

Fig. 1. Alexander Paul Walther
View toward "northeast" corner of El Lissitzky's *Raum für konstruktive Kunst*, Internationale Kunstausstellung, Dresden, 1926
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute

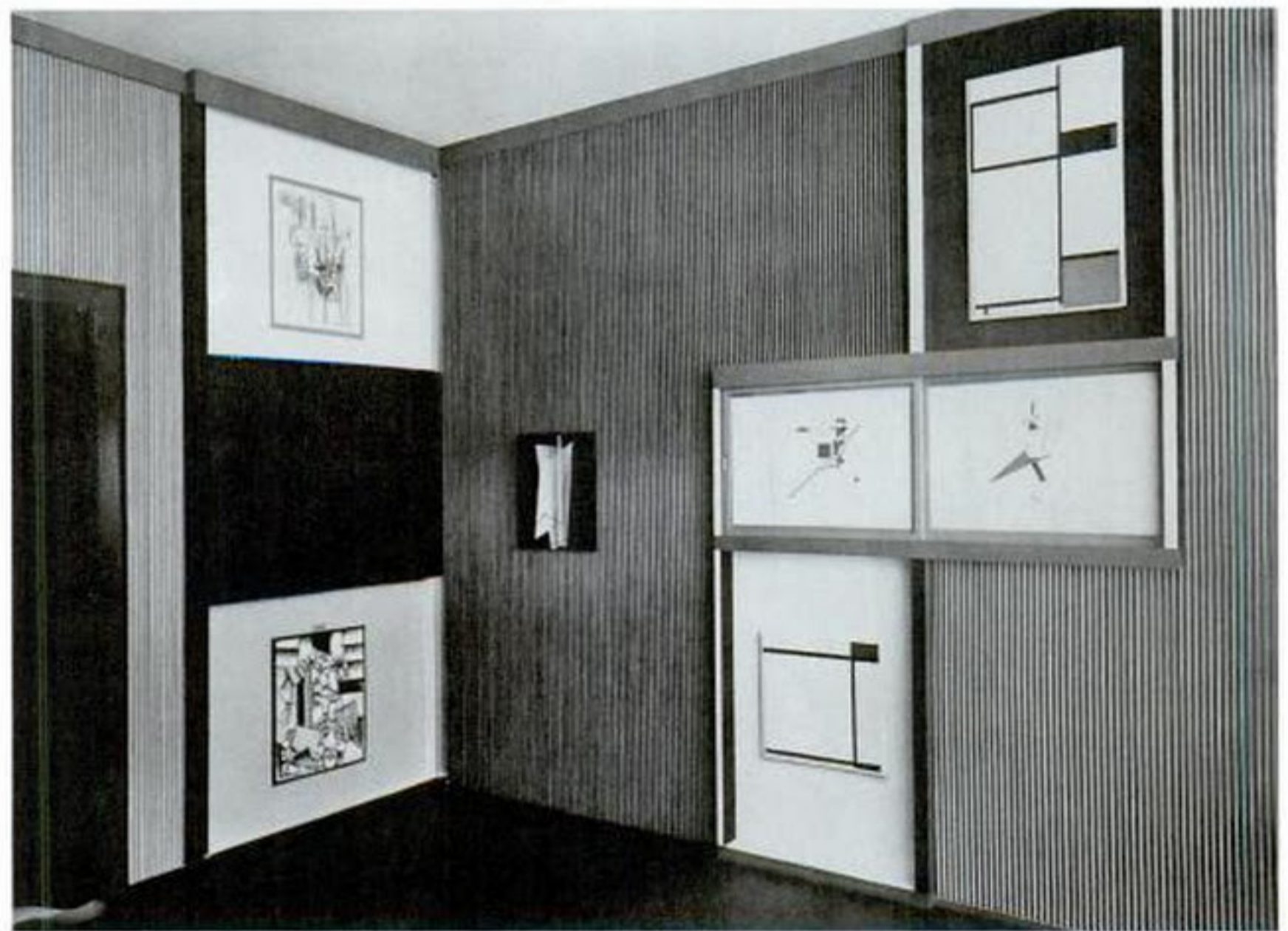


Fig. 2. Redemann
View toward Walls 2 and 3 of El Lissitzky's *Kabinett der Abstrakten*, Provinzialmuseum Hannover, 1928
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute

Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover *Demonstrationsräume*

Maria Gough

In developing his theory and practice of epic theater in the late 1920s, the German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht sought to transform the theater from a *Bannraum* (spellbound zone) into an *Ausstellungsraum* (exhibition space).¹ At the same time, the Russian artist El Lissitzky, in designing his galleries for contemporary art—*Raum für konstruktive Kunst* (1926) in Dresden (fig. 1) and *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (1927–28) in Hannover (fig. 2)—sought to transform the space of exhibition into that of the theater: “The space [*Raum*] must be a . . . stage . . . on which the pictures appear as . . . actors in a drama (or comedy).”² Playwright and artist were each attempting the transformation of his respective realm of artistic production by invoking that of the other: theater as exhibition, exhibition as theater. This striking chiasmus exemplifies, in the very form of its articulation, a broad tendency of the 1920s—what one might call its culture of inversion—such as that which Walter Benjamin saw at work in Franz Hessel’s redescription of the street as the true “dwelling” of modernity or in Sigfried Giedion, Erich Mendelsohn, and Le Corbusier’s conversion of “human habitations into the transitional spaces of every imaginable force and wave of light and air.”³

A certain triangulation of desire drove the enterprises of both Brecht and Lissitzky. Rejecting his theatrical inheritance (Aristotelian catharsis, Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total artwork]), Brecht strove for what he imagined to be the bright, noisy interactivity of the exhibition. Lissitzky, endeavoring to escape both the museum-as-mausoleum and the bourgeois realm of so-called private consumption (“It should not imitate a living room”),⁴ sought the bright, noisy interactivity of the theater. Each desired what he imagined the other had. What makes this chiasmic inversion so significant, however, is that both Brecht and Lissitzky had as his primary objective more or less the same thing—the activation of the viewer—and that each assumed that his newly refunctioned art would produce such activation.⁵ In Brecht’s case, the traditional relationship between stage and audience, text and performance, director and actor, was to be transformed by means of what Benjamin called a montage-like device of “interruption”; in Lissitzky’s, the traditional relationship between work of art and the wall on which it is hung—and, thus, the relationship between work and visitor—was to be transformed chiefly through the invention of devices that solicit, as we shall see, not only the

latter's active participation but also, and most especially, his or her sensory disorientation.⁶

The present essay seeks to unpack Lissitzky's *Demonstrationsräume* (demonstration spaces)—his collective term for the Dresden *Raum* and the Hannover *Kabinett*—as the instantiation of a theory of exhibition built on two inextricably intertwined ambitions: the differentiation of the exhibited object and the activation of its viewer. With the exception of an essay by Kai-Uwe Hemken,⁷ the literature on these spaces has focused overwhelmingly on the Hannover gallery to the neglect of the Dresden precedent on which it was based. To a certain extent, this imbalance may be attributed to the fact that the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* was installed as a permanent exhibition space within an existing museum, the Provinzialmuseum Hannover. The *Kabinett* was visited by numerous cultural luminaries over the years (including Albert Barnes, Alfred Barr, Katherine Dreier, Giedion, Philip Johnson, Jan Tschichold, and Dziga Vertov) until its destruction by the National Socialists in 1937 and the degradation of its contents in the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate art) exhibition held in Munich later that year (fig. 3).⁸ Unlike the *Kabinett*, the *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* was constructed specifically for a temporary summer exhibition—Dresden's Internationale Kunstausstellung of 1926—and thus was in existence just a few short months.

There are also historiographical reasons for the disparity in the literature. In his *The Way Beyond "Art"* (1947), Alexander Dorner, the director of the Provinzialmuseum from 1923 to 1937, fails to mention the existence of the *Raum für konstruktive Kunst*, even though it was on the basis of his visit to Dresden that he commissioned the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* in fall 1926. The captions to the illustrations in his book backdate the Hannover space to 1925, further obscuring the fact that it was essentially a reprise of the Dresden design.⁹ Although patron and artist shared certain fundamental principles, such as the necessity of activating the museum visitor, Dorner's later description of the Hannover *Kabinett* as a "collaboration" between himself and Lissitzky is problematic. In his biography of Dorner, however, Samuel Cauman merely reiterates his subject's claim to collaboration.¹⁰ Unfortunately, due to the absence until recently of other historical studies, Dorner's and Cauman's mid-twentieth-century texts have influenced almost all subsequent commentators. The occlusion of the Dresden *Raum* and the subsequent "Dornerization" of Lissitzky's demonstration spaces reached a peak in the late 1960s, with the eulogies to Dorner that accompanied the reconstruction of the Hannover *Kabinett* in 1968¹¹—much to the irritation of Sir Nikolaus Pevsner.

In a letter published in *Art Journal* in 1971, Pevsner complained, "Time and again I find that Lissitzky's... Room at Hannover is mentioned... without a word about the... Room in the Dresden International Exhibition of 1926.... [But] what was done in Hannover in 1927 was exactly what had been done in Dresden in 1926. I need not add that I remember the Lissitzky room of 1926 very vividly."¹² Today Pevsner is most remembered as the

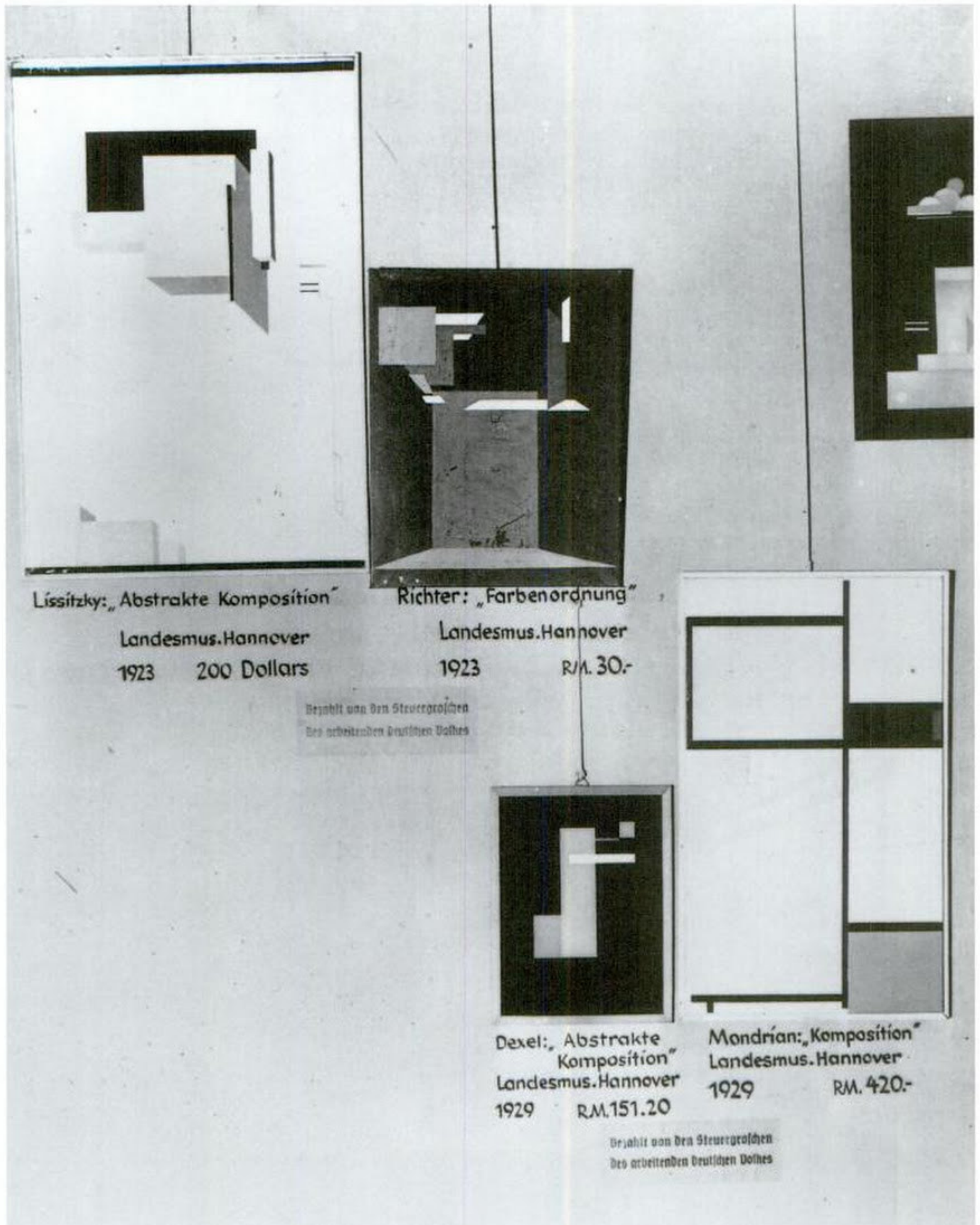


Fig. 3. View of section of gallery 5 of *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate art), Munich, 1937

Works by El Lissitzky, Hans Richter, Walter Dexel, and Piet Mondrian from El Lissitzky's *Kabinett der Abstrakten*, Provinzialmuseum Hannover
Berlin, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz

Saxony-born architectural historian who, after the National Socialist seizure of Germany in January 1933, emigrated to England where over the course of the next fifty years he made a major contribution to the study of both the European modern movement and the older English architecture. At the time of the Dresden exhibition, however, he had just recently completed a dissertation on baroque architecture at the Universität Leipzig and was employed in his first job, as assistant keeper of Dresden's Gemäldegalerie. In this capacity, he served as assistant to Hans Posse, a scholar of Italian baroque painting and long-time director of the Gemäldegalerie. With the architect Heinrich Tessenow, then a professor at the Akademie der Künste in Dresden, Posse curated the Dresden exhibition of 1926. As Posse's right-hand man, the young Pevsner had a front-row seat to the exhibition committee's negotiations with Lissitzky. Although to my knowledge he did not write about Lissitzky following his emigration to England, Pevsner published one of the first (but rarely cited) reviews of the *Raum* in the *Dresdner Anzeiger* in July 1926.¹³

Two detailed studies of Dorner's museology — one published by Monika Flacke-Knoch in 1985, the other by Joan Ockman in 1997 — rectified numerous errors in the historical record.¹⁴ But insofar as Dorner was their major focus, the Dresden space was marginal in both discussions. One of the objectives of the present essay is to set forth an account of the Dresden *Raum*, drawing in part on archival documents published to date, but more particularly offering a range of new speculative readings and contextualizations. I track the circumstances surrounding the Dresden commission, reconstruct Lissitzky's interpretation of that commission, and detail the specific characteristics and significance of his design solution. In so doing, my concern is not to insist on the "originality" of the earlier space due to its temporal priority but rather to open for consideration a matrix of issues not previously broached with regard to the Dresden *Raum* that I believe were fundamental to Lissitzky's generation of its design and thus to the design of the Hannover *Kabinett*.

This essay also questions the most problematic aspect of the Dornerization of the *Demonstrationsräume*, namely, the interpretation of the Hannover *Kabinett* within the terms of a museological model that Dorner developed while reorganizing the Provinzialmuseum's galleries in the early to mid-1920s. Dorner's model was the so-called *Stimmungsraum* (atmosphere, or mood, room), the task of which was to establish a synaesthetic correspondence between works of art and the context of their exhibition.¹⁵ Dorner's interpretation of the Hannover *Kabinett* as a *Stimmungsraum* seems to have gained widespread acceptance in the literature — with some serious consequences, in my view, such as a tendency to read the demonstration space as a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. While we are greatly indebted to Dorner for his perspicacity in having envisaged and facilitated a permanent home for Lissitzky's demonstration space and thereby contributed to its preservation, his eventual claim to partial authorship of the Hannover *Kabinett* — through his insistence on the collaborative nature of its undertaking and his suppression of its

Dresden precedent—has served to insulate his particular interpretation of that space from the kind of challenges that any other interpretation would necessarily accrue.

One such challenge arose when the Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov visited the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* in summer 1929. “I saw your room in the Hannover museum,” Vertov wrote to his friend and colleague Lissitzky on 7 June 1929. “I sat there for a long time, looked around, groped [*Dolgo tam sidel, osmatrival i oshchupyval*].”¹⁶ Vertov was traveling in Germany at the time, having just overseen the installation of Lissitzky’s design for the Soviet pavilion at the Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds: Film und Foto, held in Stuttgart in 1929. Included in the Soviet pavilion were a number of enlarged stills selected by the German art dealer Sophie Küppers—Lissitzky’s future wife—from Vertov’s *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* (1929; Man with a movie camera) and other films. The filmmaker, who was in Küppers’s hometown of Hannover to present two lectures on his concept of the *kinoglaz* (cinema eye), took time out to see Lissitzky’s *Kabinett*.

As is well known, Vertov was no stranger to innovative exhibition formats: during his lectures in Hannover, for example, he projected excerpts from his documentary films directly onto the ceiling of the auditorium in which he spoke.¹⁷ But his choice of the word *oshchupyval* (groped)—a dense and difficult word, the very sound of which, in English as in Russian, seems to resemble the impeded kind of action it describes—is, nevertheless, extremely provocative. In fact, I would argue that Vertov’s epigrammatic commentary gets to the heart of Lissitzky’s enterprise not only in the Hannover *Kabinett* but also in the Dresden *Raum*, an enterprise hitherto largely occluded by the widespread dissemination and repetition of Dorner’s forceful interpretation. Through a reading of the surviving photographic documentation of Lissitzky’s demonstration spaces and his accompanying text “2 Demonstrationsräume” (circa 1926),¹⁸ and also by elaborating on Vertov’s letter of 1929, I seek to define both the precise nature of Lissitzky’s work in Dresden and Hannover, and its broader significance as an intervention within a nexus of Soviet and Weimar cultural discourses.

