zu erfassen.” Dorner, “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens,” 218 (see fn. 121).

¹²⁷ Dorner’s English-language notes on “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens,” 2 (see fn. 125).

¹²⁸ Dorner, “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens,” 218 (see fn. 121).

parts, disregarded the historical part and dealt with it only as a timeless thing with *a priori* concepts.”¹²⁹

Panofsky was motivated to clarify his position again on the pages of the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1925, summarily dismissing Dorner’s failure to understand the very concept of *a priori* understanding in his introduction (and footnoted this assertion with the statement that he would not “overburden” the argument by responding to Dorner further at that juncture but would “discuss his misunderstandings in an excursus at the end”).¹³⁰ In this essay Panofsky labored to clarify that *Kunstwollen* could only be understood as “an immanent sense within an artistic phenomenon.”¹³¹ In other words, for Panofsky, *Kunstwollen* was not constituted by experience by the beholder or art historian but in the form of problems resolved within “the works of art themselves” – which could then be subject to experience: “When the fundamental concepts of art theory are accounted for on an *a priori* basis and therefore are valid independent of any experience this does not of course mean that they could be deduced in a purely rational way independent of any experience.”¹³² Dorner, however, Panofsky resumed in his coda, did not “grasp that *Kunstwollen* must be exclusively understood in a metempirical sense.”¹³³ Panofsky correctly identifies the fundamental difference in the value of materialist history that he and Dorner attribute to *Kunstwollen* – Panofsky’s is “an immanent sense, while Dorner

¹²⁹ Dorner’s English-language notes on “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens,” 1 (see fn. 125).

¹³⁰ Erwin Panofsky, “On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory: Towards the Possibility of a Fundamental System of Concepts for a Science of Art,” trans. Katharina Lorenz and Jas Elsner, *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 44.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, 55.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 68.

takes it to be a content within the material sphere of reality” – but he misunderstands Dorner’s method as being “only open to art historical study in the stricter, descriptive sense.”¹³⁴ Dorner was, in fact, interested in understanding the contextual forces that created, and were mutually informed by, a kind of culturally produced vision that inflected both representation and reception. Because of this, Dorner understood the interpretive vision of the present to be similarly culturally constructed. When Panofsky criticized Dorner’s sentiment that *Kunstwollen* represented a conception of historical sequencing viewed through the filter of the present, he understood Dorner to have placed greater emphasis than deserved on *a posteriori* interpretation of artistic development. In some respects, Dorner’s concluding statements about *Kunstwollen*, to which Panofsky referred in his response, were not entirely in opposition to Panofsky’s:

Kunstwollen, theoretically conceived, is a formal, timeless term of general aesthetics without contents.

Kunstwollen as a contemporary phenomenon is an impulse that can only be understood intuitively.

Kunstwollen, as conceived historically, is the series of artworks itself, understood with the concepts of the present.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵

Das Kunstwollen theoretisch gefaßt, ist eine formale zeitlose Begriffsdefinition der allgemeinen Ästhetik, die ohne Inhalt ist.

Das Kunstwollen als Gegenwarterscheinung ist ein nur gefühlsmäßig erfaßbarer Trieb.

Das Kunstwollen historisch gefaßt, ist die Reihe der Kunstwerke selbst, erfaßt mit den Begriffen der Gegenwart.

Not unlike Panofsky, Dorner understood Riegl's *Kunstwollen* to be altogether formal ("without contents") and perceivable only through the transcendental limits of the subject. Panofsky preferred to describe his "methodological perspective" of examining art in terms of developments of space and time, instead of using the term "genetic" precisely because "this term does not denote the transcendent philosophical but rather the empirical and especially the historical conditions of artistic production. In this inquiry . . . it is the former that are relevant and not the latter."¹³⁶ Contrastingly, however, Dorner was interested in the ways that history was prone to nondeterministic diversion, changing by the agency of its subjects from the inside out, as subjectivity shifted in relation to techno-historical context. Dorner used Wölfflin as a foil to describe this theory:

The chain of art historical events could never lead to eternal and changeless laws. The necessity of art history and history in general consisted in its very sequence. Art history could not have any predetermined and predetermining laws because this would freeze and confine the very life of its growth.

If one asked which certainty could replace the impossible certainties of Woelfflin and Panofsky . . . the answer would be: None.

. . . It was, therefore, a waste of time to try with Woelfflin to prove the absolute necessity of an eternal circle of repetitious styles or (with Panofsky) of the sequence of different intentions to see reality. Art history had two tasks: 1.) to collect and arrange all the art historical documents according to their date and

Dorner, "Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens," 222 (see fn. 121).

¹³⁶ Panofsky, "On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory," 46, note 12 (see fn. 130).

places. 2.) To give meaning to this material by analyzing the different “wills” of visualizing reality and by arranging them in sequence.¹³⁷

Riegl wished to separate artistic will from overly contextual explanation, and Panofsky sought to teach an interpreter in the present an “eidetic” perception of that will, stripping the phenomenon to its most essential attributes. Dorner wanted to understand artistic volition as tied to superstructural relations both in the past and the present, messy and intertwined, leading toward a future that he believed its citizens had the power to change.

Evolving into the Future

Dorner’s version of “evolution,” as conveyed in his galleries, attempted to allow the subjective individual audience member to experience the developmental history of art – a history that was that was bound to context, both in principle as well as in the literal presentational devices that Dorner employed in the gallery. Building on the *Kunstwollen* of Riegl, Dorner’s galleries were entirely committed to historical materialism relayed through *Erlebnis*, optical encounter, and affect. Intention and affect had been individual for Panofsky, but were material and social for Dorner. Dorner’s galleries thus attempted to evoke and “give direct access” to historical shifts in environment and reception, calling both curator and viewer to participate in such shifts, in a manner that he believed would yield a more critical cultural immediacy. In this sense, Dorner’s primary concern was to produce understanding about the past – in order to inform – and formulate – the

¹³⁷ Dorner’s English-language notes on “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens,” 5 (see fn. 125); underlining in the original.

constituents and shape of an abstraction of the present. In his personal notes about gallery display from circa 1934–35, Dorner wrote (in English, with informal, idiosyncratic punctuation and line breaks):

The task is not to place the works of art: so to speak “impartially” and in a not involved manner, but in good taste against a white wall,
But to participate actively in them by giving them a surroundings which in colors + forms convey a overall impression of the spirit of the respective period to which the works of art belong.

Romanesque + gothic sculpture look always “nice” against a white background. But in this way they are so to speak “exposed” (like a ~~child~~ newborn) and thus forced into becoming a modern “work of art”: the historical distance gets lost and with it the meanings of the art historical development. And that means art museums fail in their main task: to convey the faith in the meaning of historical growth incl. our present + near future.¹³⁸

For Dorner, in recognition of the fact that values changed over time through changes in politics, knowledge, and the basic structure of human perception, the best museum would use any means necessary to successfully entreat the contemporary viewer to experience the spirit of an artwork’s original reception. And this would be accomplished by shapes and colors that stimulated the emotions Dorner conceived as most suggestive of their times: red velvet walls for the Flemish baroque, pale yellow for the rococo, and so on. With this philosophy and method, Dorner justified and even celebrated his own

¹³⁸ Handwritten notes titled “Re: Art Museums” and dated “c.1934/5,” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 61, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Grammar and punctuation presented here as in original.

elaborations of the affect conveyed by an artwork, through additional architectural embellishment in the Hanover museum galleries, as a means of better conveying to the contemporary perceiver the truths of other historical periods, interpreted for present-day reception. In his own words:

I tried to make the display as vivid as possible, giving the rooms in color and form the atmosphere of the period, which in no way means an imitation of historical rooms. . . .

I started to put in each room near the sofa a widely illustrated and colored booklet which told the story of the period concerned, including the political and social situation, the literature, music, dance and architecture, and the arts as exponents of the culture concerned. I explained the new conception of the world . . . based on the achievements of the past. I tried to explain how this idea is expressed in all its institutions [*sic*] and most vividly and impressively in its works of art. I indicated in a colored print the works of art on display, which exemplified this. I repeated at the end: Understand this art not as a competitor with our own age; it is born of quite other conditions, but it goes farther in its conception than the previous period. Bow, get up and look at the exhibits.¹³⁹

By presenting historical art in a contemporary context, Dorner feared, the viewer's impression and interpretation would be guided by a contemporary bias – resulting from an erasure of the distance between the present and its historical antecedents that “forced” historical works to become modern. It was in response to this concern that Dorner

¹³⁹ Alexander Dorner, “New Haven,” talk (annotated in pencil: “1939”), 11, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 312, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

surrounded collection works with evocations of historical affect calibrated for the contemporary perceiving subject. This, Dorner believed, would be of the greatest benefit in coercing viewer appreciation of epochal (stylistic) evolution and preparedness for participation in the continuity of change into the future.

As the concluding room in Dorner's Hanover galleries, Lissitzky's *Cabinet* was made to carry all of Dorner's theories of artistic development in perspective, abstraction, and subjective experience. In a speech written during the commissioning process, Dorner described Lissitzky's work as a synthetic progression out of material historical and spiritual developments that had so vexed him in their "dualistic" separation by Panofsky:

This transition from Romanticism to pure Expressionism is accomplished in the art of El Lissitzky. This is not a fight against more ancient forms – here there is no longer any dualism of the soul and of matter importuned; instead the new content has established its own form.

Hence it is extremely interesting, and evidence for the claim of a new unity, that this new art has detached its way of thinking from the recreation of the nineteenth century – an act that was once genuinely inspired – i.e. from the realm of our new nature as it is to be understood, as science and technology have taught us. Now matter is no longer an enemy of the soul, but this new matter is the symbol of spiritual time.¹⁴⁰

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Diese Uebergang von der Romantik zum reinen Expressionismus aber ist bei der Kunst Lissitzkys vollzogen. Hier ist kein Kampf mehr gegen alte Formen, hier gibt es keinen Dualismus der drängen denG [sic] Seele und der zu bedraengenden Materie mehr, sondern hier hat der neue Inhalt seine eigene Form aufgebaut.

Es ist daher äusserst interessant und zugleich ein Beweis fuer die Behauptung der neuen Einheit, dass diese neue Kunst ihre Gedankenwelt aus der einstigen wirklichen genialen Neuschöpfung des 19. Jahrhunderts nimmt, naemlich dem Gebiet unserer neuen Natur, wie sie aufzufassen, uns

Rather than a dualism between spirit and matter, Dorner found in this work an appeal to new technologically-hedged spatial-pictorial strategies as a type of artistic form.

Lissitzky's room included moving parts that permitted visitors to reveal new works on display by sliding panels with artworks in front or in back of each other. Viewers also experienced durational change in this room through shifting daylight, which, according to the artist, was a welcome feature of the room's orientation to the window.¹⁴¹ The inclusion of "new matter," of temporal address, and dynamism, did not mean abandoning "experience or feeling" altogether but rather focusing on experiencing new types of energy and dimensional limits (and limitlessness). "Not that the experience or the feeling would now be turned off – it is simply that the world of this experience is now undivided" – in Lissitzky's work, in Dorner's assessment, these combined as "a harbinger of the desired unity of our new culture."¹⁴²

Dorner's notes on his postwar reparations thus recall Lissitzky's *Cabinet* as a cultural "culmination":

Naturwissenschaft und Technik gelehrt haben. Nun ist die Materie keine Feindin der Seele mehr, sondern diese neue Materie ist das Symbol des Geistigen.

Alexander Dorner, speech to the Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, labeled in pencil "1923?" Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 984, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁴¹ The artist noted that changing schemas of electrical lighting were also planned for this room but were not feasible as "no electrical circuit had been installed in this new complex." Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, ed. *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), as reprinted in Jorge Ribalta, *Public Photographic Spaces: Exhibitions of Propaganda, from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928–55* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani, 2008), 77. Originally appeared as a typescript in Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hanover, published in Henning Rischbieter, *Die zwanziger Jahre in Hannover* (Hanover: Kunstverein, 1962).

¹⁴² Dorner, speech to the Kestnergesellschaft (see fn. 140).

This reorganization of the Hanover art collections was thus the beginning of an evolutionary philosophy of the human capacity for seeing and thinking. Hence, the natural culmination of this reorganization was the space that was translated into the visual plane by El Lissitzky in accordance with my ideas – this gave perceptible form to the same vision of a mutable four-dimensional reality as was espoused by the abstract art exhibited in this space.”¹⁴³

In Dorner’s conjecture, the non-mimetic aspects of abstraction, particularly its ludic treatment of spatial representation and progression toward a flat picture plane, could offer an escape from the condemnation of expressionism as elitist and not entangled in the struggles of the common social condition – an allegation that came from both conservative and radical positions alike (as seen in the art criticism and intersections of political theory with artistic modernism explored in the section of this chapter titled “Dorner’s Abstraction and the Troubles with Expressionism.”) Film was the next step in the “dimensional” progression that Dorner leaned on in this argument. Where Hausenstein – the critic who had declared the end of expressionism – had lamented the “flat profile of cinematography” that, after the alienating effects of expressionism, had led the promises of socialism “into bankruptcy,” Dorner eschewed the implications of expressivity and celebrated cinema as the ultimate extension of a perspectival

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Diese Neuordnung der Hanoverschen Kunstsammlungen war daher der Anfang einer evolutionären Philosophie der menschlichen Seh- und Denkfähigkeiten. Demgemäß war die natürliche Krönung dieser Neuordnung der nach meinen Ideen von El Lissitzky ins Visuelle übertragende Raum, der dasselbe Sehen einer 4-dimensionalen, selbstveränderlichen Wirklichkeit sichtbar machte, wie das die in diesem Raum ausgestellten abstrakten Kunstwerke taten.

Kurzhaus, “Politische Blindheit,” 94 (see fn. 52), where he quotes “Bericht zur Wiedergutmachungsakte Nr IV A(2) 5793/56” page 3. The “reparations” materials, Kurzhaus notes, are available in the Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv (V.V.P. 21) and in the archives of the Sprengel Museum (Dorner-Archiv) and the Landesmuseum (“Entartete Kunst” folder).

progression.

In a creative interpretive maneuver, Dorner also championed film as a challenge to the premise of the universal subject. As Dorner's assessment of both abstraction and relativity theory conveyed, contemporary life was non-absolute, interdependent, and always changing. Shifts in the fixity of perspective, and the additional element of temporality, such as was conveyed through film, was the ultimate means by which to break out of what Dorner called the "straitjacket" of the picture plane (Dorner's advocacy of film and photography will be further elaborated in the next chapter).

Dorner had begun his gallery renovations looking for the best philosophy of art by which to convey art history. In constructing a physical and environmental argument for an evolution of affect, perspective, and vision, Dorner argued for a contextually aligned version of *Kunstwollen* and a self-propelling vision of art history. Dorner thus believed that his "atmosphere rooms" told a story of art history that also explained "modern art, and [helped] to understand our own problems. It even proved that it is impossible to go backwards."¹⁴⁴

With their focus on a progressive course of "experiencing and feeling," Dorner's galleries confronted major discussions of the day in museology and art history: about the shape of history as read through aesthetics, the stark politics of representation in the context of 1920s and 1930s Germany, and the political positioning of the individual within a democratic collective. By differentiating the gallery environments of a variety of historical periods as connected to – but distinct from – the present, Dorner urged an open-ended interpretation of the development of civilization, one engineered by its

¹⁴⁴ Dorner, "New Haven," 12 (see fn. 139).

constituents. Ultimately, Dorner aspired to train his visitors, through navigating and experiencing his galleries, to become good citizen-producers of a future that Dorner believed could be culturally constructed without being culturally preordained.

“Original oder Reproduktion?” Dorner and the (Re)production of Atmosphere

As the last chapter outlined, Alexander Dorner’s reorganization of the Hanover Provinzialmuseum focused on producing “atmospheres” to surround objects in the collection.¹⁴⁵ Thus his galleries used wall painting, lighting, and other types of architectural framing to suggest epochal “realities” to gallery viewers.¹⁴⁶ In writing, as in praxis, Dorner consistently suggested that the contextual space around an artwork was as important for evoking a cultural sensibility as the object itself, prioritizing viewer reception over the materiality of an object overall. The last chapter demonstrated that the cultivation of “atmosphere” was no idle aesthetic choice within a Weimar Republic art

¹⁴⁵ Dorner introduced the term “atmosphere” in a proposal to describe his renovations to the galleries in the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, where he used the same method as in his Hanover galleries. This chapter will use this English term to describe Dorner’s work in Hanover as he applied it retrospectively. See Alexander Dorner, “Report of the Museum Director on the Activity of the Art Museum: January 1, 1939–April 1, 1939,” 3 ff., Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 470, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. This dissertation will occasionally abbreviate the name Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design with the name “Museum of Art” or the historical school name R.I.S.D. instead of the more contemporary brand, “RISD.”

¹⁴⁶

The walls and ceilings of the medieval rooms at Hanover were painted in dark colors, for, except for Cistercian examples, medieval churches did not have light interiors or white walls. The rooms receded, permitting only the works of art to stand out and leaving the towering crucifixes and shining altars as the focal points of display. The gold ground and the mystical, soft forms of Late Gothic altarpieces swam in their particular “reality.”

In strong contrast, the walls and ceilings of the Renaissance rooms beyond were a clear white or gray. The new conception developed in this period was of clearly defined volumes of space – cubes and hemispheres – with structural elements forming the defining frame. Perspective, in Renaissance painting, was used to make this geometrical picture of reality plain to the senses. The clear, light walls of the Renaissance galleries emphasized the cubic character of the rooms. The pictures were like views lit into the walls; their frames played the part of window frames.

Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 88–89 (see fn. 10).

world in transition – in the throes of widespread renovations in gallery architectures, museum legislatures, and technologies of artistic production. Indeed, the stakes of these shifts in the artistic realm extended the quest to identify the role of a subjective perceiving individual in relation to a greater collective history and society. Between 1928 and 1930, all of these concerns became sharply defined in a public debate about reproductive apparatuses in which Dorner was a major contributor. Dorner led the call to restore, enhance and even replicate artistic works in order to more efficaciously distribute artistic affect.

As Weimar society at large sought to understand the changes resulting from what Hermann Hesse called the “irreplaceable things [that] have been lost and destroyed forever . . . [and] new, unheard-of things . . . being imagined in their place,” the German museum world became involved in a lengthy discussion about the treatment of extant artworks and other cultural artifacts, and their value to the preservation of art history as well as to the imagination – in the form of aesthetic perception – overall.¹⁴⁷ One of the better-known polemics on this theme focused on the replication of original artworks, opening with an essay published in the Hamburg art journal *Der Kreis* by Max Sauerlandt, director of the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe. Sauerlandt railed against a prospectus sent to him by a Würtemberg-based metal-fabricator, offering a range of prices for variously sized reproductions of the famed thirteenth-century stone statue of the *Bamberg Horseman*. **(figure 24)** The modern art enthusiast emphatically rejected this kind of fabrication as “fake!” (gefälscht!) – proposing that the deception inherent in the translation

¹⁴⁷ Hermann Hesse, “The Longing of Our Time for a Worldview,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 364 (see fn. 95). Originally published as “Die Sehnsucht unserer Zeit nach einer Weltanschauung,” *Uhu* 2 (1926): 3–14.

from the medium of stone into that of metal would produce in the viewer a “corruption of the senses, of taste, and of artistic feeling” (Verderbnis der Sinne, des Geschmacks, des künstlerischen Gefühls). The objection was more than a proto-modernist defense of medium specificity: Sauerlandt called the “absurd” forgery of the horseman a “barbaric mistreatment” of a “defenseless” original work of art.¹⁴⁸

Sauerlandt’s next article in the September issue of *Der Kreis* claimed that reproductions also mistreated their audiences. He named in particular a recent exhibition in Hanover in which thirty-five original works “were smuggled” in amongst reproductions of original artworks.¹⁴⁹ Viewers were challenged to differentiate between the originals and their copies in order to win a prize. Such a direction could only displace viewer appreciation of original works, Sauerlandt surmised. “A life of false feelings – the worst thing there is! – is the inevitable result.”¹⁵⁰

Elsewhere in his article, Sauerlandt took a sarcastic tone, scorning the justification of reproductive “deceptions” as ethical on the basis of an “all things to all” (alles alles) “communist” spirit: “We have pearls – you like them too? Here! Take them in handfuls: deceptively similar wax beads!” Sauerlandt continued: “Drawings by Dürer, Grünewald, Rembrandt? Here they are! ‘It is only prejudice that precludes the happy owner of such a replica from having the feeling of owning the original itself!’”¹⁵¹ Sauerlandt’s last line

¹⁴⁸ “Die absurde Fälschung des Bamberger Reiters läßt das Schlimmste befürchten, wenn sich nicht alle Einsichtigen gegen solche barbarische Mißhandlung wehrloser Kunstwerke zur Wehr setzen.” Max Sauerlandt, “Der Bamberger Reiter – gefälscht!” *Der Kreis* 6, no. 3 (1929): 131, 133.

¹⁴⁹ According to Wilfried Basse’s review in *Der Kunstwanderer* (August 1929, 560), the actual numbers were thirty-six original artworks out of a total of 104 artworks in the exhibition. As quoted in Luke, “The Photographic Reproduction of Space,” 340 (see fn. 7).

¹⁵⁰ Max Sauerlandt, “Original und ‘Faksimile-Reproduktion,’” *Der Kreis* 6, no. 9 (1929): 497–504.

¹⁵¹

quoted art historian Wilhelm Pinder, a likely reference to a recent speech that itself invoked the same quote. That talk, bearing the provocative title “Über die Möglichkeit originaltreuer Nachbildungen plastischer Kunstwerke (Gips-Museen)” (On the Possibility of Fidelity to the Original in Replicas of the Plastic Arts [Plaster-Cast Museums]) was delivered by Carl G. Heise, head of the Museums für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte in Lübeck, advocating the merits of reproductions of artworks. Heise presented this speech during a 1927 meeting of the museum commission in which Sauerlandt was an active member; the talk was later printed and circulated to all members of the commission on June 15, 1928.¹⁵²

Sauerlandt’s articles in *Der Kreis* were followed by an essay by Heise himself, bearing the title “Bekanntnis zur Kopie?” (Commitment to the Copy?), which defended the use of reproductions. The article very likely seemed defensive to its readers: in it, Heise justified his own curatorial cultivation of a plaster-cast collection, asking how the collection of casts he had placed on display in Lübeck’s Katharinenkirche could be simultaneously regarded (by unattributed others) as reflective of a “museum of the future” and denounced by others as “an example of a dangerous, superficial form of caring for

Wir haben Perlen – Ihr mochtet sie auch? Hier! Nehmt sie aus vollen Händen: täuschend ähnliche Wachsperlen!

Zeichnungen von Dürer, von Grünewald, von Rembrandt? – Hier sind sie! Der glückliche Besitzer eines solchen Druckes ist ja “eigentlich nur noch durch ein Vorurteil von dem Gefühl ausgeschlossen, das Original selbst zu besitzen”!

Ibid., 498.

¹⁵² Notably, Dorner annotated one copy of this speech and archived it as his own with the label “Vortrag von Dorner” (lecture by Dorner) in his own files, though the proceedings of the 23rd meeting of the German Museum Association confirm that the lecture and its aforementioned publication was Heise’s. “Ueber die Möglichkeit originaltreuer Nachbildungen Plastischer Kunstwerke (Gips-Museen),” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 449, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

art.”¹⁵³ One finds, in both Sauerlandt’s allegations and Heise’s justification claims, an implicit association between the potential for the reproduction of art objects and fears about their diminishing value and care.

Original und Reproduktion

The young curator Alexander Dorner, then head of the *Kunstsammlung* at the Provinzialmuseum, also contributed to this published discussion, weighing in decisively with the pro-reproductionists. Dorner was, in fact, a member of the leadership of the Hanover organization that presented the exhibition of facsimiles so fiercely decried by Sauerlandt, which was on view from May through June of 1929 at the Hannover Kestnergesellschaft.¹⁵⁴ That exhibition, “Original und Reproduktion,” placed high-quality print reproductions alongside original works on paper and challenged the general public and experts alike to identify the originals. Works on view included artworks by Paul Cézanne, Käthe Kollwitz, Claude Lorrain, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, and Hans von Marées, on loan from institutions including the Kunsthalle Bremen, Kunsthalle Hamburg, Provinzialmuseum Hannover, Museum für Kunst und

¹⁵³ “[V]on der einen Seite als ‘Museum der Zukunft’ überschwenglich gefeiert, von der anderen Seite als Musterbeispiel gefährlicher, verflachender Kunstpflege gebrandmarkt worden.” Carl Georg Heise: “Bekenntnis zur Kopie?” *Der Kreis* 6, no. 11 (1929): 598–99. Scholar Michael Diers further suggests that the “educational value” of Heise’s cast collection was “endorsed” by his mentor, Aby Warburg. See Diers, “Kunst und Reproduktion: der Hamburger Faksimile-Streit,” 135 (see fn. 7).

¹⁵⁴ While Hanns Krenz was the actual director of the Kestnergesellschaft during the period that the exhibition took place, and thus has been credited as its curator by some sources, Dorner was its most visible public persona, and is named as the organizer of the exhibition in others. See Veit Görner et al., *Kestnerchronik* (Hanover: Kestnergesellschaft, 2006), 176; Tobias Wall, *Das unmögliche Museum: Zum Verhältnis von Kunst und Kunstmuseen der Gegenwart* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2006), 212; Ockman, “The Road Not Taken,” 94 (see fn. 10).

Kulturgeschichte Lübeck, and private collections throughout Germany.¹⁵⁵ While the Kestnergesellschaft records pertaining to this exhibition were either destroyed or are missing today, the Hamburg Kunsthalle archives offer a small window into the types of work displayed – works on paper in pen, pencil, crayon, chalk, and graphite.¹⁵⁶ **(figures 25–30)** Promotional materials for the exhibition led with the polemic: “PREISFRAGE: Welches sind die Originale?” (Prize question: Which are the originals?) **(figure 31)**

Prize question: Which are the originals? To ascertain which of our viewers are capable of discerning the original from the copy, we are offering a prize competition during the first week of our exhibition ORIGINAL AND REPRODUCTION, asking: Which are the originals?”¹⁵⁷

A newspaper reporting on “Das Ergebnis der Preisfrage” (the results of the prize question) concluded that “at first no one wanted to have a serious go at answering the question because they all thought it seemed impossible” (Zunächst wollte niemand sich ernstlich an die Beantwortung der Frage machen, weil es jedem unmöglich erschien), suggesting that the availability of original objects may be of less importance – even for the experts – than the purists contended.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ For the list of contributing artists compiled by Joan Ockman, see Ockman, “The Road Not Taken,” 95 (see fn. 10). A partial list of lending institutions is also reproduced in Veit Görner et al., *Kestnerchronik*, 101 (see fn. 154).

¹⁵⁶ Dr. Ute Haug, Head of Provenance Research and Historical Archive, Hamburger Kunsthalle, e-mail correspondence with author, June 16, 2014.

¹⁵⁷ “Um festzustellen, wie weit es den Beschauern noch möglich ist, das Original von der Reproduktion zu unterscheiden, veranstalten wir während der 1. Woche unserer Ausstellung ORIGINAL UND REPRODUKTION . . . eine Preisfrage: Welches sind die Originale?” Veit Görner et al., *Kestnerchronik*, 101 (see fn. 154).

¹⁵⁸ “Das Ergebnis der Preisfrage der Kestner-Gesellschaft: ‘Welches sind die Originale?’” *Hannover Anzeiger*, June 13, 1929, in Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 448, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

On the occasion of his exhibition, the local newspaper invited Sauerlandt, Heise, and other art historians to participate in a June 1929 “survey” (Umfrage) on the theme in an insert in the *Hannoverscher Kurier*, with the title “Original oder Reproduktion?” (the exhibition title rendered as a question). **(figure 32)** Sauerlandt’s response was published on the front page, under the title “Verteidigung des Originals” (Apologia for the Original). This essay formed the core of the second facsimile essay that Sauerlandt would later publish in the September 1929 edition of *Der Kreis*, but in the updated text Sauerlandt added some additional, scathing, commentary.¹⁵⁹ One such passage critiqued the very grounds for the exhibition, asking, “But what should one say if a ‘connoisseur,’ based on the fact that, in his own judgment, he has blundered on similar occasions in the past and has also made other people look ridiculous, infers the integrity of the facsimile, instead of using this blunder as an opportunity to sharpen his eyes and sensibility?”¹⁶⁰ The question was hardly rhetorical – referring directly to Dorner’s exhibition, it suggested the prize contest had in fact debased expertise, rather than elevating the value of the copy.

“99% Fidelity”

Dorner was, in turn, one of many museum practitioners invited to elaborate the debate in subsequent issues of *Der Kreis* following Sauerlandt’s articles. In the March 1930

¹⁵⁹ Heise’s “Bekanntnis zur Kopie?,” later to appear in *Der Kreis*, was also published originally in the Hanover newspaper series under the title “Bekanntnis zur Kopie.”

¹⁶⁰ “Was aber soll man dazu sagen, wenn ein ‘Kenner’ daraus, dass er sich nach eigenem Urteil schon früher bei ähnlichen Anlässen blamiert hat und andre [*sic*] sich hat blamieren lassen, auf die Vollwertigkeit der Faksimile-Reproduktion schliesst, statt diese Blamage zum Anlass zu nehmen, seine Augen und sein Gefühl zu schärfen?” *Der Kreis* 6, no. 9 (1929): 499. It is possible that this passage referred to recent exhibitions at the Kestnergesellschaft, featuring prints from the Piper Drucke publishing house, that were also condemned by critics for infidelity to the original works.

issue to which Dorner contributed, the editors began with an introduction making clear that they had invited “the most notable” figures to offer a range of perspectives on this theme in response to public interest in the topic. They distinguished this suite of contributions from Dorner’s *Umfrage* from the year before: this was not one of the “popular ‘surveys’” of the day, the introduction insisted, it was an attempt to invite experts to consult on an area of expertise that had also struck the public interest.¹⁶¹ The editors also made it clear that the stakes were high, even tantamount to armed revolution: “Man finds beauty in the clash of weapons, but even more beautiful is the battle of wits” (“Schön ist für einen Mann der Streit der Waffen, schöner ist der Kampf der Geister”). Dorner was the first respondent in this issue, which was illustrated throughout by images from a recent exhibition of works by Christian Rohlf’s at the Kestnergesellschaft in Hanover, the same venue that hosted the *Original und Reproduktion* exhibition, where Dorner was president.¹⁶²

In his article, Dorner proposed bringing *in absentia* artworks into the contemporary imagination through the use of facsimiles. Dorner maintained that the unique authenticity of a displayed object held value only in the case of the relic. He illustrated his logic with the example of Frederick the Great’s sword, an original material object that should be valued as such:

From the objective point of view of the artist and his work, the facsimile of an old work of art represents a disregard of that work’s original

¹⁶¹ “Es erscheint überflüssig, zu betonen, dass es sich hier nicht um eine der heute so beliebten ‘Umfragen’ handelt. . . .”

