

# Lost and found in translation: the post-war adaptation strategies of Sigfried Giedion and Alexander Dorner

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## Introduction

In a livid letter to Walter Gropius dated 5 February 1947, Alexander Dorner accuses his colleague Sigfried Giedion of being responsible for the untimely end of his career as museum director five years earlier. After having spent a little over three years at the helm of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Dorner resigned from his post after the board had made it clear they harboured no intention of renewing his contract.<sup>1</sup> Dorner, convinced that he had become the victim of an anti-German smear campaign, claims in the letter that Giedion confessed to having ‘participated in Mrs. D’s witch hunt against me as a Nazi spy. His kind of Fascism is just as bad as Nazi Fascism and he deserves every word I said to him and more. I rather die than shrink away whenever I meet with so much meanness and wrotten [sic] human qualities.’<sup>2</sup>

What could have led a German émigré who left his country to escape National Socialist cultural policies to accuse a colleague — one of Jewish descent no less — of being a fascist? A simple yet compelling answer would be that it was motivated by a sense of rivalry: Dorner, unable fully adjust to his new environment, was taking his frustrations out on somebody who had enjoyed great success in both the United States and Europe since the mid-1940s.<sup>3</sup> Adding insult to injury, Dorner considered significant aspects of Giedion’s highly influential theories about historical space conceptions to be blatant copies of his own work; in another letter, he confessed to being ‘ashamed’ by the way Giedion had used his ideas without

<sup>1</sup> As Daniel Harkett has pointed out, Providence’s local elite were all but unanimous in their assessment that Dorner was a bad fit for the museum both as a person and a curator. Daniel Harket, ‘Tea vs. Beer: Class, Ethnicity, and Alexander Dorner’s Troubled Tenure at the Rhode Island School of Design’ in Sarah Ganz Blythe and Andrew Martinez, eds, *Why Art Museums? The Unfinished Work of Alexander Dorner*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018, 93-109.

<sup>2</sup> The contents of this remarkable letter were recently also commented on by Dietrich Neumann; as Neumann points out, it was in fact Royal Farnum, RISD’s executive president, who had concocted the allegations of Dorner being a Fascist spy, which eventually led the FBI to open an investigation into Dorner. Dietrich Neumann, ‘“All the Struggles of the Present”: Alexander Dorner, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and Rhode Island Architecture’ in Blythe and Martinez, *Why art museums?*, 69-92.

<sup>3</sup> Professional rivalries are often overlooked as significant motivators in academia and the visual arts alike. For some compelling examples of the latter, see Sebastian Smee, *The Art of Rivalry: Four Friendships, Betrayals, and Breakthroughs in Modern Art*, New York, NY: Random House, 2017.

crediting or even referencing him — a sure way to be antagonised by your peers.<sup>4</sup> Giedion had actually referenced Dorner in earlier publications, but omitted his name in later work, even though it still heavily relied on the very ideas that he previously attributed to Dorner.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of whether the accusation that Giedion copied Dorner's ideas is true or not, it remains a puzzling fact that of these two 'rivals' who dealt with the history and theory of modern art and architecture in similar ways, one rose to such heights of fame that he became the *de facto* official postwar historian of architectural modernism, while the other was relegated to historiographical obscurity.<sup>6</sup> How could two theories that are similar to the point of plagiarism enjoy such wildly different receptions? Despite Dorner's life and curatorial activities having been the subject of a significant amount of studies in recent years,<sup>7</sup> not to mention the vast

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Dorner to Wilhelm Valentiner, 1943, quoted in Monika Flacke, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik: die Tätigkeit Alexander Dorners im Provinzialmuseum Hannover*, Marburg: Jonas, 1985, 191. In Dorner's 1958 biography *The Living Museum*, Valentiner is quoted as saying that '[t]he first study of fundamental importance of the new space conception in modern art was published by Alexander Dorner in *Museum der Gegenwart*, Berlin, 1931, Vol. II, No. 1'. Samuel Cauman, *The Living Museum: Experiences of an Art Historian and Museum Director - Alexander Dorner*, New York, NY: New York University Press, 1958.

<sup>5</sup> This was first pointed out by Joan Ockman in her seminal essay on Alexander Dorner's life and work in America. Joan Ockman, 'The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way Beyond Art' in Robert E. Somol, ed, *Autonomy and Ideology. Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, New York, NY: Monticelli Press, 1997, 80-120.

<sup>6</sup> Hilde Heynen once described Giedion as the 'ghost writer of the Modern Movement', noting that his work has 'long been obligatory reading for all students in architecture'. Hilde Heynen, 'Modernity and Community. A Difficult Combination' in Rajesh Heyninx and Tom Avermaete (eds), *Making a New World. Architecture & Communities in Interwar Europe*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012, 70. The most significant and likely very last 20th-century discussion about architectural historiography and criticism that takes Dorner's ideas into account seems to have been Manfredo Tafuri's *Theories and History of Architecture*; ironically, this book became known primarily for its critique of Giedion through Tafuri's notion of 'operative criticism', which in fact also applied to Dorner. Manfredo Tafuri, *Teorie e storia dell'architettura*, Bari: Laterza, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> While Dorner was largely forgotten or ignored after his death in 1957, German historians started to pay scholarly attention to his groundbreaking work as museum curator starting in the mid-80s, and Joan Ockman introduced him back into the history of American modernism in 1997. See Monika Flacke, *Museumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik: die Tätigkeit Alexander Dorners im Provinzialmuseum Hannover*, Marburg: Jonas, 1985 and Joan Ockman, *The Road Not Taken*. The first comprehensive biographical overview came in 2005 through Rebecca Uchill's PhD dissertation, and a collection of essays in 2019 focussed on the facets of Dorner's directorship of the RISD Museum. See Rebecca Uchill, *Developing Experience: Alexander Dorner's Exhibitions, from Weimar Republic Germany to Cold War United States*, Cambridge, MA: Doctoral Dissertation, 2015 and Sarah Ganz Blythe and Andrew Martinez, eds, *Why art museums? The unfinished work of Alexander Dorner*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

amount of literature that exists with regard to Giedion,<sup>8</sup> the answer to this question remains largely unanswered.

While the significance of Giedion's role as founding member and secretary of the highly influential *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) can hardly be underestimated as part of his popularity, it is certainly not the only explanation for his success, nor is it the prime reason behind Dorner's comparatively minor postwar influence. Over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, a sizeable contingent of German émigrés influenced the emergence of art history as an autonomous academic discipline in the United States. Jewish academics represented a quarter of all German-speaking art historians prior to 1933, and roughly half of those resettled temporarily or permanently to the United States following the National Socialists' rise to power.<sup>9</sup> This larger context of art history as a discipline rooted in the German language is an important factor in the disparate receptions of Giedion and Dorner as well.

As late as 1955, Erwin Panofsky — without a doubt the most successful German émigré art historian of them all — quoted an unnamed American colleague's assessment that art history's 'native tongue' was, alas, still German.<sup>10</sup> Panofsky's English publications nevertheless fared extraordinarily well in U.S. academia, and he almost single-handedly introduced an entire sub-discipline of art history (iconology) to the English-speaking world — clearly it was possible for art history to successfully stray from its mother tongue. However, by his own account, Panofsky's success had been dependant on a myriad of extra-theoretical factors

<sup>8</sup> Giedion, who died of a heart attack while walking back home from a cinema in Zürich in 1968, remained a vivid spectre in the historiography of modern architecture during the decades following his death. After initial laudatory assessments of his legacy (Paul Hofer, Ulrich Stucky, eds, *Hommage à Giedion, Profile seiner Persönlichkeit*, Basel and Stuttgart: Birkhäuser, 1971), new approaches to architectural historiography and postmodern conceptions of architecture resulted in Giedion quickly becoming the prime target of various critiques, see e.g. Spiro Kostov, 'Architecture, You, and Him: The Mark of Sigfried Giedion', *Daedalus*, 105:1, Winter 1976, 199-201; Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, London: Granada, 1980 (which had appeared in its original Italian version twelve years earlier but remained a highly relevant work for Marxist conceptions of architectural history and theory). Even authors who generally tended to defend modernist positions, such as Marshal Berman, used Giedion's work to exemplify the 'wrongs' of modernism, see Marshal Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: the Experience of Modernity*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1982. The publication of an intellectual biography in 1989 sparked a new generation of historical investigation into his role as a major force in the historiography of modern architecture: Sokrates Georgiadis, *Sigfried Giedion. Eine intellektuelle Biographie*, Zürich: gta/Amman, 1989. Almut Grunewald's recently published assessment of the interaction between Giedion and his wife, the eminent art historian Carola Giedion-Welcker signals the continued interest in his intellectual legacy. Almut Grunewald, *The Giedion World: Sigfried Giedion and Carola Giedion-Welcker in Dialogue*, Zürich: Scheidegger und Spiess, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Karen Michels, *Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft: die Deutschsprachige Kunstgeschichte im amerikanischen Exil*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999, ix.

<sup>10</sup> Erwin Panofsky, 'Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European', *College Art Journal*, 14:1, 1954, 8.

related to use of language, professional embedding, and overall cultural adaptation. Naturally, other internationally operating art historians were faced with similar predicaments, including those working as historians of modern art and architecture.

Just like countless other displaced or exiled European émigré artists and intellectuals, Dorner and Giedion were forced to adapt their cultural and intellectual identities to a foreign context — a requirement that extended to their personal lives as much as to their oeuvres. The emphatically international character of postwar discussions about art and architecture meant that cultural and linguistic competences became increasingly important prerequisites for academic and public outreach.<sup>11</sup> This fact renders approaches to (self-)translation in particular a crucial factor for transatlantic success, which determined to a considerable extent which ideas were picked up, and which ones were not, in the increasingly connected and international *milieu* of postwar academia. While this line of thinking has been acknowledged in many biographical studies dealing with ‘transplanted’ scientists and writers, the introduction of German history and theory of modern art and architecture to the United States and beyond has hardly been investigated in this light.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, because both men also served as mediators between different cultural fields — Dorner between art theory and museum practice; Giedion between architecture theory and practising architects — their exploits extended well beyond academic circles, which warrants a closer look at how these ideas were transferred and presented.<sup>13</sup> The cases of Dorner and Giedion illustrate how the disparate

<sup>11</sup> As Maria Teresa Costa and Hans Christian Hönes have recently argued, the sudden internationalism of postwar academia ‘depended heavily on individuals acting as interlocutors, bridging methodological traditions. Focusing on how authors themselves navigate between these spheres will shed new light on how autobiographical self-perception and disciplinary conventions intersect.’ Maria Teresa Costa and Hans Christian Hönes, eds, *Migrating Histories of Art: Self-Translations of a Discipline*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, 12.