The Dresden Commission

Lissitzky’s *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* was one of fifty-six galleries newly constructed within the existing Städtischer Ausstellungs-Palast in Dresden to house the Internationale Kunstausstellung in summer 1926. Curated by Posse and Tessenow, the exhibition included works by modern and contemporary artists from sixteen European nations, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Japan. This massive survey of modern and contemporary art was conceived as a complement to an even larger undertaking by the city of Dresden—the Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung, which was organized in association with the centenary of the city’s society for the art of gardens and botany. As indicated in the *Gesamt-Entwurf* (Overall design; fig. 4) by the Berlin landscape architect Gustav Allinger, who oversaw its design and construction, this

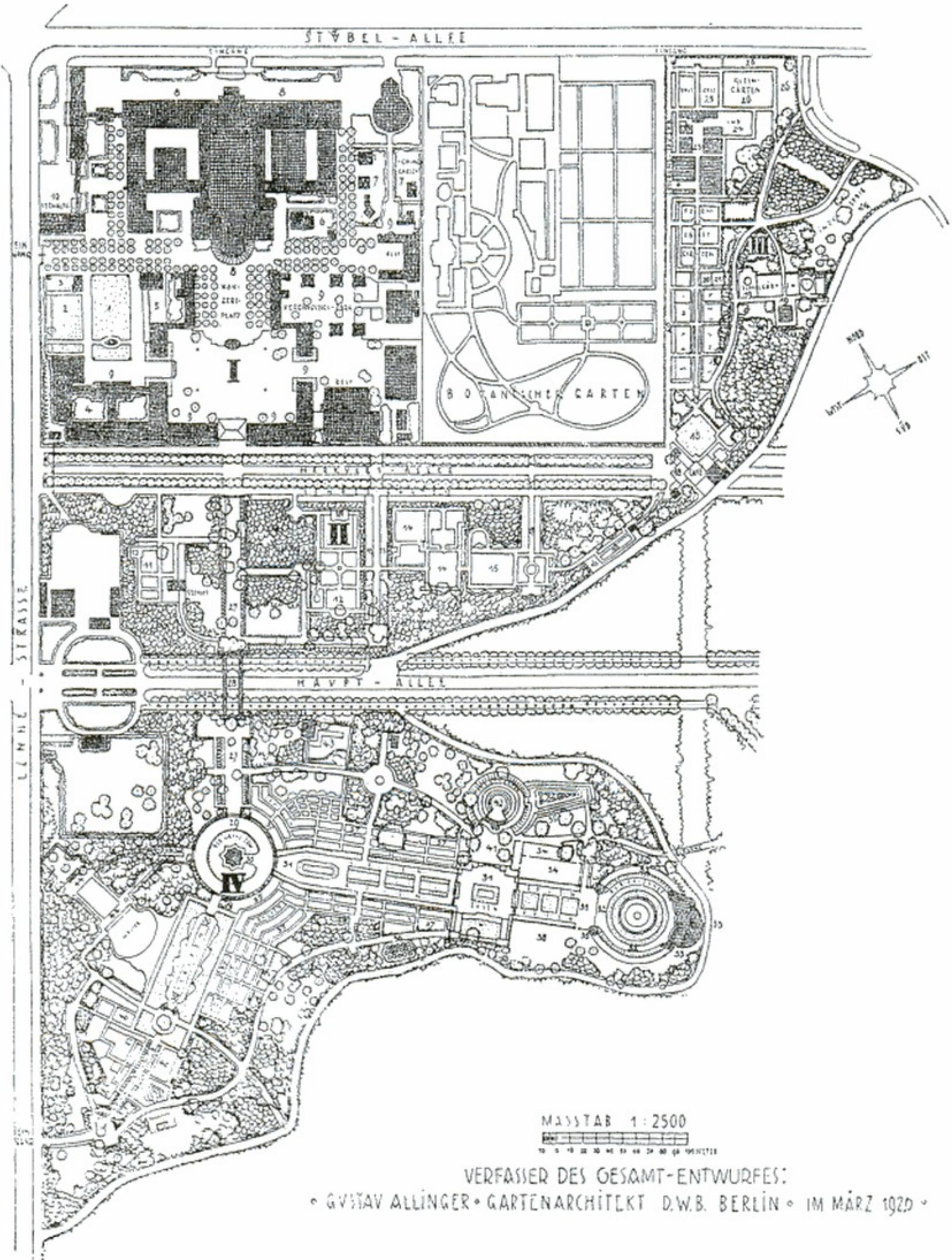


Fig. 4. Gustav Allinger
Plan and key for the Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung
From Gustav Allinger, "Die Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung Dresden 1926."
Der Cicerone 18 (1926): 424-25

JUBILÄUMS-GARTENBAU-AUSSTELLUNG DRESDEN 1926

ERLÄUTERUNGEN:

ABSCHNITT I

- 1 Die große Schmuckanlage. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 2 Die kleine Schmuckanlage. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 3 Der kleine Hausgarten. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 4 Der Gartenhof. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Reinold Rose, Dresden.
- 5 Wissenschaftliche Abteilung im Freien. Prof. Dr. Tobler, Dresden.
- 6 Hausgarten am Ingolstädter Haus. Ausführung: Fa. Victor Teschendorff, Dresden.
- 7 Siedler-Garten. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Wilhelm Röhnick, Dresden.
- 8 Städtischer Ausstellungs-Palast, Internationale Kunstausstellung. Gärtnerische Sonder-schauen, Haupt-Restaurant.
- 9 Neue Ausstellungs-Hallen, Vergnügungs-park, Planetarium. Entwurf: des Bebauungs-planes Stadtbaurat Paul Wolf.
- 10 Verwaltungsgebäude.

ABSCHNITT II

- 11 Sondergarten mit Teehaus. Der Fa. Münch & Haufe, Dresden. Entwurf: Arch. Heinz Wich-mann, Weimar.
- 12 Sondergarten der Fa. Paul Hauber, Dresden. Entwurf: Garten-Gestaltung D. Hauber.
- 13 Sommer-Blumen-Rabatten der sächsischen Samenzucht-Ges., Dresden. Entwurf: Kurt Reiter, Dresden.
- 14 Sondergarten der Dresdner Garten-Gestalter. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Reinold Rose, Dresden.
- 15 Sondergarten der Fa. Teschendorff, Dresden. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Joh. Gabriel, Dresden.
- 16 Heil- und Giftpflanzen-Garten der Fach-schule des Drogisten-Vereins, Dresden. Ent-wurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 17 Gehölz-Garten der Fa. O. Poscharsky. Inhaber Rich. Quantz, Willsdruff.

ABSCHNITT III

- 18 Sondergarten der Firma Ziegenbalg Nieder-Sedlitz. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Reinold Rose, Dresden. Café im Sondergarten Ziegenbalg. Entw.-Arch. M. Herfurt.
- 19 Schulgärten der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sächs. Lehrer-Verbände, Dresden. Entwurf: Studien-rat Behr, Leipzig; Studienrat Dr. Teuscher, Dresden; G.-A. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 20 Ausstellung von Baumschul-Erzeugnissen und Wachstums und Düngungsversuchen. Leitung: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.

- 21 Bienengarten des Landesverbandes Sächs. Bienenzüchtervereine, Dresden.
- 22 Formobst-Garten der Firma P. Hauber. Ent-wurf: Garten-Gestaltung, P. Hauber, Dresden.
- 23 Gewächshaus-Abteilung.
- 24 Gelände für Industrie, Regenanlagen, Boden-fräsen.
- 25 Obstbaumanlage der Firma Stöckert. Baum-schulen-Besitzer K. Scholz, Coswig.
- 26 Kleingarten-Kolonie des Kreisverbandes Dresden der Gärten und Schrebervereine. Entwurf: Dipl.-Gart.-Bau-Insp. H. Schüttauf, Dresden.

ABSCHNITT IV

- 27 Rhododendronweg der Firma Seidel, Grün-gräbchen, Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 28 Brücke über die Haupt-Allee. Entwurf: Arch. Otto Wulle, Dresden.
- 29 Terrasse am grünen Dom. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 30 Der grüne Dom. Entwurf: Arch. J. Wentzler, Dortmund.
- 31 Der riesengroße Rosengarten. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger Berlin.
- 32 Rosenhof mit Leuchtfantäne. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 33 Café-Restaurant und Pavillons am Rosenhof. Entwurf: Prof. Dr. Tessenow, Dresden.
- 34 Garten der Rosenfreundin. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 35 1. Garten der Rosen-Neuheiten. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin
- 36 2. Garten der Rosen-Neuheiten. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 37 Farbenfelder der Dahlien. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 38 Garten des Dahlien-Freundes. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 39 Garten zum blauen Rittersporn. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 40 Farbenfelder der Einjabs-Blumen. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 41 Eichenhof mit Architekturen. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 42 Parktheater und Theatergebäude. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin.
- 43 Der kommende Garten. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Gust. Allinger, Berlin. Sommerhaus, Deutsche Werkstätten, Hellerau.
- 44 Der Friedhof. Entwurf: Gart.-Arch. Wilhelm Röhnick, Dresden. Architektur des Friedhofs: Arch.-Prof. O. Hempel, Dresden.

grand national horticultural exposition transformed the entire area surrounding the Städtischer Ausstellungs-Palast, including the adjacent Botanischer Garten and the vast Grosser Garten.

Together, the Internationale Kunstausstellung and Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung constituted the fifth in a series of annual exhibitions held by the city of Dresden in the aftermath of World War I. Earlier exhibitions had been devoted to glass, porcelain, and ceramics (1922), sports and games (1923), textiles (1924), and apartment and housing estates (1925). Underlying all was a shared objective: the regeneration of the former capital of Saxony's industry, economy, trade, and culture.¹⁹ The ostensible purpose of the Internationale Kunstausstellung was rather different, however. In a long essay published in *Der Cicerone* and sanctioned by Posse, the art critic Will Grohmann argued that the exhibition presented a picture of a Europe united and still triumphant over the rest of the world in the cultural, if no longer the material and spiritual, arenas.²⁰ But in the only study of Lissitzky's *Raum* published to date, Hemken argues that Posse's overall claim to the presentation of a united Europe was undermined by the fact that the exhibition was arranged almost exclusively by nation (rather than, for instance, by medium, style, period, genre, or subject matter), thus provoking what Hemken calls a "contest between nations" rather than a genuine demonstration of European unity. Furthermore, almost half the exhibition's galleries, including its concluding suite, were reserved for German, and specifically Dresden, artists.²¹ Despite Grohmann's recitation of the official line, therefore, the Internationale Kunstausstellung presented to the world a picture of the reconstruction of primarily German, and particularly Saxon, cultural might in the aftermath of military defeat and economic devastation.

Nevertheless, Posse's exhibition strategy was probably more complex than Hemken's argument allows. Any so-called contest of nations would have been immediately confounded, for example, by the Russians, with regard to whom the very category of nation crumbled. Aside from the fact that the Soviet Union was not a nation-state, the Russian *Saal* (hall) featured not only twenty-eight easel pictures by artists resident in the Soviet Union (apparently all extremely tame — "nothing with a punch," complained Pevsner²²) but also an equal number by Russian émigrés such as Marc Chagall, who had recently relocated from Berlin to Paris; the Dresden-based Lazar Segall; and Natal'ia Goncharova, resident in Paris for more than a decade (whereas a fellow Parisian, the Spanish émigré Pablo Picasso was included in the French section).²³ The Russians Alexej von Jawlensky (Aleksei Iavlenskii) and Vladimir Bechtejeff (Bekhteev), however, were included in the German section of the exhibition in light of their contribution to the Blaue Reiter (Blue rider) group before World War I, even though the latter had returned permanently to Moscow in 1914. Finally, Lissitzky's *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* — regarded by some critics as the only "Bolshevik" work in the entire exhibition²⁴ — was neither part of the official representation from the Soviet Union nor physically part of the Russian *Saal*. It included an international front of artists, including Willy Baumeister, Naum

Gabo, Lissitzky, László Moholy-Nagy, Piet Mondrian, Francis Picabia, and Oskar Schlemmer—and was the only gallery in the entire exhibition not to have been “subjugated,” as Roman Jakobson wrote in 1921 in another context, “to the laws of bell-ringing patriotism.”²⁵ (Although it also included a number of figurative works, such as Picabia’s satirical portrait—a dadaist construction of the former French president Raymond Poincaré—Lissitzky’s *Raum* showcased chiefly nonfigurative production—again, the only gallery to do so.)

To accommodate the Internationale Kunstausstellung, Tessenow designed a new interior for the Städtischer Ausstellungs-Palast, a building that had hosted a number of different civic functions over the years, including concerts, bazaars, trade fairs, and exhibitions of various kinds. Within the existing structure, he constructed some fifty-six galleries (see, for example, fig. 5) and an interior courtyard.²⁶ Hung with paintings in a single tier at the viewer’s eye level on a calm, neutral gray background, Tessenow’s enfilade of sober galleries, stripped of all ornament other than their elegant geometry, superceded the traditional salon-style carpeting of walls with paintings from floor to ceiling.

The innovation of Tessenow’s Dresden galleries was extremely well received. The critic Paul Schumann remarked that the architect had created, without recourse to the “usual decorative embellishments,” a perfect setting for the presentation of works of art strictly by means of “impeccable proportions” and the “intelligent distribution of space.”²⁷ The architectural critic Adolf Behne—incidentally, one of Lissitzky’s great supporters—pronounced them “the best exhibition galleries produced in all of Germany.”²⁸ Ludwig Justi, director of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, went further, lauding the galleries as “the best thing produced in this field to date.”²⁹ Tessenow’s cool restraint, however, was in contrast not only with traditional exhibition practice but also with another kind of floor-to-ceiling drama occurring right in the midst of his galleries—that of Lissitzky’s *Raum*. Interestingly, despite the sharp divergence of their architectural visions, it seems to have been Tessenow who was largely responsible for convincing Posse to commission Lissitzky to design one of the Dresden galleries. Precisely how this came about is a matter of some debate.

On the one hand, in his *Dresdner Anzeiger* review of 30 July 1926, Pevsner asserts that “*Right from the start* the exhibition directors had a very successful idea to unite the abstract artists in a room dedicated solely to them and to have this room designed by one of the most talented of their movement. For these works [by Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, and Mondrian] are not meant to be housed in halls together with ‘pictures,’ they follow other rules and demand a different environment to be effective, indeed, to be understood at all.”³⁰ On the other hand, the surviving evidence pertaining to the negotiation of the commission—which Lissitzky conducted by correspondence from Moscow between November 1925 and May 1926—suggests a more complicated scenario.



Fig. 5. Alexander Paul Walther
View of interior galleries designed by Heinrich Tessenow for
the Internationale Kunstausstellung, Dresden, 1926
Berlin, Kunstbibliothek

Küppers later noted that Lissitzky himself had initially proposed the idea that “he might possibly design a special exhibition-room” for the abstract pictures she had assembled. “The nicest thing,” Lissitzky wrote to Küppers on 30 January 1926, “would be if I were to get the commission to design the space. I believe that it would be important in every respect.” He then added, in retrospect prophetically, “It could become the chief attraction of the exhibition.”³¹ Through the intervention of a friend, the progressive Dresden collector Ida Bienert, Küppers brought Lissitzky’s idea to the attention of the exhibition committee. While Posse maintained an “indifferent attitude,” according to Küppers, Tessenow apparently supported the idea with great enthusiasm.³² Accordingly, on 8 February, Lissitzky urged Küppers to obtain from Tessenow himself “precise information” about the available space: “I should like to know . . . as soon as possible, so that I can think out the general concept. I am besieged by various ideas, and the space allotted is bound to impose certain limitations [*die Schranken*], within which I can allow my imagination to have full play.”³³

As of 6 March, however, the commission still seems to have been somewhat uncertain.³⁴ Nevertheless, later that month Lissitzky referred to “my plan for the space” in the context of inquiring whether Küppers thought the exhibition committee would release sufficient funds for its execution. If not, he added, he and Küppers would surely face bankruptcy, “[e]specially with the competition from the two champions—Mondrian and the Bauhaus.”³⁵ The implication seems to be that if these last two were to design spaces at the Dresden exhibition (it is uncertain whether this was in fact the case), they, unlike Lissitzky, would have the financial means to bring their projects to fruition.³⁶

On 29 March, Lissitzky reported to Küppers that he had just received a letter from Posse with a ground plan of a gallery space measuring 6-by-6 meters (about 20-by-20 feet). This was gallery number 31 in the Städtischer Ausstellungs-Palast. Lissitzky turned to Küppers for clarification: “So it’s not the hall of modern painting [*der Saal der modernen Malerei*], it’s a space [*ein Raum*] without specific function, with which I can do what I like?” Lissitzky, evidently, had been negotiating with Posse for the design of a large hall of “modern painting,” a rather different proposition than the space for “the new (constructive) art” that he eventually realized.³⁷ Nevertheless, the alternative offered by Posse in late March—a smaller space without, as yet, determinate function—seems to have intrigued the artist equally, if not more so. He asked Küppers, “And if I want to do a Lenin corner [*und wenn ich eine Lenin Ecke machen will*]?” playfully trying the exhibition committee’s apparent latitude.³⁸

A letter from Lissitzky to Posse dated 30 March reveals that, even with the opening of the exhibition less than three months away, it was not clear that the Dresden *Raum* would include abstract works of art.³⁹ For at least part of the design process, therefore, the precise function of the Dresden space was undecided, a fact that I take to be highly significant to the generation of

Lissitzky's design. The first explicit statement suggesting that Lissitzky had secured the commission is found in a letter from Posse to Wassily Kandinsky on 5 May, wherein the former expresses the hope that "the design and arrangement of a small room by Mr. Lissitzky will materialize."⁴⁰ Posse's concern was no doubt genuine — Lissitzky had been experiencing inordinate frustration in securing travel documents from the Soviet authorities. He expressed his despair in a letter to Küppers on 10 May. With all the delay, he wrote, "I have no idea how I am going to get the space finished now."⁴¹ After weeks of almost daily setbacks, Lissitzky finally arrived in Hannover in late May, with his design for the Dresden *Raum* in tow. He and Küppers then "deliberated which pictures from the reserves [she] had in hand would be most appropriate for the exhibition."⁴² It was thus only after the completion of the design for the *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* that the works eventually installed within it were selected.

In terms of its most immediate function, therefore, Lissitzky's Dresden demonstration space promoted not only the artist's new interest in interior design but also Küppers's intrepid business. The *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* increased the exposure of the dealer's stable of "difficult" artists in the context of the otherwise staid Dresden art world, which was predisposed chiefly to postimpressionist knockoffs and jolted only sporadically by a now more or less orthodox expressionism and an emerging political criticism in the work of the caricaturist George Grosz and others.⁴³ The Internationale Kunstausstellung advertised the enterprises of all involved — this was, after all, one of its explicit functions — and it served Lissitzky in precisely this way, since the Dresden *Raum* led directly to the Hannover commission.