¹⁶² *Christian Rohlf zum 80. Geburtstag* opened in February 1930. Dorner was president of the Kestnergesellschaft from 1925 to 1931. Veit Görner et al., *Kestnerchronik*, 169 (see fn. 154).

purpose: while from the subjective point of view of our time it is a necessity. Thus it is understandable that no agreement can be reached in debates on the value of facsimile reproduction. For those who are more concerned with preserving the integrity of art works of the past than they are with adapting those works to the uses of our time, facsimiles will be anathema. As far as they are concerned, the ancient work of art can only be experienced at first hand, with a fingertip sense of the cracks in the surface [*Fingerspitzerlebnis*]. Indeed, for them the arduous pilgrimage to the work of art is part of the artistic experience; they want the old work of art to stand isolated from the stream of contemporary life.

For the others, the ideal artistic experience [*Kunsterlebnis*] is naturally obtained before the original, but at the same time it is essential that the art of the past have the greatest possible effect on the present. Now, since, practically speaking, the overwhelming majority of people cannot frequently come into contact with outstanding works of ancient art, and since, on the other hand, the facsimile – even according to its detractors – is able to convey up to 99 percent of the effect of the original, they are willing to sacrifice that one percent in the interests of the majority, and will advocate the production of facsimiles. They do so with a good conscience, because what distinguishes an ancient work of art from a historical relic – like Frederick the Great's sword – is the fact that the sword loses all its value if it is not the original, that is, if I cannot put my hand on the spot where Frederick the Great put his. But with a work of art, the purely historical experience is quite separable from apprehending the artist's ideas. The relation between the original and the ideal facsimile is comparable to the difference between the experience of hearing someone give a lecture (that would be the original) and that of reading the same

speech (that would be the facsimile). The ideal facsimile can convey the full content of the original with a minimum of loss.¹⁶³

Dorner, who had argued against Panofsky and Riegl to interpret art history through its material realities in addition to the *Geist* of its forms (see Chapter 1), here broke down these same interpretive categories schematically: in the valuation of the historical artifact, Dorner held original materials to be crucial. A contemporary experiencing agent should be able to project his imagination onto the grip of a sword where a historical figure's hands once rested. On the other hand, Dorner held, an *artistic* object's primary necessity for the contemporary "subjective" receiving agent was to convey artistic form, not original materials (nor even, necessarily, artists' intent). A facsimile espousing "99 percent" fidelity to original form would be a sufficient stand-in for an original art object. By Dorner's logic, reproduction of a damaged artwork might even be understood as a means for its preservation (culturally and materially), and not its opposite – contra the Sauerlandt/Heise dialectic that positioned reproduction as tantamount to abandoning the care of artworks. In this respect, decades before reproductions of failing objects would become a standard operation of museum conservators, Dorner suggested that invoking something approximating original aesthetic experience in a viewer would be a kind of perpetuation of aesthetic effect; thus, an artwork could conceivably be productively preserved through the recreation of an

¹⁶³ Alexander Dorner, "Original and Facsimile," in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips, trans. Joel Agee (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 152. Originally published as "Original und Faksimile," *Der Kreis* 7, no. 3 (1930): 156–58.

imperiled object using less fragile mediums.¹⁶⁴ Maintaining the vitality of artistic form was the only way to reincorporate an artwork into the “stream of contemporary life” from which it would otherwise be isolated.

Critical Responses

Dorner found both allies with and antagonists to his argument among the contributors to the *Kreis* debate. Kurt Karl Eberlein, who would soon contribute to the National Socialist machine with advocacy for a good “deutsche Kunst” (1933), argued vehemently against photoreproductive copies of art. Eberlein claimed these were “forgeries,” and while they may be useful to the master scholar who could use photographic information as a “mnemonic aid,” the general public could only be deceived by the artistic losses inherent therein. For Eberlein, it was of paramount importance to retain the purity of original material and not produce what he called “artificial skin.”¹⁶⁵

Here Eberlein advanced his polemic begun in a debate with Dorner published two years earlier on the merits of preserving paintings. In that 1928 “Rundfrage,” published under the title “Ist es zweckmäßig, Gemälde zu restaurieren?” (Is it proper to restore paintings?), Eberlein moved the question of painting restoration directly into one about the production of copies, writing, “Since art losses and art theft in our cultured civilization are once again a possibility and since the European museum will also first and foremost be a copy museum, the problem of the scholarly replica – which is only made possible today

¹⁶⁴ Coincidentally, such a strategy would later be employed with Naum Gabo’s *Construction in Space with Balance on Two Points* (1925–26), donated to the Busch-Reisinger Museum by Dorner’s wife Lydia in his memory, and recreated in plexiglass for exhibition ten years after Dorner’s death.

¹⁶⁵ Kurt Karl Eberlein, “On the Question: Original or Facsimile Reproduction?” in Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era* (see fn. 163). Originally published as “Zur Frage: ‘Original oder Faksimilereproduktion?’” *Der Kreis* 6 no. 11 (1929): 650–52.

through museum workshops and the courses they offer – is becoming an increasingly urgent one.”¹⁶⁶ Without citing Alois Riegl directly, Eberlein fought for *Alterswert* (or age-value, a term taken from Riegl) – the taste for and value of materials that bear the effects of nature and time. Eberlein followed with a condemnation of restorers who filled in lost sections of paint on canvas: “Leave the artistic effect of the ‘as-if’ to the counterfeiters and dilettantes! [T]oday we sneer at anyone who finishes making, writing, or composing a piece of art – only America has the bad taste to stage these kinds of prize competitions as a promotional attraction.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ “Da der Kunstverlust und der Kunstraub in unserer kultivierten Zivilisation wieder möglich geworden sind, und da das europäische Museum zunächst auch ein Kopiemuseum sein wird, wird das Problem der wissenschaftlichen Kopie, die erst durch die Museumswerkstätten und ihre Schulung heute möglich ist, immer drängender. Erhaltene und verlorene Kunst ergänzen sich gegenseitig.” Eberlein, in response to “Ist es zweckmäßig, Gemälde zu restaurieren? Eine Rundfrage,” in *Die Kunstauktion*, June 17, 1928, 8. Hanover Landesmuseum conservator and historian of Weimar preservation Michael von der Goltz points out that restoration was not a common topic of public discussion, least of all by restorers themselves. *Kunstauktion* – an art dealer’s journal – invited positions on the prompt from artists, restorers, museum directors, and professors. In this debate, Dorner argued for restoration to produce what von der Goltz characterizes as “complementary” “completion” of a painting rather than maintaining visible damages; he, along with Austrian conservator Robert Maurer, resisted the counterarguments that this was tantamount to forgery, instead suggesting that photographic documentation of unrestored work would enhance the educational content and verification process. Art critic Karl Scheffler was appalled, writing: “A Viennese man, presumably a restorer, wrote the maddest thing. . . . The proposal of this Viennese expert is, to first take photographs of what is really left, and then, in the name of the lord, restore it. The original state is recorded for eternity. Everybody is content thanks to a genius photogrpaher. – Something like this gets published, and seriously appreciated by people who are said to have an aesthetic sensibility. At this point, the discussion becomes a farce.” Karl Scheffler, “Polemisches: Zur Frage der Bilderrestaurierung.” *Kunst und Künstler* 26, no. 11 (1928): 413. As quoted and translated in Michael von der Goltz, “Is it useful to restore paintings? Aspects of a 1928 discussion on restoration in Germany and Austria,” in Janet Bridgland, ed., *12th Triennial Meeting, Lyon, 29 August–3 September 1999: ICOM Committee for Conservation* (London: Janes & James, 1999), 204.

¹⁶⁷ “Die Kunstwirkung des ‘als-ob’ bleibe den Fälschern und Dilettanten überlassen! Während man schon heute bei uns über jeden lächelt, der ein Kunstfragment fertigmacht, fertigdichtet, fertigkomponiert – nur Amerika hat die Geschmacklosigkeit solcher Preisausschreiben aus Reklamegründen.” Eberlein, in response to “Ist es zweckmäßig, Gemälde zu restaurieren?” 8 (see fn. 166). The United States experienced a rampant acceleration of museum plaster-cast displays between the years 1894 and 1914, as Alan Wallach outlines in “The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional Definition of Art,” in *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays*

To Eberlein, such tastelessness pervaded the very premise of painting restoration – antithetical to collecting at large – despite its embrace by museum professionals. “[W]hile no educated collector calls for the museum to add to an antique sculpture, mosaic floor, or vase, if one were to still hear – or even hear anew – certain incomprehensible objections on the part of the experts, for pictures it would be something different: in pictures what is missing should be replaced!”¹⁶⁸ Equating the organic weathering of materials (and honor for such material losses) with the natural evolution and cessation of a bloodline, Eberlein advised: “By granting it [what is lost] an empty seat at the intellectual high table, one gives it rights and a sense of presence, while also concluding the genetic sequence – in any case what is preserved or has survived presents the viewer with nothing more than fragments, representatives of a larger whole and the ‘misplaced instrument’ of a creative, fashioning spirit.”¹⁶⁹ For Eberlein, the title question of whether it was appropriate to restore paintings could best be answered by equating material losses with theft, restorations with the production of a copy museum, and facsimiles with genetic artifice or impurity.

Hyperbole aside, Eberlein’s treatise continued a longer argument begun fifty years earlier with Berlin antiquities’ curator Reinhard Kekulé’s 1872 article condemning the continued display of casts in the Berlin museum, a public institution in the service of

¹⁶⁸ “Kein gebildeter Sammler [der] die Ergänzung einer antiken Plastik, eines Mosaikfußbodens, einer Vase für das Museum fordert, hört man doch von fachmannischer Seite immer noch oder sogar wieder den unbegreiflichen Einwand, für Bilder wäre das etwas anderes, auf Bildern dürfe man das Fehlende ersetzen!” Eberlein, in response to “Ist es zweckmäßig, Gemälde zu restaurieren?” 8 (see fn. 166).

¹⁶⁹ “Indem man ihm den leeren Stuhl an den Tischen des Geistes gönnt, gibt man ihm Recht und Gegenwart und schließ die genetische Reihe, die ohnedies in dem Erhaltenen, Überlebenden nur Bruchstücke, nur Vertreter eines großen Ganzen und das ‘verstellte Gerät’ eines schöpferisch gestaltenden Geistes den Schauenden darstellt.” Ibid.

educating its citizenry. Historian James Sheehan notes the contemporaneous exhibition of two seemingly identical works attributed to Holbein the Younger, acquired separately into museum collections in Dresden and Darmstadt: the exhibition of these works together gave experts an opportunity to serve the public through assessing which was the original work (they concluded it was the one belonging to Darmstadt). Sheehan connects this public service of connoisseurship to another contemporaneous publication of a paper by art historian Hermann Grimm, which relatedly argued that, while public institutions and their policies were intended to serve the *Volk*, it was the obligation of qualified museum and art historical leaders to help guide appointed officials in this endeavor.¹⁷⁰ Connoisseurship and contravening the falsity of restoration was thus established as a means of public service. Eberlein argued in favor of retaining the damages to original work in the name of authenticity. Copies could be made to show the original form of a work, but never take its place, even in the name of education: “There is no universal right to art! Whoever wants to possess life and art must ‘acquire’ and earn them before they are his. The problem of art reproductions, of art restoration, is, like everything else, a question of truth and authenticity.”¹⁷¹ The copy could never approximate the “truth” of the original: “Every explanation of why the mysterious, magical, biological ‘aura’ of a work of art

¹⁷⁰ James Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108–10. Eberlein’s elaboration of these points in a treatise on preservation exemplified the correspondence between the defeudalization of the *Bürgertum*, or middle class, and the development of modern art and modern art institutions in Germany. See also Thomas Nipperdey’s *Rise of the Arts in Modern Society* (London: German Historical Institute, 1990).

¹⁷¹ “Es gibt kein allgemeines Kunstrecht! Wer Kunst und Leben besitzen will, muß sie erst ‘erwerben’ und verdienen, um sie zu besitzen. Das Problem der Kunstproduktion wie der Kunstrestaurierung ist, wie überhaupt alles, eine Frage der Wahrheit und Echtheit.” Eberlein, “Zur Frage,” 652 (see fn. 165).

cannot be forged – even though 99 percent of the viewers do not notice the difference – is an offence against the sovereignty of art.”¹⁷²

Dorner too felt strongly about the curator’s obligation to the public, but for him, this responsibility did not preclude the use of reproductions. In the annotated version of a talk given to the 1927 meeting of the German Museum Association described in the

¹⁷² Eberlein, “On the Question,” 148 (see fn. 165). Eberlein’s invocation of “aura” (in scare quotes) precedes the famed essay by Walter Benjamin that would appear five years later. Like many of the contributions to the facsimile debate, Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” considered the paradigmatic shifts in viewership that were associated with photomechanical technologies, and asserted the necessary relationship between an artwork’s uniqueness and its being “imbedded in the fabric of tradition” tied to photo-mechanical reproduction; the articles on reproduction in *Der Kreis* addressed these same themes. See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 223; reprinted in *Art in Theory: 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992), 522. Originally published as Originally published in an edited French version as “L’oeuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée” in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5, no. 1 (1936). Other contemporary scholars have noted these correspondences. György Markus suggests the likelihood that Benjamin saw this series of essays on the basis of his “Work of Art” essay, taking as a primary concern, as these essays did, the photograph as a means for reproducing other artworks (a rupture from the treatment of photography in Benjamin’s “Little History” that preceded it). “It cannot . . . be convincingly proven that he knew about it, though if not, this certainly would be a rather strange case of coincidence.” Markus, “Walter Benjamin and the German ‘Reproduction Debate,’” (see fn. 7). Charles W. Haxthausen also notes the correspondence between these publications, writing, “It is tempting to speculate whether [Benjamin’s] introduction of authenticity as quintessential to the artwork’s aura, integral to his displacement of aura from image and the objects within an image (e.g., in van Gogh’s paintings) to the material artifact itself, was inspired by [the *Kreis* essays].” Ultimately, Haxthausen concedes that there is no reference to these articles in Benjamin’s surviving notes for the “Work of Art” essay, “nor, for that matter, any reference to issues of material duration and authenticity.” Haxthausen, “Abstract with Memories” (see fn. 7). Megan Luke’s essay in *RES* connects Panofsky’s claim that photography can be “an entirely personal recreation” with a 1933 essay by Benjamin, who asserted that architectural drawings are a means of production, not strictly reproduction: “Such architecture is not primarily ‘seen’ but rather is imagined as an objective entity and is sensed by those who approach or even enter it as a surrounding space sui generis, that is, without the distancing effect of the edge of the image space.” Luke, “The Photographic Reproduction of Space,” 341 (see fn. 7). And Michael Diers’s essay on the series of articles positions these debates as “Prolegomena” to the Benjamin essay, whose author himself locates conceptual antecedents in a 1930 talk with Adrien Monnier (simultaneous, Diers notes, with the facsimile debates in Germany). Diers, “Kunst und Reproduktion: der Hamburger Faksimile-Streit” (see fn. 7).

previous chapter, Dorner footnoted his use of casts in the collection with the comment, “Funnily enough, I call this a subjective activity in contrast to the objectivity of fact collecting.” He wrote: “The public wants the fruits of our special knowledge. No great ‘science’ of the past has stopped at accumulating simple facts. They always had the courage to make use of it by giving them a creative interpretation. . . . There is no creative activity without subjectivity.”¹⁷³ For Dorner, an educational institution could be most successful through experts’ elaboration and interpretation of facts and art objects, which could manifest through restoration and display design, and the inclusion of facsimile objects.¹⁷⁴ Dorner did not share his colleague’s concerns about reproductions, as characterized by Sauerlandt’s objection to the *Bamberg Horseman* – where plaster casts of classical antiquities had been established as normative in the museum, the metal fabrication of a Medieval German work in stone was cause for alarm.¹⁷⁵

Dorner also diverged from Eberlein’s valuation of *Alterswert*: in a 1921 essay “Über den Sinn der Denkmalpflege,” (On the Purpose of Preserving Monuments) published in *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt*, Dorner outlined his position that preservation should be reserved for objects of value, which for him was not defined by age.¹⁷⁶ Rather, true to his vision of stylistic evolution:

¹⁷³ Dorner, “How to Make Use of Museums of Historical Art” for October 12, 1927 meeting of the German Museum Association, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 447, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; underlining in the original.

¹⁷⁴ Dorner made a separate argument for the value of reproductions in teaching connoisseurship for both student and popular education purposes. Carbon copy of lecture “Original und Reproduktion: Ihre Bedeutung für Schule und Volksbildung” c.1929, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 448, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁷⁵ This objection recalls Riegl’s assertion that Germanic taste did not favor its own style, and only classical or Renaissance work could be elevated to the stature that would necessitate reproductions for mass dissemination. See Chapter 1, fn. 55.

¹⁷⁶ Alexander Dorner, “Über den Sinn der Denkmalpflege,” in *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt*, November 18, 1921, 131–34.

A mode of thinking centered on developmental history – and this is inherent in the term – necessarily calls for the preservation of historic monuments. And if we now close these reflections by returning to Tietze’s original question – How can the preservation of monuments, fundamentally speaking, have a fruitful connection to the present? – we would reply: It prompts us to think about how our history has developed. But this task is not sufficient in itself because it does not take care of all old things, only the old monuments that are significant for our developmental history.¹⁷⁷

Dorner’s philosophical mentor Alois Riegl had warned that the “cult of age-value” could hinder preservation and ongoing use, whereas the “cult of historical value” favored preservation and granted concession for the use of copies “if the originals are irretrievably lost.”¹⁷⁸ Where Eberlein promoted *Alterswert*, Dorner falls in line with the latter “cult,” and his definition for historical significance is contingent upon an artifact participating in his vision for evolutionary stylistic development.

¹⁷⁷ Ein entwicklungsgeschichtliches Denken aber – das liegt im Sinne des Wortes – fordert notwendig eine Denkmalpflege. Und wenn wir nun den Kreis der Überlegungen schließend zur Tietzeschen Anfangsfrage zurückkehren: wie kann Denkmal pflege prinzipiell eine fruchtbringende Verbindung mit der Gegenwart haben, – so werden wir antworten: wenn sie das entwicklungsgeschichtliche Denken fördert. Dieser Aufgabe aber genügt sie dadurch, daß sie nicht alle alten, sondern nur die alten Denkmäler pflegt, die entwicklungsgeschichtlich bedeutsam sind.” Ibid., 134. Dr. Hans Tietze was a professor from Austria who was responsible for the rearrangement of the Viennese collections after the collapse of the Hapsburg empire. He would later be a fellow contributor to the 1928 *Umfrage* on the restoration of painting, where he joined with Dorner’s opinion that “a completed painting could . . . save more of its intent than a fragment ever could.” Hans Tietze, “Die Frage der Bilderrestaurierung,” *Kunst und Künstler* 26 (1928): 340. As quoted and translated in von der Goltz, “Is it useful to restore paintings?” 204 (see fn. 166).

¹⁷⁸ Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin,” trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, in *Oppositions: A Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture* 25 (Fall 1982): 37.

Dorner's counter-Ruskinian desire to rejuvenate or replicate the weathered or otherwise absent art object through extra-artistic facture was one to which he held fast throughout the debates and one that ultimately informed his full curatorial repertoire: building full environmental contexts for collection objects, which would allow visitors to encounter them as "living" art forms. These displays drew from art theory as well as history. For example, Dorner's dramaturgical treatment of the Provinzialmuseum's Renaissance galleries (see Chapter 1), inventing viewing conditions commensurate with a contemporary version of a past epochal culture of vision, evoked Erwin Panofsky's philosophy of perspective as "symbolic form" (also considered in the previous chapter), but Dorner's deployment of this philosophy occurred within the aegis of a polarizing approach to art stewardship.¹⁷⁹ Renaissance reliefs were displayed obscured by wooden trestles, positioned to hide deterioration. This protected viewers from the distraction of "irregularities" in form in order to make their appearance nearer to how "they had been intended in the beginning."¹⁸⁰ Just as he had polemicized Panofsky's response to *Kunstwollen* on the pages of the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1922, Dorner also took a more radical position than that of his former Berlin classmate in the published debates in *Der Kreis* at the end of the decade. Panofsky, at that time a professor in Hamburg, contributed the longest article to the *Kreis* series. **(figure 33)** Published in full under the title "Original und Faksimiliereproduktion" in a special edition under the *Kreis* imprint, Panofsky's text argued that facsimile reproduction could not approximate "original experience" – that is, the experience of

¹⁷⁹ Erwin Panofsky, "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form,'" in *Aufsätze zu Grundlagen der Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Hariolf Oberer and Egon Verheyen (Berlin: Verlag Volker Spiess, 1980), 99–167 (also see fn. 2)

¹⁸⁰ Dorner, "What Can Art Museums Do Today?" 12 (see fn. 25).

standing in front of an original – but could certainly give a better, albeit “qualified” impression of artistic intent than defaulting only to originals in absentia.¹⁸¹

Panofsky acknowledged that taste of the day favored *Echtheitserlebnis* – that is, seeing, experiencing, and maintaining the “unrepeatable organic singularity” of the material artifact – over *Sinnerlebnis*, the experience of sensing what he called the “conceptual form” of art (which, implicit in this argument, is not necessarily beholden to its materials). Though he perceived this inclination as a contemporary cultural tendency, Panofsky himself did not claim this preference.¹⁸² To begin, he argued, not all artists intended to collaborate with the weathering of nature; and, in direct response to the articles that had preceded his, Panofsky made qualified defense of the use of models such as Heise’s Lübeck polychrome casts that allowed a “poor student” such as himself to get an impression of an artist’s original intent.¹⁸³ Finally, Panofsky also argued there were

¹⁸¹ “It appears to me that the aesthetic experience of facsimile reproduction and gramophone reproduction does not seek to rival the ‘original experience’ but is *qualified* in contrast to this experience.” Erwin Panofsky, “Original and Facsimile Reproduction,” trans. Timothy Grundy, in *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58, *Spring/Autumn 2010*, ed. Francesco Pellizzi (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2011), 332. Originally published as “Original und Faksimilereproduktion,” *Der Kreis* 7 (Spring 1930).

¹⁸² *Ibid.* Conservator and historian Michael von der Goltz synthesizes the multifold positions on restoration during this period as follows – “Done over” restoration (involves overpainting and repair), “Fragmentary” restoration (conserves or maintains original material and allows for visible damage and aging), “documentary” restoration (makes repairs that are evident to the viewer), and “complementary restoration” that “corresponds to the artist’s intention.” This latter category, von der Goltz argues, had proponents in “extremely modernist followers.” Panofsky would appear to be among these; Dorner’s position was even more extreme. Von der Goltz points out that after 1933 discussions about restoration shifted to valuations of what should be restored, on the basis of contributions to (dominant, conservative) culture, following the “retirement and emigration of many of the participants” in the former “controversies.” Michael von der Goltz, “Restoration Concepts of the 1920s/1930ies [*sic*] in Germany” in *Theory and history news: Newsletter of the ICOM-CC Working Group* 3 4 (1999): 3.

¹⁸³ Panofsky did not wholeheartedly support the use of colored casts, claiming that in “their current, ambiguous state situated between mechanically cast reproductions and freehand copies they are *not yet* facsimile reproductions.” But he conceded that, in giving a strong impression of the original vision of the works, they were “still preferable to nothing at all.” Panofsky, “Original and Facsimile Reproduction,” 334 (see fn. 181). Panofsky would later elaborate this position –

gradations of importance of material significance – for example, that they are more important in applied arts or “arts and crafts,” which are “first and foremost formed material,” than in fine arts, which are “first and foremost materialized conceptual forms.”¹⁸⁴ For Panofsky, the stakes of this debate were equally about the experience of an exhibition visitor in a museum as they were about any fundamental distinction between an original and facsimile object. Panofsky, with his preference for a good “impression” of “conceptual forms,” might not have entirely disputed Dorner’s strategy: entreating visitor experience by allowing viewers an approximation of the original perception of an artwork was a means of honoring a work of art, equally important to reverence for its material ontology.

It is even plausible that Panofsky drew some inspiration for his essay from Dorner’s earlier *Hannoverscher Kurier* essay on the subject of reproductions, “Das Lebensrecht des Faksimiles” (Facsimiles’ Right to Life). There Dorner argued, “He who seeks to forbid the making of facsimiles must also ban the movie, the radio, and the gramophone. For these are closely related things.” However Dorner held that no one would undermine a recorded experience of Beethoven’s symphony in C Minor simply

advocating overtly for enabling viewer perception over material austerity – in his 1940 essay “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline.” In this essay, Panofsky famously offered the suggestion that “it is possible to experience every object, natural or man-made, aesthetically,” but, he added, certain objects “demand to be experienced aesthetically” because of ‘intention.’” Panofsky argues that handling man-made things – things made with aesthetic intentionality, in the case of the art historians – is precisely that which distinguishes humanists from scientists. Meaning, Panofsky continues, “can only be apprehended by re-producing, and thereby, quite literally, ‘realizing,’ the thoughts that are expressed in the books and the artistic conceptions that manifest themselves in the statues.” One can infer that divining such intent is central to the restoration process – which by extension, obtains not in strictly material but also *perceptual* terms. See Erwin Panofsky, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 11, 14

¹⁸⁴ Panofsky, “Original and Facsimile Reproduction,” 335 (see fn. 181).

because he was not listening “in a crowded concert hall”; indeed, most likely such listening was only accessible with the help of the “good-quality” gramophone-reproduction in the first place.¹⁸⁵ Panofsky seems to have picked up this thread in his *Kreis* article written the following year:

A good gramophone record is not “good” because it makes me believe Caruso is singing in the next room, but because it conveys the *musical intention* of his singing precisely. The recording is good because it translates the *largest possible number* of “Caruso-esque” sounds into a sphere of fundamental *differentness*, namely, into the sphere of a *specifically “gramphonic acoustics.”* At base, this sphere is determined by an *inorganic-mechanistic character* in even the best recordings: We *hear Caruso’s* voice, but *colored* or, if you will, *discolored* by the acoustic determinants of the recording and reproduction equipment, by the axial rotation, the hard rubber, wood, glass, and metal. As such, it now seems to me that a “good reproduction” of a Cézanne watercolor is not “good” because it convinces me of viewing the original. Rather, it is good because it translates the watercoloristic intentions of the artwork to as great an extent as possible into the specific sphere of “reproductive optics.” This sphere is also, and should also be, determined by the inorganic-

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Wer das Faksimile verbietet, muß auch den Film, das Radio und das Grammophon verbieten. Denn es sind nah verwandte Dinge. Aber wer wird heute noch wagen, zu sagen, ihm gehe der “Schauer vor dem Kunstwerk” verloren, weil er Beethovens C-Moll Symphonie nicht im gedrängten Konzertsalle mit sichtbaren und unsichtbaren Störungen und in meist nicht einmal erstklassiger Aufführung im Original sieht, sondern “nur” in der Reproduktion mit Hilfe eines vollwertigen Grammophons hört, und zwar wirklich in stiller Stunde.

Alexander Dorner, “Das Lebensrecht des Faksimiles,” in *Beilage zum Hannoverschen Kurier* 264/265, June 9, 1929.

Indeed, Dorner’s interest in augmenting visitor experience through reproductive apparatuses did not end with the cast or photographic replica but also extended to the gramophone. In his later work at the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design. (1938–41), Dorner conceived of devices embedded in furniture that would play period music in the museum galleries.

mechanistic character traits: We see the brush strokes and Cezanne's watercolor paper, but colored and, if you will, discolored by the optical determinants of the reproductive machines, the photochemical processes, the *printing* color, and the *printing* paper.¹⁸⁶

A reproduction bore the marks of its processes, Panofsky acknowledged, and good reproduction should be judged for its ability to convey the most important qualities of the original to the viewer, using the specific optical and technological attributes that were readily understood to be associated with the facsimile.

Correcting “Violations”: Museum as Facsimile, Facsimile as Experience

Dorner's radical populism was indisputably more extreme than Panofsky's. Where Panofsky simply observed a popular valuation of *Echtheitserlebnis* that favored materiality over intentionality or viewer reception, Dorner's article expressed total enmity toward the “fetishized” fragment. Recall that, for Dorner, the populist position was under threat from that faction which valorized the *Fingerspitzenerlebnis* of touching the “cracks of the surface” or the *Kunsterlebnis* of a “difficult pilgrimage to the work of art.” Rarefication of materials and experiences was precisely what isolated art from the urgency of everyman's daily life.¹⁸⁷ But the Hanover curator gave utmost priority to

¹⁸⁶ Panofsky, “Original and Facsimile Reproduction,” 332 (see fn. 181); italics in the original.

¹⁸⁷ “Ihnen ist ein Erlebnis des alten Kunstwerks nur möglich in Verbindung mit dem Bewusstsein des Eigenhändigen und dem Fingerspitzenerlebnis der Risse an der Oberfläche. Ja, für sie ist die schwierige Pilgerfahrt zum Kunstwerk ein Teil des Kunsterlebnisses; sie wollen, dass das alte Kunstwerk isoliert steht vom Strom des gegenwärtigen Lebens.” Dorner, “Original und Faksimile,” 158 (see fn. 163).