<sup>12</sup> The impact of language and translation for German émigrés’ work in general is discussed in Eckart Goebel and Sigrid Weigel, eds, *‘Escape to Life’. German Intellectuals in New York: A Compendium on Exile After 1933*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012. Another authoritative work regarding this theme for the visual arts and many Bauhaus protagonists is by Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckman, eds, *Exiles + Emigres*, Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1997. For a more general assessment of the impact of (self-)translation in relation to art historiography, including many medieval and early modern examples, see Costa and Hönes, *Migrating Histories of Art*. For the general impact of German émigrés in the field of art history see Michels, *Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft* and Colin Eisler, ‘Kunstwissenschaft American Style’ in Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, eds, *Intellectual Migration. Europe and America 1930-1960*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969, 544-629.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of the role that such mediators can play in cultural transfers, especially in a bilingual context, see Reine Meylaerts, Maud Gonne, Tessa Lobbes and Diana Sanz Roig, ‘Cultural Mediators in Cultural History. What Do We Learn from Studying Mediators’ Complex Transfer Activities in Interwar Belgium?’ In Elke Brems, Ton van Kalmthout, Orsolya Réthelyi, eds, *Doing Double Dutch: The International Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries’* Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017, 51-75.

approaches to the translation and publication of their work led to different modalities of intellectual ‘Americanisation’ of ideas about space in relation to the historiography of art and architecture — and to different degrees of international success and canonisation. This article therefore looks at Dorner and Giedion’s early American careers from the vantage point of their personal, linguistic and cultural competences in relation to the English (re)formulation of their ideas. It thus focusses not merely on the intellectual bases of those ideas, but also investigates how they were biographically enabled and embedded within a strategic framework of translation and adaptation.

### **Sigfried Giedion’s *vox populi***

Upon arrival in the United States, whether temporarily ‘exiled’ or with the goal of starting anew, émigré academics had to adapt to their new situation not just personally — which often proved to be hard enough as it was — but also were required to adapt their work so as to fit its new environment. This entailed literal translation, obviously, but arguably even more important were shifts in style, meaning and emphasis. These translations were therefore rather like the film adaptation of a book: in order to be successful, the original had to be subjected to a different set of stylistic rules and conventions that have repercussions for not just form but also content. The effects of such a transformation can be significant: Hannah Arendt’s (self-)translated English publications, for example, took on a more political character after her move to America because she was unable to employ the literary, poetic and metaphoric motifs associated with her German work.<sup>14</sup> The crucial point here is not that English necessarily implies a more political approach (as we will see, it appears that the very opposite was the case for both Giedion and Dorner), but rather that these differences in meaning persisted even when Arendt translated work that she had originally written in English back to her native tongue. This renders the notion of an ‘original’ problematic, which is why Sigrid Weigel has referred to the experience of writing in a second language as a ‘translation without original.’<sup>15</sup> This means that there is always to some degree a kind of re-invention or revision at play in the translation of one’s work. A closer look at how Giedion and Dorner approached this process reveals the various considerations that influenced its outcomes.

After initially studying engineering in Vienna, Sigfried Giedion obtained a doctorate in art history in 1922, with a thesis on late Baroque and Romantic neo-classicist architecture written under the tutelage of the influential Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin. In the following year, he visited the Bauhaus school at Weimar and made his first acquaintance with its director, the architect Walter Gropius. This encounter paved the way for Giedion’s forays into modern architecture, which

<sup>14</sup> Sigrid Weigel, ‘Sounding Through — Poetic Difference — Self-Translation: Hannah Arendt’s Thought and Writing Between Different Languages, Cultures and Fields’ in Goebel and Weigel, *Escape to Life*, 55-79.

<sup>15</sup> Weigel, *Sounding Through*, 72.

manifested themselves not just in the form of publications, but also through an ongoing engagement with several Swiss initiatives that championed modern building principles. By far the most influential was his involvement with the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*, or CIAM, which he co-founded together with the legendary modern architect Le Corbusier in 1928 at the La Sarraz castle near Lausanne, Switzerland.<sup>16</sup> Giedion would serve as the organisation's first secretary-general and remained an avid propagator of the Modern Movement for the rest of his life. He ended up becoming all but synonymous with the avant-garde architects that were the object of his first ground-breaking studies of German as well as other Western-European incarnations of *Neues Bauen* [New Building].<sup>17</sup>

By the mid-1930s, many of Giedion's allies at the Bauhaus, which had since moved to Dessau and finally to Berlin where it was shut down by the Gestapo in 1933, were planning an escape to the United States. After leaving for London in 1934, Gropius was able to land a position at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design (GSD) shortly after crossing the Atlantic in early 1937. When he suggested to his new colleagues that Giedion be considered for the esteemed position of Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry, the latter's English proficiency was limited at best.<sup>18</sup> Even though this was the norm rather than the exception for academics educated in continental Europe, the poor English of the telegram with which Giedion accepted the invitation alarmed the GSD's dean, Joseph Hudnut. It prompted him to urge Gropius to make sure his friend drafted and delivered the lectures in correct and understandable English.<sup>19</sup> It appears his calls were to no avail: those who attended the lectures in 1938-39 allegedly had trouble following them, and Gropius later admitted to Giedion that his audience had 'absolutely' not understood him.<sup>20</sup> However, this did not mean the lectures were a complete failure: Giedion's poor oral performance was mitigated by his original theoretical approach and ample use of imagery. He had taken over 500 of his own photographs of German, French, Dutch and Belgian modern architecture with him across the Atlantic, many of which were completely new to American eyes. If his discourse on the grand history of modern architecture did not resonate with his audience, the

<sup>16</sup> For more about the founding of CIAM, and the historical and theoretical development of the organization in general, see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928 and *Befreites Wohnen*, Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1929.

<sup>18</sup> This chair, named after one of the first professors to teach art courses at an American university, explicitly allowed for poetry to be understood in the broadest possible definition, i.e., including visual arts and architecture. Gropius was but one of many Bauhaus members who continued the academy's legacy in America, see the articles of Peter Hahn, Franz Schulze and Kathleen James in Barron and Eckman, *Exiles + Emigrés*.

<sup>19</sup> Eduard F. Sekler, 'Sigfried Giedion at Harvard University', *Studies in the History of Art*, 35, 1990, 267.

<sup>20</sup> 'Die Leute verstanden Dich absolut nicht nach Deinen 'lectures'', Gropius to Giedion, 18 May 1941, Giedion Archives, ETH/gta Zürich, quoted in Sekler, *Giedion at Harvard*, 269, nt. 25.

accompanying slideshow certainly did.

Furthermore, if his lectures were indeed so hard to understand, it was certainly not because he had been ignoring Gropius's advice to properly prepare his lectures. In fact, Giedion had gone to considerable lengths to make sure he was able to present his ideas to an American audience: soon after accepting the position, he had approached one Royston Bottomley, a young British journalist residing in Zürich at the time, with the request to help him prepare the lectures by producing an English adaptation of his German work. Despite Bottomley's hesitation and utter ignorance of art and architecture, he ended up accepting the offer. Paradoxical as it may seem, Bottomley's lack of any credentials in the history of architecture turned out to be the very qualification that made him suitable for the job. Giedion referred to him as 'a sensible, modern type who is not familiar with the topic and therefore acts as correcting *vox populi*.'<sup>21</sup> He considered Bottomley's ignorance a corrective asset rather than an impediment to the translation of his work, which suggests the English manuscripts were not just intended as translations, but crucially also as revisions of his German work. Bottomley's account of the process suggests that the resultant texts can indeed be considered as a negotiation between his amateur sensibilities (he noted his 'instinctive English dislike of Baroque') and Giedion's professional eye, which allowed for significant amendments to the narrative that Giedion had thus far developed in his two German book-length publications.<sup>22</sup>

After further editorial work by two graduate students at Harvard, the lectures were published as *Space, Time and Architecture* in 1941.<sup>23</sup> The book is widely regarded to be an essential turning point in Giedion's career, and not just because of its unparalleled commercial success (over 65,000 copies were sold between 1941 and 1962, with another 50,000 until the 1990s).<sup>24</sup> In relation to the history and historiography of architecture at large, it is also interpreted as modernist architecture's definite turn away from the vanguard socialist ideals still present in many architectural manifestos and analyses of the 1920s. Within this context, Hilde Heynen has argued that Giedion's concept of *Durchdringung* (usually translated as 'interpenetration'), which was presented in *Bauen in Frankreich* (1928) as the

<sup>21</sup> 'Es ist ein sensibler, moderner Typ, der das Thema nicht kennt und daher als korrigierende Vox Populi auftritt', Sigfried Giedion to Walter Gropius, 21 March 1938, Giedion Archive, ETH/gta Zürich, translated and quoted by Sekler, *Giedion at Harvard*, 267, nt. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Royston Millmore, 'Working with Sigfried Giedion', *Building Design*, 15 March 1974, 22-24, quoted in Jacob Moore, 'Origin and Development of a New Tradition. *Space, Time and Architecture* in the Translation Zone', *Future Anterior*, 12:1, summer 2015, 32-44. Before embarking on his international career, Giedion had only written the formerly mentioned two German-language books *Bauen in Frankreich* and *Befreites Wohnen*.

<sup>23</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: the Growth of a New Tradition*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941.

<sup>24</sup> These are figures indicated by Harvard University Press around 1990 (Sekler, *Giedion at Harvard*, nt. 33). Recent numbers are hard to come by, but given the steady flow of new printings — with the latest English edition dating from 2008 and a new German edition appearing as recently as 2015 — it is safe to assume that the past thirty years have equalled, if not surpassed, the 50,000 sold copies of the thirty-year stretch before it.

quintessential trait of modernist architecture, embodied an avant-garde approach to architecture that was no longer present in his later English publications. Heynen notes that *Durchdringung* allowed for a polyvalent and multi-layered meaning: on the one hand, it designated how new construction methods in iron and concrete allowed for the physical interpenetration of volumes, and how expansive glass surfaces dissolved the borders between inside and outside and between private and public. But the notion also covered more abstract interpenetrations, such as those in the social sphere, where it marked the dissolution of social classes; or in the demarcation of disciplinary fields, where modern architecture allowed for the problematisation of the borderline between architecture and utilitarian building methods.<sup>25</sup>

Whereas Giedion's earlier analyses were concerned with identifying precursors to early 20th-century architecture in the technical advancements of 19th-century French utilitarian construction methods, *Space, Time and Architecture* presents a historical narrative that spans over a thousand years and includes assessments of Egyptian architecture, Roman temples and artworks ranging from the baroque to the abstract. In order to still have an analytical tool that could both differentiate and synthesise these wildly differing cultural artefacts, Giedion turned to the notion of space as a central tenet of his narrative. This move rendered the history of art and architecture as a history of space and its changing conception. Based on an analysis of cubist painting, *Space, Time and Architecture* argues that the early twentieth century experienced a new, 'relative' conception of 'four-dimensional' space-time that was present in art, architecture and science alike (most notably in theoretical physics).<sup>26</sup> According to Giedion, the multiple perspectives that synthetic cubism unites into one picture represent a notion of space that emphasises relativity and simultaneity, where no one viewpoint has full authority. Giedion suggests that this approach implies movement, and thus also adds time to the equation. He consequently claims that this position countered and superseded the 'absolute' spatial paradigm exemplified by one-point perspective that prevailed throughout the preceding epochs of 18th- and 19th-century painting and, by extension, architecture. He pertains the cubist approach to space is similar to the 'relative' position of Albert Einstein's general relativity theory, leading him to finally conclude that this approach to space exemplifies a wider shift that spans all aspects of early 20th-century intellectual and artistic culture, including modern architecture.