Demonstratio

In the catalog of the Dresden exhibition, gallery 31 is entitled *Raum für konstruktive Kunst*,⁴⁴ but Lissitzky usually referred to it as a *Demonstrationsraum*, an expression he had used earlier in relation to his *Proun Room* (1923; Berlin, Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung). In a commentary published in July 1923 in the inaugural issue of *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, a new journal edited by Hans Richter in conjunction with Viking Eggling, Lissitzky wrote, "I am designing an exhibition show-room [*einen Ausstellungs-Schau-Raum*]," which signifies "for me... a demonstration space [*für mich... Demonstrationsraum*]." *Proun Room* "demonstrated" the art or mechanics of exhibition itself: its walls were not subordinated to the work of art ("We are destroying the wall as a resting-place for... pictures") but instead played an active role in the production of that space qua exhibition space by actively inducing the visitor's continuous circulation within it ("The space should be so organized that of itself it provides an inducement to walk around in it").⁴⁵ Three years later, Lissitzky fleshed out his argument for the wall's *productive* role in his text "2 Demonstrationsräume," in which he documented both his interpretation of, and solution to, the Dresden commission, as well as its projected redevelopment for Hannover.⁴⁶

In German, the word *Demonstration*, it should be emphasized, is not a synonym for *Ausstellung*. A critical dimension of Lissitzky's enterprise is thus obscured if we automatically translate *Demonstration* as "exhibition" (and, accordingly, *Demonstrationsräume* as "exhibition spaces" or "exhibition rooms"), as English-language commentators have tended to do. A study of *Demonstration's* significance in the early twentieth century reveals that it was at once broader but also more specific in its scope than *Ausstellung*: broader in that it meant political protest; more specific in that it also denoted the making—the unfolding—of an explanation or reasoned argument; yet more specific again in that it signified, furthermore, projection (such as, for example, slide projection).⁴⁷ By reconceptualizing the space of exhibition as a space of demonstration—in the political, exegetical, and "paracinematic" senses just noted—Lissitzky brought to the fore two fundamental conditions of his Dresden and Hannover designs: their explicit temporal and spatial extension and their frank solicitation of the visitor's active participation. The *Demonstrationsräume* thus comprises not simply a showcase for the new art but also a reformulation of the very mode of exhibition consumption, from contemplation or distraction to activation.

Yet, if Lissitzky offers his visitor a demonstration, in the sense of a proof by reasoning, his reasoning takes the form not so much of rationality—the form in which reason had been contained since the Enlightenment—but rather of that which the latter had *invented* as altogether outside or beyond reason, namely, so-called irrationality. While working with Vertov, Küppers, Lissitzky, and others on the selection of stills for the Soviet pavilion at the Film und Foto exhibition in 1929, the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein published a vigorous defense of the avant-garde's dismantling of reason's historical bifurcation: "The new art must set a limit to the dualism of the spheres of 'emotion' and 'reason,'" Eisenstein wrote. "It must restore to science its sensuality. To the intellectual process its fire and passion. It must plunge the abstract process of thought into the cauldron of practical activity." For the filmmaker, only the cinema would be able to meet this challenge: "A cinema of *extreme cognition and extreme sensuality* that has mastered the entire arsenal of affective optical, acoustical and biomechanical stimulants."⁴⁸ Lissitzky's *Demonstrationsräume*, as we shall see, constituted another arena in which that challenge could be met.

A Constructivist Standard

In my discussion of the trade-fair function of the Dresden *Raum*, I noted that its contents were selected only after the completion of its design. This fact is important because one of the essential but nevertheless often overlooked features of the demonstration space is that its contents were fully changeable and interchangeable. Lissitzky's ambition in Dresden was the demonstration of a standard or prototype for exhibition design. He wrote that the design "should present a standard [*Standard*] for spaces in which new art is shown to the public." As such, his demonstration space is "not just the usual arts-and-crafts

object” but rather “a type” — a prototype — which he hopes “will become the standard.”⁴⁹ The Dresden space is thus not a synthetic environment or total work of art in the sense often attributed to the Berlin *Proun Room* but rather a site of substitution and exchange.⁵⁰

The problem of standardization was one of Lissitzky’s major concerns in the mid-1920s, particularly after his return to Moscow in early June 1925. Almost immediately, Lissitzky had become involved with ASNOVA (Assotsiatsiia novykh arkhitektorov; Association of new architects), both contributing to its collective project for an international sports complex in Moscow’s Vorob’evye Gory (Sparrow Hills, later renamed Lenin Hills) and designing the inaugural issue of its bulletin, *ASNOVA: Izvestiia Assotsiatsii novykh arkhitektorov*. In September 1925, he was appointed to the architecture faculty at VKhUTEMAS (Vysshee gosudarstvennye khudozhestvennye tekhnicheskie masterskie; Higher state artistic and technical workshops), where he taught interior and furniture design, with a particular emphasis on the development of industrial prototypes. Concurrently with his negotiations for the Dresden space in early 1926, Lissitzky was collaborating with Nikolai Ladovskii, ASNOVA’s unofficial leader, in the design of communal housing projects whose viability directly depended on the expeditious implementation of new principles of standardization in planning and construction.⁵¹

The design for the Dresden *Raum* was thus generated during a period in which Lissitzky’s chief arena of interest and production had shifted back to architecture, the discipline of his early formation while a student before World War I at the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt and then during the war at the Riga Polytechnical Institute (Rizhskii politekhnicheskii institut), which had been evacuated to Moscow in 1915. Increasingly preoccupied with the problem of standardization at the time of the commission in Dresden, Lissitzky was also on the verge of abandoning altogether the production of *Prouns* (Proekt utverzhdenia novogo; Project for the affirmation of the new). This move was long in the making.⁵² In fall 1921, Lissitzky had already distinguished the *Proun* from the art of easel painting, claiming instead for the *Proun* the status of a “construction” on the grounds that it possessed a rotational force that destroyed the perpendicular axis proper to the easel picture.⁵³ With his new commitment to the task of Soviet reconstruction from 1925 on, Lissitzky’s earlier polemical differentiation of the *Proun* and the easel picture now seemed exhausted. It is thus no surprise that Lissitzky could find little time in which to make the new *Prouns* he had initially proposed for the Dresden *Raum*. That the artist returned to Germany in summer 1926 and was involved in the promotion of Küppers’s remaining reserve of easel pictures is, on the one hand, testimony to Lissitzky’s mercurial ability to be many things to many people at many times (to which even his celebrity-stuffed address book bears witness).⁵⁴

On the other hand, the Dresden space constituted a remarkable conjunction of Lissitzky’s Soviet and Western agendas. As other essays in the present volume discuss, Lissitzky was the Russian avant-garde’s unofficial ambassa-

dor and courier to western Europe. After installing the Dresden space in June 1926, he visited with the young Dutch architects J. J. P. Oud and Mart Stam in Rotterdam to study their most recent designs for workers' housing estates. He also traveled to Utrecht to make drawings of Gerrit Rietveld's Schroeder House, the flexible interior partitions of which particularly fascinated him, and to Saardam to interview a factory owner about technical processes for the mass production of standard doors. Lissitzky elaborated on his post-Dresden study tour in a detailed account of European and American examples of prefabricated living spaces, which he published in the Moscow technical journal *Stroitel'naia promyshlennost'* (Building industry) in December 1926 (fig. 6). In this survey, which he signed as an architect, Lissitzky argued that the new architect's most fundamental task was the design of a new kind of "dwelling" or "habitation" in which the interior fittings and furniture would be designed and constructed simultaneously with the house itself "as a single whole."⁵⁵

By stipulating that the Dresden *Raum* must constitute a "standard" for exhibition space, rather than a one-off installation, Lissitzky was opening a dialogue with Western practitioners similarly preoccupied with standardized design solutions. There was perhaps no German architect of greater significance on this front than Tessenow, the very architect who was largely responsible for Lissitzky's having secured the Dresden commission in the first place. Tessenow had contributed substantially to the design of Germany's first garden city at Hellerau, outside Dresden. Begun in 1906, Hellerau was one of the initiatives that led to the contemporaneous foundation of the Deutsche Werkbund, in which the German debate over standardization found its earliest forum. Further, as I noted above, the design of apartments and housing estates had been the subject of Dresden's annual summer exhibition in 1925; Tessenow was among its major contributors.⁵⁶ Therefore, despite their substantial ideological and stylistic differences, particularly on the issue of the pursuit of national styles (a topic for which Lissitzky, a sincere Cominternist, had zero tolerance),⁵⁷ Tessenow's pioneering involvement in standardized housing made him a figure of considerable importance for Lissitzky's own developing interest in estate design in 1926.⁵⁸

According to the logic of the standard, the works chosen for presentation within the demonstration space were to be fully interchangeable. Once installed in the demonstration space, however, each work was to be fully *differentiated* in the moment of its display: "Each [work] demands a different manner of isolation and illumination . . . all the works [must] achieve the same degree of effectiveness." (The *same degree* of effectiveness, that is, not the *same effectiveness*.) Lissitzky's problem was thus how to afford each exhibited object the "best optics," just as the "best acoustics are created for the concert-hall."⁵⁹ The function of the demonstration space—the function of Lissitzky's standard—was thus to slow the process of interchangeability on which it was otherwise predicated.

Lissitzky's explicit target was the "great international picture-review . . .

Обыкновенный вагон (рис. 3) или пароход тому примером. Рядом с путями сообщения растут гостиницы, их развитие и усовершенствование должны идти в ногу с подвижными составами. Номер современной гостиницы очень близок по своей планировке к примеру на рис. 4. И в самом деле, мы видим, что каждый, кто ищет новых достижений в культуре жилья, должен обратиться к изучению спального вагона, вагона-ресторана, каюты парохода и в ближайшем к кабине аэроплана и дирижабля. Здесь перед нами тоже стан-

жилья. Он не ученый архитектор, он столяр, он не умеет рутинно чертить план, он все делает в модели, он *осласт* руками вещи, и поэтому его квадрат не абстракция, и поэтому о такой работе нельзя судить по фотографии, ибо на фотографии мы видим лишь вид, а не *жизнь* формы. Его вещи не «функционализм», а служат для определенных функций, и пространство, которое он оформляет для жилья, изменяется соответственно функциям, которые оно должно исполнять. Дом, о котором мы говорим, двухэтажный, —

это тип голландского жилья, но революционизированный. Весь верхний этаж представляет собой одно большое помещение, в котором мебель, за исключением стульев, плотно встроена: шкафы и дивано-постели, и столы расставлены как дома в городе, так, что остаются необходимые для продвижения и пользования как бы улицы и площади. Попадаясь из нижнего этажа по лестнице, мы попадаем сразу в одно большое общее помещение (рис. на обложке). Если мы хотим изолировать лестницу (рис. 5), мы поворачиваем по верхнему барьеру перил раму, и мы получаем застекленную лестничную клетку. Позади лестничной клетки находятся уборная и ванная. Сама ванна находится в нише и закрыта коленчатой дверью; раскрыв ее, она образует угол ABC и мы получаем замкнутую ванную комнату, примыкающую к спальной кабине. На потолке мы видим полосы из углового железа, на плане в местах 1, 2, 3, как бы складные ширмы, задвинутые между шкафами — это остроумные системы сложенной стены. Они очень легко вытаскиваются из их гнезд, бегут вдоль рельса и разделяют общее помещение на 2 или 3 комнаты. Эти перегородки около 6 см. толщиной, из фанеры с прокладкой торфолинеума,

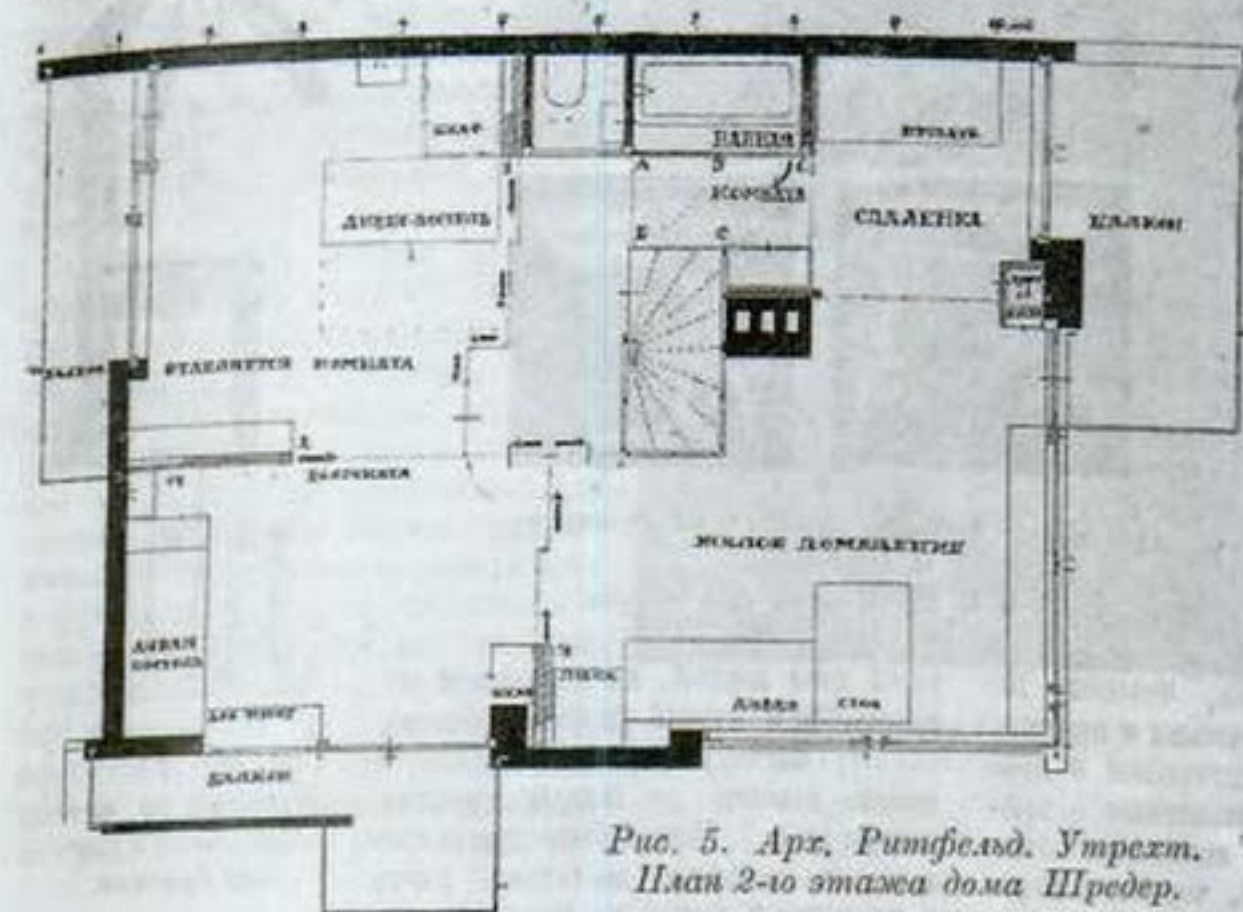


Рис. 5. Арх. Руйтер. Утрехт. План 2-го этажа дома Шредер.

дарты, и стандарты интернационального характера, потому что вагоны и пароходы бегут и плывут через все материки, моря и границы. Не нужно лишь обращаться к роскошным образцам в первом классе, особо на пароходах, стараться имитировать драпировку вкуса богатого особняка с его салонами разных стилей; во средних помещениях мы можем найти в высшей степени ценные приемы утилитарной изобретательности и отличной формы. Мы видим здесь, как новая потребность в экономии пространства, новая обработка материала и свежие головы, не засоренные пылью старых рецептов, создают новую культуру подвижного жилья, качества которого должны быть использованы и для статического жилья.

3. Работа новых архитекторов. Еще нигде не реализовано строительство жилья в порядке массового производства, поэтому и нет еще типа, нет серии. Сегодня повсюду на свете тоже понимают, что необходимо приступить к такой же проработке типа жилья, как Форд прорабатывал тип своего автомобиля. Пока же мы имеем лишь отдельные части жилья в такой проработке (ватерклозет и ванна); сейчас вырабатывается тип кухни, — это что касается целого, отдельные же части, как например, двери, окна и предметы мебелировки, хотя и производятся в массе и сериями, но безусловных типов еще не выработано. Но мы имеем на Западе отдельные опыты художников, производимые ими на свой страх и риск, так же, как они пишут свои картины и лепят статуи; поэтому и нельзя требовать, чтоб эта работа не носила в большей или меньшей степени субъективного характера. Мы останавливаемся здесь на лучшем и единственном в своем роде образце, доме Шредер в Утрехте, голландского архитектора Руйтера. Внешний вид его (Стр. Пром. № 9, стр. 654) уже дает чувствовать, что внутри за этими стенами должно быть и свежее содержание. Руйтер — лучший представитель сегодняшнего художника

задвинутые между шкафами — это остроумные системы сложенной стены. Они очень легко вытаскиваются из их гнезд, бегут вдоль рельса и разделяют общее помещение на 2 или 3 комнаты. Эти перегородки около 6 см. толщиной, из фанеры с прокладкой торфолинеума,



Рис. 6. Арх. Руйтер и Шредер. Спальня в Амстердаме.

изолирующего на тепло и звукопроводность. Когда дети должны заниматься или ложиться спать, они сами в одну минуту отделяют себе комнату. На рис. 6 мы приводим последнюю работу Руйтера — спальню в Амстердаме; так как эта комната исполняет лишь одно назначение, то она еще более кристальноважна, чем предыдущий пример. Мы обращаем внимание на эти работы не только потому, что они

Fig. 6. El Lissitzky

Illustrations of prefabricated living spaces

From El Lissitzky, "Kul'tura zhil'ia" (Culture of dwelling), *Stroitel'naia promyshlennost'* (Building industry) 4, no. 2 (1926): 879

where the visitors are roared at by a thousand different beasts *at the same time*.”⁶⁰ The traditional exhibition space of the time, with its walls carpeted with gilt-framed pictures, created a cacophony of *simultaneously* competing voices, an overloaded environment in which difference is erased. Overstimulation, Lissitzky suggested, induces indifferenciation. The international exhibition, with its inexorable law of exchangeability, anesthetizes its visitor, who then becomes passive, lethargic, bored; according to Lissitzky, “in his march-past in front of the picture-walls . . . [the visitor is] lulled by the painting into a certain *passivity*.”⁶¹

The demonstration space, by contrast, must *interrupt* this cacophonous simultaneity. As I noted at the outset, interruption was Brecht’s cardinal device: “[T]he principle of Epic Theatre, like that of montage,” Benjamin explains in 1932, “is based on interruption. . . . It brings the action to a halt, and hence *compels the listener to take up an attitude* toward the events on the stage.”⁶² Similarly, the demonstration space must orchestrate not only spatial but also temporal rhythms in order to slow the encounter between visitor and exhibited object. “[T]he objects should not all suddenly attack the viewer”; instead, each object should make its entrance individually, staggered in both space and time like the entrance and movement of actors on a stage. Only by interrupting simultaneity will the demonstration space fulfill its “purpose,” Lissitzky argued, which is to “make the man *active*.”⁶³ Lissitzky’s *Standard* is thus driven by two imbricated objectives, each directly dependent on the temporal extension of the process of looking: *differentiation* of exhibited object, *activation* of exhibition visitor. Through differentiation, activation; through activation, differentiation.