This sentiment continues to bear the specter of Alois Riegl that haunted the full cycle of *Kreis* articles; Riegl believed that touch was the best means to perceive the patina of corrosion. It is therefore not surprising that Dorner would appeal to kinesthesia in the exceptional case of the artifact, where *Alterswert* (age-value) can be legitimately prioritized.

recreating what he held to be the original viewing experience, in the sense of conveying the original *conditions* of reception or perception. Dorner's interest in conservation did not end with the elaboration of ruins (as would optimize what Kevin D. Murphy describes as the historical "stylistic completeness" that the earlier preservation theory of Viollet-Le-Duc would have advocated.)¹⁸⁸ Dorner sought to consider how a viewer might gain insight into the historical conditions of viewing, whether accomplished through reproduction, radical restoration, or means that extended beyond the object proper, as in the "atmosphere" gallery rooms he oversaw at the Provinzialmuseum in Hanover.¹⁸⁹ Because Dorner believed that objects were best valued and canonized through this atmosphere, he held that the fundamental recontextualization of every object produced by its insertion within the museum itself was as much a violation against originality as facsimile reproduction. His *Kreis* article elaborated:

When an altar is removed from a church, or a painting from a castle, and is placed in an environment that, generated by the interests and needs of the present, is incomprehensible apart from those interests and needs – [that] is a violation of the original purpose of the work of art and the intentions of its creator. A movement calling for the elimination of museums and the return of all works of art to churches and castles would be essentially destructive [and] diminish the use we make of the works of the past, by making them into islands lying isolated in the stream of contemporary life.

¹⁸⁸ See Kevin D. Murphy, *Memory and Modernity: Viollet-le-Duc at Vézelay* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 130.

¹⁸⁹ Noam M. Elcott interprets Dorner's objectives in terms of a "historical" *Kunstwollen* viewed through the lens of the present. "Review: Raum der Gegenwart (Room of Our Time) in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* vol. 69, no. 2 (June, 2010): 265-269.

A similar case can be made for the facsimile reproduction of old works of art. A medium that evolved organically in response to the needs of our time, facsimile reproduction makes it possible to convey the riches of the art of the past to the greatest number of people. It goes one step further in the direction that was taken by founding museums. But this new step, too, unavoidably violates the original meaning of the works of art. How could it be otherwise, when pieces of an old world are translated into the terms of a new one and put to its uses?¹⁹⁰

Dorner believed that the virtue of the museum was to educate, and to bring the experience of an artwork to the widest audience possible. But, just as a reproduced or refurbished artwork might not convey the full contour of the original material object, neither could the museum fully encapsulate the aura of original experience – something entirely immaterial, an “atmosphere” which Dorner nonetheless made a goal of his curatorial production. But in Dorner’s prioritization of viewer experience over object stewardship, two wrongs could make a right: for him, the double violations of facsimile production and museum recontextualization could combine to produce the best representation of art’s history for an art viewer. Thus, his contribution announced: “Since the tendencies of museum and facsimile run parallel to each other, it seems obvious that facsimiles belong in museums that are not able to give a complete overview of the development of art.” Though these objects should not be presented as originals or even in the same spaces as original works, they “could substitute for originals in all areas not covered in the museum’s collection.

¹⁹⁰ Dorner, “Original and Facsimile,” 152 (see fn. 163).

The effect could only be to enhance the value of the museum, by increasing its effectiveness in one essential respect.”¹⁹¹

In questioning the appositeness of the museum as a context for displaying the historical artifact in the present day, Dorner may have been drawing on the work of Walter Gropius.¹⁹² The Bauhaus founding director had published a critique of conventional museum displays in his response to the “Umfrage” circulated to the Workers’ Council for Art, which had been published in Berlin in 1919, the year that Dorner graduated from the Berlin University – a text on which Dorner took extensive notes.¹⁹³ In this text, Gropius condemned the platform of the exhibition as a “grotesque” emporium where art becomes ripped free from its context. Gropius warned of the perils of art dissociating from the “real lives of civilized people” (wirklichen Leben der zivilisierten Völker) and congregating instead in “those grotesque showplaces [where it] prostitutes itself” (jene grotesken Schauhäuser . . . und sich dort prostituieren). The stakes of this maneuver were political: art became a tool of the luxury class, despite the aim that “the real task of socialism is to destroy the evil demon of commercialism in order that the creative spirit of the Volk might once more flourish” (diesen bösen Dämon des Kommerzialisismus auszurotten, den gestaltenden Geist des Aufbaus aber im Volke wieder blühen zu lassen, ist die wahre

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 153.

¹⁹² Dorner was an advocate of Gropius and the Bauhaus, writing a public defense of the project in 1924, when the government seemed poised to “liquidate” the school. See Alexander Dorner “Das Weimarer Bauhaus,” *Hannoverscher Kurier* (evening edition), April 9, 1924, reprinted in *Pressestimmen für das Staatliche Bauhaus Weimar: Auszüge, Nachtrag, Kundgebungen, 1924*, ed. Peter Hahn (Munich: Kraus-Reprint, 1980), 97–99. Dorner was also involved in preliminary planning discussions and writing catalogue text for the Museum of Modern Art exhibition on the Bauhaus upon his emigration to the United States, along with Gropius and other collaborators.

¹⁹³ Gropius’s text was published in *Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrates für Kunst in Berlin* (Berlin-Charlottenburg: Verlag Photographische Gesellschaft, 1919). Dorner’s notes on this text are archived under “das Kunstpublikum im Jahre 1919,” NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 135.

Aufgabe des sozialistischen Staates). The outrage is obvious for Gropius, whose comments appear in full in Victor H. Miesel's translation as follows:

Art exhibitions are the misbegotten creatures of an art starved Europe. Since art is dead in the actual life of civilized nations it has been relegated to these grotesque morgues and there prostituted. Today a work of art no longer occupies a well-defined and hallowed place in the midst of the Volk, it is free as a bird and has become merely a luxury object in the salons of the bourgeoisie. An art exhibition is its warehouse and market. The Volk leaves empty-handed and has no conception of a living art.¹⁹⁴

Gropius describes art in this circumstance as *vogelfrei* – operating as “free as a bird” – a word that in the original German also has the connotation of operating outside the law. The art exhibition (like the French *Salon* and the more recent *Secessions*) marketed art to the wealthy and deprived the greater populace from receiving art as part of lived experience. Gropius's objection to the conventional museum found its curative in his suggestions for new types of venues, including temporary traveling exhibitions in “brightly painted” tents alongside films and models showcasing architecture, as well as building large architectural environments (instead of using picture frames) to house art objects.

¹⁹⁴ Walter Gropius, “Reply to Arbeitsrat für Kunst Questionnaire,” translated by Victor H. Miesel, in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 266–67 (see fn. 172). For nuance, the original reads: “Die Kunstausstellung ist eine Mißgeburt des kunstverarmten Europas. Da die Kunst im wirklichen Leben der zivilisierten Völker erstarb, mußte sie sich in jene grotesken Schauhäuser flüchten und sich dort prostituieren. Das Kunstwerk hat heute nicht mehr seinen festen, geheiligten Platz inmitten des Volkes, es ist vogelfrei geworden und dient als Luxusware für den Salon des reichen Bürgers. Die Kunstausstellung ist ihr Stapelplatz und ihre Kaufbörse. Das Volk geht leer aus und weiß heute nichts von der lebenden Kunst.” Walter Gropius, “Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrates für Kunst” (see fn. 193).

Following Gropius's treatise, the art historian and critic Carl Einstein's own critique of "Das Berliner Völkerkunde-Museum: Anlässlich der Neuordnung" (The Berlin Ethnographic Museum: On the Occasion of the Reinstallation), written in 1926, similarly expressed concern about the fate of the object torn from the contexts of its original environment and contemporary utility. In a passage very close to Dorner's later commentary on the altarpiece, Einstein elaborated these thoughts:

An art object or artifact that lands in a museum is stripped of its existential conditions, deprived of its biological milieu and thus of its proper agency. Entry into the museum confirms the natural death of the artwork, it marks the attainment of a shadowy, very limited, let us call it an aesthetic immortality.

An altar panel or a portrait is executed for a specific purpose, for a specific environment; especially without the latter the work is but a dead fragment, ripped from the soil; just as if one had broken a mullion out of a window or a capital from a column; probably the building had already collapsed. And yet one thing is now isolated: the aesthetic phenomenon—from that very moment the effect of the art object becomes falsified and limited. An altar panel without prayer is dead; feeble natures attempt, in their suave aestheticism, to conjure from it some kind of vague religiosity: a poetic mood is to supplant the grand, specific, and vital condition of the work's origins. Rapt devotion is supplanted by scholarly art-historical method, by discussions of style and authorship, things that were completely insignificant in the realm of prayer. The beauty of an altar panel lay in its being surrounded by fears, desires, and anxious cries to God, in having functioned as a modest part of an action, that the shadow of God dwelled within it and it was served by priests rather than by museum officials.

Woven into the portrait were the last traces of the cult of ancestors and of the dead; life-defining events were captured for those who were affected and transformed by them.

The entire character of all art was changed once it became valued for itself. It was torn from the transcendence of a living faith and investigated for its formal qualities.¹⁹⁵

Dorner's and Einstein's texts share stunning similarities. Dorner writes of an altar divorced from context when "placed in an environment that [serves] the interests and needs of the present" in the museum; Einstein writes similarly about the "art object or artifact that lands in a museum [and is thus] stripped of its existential conditions." Where Dorner's artifact is "removed" from an original site, Einstein's is, moreover, "torn from the transcendence of living faith." This constitutes a "destructive" act (Dorner) against or even "death" (Einstein) of the work of art. The effect is that the "aesthetic phenomenon" is "isolated" through its limited effect (Einstein) or artworks become "islands isolated in the stream of contemporary life" (Dorner).

Dorner's written work and gallery design methodologies at minimum demonstrate his involvement in the same period concerns about the construct of the museum to which both Gropius and Einstein were also responding, and Dorner's position on this point falls between those taken by Gropius and Einstein. On the one hand, Dorner's focus on atmosphere in his museum galleries could be seen as following Gropius's suggestion that

¹⁹⁵ Carl Einstein, "Das Berliner Völkerkunde-Museum: Anlässlich der Neuordnung," in *Der Querschnitt*, 6, no. 8 (1926): 588–92. Many thanks to Charles W. Haxthausen, for his direction to this citation and providing me with his English translation, to be published in *Refiguring Vision: The Art Theory and Criticism of Carl Einstein* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, 2016).

architectural environments might recuperate the *vogelfrei* object and stimulate the imagination of the perceiving viewer. On the other hand, Dorner seemed sympathetic to the Einsteinian concern about the death of an object when placed in isolation from original historical or cultural context and valued primarily for formal or material attributes. Dorner's attempts to expand the aesthetic impact of an object through contextual atmospheric embellishments intended to rectify these problems by conveying not only period style but also the sensation of culturally determined vision – the nexus of original “existential conditions” and their “biological milieu.” And despite (or perhaps due to) his concerns about tearing an artwork from its original context, Dorner was all the more willing to work with the museum to situate cultural artifacts in totally fabricated contextual environs.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Michael von der Goltz, publishing under his extended name Michael Graf von der Goltz, draws a similar link between Dorner's desire to restore art and to restore “atmosphere” in his *Kunsterhaltung-Machtkonflikte: Gemälde-Restaurierung zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2002), a conclusion he derives from different historical sources and speculations. Looking at the color theory of famed contemporaneous restorer Max Doerner, Graf von der Goltz notes a 1922 lecture by Wilhelm Ostwald in Hanover that may have been influential on Dorner. (For more on Ostwald, see Klonk, 2009 (see fn. 4). Graf von der Goltz asserts that Dorner's basic premise was to bring art “closer to the public lore through reproductions.” (Aber auch für Dorner lag der grundsätzliche Gedanke, mittels Reproduktionen Kunst zum ‘Volksgut’ werden zu lassen, nahe. [ibid., 42]) Graf von der Goltz continues, “He did not stop at the contemporary but applied this approach to earlier epochs and restoration.” (Er ließ es nicht bei der zeitgenössischen Kunst bewenden, sondern übertrug diesen Ansatz auf frühere Epochen und auf die Restaurierung. [ibid.]) Graf von der Goltz cites Dorner's “Lebensrecht des Faksimiles” contribution to the 1929 “‘Original oder Reproduktion?’ Umfrage,” wherein Dorner argued, “I'd like to see [Tilman] Riemenschneider's face when someone tells him that the ‘delicate life of his wood figures’ – i.e., the abrasion of the varnish on the gold background, the changing colors, and the crumbling of the mounting, even the fingers – represents one of the special charms of his work for us and a main part of their experience. That's romanticising the ruin, (“ruin-romance”), nothing more.” (Ich möchte das Gesicht Riemenschneiders sehen, wenn man ihm sagte, dass das “zarte Leben seiner Holzfiguren”, nämlich das Abscheuern der Lasuren auf dem Goldgrund, die Veränderung der Farben und das Abbröckeln der Fassung, ja sogar von Fingern, für uns einen besonderen Reiz seiner Kunst bedeute und ein Hauptteil von deren Erlebnis. Das ist Ruinromantik, nichts anderes.) Graf von der Goltz then compares this position to the “political interpretation” of “Dorner's biographer, Samuel Cauman: As a member of the state commission for the preservation of monuments since 1922 Dorner what already well known for

Photography as Modern Apparatus for Vision

It is no surprise that these debates erupted at the same time that art criticism was attempting to process the new widespread use of photography and other photo-mechanical devices. Art photography was exhibited in venues such as the major *Film und Foto* (FIFO) exhibition of 1929, which toured Germany without inspiring the same reactionary results as print and metal factory reproductions of art had inspired in *Der Kreis*. In this sense, photography seemed on the whole to be permissible as an artistic medium as well as a method of education (in book form, for example), but not as a stand-in for the original. The rising media of photography inspired other debates, however, including its implications for how vision overall should be understood – both the vision of creators and audiences alike: the art discourses of *Neue Optik* and *Neues Sehen* elaborated ongoing discussions about the role of the perceiving individual within the new democratic collective or the distinction between an objective thing and its subjective interpretation (schematized in the last chapter). For Dorner, who had been invited to contribute to the *Das Neue Sehen* exhibition, photo-reproductive devices offered a possible ameliorative to the dreaded romanticism of expressive representation as well as a means to circumvent the perspectival platitudes inherited by prior art movements.¹⁹⁷ In a 1929 article for a

his opposition to a policy did would encourage romantic dreams tied in with political theories of Nordic supremacy. There something less political coloration to the more limited question of how to restore works in museums, but the issue what not dissimal [*sic*].” These claims by Cauman (and Dorner) about Dorner’s vita were not verified by this dissertation research. It is interesting, as Graf von der Goltz also notes in a footnote, that this passage was not included in the German edition of Cauman’s book, published under the title *Das Lebende Museum* (Hanover: Fackelträger Verlag, 1960).

¹⁹⁷ Sigfried Giedion invited Dorner, along with Kurt Schwitters (also from Hanover) to work as consultants on the German contributions to the *Neue Optik* exhibition that he was organizing. See Iris Bruderer-Oswald, *Das Neue Sehen: Carola Giedion-Welcker und die Sprache der Moderne*

newspaper in Lübeck, he elaborated: “I consider it certain that the possibilities of painting, which represents the traditional aspect of reality as three-dimensional space, are exhausted. Photography takes over its heritage and is able to transfer into the new modern vision of a supra-spatial reality. . . . The technical means of the film must be new and different from those of art, because it is no longer ‘a creative art’ to represent the traditional vision of reality. . . . That the means of photography and film are technical does by no means speak against them.”¹⁹⁸ Whether a means for divestiture of expressive representation or an apparatus for a new structure of vision, photography offered itself as an important tool for contemporary art production, and Dorner was an enthusiastic proponent.

László Moholy-Nagy called the camera “the most reliable aid to a beginning of an objective vision” (das verlässlichste Hilfsmittel zu Anfängen eines objektiven Sehens); at the same time, Moholy-Nagy wrote, photography would allow artists to see the world “with entirely new eyes” (mit vollkommen anderen Augen), which would enable new forms of artistic work.¹⁹⁹ Photographer Albert Renger Patszsch equally celebrated the revolution in audience viewership that this new medium would enable and cautioned artists not to adhere to the model of painting but rather “examine old opinions and look at things from a new vantage point [while being] fully conscious of the splendid fidelity of

(Zurich: Benteli, 2007), 62. The exhibition title was changed shortly before the opening to *Abstrakte und surrealistische Malerei und Plastik* (Abstract and Surrealist Painting and Sculpture). See *ibid.* Dorner also presided over a presentation by Dziga Vertov on the theme “Was ist Kino-Auge?” at the Kestnergesellschaft in early June of 1929.

¹⁹⁸ English language translation by Dorner of “The End of Art?” labeled “in the Luebeck Paper, February 1929,” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 447, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁹⁹ László Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*, 3rd ed. (1925; repr., Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2000), 26–27.

reproduction made possible by his technique.”²⁰⁰ Art criticism responded with questions about what this meant for the viewing subject, including Siegfried Kracauer’s assertion that the fragmentation and distancing of reality endemic to photography demands that the viewer understand the “provisional status of all given configurations” of history, nature, and representation.²⁰¹

Dorner used his *Kreis* article – ostensibly a position statement on facsimiles – as a platform to declare his advocacy of photography for artistic use overall:

Not until the emergence of the most modern schools of art, such as Mondrian’s neoplasticism or Lissitzky’s constructivism, do we find a new, previously unthinkable state of affairs: artists welcoming the facsimile as a worthy ally of their art. For these artists do not aim at giving a complex illusion of the surface appearance of bodies within a three-dimensional space: they show in the simplest way planes, lines, and colors themselves, in their real structure, liberated from illusory space.²⁰²

The facsimile hardly threatened the artistic integrity of the work of the day, according to Dorner – such contemporary art, including work that used photo-reproductive devices, was fundamentally concerned with conveying “structures” of reality instead of expressive interpretations or mimetic representations thereof. It is unsurprising that for Dorner the

²⁰⁰ In “Joy before the Object,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 647 (see fn. 95). Originally published as “Die Freude am Gegenstand,” *Das Kunstblatt* 12, no. 1 (January 1928): 19.

²⁰¹ “Just as consciousness finds itself confronting the unabashedly displayed mechanics of industrial society, it also faces, thanks to photographic technology, the reflection of the reality that has slipped away from it. To have provoked the decisive confrontation in every field: this is precisely the go-for-broke game of the historical process.” Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 62. Originally published “Die Photographie,” appearing in 1927 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

²⁰² Dorner, “Original and Facsimile,” 152 (see fn. 163).

photo-reproductive technology of film, with its structural dimension of time, possessed the greatest potential for artistic advancement, neatly continuing his argument for an evolving period vision. In a 1929 position statement that elaborated his theories of the development of perspectival vision, leading to new “dimensions” in film, he explained: “The technical means of the film must be new and different from those of art, because it is no longer ‘a creative art’ to represent the traditional vision of reality. The perspective picture was once a creative break-through (of the Renaissance, 500 years ago). Our pioneering drive aims toward a concept of reality which needs time, i.e. movement, as a new dimension of space.”²⁰³ Film was a step beyond the “vision of reality” that had been expressed through prior art forms. Photography, Dorner held, was the “bridge” to that atmosphere of contemporaneity, the “new aspect of what is real.” Dorner concluded, playing advocate for the technological advances in artistic media that photography constituted: “The means of all art in the past have been technical within the technical abilities of its different ages.” In a note appended to this translation, Dorner elaborated: “The more we descend to the new depths of a picture of the world which gives up entirely its former static essence and searches for a more effective and ‘truer’ reality, the more we ‘see’ creativeness in a more detached and mature way than in the touchable ‘original’ (relic-cult) work of art. The latter is bound to remain static and be valuable by its alleged timeless finality.”²⁰⁴ Photography as an art form was a technological advancement of the present *Zeitgeist*, and to object on principle to the analogous advancement of reproductions of artworks was only an expression of fidelity to the “relic-cult” that favored the “touchable” original over the “‘truer’ reality [of] creativeness.”

²⁰³ Dorner, “The End of Art?” 2 (see fn. 198).

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2; underlining in the original.

Dorner versus Sauerlandt

In March of 1929, Sauerlandt wrote to Dorner, “With your view on the facsimile I cannot agree. I think the facsimile is just as false and reprehensible as the colorfully painted plaster cast”²⁰⁵ – a subject about which Sauerlandt had written another essay that he promised to send soon. It is possible that Sauerlandt was anticipating Erwin Panofsky’s forthcoming contribution to *Der Kreis*, which condemned the painted plaster cast for not being a straight mechanical reproduction but involving the “purely personal, even ‘artistic’” human hand. In this case, unlike the “gramophonic acoustic,” the intervention could not be understood and filtered out by the perceiver; it would provide an additional and detracting layer of affect to the perceptual experience. For Panofsky, “the resulting object is a particular *hybrid, neither a mechanical cast nor an ‘artistic’ copy,*” a “dubious” object for its removal from the realm of objective mechanical reproduction to that of the “productive optic.” Panofsky differentiated between this freehand paint application and the “*inner* freedom of expression that makes a copy cast by Courbet, for example, a true work of art.”²⁰⁶ The distinction between mechanical objectivity and artistic expressivity thus finds its hybrid in an artist’s copy; and Panofsky enables conceiving of a copy as an artistic gesture in a manner that Sauerlandt did not anticipate, but Dorner, who had referred to the facsimile as a “medium” unto itself in his *Kreis* article, aspired to cultivate.

An underlying current of debate that ran throughout these discussions was the matter of which works of art merited facsimile production and which types of facsimiles

²⁰⁵ “Ich halte das Faksimile für ebenso falsch und verwerflich wie etwa den farbig bemalten Gipsabguss . . .” Letter, Sauerlandt to Dorner, Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover V.V.P. 21 Nr. 175.

²⁰⁶ Panofsky, “Original and Facsimile Reproduction,” 334 (see fn. 181).

were admissible to the museum and to art historical attention. In a 1926 antecedent to the *Original und Reproduktion* exhibition addressed to “he who faces all reproductions of artworks with great skepticism,” Dorner first suggested the criterion for exhibiting facsimiles that would later be elaborated in the debate.²⁰⁷ What was valuable, Dorner wrote, was the “spiritual creation of the artwork as such” (*geistige Schöpfung des Kunstwerks als solche*) and not its material and “uniqueness value” (*Einzelheitswert*). This statement preludes Dorner’s later position, in which he would eschew the *Fingerspitzenerlebnis* of age, the *Kunsterlebnis* of originality, and the overall *Echtheiterlebnis* of authenticity. Throughout, Dorner rejected the supremacy of original materiality, both in his written work as well as in his exhibition production – including the *Preisfrage*, which ultimately stood to prove that lay audiences and experts alike could not distinguish between originals and reproductions. Instead, Dorner prioritized a kind of experience of sensory perception that could best be achieved through atmosphere. Committed to cultivating the vision (and the subjectivity) of his public, Dorner sought out opportunities to entreat the imagination of viewers, while remaining less invested in artistic expressivity. In this sense, photography, with its potential for an objective eye and ability to elicit contemporary vision in its beholder, was a favored medium.

It was not until September of that year that the Dorner–Sauerlandt confrontation came to a head, when Sauerlandt announced that, on the basis of Dorner’s position on the value

²⁰⁷ Alexander Dorner, “Original und Faksimile: Gedanken zur Ausstellung der Piperdrucke in der Kestner Gesellschaft,” *Hannoverscher Anzeiger*, May 12, 1926. The exhibition of prints named in the article’s title, and others like it, were also subject to local reviewers’ scrutiny over the quality and purpose of the reproductions. See, for example, Broderson, “Die Piper-Drucke,” *Hannoverscher Anzeiger* 110, May 12, 1926, as archived in Kestnergesellschaft press book, NLA HA, Dep. 100, no. 211.

of facsimiles, he would not back Dorner's bid to join the Museum Commission. In an undated draft of a letter to an unknown recipient, Dorner expressed his outrage over this sudden proclamation from Sauerlandt, who had been in contact with Dorner for months prior to the pending vote without naming this objection:

On August 6 (or 7), I was personally with Mr. Sauerlandt and in a conversation over several hours made my standpoint on "original and reproduction" clear to him and informed him that on the entrance level of the Hanover Provinzialmuseum I would put on an exhibition of facsimiles of oriental and ancient art and the building alterations were already underway or were being finalized. Mr. Sauerlandt explained to me in the course of conversation that he could communicate better with me than with Mr. Heise. Following that, we also talked about my admission to the International Association of Museum Officials. . . .

In a letter dated September 5, and a supplement from September 11 – i.e., ten days before the conference of the German Museum Commission – Mr. Sauerlandt tells me suddenly that he has re-read my article (known to him since June) in the *Hanover Courier* and that "if one thinks, as I do, about galvanoplasty, he cannot very well enter an alliance with someone who thinks and reasons in a fundamentally different way."²⁰⁸

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Am 6. August (oder 7. August) war ich dann persönlich bei Herrn Sauerlandt und habe ihm in einer mehrere Stunden währenden Unterhaltung meinen Standpunkt in der Frage "Original und Reproduktion" klargelegt und ihn davon unterrichtet, dass ich im Erdgeschoss des Hannoverschen Provinzial-Museums eine Ausstellung von Faksimiles alt-orientalischer und antiker Kunst machen werde und das die Umbauten bereits im Gange, bzw. beendet seien. Herr Sauerlandt erklärte mir im Laufe der Unterhaltung, dass er sich mit mir besser verständigen könne als mit Herrn Heise. Im Anschluss daran sprechen wir auch über meine Aufnahme in den *Internationalen Verband von Museumbeamten*

In einem Brief vom 5. 9., mit 1 Nachtrag von 11. 9., also 10 Tage vor der Tagung des Deutschen Museumsverbanden, teilt mir dann Herr Sauerlandt plötzlich mit, dass meinen, (ihm seit Juni

Dorner began a letter-writing campaign, clarifying to Sauerlandt, as well as the two Commission members who nominated him, Carl Küthmann and Werner Noack, that he did not believe that museums should collect copies the way they did originals.²⁰⁹ Perhaps in an attempt to pivot and prove his solidarity in caring about distinguishing original materials from fakes and other post-completion elaborations, Dorner added: “I should also probably mention that I have discovered a couple of instances of overpainting on old original paintings, which anyhow evinces interest in and understanding of the objectives of your association.”²¹⁰

Nevertheless, Sauerlandt succeeded in his efforts to block Dorner; the minutes of the association’s meeting on September 23, 1929, in Leipzig show that “after a long debate” (nach längerer Aussprache) Sauerlandt persuaded Noack and Küthmann to “withdraw their proposal” (ziehen . . . ihren Vorschlag zurück).²¹¹ Scholar Michael Diers contextualizes this episode as part of a greater effort by Sauerlandt to bar facsimiles from

bekanntem) Aufsatz im “Hannoverschen Kurier” nochmals gelesen habe und dass man, “wenn man so, wie ich, über das Galvano denkt, nicht gut einer Verbindung beitreten kann, die grundsätzlich anders denkt und urteilt.”

NLA HA, HSTAH V.V.P. 21, no. 175, records 226–227.

²⁰⁹ Küthmann and Noack hailed from the Kestner Museum in Hanover and the Städtische Sammlungen in Freiburg, respectively.

²¹⁰ “Ich darf vielleicht auch bemerken, dass ich ein paar Fragen zur Feststellung von Übermalungen auf alten Originalgemälden entdeckt habe, was immerhin Interesse und Verständnis für die Ziele Ihrer Vereinigung bekundet.” Dorner to Sauerlandt, letter, November 12, 1929, Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover V.V.P. 21, no. 175. Dorner’s tone continued in this vein throughout this correspondence – by November of 1929 he attempted a comprehensive defense “so that my conscience is clear in this matter from A to Z” (dass mein Gewissen in dieser Sache von A–Z rein ist), which seemingly did little to alter Sauerlandt’s opinion. Dorner to Sauerlandt, letter, November 13, 1929, Zentralarchiv, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, III/DMB 301.

²¹¹ “Verhandlungen der fünfundzwanzigsten Versammlung des Verbandes von Museumsbeamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebahren,” minutes of the twenty-fifth meeting of the Association of Museum Officials, Leipzig, September 23 and 24, 1929, p. 4, accessed December 29, 2014, http://digiview.gbv.de/viewer/image/PPN616566166_1929/4/.

museums altogether. Sauerlandt fought adamantly for this, using the words “That goes to the roots of our existence” (Das geht an die Wurzeln unserer Existenz), and twice proposed a Commission resolution against the museum display of facsimiles.²¹² Each time – once in October of 1929 and once the following year – the proposal was unsuccessful (on the first occasion for reasons of time, the next for lack of sufficient votes).²¹³

The debate over locating aesthetics of art in materiality or reception was prominent in a number of contemporaneous exhibitions and publications and continued to unfold in publications and galleries off the pages of the journals hosting Dorner’s facsimile debate and outside of his Kestnergesellschaft walls. Between the years 1928 and 1929, the Berlin journal *Kunst und Künstler* saw multiple pieces by editor Karl Scheffler on the topics “Die gefälschte Kunst,” naming “truth” as the “fundamental basis of art,” “Echt und Unecht,” noting the recent proliferation of articles on the topic in his journal “because nothing is worse than uncertainty,” and “Echt und Falsch,” decrying the “embarrassment” of mixed collections of original and reproduced works.²¹⁴ A notable response in an exhibition format is found in the Folkwang Museum’s program during the 1930 meeting of the Deutscher Museumsbund in Essen, which also took as its point of departure the theme “Original and Reproduction.”²¹⁵ The exhibition, like that at the Hanover venue, presented

²¹² Carl Georg Heise, *Der Gegenwärtige Augenblick: Reden und Aufsätze aus vier Jahrzehnten* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1960), 169. Also cited also in Diers, “Kunst und Reproduktion,” 127 (see fn. 7).

