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“1945” AS A TURNING POINT
IN GERMAN ART HISTORY?
CHALLENGING THE PARADIGM OF RUPTURE
AND DISCONTINUITY

An established and fairly common chronology for modern German history starts in 1871 and, including the First World War, ends with the Revolution in 1918, continues throughout the Weimar Republic to finish with the Nazi rise to power in 1933, equates the surrender of the German Army with the collapse of the National Socialist regime in 1945, and probably references the interlude of the Allied Military Government until 1949 when two German states were founded, but might as well go straight to the collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989.

Following this narrative, the quintessential turning points for German history are easily identified as 1918, 1933, 1945 and 1989. Concurrently, both art historical accounts of stylistic developments – for instance, the allocation of Bauhaus and New Objectivity to the Weimar Republic – and the historiography of art history usually follow the very same trajectory. But looking at these four decisive, important and relevant years (or “turning points”), however, we need to differentiate, and we certainly need to resist the temptation to believe that these most obvious and partly radically violent events that subsequently changed society and governmental structures alike changed the political system, the administration, in part also law, economy, and power relations at large, and that all these changes are indeed truly mirrored by equally major and immediate shifts across the arts, in the “Betriebssystem Kunst,” in the humanities in general and in the academic discipline of art history in particular. As a matter of fact, in this paper, I would like to argue that we face serious difficulties in accepting this chronology for the history of art history in Germany, especially when investigating key processes before, during and after 1945.

One or perhaps the most widely used metaphor that references the breakdown of the German Reich in 1945 – indicated by military and political fail-

ure of National Socialism and the Wehrmacht, by the suicides of higher and lower Nazi ranks and by the surrender to the Allies – is the concept of the “Stunde Null” or “hour zero,” which stresses the idea of a *tabula rasa*, of an entirely new beginning. Indeed, the situation in summer 1945 is characterized by enormous devastation of both material and immaterial values, by the ubiquitous destruction of cities and entire landscapes across Europe, and by the forced ending of unprecedented violence and annihilation that had culminated in the Holocaust, or Shoah. Being confronted with the results of these expansionist, racial politics and ideologies, it is perfectly understandable that the decline of the Nazi system and the more or less sudden absence of the rigid system of control and complicity – a short vacuum of power, soon regulated by the Allies, albeit in different ways – was conceived as an open field and a new beginning. Similar then, in a sense, to the French Republican calendar and to the self-proclaimed “Era Fascista” or fascist era with its own numbering of years, the break with the past was considered so grand, encompassing and wide-ranging that not even time itself was allowed to continue – the clock was set back to start all over again. We need to acknowledge, however, that the term “hour zero” had already been employed for various contexts in the previous decades, for novels and films in the 1920s and 1930s. Nonetheless, in the cultural field, the term has been frequently employed after 1945 and is still in wide use. Regardless of the few critical voices that have challenged the assumption of 1945 as a clear-cut break, and irrespective of research that has achieved a more nuanced and differentiated picture, the temptation to adopt a simplistic categorization is obviously a lingering concern. Consequently, again and again in the second decade of the 21st century, we encounter activities in the art scene that address the concept of “hour zero” in an approving, confirmative way.¹ Concurrently, using www.kubikat.org, the search for “Stunde Null” yields 22 hits, including two by Polish authors (one of them is Piotr Majewski, *Czas końca, czas początku: architektura i urbanistyka Warszawy historycznej 1939–1956*, Warszawa 2018), and including an article by Willibald Sauerländer from 1997, and four hits for “hour zero” – *notabene* only in scholarly publications by art and architectural historians. If we also

¹ My sincere thanks go to the anonymous reader of *Artium Quaestiones* who criticized the submitted manuscript and insisted on further clarification of my thesis.