As mentioned earlier, this line of reasoning closely resembles a point that Dorner had been making since around 1929, when he linked ideas from theoretical physics to cubist painting and confronted them with modern architecture such as Gropius' building for the Dessau Bauhaus (1925-26).<sup>27</sup> As with Giedion, for Dorner each of these examples denoted a new experience of space, one no longer concerned

<sup>25</sup> Hilde Heyen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000, 40ff.

<sup>26</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture* (5th edition), 429ff.

<sup>27</sup> These ideas were first published in Alexander Dorner, 'Considerations sur la signification de l'art abstrait', *Cahiers d'Art*, 6:7-8, 1931, 354-56.



with an 'absolute' one-point perspective. He similarly implied a steady development of spatial experiences that changed along with certain demarcated epochal periods (antiquity, the mediaeval period, the renaissance, etc.) that were thought to be comprehensive cultural and intellectual systems of thought that informed perception and pictorial convention alike. In fact, neither Dorner nor Giedion were the first to associate the experience and conception of space with art and architecture. The idea that the history of architecture could be written as a history of space conceptions dated back to the turn of the century, when the historiography of art was reimagined by a new generation of art historians. During this time German aesthetic theory saw the emergence of an emphasis on the relation between so-called *Weltbilder*, or world views, and *Raumbilder*, or space conceptions, as defining psychological categories that could account for stylistic and formalistic changes in the history of architecture.<sup>28</sup> Both Giedion and Dorner clearly operated against the background of this tradition.

But while Giedion's notion of space-time, like interpenetration before it, served as an effective quintessential concept to describe the material, formal and spatial innovations of modernist architecture, it did not lend itself very well to theorising the upending of social and disciplinary orders the way *Durchdringung* used to. And indeed, no mention of such potential is to be found anywhere in *Space, Time and Architecture*. While this omission of the social implications of modern architecture could be ascribed to the different theoretical implications of space-time compared to interpenetration, it was certainly warranted by other circumstances as well. Within the historiography of modern architecture, Giedion's less 'radical' interpretation of architecture in *Space, Time and Architecture* is often regarded to align with the general development of CIAM: after rapidly becoming an influential international mouthpiece for those propagating modern architecture and its transformative potential following its first couple of meetings in the first half of the 1920s, the organisation's emphasis shifted from being devoted to the social and economic potential of new building methods to a rather more neutral forum for architecture and urban planning over the course of the 1930s.<sup>29</sup> Given Europe's increasingly volatile political climate, this depoliticisation was perhaps inevitable for the often pragmatically oriented CIAM members.

Giedion's commitment to this realignment is clearly represented by the figure of Bottomley. He considered him a test case for the popularisation of his ideas beyond the progressive artistic circles he was initially addressing. With the avant-

<sup>28</sup> As Andrea Pinotti has written: '[Alois] Riegl and [Heinrich] Wölfflin connected the different forms of spatial representation to different *Weltanschauungen* [world views], and (...) [August] Schmarsow could state in his inaugural lecture [in 1896] that '*the history of architecture is the history of the sense of space, and thus consciously or unconsciously it is a basic constituent in the history of worldviews*'. Andrea Pinotti, 'Body-building, August Schmarsow's *Kunstwissenschaft* between psychophysiology and phenomenology' in Dan Adler and Mitchell Benjamin Frank, eds, *German Art History and Scientific Thought: Beyond Formalism*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 6.

garde momentum stalling and the Weimar Republic crumbling in the early 1930s before being finally supplanted with a Nazi regime that did not condone flat roofs, let alone vanguard ideas about the radical social potential of architecture, the reorientation of his ideas can certainly be understood as a tactical choice if nothing else. This is especially true if one considers that at the time, Giedion was still not quite accepted within Swiss academia, despite having worked as a historian of modern architecture for the better part of a quarter-decade.<sup>30</sup> European academic history of architecture was still decidedly concerned with the Romanesque, the Gothic, and the baroque rather than the ‘international style’ — the name under which the Museum of Modern Art had popularised a ‘sanitised’ version of modernist architecture in the eponymous exhibition of 1932.

It was therefore only logical for Giedion to adopt an approach that would also have traction outside the limited political and academic circles that had thus far constituted his primary audience. The embrace of a less specialised, more easily understandable prose — likely spearheaded by his translator — augmented with a highly visual way of argumentation that had proven an invaluable asset during his lectures, represented an obvious way of achieving this goal.<sup>31</sup> Giedion’s motivations for abandoning the modus operandi of his earlier work should therefore be seen as more than just a reactionary result of CIAM’s shifting politics: it was also a personal choice, reflecting the need to appeal to a new readership given the changed circumstances. The need for his work to be translated into English provided him with the perfect opportunity to realign his foundational notions so as to accommodate a more interdisciplinary narrative. It would inform the future direction of the rest of his career, on both sides of the Atlantic.

### Alexander Dorner’s Teutonic traces

After defending his doctoral thesis in art history at the University of Berlin in 1919, Alexander Dorner quickly found a job at the Provinzialmuseum in Hannover. During his tenure as its director, a position which he assumed at the unusually young age of 31 in 1924, Dorner received international praise for his pioneering museographical interventions. The most radical example was the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (1927), or Abstract Cabinet: an exhibition space for abstract art designed by the Russian constructivist El Lissitzky. The room featured slatted wall coverings that appeared to change colour when visitors moved through the space, its display

<sup>30</sup> Sekler, *Giedion at Harvard*, 265.

<sup>31</sup> Gregor Harbusch had noted how this visual aspect has proven a crucial aspect of the appeal that *Space, Time and Architecture* exerted on a non-academic audience. This unconventional approach tripled the book’s production costs, leading to significant reservations on the part of Harvard University Press, but Giedion was adamant it be done in the way he wanted to, which suggests he was very much aware of the strength of this non-discursive mode of argumentation. Gregor Harbusch, ‘Work in Text and Images: Sigfried Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture*’, 1941-1967’, *The Journal of Architecture*, 20:4, 2015, 596-620.

mounts could be moved on rails to re-arrange the configuration of the artworks, and it was furnished with contemporary chairs to transpose the formal and ideological content of the artworks to the environment as a whole. The room was visited by the likes of Museum of Modern Art director Alfred Barr, Jr., and his newly appointed architecture curator, Philip Johnson.<sup>32</sup> Giedion noted in a review that the installations broke with the 'eternity viewpoint' of traditional display methods.<sup>33</sup> With these interventions, Dorner mediated ideas from contemporary aesthetics and academic art history to the wider public by operationalising them within artistic and museographical contexts.

After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the Nazi party's cultural policies were still sufficiently decentralised to have Dorner think that he might be able to continue to run the Hannover museum as a haven for modern art and architecture within the Third Reich.<sup>34</sup> It did not take long for the Nazis to signal in no unclear terms this was not the case: when Dorner returned to Germany after work in London and Oslo in 1936, he found the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* destroyed by the authorities. Shortly after, Dorner resigned. The Nazis would end up sourcing more art from the Provinzialmuseum than any other museum in the country for their infamous *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition that opened in Munich on 19 July 1937. Dorner consequently travelled to Paris and embarked on a steam liner headed to New York in August of the same year.<sup>35</sup> Through the advocacy of Barr, Dorner was able to land a job in Providence, Rhode Island, as director of the Rhode Island

<sup>32</sup> Almost thirty years later, Johnson would write to Dorner to offer his 'belated congratulations', stating that '[t]he Abstract Cabinet at the Hanover Museum was one of the most vivid memories and most exciting parts of the Weimar Republic. It was this kind of experience that first aroused my interest in the Bauhaus Movement and indeed in Modern Architecture in general'. Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 106. Also see Ockman, *The Road Not Taken*, 120.

<sup>33</sup> Siegfried Giedion, 'Lebendiges Museum', *Der Cicerone*, 21:4, 1929, 103.

<sup>34</sup> His biography states that due to Dorner's supposed intellectual and personal authority over the local Nazi official, characterized as 'a young man of extremely sketchy education and not more than average intelligence', it was 'not too difficult to persuade him that modern architecture and the abstract movements were not a threat to the Third Reich.' Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 118. The biography fails to mention that Dorner's initial strategy, applying for membership of the Nazi party, had failed because his application was promptly rejected due to his overtly leftist political and cultural associations. This should obviously have rung alarm bells on the part of Dorner, but as Ines Katenhusen has pointed out, he was adamant to continue the work of his museum as long as possible. He would go on to enable the smuggle of several contemporary artworks from his collection to the Netherlands and the U.S., including many Malevich works famously hidden in Alfred Barr's luggage and umbrella, which as of today are still present in the collections of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum for Modern Art in New York, respectively. For more on Dorner's ambivalent relation to the Third Reich, see Ines Katenhusen, 'Ein Museumsdirektor auf und zwischen den Stühlen: Alexander Dorner (1893-1957) in Hannover' in Olaf Peters, Ruth Heftrig, Barbara Schwellewald, eds, *Kunstgeschichte im "Dritten Reich": Theorien, Methoden, Praktiken*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Uchill, *Developing Experience*, 158.

School of Design's (RISD) art museum. As such, he belonged to a relatively small group of German émigré art historians who were able to immediately secure a position on par with the one they used to have back in Europe.<sup>36</sup>

As far as language is concerned, it appears Dorner was able to adjust fairly easily as well. It undoubtedly helped that as a child, he used to practice English with his 'Anglo-Indian-educated' mother – though he was not allowed to actually study it because it was not a 'classical language'.<sup>37</sup> In the U.S., he made sure that people understood him when he had to speak English, as a typescript of a speech Dorner delivered at an exhibition of the work of émigré artist Lyonel Feininger proves. The script has been augmented with tiny notes in pencil to indicate the correct pronunciation of tricky vowels: the 'eigh' of weightlessness is marked 'ä', emphasis is indicated with oversized acute accents on the first and third 'o' of 'locomotives', the 'a' in 'Baltic' is represented in Greek diacritics as 'ō', and the word 'yachts' is phonetically represented as 'jots'.<sup>38</sup> It shows that Dorner made earnest efforts to master the English language as well as he could. However, while one might be led to think that the ability to speak correct and understandable English would have bolstered Dorner's efforts of publishing and popularising his ideas in the United States, the opposite seems to have been the case.