²¹³ The association did, however, take a position supporting “respect for the uniqueness of the original,” according to a letter from Sauerlandt to Dorner of September 5, 1929. See Flacke-Knoch, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik*, 105 (see fn. 5).

²¹⁴ These articles appeared respectively in *Kunst und Künstler* 7 (1928): 251; 3 (1929): 109; and 8 (1929): 326.

²¹⁵ “Tagung des Deutschen Museumsbundes in Essen,” in *Essen Volkszeitung*, August 21, 1930. Compiled in series in “*Original und Reproduktion*, Ausstellung im Museum Folkwang (14.09–

original works and their reproductions alongside each other.²¹⁶ While no museum records of the exhibition remain, Michael Diers assesses that this was primarily intended as a “Korrektur” (correction) to the Hanover Kestnergesellschaft exhibition.²¹⁷ On the occasion of this meeting, Sauerlandt, along with colleagues, received unanimous support for a resolution declaring that “the present consider it their special task to illuminate, through exhibitions and instruction, the essential difference between each reproduction and the original.”²¹⁸ The resolution included measures whereby museums would use reproductions for didactic purposes and with the requirement to mark these works as reproductions, thus marking a conclusion of sorts to the “Facsimile Debate,” as it has come to be known by art history.

Further Reverberations: Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design

But for Dorner, the fight for reproductions, restorations, and the cultivation of visitor experience which he initiated in Hanover would continue following his emigration to the United States. At the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, where Dorner held the position of director from 1938 to 1941, he continued his “experiment in the new direction” begun in Hanover with his immersive “atmosphere” rooms.²¹⁹ During his three-

12.10.1930) & Tagung des Deutschen Museumsbundes in Essen (14.–16.09.1930).” Supplied by Stadtarchiv Essen – Haus der Essener Geschichte, courtesy of Hans-Jürgen Lechtreck.

²¹⁶ In “‘Original und Reproduktion’ im Folkwang-Museum,” *Essen Volkszeitung*, September 17, 1930. Supplied by Stadtarchiv Essen – Haus der Essener Geschichte, courtesy of Hans-Jürgen Lechtreck.

²¹⁷ Diers, “Kunst und Reproduktion,” 128–29 (see fn. 7).

²¹⁸ “Protokoll der Tagung der Abteilung A (Kunst und Kunstmuseen in Essen) am 14. und 15. Sept. 1930,” in Zentralarchiv, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: III/DMB 003.

²¹⁹ Photocopy of speech to the Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, 1923, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 984, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. This

year tenure, Dorner brought a defense of artifact restoration and refabrication – drawn from his Hanover formulations – to bear on the objects in the Museum of Art’s collection. An extensive example is seen in the Egyptian tomb statue from which Dorner erased all traces of *Alterswert* by adding eyes, arms, and other embellishments. **(figures 34, 35, and 36)** Curt Germundson explains that Dorner sent the piece to Boston for restoration, and that the additions took on a slightly different color than the original, in order not to deceive the viewer. Nevertheless, “Dorner was criticized for the restoration, the secretary of the director claiming for example that the piece’s value decreased from about US\$1,000 to about US\$100, destroying its value as an antique. Another member of the Museum’s administration accused Dorner of having no love for the objects and having no aesthetic sense.”²²⁰

Dorner’s galleries attempted to invoke period experience, as they had in Hanover, yielding experiences of past cultures through acts of collecting and display. For example, a reconstruction of a large Coptic portal was among his first major acquisitions – revealing a preference for room-scaled objects that could contribute environmentally to a display. **(figures 37 and 38)** A comparison of gallery photographs and gallery plans reveals that smaller objects whose existence in the collection predated Dorner’s arrival were displayed in specialty niches and vitrines, such as a fifteenth-century head of St. James or a fourteenth-century chasuble. Pedestals and other architectural elements intended to evoke the style of the period were designed to surround or otherwise support

dissertation will occasionally abbreviate the name Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design by using the name “Museum of Art” or the historical school name R.I.S.D. instead of the more contemporary brand, “RISD” (see fn. 145).

²²⁰ Curt Germundson, “Alexander Dorner’s Atmosphere Room: The Museum as Experience,” *Visual Resources* 21, no. 3 (2005): 266. Germundson is one of a handful of historians who have also made note of Dorner’s notes on a proposal for a facsimile museum, penned in 1950.

the display of these objects. Dorner wrote: “All cases and stands should be dispensed with as much as possible. Works of art should speak alone. They do so if they are put into the walls or niches, or on stands which go with the wall. This, in most cases, corresponds to the way they were arranged in their own period.”²²¹

Far from the white cube ideal of autonomous modernism, Dorner indicates that, while works of art should “speak alone,” the best way to accomplish this is by fabricating a gallery environment for them. Among his first temporary exhibitions in his new directorship was a collaborative project with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., focused on Rhode Island architecture, which was equally an opportunity to forecast his desire to use architecture as a means of interpretation and elaboration of cultural objects: Hitchcock’s article about the enterprise noted not only the rise of the “new tradition of architectural exhibition which has been developed in this country, particularly at the Museum of Modern Art, in the last ten years” but also that “[t]he technique of incorporating the architectural background ideologically in the permanent galleries which Dr. Dorner developed at Hanover will, however, gradually be extended in the reinstallation of the Providence galleries now under way.”²²² Dorner covered the windows of his galleries with transparencies, with the dual benefit of blocking out the contemporary, outside world, and introducing “the colorful atmosphere of the surrounding landscape as well as of the art itself.”²²³ **(figure 39)** In this sense, the transparency worked in the service of Dorner’s contention that “everything should be eliminated which reminds the visitor that

²²¹ “Quarterly Report of the Museum Committee to Board of Trustees, January 1–April 1 1939,” in NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 39 (See Addendum).

²²² Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., “Architectural Models: Accent on Display Techniques in the Providence Show,” *The Art News*, August 12, 1939, 7–9, 19, here: 7.

²²³ Report of the Museum Committee to the Board of Trustees (January 10, 1940), quoted in Curt Germundson, “Alexander Dorner’s Atmosphere Room,” 268 (see fn. 221).

he is in a contemporary building.”²²⁴ Blocking out windows could thus address the failure of the museum to connote original context that Dorner so lamented in his *Kreis* article.

In Dorner’s galleries at the R.I.S.D. Museum of Art, evocations of atmosphere were of equal value to the material artifacts, evident through sheer comparison between the massive scales of these transparencies to the collection objects shown alongside them. **(figure 40)** Dorner also made acquisition of period-evocative architecture and fixtures as well as various kinds of perceptual enhancement, such as earphones that played period music embedded in furniture, with which viewers could expand their museum-going sensorium through the aural experience of hearing period music. **(figure 41)** Further developments included covering the Museum of Art’s yellow floor with dark tile (as in Hanover) and creating a series of period vignettes with a variety of small objects built into specialty niches and vitrines – not unlike Gropius’s suggestion to adopt architecture in the place of picture frames.²²⁵ Dorner articulated these plans in his first briefing to the museum trustees, describing the galleries as “atmosphere rooms,” each of which “should

²²⁴ “Quarterly Report” (see fn. 221). The device of transparencies over windows drew directly from an unrealized proposal for the Hanover museum by Theo van Doesburg – a proposal that had been passed up for Lissitzky’s *Abstract Cabinet*. However, where Van Doesburg’s transparencies in Hanover would have been abstract artworks, Dorner repurposed the device at the Museum of Art in an attempt to produce atmospheres that could evoke period experience – again making the artifact secondary in scale and visual impact to the ornamentation of a fabricated gallery context. “Van Doesburg’s design was a disappointment. All he did was to design, for the fenestrated wall, a transparent mural which would have added one more to the works of abstract art. The transparency was an idea which D tucked away in his head for future dealings with the window problem, but, of itself, it lacked the power to create a new identity for the whole room.” See typescript, NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 73. Unfortunately, the file containing this excerpt has gone missing in the archives, the transcription is as noted in an early dissertation archival visit and was not double-checked in the revision process.

²²⁵ See Chapter 1 for more on Gropius’s 1919 suggestion that architecture should replace cases for art in an effort toward better contextualization of art objects and greater democratization of viewing.

display a period.” Dorner went on to describe his strategies of coloring walls and floors and presenting contextual “religious, social and political” information in booklets in each room, as he had begun to do in Hanover.²²⁶ Regarding the depictions of views to imagined historical exteriors, using transparencies over windows, Dorner clarified: “This will show the most outstanding buildings of the period concerned in the newest restoration. Ruins are picturesque objects of Romanticism, but give no one the correct ideas of the real spirit of historical buildings.”²²⁷ **(see Addendum: Quarterly Report)**

A contemporaneous brochure authored (but never published) by Dorner at the Museum of Art at R.I.S.D. recapitulated many of his theories already articulated in the Hanover context:

History has begun to function. The simplest meaning of such a history of art would be – what one might call “the march of the dimensions.” . . . Paleolithic man conquered the point (spot) as the first constructive basis. About 7000 B.C., Neolithic man proceeded to the first dimension, the standing line indicating the plane of action and relation. After that the world became a frontal stage. This is the stage of the great early cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Central America, and so forth. Greece established the three dimensional individual body, the Middle Ages the space which encompasses the mass. Via the transitional stage of Romanticism which blasts the stage to the open horizon with the autonomous individual in the center, we arrive at the latest, but not the last, step where the four dimensional movement-space integrates everything so far thought of in a wider concept.

²²⁶ “Quarterly Report,” 2–7 (see fn. 221).

²²⁷ The guides for children (“Museum Club Members”) produced during Dorner’s Providence tenure further encapsulate the educational objectives of projecting the imagination into faraway histories or localities as precursors to a present (Western) civilization: “When you come to the museum to visit, say to yourself, ‘I am living NOW, here in Providence, and I am learning about people who lived THEN, many miles away from HERE, who had to get food, and build houses, and wear clothes, and think about it all – just like people nowadays. In fact, just like me.’” Educational materials on loose papers circa November 1940, in NLA HA, V.V.P. 21 Nr. 39.

“The march of the dimensions,” which thus is sketched very roughly, is not a ladder of separate steps but, like any evolution, a flowing trend with impasses, accelerations and retardations. It is not here alone that modern minds must get accustomed to giving up the idea of rigid, eternal rules. “The march of the dimensions” is only the first step toward a philosophy of history of art seen as an organic growth. It is only a skeleton of it. But it is also a possible skeleton for a new philosophy of history of culture.

*. . . For the first time history becomes a constructive factor in the building of our culture because for the first time we see history no more determined by timeless ideas of static special character but as a functional growth created by an inseparable dynamic integration of time and space.*²²⁸

The museum best suited to history that had “begun to function” was the museum that saw art in terms of its social functions – collecting art neither for its beauty nor its value in a “treasury,” and situating art within the past and the present by “recognizing the dynamic role of time” (a chart articulating these sentiments accompanied this brochure under the title “The Genealogical Chart of the Art Museum” [see **figure 42**]). Thus Dorner outlined his own plan for the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, characterized by perceptual enhancement, historical succession, social context, and a sense of progressive periodicity conveyed through tightly controlled visitor experience, a continuation of the project started in Hanover in his evolutionary experience galleries in

²²⁸ Layout designs for unpublished “Why Have Art Museums?” 1941, Rhode Island School of Design Archives, Director Biographical Files: Alexander Dorner, ““Why Have Art Museums?” unpublished, 1941,” n.p., labeled p. 11A, 12; italics in the original. In addition to this unpublished manuscript, Dorner’s ideas for a variety of museum institutions are sketched out in personal notes throughout his career, many taking quite fanciful forms. Pertinent to the themes of this chapter, but outside of its historical scope, Cauman’s biography of Dorner chronicles, without citation, ideas for a facsimile museum (or a series of such museums) that Dorner claims to have conjectured during his tenure as a professor at Bennington College, from 1949 onwards. Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 187-88 (see fn. 10).

the Provinzialmuseum/Landesmuseum and in his arguments to enable historical perceptual experience through the use of restoration and facsimile production in the debates concentrated in *Der Kreis*.

From a young curator experimenting in Hanover to the reforms of a new national museum commission in Essen to a catalyzing theory on reproductive aura in Paris to a renovation of an art school museum in Providence, Rhode Island, the *Kreis* debates and their reverberations demonstrate period anxiety about the virtues of material fidelity as an aesthetic virtue, invoking connotations between the concepts of copies, reproductions, photography, damage, and restorations. Contributors took a range of positions: reproductions should stand in for objects that could not be included in the collection, in order to provide populist access; replicas were permissible to help original objects achieve better historical context; reproductions were tantamount to the restoration of art objects; replicas were anathema.²²⁹ For Dorner, the “living” form of art was realized only through the visitor, who concretized aesthetics through internal reception of replica and original objects alike. It is clear that the *Kreis* reproduction debates, and Dorner’s contextual contributions to them in particular, were ultimately as much about museum experiences as they were about any epistemic urgencies surrounding photography and casts. Dorner’s advocacy for reproductions and period experiences were connected; the facsimile object may not solve the problem of ripping an object from its original context (because original objects would always be desired for collections) but the production of a facsimile experience might better fuse the object to its originally intended reception. Such

²²⁹ Monika Flacke-Knoch’s extensive handling of the Sauerlandt-Dorner correspondence positions these two characters as marking the “two completely opposite positions that marked the museum landscape of the 1920s.” Flacke-Knoch, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik*, 110 (see fn. 5).

elaborations of context to house art objects were, for Dorner, permissible liberties given that the museum was, as he argued, already tantamount to a facsimile (i.e. not an original viewing venue) for most historical objects. Thus, despite his avant-garde predilections, we see Dorner advocating a version of autonomy very different from the modernist myth: Dorner's work of art speaks only from within period atmosphere and context, not in isolation.

Dorner's ultimate ambition was to become the best curatorial shepherd for a society infused with concerns about the relationships between the perceiving beholder and mechanized "optics," between subjective assessments and objective truths, and between the experiencing solo agent and the community at large. In his advocacy for reproductions, Dorner sought a corrective to art criticism's prevalent assessments that museum displays, reproductions and restorations – in short, any device that could share the formal appreciation of artistic works with a mass audience – would constitute the "death" of the work of art, the end of its "living" status, or the cessation of its historical (or "genetic") legacy. Dorner recovered the artwork from these threats of death by proposing the birth of an *aesthetic* reading, one that Panofsky would also theorize in turn. Atmosphere allowed Dorner to advocate the cultivation of subjectivity in the viewer without making a statement of advocacy for artistic expressionism – an endeavor whose perils ranged from being outmoded to downright dangerous in an era where such art might be decried as degenerate. The pursuit of atmosphere also opened the possibility of a creative *curatorial* enterprise, one that was not at all dependent on the artist's expression, the historical fact, or the material object. Dorner's atmospheres were neither originals nor reproductions, but rather *new* productions meant to convey information

about the past, present, and future simultaneously. Within Dörner's idealized atmospheres, imperfect replicas could prevail, not by attempting perfect historical mimesis, but by coercing a historical genre of perception within the imagination of the beholder – and thus be instrumental in training the contemporary viewer how to perceive.

Chapter 3

The Way Beyond “Art”: Dorner, Herbert Bayer, and the Production of the Exhibition Viewer

In 1947, the New York–based art publisher Wittenborn-Schultz printed the third in their “Problems in Contemporary Art” series, Alexander Dorner’s *The way beyond ‘art’; the work of Herbert Bayer*. (figure 43) Despite the subtitle, printed only in the inside cover page, the greater part of the text did not concern the work of Herbert Bayer – rather, the majority of the book comprised a lengthier treatment of art theory best described as “Dornerian.” Proposing a transition from the sensuousness of classical depiction to the three-dimensional perspectival innovations of the Renaissance, to the infinite space of abstraction, and finally turning to recommendations for contemporary museums, the evolutionary development of art and culture conveyed in *The way beyond ‘art’* echoed that which had carried Dorner’s gallery work in Hanover and beyond – art history manifested in conceptions of dimensionality, within exhibitions produced as elaborations of these movements. Now, Dorner’s developmentalist views – reimagined in notes and lectures in the United States as a clear lineage (what he would later call a “genealogical tree” figures 44 and 45) – found their surprising illustration in the figure of Herbert Bayer.

Where Chapter 2 looked at how Dorner’s early career in the United States reflected the intersections of theories of reproduction and atmosphere formulated in Germany, this chapter traces Dorner’s theories of artistic evolution and developing

vision, also formed in Germany, as they were executed in a United States context. In the US, Dorner's ideas were articulated in concepts for exhibition designs, in texts, and in vision research. In all of these articulations of his "evolutionary" themes, it is clear that Dorner understood his exhibition visitor as a viewer in training – conditioned by the past and ready to be primed, by an attentive curator, for the future. Dorner's theories played out in unrealized plans for a "Living Museum" and his discussions about vision research with the Dartmouth Eye Institute/Hanover Institute, discussed later in this chapter.²³⁰ They also form an important backdrop for Dorner's work with Herbert Bayer on the "way beyond 'art'" – a idea bound into a slogan that had very different meanings for the two protagonists. Compared with Herbert Bayer – the subject of Dorner's exhibition and book that are the particular focus of this chapter – Dorner's understanding of vision is thus revealed to be a relatively flexible construction, and his exhibition ideations were accordingly fashioned to be spaces of educational transaction.

The book *The way beyond 'art'* has been used extensively in the attempt to better understand (and recuperate) Dorner as a figure in art and curatorial history (especially in the English-speaking world, as he published few other significant English-language texts). Beginning in the late twentieth century, the book has become the basis for various threads of Dorner-themed historical scholarship and statements of curatorial virtuosity. Notable examples include Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson's appraisals of Dorner's grasp of theoretical physics, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist's promotion of Dorner as a pioneer of museum experimentation, and the California College for the Arts' 2010 exhibition series borrowing Dorner's title, celebrating his multidisciplinary and

²³⁰ The Institute changed name in 1947, shortly after Dorner became involved with them.

multimedia approach.²³¹ However, the exhibition of “the work of Herbert Bayer,” as conveyed by the book’s subtitle, and which was ostensibly the occasion for publication of the book, has remained largely ignored in this reception.²³²

What has caused this omission of Herbert Bayer in this legacy? One answer may be that Bayer was literally written out of the book in the 1958 reprint of the catalogue, published shortly after Dorner’s death by New York University Press. The latter “revised” edition retained the same chapter structure as the original, with the first two major sections comprising “Tensions in Contemporary Art” and “The Genesis of Contemporary Art.” But the third main section, “The work of Herbert Bayer” (as well as the “Biographical Notes” section of the original conclusion) was removed for the later edition. **(figure 46)** Also expunged was Herbert Bayer’s signature printed on the title page. **(figure 47)**

What was the relationship between Bayer and Dorner, and how did Bayer figure in Dorner’s treatise? The two men – one a designer and artist, the other a cultural administrator and historian of art – shared notable biographical parallels, and were in direct and indirect dialogue throughout their professional development. But they differed in their theories and methods of exhibition making and conceptions of audience perception. Bayer could be said to be appealing to opticality first and foremost, as the eye

²³¹ See Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); countless interviews and public statements by Obrist demonstrate his personal indebtedness to Dorner and this book in particular (see fn. 14). The CCA website chronicling this project is found at <http://www.wattis.org/exhibitions/way-beyond-art> (accessed January 1, 2015)

²³² Joan Ockman’s 1997 essay “The Road Not Taken” (see fn. 10) notes the omission of Bayer from the reprinting of *The way beyond ‘art,’* and examines the relationship between Dorner and Herbert Bayer in the context of a comparative analysis that convincingly offers the work of László Moholy-Nagy as a more deserving recipient of Dorner’s attention and theoretical treatment.

was the best portal to affecting the human subject. And if, for Bayer, the eye “made the man,” Dorner contrastingly envisioned a form of seeing that was inflected by social constructs – a man that made the eye.

Born in 1900, Austrian-American designer Herbert Bayer developed his career in coincidental but striking alignment with the trajectory of Dorner, Bayer’s eventual colleague and collaborator. Bayer began his Bauhaus training in 1921 in the mural-painting workshop. Dorner, meanwhile, followed and advocated the Bauhaus from its inception. In 1924, the year preceding the relocation of the Bauhaus to Dessau (and Bayer’s graduation), Dorner was invited by the *Hannoverscher Courier* to write on the apparent coming “liquidation” of the Weimar Bauhaus in the role of “a warning voice and fervent defender of the Bauhaus idea” (Warner und warmer Verteidiger des Bauhausgedankens).²³³ In this written defense, Dorner championed the Bauhaus as a “productive” agency: “Productive in the very special – and for art very new – respect that the ‘art work’ is not dependent on art-loving patrons, i.e. it is not a luxury that runs along incidentally like a spare wheel, an inorganic appendage somewhere or other in the overall life of the nation, but is rather a field of activity that is interwoven into the entire organism of economic life.”²³⁴ (Dorner would later celebrate Bayer as the best example of a designer integrating his work into the commercial lives of non-elite audiences.) Though Dorner and Bayer did not work together during Dorner’s tenure in Hanover, they traveled in the same circles, sharing, for example, a common figure of inspiration in El

²³³ Dorner, “Das Weimarer Bauhaus,” 97 (see fn. 192).

²³⁴ “Pruduktiv aber in der ganzen besonderen und für die Kunst ganz neuen Hinsicht, daß das “Kunstschaffen” nicht von kunstliebenden Gönnern abhängt, also ein Luxus ist, der unorganisch irgendwo im Gesamtleben des Volkes als fünftes Rad am Wagen mitläuft, sondern ein Tätigkeitszweig, der im Gesamtorganismus des Wirtschaftslebens verflochten ist.” *Ibid.*, 98–99.

Lissitzky. Bayer's oral history interviewer and biographer Arthur Cohen reports that Bayer named Lissitzky as an important influence on his own experiments with exhibition design, after encountering his "mixture of techniques – new techniques" at the 1928 Cologne Pressa exhibition.²³⁵ Soon after, Bayer produced the total reevaluation of the architectural framework for exhibition design for which he would later become known: a design for the viewer's "field of vision" (1930) that dispensed with the convention of standard vertical walls, replacing them with panels hung at diagonal angles to the floor and ceiling in order to better address the eye. (**figure 48**) If the Weimar Republic aesthetic theory in which both men were steeped as young professionals was concerned with the role of individual perception in the construction of aesthetic truth (as explored in Chapters 1 and 2), both of these protagonists favored addressing the perceiving viewer subject over curating (in the sense of caring for) an expressive artistic object. Bayer's exhibition methodologies made the viewer's optical point of view a central element, and were developed concurrently with Dorner's redesign of the Hanover museum with displays meant to evoke in the viewer an approximation of changing period vision.

In 1937, Dorner wrote the catalogue essay for Bayer's one-man exhibition at the London Gallery in the UK. Running from April 5 through May 1 of that year, the exhibition was the first showing of Bayer's work in England, and presented paintings, collages, and a large work of photomontage on the gallery door (**figure 49**). Dorner's text

²³⁵ Arthur A. Cohen, *Herbert Bayer: The Complete Work* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 283. The full interview from which this quote derives can be found in Arthur A. Cohen, "Interviews with Herbert Bayer," November 3–6, 1981, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, 1981. Bayer also reports that he was experimenting with a pavilion at the Pressa exhibition that featured fixed wooden slats in patterned intervals over white walls – reminiscent of Lissitzky's lenticular design for the Dresden *Demonstrationsraum* of 1926 that preceded his Hannover design the following year. Cf. Gough, "Constructivism Disoriented" (see fn. 34).

for the catalogue celebrated Bayer as a “student of Kandinsky,” under whose tutelage Bayer learned

the new wider view, which goes beyond the tradition of the ‘Picture’ in its old sense. These artists of the Avant Garde express their new concept of the world – which for the visual arts entails a new concept of space – quite logically in basic mathematic terms. In these terms both Cubists and Constructivists try to solve the problem of space, breaking away from the fixed perspective of the Renaissance into fluctuating motion thus introducing the element of time into pictorial representation. Like a solar system, the color and form values hold themselves in a state of balanced tension and eternal movement.”²³⁶

In this text, Dorner repeated the assertion – a familiar trope of his exhibition foci from the 1930s – that the radical departure of the avant garde was its production of a new compositional (dis)order, essentially one conveying perpetual perspectival tension (to be resolved in the perceptual apparatus of the viewer) instead of spatial resolution (achieved and concretized by the artist). On Bayer’s contribution to this advancement, Dorner elaborated that his works

are no “pictures”. They have literally “stepped out of their frames”.

Everyday things or things from the unconscious are all brought forward

²³⁶ Alexander Dorner, *Herbert Bayer (Austrian) [First exhibition in England, April 7th – May 1st 1937, London Gallery]*, exh. cat. (London: London Gallery Ltd., 1937), 3-4. Bayer’s admiration for Kandinsky preceded his own enrollment in the Bauhaus, but Kandinsky did not begin working there as an instructor until the subsequent year. See Gwen Finkel Chanzit and Daniel Liebeskind, *From Bauhaus to Aspen: Herbert Bayer and Modernist Design in America* (Boulder, CO: Johnson Books, 2005), 10. In 1951, Bayer wrote to Dorner to request that the *way beyond ‘art’* catalogue be revised to reflect that “Kandinsky came to the Bauhaus almost a year after I arrived” and thus that Kandinsky’s book and tutelage was not his first means of attraction to the school. See Herbert Bayer to Alexander Dorner, cc. Wittenborn, letter, February 8, 1951, Museum of Modern Art archives, New York, Wittenborn collection, Series I.B. 9.

and set in a wide and endless dream-world, where they enter a second life, in which they mean something fresh and begin a new limitless, sparkling movement which exists on all sides and which moves like the new space in which they live.

One can easily see that these new thought associations in pictures are particularly suited to all forms of publicity. Bayer is indeed the publicity art specialist par excellence.

. . . All this is only possible, both as a painter and as a commercial artist, because we have here a creative person who is really widening our world concept.²³⁷

Here Dorner confers upon Bayer his highest points of praise: Bayer eludes the conventional picture frame, he defies conventional perspective, he engages in the lived and commercial world rather than being constricted by “spare-wheel” status within the rarified arena of fine art. In this text, Dorner also makes an uncharacteristic concession to the themes of his *bête noire*, surrealism, celebrating Bayer’s integration of material from the “dream-world” or “the unconscious” into a space of publicity. It is only in the arena of the applied commercial venture that Dorner can abide an address to the individual psyche as part of a notional collective imagination. Notably, in his celebration of Bayer’s compositions, Dorner speaks only to Bayer’s work as a limner and designer for the printed page, where spatial depth often remains ambiguous or unreconciled. Dorner could not confer the same praise upon Bayer’s carefully ordered (and ordering) exhibition designs, which relied upon cautiously calibrated perspectival arrangements within gallery

²³⁷ Dorner, *Herbert Bayer (Austrian)*, 5–6 (see fn. 236).

environments. The distances between Dorner's curatorial strategies, Bayer's design work, and Dorner's interpretation of Bayer as an art historical subject would all come into stark relief in the large retrospective exhibition of Bayer's work, *the way beyond 'art'* (titled in all-lowercase letters, per the typographic innovations of Herbert Bayer), that Dorner later organized in the United States.

Emigration to the United States

Art historical mythology has occasionally linked Dorner and Bayer's emigration stories, based largely upon Bayer's own telling. (For example, Bayer's oral history interviewer and biographer, Arthur Cohen, writes that Bayer and Dorner traveled together with Dorner's wife, Lydia, on the *SS Bremen* from Germany to New York in August of 1938.)²³⁸ Bayer biographer Patrick Rössler has recently proven the unlikelihood of this story, noting that Dorner traveled (with Lydia) on the *Normandie* from Paris to New York on August 2, 1937, while Bayer made only an "exploratory journey" (*Sondierungsreise*) to the United States earlier but emigrated the year following.²³⁹ In recounting and reconstructing the story of Bayer's emigration, Rössler also corrects the myth that Bayer arrived in the United States penniless and without work prospects. Rather, Rössler asserts,

²³⁸ Cohen, *Herbert Bayer*, 380 (see fn. 235).

²³⁹ Patrick Rössler also notes that it is equally unlikely that Bayer traveled with Marcel Breuer, despite his own temptation to attribute Bayer's comments about his ship passage with Dorner to a misrecollection about discussions with Breuer. See Patrick Rössler and Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, eds., *Herbert Bayer: Die Berliner Jahre – Werbegrafik 1928–1938* (Berlin: Vergangenheitsverlag, 2013), 112.

the emigration of this former Bauhaus Master turns out to be less a desperate flight into the diaspora, than it was a thoroughly deliberated departure from Germany for this long-compliant avant-gardist, well liked by those in power, one who must be regarded as one of the best-earning applied artists in the Third Reich.²⁴⁰

Rössler distinguishes between the category of the émigré and the exile, placing Bayer in the former category – departing his native country without threat or urgency and having had the opportunity to make considerable advance preparations. Rössler aligns Bayer’s plight (and one could say the same of Dorner) with that of the Bauhäusler Gropius, Kandinsky, Breuer, and Moholy-Nagy, referring to Peter Hahn’s statement: “It is hardly possible in their cases to speak of exile in the strictest sense, and also not of political resistance against the radical changes brought about by the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, or even of anti-fascist struggles. Rather, it was out of professional considerations that they reached their decisions to emigrate, tied to an expectation of finding better chances for realizing their artistic credos outside of Germany.”²⁴¹

Moreover, Rössler asserts that Bayer differs from those colleagues to whom Hahn refers, in that “he remained in Nazi Germany for a comparatively longer time, advancing to become one of the most successful graphic designers of his generation in this country.”²⁴² The same may also be said of Dorner, who enjoyed professional success in Hanover into the 1930s and emigrated only when his professional situation became

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 157.

²⁴¹ Peter Hahn, “Bauhaus and Exile,” in *Exiles and Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, ed. Stephanie Barron (New York: Abrams, 1997), 216. Rössler clarifies, “Hahn’s statement refers explicitly to Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Kandinsky, Klee, Feininger, Itten, Albers, Breuer, Moholy-Nagy and Bayer.” Rössler, *Herbert Bayer*, 163 (see fn. 239).