The Design Solution

Gallery number 31 of the Dresden Ausstellungs-Palast is a truncated cubic space, as Lissitzky’s axonometric rendering emphasizes, splaying its internal walls at top and bottom like the open flaps of a cardboard box (fig. 7). Its ground plan measures six meters square. Two entrances lead visitors into this boxy space from Tessenow’s long galleries, which can be glimpsed through the drapes that only partially sequester it. For ease of reference in what follows, the wall at the top left of the maquette will be designated the north wall. The access walls would thus be the west and south walls, respectively. Three installation photographs taken by the Dresden architectural photographer Alexander Paul Walther are pasted on the maquette; these correlate to the gallery’s northeast (see fig. 1), southeast (fig. 8), and southwest (fig. 9) corners.⁶⁴ Stretched calico spans the gallery’s upper reaches, serving as both dropped ceiling and vehicle for the diffusion of light from above. Along the north wall, the scrim is striped in yellow for warm illumination, while along the east, in blue for cold—this differentiation is registered tonally in both the axonometric rendering and the installation photograph of the northeast corner (see fig. 1). The single exception to the centrifugality of the space is a constructivist stand in the dead center, supporting Gabo’s *Model for a Rotating*

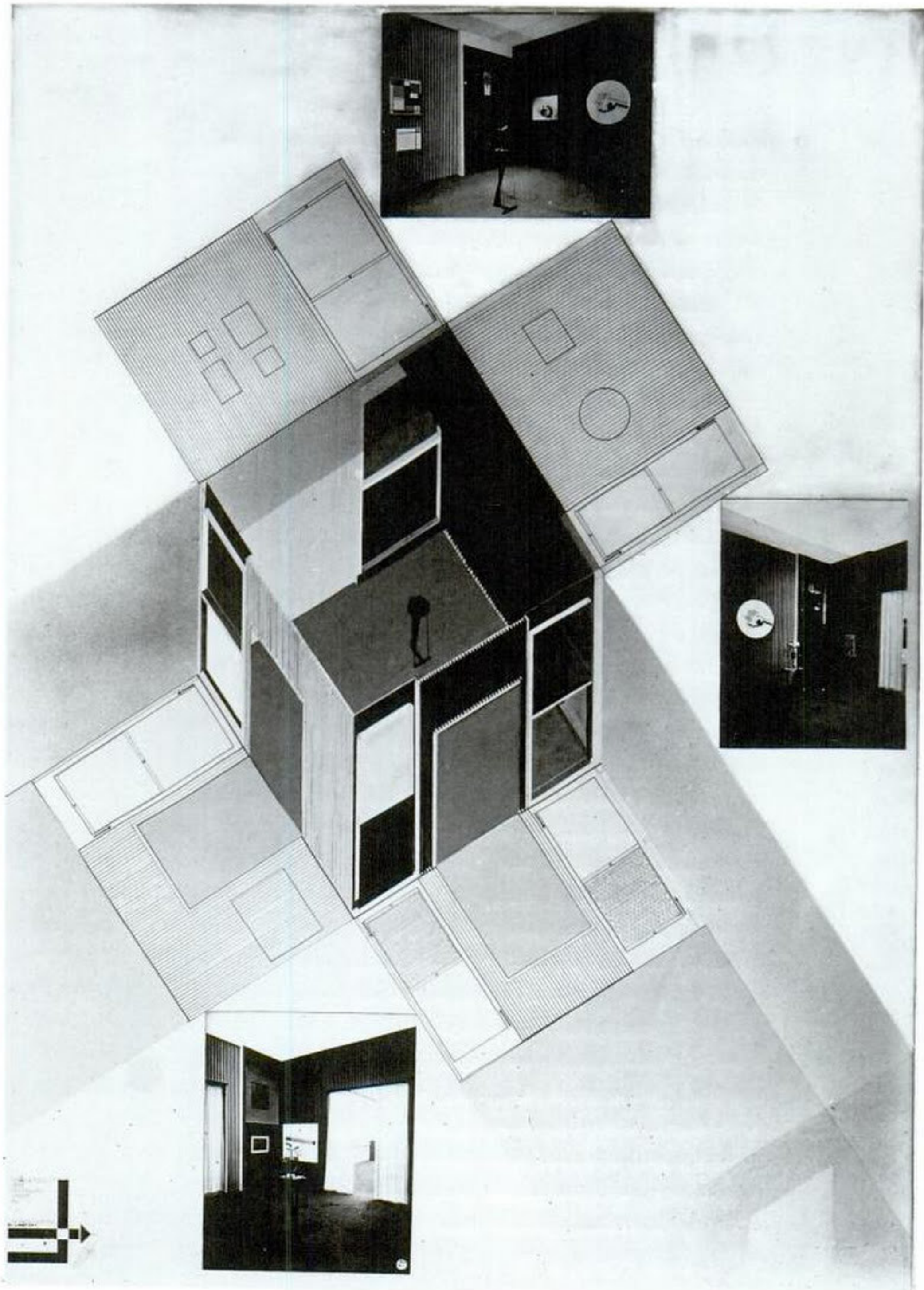


Fig. 7. View of El Lissitzky's maquette for *Raum für konstruktive Kunst*, Internationale Kunstausstellung, Dresden, 1926
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute



Fig. 8. Alexander Paul Walther
View toward "southeast" corner of El Lissitzky's *Raum für konstruktive Kunst*, Internationale Kunstausstellung, Dresden, 1926
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute



Fig. 9. Alexander Paul Walther
View toward "southwest" corner of El Lissitzky's *Raum für konstruktive Kunst*, Internationale Kunstausstellung, Dresden, 1926
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute

Fountain (1925). The stand itself is of particular interest as a literal invocation, or making present — albeit without anything like the disruption of scale relations — of those designed by Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg, the Moscow constructivists whose pioneering constructions are otherwise absent from this so-called space of constructive art.⁶⁵ The original walls are painted the same reserved gray as the rest of Tessenow's galleries. Aside from the ceiling scrim, the design consists in two major devices.

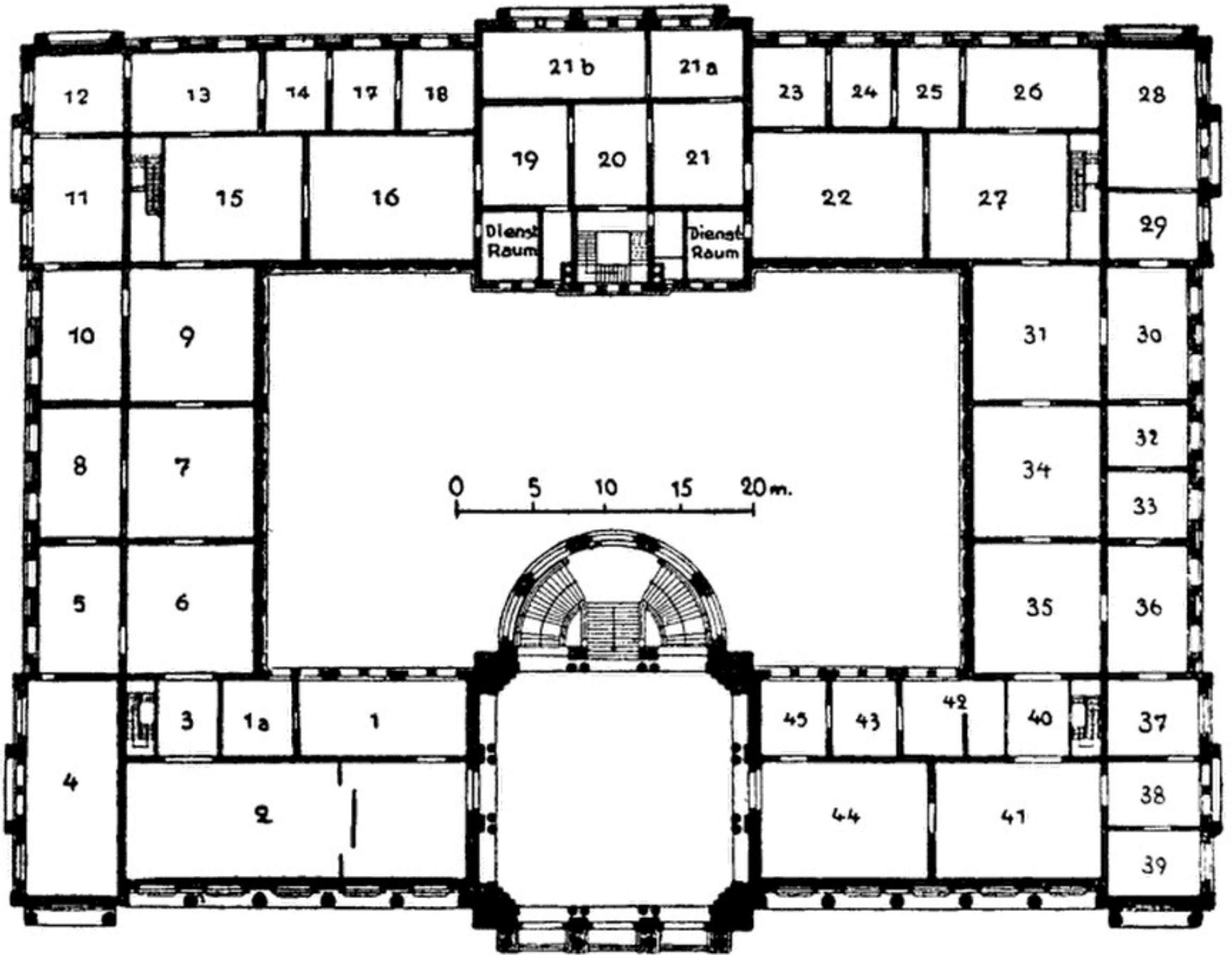
First, Lissitzky ribs the interior of the space from floor to ceiling with a modular *Lattensystem* (lath system), which, in Dresden, is executed in wood. Each vertical lath is 7 centimeters (about 2¾ inches) in depth, extends perpendicularly 7 centimeters from the wall, and is spaced along its breadth at 7-centimeter intervals. With a single modular unit (a piece of wood cut to standard dimensions), Lissitzky wraps the walls of the Dresden gallery in a nonrelational progression (a structure governed by the repetition of homogeneous units rather than the compositional balancing of heterogeneous ones): 7-centimeter units set at 7-centimeter intervals. This “squared” articulation reiterates, in turn, that of the cubic ground plan. Lissitzky seems to have returned, therefore, to the Moscow constructivists' earlier fascination with modular progressions, such as is evident in Aleksandr Rodchenko's third series of spatial constructions and in Karl Ioganson's so-called cold structures.⁶⁶ (While both series dated to 1921, neither was represented in the *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* — further examples of the Moscow group's significant omission from the Dresden space.) In addition, Lissitzky's modular unit, as well as the necessarily repetitive labor that went into its installation, thematizes his endeavor to produce a constructivist standard for exhibition design.

In the wake of Tatlin's *Model for a Monument to the Third International* (1920), open-lath construction had been deployed in a variety of other ways by the constructivists. It was especially characteristic, for example, of the apparatus-like stage designs produced in the early 1920s by Varvara Stepanova, Liubov' Popova, Aleksandr Vesnin, and the Stenberg brothers. For Lissitzky, however, open-lath construction had a more specific valency. Already in 1924, in an essay in *ABC — Beiträge zum Bauen*, a new architectural journal edited by his friend Stam and others, Lissitzky had described the “rib” in terms of “openness,” writing that the “modern style separates the parts under tension from the parts which outline it and enclose it. It does not seek to cover, mask or decorate. Its health is its naked form.”⁶⁷ Yet resistance to the kind of open construction afforded by the rib in favor of traditional masonry construction was what Lissitzky was encountering in Moscow at this time. Thus, in a letter to Küppers of March 1926 he bemoans the specifications (“Everything had to be done in brick”) that he and Ladovskii were obliged to follow in preparing their design of a housing estate for a large textile trust in Ivanovo-Voznesensk.⁶⁸ In the Dresden *Raum*, however, Lissitzky is free of such specifications and thus at liberty to usurp the restrained (and concealed) architectural interior of Tessenow's galleries by laying bare the primary form and material used in the construction of their very partitions.

Before continuing this discussion of the Dresden *Raum*, I would like to consider Lissitzky's substantial alteration of the lath system for the Hannover space, where it was executed in steel (see fig. 2). As noted earlier, the Hannover *Kabinett* was commissioned by Dorner for the Provinzialmuseum after his visit to Dresden in 1926. According to a letter to Tschichold of 26 August 1926, Lissitzky began work on the Hannover design before his return to Moscow in early fall 1926.⁶⁹ The space allocated—gallery number forty-five on the museum's second floor (fig. 10)—was rectangular and of somewhat more intimate dimensions (5.32 by 4.4 meters, or about 17½ by 14½ feet) than that of Dresden. Two windows running almost the breadth of one wall (fig. 11), which overlook the museum's courtyard below, comprised its main source of illumination. In one of the four specification drawings for the *Kabinett*, now in the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Lissitzky refers to this as the window wall (*Fensterwand*). He then designates the entrance wall to its right, Wall 1 (*Wand 1*), that directly opposite, Wall 2 (*Wand 2*), and the wall to its left, Wall 3 (*Wand 3*). Aside from the detailed specification drawings at the Busch-Reisinger, two watercolor sketches and an extraordinary gouache and collage presentation drawing (see pl. 3), to which I will later return, have fortunately been preserved in the Sprengel Museum Hannover.⁷⁰ While Lissitzky did not personally supervise the Hannover *Kabinett's* installation—which was begun in 1927 and completed by early 1928⁷¹—he visited the museum in September 1928 on his way back to Moscow from Paris and gave his approval.⁷²

According to Lissitzky's rough sketch preserved in the Sprengel Museum's archives, each of its 544 exceedingly thin *Eisenbänder* (steel bands) was to measure 4 centimeters (about 1⅝ inches) in depth but no more than a millimeter in width—Lissitzky annotates his sketch *Eisenbänder 40 m[m] × 1 m[m] (oder 0, 8)*. Inserted into a frame, the bands were to extend perpendicularly 3 centimeters (about 1⅛ inches) from the wall and were to be spaced at 2-centimeter (about ¾ inch) intervals.⁷³ The overall effect was an intensification and refinement of the Dresden lath system. In encasing the masonry interior of a neobaroque museum building with steel bands, Lissitzky shifted his construction metaphor from open lath to steel frame. Further, both the Dresden and the Hannover designs appear to broach in micro the typological shift from museum architecture to exhibition building, which Giedion argued marks the historical shift from the early nineteenth century's "nostalgic inclination to imbibe the past" (the museum) to a later fascination with the experimental new materials and structures of industrial building (the exhibition building). "Exhibitions are light buildings, quickly assembled and quickly disassembled: *laboratories for industrial building*," according to Giedion, who notes that this fascination abated "[o]nly when industrial development's initial wonder had lapsed into a self-evident fact."⁷⁴

Within the material conditions of Lissitzky's everyday praxis in Russia in the mid-1920s, that wonder had yet to lapse into self-evident fact. Most poignantly in the Hannover case, therefore, Lissitzky's steel armature might



Plan der Gemäldegalerie des Provinzial-Museums Hannover.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Romanischer Saal | 16. } Holländer | 31. Feuerbach-Saal |
| 2. Saal der goldenen Tafel | 17. } | 32. Spitzweg-Kabinett |
| 3. 15. Jahrhundert | 18. } | 33. Lenbach-Kabinett |
| 4. 15. Jahrhundert | 19. Poussin-Saal | 34. Thoma-Saal |
| 5. } Hans Raphon und sein Kreis | 20. Rokoko-Saal | 35. Schuch-Saal |
| 6. } | 21. Ramberg-Saal | 36. Lenbach-Kabinett |
| 7. Riemenschneider-Saal | 22. } Klassizismus u. Nazarener | 37. Gebhard-Saal |
| 8. Deutsche Renaissance | 23. } | 38. Uhde-Saal |
| 9. Saal der Celler Skulpturen | 24. } | 39. Fr. Aug. Kaulbach-Saal |
| 10. Italiener | 25. } Romantik und Düsseldorf | 40. } |
| 11. Gobelin-Saal | 26. } Schule | 41. } Impressionismus |
| 12. Waffenkabinett | 27. } | 42. } |
| 13. } Manirismus und Flamen | 28. Fr. Kaulbach-Saal | 43. } Expressionismus |
| 14. } | 29. Piloty-Saal | 44. } |
| 15. } | 30. Frühe Franzosen | 45. Abstrakte Kunst |

Fig. 10. Plan of the Gemäldegalerie, Provinzialmuseum Hannover, 1925
Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum

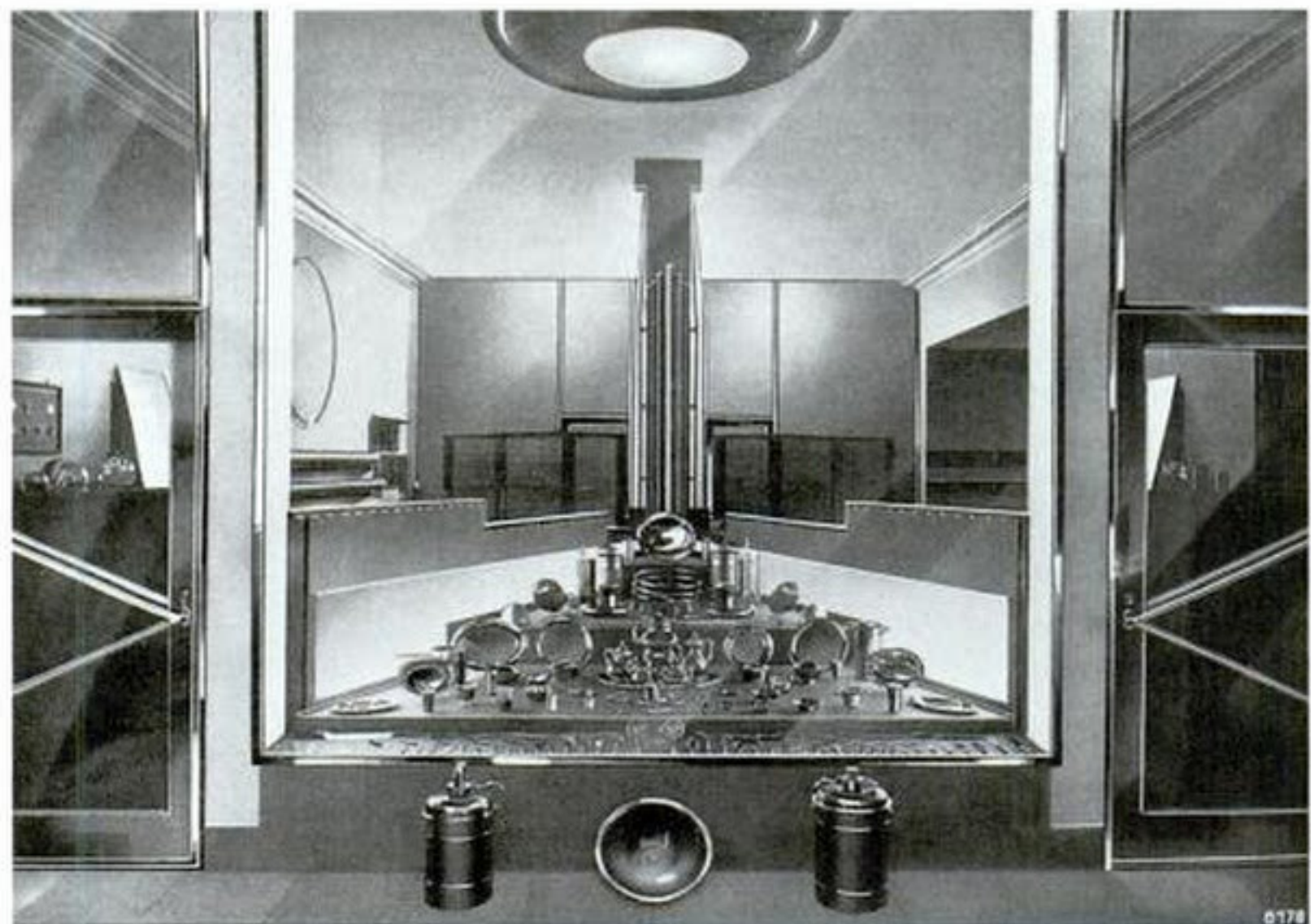
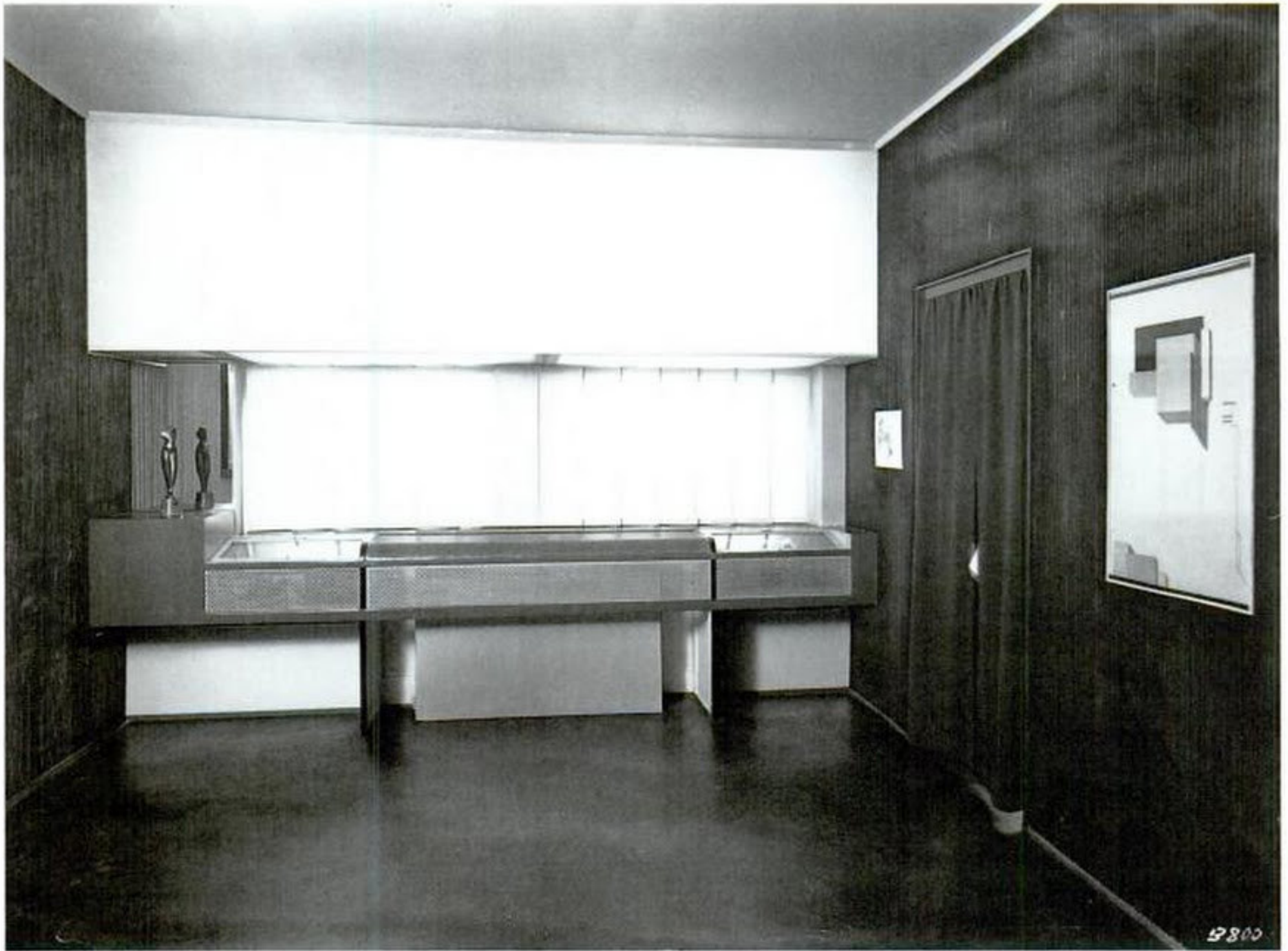


Fig. 11. View of Fensterwand and Wall 1 of El Lissitzky's Kabinett der Abstrakten, Provinzialmuseum Hannover, 1928
Hannover, Sprengel Museum

Fig. 12. Innenansicht des Nirosta-Ausstellungsraumes in Düsseldorf, Königsallee Nr. 28
From *Kruppsche Monatshefte* 9, no.5 (1928): 92

be read as a certain confinement of constructivist ambition, insofar as the artist's participation in the realm of the structural art of the engineer is limited to the microenvironment provided by the museum. Read ungenerously, this confinement might be said to represent Lissitzky's aestheticization and, hence, dilution, of the force of that major historical shift outlined by Giedion in 1928.

There is an important detail, however, that should not be overlooked. In a memorandum to his "2 Demonstrationsräume" text, Lissitzky specified that the bands "should be made in Nirosta (Krupp's stainless steel)."⁷⁵ Invented and patented by two research scientists at Friedrich Krupp AG just before World War I, Nirosta was a chromium-nickel alloy with unprecedented corrosion-resistant properties (hence the term *stainless*).⁷⁶ It was not until the mid-1920s, however, that the German metallurgical giant greatly accelerated its production of Nirosta, rapidly developing the new alloy's industrial, architectural, domestic, and consumer applications. Krupp marketed Nirosta not only in specialist trade fairs but also on the high street in elegant, streamlined Krupp Nirosta *Ausstellungsräume* (showrooms), which opened in Berlin in 1927 and in Düsseldorf in 1928 to stimulate the consumption of stainless steel domestic appliances, kitchenware, and architectural fittings and claddings (fig. 12).⁷⁷ Nirosta was the glamour metal of the interwar period.⁷⁸

Lissitzky's ribbing of the interior of the Hannover demonstration space in the very latest metallurgical invention thus resonates not so much with the steel-frame architecture to which he elsewhere so aspired⁷⁹ — for stainless steel was not, at this time, a viable *structural* material — but rather with the new spanning, and thus blurring, of the otherwise strictly demarcated realms of industrial production and luxury consumption, which Krupp's Nirosta seemed to promise. This indicates a certain critical reconfiguration — or at least an inflection — of the constructivist standard on Lissitzky's part. As I have generally described them in this section thus far, the demonstration spaces are constructivist eulogies to the structural art of the engineer and modern mass production: open-lath construction, cubic space, modular units, nonrelational progressions, and Krupp's steel. They are demonstrations of Lissitzky's confidence in the rib's capacity to guarantee the stability of the "parts under tension," demonstrations of faith in the certainty and progressive character of industrial modernity. There is a sense, however, in which, at the very same time, Lissitzky's demonstration spaces undermine that confidence, query that faith, subvert that logic of standardization, unravel that cube, and stem the inexorable march of the modular unit, so as to obviate constructivism's apparent rush into a technocratic embrace of mechanization, technologies of mass production, and, accordingly, social engineering.

That rush is undermined by what Lissitzky calls the demonstration space's *optische Dynamik* (optical dynamic). "Generated as a consequence of the human stride," it is this *optische Dynamik* (or "play of the walls"), he writes, which "makes the spectator active."⁸⁰ Here, Lissitzky is referring to his having painted each lath in the Dresden *Raum* white on its left side, black on its

right side, and gray on its front edge. Thus, once installed, the painted laths produced a white wall from a left vantage point; a gray wall from a position directly in front; and a black one from the right. (Although Lissitzky unpacks his concept of the *optische Dynamik* specifically with regard to the Dresden *Raum*, a “M[emorandum]” to his discussion implies that he projected a comparable dynamic for the Hannover *Kabinett*, since he notes that its colors will also be “white—gray—black.”⁸¹)

If the visitor stood at the west entrance to the Dresden space, for example, she or he found directly ahead—and thus on gray—an enlargement of Lissitzky’s photograph *Untitled (Hand with Compasses)* (1924; see p. 132, fig. 1),⁸² and his gouache-and-paper *Round Proun* (1926).⁸³ From the same standpoint, Mondrian’s paintings on the wall to the left—the north wall—appeared on white. As the visitor entered the gallery and moved closer to Lissitzky’s works, the north wall gradually turned to black through an infinitesimal range of shades of gray. This process of architectural chiaroscuro was reversed in the case of the south wall, to the visitor’s right, which shifted from black to gray to white as the visitor approached Lissitzky’s work. Entering via the Dresden *Raum*’s south entrance, however, the visitor found Mondrian’s work directly ahead on gray, Lissitzky’s work to the right on a black wall that transformed into white as she or he moved closer to the north wall, and so on, ad infinitum.

In Hannover, by contrast, the enameling of the steel bands was orchestrated with respect to the gallery’s primary source of illumination—the windows; the bands on Walls 1 and 3 were enameled white on the side facing the windows and black on the obverse. Those on Wall 2 were white on the side facing Wall 1 and black on the side facing Wall 3. Hence, in figure 13, looking toward the conjunction of Walls 1 and 2 with one’s back to the windows, the effect of striation is lighter in tonality than in figure 11, for example, where looking directly toward the windows, the bands create an almost black wall. The mirror behind Aleksandr Arkhipenko’s *Flat Torso* (at the left of fig. 11) reflects what we do not see from our vantage point close to Wall 2: at the point at which the vertical steel bands and the left edge of the mirror converge, the striated wall flips from black to white, from dark to light, from shadow to illumination.

The significance of Lissitzky’s *optische Dynamik* is that it undoes both the lath system’s modular structure and the cubic symmetry of the Dresden ground plan—an undoing that is crucial to the artist’s self-appointed task of designing a space in which the exhibited objects are differentiated. In “2 Demonstrationsräume,” Lissitzky asserts that, via its *optische Dynamik*, the works hung on the lath system “acquire a three-fold life.”⁸⁴ A triad of photographs first published by Traugott Schalcher in December 1928 (and reproduced many times since) documents this effect (fig. 14). Lissitzky’s early gouache *Proun schwebender Körper* (1919), installed on Wall 1 of the Hannover *Kabinett* (to the left in fig. 13 and to the right in fig. 11), is photographed from a left vantage point, where it appears on a striated light ground;



Fig. 13. View of Walls 1 and 2 of El Lissitzky's *Kabinett der Abstrakten*, Provinzialmuseum Hannover, 1928
From Alexander Dorner, "Zur abstrakten Malerei: Erklärung zum Raum der Abstrakten in der Hannoverschen
Gemäldegalerie," *Die Form* (Berlin) 3 (1928): 113

Kabinet der Abstrakten-Malerei
Museum Hannover

Room for Abstract Painting
Museum Hanover

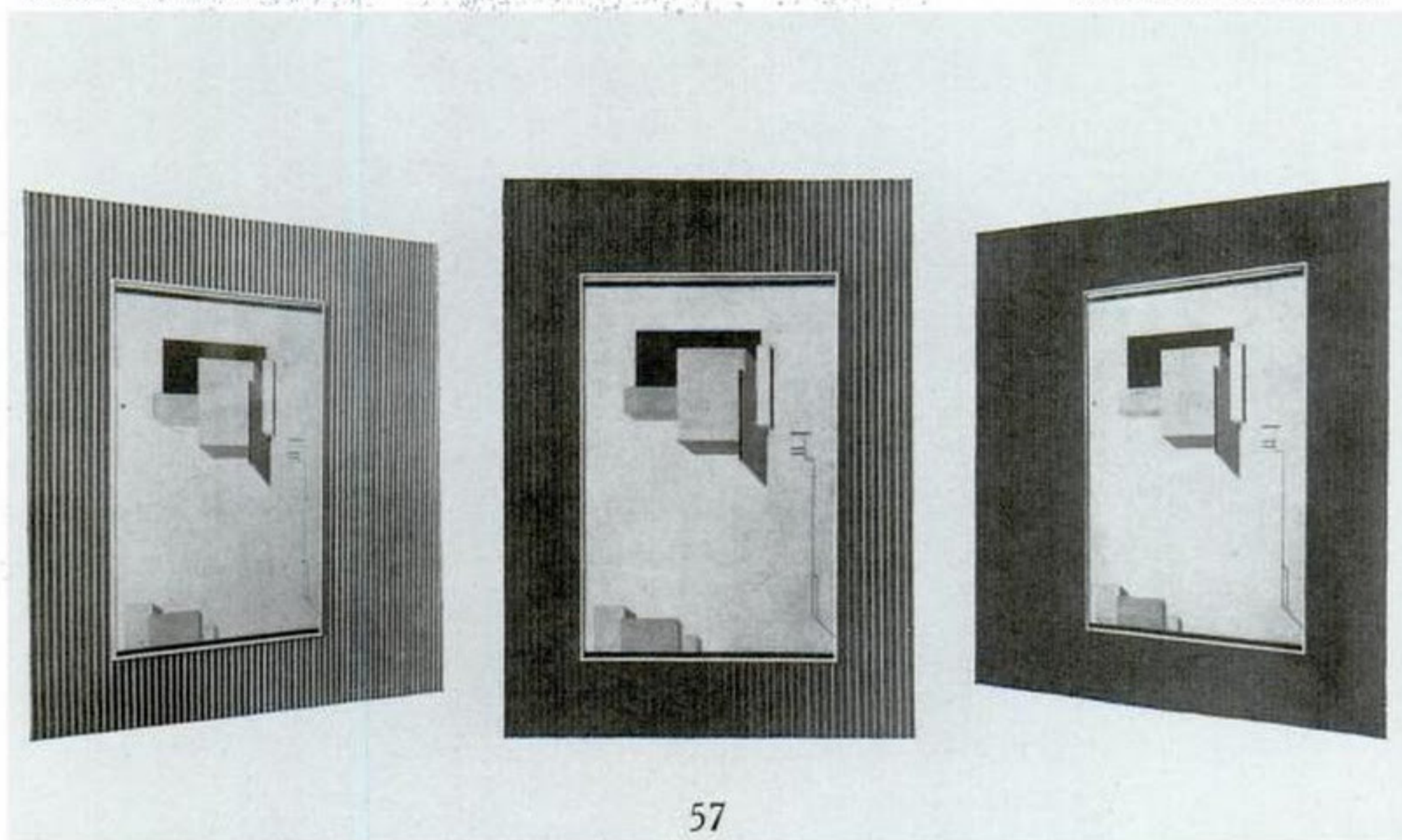


Fig. 14. Three views of El Lissitzky's *Proun schwebender Körper* (1919) installed on Wall 1 of his *Kabinet der Abstrakten*, Provinzialmuseum Hannover, 1928

From Traugott Schalcher, "El Lissitzky, Moskau," *Gebrauchsgraphik* 5, no. 12 (1928): 57

then frontally, where the ground is intensely contrastive; and finally, from the right, where the ground is almost black.⁸⁵

But these works acquire more than a threefold life; in fact, they acquire a near infinity of lives, as Lissitzky himself notes: “With every movement of the spectator in the room the impression of the walls changes — what was white becomes black and vice versa.”⁸⁶ Lissitzky’s multiplication of sensory images thus departs from Tessenow’s binary relationship of easel painting to background, in which the background is subordinated to the painting as its static resting place or supporting ground. Lissitzky activates the background itself. In so doing, the artist’s endeavor to differentiate the exhibited object finds itself inextricably bound up with the problem of parergonality: if each work has as many individuations as backgrounds, the process of its differentiation can never be reduced to the pursuit of that object’s supposed, if elusive, autonomy. Lissitzky’s *optische Dynamik* thus redefines the task of differentiation not as a finite process of essentialization but as an ongoing process that will remain, necessarily, always incomplete.

Thus, if we compare Tessenow’s and Lissitzky’s respective attempts in the Dresden exhibition to overcome the cacophony of the traditional mode of exhibition, we find that Tessenow rejects that mode outright while Lissitzky appropriates one of its central features so as to invert it. It is the lath system, rather than Tessenow’s proto-white cube, that initiates a dialogue with the quasi-architectural framework created in the older, salon-style museum installations by the close alignment of picture frames — what Lissitzky called the “crucifixion” of pictures (fig. 15).⁸⁷ The lath system reconfigures this mode of installation into an invitation to active engagement.