This becomes clear in Dorner's first and only English book-length publication, *The Way Beyond "Art": the work of Herbert Bayer* (1947), which accompanied an exhibition of the same name.<sup>39</sup> In the brief for the exhibition, Brown University had apparently asked Dorner to curate an exhibition about 'an artist exemplifying successful integration of scientific and artistic activity'.<sup>40</sup> He found his subject in the visual artist and graphic designer Herbert Bayer, a former Bauhaus instructor who, like Dorner, was a non-Jewish German émigré (Bayer also happened to be the graphic designer of *Space, Time and Architecture*). The two men had been playing with the idea of a monographic exhibition of Bayer's work ever since his European solo show at the London Gallery in 1937, for which Dorner had written

<sup>36</sup> Michels, *Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft*, ix.

<sup>37</sup> Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 128. Furthermore, Dorner's grandfather Adalbert Dorner, a Professor of Theology at the University of Berlin, had taught at Harvard and Columbia as early as 1876.

<sup>38</sup> 'Lyonel Feininger, Speech of Introduction, Opening of the Feininger Exhibition,' November 9, 1938. Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), folder 313. Harvard Art Museum Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Dorner, *The Way Beyond "Art": the Work of Herbert Bayer*, New York, NY: Wittenborn Schultz, 1949. Further references to this book will be to the second edition: Alexander Dorner, *The Way Beyond "Art"*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1958. The fact that the book is coupled to an exhibition about Bayer (whose work was all but erased from the second edition) is significant and, as Rebecca Uchill has recently reiterated, often overlooked in the contemporary reception of the book. Rebecca Uchill, 'Re-viewing The Way Beyond "Art": Herbert Bayer, Alexander Dorner, and Practices of Viewership', *Architectural Theory Review*, 23:1, 2019, 114-145.

<sup>40</sup> This quote is provided by Joan Ockman, though she does not specify the source. Ockman, *The Road Not Taken*, 107.

the catalogue.<sup>41</sup> A third German émigré, George Wittenborn, born in Hamburg to a long line of publishers, agreed to publish the book as the next instalment of his 'Problems of Contemporary Art' series. Wittenborn had fled Germany in 1933, and after marrying the British translator and editor Joyce Philips in Paris he founded a publishing house in New York in 1939.<sup>42</sup> Another series of books published by Wittenborn, 'Documents of Modern Art', was the first to introduce English editions of key texts by the likes of Guillaume Apollinaire, Marcel Duchamp, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Piet Mondriaan to the thriving New York art scene. It was a promising platform for the American dissemination of Dorner's ideas.

Contrary to Giedion, who had worked together with a native speaker to produce an English version from the ground up, Dorner produced a German manuscript to be translated by Franz (or Francis, as he was known in America) Golffin, an Austrian-born intellectual who held a doctorate in literature and had written his thesis about the German poet Friedrich Rückert. Since he was already working with Wittenborn on an English translation of Wassily Kandinsky, Golffin was tasked with translating Dorner as well.<sup>43</sup> However, the publisher was less than happy with the initial results: on 4 June 1946, Wittenborn wrote to Dorner with the message that 'we believe we should insist upon having this second draft elevated into more concentrated and direct expression, which is essential for the reader to follow your very difficult and new ideas,' assuring Dorner that his manuscript ought to be 'as clear as crystal', and added that he should be presenting his ideas 'in a steady, mounting highway without any "literary defects"'. Let's work together toward this end!<sup>44</sup> Dorner was not at all receptive to his publisher's calls. Four days later, he responded that 'any changes in the [manuscript] are out of the question', but that he was willing to eliminate any repetitions pointed out by Wittenborn — though not without defiantly adding that Golffin's wife had found the manuscript "infinitely stimulating" and did not see any repetitions that offended her reading.<sup>45</sup> In the end, it seems Dorner could bring himself to make minor corrections after all: after having 'done everything to eliminate everything which might still have been

<sup>41</sup> Uchill, *Re-viewing The Way Beyond "Art"*, 117.

<sup>42</sup> The publishing house, which Wittenborn founded together with his colleague Heinz Schultz, was initially called *Wittenborn & Co.* and became known as *Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc.* in 1946. In 1954 Schultz's name disappeared again, and Wittenborn kept on publishing books under the company name *George Wittenborn, Inc.* until the early 1970s.

<sup>43</sup> Franz Karl Golffing, *Friedrich Rückert als Lyriker: ein Beitrag zu seiner Würdigung*, Vienna: Saturn Verlag, 1935. The translation of Kandinsky was produced in collaboration with Michael Sadleir: *Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the spiritual in art: and painting in particular*, New York, NY: Wittenborn-Schultz, 1947.

<sup>44</sup> George Wittenborn to Alexander Dorner, 4 June 1946. George Wittenborn, Inc. Papers, I.B. 14, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander Dorner to George Wittenborn, 8 June 1946. Wittenborn, I.B. 14, MoMA Archives, New York.

complicated and repetitious,' he finally wrote to his publisher in October 1946 that he now considered the text to be 'foolproof.'<sup>46</sup>

The initial instincts of Wittenborn, who likely had acquired a better sense for the stylistic requirements of the English language through his wife, would nevertheless quickly prove to be accurate barometers for the general response that the book solicited. Due to constraints at the printing plant over the holidays, the book was not ready by the time the exhibition debuted at Brown University in January 1947.<sup>47</sup> Although the show was generally well-received, many reviewers pointed out that the exhibition's wall texts — which consisted mostly of excerpts from the book — seemed to bear little if any explicit relation to Bayer's work, and represented a confusing addition to his clear and simple oeuvre.<sup>48</sup> Bayer actually wrote to Dorner to bring to his attention 'numerous comments to the effect that the style of the copy in your text panels is quite difficult to read and understand.'<sup>49</sup> It would turn out that for many, this sentiment applied even more so to the book.

Building on his German work from before the war, *The Way Beyond "Art"* presented a historical narrative that bore many resemblances to the central thesis of *Space, Time and Architecture*: a 'march of the dimensions' leading from vitalistic primitive art, to two-dimensional imagery in antiquity and mediaeval times, to the renaissance one-point perspective, to the 20th-century 'relative' space conception. However, contrary to Dorner's earlier publications, the idea that a new 'relative' conception of space paved the way for novel modes of architectural and artistic expression no longer formed the primary argumentative thrust of this history. Dorner expanded on his previous work with a discussion of early postwar art as well as contemporaneous scientific advancements, and updated his ideas about space accordingly. He went beyond the mere spatio-temporal interpretation of art and architecture in favour of new paradigms of energy and change that he felt aligned better with the future direction of artistic endeavours. He argued that this new paradigm was most promisingly executed by graphic designers operating within the commercial sphere rather than the autonomous arts.<sup>50</sup> The book therefore

<sup>46</sup> Alexander Dorner to George Wittenborn, 19 October 1946. Wittenborn, I.B. 14, MoMA Archives, New York.

<sup>47</sup> George Wittenborn to Alexander Dorner, 16 November 1946. Wittenborn, I.B. 14, MoMA Archives, New York.

<sup>48</sup> Uchill, *Developing Experience*, 201ff. More recently, Uchill again noted that 'Dorner's ornate language and complicated historical theorizations were the antithesis of Bayer's interest in effecting simplicity in design for a common audience, and mentioned that initial local reviews were quick to point out that the exhibition was essentially a dualistic proposition, quoting assessments such as the following: 'actually it is a two-man proposition; it uses the art of Bayer, who is both easel painter and remarkable commercial artist, to expound the aesthetic philosophy developed by Dr. Alexander Dorner, lecturer at the university.' Uchill, *Re-viewing The Way Beyond "Art"*, 131.

<sup>49</sup> Uchill, *Re-viewing The Way Beyond "Art"*, 133.

<sup>50</sup> The connection between art, design and mass culture took hold in Germany quite early in the 20th century with the *Werkbund* that actively promoted collaboration between art and industry, see Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the*

actually signified a decisive shift away from the history of art and architecture based on notions of *Raumbild* that had continued to mark Giedion's concept of 'space-time' in *Space, Time and Architecture*, which by the 1950s dominated many discussions about the relation between modern art, architecture and theoretical physics.<sup>51</sup>

When *The Way Beyond "Art"* came out, however, critics of the book were largely oblivious to the novelty of this approach, and their assessments first and foremost echoed the critical exhibition reviews. Even the young art historian Samuel Cauman, who would prove himself a staunch defender of Dorner's ideas and later actually wrote his biography, adhered to the view that the book's language obscured its contents:

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 Hegelian dialectic, which, as Mr. George Boas observed in *The Art Bulletin* (vol. XXIX No. 4), form the substructure of Mr. Dorner's thinking, and with the special Hegelian language, which endows familiar words with unwonted meanings.<sup>52</sup>

In the review Cauman refers to, George Boas — an emeritus professor of philosophy at the time — actually went as far as characterising the book as 'unintelligible for most readers' due to the 'jargon of the metaphysical classroom,' even though he was generally positive and, somewhat contradictorily, called for the book to be read 'with care and sympathy.'<sup>53</sup>

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*First World War*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996. The idea that avant-garde art practice is not antithetical but rather complementary (or even inherently connected) to modern commercial and industrial life was widespread among Weimar intellectuals, a fact clearly represented in the goals of Bauhaus; in relation to advertising in particular the most avid supporters of this idea were represented by Hungarians such as László Moholy-Nagy and Gyorgy Kepes, who would continue this tradition after migrating to America.

<sup>51</sup> As Linda Dalrymple Henderson has pointed out, the postwar ubiquity of Albert Einstein's ideas in cultural imagination, particularly in America, certainly helped to popularise this narrative even more. Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983. Henderson elaborates on the specific postwar situation of America, including the role of Dorner within this constellation, in 'Four-Dimensional Space or Space-Time? The Emergence of the Cubism-Relativity Myth in New York in the 1940s' in Michelle Emmer, ed, *The Visual Mind II*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005, 349-97.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel Cauman, 'Comments on the Way Beyond "Art"', *College Art Journal*, 8:1, 1948, 9-13. As Rebecca Uchill has pointed out, Wittenborn actually used this review to motivate his decision not to pursue a reprint of the book in 1949. Uchill, *Re-viewing The Way Beyond "Art"*, 138.

<sup>53</sup> George Boas, 'Alexander Dorner, *The Way Beyond "Art"* (review)', *The Art Bulletin*, 29:4, 1947, 283.