²⁴² Rössler, *Herbert Bayer*, 157 (see fn. 239).

untenable.²⁴³ Where the figure of the exile may be received as one cut off from the primary site of identified origin, the émigré has the privilege of being simultaneously a part of and apart from both his place of origin and the new home. In their transatlantic moves, Bayer and Dorner brought with them tactics of exhibition making first devised in the complex, shifting political-aesthetic landscapes of Weimar and then National Socialist Germany, extended into a postwar United States environment. Their work was developed and executed in relation to both contexts.

Both before and after emigrating, Bayer appealed to the primacy of optical apprehension in constructing the meaning of objects within consciousness, whereas Dorner attempted to understand a shifting episteme of vision over time – designing galleries that aspired to evince changing historical perception and produce the terms of perception for the present day. Whether elucidating historical objects in the museum (Dorner) or selling commercial products in advertising kiosks (Bayer, **figure 50**), Dorner and Bayer both favored large-scale architectural environments for their viewers to encounter objects or ideas on display. Like Bayer, Dorner’s exhibition designs were centered around the idea of vision, but in Dorner’s case, vision was cast as a shifting socially and historically contingent construct, activated within the individual in response

²⁴³ Bayer was a designer for Nazi-commissioned print propaganda, where Dorner included such materials in his vitrine in the *Abstract Cabinet* as a silent comparison with Schwitters’s letterhead. Both men could be argued to have endured party commitments as a means of career preservation, not political sympathy. The complexities of an indictment about party affiliation are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Ultimately both men were under party scrutiny – Bayer’s work was also included in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition that showcased confiscated works from Dorner’s museum; Patrick Rössler asserts that Bayer’s exhibition in London, to which Dorner contributed the catalogue essay, was grounds for party repression, and that Bayer had trouble securing loans for the Bauhaus exhibition in New York because of ex-Bauhäusler unwillingness to be seen as affiliated. See *ibid.*, 117, as well as Alice Rawsthorn on Rössler’s exhibition, “Exhibition Traces Bauhaus Luminary’s Struggle with His Past,” *New York Times*, January 7, 2014, accessed January 1, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/08/arts/design/A-Bauhaus-Luminarys-Struggle-With-Past-as-Nazi-Propagandist.html?_r=0.

to cultural (or curatorial) stimuli. Dorner's environments sought to replicate epochal history; Bayer's promoted the optimally sympathetic response in the presumed universal vision mechanism of a contemporary viewer. Both approaches were developed as educational and/or advertising strategies that were also expressly political – Dorner would claim to be producing an enlightened citizenry while Bayer contributed to what communication theorist Fred Turner has defined as the “Democratic Surround” – a prevalent midcentury use of environmental medial apparatuses in order to “call for a society in which individual diversity might become the foundation of collective life.”²⁴⁴ Though Turner's argument revolves around prevalent concerns in the postwar United States context, it is notable that very similar political stakes and circumstances surrounded Bayer and Dorner's projects executed within democratic Weimar Germany. Dorner's galleries in Hanover tactically invited perceiving subjects to understand themselves as individual members of a society that conditioned vision, which itself changed over time in relation to cultural and material historical shifts. Bayer's work was also deployed by political organs, most notoriously after the fall of Weimar by the NSDAP, similarly effecting a foundation for collectivity – in this case an explicitly totalizing, perilous one.

In 1937, Bayer and Dorner each came to a meeting at the vacation home of Walter Gropius, along with others including Moholy-Nagy and John McAndrew, soon to be appointed the curator of architecture at the Museum of Modern Art.²⁴⁵ One purpose of

²⁴⁴ Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround*, 9 (see fn. 8).

²⁴⁵ Cohen names the meeting location as “near the seashore near Providence, Rhode Island, where Walter Gropius, who had already arrived from England . . . had rented a summer home.” Cohen, *Herbert Bayer*, 41 (see fn. 235). Joan Ockman names the location as “Cape Cod.” Ockman, “The Road Not Taken,” 108 (see fn. 10). At any rate, Gropius wrote from an address on “Planting

their meeting was to plan the upcoming Bauhaus exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, for which Bayer would design the exhibition and catalogue, with Dorner contributing an introductory text.²⁴⁶ This collaboration inaugurated both Dorner's and Bayer's careers in the United States. As described by Gwen Chanzit, curator of the Bayer Collection and Archive in Denver, the exhibition utilized many of Bayer's signature devices from his prior exhibition designs, including "peepholes," "moveable exhibits," and "directional shapes" on the floor to help guide visitor movement through the galleries.²⁴⁷ **(figure 51)** The challenge to use the least amount of material to create a design effect was a programmatic Bauhaus exercise with which Bayer would have been familiar, and his use of floor-staining as a means of architectural configuration was conceived in these terms, as he recalled in mixed language and schematic notes in his diary of 1940: "how to furnish a given space with a minimum of materie [material]/ Imaginary volumes, interpenetration of spaces on volumes vergleiche versuch des [cf. experiment with . . .] suspended table in Bauhaus show new york 1938."²⁴⁸ Bayer illustrated this entry with a depiction of a gallery with "imaginary spaces" connoted by painting on the ceiling and floor. **(figure 52)** For the accompanying catalogue, Dorner wrote retrospectively about the Bauhaus in much the same language as he had used thirteen years prior, in his defense of the then-young school.

Island, Marion MA" on August 16, 1937, to say that Dorner and his wife were staying with him there and to report on the discussion on the Bauhaus exhibition plans. Walter Gropius to Alfred Barr, copy of original letter, August 16, 1937, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, Collection REG, Series 82. It is likely that Bayer was involved in this visit as part of his exploratory trip to the United States; he emigrated the following year.

²⁴⁶ Bayer recalled having met Dorner for the first time in these terms at the Bauhaus but that their "friendly relations" (*freundschaftliche Beziehung*) only developed after traveling together to the United States. Rössler, 2013, *Op. cit.* p 94. Rössler puts the recollection of this "gemeinsamen Ausreise in die USA" into dispute, as cited above, but it is clear that their relationship developed post-emigration.

²⁴⁷ Chanzit and Liebeskind, *From Bauhaus to Aspen*, 121 (see fn. 236).

²⁴⁸ Herbert Bayer, journal "September 1940 bis 1943," 11, Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum, underlining in original.

He lauded the Bauhaus “spirit of functional design” as marking one of “the great potentialities of this technical age.”²⁴⁹

The exhibition-planning process was also an opportunity for Dorner’s friend and colleague Walter Gropius to further a campaign-in-process to find employment for Dorner in the United States. A letter from Gropius to Alfred Barr on August 16, 1937, was equally a report on the exhibition (“I have talked already about your idea with Moholy-Nagy, Schawinsky, Breuer and Dorner and we have made some notes”) as about Dorner’s prospects (“We are busy writing letters to different places. . . . I am very glad you and Mrs. Barr are so extremely helpful to him. I hope a favourable result will soon [*sic*] attained.”).²⁵⁰ Indeed, Dorner soon obtained a successful but brief posting in his truncated three-year tenure as director of the Museum of Art, which he redesigned very much in the spirit of the Hanover museum (see Chapter 2).

A Living Museum

Dorner’s years following his departure from the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design in 1941 were spent as a lecturer and professor at Brown University and, finally, Bennington College, where he also worked as an occasional curator in both schools’ galleries. Throughout, Dorner continued to focus – although now primarily in his lectures and writings, rather than in his gallery exhibitions – on proposals for furthering the curatorial treatment of interdisciplinary epochal development, non-object based artistic experience, and the subjectivity of audience members. From the mid-1940s through the

²⁴⁹ Alexander Dorner, “The Background of the Bauhaus,” in *Bauhaus 1919–1928*, ed. Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius, and Ise Gropius (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1938), 15.

²⁵⁰ Walter Gropius to Alfred Barr (see fn. 245).

end of his life in 1957, Dorner developed the concept of a “Living Museum” formulated in a variety of personal notes, unrealized grant proposals, and classroom exercises. As forecast by his curatorial work in Hanover and Providence, the museum rubric articulated by Dorner during this period was less a conception of a building to house material objects than a space emphasizing intersubjective encounters and other knowledge-producing “transactions” between viewer and gallery design (or assemblage of gallery objects).²⁵¹

While the “Living Museum” was never built, its ideas were embedded in an assignment to design an “Art Center” that Dorner posed to students in Walter Gropius and William W. Lyman, Jr.’s “Architecture 2d” course at Harvard Design during a 1947 visit. Dorner cautioned: “Your immediate clients are the directors of the art foundation, but it is most important to remember that the real, overall clients are the men, women and children of the city who will either reap a harvest of learning and appreciation of art from the center

²⁵¹ John Dewey’s philosophy of “transaction,” developed late in his career with his younger collaborator Arthur F. Bentley, was published in the volume *Knowing and the Known* in 1949. Dewey and Bentley defined “transaction” as an “inquiry which ranges under primary observation across all subjectmatters that present themselves, and proceeds with freedom toward the re-determination and re-naming of the objects comprised in the system. . . .

. . . [and a] Fact such that no one of its constituents can be adequately specified as fact apart from the specification of other constituents of the full subjectmatter. . . .

Transaction regards extension in time to be as indispensable as is extension in space (if observation is to be properly made), so that ‘thing’ is in action, and ‘action’ is observable as thing, while all the distinctions between things and actions are taken as marking provisional stages of subjectmatter to be established through further inquiry.” John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), 122–23.

Dorner’s notes on philosophy in “Das Moderne USA” summarize Dewey’s ideas in one word: “transaction” – followed by the sub-statement, “[Dewey] = ‘Instrumentalism’ (Knowledge is an instrument for doing, *kein objekt zu Betrachtung absoluter Gewissheit* [not an object for the contemplation of absolute certainty]).” In a different color pen, Dorner later appended to this note the comment “*nach* [according to] Burkhardt [the president of Bennington College, where Dorner was then a professor] truth is successful action, knowing)(doing.” [There Dorner inserted two interlinked parentheses, his shorthand for two transacting or “interpenetrating” systems or propositions.] Notes dated “22. Oct 55,” in Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 152, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

or will avoid it as a great dead monument erected to the ego of the designer.”²⁵² Students were asked to design for a vision of an evolving history that de-emphasized the permanent collection in favor of the dynamism of the present and future. The historical collection was on display, but as a foundation for the contemporary:

The permanent collection is the genealogical tree of our present visual language. Its trunk and ramifications convey to the visitor the evolution of man’s reality and thereby the driving forces of our present. It illustrates the evolutionary growth of our cultural forces focused on the growth of man’s visual language.

Since it has to simplify and also to freeze what is actually a totally moving and very complicated process of interpenetrating transformations, it will first consist of only a trunk, i.e. of a succession of ten rooms. Ample room should be left for a later addition of branches to that trunk.²⁵³

Other features of the museum, the assignment stipulated, should include Dorner’s signature gallery approaches including “transparencies representing architecture,” and “loudspeakers and earphones (to hear the poetry and music of the period.)”²⁵⁴ Multiple “Living Art Museum” proposals were submitted, dedicating prime space to theaters, tea rooms, and temporary exhibition spaces. (**figures 53 and 54**). These proposals honored Dorner’s theorization of the museum as a progenitor of culture rather than merely a display hall or steward of existing objects – a vision of the museum very much aligned with developments

²⁵² “Problem II,” issued November 24, 1947, in Graduate School of Design archives, Loeb Library, Special Collections, Harvard University, H26151v1, GSD Design Problems, Arch 2d Problem II.

²⁵³ Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 177 (see fn. 10).

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

in exhibitionary culture in the latter part of the twentieth century – the temporary architectures and program-heavy activities of the contemporary art fair and the biennial (Dorner emphasized that the museums designed by these students should have “no fixed walls”).²⁵⁵

For his suggestion that the museum should dispense with material or philosophical permanence (and the implication that this should perhaps extend to art overall), Dorner sought vindication in American pragmatist philosophy. His 1955 presentation for the Bennington College “Symposium on Art and Music” stated:

A tough Yankee attitude, pragmatism *can* [emphasis in the original] *only unify because it outgrows any contemplative cult of allegedly immutable timeless conditions*. For the time being, this integrating process is more evident in sciences than in art, which tends to backslide toward the absolutes.

Yet we shall need artists more than ever, a trained group developing imaginative seeing, though *their works of art should not have more than a temporary character*, without finality of form and content, (note George Grosz’s work for the recent film “I Am a Camera”).²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Ibid. Cf. Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube,” in *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-wall Europe*, ed. Elena Filipovic and Barbara (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). Filipovic notes that the expansion of “mega-exhibitions” such as the biennial beyond the contained form of the white cube reflects the interests of “curatorial discourses that increasingly distinguish the biennial as larger than the mere presentation of artworks. They are understood as vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debate” (ibid., 327). See my essay contextualizing this statement within discussions about exhibitions as discursive sites for knowledge production in Rebecca Uchill, “Hanging Out, Crowding Out or Talking Things Out: Curating the Limits of Discursive Space,” *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012).

²⁵⁶ “The Film: A New Species of Art,” special issue, *Bennington College Alumnae Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1955): 20; emphasis added.

Dorner did not encounter the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey until he was working in Providence, and when he did, he felt he had found his philosophical guru. In an undated draft of a letter to Dewey scholar and interpreter Joseph Ratner, Dorner remarked that he wished he had encountered Dewey's work earlier: "It would have saved years of single searching and fighting and that to read Dewey to me is like a warm spring rain that wets all the land around you."²⁵⁷ Dorner would cite Dewey and pragmatist philosophy throughout his theories of museum development, and Dewey would write the introduction to Dorner's original 1947 edition of *The way beyond 'art.'*

As Dorner's theorizations of museums and artistic output continued to reveal fascination with flux and ephemerality, increased attentiveness to environments and experiences, and interest in transactions as (pragmatist) opportunities for knowledge development, his language promoting these spaces as centers for interdisciplinary knowledge production became more obviously political. An émigré who faced xenophobic attitudes in the United States, Dorner's advocacy for the museum as a "living" space for knowledge coproduction was explicitly dedicated to the pursuit of democracy.²⁵⁸ Dorner introduced his "Living Museum" assignment to Gropius's students with a lecture defining a museum building as "the result of cooperation and transaction" between architect and museum director, with the caution that "no Museum design should

²⁵⁷ Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 533, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

²⁵⁸ Dorner was the target of suspicion and investigation by his staff and supervisors during his directorship at the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, who reported his movements and activities to FBI personnel. See the Rhode Island School of Design Archives, Executive Vice President (Royal Bailer Farnum) Files.

freeze into a form.”²⁵⁹ Stasis in form, Dorner cautioned, could only be motivated by “the same fear [that] is behind Fascism.” The language of war slowly gave way to that of Cold War U.S. nationalism in his teaching: during a 1953 lecture at Bennington College, for example, Dorner prompted his students: “What’s at stake in the art-science question is one of democracy. . . . We all know by now what depends on the abilities and deeds of our democracy. Are we stronger than communism?”²⁶⁰ Dorner’s theorization of the experiencing subject was one that understood the individual to be mutually influenced by context – via transactions with his environment and other members of society. For this reason, Dorner was able to justify the museum as necessarily entrenched in the fight for democracy: if art was comprised of perceptual reception (as he argued in the “Facsimile Debate” outlined in Chapter 2) and the subjectivity that manifested that reception was produced through contextual social relations (as posited by Dorner’s Hanover galleries explored in Chapter 1), that which was ultimately being displayed and produced through “atmospheres” in the museum was the shape of society itself.

Exhibiting Perception

Where Dorner’s museum galleries were produced for interpretive-experiential perception, Bayer’s exhibitions were produced specifically for the visual-optical spectator. In both Dorner and Bayer’s ideations, the viewer was subjected to immersive

²⁵⁹ Lecture notes for “A Living Museum,” noted in pencil “Lecture to 2 Harvard Classes, Nov. 14, 1947,” 1, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 117, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

²⁶⁰ Lecture notes dated “March 55,” Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 488, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

environments with experiences carefully scripted by their designers: in one case, with the aim of teaching period vision, in the other, a strategy of exploiting it. In his 1942 *Road to Victory* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Bayer appealed to what he called an “enlarged field of vision” – raising the visitor on a ramp, as he had done in the 1930 Werkbund exhibition, orienting photo panels toward the viewer’s eye from above and below, facing the viewer on the diagonal and involving the viewer’s full range of directed opticality. In his 1940 diary, anticipating this design, Bayer wrote about employing a “view from above.” He elaborated: “make idea of airview general theme for a [*sic*] exhibition design in space on open air. By building bridges for visitors as point of view on exhibits.”²⁶¹ (figure 55) Notes on preliminary title ideas for the exhibition revealed the tensions between its desire to convey proximities of a global community and the coordinates of global warfare: “Global War for World Peace,” “New Roads to Victory,” “The World we Fight In,” “Our Shrinking World.”²⁶² At least in his own private notes, Bayer was quick to distinguish his design efforts on *Road to Victory* from those of his collaborators, particularly the photographer Edward Steichen:

I learned much, working with Steichen.

Positive: Editions, a story has to be followed. Without a story, a photo does not mean anything to people (in this country).

(This is hard to take for abstrakt [*sic*] artists.)

Otherwise his [Steichen’s] point of view is definitely that of another generation. . . . his artistic senses work only in two dimensions. the third dimension I had to smuggle into the show. I followed my theory of a

²⁶¹ Herbert Bayer, journal “September 1940 bis 1943,” 13, Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum, underlining in original.

²⁶² Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, Collection REG, Series 236.

sequence and direction through the show, opened up long views through the floor. Made use of an enlarged field of vision, by inclining the floor for display and raising the visitor on a ramp, to look down upon [*sic*].²⁶³

Bayer continued to develop an exhibition passage that “shows the viewer a story” in his *Airways to Peace* exhibition of 1943. The exhibition opened with an overview of the history of mapmaking followed by an inverted globe that the viewer was to step beneath in order to see all at once the entire world and the geographic relations between its different points. **(figure 56)** That section was followed by a ramp from which the visitor viewed aerial photos below.²⁶⁴ Here Bayer used the exhibition trajectory to narrate a story about the supremacy of aerial transit as a way of envisioning and uniting the world. According to Cohen: “in each situation Bayer located the narrative line and devised a system of disclosure that enabled the viewer to pass through the exhibition space keyed by appropriate diagrams of exposition (and inhibited from circumventing the narrative by impedimenta – walls, plastic interventions) to assimilate beginnings, middles, and ends. The intent of an exhibition was to transmit a few critical ideas – excellence, quality, moral clarity – regarding the subject matter.”²⁶⁵

The exhibition was explicitly framed in terms of teaching its viewer – like a modern cartographer or navigator – to see, through the production and use of maps. The flatness of the Mercator projection, the exhibition argued, had served mariners well, but did not serve aerial transit. Wendell L. Wilkie, writing about this section of the exhibition in *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* in 1943, added:

²⁶³ Ibid., c. April 1941, 100–101.

²⁶⁴ Cohen, *Herbert Bayer*, 302 (see fn. 235).

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 288.

Even before Mercator . . . the most useful projections for the conquest of the air had been discovered. But they had been neglected for some time.

Most adults have learned geography from Mercator maps, and it is hard to *readjust the eye and the imagination to other maps better suited to the air age.*²⁶⁶

The full, three-dimensional optical experience of a globe was understood to be superior to the flat map for conveying global geography. The implications of adjusting vision to be a better global citizen was made plain in Director of Exhibitions Monroe Wheeler's contribution to the same volume, "A Note on the Exhibition":

[T]he Germans' lack of the global concept [was] the basic flaw in their strategy. They planned their conquest on Mercator maps and relegated the United States to the fringe of their world. To demonstrate this and other essential factors of an air-age war, an important section of the exhibition, consisting of spheres and "outside-in" hemispheres, shows Germany's tragic misinterpretation of geo-political theory, Japan's scheme of Pacific conquest, the possibilities of long-range bombing, the chances of dislocating war industries inside Germany's enslaved and fortified Europe, and the importance of Allied air bases in China.²⁶⁷

Bayer's well-honed exhibition design methodologies both reflected and informed

²⁶⁶ Wendell L. Willkie, "Airways to Peace," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 11, no. 1, "Airways to Peace: An Exhibition of Geography for the Future" (August 1943), 3–21, here: 5, accessed January 1, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/4058156>; emphasis added.

²⁶⁷ Monroe Wheeler, "A Note on the Exhibition," in *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, 23 (see fn. 266).

the subject matter of *Airways to Peace*. The exhibition placed the viewer's eye at the center of a multi-plane design, just as the world was best understood with the eye positioned at the center of a surrounding globe. The curatorial trajectory took the visitor through a narrative progression of knowledge mirroring the expressive development of cartography. Exhibition files on the "Sequence of Exhibits" explained this throughline: "This section shows how man has translated his knowledge of the world into diagrams (maps) and how he has altered these diagrams with each increase in knowledge."²⁶⁸

In contrast, Dorner did not always attempt a straight narrative flow, nor did his exhibitions facilitate the acquisition of cumulative knowledge through viewer movement through the galleries. Rather, evolutionary ideas were built through encounters with galleries that required active negotiation. Dorner was particularly taken by an architecture exhibition he saw at the Baltimore Museum of Art, in which visitors could confront a view through a window into a room that would come later in the gallery sequence, but not gain access to it until later in their perambulations through the exhibition. **(figure 57)** In an unpublished, undated manuscript written while at the R.I.S.D. Museum of Art, Dorner stated that he was most impressed by the way in which "a layout . . . can make the visitor experience through the senses the growth of a cultural movement, its impasses and the functioning of its trend. . . . [The visitor] comes to a point (see arrow) where the development stuck in an impasse. He bumps against a barrier over which he can see into the promised land of modern architecture, but in order to reach it he has to turn around, go back and branch off at the right spot. This makes the visitor feel, think, and act. He

²⁶⁸ "Airways to Peace: Sequence of Exhibits for Section II, How Man Has Drawn His World," organizational memo, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, Collection REG, Series 236.

participates personally in the functioning of history.”²⁶⁹ Once again, Dorner demonstrates that he is less invested in showing an object of material culture than he is in having the visitor feel and learn from participatory maneuvering through a given environment – in this case, by actively working to find the final gallery in order to reap its reward. Arthur Cohen also writes about Bayer’s exploitation of “impedimenta”; while both exhibition designers share a common aim of orchestrating an audience, in Bayer’s case it is the producer, not the audience, who negotiates strict parameters: “the designer must work with an economy of means, counterpoint of message, and grading of impacts and effects (by use of color, lighting, signage to establish stress and focus), various techniques of drawing attention and achieving drama, until the viewer is sure to have gotten what the exhibitor intends to transmit.”²⁷⁰

Dorner’s fascination with the Baltimore museum device – an obstruction that created desire, providing views into adjacent rooms, without providing access – favors disrupted paths of viewer engagement that force an alert and active engagement, not a passive reception of information delivered. In Weimar Hanover, Dorner had navigated a variety of competing positions on the relationship between a subjective individual citizen and his empathic relationship to a collective, ultimately weighing in with the conservative anti-expressionist position in his label texts (see Chapter 1) – using developmental aesthetic philosophy as a means for this critique, as well as its exit device, by claiming abstraction as a “next phase” of collective cultural advancement. Now, in the United States, Dorner continued to theorize the relationship between the individual viewer and the audience at large, making the unifying experience of the (gallery) environment a key

²⁶⁹ Layout designs for unpublished “Why Have Art Museums?” n.p., labeled p. 15 (see fn. 228).

²⁷⁰ Cohen, *Herbert Bayer*, 288 (see fn. 235).

feature in training for the present and future civilization:

I imagine we could perhaps have been more functional and less static in the layout itself and not simply add one field of art to another as the visitor passes along. One could perhaps represent the trend with a successive change in shape, color, light and materials of the room and make the visitor feel with all his senses how history is functioning through our own age. This would give him a feeling for modern life, it would strengthen his integrity and thus make him a better citizen of the coming culture.²⁷¹

In this unpublished manuscript, penned at least five years before *The way beyond 'art,'* Dorner sought to employ exhibitions “beyond art” – focused instead entirely on design – as the best means to “make” a good citizen.

Bayer’s “field of vision” environments suggested a different kind of viewer activity, facilitating a common audience experience of a design apparatus in order to stimulate individual syntheses of information. Fred Turner compares Bayer’s work in the United States to its German antecedents by way of distinguishing between heterogenic democracy and fascist homogeny:

Moholy’s “New Vision” and Bayer’s “field of vision” techniques solved a problem for American promoters of morale. If fascist communication worked instrumentally and molded individuals into a single, unthinking mass, these Bauhaus modes of seeing were designed to do the reverse: like the preliminary course, they demanded that individuals reach out into an array of images and knit them back together in their own minds. In the process, they could reform both their own fractured psyches and,

²⁷¹ Dorner, “Why Have Art Museums?” n.p., presumed intended p. 14 (see fn. 228).

potentially, society itself. For Moholy and Bayer, as for Gropius, art and the technologies of artmaking offered environments in which individuals could experience themselves as simultaneously more completely individuated *and* more integrated into society.²⁷²

Turner convincingly posits that Bauhäusler design strategies, self-consciously aware of fascist dangers, were poised to address the “fractured psyches” of United States society. It is also important to recall that these same strategies were formulated in Germany within the conditions of its newly democratized society of the 1920s. The themes of individualism and collectivity of expression and reception that pervaded the debates over abstraction, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and representation, now found renewed urgency in the postwar United States context.

The way beyond ‘art’ Exhibition

In 1940, Herbert Bayer wrote in his diary, primarily in his signature all-lowercase text, about “plans for a museum, worked out with axel dorner. the museum, which by all means of display, presents all significant and characteristic accomplishments, philosophies, . . .etc. of significant art periods in relationship to each other and as a whole.” (**figure 55**) Such a museum, Bayer went on, “does not know only the finished result isolated from its background of origin, but . . . emphasizes that and its relations to its surroundings as the reason for its being, and being just that way. This idea should be

²⁷² Turner, *The Democratic Surround*, 81–82 (see fn. 8).

worked out first as a book before realizing it in three dimensions.”²⁷³ Bayer’s comments on producing a collaborative book and museum or display to surface artistic “results” against their “background of origin” bring echoes of the integration of artistic objects into their most appropriate environments, a strategy that both Dorner and Bayer had developed in the German context, and had continued to cultivate in the United States.

On the following pages of Bayer’s diary (in what may be a separate entry but likely dates to the same time as his comments on Dorner), Bayer ruminates on the urgency of publishing his ideas, on the perils of collaboration (“but they want the credit for the book then”) and on the plan to “organize and prepare an umfassende [comprehensive] show of my work, mounted foto [sic] enlargements, the display, including paintings, etc. for a travelling show in towns like boston, providence, worcester. That ‘new’ kind of an artist, who is painter and commercial artist (and therefore none of either one!) should be promoted, so that one learns to understand how these seemingly separated activities come from the same sources and need each other today.”²⁷⁴ Bayer seems to be describing the exhibition on which he would collaborate with Dorner, who indeed had already written about Bayer and the Bauhaus in terms of the importance of precisely this “new kind of artist.”

Over the year of 1947, *the way beyond ‘art’* exhibition would tour across the United States, in venues including Brown University, Harvard University, the Institute of Design in Chicago, and an art center in Colorado Springs. Dorner and Bayer corresponded about the exhibition layout for many months, if not years, leading up to the

²⁷³ Herbert Bayer, “September 1940 bis 1943,” 14–15 (see fn. 261).

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 17–18

1947 opening in Providence.²⁷⁵ The two collaborators did not agree on all organizational points: Dorner advocated a meandering circulation route (reminiscent of his fascination with the Baltimore Museum obstructions), while Bayer proposed a straight and right-angled design, at least for one venue, as submitted in two versions of “rough suggestions” for the Harvard University Robinson Hall version of the exhibition.²⁷⁶ (**figures 58 and 59**) Bayer’s version of the design also included a tracing paper overlay to propose the use of a glass case, representing the viewer seeing the case from “eye-level” with the symbol of an eyeball.²⁷⁷ (**figure 60**) The exhibition trajectory envisioned by Dorner opened with Bayer’s typographical work, moved through his work with the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau, passed contemporary paintings hung on a wall across from a temporary wall showing his advertising work in Germany, then arrived at Bayer’s work in the United States, including his exhibition work, which was also planned to be seen across from a grouping of recent paintings. While Dorner’s trajectory won out, Bayer appears to have organized the hanging apparatus – this becomes apparent when viewed in comparison with Bayer’s Chicago *Modern Art in Advertising* show from 1945, which used the same wooden armatures and tiered hang levels.²⁷⁸ (**figures 61 and 62**)

The exhibition opened at Brown University in the Faunce House Art Gallery on January 20, 1947. Educational programming associated with the exhibition included an

²⁷⁵ A May 1945 letter from Bayer to Dorner makes early recommendations for layout, construction, and material to be included. Herbert Bayer to Alexander Dorner, letter, May 28, 1945, NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 76.

²⁷⁶ Herbert Bayer to Alexander Dorner, letter, February 5, 1947. “The partitions marked with a red cross seem necessary in order to tie this wall space in with the rest of the show. If such temporary partitions interfere with the regular traffic we will have to leave them out. I am sending these sketches to you so that you might consider this and then contact Pius [Walter Gropius].” NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74.

²⁷⁷ NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74,

²⁷⁸ Bayer also recalled, “I designed the installation to be installed inexpensively.” Interview with Arthur Cohen, “Questionnaire #7,” 6. Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, box 9, folder 98.

“informal talk and discussion” with Dorner hosted by the Rhode Island Art Teachers Association – the invitation included the helpful endorsement “Your association feels that this is a rare opportunity to feel future trends.”²⁷⁹ As he had in Hanover, in Providence Dorner also happily engaged local commentators in published discussions about the meaning of the exhibition; in a response to one Providence-based critic, Frederick Sisson, Dorner described his exhibition title (and the perils of artistic autonomy) in a challenge to Sisson’s commitment to a vision of “the imagination of the ‘free and independent artist’”:

[W]hen I speak of a “way beyond ‘art’” I place the word “art” in quotation marks. Art in quotation marks means irresponsible art, the kind of “independent and free art” which has existed only since the split-world of Romanticism and which has led to the chaotic language of the Babylonian tower. The asocial performances of Surrealism are the natural end-product of this movement.