If Lissitzky’s first device of differentiation in the Dresden *Raum* was the encasing of its interior with a modular armature disrupted by an *optische Dynamik*, his second device is to be found in the floor-to-ceiling casings (*Kassetten*) with which he punctuated each of the gallery’s corners. Within the confines of these semi-open casings, works were hung directly on the wall one above another — perhaps also a nod to the traditional mode of display but without its tendency to overcrowding. A sliding, perforated metal screen (in Hannover, a solid black plate) was inserted into the casing’s vertical runners. The perforation of the screen, insofar as it revealed the work it supposedly concealed, incited the visitor to raise or lower the screen. (Small knobs found at the middle of the top and bottom of each screen enabled the visitor to operate the device.) The casings introduced into the exhibition the constructivist fascination with the mechanics not just of motion in general but of traction in particular — in this instance, the adhesive friction of the screens dragged along their runners. Further, in the Hannover *Kabinett*, Lissitzky reduced the number of vertical casings to two but increased the number of tiers to three, thereby shifting registers from an architectural motif (a gigantic sash window; see fig. 8) to a cinematic one (the filmstrip; see fig. 13).

Lissitzky notes that the varying widths of the casings in Dresden — ranging from 110 to 190 centimeters (about 43 to 75 inches) — shift the “visual axes”

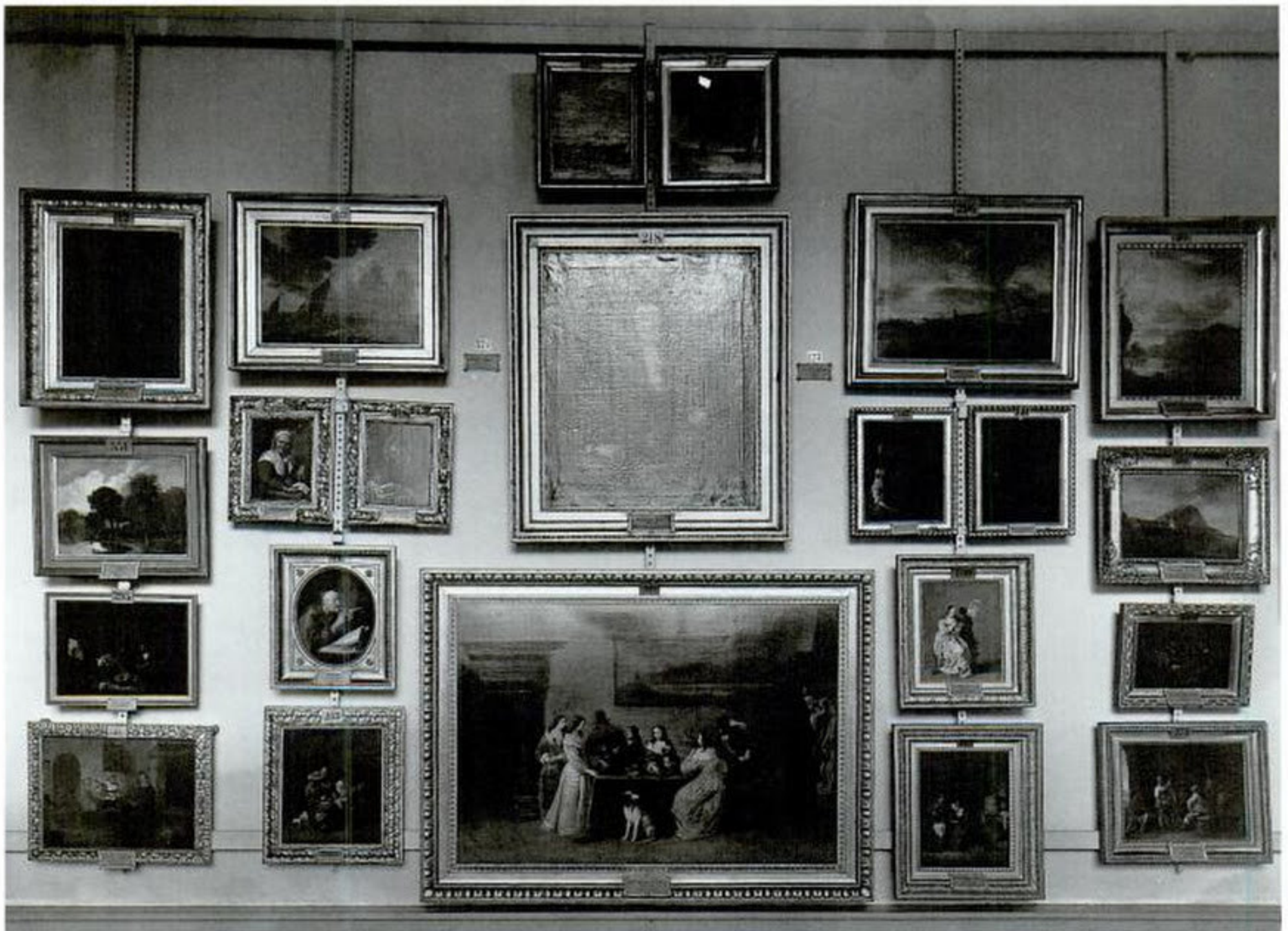


Fig. 15. View of the Gemäldegalerie (Kabinett 13), Provinzialmuseum Hannover, 1922
Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum

of the space away from the “symmetrical axes of the doors,” thus creating an asymmetrical “rhythm of the whole.”⁸⁸ The symmetry of the cubic space is further disrupted by Lissitzky’s busy animation of one corner in particular, wherein two vertical casings “collide,” as Pevsner expressed it in 1926 (see fig. 9).⁸⁹ While the number of corner casings was reduced in the Hannover *Kabinett*, Lissitzky extended his thematic of asymmetry there through the asymmetrical conjunction of the casings that enclose two oils by Mondrian and two sheets from his own *Sieg über die Sonne* (1923; Victory over the Sun) portfolio of lithographs. Here, it is as though the two halves of the vertical casing found in the corners of the Dresden *Raum* have been slid apart in order to have sandwiched between them a horizontal casing comprising two movable panels. Also exclusive to Hannover—and apparently Dorner’s idea⁹⁰—were the horizontal vitrines on either side of the radiator on the window wall (see fig. 11); these contained four-sided display boxes, which were to be rotated by the visitor. According to Cauman, the vitrines presented an illustrated text on “the effects of abstract art on the features of daily life,” which dealt chiefly with modern technologies of printing, advertising, fashion, and architecture.⁹¹

Dorner’s Stimmungsraum

Lissitzky was an artist whose work Dorner had known, admired, and acquired since 1923, primarily through mutual connections in Hannover. It is worth noting, however, that prior to visiting the Dresden exhibition, Dorner knew Lissitzky chiefly as a maker of *Prouns* and was unfamiliar with the artist’s more recent concerns. His commissioning and subsequent interpretation of the Hannover *Kabinett* are best understood within the context of his major reorganization of the Provinzialmuseum’s galleries, a task to which he dedicated himself for several years after assuming the directorship in 1923.⁹² Under his predecessor, the installation of the museum’s galleries mirrored the nature of its holdings: an assortment of individual collections of often diverse objects, each collection a discrete universe unto itself. The governing principle of the Provinzialmuseum’s organization was that of patrimony, its collections having been acquired through imperial marriages and other acts of state and regional administration.

Dorner sought to unite these hybrid collections into one vast inventory; he would then redistribute the latter’s contents according to each object’s specific place within an evolutionary and teleological narrative of world art-historical production culminating in the art of abstraction. Each gallery was thus to represent a particular period and its *Weltanschauung*. In orchestrating this shift from patrimony to periodization as organizing principle, Dorner was acting in accordance with museological trends since Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s design of what is now the Altes Museum (1823–30), which had largely abandoned another earlier model—the beaux-arts’ model of great exemplars—for the sake of a narrative of historical development. To that end, Dorner introduced the concept of the *Stimmungsraum*, in which an empathetic relation between

the works and the space in which they were presented would facilitate the visitor's apprehension of the specific achievement and character of each period in the history of art. Instead of associated decor, the *Stimmungsraum* introduced perceptual clues in order to make distinctions between art-historical periods: low illumination, for example, enhanced the rich luminosity of the works hung in the medieval galleries; baroque paintings, by contrast, were hung in gilt frames on red velvet backgrounds.⁹³

In contrast to Ockman—who suggests that Lissitzky's Hannover *Kabinett* was the *culmination* of Dorner's synaesthetic concept of the atmosphere room⁹⁴—I would argue that there is a fundamental difference between Lissitzky's invention and Dorner's interpretation of it as a *Stimmungsraum*, a difference somewhat occluded, as mentioned at the outset, by the latter's later claim to have collaborated on its design.⁹⁵ The primary issue here is one's interpretation of Lissitzky's transformation of the walls of the demonstration space, of his refusal to subordinate those walls to the objects displayed on them, and of his manifest consciousness of the parergonal differentiation of a work of art's identity and significance.

In his most important early essay on the Hannover *Kabinett*, which was published in April 1928, Dorner argues that Lissitzky's armature of metal slats deprives the wall of its traditional character as a tangible, graspable, or concrete surface (*greifbar Fläche*) and affords it a floating quality (*etwas Schwimmendes*).⁹⁶ Dorner is referring to the way in which Lissitzky's *optische Dynamik* set the room in motion, destabilizing once rigid coordinates, dematerializing once tactile surfaces. In a review of the space, Giedion describes this effect in comparable terms, stating that "these strips throw vertical clefts of shadow and dematerialize the wall to the point where it seems to dissolve completely."⁹⁷ Nothing to dispute so far. The problem lies with what comes next in Dorner's account.

The effect of spatial destabilization produced by the design of the Hannover *Kabinett*, Dorner argues, *corresponds* precisely to a comparable effect in the works exhibited within it. For Dorner, the essential feature and achievement of abstraction is a new conception of representation in which space is infinite, dissolving, dematerializing, optical, traversible by the eye but not the body—one cannot imagine oneself physically within such spaces. This new conception of spatial representation replaces, in his view, the primary ambition (so the story goes) of painting since the Renaissance—the illusion, by means of perspective and chiaroscuro, of three-dimensional volumes in an apparently tactile, that is, physically traversible, space. According to Dorner, the Hannover *Kabinett* presents the progressive breakdown of this ambition, beginning with cubism (the decomposition of space), proceeding through Mondrian (an art of pure surface), and culminating in Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy (free compositions floating in infinite space in which neither foreground nor background may be defined).⁹⁸

Whether Dorner's teleological account of abstraction's genesis is convincing is less important than the fact that, within his interpretation of Lissitzky's

demonstration space, dematerialization is defined as the *Stimmung* (mood or atmosphere) of which Lissitzky's *Kabinett* is the *Raum*. Had the walls been, for example, a mute gray (as in Tessenow's Dresden galleries), they would have, Dorner implicitly suggests, "iron[ed] out" (that is, destroyed) the dematerialized space of the "constructivist compositions" hung on them.⁹⁹ Instead, Dorner argues, Lissitzky produced a synthetic environment in which architectural and pictorial space cohere, mutually courting and reiterating each other. In this way, the artist had found a solution to the problem of exhibiting so-called constructivist art, a problem that had been raised by numerous artists and critics since its advent. Dorner's adequation of Lissitzky's destabilization of museological space with the essence of abstraction is an example of that which Giedion described in 1928, in another context, as the international exhibition's "peculiar demand for premature synthesis," comparable to the analogous desire for a "total work of art [*Gesamtkunstwerk*]," the desire "to generate a version of the human cosmos."¹⁰⁰

I have tried to show that the purpose of Lissitzky's *Standard* was to facilitate the differentiation rather than synthesis or totalization of the works within the space of exhibition. The design was to encourage the visitor's intimacy with the work of art by endeavoring to refocus his or her attention in a context otherwise given over to restless distraction. Its devices facilitated the visitor's active differentiation of the works on display through their revelation and reconcealment, or through their incessant reformulation by the parergonal shifts induced by the visitor's own movement within the space. Dorner, by contrast, sought to impart a certain synthetic content to the visitor's apprehension of the works on display—for the museum director, the Hannover *Kabinett* was a gigantic, explanatory wall text.

The Man with a *Kabinett*

It seems likely that Dorner hosted or otherwise played a role in Vertov's visit in early June 1929 to Hannover, and to the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* in particular. They had mutual acquaintances and interests, and, in any case, the director customarily played cicerone to the museum's foreign visitors.¹⁰¹ Yet Vertov's response to the *Kabinett* in his letter to Lissitzky of 1929 opens a trajectory of thinking apropos the *Demonstrationsräume* rather different than that initiated by Dorner (fig. 16).

In order to elaborate and extend on Vertov's commentary, we should return to his original sentence: "Dolgo tam sidel, osmatrivat i oshchupyvval."¹⁰² The last two verbs are of particular interest in the present context—*osmatrivat'* (to examine or inspect, to look round or look over) and *oshchupyvvat'* (to touch, feel [for], or probe from all sides in order to examine and analyze, or, to grope about [in]).¹⁰³ An entirely valid rendering of this sentence—although, for my purposes, one much less interesting than Margarita Tupitsyn's, which I quoted at the outset—might read, "I sat there for a long time, examined and touched." A little odd perhaps, due to Vertov's transitives having no designated objects, but within the rhetorical form of a letter



Fig. 16. Still from *Chelovek s kinoapparatom (Man with a Movie Camera)*, dir. Dziga Vertov, 1929
New York, Thomas Walther Collection

to a friend and colleague these would be implied. In the most immediate sense, then, Vertov would seem to be reporting to Lissitzky his interactive experience of the Hannover *Kabinett*: sliding movable screens, examining works thereby revealed, rotating cylinders in glass vitrines. Activation in this sense meant *participation*: Vertov's purposeful manipulation of the *Kabinett*'s kinetic devices.

But I think something more than visitor participation is implied by Vertov's "osmatrival i oshchupyval." That something more is conveyed by Tupitsyn's translation: "I sat there for a long time, looked around, groped." By rendering *oshchupyval* as *groped* (rather than *touched*), Tupitsyn captures in English precisely the Russian word's stronger, more disquieting, less salutary, and even ugly dimension. *Groped*, insofar as it also suggests an illicit or otherwise improper mode of touching, thematizes the transgressive nature — vis-à-vis conventional museum decorum — of the behavior solicited by Lissitzky's demonstration space. Vertov is thus acknowledging his recognition and acceptance of that invitation to transgression.

At the same time and, more important, *groped* lessens somewhat the transitive force of Vertov's phrase, thus avoiding its reduction to a simple account of the operation of the Hannover *Kabinett*'s interactive devices, as important as these are to Lissitzky's theory and practice of exhibition. A more profound sense of tactility is at issue here, for "to grope about (in)" is also to feel about in the dark or *as if* in the dark, to feel about, deprived of the sense of sight or *as if* so deprived. While Vertov's usage is not intransitive, it seems to veer in that direction, broaching a curious self-reflexivity wherein the action occurring starts to refer back to the body of the subject performing it. In groping about as if in the dark or deprived of sight, one's body becomes implicated — in the sense of made vulnerable — in the performance of that action in a way that is not the case when one is merely examining something (the latter implying a kind of detached or disembodied mastery over the object under examination).

In fact, insofar as the Hannover *Kabinett*'s devices afford the visitor a certain delimited mastery, there is even a sense in which their manipulation is inconsistent with Vertov's professed groping. I want to suggest, therefore, that it is rather to Vertov's experience of Lissitzky's *optische Dynamik* or flicker to which his "oshchupyval" chiefly refers. Centrifugally wrapping the space, Lissitzky's "play of the walls" is unrelenting, brooking no exception. Triggered by the movement of all or part of the filmmaker's body and in fact an index of his body in motion, the flicker destroys the spatial coordinates that would otherwise afford equilibrium, pushing Vertov into a kind of free fall. In the demonstration space, therefore, vision is a matter of the body not only in motion but also at risk, which in turn induces a rush to shore up — grope for or toward — bodily integrity. Nothing could be further removed from the safety of Mondrian's design of 1925 for an interior in the home of Ida Bienert, which Lissitzky criticized in a letter to Küppers in March 1926 as but "a still-life of a room, for viewing through the keyhole."¹⁰⁴ Lissitzky's spectator

does not devour the optical flicker; rather, the optical flicker devours his spectator. It is this experience, I think, which underlies Conrad Buchwald's bizarre description of the Dresden *Raum* as "half operating theatre, half padded cell,"¹⁰⁵ insofar as these are both sites of bodily subjection, one surgical, the other carceral.

It is Lissitzky's experience of the disorienting effect of the Dresden *Raum*'s *optische Dynamik* that motivates his exacerbation of that effect in spectacular fashion in the course of revising the demonstration space for the Provinzialmuseum. In comparison to the more sober Dresden maquette (see fig. 7), Lissitzky's presentation drawing for the Hannover *Kabinett* (see pl. 3) is profoundly disorienting. A single detail almost seems to *announce* this disorientation—an axonometric projection of a cubic volume at the left of the window wall, sandwiched between the third wall and the left glass vitrine, in front of a mirror of the same dimensions rendered in aluminum leaf. (In the *Kabinett* itself, this cube serves as a stand for Arkhipenko's *Flat Torso* [see fig. 11].) In the presentation drawing, a red rhombus designates the cube's front, an implied white rhombus its right side, and an oblique black diamond its upper surface. But with the encroachment of the vitrine from the right and the presence of the rhombus of aluminum leaf designating the mirror, we become increasingly less aware of the cube and more aware, instead, of the concertina-like rhythm of three distinctly articulated planar elements, each derived from the suprematist vocabulary of Lissitzky's *Prouns*: red rhombus, black diamond, aluminum rhombus.¹⁰⁶

When we try to grasp the precise concatenation of these suprematist elements, matters get interesting. Consider the black diamond shape, for example. On the one hand, it signifies the top of a black-, red-, and white-sided cubic volume set against an aluminum-leaf wall plane. On the other hand, it represents the underside of a black-, aluminum-, and striated-sided cube that cantilevers out from and over a red wall plane. The alternation between these two distinct concatenations is harsh on our eyes—their graphic elements seem to ricochet from one volume to the other and back, *ad infinitum*. This ricochet is characteristic not only of this particular detail, however, but also of the drawing's overall spatial ambiguity.

In the boxlike Dresden maquette (see fig. 7), each of the four "flaps" unambiguously explicates the frontal elevation of its corresponding, but axonometrically rendered, wall. Each planar flap is, as it were, a notational repetition that serves to open up the Dresden *Raum*'s interior, facilitating the viewer's grasp of its overall spatial volume. In the Sprengel Museum's drawing, by contrast, Lissitzky dispenses with the maquette's straightforward, explicative function. The flap is no longer the notational repetition—and, thereby, the explication—of the wall but rather constitutes it. Flap and wall are one and the same. This greater economy produces, however, a graphic polysemy that frustrates our mental grasp of the whole.