The reviews could hardly have come as a surprise. During the preparations for the book, not only Wittenborn, but Bayer, too, made numerous editorial suggestions. However, by all accounts, their attempts were in vain: in a letter to Gropius, Bayer complained that his suggestions and corrections were never incorporated in the final draft of the book.<sup>54</sup> Dorner had clearly made no effort to adapt his argumentative style to American conventions, a fact that was undoubtedly enabled by a translator with deep personal and intellectual ties to German literary tradition. As Boas points out, Dorner's idiom is decidedly Germanic, which together with his idiosyncratic historical narration results in passages that would most likely repel the average American reader, such as the following one:

God now [in the Renaissance] became the formative principle of each natural phenomenon and, especially, of each individual man (...). Nevertheless this was *a remarkable concession to mutability and multiplicity* – those *arch enemies of sheer Being!* The *prestige of the absolute One* was undermined; the structure of the three-dimensional world began to crumble. The opposite poles of idea and sense were moving towards each other. *The unequivocal dictatorship of immobile form was turning into a HYBRID ONENESS* that could be grasped only through the medium of ever changing multiplicity.<sup>55</sup>

Few noticed how passages such as these signified an emphatic departure from the 'space-time' discourse to which many commentators still counted Dorner.<sup>56</sup> From the assessments quoted above, the reason for this is clear: Dorner's use of language impedes a clear presentation of the argument.

By the time *The Way Beyond "Art"* came out, there were several German historians of art and architecture who had achieved notable successes abroad. Nikolaus Pevsner, for example, is often credited as the driving force behind the introduction of architecture history as an autonomous discipline to the United Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> But in North-America, other German émigrés in the field who concerned themselves with modern architecture struggled to compete with Giedion's increasingly popular ideas about the history of architecture. Among them was not just Dorner but also the German historian Paul Zucker, who had grown

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Bayer to Ise Gropius, letter, 6 April 1947, Gropius Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Ger 208 (431), cited in Uchill, *Re-viewing The Way Beyond "Art"*, 138.

<sup>55</sup> Dorner, *The Way Beyond "Art"*, 26, emphasis mine.

<sup>56</sup> Linda Dalrymple Henderson presents Giedion and Moholy-Nagy as the most significant postwar promoters of the space-time narrative, though she cites several contemporary sources who also explicitly count Dorner as member of this group. Following Joan Ockman, Henderson has also noted that Giedion indeed seemed to have picked the idea about the relation between Einstein and Cubism from Dorner. Henderson, *Four-Dimensional Space or Space-Time?*

<sup>57</sup> Emilie Oléron Evans, 'Transposing the Zeitgeist? Nikolaus Pevsner between Kunstgeschichte and Art History', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 11, December 2014.



frustrated with how successful Giedion's visual arguments (which he considered historically deceptive and simplistic) turned out to be.<sup>58</sup> However, there was one German émigré whose success overshadowed even that of Giedion: the historian of medieval and early modern art and architecture Erwin Panofsky, with whom Dorner had actually attended the classes of Adolph Goldschmidt back in Berlin.<sup>59</sup> Contrary to Dorner, Panofsky had shown remarkable intuition and skill for how best to express his ideas in English. In a reflection on his experiences as a German art historian in America, Panofsky warned against 'the dangers inherent in what has been described as "Teutonic" methods in the history of art.'<sup>60</sup> He rhetorically wondered whether the German art historical tradition, which hails back to the mid-18th century, perhaps was institutionalised 'a bit too soon'. Combined with the strong presence of German philosophy, this 'Teutonic tradition' was marked by distinct idiomatic, syntactic, and philosophical conventions, a fact that Panofsky judged to be a curse rather than a blessing:

[the German art historians'] native terminology was either unnecessarily recondite or downright imprecise; the German language unfortunately permits a fairly trivial thought to declaim from behind a woolen curtain of apparent profundity and, conversely, a multitude of meaning to lurk behind one term.<sup>61</sup>

In his continued adherence to this very style, Dorner had become the polar opposite of Panofsky. Having assimilated remarkably quickly, Panofsky noted that '[e]very German-educated art historian endeavouring to make himself understood in

<sup>58</sup> Zucker always maintained that he himself had developed a notion of a new space conception in modern architecture that includes the temporal dimension as early as 1924, a fact he mentions in an article that deals with virtually all previous and contemporary theorists of modern architecture but fails to name the 'elephant in the room', Giedion. Paul Zucker, 'The Paradox of Architectural Theories at the Beginning of the "Modern Movement"', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 10:3, October 1956, 8-14. In an earlier article, he specifically addresses Giedion's *modus operandi* of juxtaposing modern art and architecture, but also stopped just short of naming Giedion specifically. Paul Zucker, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 2:7, Winter 1942-43, 26. It is highly unlikely that both instances constitute an oversight on Zucker's part, and they are likely to be understood as deliberate efforts to assert his own authority in relation to this topic.

<sup>59</sup> Goldschmidt was among the first German art historians to teach overseas in 1921. Both Panofsky, Dorner and Giedion have described their indebtedness to such earlier generations of art historians, most notably Alois Riegl, who exerted significant influence on Panofsky and Dorner's early work. See Samuel Cauman. *The Living Museum. Experiences of an Art Historian and Museum Director - Alexander Dorner*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1958, 17-29 and Sigfried Giedion, *The Eternal Present: the Beginnings of Architecture. A Contribution on Constancy and Change*, New York, NY, Pantheon Books, 1964, 499ff.

<sup>60</sup> Panofsky, *Three Decades*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Panofsky, *Three Decades*, 14.

English... had to make up his own dictionary.'<sup>62</sup> Panofsky's vocabulary and syntax alike were indeed overhauled almost overnight into a style that would become a hallmark of his later work. It has to be noted, however, that like Giedion, Panofsky initially had a helping hand: Alfred Barr's wife Margaret (often referred to as Daisy) assisted Panofsky in his search for a new artistic vocabulary suitable for an American audience.<sup>63</sup> This shows that a successful self-translation can hardly be achieved completely on one's own devices, nor by working solely with German-born translators. While Giedion deliberately chose to remain based in Zürich, absolving him from the need to fully commit to such a change outside of his published work, Panofsky adhered to the other extreme: after settling in Princeton, he solemnly vowed to never publicly speak or write in German ever again — he wanted to be fully and gratefully committed to his new environment.

### Anglophone integrations

The fact that Panofsky could count on Margaret Barr and her English and German proficiency to 'construct' his new art historical vocabulary shows that one's personal life often has a bearing on professional and intellectual endeavours as well. Emily Levine has made a compelling case for also looking into this 'private' history of ideas, including the often neglected marital perspective.<sup>64</sup> Levine describes the case of Dora Panofsky (née Mosse), who had met Erwin Panofsky in Berlin at the very Goldschmidt seminars that were also attended by Dorner,<sup>65</sup> and notes how she was shut out of the Warburg Institute's reading room in Hamburg on account of being a woman.<sup>66</sup> After their emigration, she had the chance to redeem herself as an art historian, by writing a book together with her husband that showed how her husband's work was to a significant extent influenced by her own research endeavours.<sup>67</sup> However, this situation is certainly the exception to the rule: more often than not, émigrés' partners were condemned to lives as 'university-educated

<sup>62</sup> Panofsky, *Three Decades*, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Irving Lavin, 'American Panofsky', in Costa and Hönes, *Migrating Histories of Art*, 69. Karen Michels has noted that Panofsky found a life-long friend and confidant in Margaret Barr: Michels, *Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft*, 18. Whereas Alfred Barr spoke no other language than English, Margaret was fluent in French, Italian, Spanish and German, and she served as a crucial interpreter between her husband and the subjects of his books, including Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. See Michael Brenson, 'Margaret Scolari Barr, a Teacher And Art Historian, Is Dead at 86', *The New York Times*, 31 December 1987.

<sup>64</sup> Emily Levine, 'PanDora, or Erwin and Dora Panofsky and the Private History of Ideas', *The Journal of Modern History*, 83:3, 2011, 753-787.

<sup>65</sup> Levine, *PanDora*, p. 764.

<sup>66</sup> As a private institution, the Warburg Library was one of the few viable ways to pursue an academic career as a Jew, who were at the time still largely excluded from most universities; unfortunately for Dora, these opportunities were not extended to women as well.

<sup>67</sup> Levine, *PanDora*, p. 755. Even though Panofsky apparently refused to consider Dora a proper scholar, she seems to have had considerable influence on him both before and after their emigration.

housewives.<sup>68</sup> While this was also true for Dorner's wife Lydia,<sup>69</sup> considering her presence in Dorner's life nevertheless allows for a more informed perspective on Dorner's American career.

Unlike émigrés such as the Panofskys, who emphatically decided to start anew in the U.S. and leave their past literally unspoken, Lydia Dorner was more than willing to remind others of her German roots — both linguistically and biographically. In a letter to Panofsky dated 2 September 1953, she wrote that 'I believe you have known [Dorner] for longer than all the others; with Papa Goldschmidt auf harten Stühlen.' She endearingly refers to Adolph Goldschmidt as *papa*, or 'daddy', and alludes to the uncomfortable benches (*harten Stühlen*) that Dorner and Panofsky populated during his seminars.<sup>70</sup> She continues: 'We just spent a few days with the Gropius'[sic]. Walter wird mit Orden und Ehrenzeichen überhäuft und is fresh like a daisy.'<sup>71</sup> Both the reference to Walter and Ise Gropius and the hybrid use of language emphasises their shared experience of being a community of Germans residing in America. The purpose of her letter was to ask Panofsky for a few lines praising her husband's work for a local periodical, and her mention of Gropius being 'überhäuft mit Orden und Ehrenzeichen' (which translates to something like 'being bombarded with decorations') might well be intended to signal that unlike the famed and decorated Gropius, Dorner could use an endorsement or two from an old friend.

When Dorner himself wrote to Panofsky about four years earlier, he actually asked for the very same favour, but did so entirely in German. Dorner wondered whether his former classmate would be willing to provide one or two lines of recommendation, to be featured on the back cover of the second printing of his book.<sup>72</sup> Just two days later, Panofsky politely denied his request — in English, of

<sup>68</sup> The term 'university-educated housewives' comes from Sybille Quack, 'Everyday Life and Emigration: The Role of Women' in Hartmut Lehman and James J. Sheehan, eds, *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, Cambridge, MA: Publications of the German Historical Institute, 1993, 103.

<sup>69</sup> Lydia was Dorner's fourth wife, whom he had married in 1935 at the age of forty-two, a fact he failed to mention on American immigration forms due to the bad reputation it had earned him back in Germany. See Ines Katenhusen, 'Alexander Dorner (1893-1957): A German Art Historian in the United States', AICGS/DAAD Working Paper Series, 2002, 6.

<sup>70</sup> The letter seems to imply that not only Alexander Dorner but Lydia Dorner, too, moved in Adolph Goldschmidt's social circles when they were still living in Germany. As Emily Levine has pointed out, a woman's role in Weimar academia was often limited to socialite gatherings such as dinner parties and soirées at professors' homes, which allowed spouses to contribute to conversations from which they were normally excluded. She notes that in the case of Goldschmidt, who remained unmarried and is assumed to have been gay, this could lead to close relationships: Levine mentions that Dora Panofsky would even buy him ties. Levine, *PanDora*, 767, nt. 65.