. . . What we call “art” has actually become the symbol of this separation of life into two worlds: the world of an unchanging spiritual essence and the sensuous world of change-creating forces. The “work of art” has come to represent an ideal static condition, and therefore a self-sufficient and self-enclosed idol that assures man of the eternal victory of that ultimate “form” over all forces of change.

The cure can obviously come only from an inner change in the imaginative process itself, where the very act of conceiving is imbued with the aim to help life actively rather than simply to contemplate it

²⁷⁹ Invitation card in Bayer Studio Publicity Notebook: 1947–1954, Herbert Bayer Archive and Collection, Denver Art Museum.

passively.²⁸⁰

After Providence, the exhibition began its tour. Photographs suggest that it retained largely the same layout in the other venues. Dorner's introductory text, formatted in stanzas, opened the exhibition announcing its aim was

to deal, in the field of art, with the vital problems of our time:
how to reintegrate the world of our Sundays with
the world of our weekdays. . . .

How to create a visual language which merges
the 'purely artistic' work with
the design of our early industrialized life.²⁸¹

(figure 63)

With these lofty claims, *the way beyond 'art'* – and the concomitant aspirations embedded in its title – encompassed not only Dorner's desire to produce a living and active exhibition experience but equally Bayer's status as a contemporary practitioner who had moved "beyond" the artistic and into the commercial/industrial sphere. The premise, in similar language, seems to have been formulated by Bayer in his original prospectus for the exhibition. Indeed, when he contacted Dorner to begin earnest discussions about producing a show at Brown University in 1945, Bayer enclosed a carbon of a proposal for the Museum of Modern Art, originally submitted November 23,

²⁸⁰ Alexander Dorner, "In the Day's Mail: The Way Beyond 'Art,'" letter to the editor, *Providence Sunday Journal*, February 2, 1947, in Bayer Studio Publicity Notebook: 1947–1954, Herbert Bayer Archive and Collection, Denver Art Museum.

²⁸¹ Exhibition photograph, Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum, "Bayer Exhibitions: The Way Beyond Art – Colorado Springs" folder.

1942. In that prospectus for Monroe Wheeler, Bayer had conceived of an exhibition, arguing that “the artist of today should go out of his own dream world into the reality of life and it’s [*sic*] problems. It is the fusion of the artist as a creator and visualizer with the business world and the industrial society which I would like to emphasize in my exhibition.”²⁸² Bayer elaborated:

I don’t consider myself a Fine Arts artist or a straight Commercial artist, I have always tried to integrate these two fields in my work and don’t see why there should be that strict separation between the two. For an artist, all problems of design are the same whether they stand for themselves or whether they are applied. . . . This artist (for whom a name has not yet been found) who seeks the mechanical processes and merchandizing methods, so necessary to enable him to reach a wider public and who on the other hand finds new inspiration in purely esthetic conceptions, l’art pour l’art paintings. The industrial business world is predominant in all our lives and the modern artist should be an important factor in feeding this business world the springs of life themselves. As America at war presents so many immediate problems to the modern artist a show of the art work of a “designer” who is in the midst of it should be of great interest.²⁸³

Bayer had proposed to frame his exhibition, and himself, as a conveyer of art-for-art’s-sake principles to the power brokers of the wartime industrial sphere. Having introduced Bayer as a “painter and a commercial artist, a creative person who is really widening our world concept” in the London Gallery exhibition, Dorner now took up Bayer’s shared vocabulary of “integration” in describing his position between the artistic and commercial spheres. But in his deployment of the term, Dorner ignored the fundamental

²⁸² Carbon of prospectus for “Mr. Monroe Wheeler, Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y.” dated November 23, 1942, enclosure in letter from Herbert Bayer to Alexander Dorner, March 6, 1945, NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 76.

²⁸³ Ibid.

premise of Bayer's conjecture. To Dorner, Bayer's position was not one of a siphon of fine arts into industry, but rather a figure of resistance *against* (or "beyond") the autonomous artist of the modernist mythos that had likewise been renounced by art criticism and political conservatism surrounding Dorner's later work in Germany. Dorner's exhibition of Bayer's work was calibrated to focus on Dorner's interpretation of Bayer as an example of design "Beyond 'Art'" through his design and interpretive texts.

Dorner wrote to update Bayer on the exhibition shortly after its opening, justifying some of his more dramatic departures from their collaborative plans:

Getting it ready was, as you can imagine, a devil of a job, especially since, to save the university money, I did as much as possible alone and without the involvement of outside assistance. Fitting your pictures into frames involved an unexpectedly large amount of work. Almost without exception, they all had to have mats cut for them, as did the other materials. In the process of organizing the works, it turned out that various items had to be moved because they impeded each other visually. In essence, however, nothing in the plan has been changed. But I think it would greatly benefit the exhibition if it does not finish up with pictures. That was my feeling at the beginning and has been suggested by total outsiders without any prompting on my part. Rather than enhancing the basic idea of the exhibition and your work, we are now blurring its contours.

In the exhibition I have used significantly more color than originally intended, since that was the only way to weld the diverse materials for the exhibition (images, pictures, ads, posters, etc.) together and at the same time to keep them alive. I enlarged the "World of Letters," which is framed and hanged at a distance from the wall, something that works very

well.²⁸⁴

The Dornerification of Bayer's more streamlined exhibition concept included more color on the walls and larger-scale photographic reproductions – literally at Bayer's expense. As per his suggestion, Dorner did integrate paintings with the display of documentary works in at least one venue – photographs of the touring exhibition show Bayer's 1943 *Leaves* series (water colors and gouaches) on a wall alongside photographs of Bayer's designs for United States exhibitions (the three exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, as well as the *Modern Art in Advertising* exhibition in Chicago).²⁸⁵ (**figure 64**)

The shift from a straight chronological order to one comparing these exhibition projects with recent paintings would better suit Dorner's interpretation of Bayer's work as a progression into dynamic dimensionality (represented in the movement of the lines in the *Leaves* paintings, fusing many layers of the picture plane into an ambiguous space) as well as in the multi-plane hang in the "field of vision" in the Museum of Modern Art

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Die Fertigstellung war, wie Du Dir denken kannst, eine Heidenarbeit [*sic*] zumal ich, um der Universität Geld zu sparen, so viel wie möglich allein und ohne Hinzuziehung fremder Kräfte machte. Eine unerwartet grosse Arbeit war das Einpassen Deiner Bilder in Rahmen. Fast ohne Ausnahme mussten sie alle Passepartouts bekommen, ditto die anderen Sachen. Im Verlauf der Anordnung ergab sich, dass verschiedene Stücke ihre Plätze ändern mussten, weil sie sich optisch gegenseitig bedrängten. Im Wesentlichen ist jedoch an dem Plan nichts geändert. Ich glaube aber, dass es der Ausstellung wesentlich helfen würde, wenn wir nicht mit Bildern endigen. Das war mein Gefühl von Anfang an und ist von völligen Aussenseitern ohne jedes Zutun meinerseits vorgeschlagen. Anstatt die Grundidee der Ausstellung und Deiner Arbeit zu betonen, verwischen wir sie jetzt.

In der Ausstellung habe ich bedeutend mehr Farbe angewendet, als ursprünglich beabsichtigt, da das der einzige Weg war, das verschiedenartige Material der Ausstellung (Bilder, Photos, Ads, Posters, etc.) zusammen zu schweissen und zugleich lebendig zu erhalten. Die "World of Letters" habe ich vergrössert, gerahmt und im Abstand von der Wand gehängt, was sehr gut wirkt.

Alexander Dorner to Herbert Bayer, letter, January 26, 1947, NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74.

²⁸⁵ Exhibition photograph, Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum, "Bayer Exhibitions: The Way Beyond Art – Colorado Springs" folder.

exhibitions. Dorner presents these exhibition documents beneath a documentary image of Bayer's *Modern Art in Advertising* exhibition. That show, which did not employ the diagonal orientation of surfaces toward the visitor's eye as Bayer's other exhibitions did, looked the most like *the way beyond 'art'* exhibition design. Perhaps in hanging this documentary image above the others, Dorner may have been making a sort of meta-commentary, signaling the virtues of his own (visually similar) exhibition, which itself was otherwise visually unspectacular, especially in comparison with Bayer's exhibitions included as its subjects.

The *way beyond 'art'* exhibition was retrospective, including examples of Bayer's design work for advertisements, typography, and exhibition design, in many cases chronicled through photographic documentation. Works of fine art itemized in the packing list for the exhibition included six montages from the late 1920s and early 1930s, twenty-two paintings ranging in date from 1921 to 1942, and assorted water colors, gouaches, and drawings in crayon, charcoal, oil stick, and pen and ink. A significant number of materials documented Bayer's Bauhaus years.²⁸⁶ On October 25, 1946, Bayer sent a crate containing the works for the exhibition, followed the next day by a letter itemizing not only the works sent but also a layout for the exhibition describing which work should appear on which wall. Listed among the materials for inclusion on Wall A, for example, were Bayer's design for a poster advertising the 1923 Bauhaus Dance; an invitation he designed for the 1925 "Last Bauhaus Dance in Weimar" and a photograph of his mural in the Bauhaus staircase; along with an early drawing and collage. Wall B, meanwhile, was intended to show an "outdoor poster design" and "small outdoor poster

²⁸⁶ Packing list, October 26, 1946, NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74.

design” from 1923, two postcards, a “BH book cover,” and a tempera painting titled “Bunch of Keys” from that same year, two banknotes from 1922, and a suite of “Italian drawings” from 1924. As documented in archival slides and photographs, the Providence display honors this preliminary schema for the most part, with some changes: the two Bauhaus Dance designs indeed appear on the introductory wall placed alongside a postcard and directional sign for a 1923 exhibition at the Weimar Bauhaus; the cover of the Bauhaus book from the same year (that Bayer intended for Wall B); and at least one version of Bayer’s designed banknotes (also intended for Wall B). The book *The way beyond ‘art’* sat on a table at the gallery entrance. **(figure 65)**

Notably, the exhibition included Bayer’s designs for the 1935 *Wunder des Lebens* exhibition catalogue, chronicling a Berlin-based exhibition thematizing racist extremism. Bayer’s poster for the exhibition, featuring a transparent human form, with veins and neurons pulsing in primary colors, emerging from an egg-shaped capsule, was hung high in *the way beyond ‘art’*; beneath it can be seen cropped excerpted designs from the catalogue, omitting the original accompanying text that described human history as the endpoint of lengthy biological development, with human eyes, the “windows to the soul” as the most important connection between a sensory individual and the world around him/her. **(figures 66–72)** Instead, Dorner’s exhibition text expounds:

In paintings as well as in educational and commercial designs the Greek symbols play an increasingly important role. The Greek world is not revived in the traditional nostalgic sense, however, but rather is boldly transformed by integrating it with our modern reality. This merging process reaches an almost classical peak in the Book Cover and the Poster of the Hygiene Exhibition “Wonder of Life” (1935). Here one can really

say that the traditional concept of “Art” as a symbol of immutable form has been immersed in the dynamic concepts of modern biology, represented by the egg yoke [*sic*] which irradiates the transparent human organism.

. . . And if one looks back from these dreamy, purely artistic visions to the effective advertisements that use some of the same symbols, one gets an inkling of the enormous tensions inside of a modern artist who set out to integrate our split-world of soul and matter.²⁸⁷

Dorner eliminates signals of Bayer’s content that do not align with his interpretation. The eye is presented not as the most important sense in this arrangement but one of many sensing devices (another design he included featured a large representation of the ear). And, much as he had done with the propagandistic works in the *Abstract Cabinet* in the Hanover museum, Dorner ignored the political content of these materials in his explanatory texts, focusing exclusively on the masterful renderings of “Herbert Bayer, Painter and Designer, 1934–38” (the title for this sequence). In her essay on Alexander Dorner, Joan Ockman notes that Bayer’s commission work for Nazi organs “makes ironic Dorner’s claim in [the book] *The way beyond ‘art’* that ‘Bayer managed to brave the fascist authorities in Berlin with his utterly anti-absolutistic, visual speeches.’”²⁸⁸ The quote from Dorner in that text continues: “Every poster and picture of his proclaimed loudly that art does not become ‘healthy’ but degenerates if it relapses into traditional,

²⁸⁷ Exhibition photograph, Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum, “Bayer Exhibitions: The Way Beyond Art – Colorado Springs” folder. Dorner’s *The way beyond ‘art’* exhibition catalogue more directly articulates that the Greek reference is to the sculpture of Doryphoros by Polykleitos. Dorner, *The way beyond ‘art’*, 172 (see fn. 12).

²⁸⁸ Ockman, “The Road Not Taken,” 103 (see fn. 10). The quote is taken from Dorner, *The way beyond ‘art,’* 179 (see fn. 12). The capitalization of the book title in the quote remains as in the original.

three-dimensional structures; that when it becomes immured in allegedly eternal, general ideas of racial beauty, physical fortitude and God knows what dead Absolutes which force themselves upon life in the guise of brutal, reactionary concepts, it kills life.” Dorner thus attempts to attribute a fight against fascism to Bayer’s very designs for a fascist regime, in that his design strategies conform with Dorner’s vision of how an anti-absolutist rendering should appear (namely, not “eternal” in its representational aspirations.)

Other sections of the exhibition even more directly subsumed Bayer within Dorner’s interpretation of the evolution of art as a process of tensions between expressionism and representation, the individual and his society, and a developing understanding of the world in terms of ever-unfolding dimensionality. A large wall text on “The Semi Static Split-World of Enlightenment and Romanticism” made no allusion to Herbert Bayer at all, but did include small pictorial inserts from Blake, Van Gogh, and Kandinsky:

Thus, the servant of the absolute truth became the “free self-expressing personality.”

In part, the old systems of commonly understood ideas dissolved into a sublime infinity of less and less understandable SUBJECTIVE transformations of these ideas; and the rational framework of perceptive SPACE evaporated into the irrational “free play” of EXPRESSIVE LINES AND COLORS. Yet all these changing and wholly subjective visions still claimed to be the true representations of the timeless essence of life. . . .

The split between Being and Becoming went much further. It

SEPARATED THE REALM OF IDEAS FROM THE REALM OF DAILY LIFE. For DAILY LIFE was ruled by the absolute law of enlightened sciences (which made forces blindly and inexorably redistribute matter), whilst THE SUNDAY WORLD of churches, museums and humanities was ruled by the “sublime” variety of timeless visions of the Absolute. The world of the weekday obeyed the inexorable force of change, while in the world of Sunday there seemed to survive the immutable harmony of eternal ideas.

The semi static split-world of Enlightenment and Romanticism is now in dissolution. It tried to preserve the traditional timeless and static unity of life beside the forces of change. It created a chance of self-sufficient, sovereign Absolutes in ever-novel individual persons, organizations, and states.

* This admission of the dimension of Time to the rule of three-dimensional Space meant the birth of the four-dimensional vision of the world.²⁸⁹

Dorner’s exhibition text again situates the exhibition at the intersection of the tensions that had defined his assessments of artistic development and evolution of civilization overall – between being and becoming, between absolutism and experience, between common ideas and subjective ideas, between stability and change, between the everyday and the sublime, between fixed space and dynamic time. Herbert Bayer’s precise engagement with these dialectics are presumed to be significant but are not always articulated. It could be argued that in this exhibition, Herbert Bayer’s work served as illustrations literally hanging in

²⁸⁹ Exhibition photograph, Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum, “Bayer Exhibitions: The Way Beyond Art – Colorado Springs” folder.

between Dorner's textual arguments, rather than the catalyst provoking the curator's interpretation.

The way beyond 'art': The Book

The book's argument was conducted much in the same vein, Dorner putting to the page his theories about the evolution of perception and perspective in art history, with Bayer serving as a celebratory sidebar (confined to his own chapter). The book opens with a tribute to Dorner's hero John Dewey, who also received the book's dedication; Dewey contributed a short preface to the book. Dorner presents his reader with a modified personal career overview – demonstrating his early alignment with Dewey (despite not encountering his philosophy until arriving in the United States) in the philosophical notions of cultural self-determinism and transformation seeded in his curatorial approach in Hanover. His project was never entirely about art alone, Dorner argues, and his book accordingly places the very notion of “art” itself into categorical dispute within its title: “We have set *art* in quotation marks to indicate that even our conception [of] *art* is but a temporary fact in human history. This semantic problem is part of a universal problem: The transition from thinking in terms of eternal basic conditions to thinking in terms of a self-changing basis.”²⁹⁰

In reflecting upon his work at “The Hanover Museum,” Dorner recasts the stakes – he was not arguing about *Kunstwollen* as a mere participant in the art historical community but in an effort to expand its breadth: “I was gradually driven to a practical, sensory representation of art-historic evolution and its inherent dynamism. I discovered

²⁹⁰ Dorner, *The way beyond 'art,'* 15 (see fn. 12).

that a slow but unceasing process of far-reaching transformation was taking place in our traditional concept of reality, and that this change was conditioned by a corresponding autonomous change in our mental faculties.”²⁹¹ His gallery redesigns were not in the service of art historical understanding, in Dorner’s retelling, but motivated by desire to address contemporary urgencies of lived experience: “The changing force of life is of such a depth and intensity that it explodes any such static unification. To understand that means to be driven toward a new philosophy, not only of the history of art, but also of esthetics and the art museum – toward a philosophy which reaches with a heretofore unknown force into our whole conduct of life.”²⁹²

The majority of the book comprises a thorough overview of his philosophy of evolutionary development of art and ideas, elaborated from his gallery treatments and texts initiated in Germany. Beginning with “magical” thinking in “prehistory,” Egyptian culture developed a system of depiction of shapes – not a picture, but an aggregate of sense impressions. The three-dimensional depiction of the Renaissance revealed the birth of “Western rational thinking” – with depth revealing immutability, rationality, and an organization of matter and vision:

[Three-dimensional objects] are sensory phenomena held together from within by a rational core. The core is an unchangeable texture of fixed relations irradiating centrifugally toward the surface and thus ensuring unity. The core makes of the surface an expression of inner organization. . . . It had formerly been an unbounded complex of unstable sensory signs. Now these unstable signs cluster as it were around a central

²⁹¹ Ibid., 17.

²⁹² Ibid.

idea of form, and that turns them into a unified three-dimensional solid. The unifying effect of such form depends on its detachment from extrinsic sensory changes. The form must be “absolute,” i.e. absolved from change. The deeper the idea, the more strongly organized do we find the changing diversity of the surface.²⁹³

Throughout Dorner’s history of epistemic development, change did not occur in catastrophic paradigmatic shifts, but through evolution out of beliefs that came before – aesthetic disinterestedness was just a renewed version of magical purposelessness, for example, and the Renaissance “contained seminally the Baroque” and revealed an “extension of space [which] did not become infinite until the Baroque.”²⁹⁴ These ideas were transcribed from Dorner’s Hanover museum trajectory and guidebook: “Baroque art made use of the same formal system [as artwork that preceded it] but it no longer focused on something perfected and complete but rather on the process of moving and becoming – not the limited and tangible, but the unlimited and colossal.”²⁹⁵

Dorner embraced an evolutionary progression in form, reflected simultaneously in changes in viewership and reception of art; these ideas as outlined in the book drew largely from Dorner’s existing evolutionary theories of art seen in his Hanover and Providence galleries and texts. *The way beyond ‘art’* also made some departures from Dorner’s previous claims. For example, in the course of the book’s discussion of abstraction and modern realism, Dorner makes a necessary aside, distinguishing between two branches of surrealism. Where Dorner had been mostly dismissive of the movement

²⁹³ Ibid., 57.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 75.

²⁹⁵ “Der Barock bedient sich desselben Formensystems, aber er gibt nicht mehr das Vollkommene und Vollendete, sondern das Bewegte und Werden, nicht das Begrenzte und Faßbare, sondern das Unbegrenzte und Kolossale.” Dorner, *Amtlicher Führer, Zweiter Teil*, 10 (see fn. 25).

overall, it seems important to his argument about Bayer (as foreshadowed in Dorner's contribution to the London Gallery catalogue) to acknowledge the efficacy of dream signs and appeals to common signifiers through advertising. Dorner attempts to reconcile this discrepancy with his prior stance on surrealism by naming two "branches of surrealism" – the "Romantic Surrealists" who had followed "the process of subjective isolation . . . to its logical end, the dissolution of space" ("represented by artists like M. Duchamps [*sic*], A. Masson, W. Paalen, and S. W. Hayter"), and the "Retrogressive Branch of Surrealism" that, in error, does not attempt to undo "perspective space."²⁹⁶

Dorner elaborates:

Whoever places his daydreams in the limelight of three-dimensional logic no longer believes in their saving and deepening moral power: they are to him merely pathological phenomena. By forcing upon his irrational dream images the methods of the Renaissance tradition he invites us to analyze them by means of traditional logic. The only conceivable aim of such an artist is to project his dream irrationality against a rational foil and by so doing disavow it. . . . Retrogressive Surrealism thus becomes a model report of destructive obsessions made by a docile patient to a psychiatrist. The paintings of these retrogressive Surrealists are the best proof of the fact that "art" has run its course. "Art" had grown up as a symbol of a world which had its anchorage in the depths of a spiritual form idea. That idea dwelt beyond all sensuous change, in a secure distance. On this idea reposed the strengthening power and beauty of art, its divine loftiness and its unifying value in an energetically changing life. Experience led to a new concept of the universe. Change invaded the static basis and created a

²⁹⁶ Dorner, *The way beyond 'art,'* 97 (see fn. 12).

split-world.²⁹⁷

Dorner argues that, in the face of this changed world, art that uses traditional conventions of space and signification could only be a “pretense to a higher truth.” In such a manner of thinking and depicting, Dorner does not see an opportunity for the viewing subject to be moved to reevaluate laws of phenomena (as governed by physics, morality, etc.) or to understand himself as a force bound by change and transformation; thus, Dorner favors contemporary artistic renditions that do not make recourse to or permit any impression of fixity of space or time.

As changes in “experience” (Becoming) surfaced in relation to a perceived absolute (Being), changes in perception of time also emerged. Indeed, for Dorner, the “drive of Western civilization, from antiquity to the Baroque” was tied to a “search for an inner spiritual cause of the changing phenomena on the sensuous surface.”

“EXPERIENCE,” Dorner emphatically posited, “divested the Absolute progressively of its sensual mundaneness and so changed its identity.” The individual, through his experience, was driven by universal urges that only “affirmed an ultimate Being.”²⁹⁸

Romanticism, in contradistinction, turned its back on fixity and pattern but did not fully reject the absolutism Dorner so abhorred. It was only the next brigade of “ABSTRACT ARTISTS and their off-spring, the MODERN REALISTS” who would address the “self-changing universe” as “THE FIRST TO SUBSTITUTE A TRULY DYNAMIC UNITY FOR THE OLD STATIC OR SEMISTATIC UNITY.”²⁹⁹ Abstract artists move toward “no-longer-absolute” signs (Dorner illustrates this tendency with Lissitzky) and Modern

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 98.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 81.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 96, capitalization in original.

Realism, which entered the commercial sphere (illustrated by Bayer, among others).

Revealing his commitments to a Weimar version of Hegel, Alexander Dorner theorized the intersections between aesthetics, experience design, and questions of how the subject renders him/herself sensitive, questions that had been reflected in the Weimar context in a broad spectrum of cultural and political theory questioning the relationship of the individual perceiving subject to the (democratic) social collective – threaded through writings about culture and war by Siegfried Kracauer and Ernst Jünger into critiques of expressionism channeled by art critics Wilhelm Hausenstein and Franz Roh, and echoed in debates between Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch after the demise of the Republic. In the United States, and in his *way beyond 'art,'* Dorner reconstituted these questions about the relationship between a subject's conditioning by and conditioning of his/her environment, in relationship to the “transactional” theories of American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey.³⁰⁰

Dewey, who wrote the preface to the first edition of *The way beyond 'art,'* can agree with Dorner on the point that rebellion against fixed ideas can sometimes produce only more fixity, and he touts the importance of transformations on the individual subjective level:

In the older view, a person as individual was thought to be a fixed element in a given larger whole; departure from this fixed place was heresy, in

³⁰⁰ Working out Dorner's relationship to Weimar Hegelianism is beyond the scope of this project, but suffice it to say that relations to “the Absolute” and phenomenal experience are crystallized for German intellectuals by Hegel, and Dorner was one of many activists who kept alive questions of phenomenological acquisition of knowledge through experience from Weimar to its postwar continuation in the 1940s and 1950s by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger. Many thanks to Caroline Ann Jones for her consultation on this point.

matters of belief; disloyalty in matters of overt action. Later what was called “The Individual” was cut loose entirely, and was supposed to be fixed in himself – a synonym at the time for *by* himself, or in isolation. The author effectively calls attention to something fundamentally important, but usually ignored: the assumption of immutability is common to both cases. In the first instance, the artist was “servant of absolute form”; in the second he was taken to be himself absolute and hence “spontaneous creator.” Against these fixations, Dr. Dorner points to the personal individual as a partaker in the “general process of life” and as a “special contributor to it.” This union of partaker and contributor describes the enduring work of the artist.³⁰¹

In the final section of the book, focused on Herbert Bayer’s work, Dorner treats Bayer’s biography and artwork largely in the service of illustrating his theories of the individual as a product of (artistic) experience. As Dorner only handles Bayer insofar as he can be assimilated into Dorner’s own theoretical or compositional rubric, the text de-emphasizes Bayer’s visual focus, as Dorner held that experiences addressing the full sensorium were most effective. Dorner illustrates this aspect of his argument with the example of a pre-Hellenic “magical mind” – but clarifies that the perception of the world

³⁰¹ John Dewey, introduction to *The way beyond ‘art,’* by Alexander Dorner, 10 (see fn. 12). Dewey seems less eager to stand behind Dorner’s assertions about perspective renderings and dimensionality in physics, however:

Were I to take what Dr. Dorner says about non-three-dimensional forms in productions appealing to visual perceptive enjoyment, I should be taking an illustration from a field in which I should have to live much longer than I am going to live to form a judgment. For to some considerable extent we all have to await the outcome of a movement, we have to see what it is in accomplishment, before we can judge it with security. But I may use his treatment as an illustration, albeit a minor one, of the unusual balance of knowledge of the history of art with personal sensitiveness of perception that permeates and unites all that he says.

Ibid.

through a range of sensory experiences is also crucial for the contemporary subject:

Whenever the magical mind is driven by instinct to maintain its own life process against the energetic objects of its milieu, it does so by reproducing the desired complex of sensory experiences. All senses are involved in these experiences. The more mobile and aggressive the experience, the better. Mimetic reenactment and imitated sound are certainly more important to magical man than the visual impact of painting. But the latter, too, must be as aggressive, vital and volatile as possible. Even today, under totally different conditions, we can catch an echo of that vibration in the mind of the child. When a child desires keenly a certain experience it will scribble down a shape. That shape is the aggressive visual complex which it experiences as a moving object. The history of painting begins with a representation of such shapes. The road leads from crude scribbles to snapshots of all kinds of game. Here we are at the source of pictorial art.³⁰²

In Dorner's evaluation of the experience as a proposition, visual expression comes last. It is therefore no surprise that he de-emphasizes the primacy of the visual in Bayer's work, occasionally seeming to willfully ignore it. For example, when speaking about the photomontage *Lonely Metropolitan* (**figure 73**) – in which Bayer places a pair of eyes within the palms of two hands that face the viewer, as if they were his own – Dorner equates their fetishization with the “miraculousness” of religion:

These hands are everyday hands and these walls are everyday walls of metropolitan back yards. They are in a distinct place and something distinct themselves, and still they are somewhere else and something else

³⁰² Dorner, *The way beyond 'art,'* 41 (see fn. 12).

at the same time. Where are they? How can they throw shadows on the walls? That they can only do if the background is just a photograph. But they cannot really rest three-dimensionally on such a background, as we can see from the shadows and the positions of the arms. So they are two things at the same time, and in two places at the same time. They are part of a self-changing process. The hands have lost their identity in yet another sense: they are invaded by the eyes, which appear miraculous like stigmata.³⁰³

Dorner makes a similarly evasive step when discussing Bayer's "Field of Vision" diagram and the exhibition designs that it spawned. For Dorner, what is most important to these examples is not the viewer's vision and the range of optical devices addressing the eye, but the "interaction" of the viewer with an environment that itself is not three-dimensionally fixed:

For displaying the architectural photographs [in the Werkbund Exhibition of 1930] Bayer used for the first time the principle of the enlarged field of vision and the technique of suspending panels on wires. So he eliminated any rigidity of exhibition and animated the relationship between visitor and displayed object. This already shows Bayer's tendency to detach exhibition design from the static wall surface and to dissolve the traditional three-dimensional "room" by creating new relations with divisions, penetrations and interactions.³⁰⁴

Contrastingly, in Bayer's paintings, Dorner finds richer opportunities to explore multiplicity of space and temporality, which he champions. In Bayer's series *Moving*

³⁰³ Ibid., 147.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 201.

Mountains, Dorner salutes the artist's effective depiction of internal change:

Herbert Bayer has never embodied the new vision of autonomous change more perfectly than in his "Moving Mountains" (1944). A sojourn in Vermont freed a long slumbering urge to represent the forces at work in the mountains. What would have been to others a harmless view from a mountain down on a village with a church surrounded by the curves of the hills, a perfect symbol of a peaceful condition, became to Herbert Bayer the experience of the irresistibility of interpenetrating forces. The longer Bayer wrestled with that vision the more all the relics of static solidity inherent in the traditional appearance of a Vermont landscape vanished. The pattern of tillage, the continuity of rolling hills, the needle of the spire and the shape of a pond – they were all more and more transformed from spatial forms into the very forces behind the seemingly static forms of the landscape. There is no other work of Herbert Bayer where the modern vision of the world as self-changing energies has burnt through with such an overwhelming force.³⁰⁵

Also celebrated by Dorner is the *Plant Life* watercolor series featured in the gallery version of *the way beyond 'art,'* which appears to nearly have been a subheading for one of the essays within the book.³⁰⁶ Dorner marvels at Bayer's depiction of growth and

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 158.