To construct a four-sided spatial volume from the graphic evidence presented, therefore, we rotate the Sprengel sheet 180 degrees, from Blick A

(View A) in right-side up position to Blick B (View B) in right-side up position. (One also notes the inversion of the stenciled letters—positive on negative; negative on positive.) What is a floor to the third and window walls in Blick A becomes, in Blick B, their ceiling. Further, the point at which the orthogonals of these three planes intersect (in other words, the corner) is *both* concave *and* convex in *both* Blick A *and* Blick B. Similarly, what would have been a ceiling to the second and first walls in Blick A—had not Lissitzky mounted a photographic fragment (the figure of a gallery “visitor” in so-called workers’ clothing) onto the sheet, thereby momentarily rescuing the design from its infinite oscillation—becomes, in Blick B, their floor. Again, the intersection of their orthogonals is both convex and concave in Blick A; in Blick B, it is concave only, saved from a simultaneous convexity only by virtue of the mounted figure. The Sprengel Museum’s presentation drawing thus constructs a space in which all coordinates and contours are undermined, a space that cannot be grasped as a coherent whole, not even through a sequential accumulation of views. Yve-Alain Bois has identified and brilliantly analyzed this oscillating effect of protension/retention, or plus/minus, or positive/negative in the Sprengel Museum’s sheet as the dominant characteristic of the artist’s *Prouns* as well.¹⁰⁷

What, then, is the significance of Vertov’s epigrammatic invocation—by means of “oshchupyval”—of a metaphors of darkness or blindness in reporting to Lissitzky his experience of the Hannover *Kabinett*? For it would seem that such a metaphors is particularly oxymoronic with regard to a space of brilliant illumination, both on the literal register of its natural or artificial lighting, and also more figuratively, in the sense of its dedication to enlightenment through sensory perception (although of a kind in which the traditional antithesis of optical and tactile is destroyed). Through his invocation of a metaphors of darkness or blindness, Vertov acknowledges Lissitzky’s production of spatial destabilization in the Hannover *Kabinett*—the “ungraspable” character of its walls—as had Dorner, but reads its significance diversely. For the filmmaker, destabilization is not one of two terms in a theory of correspondence underpinned by a will to synthesis but is, rather, the key to the demonstration space’s primary achievement: its disorientation of its spectator and subsequent redirection of the spectator’s attention to the contingency of his or her corporealization. A significant paradox emerges here: the *optische Dynamik* corporealizes precisely by undoing one’s presumed bodily integrity. It is as if the tactile dimension of the demonstration space—the relief quality of the lath system—having been dematerialized by the *optische Dynamik*, is not so much negated altogether as it is rerouted to the visitor’s own body, which, in its sensory disorientation, takes that tactile dimension unto itself.

Thus elaborated, Vertov’s epigrammatic commentary opens up Lissitzky’s theory and practice of activation, fleshing out something of its phenomenological operation. “Oshchupyval,” to put it bluntly, is Vertov’s response to the disorientation he experiences in the Hannover *Kabinett*, a disorientation

induced by *his own movement* in that space. What Vertov's response seems to point out to his friend and colleague is that there exists a crucial underside to this process of activation: Lissitzky's theory of activation is not, in other words, to be mistaken for a theory of mastery. To be activated, Vertov's metaphors of darkness or blindness implies, is to be disoriented, corporeally undone.

Returning to the chiasmus with which this essay began—theater as exhibition, exhibition as theater—it is now possible to suggest that if the epic theater's cardinal device for the activation of the spectator is interruption, that of the *Demonstrationsräume* is disorientation. As we have seen, the specific form this device takes in Lissitzky's demonstration spaces is that of a visitor-triggered *optische Dynamik*.¹⁰⁸ The sheer stridency of the Hannover design's articulation of the thesis that it shares with that of the Dresden *Raum*—activation as sensory disorientation—is predicated on, and itself a reading of, the work accomplished by that earlier space. Further, if one may describe Lissitzky's venture into the medium of exhibition design in the mid-1920s as a demonstration, it is a demonstration that refuses to cede reason to rationality or standardization to technocracy. As such, the *Demonstrationsräume* constitutes a crucial intervention within the history of constructivism, for it averts the danger that the latter's certitude as to the necessarily progressive character of technological advance will careen into an unbridled submission to technocratic order and authority. It redirects the constituent elements of constructivism's technological certitude toward the task of meeting the challenge laid out by, among others, Eisenstein—the production of an art of extreme cognition and extreme sensuality. In doing so, Lissitzky's *Demonstrationsräume* opens a trajectory of major importance in the history of twentieth-century art, that of spaces explicitly dedicated to the production of the viewer's disorientation. In a sense, it is the proliferation of such spaces in the postwar period that provides the historian with a critical language with which to acknowledge and unpack Lissitzky's foundational contribution to this trajectory.¹⁰⁹ Vertov's epigrammatic commentary, in the elaborated form in which I have presented it, now affords that critical language, in turn, further historical texture and resonance.

Notes

For facilitating my research for this essay, I would like to thank Nancy Perloff, Wim de Wit, and the staff of the Department of Special Collections and Visual Resources at the Getty Research Institute; Peter Nisbet at the Busch-Reisinger Museum; and Dietmar Elger and the curatorial staff of the Sprengel Museum Hannover. Sincere thanks also to Eduardo Cadava, Harry Cooper, Ed Dimendberg, Françoise Forster-Hahn, Jodi Hauptman, David Joselit, Juliet Koss, Karen Lang, Stephen Melville, Brian Reed, and Mariët Westermann for their generous comments and critical suggestions, and to Brendan Fay, Kimberly Mims, Michael Taylor, and Margarita Tupitsyn for crucial assistance.

1. Walter Benjamin, "Was ist das epische Theater? (Erste Fassung)," in idem, *Versuche über Brecht*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 8; translation (modified) from "A Study on Brecht: What Is Epic Theatre? (First Version)," in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostok (London: NLB/Verso, 1973), 2.

2. El Lissitzky, Moscow, to Sophie Küppers, Hannover, 8 February 1926, El Lissitzky: Letters and Photographs, 1911–1941, Getty Research Institute, acc. no. 950076 (box 1, folder 4). Unless otherwise noted, the originals of all letters from Lissitzky to Küppers cited in the present essay are collected in this folder; further references will provide only the date of the letter. Translation (slightly modified) from Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 74. In the Lissitzky literature, *Raum* is often translated as "room"; in this essay I tend to prefer its broader meaning, "space."

3. Walter Benjamin, "The Return of the *Flâneur*" (1929), trans. Rodney Livingstone, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 263–64.

4. Lissitzky to Küppers, 8 February 1926; translation (slightly modified) from Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 74. Lissitzky here reiterates an earlier insistence in the discussion of his *Proun Room* (1923), that the exhibition space "should not be a living room.... The space is not a living room"; see El Lissitzky, "Prounenraum: Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung," *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, no. 1 (1923): 4; translation (slightly modified) from Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 365.

5. In drawing this connection, I am building on Yve-Alain Bois's compelling argument as to the Brechtian politics underpinning Lissitzky's artistic production between 1919 and the mid-1920s; see Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America* 76, no. 4 (1988): 167–68.

6. Despite many shared interests and the fact that they moved for some time in overlapping artistic and social circles, there is no evidence as far as I know that Lissitzky and Brecht were personally acquainted. It is interesting to note, however, that Lissitzky published an article in *Das neue Frankfurt* (1930) on his design (ca. 1926–28) for the total restructuring of director Vsevolod Meyerhold's theater in Moscow, in which he claims to have "completely superseded the stage" by fully merging it with the auditorium, so that the "actors... no longer have anything to do with the stage"; see El Lissitzky, "Der Innen-Aufbau des Theaters Meyerhold-Moskau für Tretjakows 'Ich will ein Kind,'" *Das neue Frankfurt* 4 (1930): 226; quoted in translation in Peter Nisbet, "An Introduction to El Lissitzky," in Peter Nisbet et al., *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941*, exh. cat. (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 1987), 40. The initial impulse for Lissitzky's dissolution of the traditional division between stage and auditorium was Meyerhold's ambition to stage *Khochu rebenka* (I want a child) by Sergei Tret'iakov, the Soviet writer with whom Brecht developed a close personal and professional relationship in Berlin in 1931. When Tret'iakov's play was suppressed in the Soviet Union, Brecht sought to stage it in Germany; see Robert Leach, "Brecht's Teacher," *Modern*

Drama 32 (1989): 509. Given its resonance with a number of Brecht's concerns, it seems unlikely that Lissitzky's text of 1930 would not have come to the German director's attention.

7. Kai-Uwe Hemken, "Pan-Europe and German Art: El Lissitzky at the 1926 Internationale Kunstausstellung in Dresden," in Jan Debbaut et al., *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*, exh. cat. (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1990), 46–55.

8. For a detailed account of Dorner's gradual accommodation to the Nazis between 1933 and 1936 in a bid to safeguard the collections of the Provinzialmuseum, including the *Kabinett* (which, being the work of a Jewish Communist vanguard artist, faced threefold repression), see Monika Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik: Die Tätigkeit Alexander Dorners im Provinzialmuseum Hannover* (Marburg: Jonas, 1985), 111–16.

9. See Alexander Dorner, *The Way Beyond "Art": The Work of Herbert Bayer* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947), 17–18; for the erroneous captions, see 115, 238.

10. Samuel Cauman, *The Living Museum: Experiences of an Art Historian and Museum Director: Alexander Dorner* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1958), 100–108. More recent interest in dismantling the traditional delimitation of the role of institutions in cultural production—as manifest in patronage and museum studies (among historians) and in the practice of institutional critique (among artists)—has also tended to shelter Dorner's assertion. For example, in her excellent reassessment of Dorner's lifelong achievement (which departs substantially from the eulogistic tone of Cauman's book), Joan Ockman acknowledges the Hannover *Kabinett's* Dresden precedent but nevertheless reiterates Dorner's claim to collaboration in support of her overall argument that he should be accorded the status of an "avant-garde museum director"; see 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: Monacelli, 1997), 90–91. It is interesting to note, however, that in the late 1920s Dorner made no claim to the Hannover design having been a collaboration. In his earliest published reference to the *Kabinett*, he refers exclusively to a "Prof. Lissitzky" as "the architect who created this museum space"; see Alexander Dorner, "Zur abstrakten Malerei: Erklärung zum Raum der Abstrakten in der Hannoverschen Gemäldegalerie," *Die Form: Monatsschrift für gestaltende Arbeit* 3, no. 4 (1928): 114.

11. Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 118, suggests that the Hannover *Kabinett* was reconstructed as a kind of *Gedächtnisraum* (memorial room) to Dorner.

12. Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Lissitzky Room," *Art Journal* 31 (1971): 128.

13. Nikolaus Pevsner, "Internationale Kunstausstellung — Rußland," *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 30 July 1926; see Nikolaus Pevsner Collection, Getty Research Institute, acc. no. 840209 (box 137), unpaginated notebook labeled "Zeitungs-Artikel. 1925–1926 I." Between June and August 1926, Pevsner published over a dozen reviews of the Internationale Kunstausstellung in the regular column, "Kunst und Wissenschaft," which he contributed to the *Dresdner Anzeiger*; he later pasted them into notebooks preserved in box 137 of the Pevsner Collection at the Getty Research Institute.

14. See Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 64, 184 n. 102; and Ockman, “The Road Not Taken” (note 10).

15. See Cauman, *The Living Museum* (note 10), 85–92; Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 39–76; and Ockman, “The Road Not Taken” (note 10), 86–87.

16. Dziga Vertov, Berlin, to El Lissitzky, Moscow, 7 June 1929, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI; Russian state archive for literature and art), f. 2091, op. 2, ed. khr. 294, l. 6; quoted in translation in Margarita Tupitsyn, “Back to Moscow,” in idem, *El Lissitzky: Beyond the Abstract Cabinet: Photography, Design, Collaboration* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 39. I am extremely grateful to Margarita Tupitsyn for kindly relocating and retranscribing the original Russian text of Vertov’s letter on my behalf.

17. Tupitsyn, “Back to Moscow” (note 16), 40 n. 79; and Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 88.

18. El Lissitzky, “2 Demonstrationsräume,” n.d. (ca. 1926), typescript, Alexander Dorner Nachlaß, Sprengel Museum Hannover; translated as El Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms,” in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 366–67.

19. See Marco de Michelis, *Heinrich Tessenow, 1876–1950* (Milan: Electa, 1991), 276; and Hemken, “Pan-Europe” (note 7), 54.

20. Will Grohmann, “Die Kunst der Gegenwart auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,” in Will Grohmann, Gustav Allinger, and Georg Biermann, *Internationale Kunstausstellung, Jubiläums-Gartenbau-Ausstellung*, special issue of *Der Cicerone* 18 (1926): 377; quoted in translation in Hemken, “Pan-Europe” (note 7), 46. Grohmann’s text was written by arrangement with Posse.

21. Hemken, “Pan-Europe” (note 7), 46, 54.

22. Pevsner, “Internationale Kunstausstellung — Rußland” (note 13); trans. Michael Taylor.

23. Pevsner, “Internationale Kunstausstellung — Rußland” (note 13); trans. Michael Taylor.

24. In his exhibition review (“Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden,” *Meissner Tageblatt*, 24 July 1926), Walter Preusser wrote, “The only artist who behaves like a Bolshevik is Lissitzky with his constructivist cabinet”; quoted in translation in Hemken, “Pan-Europe” (note 7), 55. Pevsner fleshes out Preusser’s claim in his own review of the Russian *Saal*: “Whoever had expected to see here a radical, Bolshevik art will be amazed to encounter nothing but peaceful, harmless painters — and however characteristic that might be for the present stage of development of that land’s Bolshevik culture, neither ‘the party’ nor art lacks men who have maintained their original nihilism.” Pevsner attributes the problem, in part, to the absence of nonobjective artists such as Kazimir Malevich, Ol’ga Rozanova, and Vladimir Tatlin. “In this respect,” he continues, “the Russians’ exhibition of 1922 in Berlin was certainly much more substantial and varied.” (The selection of the Russian *Saal* was made not by Posse but by the Soviet cultural bureaucracy, which by 1926 was no longer controlled by leftist or futurist artists, as it had been at the time of the exhibition to which Pevsner refers, the Erste Russische Kunstausstellung of 1922 in Berlin.) In Pevsner’s opinion, Lissitzky’s *Raum* was a major exception to the otherwise disappointing Russian representation: “No

area of the exhibition,” he wrote, “requires a thorough explanation as much as this one.” See Pevsner, “Internationale Kunstausstellung — Rußland” (note 13); trans. Michael Taylor. Lissitzky himself commented on the German response to the *Raum* in a letter of 6 November 1926 to Il’ya Chashnik, his former comrade from UNOVIS (Utverditeli novogo iskusstva; Affirmers of the new art) now in Leningrad: “The press referred to [the *Raum*] as the only Bolshevist work of art at the Exhibition”; trans. John E. Bowlt in *El Lissitzky*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1976), 75.

25. Roman Jakobson, “Dada,” *Vestnik teatra* 82 (1921): 3; translated as Roman Jakobson, “Dada,” trans. Stephen Rudy, in idem, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1987), 34.

26. See Gerda Wangerin and Gerhard Weiss, *Heinrich Tessenow, ein Baumeister, 1876–1950: Leben, Lehre, Werk* (Essen: Richard Bacht, 1976), 40.

27. Paul Schumann, “Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926,” *Die Kunst* 42, no. 1 (1927): 1–16; quoted in Italian in de Michelis, *Heinrich Tessenow* (note 19), 275 (translation mine).

28. Adolf Behne, “Öffnet die Museen!” *Welt am Abend* (6 January 1928); quoted in Italian translation in de Michelis, *Heinrich Tessenow* (note 19), 275 (translation mine).

29. Justi to the Minister of Science, Art, and Public Education, 13 July 1928, Staatliche Museen Berlin, Archiv; quoted in Italian translation in de Michelis, *Heinrich Tessenow* (note 19), 275 (translation mine). Although John Ruskin had called for such single-tier installations several decades earlier, the practice apparently did not become widespread until the 1930s; see Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 312 n. 28.

30. Pevsner, “Internationale Kunstausstellung — Rußland” (note 13) (emphasis added); trans. Michael Taylor.

31. Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 62; and Lissitzky to Küppers, 30 January 1926; translation (slightly modified) from Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 73.

32. Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 60–61.

33. Lissitzky to Küppers, 8 February 1926; translation from Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 74. Lissitzky is specifically concerned about the following: “(1) Is [the *Raum*] in the existing exhibition buildings, or is a new pavilion being built? (2) The size — floor area and height. (3) Lighting (overhead lighting or windows). (4) Roughly which artists are exhibiting in the room.”

34. Lissitzky to Küppers, 6 March 1926: “Mich interresiert [*sic*] sehr ob was mit den Dresdener Raum gelingt?”

35. Lissitzky to Küppers, 23 March 1926; translation (slightly modified) from Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 75.

36. In this connection, however, it is interesting to note that in a letter to Wassily Kandinsky of 5 May 1926, Posse refuses to grant the Dessau Bauhaus a collective project room on the grounds that the exhibition committee is commissioning such rooms only from “individuals”; see Hemken, “Pan-Europe” (note 7), 53.

37. Lissitzky to Küppers, 29 March 1926; translation (modified) from Lissitzky-

Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 75. Aside from the implied difference in size, it is important to note Lissitzky's differentiation between "modern" and "the new." In German artistic and architectural discourses of the 1920s, *modern* is a term used as a chronological marker, a more or less neutral term referring to that which is produced at the present time. *New*, by contrast, is an evaluative term signifying that which is considered progressive, advanced, avant-garde. On this distinction, see Rosemarie Haag Bletter's "Introduction," in Adolf Behne, *The Modern Functional Building*, trans. Michael Robinson (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996), 2–3.

38. Significantly, Lissitzky's sentence apropos the "Lenin corner" is omitted in Lissitzky-Küppers's publication of the 29 March 1926 letter. Lenin corners began to be erected in factories, apartment buildings, and workers' clubs in the wake of Lenin's death in January 1924. Most typically, such corners were filled with traditional easel pictures or portrait busts, but the Soviet avant-garde also contributed in less conventional ways to this aspect of Soviet ritual building. Aleksandr Rodchenko, for example, included a Lenin corner (comprising a large photograph mounted on the wall behind his model for a chess table, itself a metaphor for the late Soviet leader) in his worker's club installed at the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes in Paris in 1925. Nevertheless, Lissitzky's comment might also be construed as a swipe at Rodchenko's design, which Lissitzky-Küppers later compared unfavorably to the "revolutionary élan" of both Konstantin Melnikov's pavilion and Lissitzky's own honorific *Lenin Tribune*; see Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 60.