<sup>71</sup> Lydia Dorner to Erwin Panofsky, 2 September 1953, Erwin Panofsky papers, Box 3, Folder 20, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>72</sup> Dorner to Panofsky, 3 October 1949, Erwin Panofsky papers, Box 3, Folder 20, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

course.<sup>73</sup> Typed on stationery with the letterhead of his former address in Providence crossed out, the message also implicitly stressed Dorner's recent move to Bennington College in upstate Vermont. In fact, he also used the letter to extend an invitation to Panofsky to come and visit him and Lydia 'in our paradise' at Bennington, echoing Panofsky's own description of being 'exiled in paradise' following his emigration.<sup>74</sup> Panofsky, who was among the first to join the newly founded School of Humanistic Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, certainly could have regarded his new environment as an intellectual Garden of Eden. But for somebody as versed in religious mythology as Panofsky, it is likely he also wanted to point out the ambiguities of such a notion. Panofsky scholar Andreas Beyer has remarked that if paradise 'is the opposite to hell, it is not a mirror-image of the world. It describes a vacuum, a place that needs no adaptation or assimilation, a place of unconditioned welcome and paradise also in so far as it is the place of unconditioned creation.'<sup>75</sup> It may be clear that neither New Jersey nor New England were free from the need for adaptation and assimilation, which very much 'conditioned' the work of both scholars. But in comparison to the *tour de force* of intellectualism represented by the Institute for Advanced Study,<sup>76</sup> the isolated intellectual and geographic position that Alexander and Lydia Dorner found themselves in after moving to Bennington is arguably more akin to a 'paradise lost' than to a Garden of Eden.

However, this does not mean that Dorner made no effort whatsoever to expand his theoretical coordinates, and he was certainly committed to fitting in with his new American environment. In fact, from the moment he first arrived on its shores, Dorner enthusiastically mused America's intellectual and cultural practices. Contrary to Europe, where museums were regarded as temples of culture, bestowed first and foremost with preservation of artefacts, Americans saw the museum primarily as an educational facility. This view was in striking accordance with Dorner's own intuitions about the task and indeed the future of museums. As director of the RISD Museum, he was able to triple the amount of visitors, many of whom were school children accommodated by a new educational programme.<sup>77</sup> This allowed him to assume a similar role of mediation between public and art theory that he also took up in Germany, if only briefly, and transpose it to the American context with remarkable success.

<sup>73</sup> Panofsky to Dorner, 5 October 1949, Erwin Panofsky papers, Box 3, Folder 20, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>74</sup> "Wir hatten gehofft, das Sie beide uns in unserem Paradies aufsuchen würde", Dorner to Panofsky, 3 October 1949, Erwin Panofsky papers, Box 3, Folder 20, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>75</sup> Andres Beyer, 'Stranger in Paradise: Erwin Panofsky's Expulsion to the Academic Parnassus' in Goebel and Weigel, *Escape to Life*, 442-444.

<sup>76</sup> Emily Levine has noted how at one point, when Dora Panofsky fell ill, Erwin Panofsky took turns with eminent local émigrés such as Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann to read for her at her bedside. Levine, *PanDora*, 774.

<sup>77</sup> Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 162.

This focus on pedagogy also led Dorner to embrace new theoretical inspirations. While his authoritarian management style, uncompromising curatorial attitude, and failure to recognise the micro-politics of a small community museum antagonised most members of the staff and locals alike,<sup>78</sup> he found a friend and ally in Carolyn MacDonald, a graduate student from Columbia hired by Dorner to head the educational department of the RISD Museum that he founded.<sup>79</sup> She recommended Dorner to have a look at John Dewey's work, a philosopher who indeed shared common ground with him due to the aesthetic take on didactics that Dewey's later work had proposed.<sup>80</sup> Reading in Dewey a compelling American counterpoint to the European philosophical tradition that he sought to transcend with his English publications, Dorner fully embraced this new reference and actually dedicated *The Way Beyond "Art"* to Dewey.<sup>81</sup> A comprehensive assessment of the relation between Dorner and the work of Dewey is beyond the scope of this article, but for the present purposes it suffices to state that Dorner considered his re-conceptualisation of space — i.e., as a kind of energetic force, imbued with the power of change, rather than a 'relative' or 'four-dimensional' paradigm — as a feat of American Pragmatist philosophy.<sup>82</sup> This adaptational effort in relation to Dewey was not only based on intellectual integration, but also drew on rather more mundane strategies. In the same letter to Wittenborn cited earlier in the context of Dorner's reluctance to alter his manuscript, he stated that attention should be paid not to the stylistic quirks of his writing, but to what people would encounter in bookstores: he argues that the *The Way Beyond "Art"*'s publication should coincide with a forthcoming book by Dewey, and urges Wittenborn to 'publish the book as

<sup>78</sup> Harket, *Tea vs. Beer*.

<sup>79</sup> Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 139-141.

<sup>80</sup> A position that became most evident in John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York, NY: Minton Balch, 1934.

<sup>81</sup> In the draft of a letter Dorner addressed to Dewey scholar Joseph Ratner, he noted that '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', Alexander Dorner Papers (BRM 1), file 533, Harvard Art Museum Archives, quoted in Uchill, *Developing Experience*, 167.

<sup>82</sup> While many Dorner scholars, including Ockman and Uchill, have pointed out that *The Way Beyond "Art"* was thoroughly influenced by Dewey, the precise relation between the two has yet to be adequately investigated. Besides 'transactional theory' and an emphatic focus on process and lived experience, Dorner's adoption of 'a new scientific reality that transcends the space-time world of Einstein and is constituted of 'supra-spatial energies'' stressed by Bruce Clarke and Linda Henderson also suggest a certain Deweyan inspiration. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrype Henderson, eds, *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art and Culture*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002, 4. Whatever the specifics might amount to, the extent to which Dewey influenced the intellectual as well as the creative culture of the US in the first half of the twentieth century was undoubtedly significant; for an example of Dewey's influence on the artist Ray Johnson and Black Mountain College in general, see Johanna Gosse, 'From Art to Experience: the Porous Philosophy of Ray Johnson', *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies*, 2 (2011). For more general accounts of American pragmatism's influence on the art world, see Molly Nesbit, *The Pragmatism in the History of Art*, Pittsburgh, PA, 2013.

quickly as possible' in order to make sure this will happen.<sup>83</sup> Dorner was adamant to synchronise his work with that of Dewey in every possible way, which can arguably be understood as a strategic and calculated enterprise not unlike the 'depoliticisation' undertaken by Giedion in the late 1930s.

### **Editions and revisions**

Much of the scholarship on Giedion and Dorner has focussed on how their work evolved between roughly 1925 and 1945. Understandably so: it was during these years that a shift in their views is most apparent in content and style alike. However, the years that followed present some illuminating examples of their respective approaches to adaptation as well. When he returned to Europe following his stint as Charles Eliot Norton Professor, Giedion had become acquainted with Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, an urban planner and prominent member of MARS, the British chapter of CIAM. Although her role as a crucial figure within post-war CIAM urbanism is slowly gaining the acknowledgement it deserves,<sup>84</sup> her work as translator and editor of Giedion remains an under-appreciated fact; Sokratis Georgiadis's authoritative intellectual biography of Giedion mentions her name just once.<sup>85</sup> Tyrwhitt in fact closely collaborated with Giedion for many years, and her influence can hardly be overstated. She was the first to receive a copy of Giedion's second English book, *Mechanization Takes Command*, of which she had seen galleys when she travelled to the Swiss Alps following a suggestion by Giedion that it might alleviate her health issues.<sup>86</sup> After reading them, she noted in her diary that 'it's a thousand pities that [*Mechanization Takes Command's*] translation is so bad—but the material is so good, new & interesting that I feel sure it will over-ride the cumbersome English.'<sup>87</sup> When the book's publication coincided with Tyrwhitt visiting the U.S. in the spring of 1948, she took it upon herself to recommend it to whomever she encountered during her trip.<sup>88</sup> In July of that year, Giedion asked her if she would be willing to assist him with the eighth printing of *Space, Time and*

<sup>83</sup> Alexander Dorner to George Wittenborn, June 8, 1946, Wittenborn, I.B. 14, MoMA Archives, New York, NY.

<sup>84</sup> Ellen Shoshkes, *Jacqueline Tyrwhitt: a Transnational Life in Urban Planning and Design*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Georgiadis, *Sigfried Giedion*, 135. Tyrwhitt is only named in passing as the source of a quote about Giedion, even though Georgiadis identifies her as a 'longtime collaborator' [*langjährige Mitarbeiterin*] of Giedion's. A notable exception to this blind spot in the scholarly reception of Giedion is represented by an article by Michael Darroch that deals with Tyrwhitt's role in introducing Marshall McLuhan to Giedion's notion of 'acoustic' space. Michael Darroch, 'Bridging Urban and Media Studies: Jacqueline Tyrwhitt and the *Explorations* Group, 1951-1957', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 33, 2008, 147-169.

<sup>86</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1948.

<sup>87</sup> Jacqueline Tyrwhitt wrote this in a diary entry on 25 February 1948, quoted in Shoshkes, *Jacqueline Tyrwhitt*, 106.

<sup>88</sup> Shoshkes, *Jacqueline Tyrwhitt*, 109.

*Architecture*, which was due to be released in 1949. Flattered by the offer, she agreed to do so without being credited or even compensated for her work.<sup>89</sup> Tyrwhitt would remain Giedion's translator and editor until he died in 1968, and she was largely responsible for translating and editing the significant additions to the third, fourth and fifth editions of *Space, Time and Architecture*.<sup>90</sup> Although some passages were almost verbatim renditions of her own work, it was not until the final edition of the book that Tyrwhitt's name was finally mentioned in the acknowledgements.<sup>91</sup>

A telling account of Tyrwhitt's editorial approach can be discerned from her lecture at the New School in 1949, which was essentially a reprise of a talk that the pioneering town planner Patrick Geddes had delivered there some twenty-five years earlier. Tyrwhitt's biographer Ellen Shoshkes notes that the lecture 'involved a *translation*, not merely a *transcription* of Geddes's words.'<sup>92</sup> This comment can be considered to be exemplary for her editorial approach and applies to the work she did for Giedion as well: rather than literally 'transcribing' his narrative, she translated it according to her own sensibilities. In Tyrwhitt, Giedion had thus found another, rather more professional version of the *vox populi* he had encountered in Zürich in 1938. Tyrwhitt was a crucial factor in ensuring the continued topicality of *Space, Time and Architecture* by expanding it with lengthy new additions related to the field of urban design, a discipline pioneered at the GSD by herself and Josep Lluís Sert (who was the successor of Gropius as dean of Harvard's Architecture Department as well as the president of CIAM between 1947-1956). Through Tyrwhitt, the later editions *Space, Time and Architecture* could cater to a new generation of modern architects who were increasingly concerned with the relation between architecture and urban planning that urban design embodied.<sup>93</sup>

Dorner, however, went with a different strategy for revising and updating his book in the years after its initial publication: for the third edition of *The Way Beyond "Art"*, he chose to omit the part about Bayer entirely in favour of an expanded version of the theoretical section of the book. A new introduction to the revised edition praised Dorner's critical assessment of contemporary artistic movements, which amounted to a critical estimation of abstract expressionism as a

<sup>89</sup> Shoshkes, *Jacqueline Tyrwhitt*, 116.