³⁰⁶ In a typed draft titled "Sample" (likely, due to its location in the file folder, originally an enclosure in a letter to Herbert Bayer dated June 23, 1946), Dorner produced the following hierarchical ordering of title nomenclature (with Roman numerals designating book sections, the Arabic numerals the titles of chapters within the sections, and the small Roman numerals the subsections of chapters):

I.
TENSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ART
1.
The artist as Servant of Absolute Form.
i.

change:

The forces of life radiate through each other. They may make leaves fall apart on the surface, they may bend and twist their invisible shapes, but underneath there is that all-powerful vibration that binds life by transforming it, that makes plants grow by constantly changing their way of growing. Winds and clouds participate in this overwhelming drama. They enter this world of interpenetration, which is irresistible in its never-resting process of growth, where behind birth and death, behind form and outer movement, life changes itself by its own will. The modern artist sees deeper than the traditional artist, because he sees through the “immutable” ground. What was once ultimate cause has become a superficial by-product. The sight of a leaf no longer makes Bayer think of its species nor of atomic movement *in* space. It makes him sense the energies which cause this form and the final atomic units to develop and change, the ubiquitous all-powerful life that works its transformations beneath and around us.³⁰⁷

Like the leaf blowing in the wind, “the modern artist” Herbert Bayer is a participant in a larger ecology of social and biological rhythms, mutually effecting change through his paintings and designs.

Bayer’s universalist vision was in contradiction with Dorner’s own ideas of vision as changing over time, and Dorner steered his own text away from confronting it. In this way, he attempted to comport a “study” that would better achieve the objective of

Why are today’s artists unable to find the beautiful of the Christian cummunio
Herbert Bayer’s “Plantlife”

NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74, underlining in the original.

³⁰⁷ Dorner, *The way beyond ‘art,’* 155 (see fn. 12).

teaching a more contemporary vision, as outlined in his untitled notes for a (presumed) book blurb:

Dorner believes that there is more life and power in history than we are able to see with the glasses of our traditional philosophy. In this country he found in the Pragmatism of James and Dewey the soil in which this new dynamic species of thinking and seeing could be grown to full strength.

. . . In his book Dorner combines a concentrated sketch of art history as growth with the analysis of Herbert Bayer – who in his opinion represents the coming type of the designer. The work of this designer is no longer “art”, because it ceases to be the symbol of any timeless concept.

Dorner’s study is carried by the deep concern for the future of Western civilization which in his opinion is doomed if it does not succeed in transforming its traditional static or semi-static basis of life into a more dynamic one – one which is bound to have an intenser will to change those alleged basic elements of life which now clog (as stumbling stones of traditional absolutism or semi-absolutism) the flow of life’s growth.³⁰⁸

It is notable that Dorner, as Herbert Bayer’s exhibition curator, withholds full praise of Bayer’s own exhibition work within the catalogue text, on the grounds that “exhibitions, lively as they may be, are still somewhat detached from the current of modern life. The artist can come in direct contact with this life only by participating in the actual economic, social and political procedures, by turning them into exciting experiences for everybody.”³⁰⁹ For Dorner, Bayer’s exhibitions – like all art exhibitions (aside from his own) – fail to properly engage the everyday lives of modernity. Dorner nominates himself to tackle this problem, and the final section of the book posits new

³⁰⁸ Undated untitled notes NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74. Grammar and punctuation as in the original.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

rubrics for the museum as a participant in “the struggles of the present.” Dorner elaborates:

The new type of art museum must not only be an “art” museum in the traditional static sense, but, strictly speaking, not a “museum” at all. A museum conserves supposedly eternal values and truths. But the new type would be a kind of powerhouse, a producer of new energies. So long as the museum remains content to preserve old truths and to collect relics that house the timeless spirit of QUALITY it acts as an escape from life. Despite its air of restless activity it poses as a temple of tranquility and peace – something that does not exist and should not be allowed to pretend to exist. It is like a dead hand reaching forward into our lives and stopping them.³¹⁰

The way beyond ‘art’ book was thus bookended by two visions of the museum – with Dorner positioned as the most deserving subject of contemplation in both cases: the Hanover museum, with its experiments in teaching the evolution of perspective and dimensionality, and a new type of museum such as Dorner’s speculative “Living Museum,” one that would produce instead of preserve.

As with the exhibition itself, *The way beyond ‘art’* book was also a collaborative work – combining Dorner’s content with Bayer’s design.³¹¹ Dorner’s narrative is illustrated throughout with diagrams representing consciousness of phenomena – and their depiction – as progressing from sensory and momentary propositions to their uniting by an inner core of Being; to welcoming an influx of energies that shattered three

³¹⁰ Ibid., 232.

³¹¹ A letter from Bayer to Dorner dated May 2, 1945, confirmed that their contractual agreement involved Bayer designing the layout and cover of the book. See NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 76.

dimensionality; to being subject to a universe whose laws were themselves in flux. (figure 74) When compared with Bayer's personal sketchbook from 1943 (figure 75) it appears possible that Dorner was inspired by Bayer's style in preparing figures for the book, if not that Bayer illustrated the text in addition to laying out the overall design for the book.³¹² While the differences between their contributions to the book may have been less apparent, local reviews noted the distinctions between Bayer and Dorner's contributions to the exhibition. Bradford F. Swan, writing in the *Providence Evening Bulletin*, posited:

The exhibition bears the title: "The Way Beyond 'Art': The Work of Herbert Bayer." Actually it is a two-man proposition; it uses the art of Bayer, who is both easel painter and remarkable successful commercial artist, to expound the aesthetic philosophy developed by Dr. Alexander Dorner, lecturer at the university.³¹³

Swan picked up on the divergences between Bayer's contributions as the subject of the exhibition and Dorner's as its curator and interpreter. He wrote to describe his appreciation of the "visual communication" of the exhibition (Bayer's), his enthusiasm about Dorner's layout and descriptive text panels seems tempered, if not reluctant. In a

³¹² Patrick Rössler's recent exhibition catalogue notes that Bayer is said to have indirectly accused Dorner of stealing his ideas and sketches. He refers to Bayer's interviews with Arthur Cohen, in the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art and in the Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, box 9, folder 98. Rössler, *Herbert Bayer*, 130, Note 38 (see fn. 239). In the questionnaire in the latter archive, Bayer recalls sharing ideas for a museum designed to portray the cultural contexts for artistic developments during their ship passage to the United States – a personally mythology of Bayer's that has been debunked by Rössler (see fn. 239), "Questionnaire # 7," 5. Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum.

³¹³ Bradford Swan, "An Exhibition Opens at Brown University's Faunce Gallery," *Providence Journal*, January 21, 1947, 4.

section of the review subtitled “Texts by Dr. Dorner,” Swan registered that the exhibition “combines both artistic material and explanatory texts, the latter prepared by Dr. Dorner and displayed in enlargements on panels. These the visitor can read as he passes through the exhibition. The plan of the exhibition, incidentally, has been arranged maze-fashion, so that the visitor progresses logically from one stage to another – begins at the beginning, and emerges, theoretically convinced, at the end.”³¹⁴

Swan does not seem to be entirely convinced. And he was not alone; audiences also struggled with the density of Dorner’s texts. A review of the Chicago version of the show, published in *Art Digest* on June 1, 1947, was even more blatant about naming Dorner’s texts a disservice:

Bayer, as his show at the Institute of Design proves, has hit upon the way to adapt the more spectacular of the inventions of the “Moderns” to the needs of advertising. A basic requisite of advertising art is that it must catch the eye instantly and convey as quickly its message. Bayer has discovered how to talk to the man in the street convincingly in the language of Paul Klee, Kandinsky and the Surrealists.

So far, so good. But now the art of the “Manifesto” maker intervenes. Since the days of Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism, every “ism” has had its literary interpreter.

The “explanation,” couched in learned language mingled with jargon, more often than not obscures what the artist has been doing rather than making it clear. Picasso’s Cubism is easier to comprehend than Apollinaire’s literary blue-print, and Marinetti’s manifesto became a 100-

³¹⁴ Ibid.

ton stone on the grave of Italian Futurism.

Literary spokesman for Herbert Bayer is Alexander Dorner, Professor of Fine Arts at Brown University. . . . After you have seen Bayer's show at the Institute of Design and reveled in the simplicity of the grand job he has been doing for Walter Paepcke, you suddenly are confronted by the assurance that you have been unbelievably dumb.³¹⁵

Not long after, Bayer began to attempt didactic text damage control, in an appeal to his "manifesto-maker" to reform the language and save the book from Bulliet's dour condemnation. In a letter from Bayer to Dorner dated August 3, 1947, Bayer pleaded:

In the Chicago exhibition as well as in Colorado Springs I have heard numerous comments to the effect that the style of the copy in your text panels is quite difficult to read and understand. I have noticed again and again that people get tired after reading one and at the most two panels and continue on to the paintings. Please do not take this as a criticism of your philosophy. I think you have done wonders to compress as much as you say in these panels into such small space, but from the point of view of successful exhibition technique I find it essential to make the texts easier. After all, it is more difficult to concentrate in an exhibition than over a book.³¹⁶

Dorner did not change the exhibition texts, and the associating book, as seen in its reviews, was equally challenging for its readers. Early on, Dorner's editor had implored him to rein in his language – an overview of general issues described:

³¹⁵ C. J. Bulliet, "Bayer of the Bauhaus," *The Art Digest*, June 1, 1947, 13.

³¹⁶ NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74.

mixed metaphors. These are not only sloppy but always give the impression that the writer is not concentrating on what he is saying.

outworn metaphors: these are worse than useless; they annoy and bore the reader. (bed of Proustes, etc.)

Use of Latin words when we have perfectly good English equivalents: in English, this usage gives the effect of pretentiousness and false scholarship. (*communio*, *causa*, *deificatio*).

Scientific jargon: since this book is intended as a synthesis and as a statement of a new point of view, it is unfortunate to use so many words borrowed – often now words current in journalism, and having lost their original scientific precision – from psychology, etc. This is a characteristic of much German and American scholarship – it is one of the things that encourages the gap between “art and industry”, the humanities and the sciences, exactly what the author does not wish. Examples, *drives* (every other newspaper article talks of “emotional drives,” because journalists long ago stole the word from psychologists)”³¹⁷

Dorner appears to have cut the bed of Proustes and some of the Latin, but *communio* remains (and is even an indexed term), and “drives” populate the book in great number, appearing often many times on a given page. The book was not an easy or clear read. Even Samuel Cauman, who would later collaborate with Dorner on his biography *The Living Museum*, tempered his mostly positive review of the book with the concession:

Many readers will have their troubles with *The Way Beyond 'Art.'* It is much more abstract than was necessary. The writing is often opaque. Americans, for the most part, are unfamiliar with the Hegelian dialectic, which, as Mr. George Boas observed in *The Art Bulletin* (vol. XXXIX No. 4), forms the substructure of Mr. Dorner's thinking, and with the special

³¹⁷ George Wittenborn Associates to Alexander Dorner, letter, labeled in pencil 6/10/46, NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 74.

Hegelian language, which endows familiar words with unwonted meanings.³¹⁸

Wittenborn, the publisher of *The Way Beyond 'Art'*, referred to Cauman's article when he wrote to Dorner in February of 1949 to inform him that there would be no reprint of the book:

Did you read the last article in the "College Art Journal" on THE WAY BEYOND ART? The first edition is going to be exhausted during this year. The calculation of this publication and the sales figures show a very poor reward on the financial side. We hesitate very much to pour more money into a reprint and as things stand now we prefer not to consider a reprint. As far as I remember the author can in such a case find another publisher and purchase the type and engravings for himself or the new publisher.³¹⁹

Dorner's largest realized touring exhibition in the United States, *the way beyond 'art'* was a complicated collaboration with its subject, Bayer. Shortly after its completion,

³¹⁸ Samuel Cauman, "Comments on the Way beyond 'Art,'" *College Art Journal* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1948): 10. Indeed, in his review, Boas had referred to Dorner's Hegelianism, not in terms of a critique of a dialectical argument but rather insofar as a certain type of "phenomenology of spirit" can be deduced in the different types of consciousness represented by Dorner's progressive stages of civilization: "To begin with Mr. Dorner seems to believe in what has been known as 'ages.' Ages are something in which artists and other people live, which have traits to be 'expressed' by the people living in them, which can influence these people. Thus we hear about Classical Antiquity, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Enlightenment, the Romantic Period, as if they were not merely sections of time lopped off to provide convenient, i.e., small, groups of people to deal with, but entities like Spengler's 'cultures' and 'civilizations.' It would seem doubtful that Mr. Dorner still believes in the Hegelianism of his youth, but the traces of it remain in his treatment of these periods." George Boas, review of *The way beyond 'art,'* in *The Art Bulletin* 29, no. 4 (December 1947): 283, accessed January 2, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/3047150>.

³¹⁹ "GW" to "Dr. and Mrs. Alex. [sic] Dorner," letter, sent February 26, 1949, George Wittenborn papers I.B. 9, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. A second edition was ultimately put out by Wittenborn, Schultz in 1949, but the publisher was not involved in the third edition.

Bayer wrote on to Isa Gropius with cautious optimism about the book:

I am glad the book is out – the work for it bothered me quite a bit for almost two years. And now I can look forward again and do something instead of helping analyze the past. I just finished reading the book again, and I am quite impressed with the logic of it. And what pleases me most is the metamorphosis from the Bauhaus idea that is apparent with this book. Some parts I still do not understand, but I suppose this is necessary to understand other parts the better. It has a rather fighting spirit and for the American artworld will be too dogmatic. And for that reason I don't expect too much success for Axel [Dorner], maybe among the young people. But I think it is a very important book and necessary just today, considering the vacuum we paint in. I am most pleased, that [Gro]pius is reading it with great interest.³²⁰

But the artist's enthusiasm about the book and exhibition was quick to sour. Shortly after, in a letter to Walter Gropius dated July 23, 1947, Bayer retracted his previous cautious praise:

Although the production of Dorner's book took an exceptionally long time I didn't have much of a chance to read the proofs carefully enough. Some of my last minute corrections were never considered and I must admit that in reading the questionable paragraphs over and over again, I understand that some sentences might be misleading. I am entirely in accord with the points which you make and I would like to have them straightened out accordingly. I assume that Dorner will send you, as well as me, a draft of

³²⁰ Herbert Bayer to Isa Gropius, letter, April 6, 1947, Gropius Archives, MS Ger 208 (431), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

the changes he will make for the second edition.³²¹

In 1951, Bayer wrote to Dorner suggesting that a third edition should include a series of corrections, including the addition of the roster of exhibition venues to which *the way beyond 'art'* had traveled, noting “we have to add the One Man Exhibitions in Providence, 1947; Cambridge, 1947; Chicago, 1947; Colorado Springs, 1947.”³²²

All of these corrections would fall by the wayside, since the next editions would eliminate Bayer altogether. A 1958 edition of the book, published by New York University Press, became the basis for a 1959 German edition, published by Fackelträger-Verlag, that also did not include the section on Bayer.³²³ When he learned of the 1958 omission, Bayer was angry. Bayer wrote to Lydia Dorner on April 21, 1959:

Not having heard from you for some time, I assume that you are still in Hannover. By mere chance I saw the new abbreviated version of “The Way Beyond Art” [*sic*]. I am disturbed by the fact that nowhere is any mentioning of the original edition and its full content, that the title was “The Way Beyond Art, the work of Herbert Bayer” [*sic*], and that it featured my work rather comprehensively. I cannot assume that my work was featured accidentally but that Axel [Dorner] believed that his statement was complete only with the addition of my work. I consider omission of this mentioning a mistake and also a dis-service to myself. Axel always believed my work to be exemplary proof of his philosophy. I

³²¹ Herbert Bayer to Isa Gropius, letter, April 6, 1947, Gropius Archives, Bayer: MS Ger 208 (431), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

³²² Herbert Bayer to Alexander Dorner, cc. Wittenborn, letter, February 8, 1951, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, Wittenborn collection, Series I.B. 9.

³²³ Alexander Dorner, *Überwindung der “Kunst”* (Hanover: Fackelträger-Verlag Schmidt-Küster, 1959). This also appears to be the template for the 1964 Italian edition, *Il superamento dell’ “arte”* (Milano: Adelphi, c.1964).

would have thought it fair also to him to have this expressed somewhere instead of passing me over as if there had never been the part on my work. I would like to recall here that it was only my modesty which placed the subtitle “the work of Herbert Bayer” small when I was designing the book.

My picture “Exfoliation” (without my name) and a diagram of it are there, but my original idea of the book is, unfortunately, mutilated.³²⁴

The response from Lydia Dorner dated June 7, 1959, was sympathetic but not reassuring:

“Your letter reached me in a clinic in Berlin and excited me more than necessary.”

Without chronicling the decision process that led to Bayer’s omission from the new edition, she wrote that she and Dorner had not seen see the galley proofs before “Axel and I left” (presumably for Germany, where he was working on reinstating his pension and other postwar reparations, immediately before he passed away in Italy), and “when I came back alone, the book was already in print. When I saw it for the first time, vital mistakes had been made, and there was nothing I could do about it.” She assured Bayer, “By the way, you have not been passed over. On page 120 you will find [your painting] ‘moving mountains’ [the title of the series that included Bayer’s 1944 work, *Exfoliation*].” (**figure 76**) She went on, “[The name of] Herbert Bayer [in the] subtitle has been omitted but so has an important diagram of Axel’s.”³²⁵ (For the German edition of the book, Bayer’s *Exfoliation* image that appeared on the dust jacket of the original was replaced by a blue-tinted and slightly less closely cropped version of the painting,

³²⁴ Herbert Bayer to Lydia Dorner, letter, April 21, 1959, Gropius Archives, Bayer: MS Ger 208 (2140), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

³²⁵ Lydia Dorner to Herbert Bayer, letter, June 7, 1959, Gropius Archives, Bayer: MS Ger 208 (2140), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

referenced on the title page as a design by Dieter Harzig, “unter Verwendung eines Originals von [using the original by] Herbert Bayer.”)

New York University Press no longer retains records of this book’s production, and, as they did not emerge during archival research for this dissertation, its author can only speculate that Alexander Dorner was aware of Bayer’s expulsion from the final copy, despite Lydia Dorner’s statements to the contrary. Lydia Dorner provided the copy to the German publisher, who retained the structure of the third American edition (without the subtitle or section referencing Bayer). This is evident both in the note “Aus dem Amerikanischen übertragen von Lydia Dorner” on the book’s title page, as well as in letters to Ise Gropius, in which Lydia Dorner discusses seeking a German publisher for the book and indicates that her translations were checked by the publisher’s translator.³²⁶ In a separate letter to Ise Gropius in this correspondence series, Lydia Dorner suggests that this structure honored Dorner’s wishes. Writing in mixed German and English, Lydia Dorner cites praise for the revised form of the book: “After about 9 months of asking myself whether I did justice to Axel’s work – a constant nightmare – these words nehmen eine Zentnerlast von meiner Seele [lift a heavy burden from my soul].”³²⁷ The quote could also be taken to apply to her decision to pursue the German publication of the revised form of the book, as her letter references Bradford Swan’s comments: “I think the book in its reduced form has a directness, a ‘straight’ (as opposed to ‘diluted’) quality which improves it considerably. Now it is all there, with nothing extraneous, nothing to

³²⁶ Lydia Dorner to Ise Gropius, letter, December 16, 1958, Gropius Archives, MS Ger 208 (656), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

³²⁷ Lydia Dorner to Ise Gropius, letter, March 18, 1959, Gropius Archives, MS Ger 208 (656), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

distract. A German Edition should be based on the Third American Edition (revised).”³²⁸

A letter from Lydia Dorner to Ise Gropius dated June 5, 1959, suggests a reading less favorable to Bayer: she alludes to Bayer’s angry letter with the (mixed language) comment “Es würde ihm a world of good getan haben, wenn ich seine gefühle nicht so geschont hatte und ihm die Tatsachen mitgeteilt hatte. But to hell. Ich werde ihn weiterhin schonen, besonders, da er nun auch die bittere Pille der deutschen Ausgabe schlucken muss.” (It would have done him a world of good if I had not spared his feelings like that and shared the facts. But to hell. I will continue to protect him, especially now that he also must swallow the bitter pill of the German Edition.)³²⁹

Way Beyond “Art”: A Philosophy

Given Bayer’s focus on a viewer’s opticality, he was perhaps a challenging choice of subject for Dorner; and, given the innuendo in Lydia Dorner’s letters, it is tempting to speculate on this fueling a decision to cut him from the book’s second edition. Dorner was not able to make Bayer’s work comport into the mold of atmospheric design with which he was most proficient. But if Dorner diverged from Bayer’s primary focus on optical perception, *the way beyond ‘art’* exhibition nonetheless propelled Dorner into a relationship with a very appreciative, though surprising, audience for his work: the Dartmouth Eye Institute (later, the Hanover Institute). This organization for optical research and experimentation was a clinic and research center based at Dartmouth

³²⁸ Bradford Swan was the reviewer from the *Providence Journal* who had commented on the differences between Bayer and Dorner in his review of the *way beyond ‘art’* exhibition.

³²⁹ Lydia Dorner to Ise Gropius, letter, June 5, 1959, Gropius Archives, MS Ger 208 (656), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

College, spearheaded by the lawyer-turned-artist-turned-optical-scientist Adelbert Ames Jr. Ames and his colleagues at the Institute were initially known and acclaimed for their work on the optical condition of aniseikonia, receiving considerable funding from the Rockefeller foundation for this work.³³⁰ But this funding was pulled back as the Institute began to shift course, becoming increasingly concerned with perception as a social construct effecting and affected by behavior. One of their best-known experiments was the “Ames room” or “Distorted Room Demonstration” (a trapezoidal room or model outfitted to play with depth perception. **(figures 77, 78, and 79)**) A 1945 statement of “Functions and Current Activities” described the broad focus of the research arm of the institute:

The research activities of the Institute embrace the fields of physics, optics, physiology, psychology, and medicine. They deal with problems of good and bad seeing and with studies leading to an understanding of the role of vision in perception and behavior.³³¹

In other words, the Institute embraced a Deweyan notion of vision as an individually acquired perceptual apparatus developed in response to a conditioning social environment—much as Dörner had understood the acquisition of perception and its representation through perspective renderings. Dörner himself read Dewey’s *Art as Experience* as a treatise on the influence of art and nature on structuring perception; in his

³³⁰ Aniseikonia is characterized by a discrepancy between the size of images received by each eye. For more on this, see Paul Boeder, PhD, Ophthalmology Oral History Series, “A Link With Our Past,” an oral history conducted in 1989 by Sally Smith Hughes, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley in cooperation with the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, San Francisco, accessed January 2, 2015, http://archive.org/stream/teacherphysiological00boedrich/teacherphysiological00boedrich_djvu.txt.

³³¹ Dartmouth Eye Institute Statement of Functions and Current Activities, Dartmouth Eye Institute Archives, Dartmouth University, DA 35/ 13:13 “Progress Rpt: Memoranda given to Dr. Gregg,” March 10, 1945.

notes on the section entitled “The Varied Substance of the Arts,” Dorner made extensive notes on Dewey’s comments on the various affects of the “quality” of the color red in different contexts and as received by different individuals “impregnated with their uniqueness,” as well as the “inexhaustibility” of perceived matter in expressing and informing a range of experience. While Dorner surely enjoyed Dewey’s claim that seeing and hearing were complementary senses, his notes on the chapter are accompanied by a rendering of a human eye reminiscent of Bayer’s renderings. However in Dorner’s rendering, rather than relaying straight arrows of lines of vision as Bayer might, this eye was pictured with a variety of throughways of perceptual projection reaching out in lines and loops to the shapes of the world, both receiving and informing cognition based on the perceived object.³³² (figure 80)

At the Dartmouth/Hanover Institute, the topics of research spanned all manner of social concerns, and their archives today house materials ranging from an analysis of the Lord’s Prayer to a chart mapping the phenomena that comprise “Trans-Action of Living,” demonstrating that the connection between an “Environment constituted of all the other Trans-Related Inorganic and Organic Functional Activities Except One’s Own” and a “Point of Converging Phenomena Relating Externally to Physiology” and “Perception” was “‘transactional’ and ‘circular’ and not an ‘interactional’ and ‘lineal’ one.”³³³ (figure 81) Accordingly, as documented in David C. Bisno’s thesis on the history of the Institute,

³³² John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (1934; repr. New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 215 ff. Dorner’s notes on Dewey’s book comprise a large file, with undated notes appearing to have been the outcome of various readings and rereadings over time. NLA HA V.V.P. 21, no. 118.

³³³ “Brief Introductory Note to Chart I, Entitled ‘Transaction of Living’; Analysis of a Sub-Phenomenon,” interdepartmental memo, labeled 5-20-49, Blanche B. Marshall McLane Bruner /1:12 “Ames selected writings 1949-1955”; and DA 35/8:38, Chronological Files: Ames/1951/1 of 2. Both in Dartmouth Eye Institute Archives, Dartmouth University.

Rockefeller Foundation representative Alan Gregg wrote in his diary after a visit to the Institute in 1945 that Ames' interests were "no longer in the direction of physiological optics but rather directly on aesthetics, psychology of exposition, explanation, and communications."³³⁴ By May of 1947, Dorner received a notice from a managing trustee of the organization, John Pearson, alerting him that the philosophical questions posed by the Institute had alienated funders who had supported the straight optical science endeavors:

I have to report that the Trustees had to face squarely this week the fact that our recent activities had not attracted new grants-in-aid for the research program, and that substantial modification of our programs had to be instituted swiftly as we made plans for the new fiscal year, starting July 1, 1947.

Since you have not been exposed to our eye clinic activities and to the pioneering work in research in physiological optics which Mr. Ames started twenty-five years ago, the termination of these two activities for which we had acquired reputation, may have little meaning for you. . . .

In keeping with the modification of objectives, the non-profit corporation, the legal basis for the institute, is to be changed in name from Dartmouth Eye Institute to The Hanover Institute, 27 North Main Street, Hanover, New Hampshire.

A major definition of the purposes of the Hanover Institute is "inter-disciplinary studies leading to a better understanding of the individual, in

³³⁴ David C. Bisno, "President Hopkins's Dilemma: The Dartmouth Eye Institute" (MA thesis, Dartmouth University, March 1994), 91.

all his relations.” I think you at least will sense the goal we are aiming at even though the statement is such a broad generalization – it may result only in vagueness for other people. It certainly gives us latitude, however.³³⁵

This new formulation cleared the way for the group to move forward with new plans and experiments such as a “demonstration via sensory experience in nuclear structure form, of truly modern thinking and acting.”³³⁶ These demonstrations – with evocative titles such as “Thereness-Thatness” and “Thereness and Apartness” were experiments in visual perception as it resolved illusions or relied upon experientially constructed assumptions about reality. In the “Chair demonstration,” for example, a viewer looked at an arrangement of strings through a peephole that, from that monocular viewpoint, appeared to compose a chair. Siegfried Giedion, who saw the demonstration presented at Princeton in 1947, remarked, “What the ‘eye perceives’ can be a chair, but it may also turn out that this chair is nothing but a few sticks hovering in mid-air. The modern artist has forever overthrown the belief that what the eye sees is reality.”³³⁷

The demonstrations revealed the primacy of individual experience in producing subjectivity; John Dewey would remark in an introduction to Earl C. Kelley’s 1947 *Education for What Is Real* that “under the inspiration and direction of Dr. Adelbert

³³⁵ John Pearson to Alexander Dorner, letter, May 10, 1947, Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 1050, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

³³⁶ “A Proposal for a Modern Realism Workshop Experiment (A Presentation of a Historical Science Endowed with a New Self-Changing Dynamism), May 29, 1947,” enclosure in a letter sent from Adelbert Ames Jr. to John Dewey, June 27, 1947, John Dewey Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

³³⁷ Siegfried Giedion, “Notes on the Ames demonstrations: art and perception,” in *Transformation: Arts, Communication, Environment* 1, no. 1 (1950): 8. As cited in Reinhold Martin, “Complexities,” in *Narrating Architecture: A Retrospective Anthology*, ed. James Madge and Andrew Peckham (New York: Routledge, 2006), 113.

Ames of the Hanover Institute, there has been developed an experimental demonstration of the principles which govern the development of perceiving, principles which are found, moreover, to operate more deeply in the basic growth of human beings in their distinctively human capacity than any which have been previously laid bare.”³³⁸ After reforming the organization, hopes were high that the group could also include John Dewey in selecting the planning team. On June 12, 1947, Pearson wrote to Dorner, in language reminiscent of Dorner’s analysis of the Baltimore architecture exhibition training its visitors through experience design, “some of us see an Ames-Dewey-Dorner sensorial experience demonstration which has a promise for moving folks toward the promised land.”³³⁹ That letter followed one day after Ames reached out to Herbert S. Marks, General Counsel for the US Atomic Energy Commission, to propose the benefits of assembling a committee with “intellectual understanding of man and nature and man’s relation to nature along the lines of our disclosures” to expand upon the understanding of “social perception” emerging from the Secretary of States Committee on Atomic Energy, formed “to increase man’s understanding of the significance of this new emergence that man created.”³⁴⁰ The letter included an enclosure outlining the idea of a “Modern Realism Workshop Experiment” to educate the visitor in a variety of subjects, among them: “Philosophy – ‘growth itself becomes the only moral end’”[the word “pragmatism” is written in pencil alongside this item]; “Psychology,” described as “growth of primitive

³³⁸ John Dewey, foreword to *Education for What Is Real*, by Earl C. Kelley (New York: Harper, 1947); reprinted in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 15, *1942–1948: Essays, Reviews, and Miscellany* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2008), 310.

