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Review of Lucy Wasensteiner (ed.), *Sites of Interchange: Modernism,
Politics and Culture between Britain and Germany, 1919–1955*

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LUCY WASENSTEINER (ed.), *Sites of Interchange: Modernism, Politics and Culture between Britain and Germany, 1919–1955*, German Visual Culture, 8 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022), xxii + 314 pp. ISBN 978 1 789 97391 4. £56.65

When did modernism come to Britain? Writing in 1936, the German–British art historian Nikolaus Pevsner had a simple answer to this question: it was already there. In his well-known book *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, which has since been republished in several editions, he asserted that there was a ‘historical unit’ between William Morris and Walter Gropius, based on an aside by Gropius in 1923.¹ This argument is contradicted by another narrative that locates the influence of modernism much later, that is, after 1933. In recent years, various publications have appeared that examine the exodus of German artists, architects, and designers to Britain after the rise of the Nazis.²

To find its own answer to the opening question and add nuance to the picture, a conference was held at the Courtauld Institute in 2018 alongside the exhibition ‘London 1938’.³ The anthology under review brings together fourteen contributions to that conference. As the editor, Lucy Wasensteiner, director of the Liebermann Villa am Wannsee in Berlin, states in her introduction: ‘Modernist culture was not only present in mainland Europe after 1919, it did not arrive in Britain with the émigrés after 1933’ (p. 3). And the transfer did not stop after 1945, as the last three essays show. Moreover, the volume emphasizes that the influence was not unidirectional, but a reciprocal relationship between the two countries.

¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (New York, 1949; 1st pub. 1936), 19.

² To name only a few examples: Marian Malet, Rachel Dickson, Sarah MacDougall, and Anna Nyburg (eds.), *Applied Arts in British Exile from 1933: Changing Visual and Material Culture* (Leiden, 2019); Andreas Schätzke, *Deutsche Architekten in Großbritannien: Planen und Bauen im Exil 1933–1945*, ed. Meike Schultz (Stuttgart, 2013); Jutta Vinzent, *Identity and Image: Refugee Artists from Nazi Germany in Britain (1933–1945)* (Weimar, 2006).

³ Lucy Wasensteiner and Martin Faass (eds.), *London 1938: Defending ‘Degenerate’ Art / Mit Kandinsky, Liebermann und Nolde gegen Hitler* (Wädenswil am Zürichsee, 2018).

The essays appear in more or less chronological order, but are grouped around topics such as applied and fine arts, photography, and architecture. The first four contributions spotlight the interchange between Germany and Britain before 1933. Artemis Yagou analyses the toy industry and the 'ongoing cross-fertilisation' between the two countries in the first half of the twentieth century (p. 29). Two essays deal with the activities of, first, a private gallery owned by Dorothy Warren (Ulrike Meyer Stump) and, second, the Anglo-German Club (Lee Beard). Both operated between London, Berlin, and Hamburg during the transition from the Weimar Republic to the National Socialist regime. The Anglo-German Club was founded in 1931 as a platform of exchange between the two countries, but ran into difficulties after 1933 and consequently renamed itself the D'Abernon Club in 1934 (p. 69). Designer and gallerist Warren is revealed to be a hitherto underestimated pioneer who was strongly committed to promoting German art in Britain and British art in Germany; however, she also closed her gallery in 1934. In the fourth essay of this pre-1933 section, Valeria Carullo discusses how the 'New Photography' was introduced to the British public in the journal *Architectural Review* in the early 1930s.

Yet the main focus of the book is on the period from 1933 to 1945, which shows that for researchers, the Nazi takeover remains a decisive factor in the relationship between Germany and Great Britain, not least because of the arrival of numerous artists and intellectuals. Early among them were Lucia Moholy, who published *A Hundred Years of Photography* in Britain in 1939 (discussed here by Michelle Henning), and László Moholy-Nagy, whose widespread artistic activities during his London exile and photographic contributions to British visual culture in 1935-7 are examined by Leah Hsiao. Karen Koehler discusses the subtle connection between two important, near-simultaneous publications by Herbert Read and Walter Gropius on *Art and Industry* (1934) and *New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (1935) respectively. Burcu Dogramaci complements this by pointing out two crucial intellectual meeting places for emigrants in London: Ernő Goldfinger's house (1937) and the nearby Isobar in the Lawn Road Flats (1934). And Antonia Behan's essay critically examines the relationship between weaving and modernity, evaluating statements

by the dedicated weaver Ethel Mairet and her involvement with the Bauhaus and its members. Mairet met Gropius in London, exchanged ideas with former Bauhaus weavers in Germany and Switzerland, and made extensive research trips to handweaving schools and workshops throughout Europe. In fact, she developed her very own take on the future of weaving in a fruitful union between the past and the modern. Volker M. Welter examines how architectural forms from Berlin and the Baltic island Hiddensee came to Britain through the designs of the émigré architect Ernst L. Freud. The last contribution in this group, by Ina Weinrautner, highlights the case of Carlton House Terrace, until 1945 the seat of the German embassy in London. It was the scene of a costly and extensive Nazi remodelling under Ambassador Ribbentrop.

Dirk Schubert examines post-1945 reconstruction in London and Hamburg through the concepts of decentralization and the creation of neighbourhoods. The next case study, by Shulamit Beer, deals with the fate of the expressionist Ludwig Meidner, who was not rediscovered in Germany until well after 1945. All the more prescient, therefore, are the early articles and writings about him by the Czechoslovak-British art theorist Joseph Paul Hodin, whom Meidner met during his London exile. Keith Holz's essay on Oskar Kokoschka's post-war London period then concludes the volume.

The book covers a wealth of topics and reveals new levels of British-German exchange, all of which certainly deserve closer examination. Of course, it is difficult to prove and measure this exchange, since it often involved very different encounters, whether of a personal nature or through the influence of the media. In addition, the question arises – and this is certainly clear to the editors – as to what extent the emigrants' 'German' influence can be separated from that of other nations; after all, Goldfinger and Moholy-Nagy came from Hungary, Hodin from Czechoslovakia, and Kokoschka from Austria. Their case studies could thus stand in for other nations, as the emigrant scene in London was distinctly multinational.

The most interesting examples are precisely those that question the linear narrative of modernism versus non-modernism. After all, what does 'modernity' mean for each of the different genres of photography, painting and graphic art, and architecture? Because of

the complexity of the term, there is no single answer to this question. The authors do not always provide a specific definition, but it is clear from the essays that modernity can be understood stylistically, technologically, or even procedurally, through collaboration. In what way is the redesign of the German embassy a modern project, for example? Its highly modern kitchen design is certainly inconceivable without prior technological developments in the Weimar Republic, while the tasteful furnishings, wallpaper, carpets, and lighting produced by the Vereinigte Werkstätten in Munich drew heavily on concepts from the beginning of the twentieth century in a 'showcase of German craftsmanship' (p. 224). Art historical research has recently established a new orientation towards a concept of multiple modernities.⁴ It may therefore have been unnecessary for *Sites of Interchange* to include the word 'modernism' in its subtitle, because this obscures rather than reveals the richness of the exchange and the diverse levels of contact between Britain and Germany in the tense period of 1919–55.

⁴ Klaus Tragbar (ed.), *Die Multiple Moderne / The Multiple Modernity* (Berlin, 2021).

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