<sup>90</sup> Tyrwhitt was involved in all subsequent book projects, including *Architecture, You and Me* (1956), the two volumes of *The Eternal Present* (1962/64), and the posthumously published *Architecture and the Phenomena of Transition* (1970). Of each of these publications significant drafts and correspondences survive in Tyrwhitt's archive. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt Papers, Series 14: Notes, drafts, correspondence and other papers concerning works by Sigfried Giedion, Royal British Institute of Architects Archives, London.

<sup>91</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (5th enlarged and revised edition), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967, v.

<sup>92</sup> Shoshkes, *Jacqueline Tyrwhitt*, 117, emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> Within CIAM, this development was also clearly discernible: see Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 143. For an interesting take on the international character of planning in particular as a postwar phenomenon, see Carola Hein, 'The exchange of planning ideas from Europe to the USA after the Second World War: introductory thoughts and call for further research', *Planning Perspectives*, 29:2, 2014, 143-151.

relapse into an individualistic or even solipsistic artistic approach. According to Dorner, this tendency would soon become obsolete through the integration of commerce and creativity already represented by cartoons and advertisement design. This vision turned out to be wholly out of synch with the realities of the success that the likes of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko enjoyed when the new edition came out, and it certainly did not align with the current direction of MoMA, which in 1953 had reversed its policy of only showing art less than fifty years old in favour of a more traditional approach to the collection and exhibition of modern masterpieces.<sup>94</sup> Some years before, Gropius had already warned Dorner that he was not convinced by his 'apodictic' and 'hot-headed' statements about modern art, and that he found it altogether unnecessary to denote 'living phenomena such as Klee and Picasso' as 'dead end kids'.<sup>95</sup>

At this point in his career, Dorner must have been disillusioned with the lack of impact his work had had on contemporary discussions about modern art and architecture. After having been part of high-profile academic discussions in Germany,<sup>96</sup> and being involved with various exhibitions and lectures during his first few years in America, he almost exclusively taught at Bennington during the final decade of his life, unable to publish anything of significance nor finding the opportunity re-enact the ground-breaking exhibition designs that had constituted his claim to fame back in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>97</sup> He was very much aware of this: on 16 June 1951, Dorner wrote to Gropius with the message that he and his wife were struggling financially and that his professional situation was getting 'dicey'. Dorner asked Gropius to 'keep [his] ears and eyes open', and entrusted him with the observation that as beautiful as Bennington might be, as little future he could expect to have there.<sup>98</sup> The new edition of *The Way Beyond "Art"* finally appeared under the

<sup>94</sup> Ockman, *The Road Not Taken*, 120.

<sup>95</sup> 'Deine mündlichen argumente [sic] waren mir nur zu hitzig und apodiktisch und noch nicht in einer form die ich zu fassen vermag und die mich überzeugt.' Walter Gropius to Alexander Dorner, 3 April 1943, Walter Gropius papers, MS Ger 208 (654), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Dorner was not just critical of major modernist artists but also lambasted modern architects, as is evident from his private assessment of Le Corbusier's church at Ronchamp (1955), of which he polemically remarked to Walter and Ise Gropius that it 'gehörte allerdings in ein Schreckenskabinet [certainly belongs in a cabinet of horrors]. For Christ's sake, what's next?' Alexander and Lydia Dorner to Walter and Ise Gropius, 25 August 1955, Walter Gropius papers, MS Ger 208 (654), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>96</sup> Especially his engagement with the use of facsimiles sparked a lively academic discussion, including exchanges with Erwin Panofsky. See Rebecca Uchill, 'Original and Reproduktion: Alexander Dorner and the (Re)Production of Art Experience' in *Future Anterior*, 12:2, Winter 2015, 13-37.

<sup>97</sup> Virtually every publication by Dorner after 1947 consists of encyclopaedia entries, despite the fact that, as his biography claims, 'the conditions of his employment left the major part of his time open for constructive research'. Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 175.

<sup>98</sup> 'Die situation hier ist brenzlich. Es ist finanziell recht bitter, und wir haben ein Massen exodus der besten Leute. Falls aus M.I.T. nichts wird, haltet bitte Augen und Ohren offen. So



auspices of New York University Press shortly after Dorner died in Naples in 1957 during a trip to Europe to seek reparations for his persecution by the Nazis.<sup>99</sup>

Self-translation is always autobiographic: it provides an opportunity to re-write and thereby re-invent oneself, especially since equivalence of meaning (the common-sense goal of a translation) is not necessarily the main objective of a self-translator.<sup>100</sup> Toward the very end of his life, Dorner seems to have reversed this proposition. By having his biography written, he could achieve the self-translation that failed to successfully materialise with his book. Although officially authored by Samuel Cauman, the book certainly reads as if it was written by Dorner himself — a fact that Gropius actually pointed out in his comments on the book's manuscript: he remarked that it was confusing that Cauman is credited as author while the style of writing is so obviously pointing to Dorner.<sup>101</sup> The biography appeared under the title *The Future Museum* in the same year as the new edition of *The Way Beyond "Art"*. Like the latter, the former almost completely omitted the collaborations with Bayer — even though he undeniably represented one of the central figures of Dorner's postwar career. About half of the biography's 200 pages are devoted to Dorner's life in Germany, with only about 60 dealing with his work in America; of those, a further one-third consists of oddly interjected testimonials rather than primary text, bringing the number of pages actually dealing with his American work even further down.

The book seems to have been mostly a tool to retro-actively use Dorner's biographical history to validate the novelty of his contributions to art historical discourse. For example, *The Living Museum* mentions that as Dorner was growing up in Königsberg (birthplace and lifelong hometown of Immanuel Kant), the influence of his father's 'neo-Kantian classicism' was moderated by his mother's sensibilities, who was instead 'raised with an English insistence upon the usefulness of knowledge.'<sup>102</sup> A similar 'influence of empiricism' is ascribed to Dorner's older brother Hermann, an aeronautical engineer who pioneered several early 20th-century aircraft — the latter's insistence on the importance of 'thinking in processes' ostensibly influenced Dorner in his adoption of the ideas of Dewey.<sup>103</sup> It all seems

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schön wie es hier ist, so wenig Zukunft ist hier... das ist strictly unter uns Pastorentöchtern." [underlining in original] Alexander and Lydia Dorner to Walter and Ise Gropius, 16 June 1951, Walter Gropius papers, MS Ger 208 (654), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>99</sup> Alexander Dorner, *The Way Beyond "Art"*, New York, NY: New York University Press, 1958.

<sup>100</sup> Costa and Hönes, *Migrating Histories of Art*, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Es wird nicht klar aus dieser Fassung, wer denn nun eigentlich schreibt, dann jeder der mit deinem Gedankengut bekannt ist, erkennt doch sofort deine Handschrift und kann dann nicht verstehen, wieso es unter einem anderen Namen lueft.' Sigfried Giedion to Alexander Dorner, 23 June 1956, Walter Gropius papers, MS Ger 208 (654), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>102</sup> Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 15.

<sup>103</sup> It appears Hermann Dorner also took the opportunity of his brother's biography to emphasise his own credentials. After presenting a brief anecdote about their father, he goes

geared towards presenting an explicit autobiographical intellectual development that effortlessly leads from German philosophical traditions towards Anglo-American ones. Noteworthy is how once more a markedly dialectical take on history is presented, only this time for Dorner's personal history rather than that of art history at large.

The fact that the book is peppered with randomly appearing and often unusually lengthy testimonials provides further evidence that the book was indeed intended to present Dorner as a universally praised innovator.<sup>104</sup> Aside from the testimonials, the book's narrative is also interspersed with fragments from previous writings by Dorner, study assignments concocted during his time as a teacher, and memoranda recounting his university years. One of the latter mentions that 'with Goldschmidt's help, [Dorner] had escaped from his father's neo-Kantian idealism and had avoided Wölfflin's. (...) His discomfort was shared; and soon there was an unruly element in Goldschmidt's seminar, led by Dorner and by Erwin Panofsky.'<sup>105</sup> One cannot help but wonder whether the passage is a mere anecdotal remark, or perhaps also intended to put Dorner on the same level as Panofsky. *The Living Museum* similarly also alludes to Gropius and Bauhaus rather more often than seems necessary: the introduction, written by Gropius, is followed by a preface that mentions Gropius and the Bauhaus more often than Dorner's own name.<sup>106</sup> Finally, the biography never fails to miss an opportunity to emphasise Dorner's opposition to Nazi Germany, with one passage recounting the moment when, at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin — not exactly an event one associates with opposition to the

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on to use the remainder of his one-page testimonial to claim that among the many earliest pilots of the first decade of the twentieth century, he was 'considered the coryphée among the pioneers', stating that 'I think it is historically accurate to describe me as the first theoretician among the first ten flyers in history', and continued to mention that 'in 1919 I built the first passenger airplane in the world', which 'set the world altitude record of 8,200 meters', and that he had built a "speed engine" for Packard that 'set a world record for duration.' Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 16.

<sup>104</sup> While most quotes from various exhibition reviewers and museum directors commending the work at the museum in Hannover are brief — albeit still rather self-congratulatory within the context of the book — the testimonials get increasingly longer towards the end of the biography. While some are from notable theoreticians such as the philosopher and architect Christian Norberg-Schulz or the architecture critic and historian Alfred Russel Hitchcock, many others are from wholly generic sources whose credentials are not mentioned at all, signed only with a name and place of residence.

<sup>105</sup> Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 25.