³³⁹ Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 1049, Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

³⁴⁰ Adelbert Ames Jr. to Herbert Marks, letter, June 11, 1947, 5–7. Included as carbon enclosure in letter from Adelbert Ames Jr. to John Dewey, June 27, 1947, John Dewey Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

three dimensional vision into the newer, deeper and sharper fourth dimensional vision”; and “Politics” – “the supraspatial autonomous change required for the establishment of a new unity among men.” This proposal for demonstrations did not simply borrow the language and philosophy of Dorner, it explicitly named him, and borrowed his exhibition philosophy, in the “Methodology” section that followed:

In effect, the “show” is based on experiential educational techniques supplemented by intellectual exercise as initiated via the free will of the visitor.

Demonstrations call for the maximum of action and participation by the observer. Written and other types of “manual” or orientation material are made available and to the degree the background of the visitor requires.

The demonstrations seek to accomplish a great step in education i.e.; [*sic*] the *Dorner contribution* – sensorially experienced history of the development of thought in several branches (physics, mathematics, biology, psychology, politics, etc.)³⁴¹

Ames also sent Dewey a copy of the letter to Marks, as well as a copy of the proposal, in late June of 1947. In the proposal, Dewey was proposed to assist in selecting the group’s planning committee, alongside Dorner and Ames.³⁴²

While no concrete collaboration came of these discussions, they reveal the

³⁴¹ “A Proposal,” 2 (see fn. 336); emphasis added.

³⁴² Ibid. The memo also indicates that Dewey had expressed interest in collaborating on “some sort of combined scientific and educational activity with you and the Eye Institute in cooperation” in a preceding letter to Dorner. Among the items up for discussion in an enclosure titled “Organizational Steps” was a note proposing to have a brochure designed by Herbert Bayer to advertise the (still-to-be-worked-out) “idea of the undertaking.”

importance of *The way beyond 'art'* to a receptive audience outside of the art community. Dorner's theories thus indeed found their way to a community "Beyond 'Art'" – which used it in turn to critique art and its establishments. In March of 1948, the Hanover Institute produced a self-motivated analysis of the "predicament" of the Museum of Modern Art, citing Dorner's *way beyond 'art'* in their critique of the museum's collections as being too "Romantic" and not conveying the full array of contemporary sentiment.³⁴³ This assessment was followed by a planned visit from Rene d'Harnoncourt, then a curator at the Museum of Modern Art (to be promoted to the position of director the following year), for which an agenda was devised with only two main items – to "find out his purposes" regarding museum demonstrations (such as motion pictures or models) and regarding the "possible bearing of our material on orientation of Museum's policy."³⁴⁴ Dorner's work continued to circulate in the Institute as a key arbiter of contemporary art and expression, but also as a philosophical basis for understanding the development of creativity. In a folder of notes on conversations with Ames, Pearson recorded a discussion on "capitalism and socialism" beginning with a comment steeped in Dorner's language: "We now see that in our social life, there are no 'absolutes.' We never see that the essence of BEING is growth, creativeness, becomingness."³⁴⁵ (The implications for socialism and capitalism of the paper's title were, essentially, that a notion of universal innate creativity was instrumentalized/regimented by socialism while

³⁴³ "Thoughts on the Museum of Modern Art: The Predicament of the Museum of Modern Art," March 17, 1948, p. 1, Dartmouth Eye Institute Archives, Dartmouth University, Blanche B. Marshall McLane Bruner /1:11 "Ames selected writings 1947–1948."

³⁴⁴ "D'Harnoncourt's Visit Agenda," April 23, 1948, Dartmouth Eye Institute Archives, Blanche B. Marshall McLane Bruner /1:11 "Ames selected writings 1947–1948"

³⁴⁵ "Diary Notes of Discussions with Mr. A. Ames, Jr. by J.P., 1940–1948: Capitalism and Socialism 4/11/47," p. 1, Dartmouth Eye Institute archives, Dartmouth University, DA 35/8:35, Chronological Files, 1948, Ames, (2 of 2).

capitalism was no better in its celebration of expressive individualism.) These notes end with the directive: “Dorner’s book ‘The Way Beyond “Art”’ needs to be studied for background to a fuller understanding of the above concepts.”³⁴⁶ While Dorner’s book was perhaps not beloved by art reviewers in its time, it found a wholly appreciative audience amongst these Dartmouth philosophers-turned-scientists-turned-philosophers.³⁴⁷

As an exhibition and as a philosophy, the *way beyond ‘art’* was an evolutionary theory of art – begun by Dorner in Hanover and now inflected by American pragmatism. Dorner’s philosophy saw the interaction or transaction between a perceiving interpreter and the object of interpretation as producing knowledge. It took seriously Dewey’s claim that the “utensils of civilization may themselves become works of finest art.”³⁴⁸ As the book was primarily dedicated to explicating Dorner’s version of pragmatism, Bayer was, from the outset, disposable, not essential to the main project of the book. Dorner conceded in his introduction:

The subtitle of this study, “The Work of Herbert Bayer,” indicates that I have tried to combine the art of an individual designer with my general inquiry into the evolution of art, or, to put it differently, to allow the monograph to generate a general history of art evolution. It is a symptom of the change in our thinking habits that I have dared to adopt such a

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

³⁴⁷ Michael O’Connell’s unpublished “Origin of a new species of visual communication” posits that the book has been under-recognized as an influential text for members of the Independent Group as well as their “proto-Pop” successors (Rauschenberg) and interpreters (Reyner Banham).

³⁴⁸ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920); essay reprinted in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 12, “*Reconstruction in Philosophy*” and *Other Essays 1920* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 185. For more on Dorner and pragmatist Philosophy, see Molly Nesbit, *The Pragmatism in the History of Art*, Pittsburgh, PA: Periscope Publishing, 2013), 42 ff.

method. The artist's personality is no longer compounded of an eternal spiritual matter. It is this very matter that has become dynamized. Therefore it is only natural that individual personality should have lost its value as ultimate, immutable and self-sufficient being. Whoever still conceives it as an autonomous end in itself, as a final product, admits that he is unable to see beyond the timeworn static ground. The traditional autonomy of the individual – once held in high esteem – strikes us today as obsolete, indeed as dangerous. We can no longer presume to capture the creative forces behind the individual in a self-enclosed biography. The value of the individual now no longer resides in his fixed peculiarity, which formed part of the eternal static foundation of life; it lies, rather in his power of autonomous change, i.e. in his participation in the general process of life, and in his specific contribution to it.”³⁴⁹

Dorner justified his marginal positioning of Bayer – contradictorily, ostensibly the book's subject – as part of the fundamental premises of his argument. For Dorner, the artist does not stand as a figure of autonomous genius, and to hold him as such would be retrograde:

It can easily be seen that the “free” artist, with his pretenses, was an impossible mixture who tried to combine the role of the prophet of Truth with that of the creator of ever changing “truths.” In the light of cultural evolution, the “free artistic genius,” with his “eternal creations,” is shown to be a short-lived transitional phenomenon – as was the whole epoch of “autonomous individuality.” We behold in him a relic of the hereditary desire on the part of Western civilization for an immutable supreme Being, still continuing at the very time when Western civilization has had to admit that the powers of change

³⁴⁹ Dorner, *The way beyond 'art,'* 15–16 (see fn. 12).

represent an ultimate truth. It has proven as impossible to continue these two concepts as it is to mix fire and water.³⁵⁰

The artist, in this read, should not operate as a visionary voice. Instead it is Dorner who plays the prophetic commentator in this text, positioning his own terms as central, all but ignoring the sometimes-conflicting imperatives of his chosen subject, Herbert Bayer. If Bayer's sensuality, focused on optics, was inappropriate for Dorner's thesis that saw vision as culturally conditioned and only part of the fully honed experience, the New Hampshire Dartmouth Eye Institute/Hanover Institute proposed a philosophy of perception better suited to Dorner's predilections. In their demonstrations, experiments with the retina proceeded in the service of proving the socially conditioned nature of vision, and by extension, of reality. The fixity that Dorner attempted to undo through Bayer's ambiguous perspectival compositions was more directly activated by the scientists working under Ames.

In his analysis of Bayer and other cultural producers, Dorner's vision was trained on his own theorizations of cultural development – and his aspiration to build a museum experience to best shepherd that development into the future – rather than the artistic virtuosity of individual artists. The *way beyond 'art'* project thus represents a continuation of Dorner's method, begun in Hanover as a means of “mediating and reviving” (Chapter 1), and honed in Providence with extreme atmospheric design of both galleries and art works alike (Chapter 2) – a way of using art works and cultural artifacts as tools for illustrating his own curatorial argument. Just as artworks required to be

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 27–28.

embedded within designed atmospheres to best speak to their viewers, Dorner subsumed them within his own theories in spite of apparent contradictions or misalignment.

While Dorner and Bayer may not have forged a fully collaborative “way beyond ‘art,’” the men did accomplish a noteworthy collaboration in a notional proposal for a museum after the close of the *way beyond ‘art’* exhibition tour. A rough version of one of these galleries was first produced in a collage form. **(figure 82)** While the collage has been attributed to Dorner in the curatorial files of the Harvard Art Museums, it is plausible that the work was done by or in collaboration with Bayer; two designs by Bayer, one adhering closely to this original, were also found in Dorner’s papers after their donation to the Busch-Reisinger Museum collection. **(figures 83 and 84)** Of these collaborative visions, one gallery is rendered as a sphere surrounded by a series of thematic exhibitions dedicated, for example, to philosophy, science, religion, theater, war, and “Akropolis.” The other design presents a period doorway, globes, and a window that has been plastered over with a color transparency depicting a historical scene that continues the perspectival lines of the room. The designs thus comprise a sort of collaborative “greatest hits” – Dorner’s architectural features, Bayer’s globe, Dorner’s transparency over the window.

It is likely that these were produced for a book project in process; a similar pair of renditions of galleries by Bayer – depicting the ways that Dorner would have wanted to complete the “atmosphere rooms” at the Museum of Art at R.I.S.D. – appear in Samuel Cauman’s biography of Dorner.³⁵¹ **(figure 85)** A letter from Bayer to Dorner, sent on December 17, 1956, likely refers to his renditions of these galleries:

³⁵¹ Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 144-145 (see fn. 10).

I am sending you a rough sketch and the following questions:

For the night picture: Is the perspective frame work to show only the perspective lines running towards the vanishing point with the horizon line, or do I also include some of the verticle [*sic*] lines of the architecture?

... Does the center sphere show as a light element surrounded by the orbids?

Please note the perspective of the room. I have given it the same vanishing point as in the painting. In other words, the perspective of the painting continues in the room itself.³⁵²

Both Bayer and Dorner came out of a democracy that had quickly moved from self-assessment to fortification to crisis, and entered another, similarly in a state of reevaluation and renewal. In both contexts they encountered civic imperatives to understand the perception of the subjective individual as constituted by and contributing to a larger collective citizenry. Bayer focused his exhibition designs on the visual absorption of the visitor, and Dorner conveyed historically evolving modes of perceiving the world. For Dorner, the way beyond “art” was in some sense a movement beyond vision, to recognize the full experiencing sensorium and its status as nonuniversal and materially/socially constructed. But for both men, these ruminations led to the same outcome in the space of an exhibition: the key object was the figure of the viewer, not the

³⁵² Herbert Bayer to Alexander Dorner, letter, sent December 17, 1956, NLA HA, V.V.P. 21, no. 76.

artistic artifact. In their collaborative renderings of imagined galleries, Dorner and Bayer literally placed their viewers at the center of the exhibit – with chairs clustered in the middle of the rooms facing outward toward walls where exhibits orbit around them. The designs thus literalize the centrality of the viewer within Dorner and Bayer’s separate but complementary grand pursuits of the ministration of the exhibition visitor-subject and his vision.

Conclusion

New Experiences: A Reflection on Dorner's Legacy

In 1968, the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum celebrated the reopening of the rebuilt *Abstract Cabinet*. This homage to Alexander Dorner was designed by architect Arno Bayer in collaborative discussion with museum director Harald Seiler, Lydia Dorner, and Ilse Bode, who provided the funds for the project, as outlined by Monika Flacke-Knoch in her *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimar Republik*.³⁵³ Flacke-Knoch observes that the reconstruction was enabled by well-documented plans of Lissitzky's "Demonstration Rooms," Sprengel Museum-based researcher and curator Karin Orchard also suggests the likelihood that some of the participants in this reconstruction had personal memories of the original *Abstract Cabinet*.³⁵⁴ Flacke-Knoch chronicles some changes in details in the revised edition:

The Cabinet had originally been set up in room 47 [of the Landesmuseum]; it was now to be installed by Bayer and Seiler in the 41st room. In terms of its dimensions, this new space was longer, but it was adjusted to the original plan and shortened accordingly. In the initial planning phase, Bayer wanted to recreate the room exactly according to Lissitzky's specifications. In the course of planning, some details were changed. Instead of fabric covering the window he chose a plastic laminate, and what could only be a mockup of an exit door was not included, but dropped.³⁵⁵ **(figures 86 and 87)**

³⁵³ Flacke-Knoch, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik*, 117 (see fn. 5).

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, and interview with Karin Orchard, December 10, 2014.

³⁵⁵

Das Kabinett war ursprünglich im Raum 47 (Grundriß Nr. 8) aufgebaut gewesen, von Bayer und Seiler wurde es jetzt im 41ten Raum installiert. In seinen Ausmaßen war der Raum länger, er wurde aber dem ursprünglichen Grundriß angepaßt und dementsprechend verkürzt. In der ersten

With this reconstruction (and relocation in the museum), the room served no longer as a the conclusion to a progressive gallery series leading from the history of art into the future of culture, but rather, as a tribute to the aspirations of the past. The reconstruction comprised a selective tribute: for example, the interpreters of that moment eliminated the components of the rotating vitrine that had included mention of National Socialist party materials, replacing these with Lissitzky-designed compositions for the Pelikan ink company, in one case, and simply cutting the didactic in half, in another. (**figures 88 and 89**) Just over a decade later, the room would be rebuilt anew, this time with the transfer of the modernist works in the Landesmuseum collection to the nearby Sprengel Museum in 1979. In that context, the *Abstract Cabinet* was rebuilt once again – this time with further new adaptations and liberties, including a gray carpet, a dropped white grate ceiling under fluorescent lights, and an enigmatic (and nonfunctioning) lighting device on the exterior of the gallery. (**figures 90 and 91**)³⁵⁶ In the new context, the gallery is no

Planungsphase wollte Bayer den Raum genau nach den Vorgaben Lissitzkys nachbauen. Im Verlauf der Planung wurden einige Details geändert. Statt der Stoffbespannung am Fenster wählte er Kunststofflamellen, und die Ausgangstür wurde nicht als Attrappe beibehalten, sondern fallengelassen.

Ibid. 118.

³⁵⁶ Other likely differences from the original designs include the omission of a red-painted frame that Lissitzky rendered in many planning documents. A research project to determine the original wall color using advanced technology that analyzes the colors portrayed in black-and-white photography is underway. The exterior lighting device consists of a series of different colored buttons mounted on the wall outside of the gallery entrance, labeled non-specifically “on/off,” “light,” “hold,” “dark,” and “slide.” The fixture allows the viewer to change the lighting schema within the *Abstract Cabinet* replica room, turning on and off the fluorescent lights in the ceiling, the backsplash/window light, a spotlight over a sculpture, and a wall-panel light fixture. Lissitzky’s contribution to the 1926 *International Kunstausstellung* in Dresden, considered by many to be the forerunner to the later Hanover contribution, did include an intervention with lighting in the form of blue and yellow muslin stretched across an expansive source of overhead light. Cf. Karl-Uwe Hemken, “Pan Europe and German Art,” in Jan Debbaut, et al., *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*. (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van

longer part of a historically broad collection or a contextual series of galleries leading Veit Görner et al., *Kestnerchronik* (Hanover: Kestnergesellschaft, 2006), 167. through art history; the Sprengel collection dates from the twentieth century onwards. The tombstone label outside of the room designates the room “Kabinett der Abstrakten, 1927 . . . Rekonstruktion, 1968,” with El Lissitzky listed as the author of the work. This label thus refers to two original referents for the work – to Lissitzky in the late 1920s and to the reconstruction of 1968, without naming its own provenance as a 1979 reconstruction, absent the original materials, artworks, and many aspects of the design that constituted Lissitzky’s production.

A longer didactic text spanning a full wall of the gallery identifies the room as a *Nachbau* – a construction created after, a remake – executed “under the leadership of architect Arno J. L. Bayer . . . [and] inaugurated in 1968 by director Harald Seiler in the Lower Saxony State Museum (room 41)” (unter der Leitung des Architekten Arno J. L. Bayer . . . der 1968 durch den Direktor Harald Seiler im Niedersächsischen Landesmuseum [Raum 41] eingeweiht wurde). No reference is made to the *re-*reconstruction philosophy, oversight, departures, or other aspects of the history of the production. The distinction between the 1968 *Rekonstruktion* to which this space refers and the 1979 *Nachbau* – between a reconstruction and an after-construction – and the reference to the 1968 reconstruction in a different venue as the “original” referent for this 1979 construction express some of the same tensions that Dorner’s interpretive historical

Abbemuseum, 1990), 47. It is not apparent that he repurposed this device in the Hanover version of the work. The current curators are unable to recall or rationalize the intention behind the inclusion of this device.

replicas provoked in his own lifetime. However, the didactic text makes clear that the primary reference is intended to be to Lissitzky, not Dorner:

The new cabinet should not only recall Dorner's contributions to the Modern in Hanover, but should be perceived as a kind of compensation to the artists who became victims to the fascist dictatorship. . . . Detached from its original context in the Provinzialmuseum [the reconstruction] today points mainly to the work of Lissitzky and the ideas of 1920s Constructivism.³⁵⁷

Only five years after this room was built, the museum acquired another major reconstruction of a Weimar-era proto-installation artwork, in the form of a tribute to Schwitters's *Merzbau*. This reconstruction was originally commissioned for the exhibition *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*, organized by Harald Szeemann in 1983 in the Kunsthaus Zürich.³⁵⁸ At the Sprengel Museum, the piece was placed down the hall from the reconstructed *Abstract Cabinet* on the lower level of the museum galleries, a siting totally unimaginable in the original gallery circumstances in Dorner's galleries (recall Dorner's vehement objections to this artwork). Upon acquisition, the museum also commissioned a second traveling version from stage designer Peter Bissegger, who had produced the first *Merzbau* reconstruction in consultation with (and drawn, in part, from

³⁵⁷ "Das neue Kabinett sollte nicht nur an Dorners Verdienste um die Moderne in Hannover erinnern, sondern wurde auch als eine Art Wiedergutmachung gegenüber den Künstlern empfunden, die Opfer der faschistischen Diktatur geworden waren. Nach der Errichtung des Sprengel Museum Hannover wurde die Rekonstruktion 1979 in die Sammlung der klassischen Moderne integriert. Losgelöst aus ihrem ursprünglichen Zusammenhang im Provinzialmuseum erinnert sie heute vor allem an das Werk Lissitzkys und die Ideen des Konstruktivismus der 1920er Jahre."

³⁵⁸ The exhibition traveled to the Städtische Kunsthalle und Kunstverein in Düsseldorf and the Museum moderner Kunst/Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Vienna, that same year. Susanne Häni and Harald Szeemann, *Der Hang der Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1899* (Aarau, CH: Sauerländer Verlag, 1983).

the memory of) Kurt Schwitters's son, Ernst Schwitters. (**figures 92 and 93**) The first version of the reconstructed piece on view in the galleries, as well as the traveling version, exposed the exterior components of its construction.³⁵⁹ Due to confusion among visitors about which elements were original to the piece, the museum changed the entrance to the gallery, covered these exposed elements, and changed the wall text to convey that the work was a reconstruction by Peter Bissegger (**figure 94**), who is a copyright holder to the work. Unlike the Lissitzky *Nachbau*, the producer of the recreation takes authorial credit: aside from the wall-up covering the former view of the exterior wall, a number of departures from the original installation continue to exist and are emphasized. These include large-scale photo enlargements of black and white documentation of the *Merzbau*, pasted to the walls, and the inclusion of a rotating light display that Bissegger innovated to replace the failing wires of another set of lights originally installed by Ernst Schwitters. According to Bissegger, "E.S. proposed [that I] place lamps wherever I like" and received Bissegger's contribution favorably; "he said, this was exactly the effect of [the *Merzbau*, which] looked like an 'upended Christmas tree.'"³⁶⁰

A third example of a contemporary tribute to Weimar Hanover during Dorner's era is found in the 2009 construction of the *Raum der Gegenwart* (now lovingly nicknamed RaDaGe) by Kai-Uwe Hemken and Jakob Gebert. The work is currently in storage at the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, where it was displayed in 2010-2011.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Karin Orchard, "Kurt Schwitters: Reconstructions of the *Merzbau*," *Tate Papers* 8 (Autumn 2007), accessed January 4, 2015, <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7375>.

³⁶⁰ Peter Bissegger, interview with the author via email, February 6, 2015.

³⁶¹ For more on this reconstruction, see Noam M. Elcott, "Raum der Gegenwart," 265–69 (see fn. 189).

While on exhibition at the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, the work was shown in two different versions. During the first half of its time on display, the audience could view the work through a pinhole camera, while listening to an audio track reading the source documents that Hemken and Gebert used to research their design (another door allowed full entry to the *Raum*). The second half of the exhibition of this work opened the view via a “show window” (*Shaufenster*).³⁶² (figures 95, 96, and 97)³⁶³ Both viewing devices pointed to the mediation of history through its recreating agents. Furthermore, the scenography of this display manifests not only as a platform for experiencing-agents to encounter works on view but a type of stage presenting that encounter to an outside viewer.

Compared with the reconstructions of works by Lissitzky and Schwitters, the “RaDaGe” is more a *Neubau* more than a *Nachbau*: it “re-creates” an proposed experience of the past that was never actually built. More than the Lissitzky and Schwitters tributes, the RaDaGe authorship lines are clearly expressed, though perhaps surprising: Dorner and Moholy-Nagy are credited as the authors, while curator/art historian Hemken and artist Gebert – the primary interpretive creators and producers – are designated under the credit line “research and realization by.” This type of artistic research and curatorial construction is a tribute to Dorner both in its direct reference (contra the *Abstract Cabinet* example) and in continuing in his tradition – yielding a

³⁶² Kai-Uwe Hemken, interview with the author over telephone and email, December 12–14, 2014.

³⁶³ The installation also included a display of the Van Abbe Museum’s edition of the *Licht-Raum Modulator* (1922/1930, replica 1970), which itself has had a complicated history of reproduction and restoration. See Christiane Berndes, “Replicas and Reconstructions in Twentieth-Century Art,” *Tate Papers* 8 (Autumn 2007), accessed January 2, 2015, <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7329>.

creative rendition of a history that never occurred, in order to give access to the *Geist* of cultural practitioners of a bygone epoch without any sense of obligation to fidelity to original materials.

All of these works of the last half-century, prompting discussions about fidelity, authenticity, and the value of recreation of original experience, in and out of original contexts or materials, are fitting tributes to Dorner, whose work in Hanover elicited similar critical discussions in their time. These works are not accurate reproductions of original form or in original materials, but suggest a creative rendition of historical works to the contemporary public – a Dornorian task if ever there was one. In the coming renovation of the Landesmuseum in the year 2015, the *Abstract Cabinet* will likely be renovated anew – with changes to the carpeted floor, a new ceiling, and a revision in the didactic texts in the rotating “drum” vitrine. The conversations about the purpose of a reconstruction – its stature as a pedagogical device, its obligations or abilities to restore versions of authenticity – are therefore ongoing.

Alexander Dorner theorized the intersections between aesthetics, experience design, and questions of how the subject renders him/herself sensitive, questions posed today by contemporary aesthetic philosophers such as Bruno Latour and Jacques Rancière and contemporary curators confronting exhibitions of Olafur Eliasson’s sensorial or Carsten Höller’s perceptual play, as in his 2011–12 exhibition at the New Museum, New York, simply titled *Experience*. The relationship to “The Absolute” and phenomenal “Experience” were crystalized for German intellectuals by Hegel; Dorner was one of many activists who kept alive questions of acquisition of knowledge through *Erlebnis* from the Weimar Republic to its postwar continuation in the 1940s and 1950s by

philosophers such as Martin Heidegger. In Dorner's context, these concerns were reflected in a broad spectrum of cultural and political theory questioning the relationship of the individual perceiving subject to the (democratic) social collective – discussions threaded through writings about culture and war by Siegfried Kracauer and Ernst Jünger, into critiques of expressionism channeled by art critics Wilhelm Hausenstein and Franz Roh, and echoed in debates between Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch after the demise of the Republic. In the United States, Dorner reconstituted these questions, about the relationship between a subject's conditioning by and conditioning of his/her environment, in relationship to the "transactional" theories of American pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, who became Dorner's correspondent and wrote the introduction to Dorner's major English-language book.

At stake in this dissertation has been the matter of how institutions at large may produce, encourage, delimit, or hinder the production and realization of the imagination through the framework of subjective experience. This dissertation has therefore attempted to treat Dorner not as a heroic biographical subject but as a mirror reflecting the urgencies of politics, technology, and ideology during a specific period in the history of museology, in order to better understand how they inflected art display practices and interpretations – and, in turn, the canonization and legacy of cultural artifacts. At the same time, Dorner's work was dogmatic and polemical, and while he is a useful catalyst for examining his contemporaries' theories of art history, restoration, and exhibition, his own curatorial procedures were unique and not reflective of dominant tendencies. This becomes evident in his exhibition of Bayer's work, an exhibition that met mixed responses in the artistic community, including by the exhibition's subject.

The theorization, and prioritization, of optical reception is key in this story. The first chapter outlines Dorner’s philosophy of evolving “periodistic” vision in comparison with contemporaneous art theorists such as Erwin Panofsky, as well as Dorner’s early mentor figure, Alois Riegl. The second chapter presented Weimar Republic–era debates over reproduction of artistic objects, including the question of whether replication can be a form of “preserving” the original visual experience of a lost or damaged work. The third chapter evaluated Dorner’s work in the United States as a writer, exhibition producer, and consultant in an optical research laboratory. In this chapter, Dorner’s major English-language publication, *The way beyond ‘art’* (ostensibly an exhibition catalogue on the artist-designer Herbert Bayer) offers Bayer’s centrally fixed ocular subject as a foil to Dorner’s developmental view of vision. For Dorner, the material artwork and the artists’ intent were secondary to the main function of an artwork – to convey to a viewer through the interpretive filter of its curator. In this sense, it is fitting that Dorner’s legacy should continue in postwar reconstructions, as experiences produced through the mediated “subjectivities” of subsequent artists and historians.

Dorner’s method of curatorial stewardship – producing designed contexts and written texts as envelopes for the reception of artworks in his custody – determined a reading of artworks likely never intended by their authors. For example, Lissitzky’s *Abstract Cabinet* became a shorthand for cinema, despite never displaying film among the works on view. And Bayer’s optical emphasis, symbolism, and implicit separation of the artistic and commercial spheres (in naming himself a bridge between them) were all either ignored or reframed by Dorner to better suit the multi-sensorial, nonpoetic, interdisciplinary objectives of his *way beyond ‘art’* (for which Bayer was apparently

incidental). Quite apart from Panofsky's version of *Kunstwollen* introduced in the first chapter, the affect or intent of the artist were of little concern to Dorner, whereas the reception of an artwork – including the matter of how it could reveal period vision or modes of community engagement in different moments in time (and into the future) – were key.

Of primary concern for Dorner was the notion that subjective interpretation was a production of individual/social experience, and hence cultural values should never be understood as absolute, though his theorization of epochal development fixed these values within history. The stylistic trope of abstraction became a shorthand, for Dorner, for values in flux during . Resisting fixity was, for Dorner, a privileged objective of art and culture and one he promoted throughout his career, as seen in the artistic progression in his Hanover galleries, his Rhode Island School of Design advocacy for a “functional” history and a museum to present/support it, and his later work as a professor, whereupon Dorner critiqued his earlier philosophies of abstraction for not going far enough. In a post-emigration reflection on his theories of *Neue Raumvorstellung* (“The New Conception of Space,” outlined in Chapter 1), Dorner surmised (in English):

The conclusion that history is an ever growing abstraction from the ego is a crude over-simplification and still has a dialectic quality, chiefly because it does not ask which kind of ego we are talking about. There is no absolute timeless human ego. . . . Today I see that also Abstract art is still closely tied up with Romanticism. Its oscillating character and the limitations of its inner changeability can only be explained by its sticking to the perspective view as the springboard. In this sense one should also speak of Abstract architecture rather than of Modern architecture, because

90% of our so called modern architecture is still only an oscillating playing with final form.³⁶⁴

Just as he had entreated Gropius's students to resist such "final form" in designing the "Living Museum" assignments, Dorner sought to promote creative endeavors that retained a formal, compositional, and interpretive openness. This is also the tendency Dorner attempted to emphasize in Bayer's work in the exhibition of *the way beyond 'art,'* with accompanying claims about the virtues of such an exhibition treatment in building a contemporary "pragmatist" citizenry.

It is interesting that Dorner allowed himself an impressionistic or subjective view of art that he criticized in artistic endeavors themselves. While he claimed to champion the philosophy of pragmatism and its allowance for multiple truths to obtain simultaneously – through the transactions and negotiations between various subjectivities comprising and being exchanged within a heterogeneous community – Dorner was surprisingly resistant to and disdainful of individualistic creative expression, and skeptical of the existing subjectivities of his viewers, which he believed it was his duty to cultivate in his vision of a future citizenry. Dorner's biography, as treated by this dissertation, is a story about the proposition of the museum treating the subjectivity of art viewers and producing visitor experience, during a period in which the categories of "subjectivity" and "experience" were radically reevaluated both in Germany and in the United States. Alexander Dorner was determined to catalyze the artistic and philosophical developments of this moment toward a future in which the art museum would look and

³⁶⁴ "Criticism of the speech according to my understanding of today," notes written in English, n.d., 62, HSTAH V.V.P.21, no. 70.

function quite differently than the museums of his youth – de-emphasizing the collection of valued artifacts, expanding the sensorium, and placing key focus on the cultivation of visitor experience.



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* The Addenda section (p.237-428) has been omitted from this thesis. A media disc containing the Addenda is available at the MIT Institute Archives & Special Collections for in-library use only.

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