39. Lissitzky to Posse, 30 March 1926; quoted in translation in Hemken, "Pan-Europe" (note 7), 47 n. 6.

40. Posse to Kandinsky, 5 May 1926; quoted in translation in Hemken, "Pan-Europe" (note 7), 53.

41. Lissitzky to Küppers, 10 May 1926; translation (slightly modified) from Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 75–76.

42. Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 76.

43. The reserves to which Küppers refers includes works by an international contingent of artists—primarily of a cubist (Fernand Léger, Georges Braque, Albert Gleizes, Robert Delaunay), dadaist (Francis Picabia, Man Ray), neoplastic (Piet Mondrian), or constructivist (Lissitzky) bent—which Küppers had collected for a series of exhibitions she curated at the Dresden gallery Kühl and Kühn in fall 1925; see Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 61. Most of this work was unfamiliar to Dresden audiences before Küppers's intervention.

44. *Internationale Kunstausstellung Dresden 1926: Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit*, exh. cat. (Dresden: n.p., 1926); see Hemken, "Pan-Europe" (note 7), 47 n. 7.

45. El Lissitzky, "Proun Room: Great Berlin Art Exhibition (1923)," in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 365. On the *Proun Room* as a demonstration of the art of exhibition, see Yve-Alain Bois, "Exposition: Esthétique de la distraction, espace de démonstration," *Les cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 29 (1989): 73–74.

46. See Lissitzky, "Exhibition Rooms" (note 18). The original typescript of this

posthumously published text is undated (“2 Demonstrationsräume” [see note 18]), but Peter Nisbet argues that it was written in late summer or fall 1926; see Peter Nisbet, *El Lissitzky in the Proun Years: A Study of His Work and Thought, 1919–1927* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1995), 364 n. 90. To this I would add only that it seems to be composed of texts written on separate occasions. A lengthy first section—dealing with the concept of the demonstration space in general and the Dresden *Raum* in particular—was perhaps initially drafted in early 1926 in order to secure the commission and then revised after the completion of the Dresden installation as a form of commentary on it. Two short paragraphs dealing specifically with Lissitzky’s plans for the Hannover *Kabinett* seem to have been added in the form of memoranda—hence (perhaps) the *M* that precedes each of the additional paragraphs in the original typescript and German edition of Lissitzky-Küppers’s book; see El Lissitzky, “Demonstrationsräume,” in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Maler, Architekt, Typograf, Fotograf: Erinnerungen, Briefe, Schriften* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1976), 367.

47. My discussion of *Demonstration* is based on entries in Hans Schulz, *Deutsches Fremdwörterbuch* (Strassbourg: Karl J. Trübner, 1913), 1:133–34; Hermann Paul (who draws from Schulz), *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 9th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1992), 167; and Hans Schulz and Otto Basler, *Deutsches Fremdwörterbuch: Begonnen von Hans Schulz, fortgeführt von Otto Basler* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 272–83. I am greatly indebted to Michael Taylor for his assiduous research assistance with the German lexica.

48. Sergei Eisenstein, “Perspektivy,” *Iskusstvo*, no. 1–2 (1929): 116–22; translation from “Perspectives,” trans. Jay Leyda, in Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, *Writings, 1922–1934*, ed. Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1988), 158 (emphasis added).

49. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366; and Lissitzky, “2 Demonstrationsräume” (note 18).

50. The same principle of substitution also governs the Hannover space; in fact, Lissitzky’s *Kabinett* seems to have served as something of a stimulus to Dorner’s acquisition of nonfigurative works for the Provinzialmuseum. Building its collections in this area around his 1923 Lissitzky acquisitions—*Proun schwebender Körper* (1919; see *Katalog der Kunstsammlungen im Provinzialmuseum zu Hannover* [Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1930], 1:265 [cat. no. 412]), and the two Kestner lithographic portfolios (1923)—Dorner acquired in 1929 (that is, after the installation of the *Kabinett*) another Proun, the *Abstrakte Komposition* (1923) (see *Katalog*, 1:265 [cat. no. 414]) and one of the two Mondrian oils, *Abstrakte Komposition* (1923) (see *Katalog*, 1:274 [cat. no. 432]). Initially, these were loans from Küppers’s reserve—hence their appearance in the installation photographs of 1928 (that is, before their acquisition by the museum). A second Mondrian, *Schildery Nr. 2* (1925), which had also been shown in the Dresden *Raum*, was on permanent loan to the museum from Küppers (see *Katalog*, 1:274 [cat. no. 433]).

51. Lissitzky to Küppers, 23 March 1926; see Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 74–75.

52. Lissitzky’s letters to Küppers on 21 March 1924, 2 April 1924, and 8 February 1926 refer to this issue; see Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 47, 48, 74.

53. See El Lissitzky, “Prouns: Towards the Defeat of Art” (1921), trans. John E.

Bowlit, in *El Lissitzky*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1976), 63, 65, 66; Bois, “El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility” (note 5), 170–75; and Maria Gough, “Tara-bukin, Spengler, and the Art of Production,” *October*, no. 93 (2000): 89–92.

54. El Lissitzky: Letters and Photographs, 1911–1941, Getty Research Institute, acc. no. 950076 (box 1, folder 7).

55. See Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 25, 40, 81; and also El Lissitzky, “Kul’tura zhil’ia” (Culture of dwelling), *Stroitel’naia promyshlennost’* 4, no. 12 (1926): 881. Perhaps thanks to Lissitzky, a photograph of the Schroeder House appeared on the issue’s cover.

56. See de Michelis, *Heinrich Tessenow* (note 19), 273–74, 276.

57. See, for example, Lissitzky to Küppers, 12 December 1924, El Lissitzky: Letters and Photographs, 1911–1941, Getty Research Institute, acc. no. 950076 (box 1, folder 2); translation in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 56.

58. Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 76, 81. Also of interest to Lissitzky in this connection was one Lüdecke, a young architect from Hellerau, who had designed, in collaboration with Küppers and a socialist mayor, a working-class housing estate for the industrial town of Harburg. Küppers had exhibited his work in an exhibition she curated at the Kestner Gesellschaft in 1925. After completing the Dresden space, she and Lissitzky visited Lüdecke at Hellerau; see Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 61, 76.

59. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366.

60. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366 (emphasis added).

61. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366 (emphasis in original).

62. Walter Benjamin, “Theater and Radio” (1932), trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *idem, Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 584–85 (emphasis added). To the epic theater, Benjamin contrasts mainstream “big-city theater,” which “always produce[s] itself as ‘symbol,’ as ‘totality,’ as *Gesamtkunstwerk*” (p. 584). Benjamin’s short text is largely based on Brecht’s earliest exposition of his model of epic theater in 1930, in which he discusses the direct effect his methods have on opera, namely, the “radical *separation*” of its elements. Such separation is essential, Brecht argues, in order to overcome the “process of fusion” by which “the spectator . . . gets thrown into the melting pot . . . and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art”; see Bertolt Brecht, “The Modern Theatre Is the Epic Theatre (Notes to the Opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*),” in John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), 37–38 (emphasis added). While I cannot discuss the complex question of Brecht’s Wagnerian inheritance here, I quote this passage because it directly connects the problem of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* with the condition of passivity that Lissitzky is seeking to overcome in his demonstration space.

63. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366 (emphasis in original). For a brief, general introduction to Lissitzky’s concern with activation, see Alan C. Birnholz, “El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation,” in Stephanie Barron and Maurice Tuchman, eds., *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910–1930: New Perspectives*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980), 98–101.

64. As far as I know, no documentation of the northwest corner has been preserved.

65. That Lissitzky had been particularly taken with constructivist stands by the Stenberg brothers is evident from his enthusiastic review of the Moscow exhibition of May 1921 at which they were first shown as an ensemble; see Ulen [El Lissitzky], "Die Ausstellungen in Russland," *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet*, no. 1–2 (1922): 18–19; translated as Ulen [El Lissitzky], "The Exhibitions in Russia," trans. Kestutis Paul Zygas, *Oppositions* 5 (1976): 125–28.

66. On Rodchenko's series, see Maria Gough, "Faktura: The Making of the Russian Avant-Garde," *RES: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 36 (1999): 52–55. On Ioganson's series, see Maria Gough, "In the Laboratory of Constructivism: Karl Ioganson's Cold Structures," *October*, no. 84 (1998): 91–117.

67. Translated as "Element and Invention," in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 350.

68. Lissitzky to Küppers, 23 March 1926; translated in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 75.

69. Lissitzky to Tschichold, 26 August 1926, Jan and Edith Tschichold Papers, 1899–1999, Getty Research Institute, acc. no. 930030 (box 3, folder 1). My thanks to Nancy Perloff for conveying to me the contents of this letter.

70. The gouache sketches (Sprengel Museum Hannover) and specification drawings (Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts) are reproduced in, inter alia, Beatrix Nobis, "Das Abstrakte Kabinett in Hannover und andere Demonstrationräume El Lissitzkys," in Norbert Nobis, ed., *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941: Retrospektive*, exh. cat. (Hannover: Sprengel Museum Hannover, 1988), 225 (cat. nos. 236–42).

71. The earliest indication I have found of the completion of the installation is a short notice accompanied by photographs by one Redemann that was published in *Das Kunstblatt* (February 1928). According to this unsigned article, the Hannover *Kabinett* was "recently opened on the occasion of the conference of the Association of German Museums"; see "Ein Museumsraum für abstrakte Kunst," *Das Kunstblatt* 12, no. 2 (1928): 52.

72. Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 87.

73. Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 64, 186 n. 126; for a reproduction of Lissitzky's sketch, now in the Alexander Dorner Nachlaß, Sprengel Museum Hannover, see Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 139.

74. Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Eisen, Eisenbeton* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928), 36; translation from Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete*, trans. J. Duncan Berry (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 120 (emphasis in original). See also Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 406–7.

75. Lissitzky, "Exhibition Rooms" (note 18), 367.

76. John Henry Gill Monypenny, *Stainless Iron and Steel*, 2d ed. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1931), 20–22, 142.

77. For photographs of the trade-fair displays, see *Kruppsche Monatshefte* 7, no. 9

(1926): 164; 8, no. 4 (1927): 78–80; 8, no. 6–7 (1927): 126–27. For the high-street shops, see *Kruppsche Monatshefte* 8, no. 6–7 (1927): 128; 9, no. 5 (1928): 92; 12, no. 5 (1931): 115.

78. Its most celebrated early architectural use was the crowning of the Chrysler Building in New York with some forty-five hundred sheets of Nirosta, and the decorative paneling of its interior; see “Nirosta und Chrysler-Gebäude,” *Kruppsche Monatshefte* 12, no. 5 (1931): 112–17.

79. See El Lissitzky, “Arkhitektura zheleznoi i zhelezobetonnoi ramy” (Architecture of the steel and reinforced-concrete frame), *Stroitel’naia promyshlennost’* 4, no. 1 (1926): 59–63.

80. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366. In this crucial formulation, Lissitzky’s initial ambition—that the pictures become actors—is transposed so that it is now the visitors who must become the actors in the space of exhibition. Tschichold later picks up on the transposition in his essay “Display That Has Dynamic Force: Exhibition Rooms Designed by El Lissitzky,” *Commercial Art* 10, no. 1 (1931): 22, in which he describes the way in which space, in Lissitzky’s trade-fair exhibition design, “became a sort of stage on which the visitor himself seemed to be one of the players.”

81. See Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 367. In Hannover, the *optische Dynamik* was to have been further enhanced by “periodically changing electric lighting,” but electrical circuits were apparently unavailable; see Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 367. Given the lustrous quality of Nirosta, it is somewhat puzzling that Lissitzky chose to enamel the stainless-steel bands, since in themselves, along with the clefts of shadow cast by them, they would have produced a comparable effect of spatial destabilization.

82. The enlargement made in 1926 is now lost. The original image—a compass proffered in an open palm lying flush against a background of graph paper on which an elongated curve has been drawn—is one of the photographic elements incorporated into Lissitzky’s *Self-Portrait* (1924). Nisbet suggests that the enlargement was probably hand-colored, since Tschichold reproduced it in an article of 1932 with the following caption: “In the original, blue in the lower right, yellow in upper left, line red.” With such a declaration of the three primary colors, Nisbet suggests, Lissitzky thereby opened a debate with Mondrian, whose work hung on the adjacent wall; see Nisbet, *El Lissitzky in the Proun Years* (note 46), 361 n. 86.

83. *Round Proun*, a simplified version on wood of the lithograph *Proun 6B* (see Nisbet, *El Lissitzky in the Proun Years* [note 46], 133 n. 21, 360), was one of the two *Prouns* Lissitzky planned to execute for the *Raum*; the second remained unrealized. On the basis of a review of the Dresden exhibition published by Küppers in the *Hannoverscher Kurier* in August 1926, Nisbet speculates that the *Round Proun*, in its installation in the Dresden *Raum*, perhaps may have been able to be physically rotated by visitors; see Nisbet, *El Lissitzky in the Proun Years* (note 46), 133 n. 21. If so, this would add a further kinetic device to Lissitzky’s design.

84. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366.

85. See Traugott Schalcher, “El Lissitzky, Moskau,” *Gebrauchsgrafik* 5, no. 12 (1928): 57.

86. Lissitzky, “Exhibition Rooms” (note 18), 366.

87. This photograph shows a pre-Dorner installation at the Provinzialmuseum Hannover; see Cauman, *The Living Museum* (note 10), 30. In a letter to Küppers, Lissitzky writes: "The walls should not be used for the crucifixion of the pictures. We will introduce quite different principles from those hitherto employed in exhibitions and museums"; see Lissitzky to Küppers, 8 February 1926; translation from Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 74.

88. Lissitzky, "Exhibition Rooms" (note 18), 366.

89. Pevsner, "Internationale Kunstausstellung—Rußland" (note 13).

90. Nobis, "Das Abstrakte Kabinett" (note 70), 223.

91. Cauman, *The Living Museum* (note 10), 104.

92. According to Flacke-Knoch, who cites earlier examples in Essen, Erfurt, and Krefeld, commissioning artists to design museum galleries was not an entirely uncommon practice in Germany in the 1920s; see Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 189 n. 178.

93. See Ockman, "The Road Not Taken" (note 10), 86–87; Cauman, *The Living Museum* (note 10), 85–92; and also Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 39–76.

94. Ockman, "The Road Not Taken" (note 10), 87.

95. As far as I know, Flacke-Knoch is one of the few historians to have argued that Dorner's reading of the *Kabinett* as *Stimmungsraum* in fact compromised the artist's intentions; see Flacke-Knoch, *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 73–74, 116, 119–20.

96. Alexander Dorner, "Zur abstrakten Malerei" (note 10), 114. See also Flacke-Knoch's gloss on this essay in *Muzeumskonzeptionen* (note 8), 74–76.

97. Sigfried Giedion, "Lebendige Museen," *Der Cicerone* 21, no. 4 (1929): 105–6; translated as Sigfried Giedion, "Live Museum," in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 383.

98. Dorner, "Zur abstrakten Malerei" (note 10), 111–13.

99. Dorner, "Zur abstrakten Malerei" (note 10), 114. Elsewhere Dorner contrasts the Palais de Versailles and Gropius's Dessau Bauhaus in order to argue that a new conception of space is not exclusive to modern painting but also fundamental within architectural history; see Alexander Dorner, "Considérations sur la signification de l'art abstrait," *Cahiers d'art* 6, no. 7–8 (1931): 354–55.

100. Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich* (note 74), 37; quoted in translation in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (note 74), 175.

101. Lissitzky-Küppers and Lissitzky intervened on Vertov's behalf in Germany, arranging introductions and also his lectures at the Kestner Gesellschaft and elsewhere; see Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, "Skvoz' dal' minuvshikh let," in Elizaveta Vertova-Svilova and Anna Vinogradova, eds., *Dziga Vertov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* (Dziga Vertov in the reminiscences of contemporaries) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), 185–88. Küppers also published an illustrated article on Vertov's work in the May 1929 issue of *Das Kunstblatt*, to coincide with the opening of the Film und Foto exhibition in Stuttgart the following month; see Sophie Küppers, "Schaut das Leben durch das Kino-Auge Dsiga Werthoffs," *Das Kunstblatt* 13, no. 5 (1929): 141–46.

102. Vertov to Lissitzky, 7 June 1929, RGALI, f. 2091, op. 2, ed. khr. 294, l. 6; quoted in translation in Tupitsyn, "Back to Moscow" (note 16), 39.

103. In this paragraph I draw on the relevant entries in the *Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Dictionary of modern Russian literary language), vol. 8 (Moscow: Izd. Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959).

104. Lissitzky to Küppers, 2 March 1926; translated in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (note 2), 74.

105. Conrad Buchwald, "Die Internationale Kunstausstellung in Dresden," *Schlesische Zeitung*, 19 June 1926; cited and translated in Kai-Uwe Hemken, "Pan-Europe and German Art: El Lissitzky at the 1926 Internationale Kunstausstellung in Dresden," in Jan Debbaut et al., *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*, exh. cat. (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1990), 47.

106. The Sprengel Museum's drawing is reproduced in color in Tupitsyn, *El Lissitzky* (note 16), frontispiece.

107. "This oscillation of a plane in opposite directions, its change from bi- to tri-dimensionality and back again, is essential to the *Proun*"; see Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility" (note 5), 174.

108. For a different reading of the significance of Lissitzky's emphasis on activation, see Myroslava M. Mudrak and Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, "Environments of Propaganda: Russian and Soviet Expositions and Pavilions in the West," in Gail Harrison Roman and Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, eds., *The Avant-Garde Frontier: Russia Meets the West, 1910–1930* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1992), wherein it is argued that Lissitzky "manipulated the visual environment for the display of modern abstract art, a manipulation that held the possibility for ideological application." His *optische Dynamik* "held the possibility of visual manipulation that could be used for didactic and propagandistic purposes" (pp. 74–75). This possibility cannot be contested, but the question remains to what extent Lissitzky is responsible for the use to which his demonstration space was, according to Mudrak and Marquardt, later put? See also Christina Lodder, "Seeing Red: Lissitzky's *Abstract Cabinet* and the Ideology of Display," *Umění* (Prague) 47, no. 6 (1999): 512–20.

109. See the compelling analyses of the *Demonstrationräume* as a site of phenomenological investigation in Benjamin D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (1984): 91–93; and also Bois, "Exposition: Esthétique de la distraction" (note 45), 72–73, 75.

SITUATING

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Issues & Debates

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