<sup>106</sup> This fact might be partly explained that at that point, Dorner was in talks with Harvard University Press to publish a book on Bauhaus in collaboration with Gropius, which would have highlighted the latter's role in providing new thrust to the movement by bringing it to America. Alexander Dorner to Walter Gropius, 23 January 1952, Walter Gropius papers, MS Ger 208 (654), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. It seems Dorner re-used some of this narrative — and likely even submitted manuscripts to Cauman — for his own biography.

regime — he met his wife through ‘a common love for dancing and a common loathing for the Nazis.’<sup>107</sup>

The autobiographical circle was posthumously completed in 1959 by this very woman, when Lydia Dorner’s German translation of her late husband’s book was published in Europe, thereby introducing Dorner’s origin story to its original geographical coordinates. It was followed by a translation of *The Living Museum* a year later.<sup>108</sup> She also donated a sizeable collection of documents and drawings to Harvard’s archives in memory of her husband, including a rather pedestrian slip of paper announcing a lecture Gropius delivered at the Hannover Provinzialmuseum in 1923 — an action that can be construed as an effort to solidify Dorner’s narrative of having moved very much in the slipstream of Bauhaus, whose members had by the late 1950s become canonical figureheads of modernism.<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusion

In January 1949, after having resided in the U.S. for almost eight years, Hannah Arendt wrote to Karl Jaspers that ‘sometimes I wonder which is more difficult: to instill an awareness of politics in the Germans or to convey to Americans even the slightest inkling of what philosophy is all about.’<sup>110</sup> Obviously, this comment is informed by the dire straits she had to navigate both in her country of birth and in America. But it also applies to Dorner’s struggle for recognition in the United States: the fact that his theory should cater to an audience unable to grasp ‘the slightest inkling of what [German] philosophy is about’ proved to be a roadblock that he was either unwilling to acknowledge or unable to recognise. According to his biography, ‘to Dorner, trained in philosophy in the most philosophical of all countries, scion of six unbroken generations of philosophers ... it came as a shock to discover that in the most antiphilosophical of all countries ... there had been formulated the principles which he had been groping’.<sup>111</sup> While this may be true, he failed to see that these principles were firmly embedded in a cultural, academic and linguistic context that differed significantly from the one he was familiar with. It is hardly a coincidence that Dewey’s pragmatism — the only philosophical school to have emerged in this ‘most antiphilosophical of all countries’ — was written in a popular,

<sup>107</sup> Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 121.

<sup>108</sup> Alexander Dorner, *Überwindung der Kunst*, trans. Lydia Dorner, Hannover: Fackelträger Verlag, 1959; Samuel Cauman, *Das Lebende Museum: Erfahrungen eines Kunsthistorikers und Museumdirektors — Alexander Dorner*, trans. A.F. Teschermacher, Hannover: Fackelträger Verlag, 1960.

<sup>109</sup> Poster announcing Gropius Lecture: May 28, 1923, object number BR61.113, Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of Lydia Dorner in memory of Dr. Alexander Dorner. Many donated items are sketches of works by the likes of Bayer, Lissitzky or Moholy-Nagy, which makes the inclusion of the rather pedestrian announcement seem at least somewhat out of place.

<sup>110</sup> Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969*, San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1993, 129. Quoted in Weigel, *Sounding Through*, 61.

<sup>111</sup> Cauman, *The Living Museum*, 7.

almost folksy prose. Despite the advice of many, including Wittenborn, Bayer and Gropius, Dorner nevertheless stuck to his proverbial guns until the very end. As late as 1956, Gropius had to point out to Dorner that ‘in order to interest an American publisher, one needs to convey a positive enthusiasm for something new, instead of expecting them to have an understanding for Hegelian and Prussian traditions.’<sup>112</sup> Dorner’s predicament rhymes with insights from other studies in self-translation, which have similarly shown that to know a language does not necessarily imply that one is also versed in its genre conventions.<sup>113</sup>

Giedion, despite or perhaps precisely because he never actually moved to the United States, instead fared extraordinarily well in recognising the need to adapt his work in accordance with the new readership it would face, without having to ‘give up’ his identity as a European intellectual. Paradoxically, the very fact that he was not required to immerse himself completely into a new culture appears to have afforded him the ability to focus on strategic changes in the style and content of his work.<sup>114</sup> Combined with Tyrwhitt’s editorial contributions, this resulted in a success formula for Anglo-American audiences. This fact must have bothered Dorner, as he clearly felt that the right way of adapting German aesthetics to American standards was by overhauling the content of its ideas, rather than its linguistic or stylistic delivery. But did this lead Dorner to consider Giedion his nemesis, as the letter quoted in the introduction seems to suggest? It remains a fact that Dorner never addressed the ideas of Giedion head-on, save for one lengthy footnote that was added to the revised edition of *The Way Beyond “Art”*.<sup>115</sup> In it, he claims that ‘with good instinct, Giedion is fighting the split-personality of today’, but in the end Dorner concludes that his colleague represents somebody still captured by the ‘split-philosophy that tries to preserve timeless elements in a world of change’.<sup>116</sup> Though

<sup>112</sup> ‘Um einen amerikanischen Verlag zu interessieren muss man, glaube ich, die Leute bei ihrem positiven Enthusiasmus fuer etwas Neues packen statt sie in dieser Textprobe von ihnen Verstaendnis fuer Hegelianische und pruessische Traditionen zu erwarten.’ Walter Gropius to Alexander Dorner, 23 June 1956, Walter Gropius papers, MS Ger 208 (654), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Clyne, ‘Cultural differences in the organization of academic texts: English and German.’ *Journal of Pragmatics*, 11:2, April 1987, 236. For more on the idea that different scholarly traditions of ‘theory’ can be understood not only through their intellectual content but also as distinct ‘genres’ with their own modes of publication and dissemination, see Philipp Felsch, *Die lange Sommer der Theorie. Geschichte eine Revolte 1960-1990*. München: C.H. Beck, 2015.

<sup>114</sup> This notion relativizes conclusions from authors such as Verena Jung, who have argued that a successful translation from German to English necessarily involves a ‘bicultural’ skill derived from the experience of adjusting to a new home country. Verena Jung, ‘Writing Germany in Exile – the Bilingual Author as Cultural Mediator: Klaus Mann, Stefan Heym, Rudolf Arnheim and Hannah Arendt’ in *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25:5-6, 2004.

<sup>115</sup> Rebecca Uchill has also pointed to this quite remarkable footnote addressing Giedion. Uchill, *Developing Experience*, 65.

<sup>116</sup> Dorner, *The Way Beyond “Art”*, revised edition, 145.

he was delivering his ideas in a way that to many, including Gropius, decidedly evoked 'Hegelian and Prussian traditions', Dorner actually tried to rid art history of its indebtedness to German Idealism. The fact that both Giedion's alleged plagiarism as well as the significant theoretical departure inherent in Dorner's later work was largely lost on contemporary critics certainly goes a long way in explaining the frustration that pervades the letter cited in the introduction.

Commentators might have been oblivious to the rivalry between Dorner and Giedion, but it did certainly not go unnoticed by their peers. In a letter to Dorner, Gropius analysed the adversarial situation as 'a result of your superficial acquaintance with one another and the fact that your natures clearly do not match very well'; always the peacemaker, Gropius remarks that he had always found Giedion to be scientifically rigorous, but that in this case of purported plagiarism he had perhaps been unfair to Dorner, and that he would try to convince Giedion of this.<sup>117</sup>

In the end, the 'difference in natures' between Dorner and Giedion that Gropius observed is crucial for understanding exactly how and why Giedion became such a wildly influential intellectual after the Second World War, while Dorner receded to the background. By all accounts, Dorner was a principled individual who remained blind not just to the linguistic requirements of his new environment, but also to the socio-cultural ones. Although the 'culture shock' that German academics experienced upon trying to assimilate into a totally different academic environment is well-documented,<sup>118</sup> most were able to keep their reservations to themselves. But Dorner failed to recognise the micro-political intricacies of a close-knit community associated with the RISD and Providence's intellectual and cultural life, and his inability or unwillingness to adjust his attitude and expectations eventually led to his premature dismissal.<sup>119</sup> While this might not

<sup>117</sup> 'Den fall giedion sehe ich mehr als eine folge eurer doch nur oberflächlichen persönlichen bekanntschaft und der tatsache dass eure wesen offenbar nicht sehr harmonisieren; aber ich habe sonst immer gefunden dass er sich in seinem schriften peinlich bemüht wissenschaftlich fair und exact zu sein. vielleicht gelingt es uns nochmal ihm zu überzeugen dass er in deinem fall unrichtig gehandelt hat.' [lack of capitalisation in original] Walter Gropius to Alexander Dorner, 3 April 1943, Walter Gropius papers, MS Ger 208 (654), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>118</sup> Panofsky's *Three Decades in America* gives multiple examples of differences in academic and intellectual culture, but the many examples in '*Escape to Life*' paint a picture that extends well beyond these issues and shows how a new life in America impacted a wide range of social and personal issues as well.

<sup>119</sup> While Dorner's dismissal from the RISD Museum certainly had something to do with growing suspicions toward Germans leading up the American involvement in the war, especially with regard to non-Jewish refugees, Dorner certainly can be blamed for how the situation developed as well. Ines Katzenhusen has pointed to his reluctance to assimilate or even adjust to the social and institutional conventions of the RISD: 'Dorner was either not willing or not able to adapt to American museum practices. He disliked teamwork and refused to take instructions from supervisors or the Board of Trustees. Again, he was asked to confer more regularly with his supervisors and allow them insight into his financial

be exactly what Arendt referred to when she lamented the difficulties of instilling a certain political awareness in the German mind, it does appear to be a significant element of Dorner's approach to dealing with the requirements of his environment: just like he failed to fully recognise the obvious but implicit requirement to remove 'degenerate' art from his museum in order to be compliant with the cultural policies of the Third Reich, he similarly appears to have thought there was no need to adapt his decidedly German approach to publication and museum work in America.

This attitude resulted in a more casual strategy of personal and linguistic as well as theoretical integration, which in turn affected his success in writing and publishing his work across the Atlantic. His ambivalent attitude represented a clear opposition to Panofsky's full embrace of American culture or, conversely, to Giedion's strategic adaptations. The latter's collaborations allowed for his person to remain at a distance, both literally and figuratively, resulting in an effective editorial apparatus to mediate his ideas between different intellectual traditions. This allowed him to introduce a way of thinking about modern architecture and space to an enormous, largely non-academic audience, bolstering his capacity as a mediator of ideas between academic theory and popularised architecture history. The fact that Giedion's work continued to inform ideas about space and architecture well into the 1960s testifies to its success.

Dorner, on the other hand, was never able to distance his work from his personal and linguistic quirks (even in a biography supposedly written by someone else), which obstructed his efforts far more than he seems to have realised. His effectiveness as a mediator was greatly impeded by the transition to Anglo-American discourse. In interwar Germany, he was able to present his ideas in a familiar local jargon in conjuncture with new exhibition spaces that were as radical as the avant-garde art shown within them. However, in America, he had to present his ideas without either an avant-garde collaborator or a public willing to indulge in the intricacies of complicated aesthetic theories. If he had been more susceptible to the editorial advice he received after moving to America, things might have turned out differently: *The Way Beyond "Art"* presented ideas about space that were in many senses more contemporary than Giedion's, but they failed to penetrate contemporary artistic and architectural discourse due to their idiosyncratic presentation. The 'road not taken', as Joan Ockman has characterised Dorner's version of postwar avant-gardism, turned out to lead to a dead end.

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transactions—a request with which he did not comply ... In general, he showed little tolerance for criticism, frequently felt threatened, and reacted with arrogance and insult.' Katenhusen, *Alexander Dorner*, 10. Daniel Harkett came to similar conclusions, see Harkett, *Tea vs Beer*.

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