I will limit this enumeration to only two examples: The first of eight sections, positioned in the first three rooms of the exhibition “Postwar: Kunst zwischen Pazifik und Atlantik, 1945–1965” at Haus der Kunst, München (Oct. 14, 2016 – March 26, 2017), was titled “Nachwirkungen: Die Stunde Null und das Atomzeitalter,” and in summer 2019, the exhibition “Stunde Null. Kunst von 1933 bis 1955” was on display at the Kunsthaus Zürich in Switzerland (June 7 – September 22, 2019).

consider the general field of what might be dubbed 'public knowledge,' as embodied, for instance, by the Google search engine, we receive more than 10 million hits for the German "Stunde Null" and a breathtaking 347 million hits for the English "hour zero."

We can thus assume that, concerning 1945, "hour zero" or "Stunde Null" is indeed a fairly well-established concept to denote the break with and sweeping away of earlier beliefs, convictions, habits, customs, and modes of thinking and behavior. However, this initiative to begin anew, allegedly without a past, can also be seen a deliberate attempt to forget and to actively suppress links and associations with National Socialism – generally, collectively, and individually.

Notwithstanding this problematic purgatory character, the term is used until today in an affirmative way in many contexts, including professional or scholarly endeavors. More often than not, the widely spread understanding of a radical break, notably in the field of the arts, extends to proper art history, and we are thus expected to assume that the very same rupture and turnover of positions, methods, values, ideals and criteria also affected curators, monument conservators, university teachers, art teachers, publishers, guides, and art critics – in short, all professional art historians. At the same time, today we are certainly witnessing a growing discomfort with simple explanations, and a growing urgency to challenge the paradigm by further differentiating our understanding of the immediate postwar situation.²

Expanding earlier publications on this problem,³ I would thus like to challenge the notion of 1945 as a turning point for art history in Germany. I would

² A case in point is the conference that took place in February 2018 in Tübingen and critically discussed the underlying concepts and assumptions for talking about the decisive changes that occurred around 1945: "Rethinking Europe: Artistic Production and Discourses on Art in the Late 1940s and 1950s," see <<https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-36202>> and <<https://www.postwar-europe.de/aktivitäten/tagung-februar-2018/>>.

³ Ch. Fuhrmeister, "Von der 'Rasse' zur 'Klasse'? Das Kunstgeschichtliche Seminar der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena 1938–1958," *Kunst und Politik. Jahrbuch der Guernica-Gesellschaft* 2006, 8, pp. 93–119; idem, "Kontinuität und Blockade," in: *Kunstgeschichte nach 1945. Kontinuität und Neubeginn in Deutschland*, eds. N. Doll, R. Heftrig, O. Peters, U. Rehm, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2006, pp. 21–38; idem and S. Kienlechner, "Tatort Nizza: Kunstgeschichte zwischen Kunsthandel, Kunstraub und Verfolgung. Zur Vita von August Liebmann Mayer, mit einem Exkurs zu Bernhard Degenhart und Bemerkungen zu Erhard Göpel und Bruno Lohse," in: *Kunstgeschichte im „Dritten Reich“. Theorien, Methoden, Praktiken*, eds. R. Heftrig, O. Peters, B. Schellewald, Berlin 2008 (Schriften zur modernen Kunsthistoriographie, Bd 1), pp. 405–429; Ch. Fuhrmeister, "Kunstgeschichte an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität – Rückblick und Ausblick," in: *Kunstgeschichte in München 1947. Institutionen und Personen im Wiederaufbau*, ed. I. Lauterbach (Veröffentlichungen

even like to maintain that for the vast majority of German art historians who had remained in Germany during National Socialism, not much regarding objects, methods, dispositions changed in 1945. Why is this so?

For various reasons. To begin with, because the history of art history has been operating with a very narrow definition of the art historian. Usually, he or she is thought of as being either affiliated, in this or that function or capacity, to a university or to a museum, and has a substantial record of publications, and it is the size of the bibliography that seems to be the top criterion. All fully trained art historians, even those holding a Ph. D., who have entered a mundane occupation in the art trade, as dealer or auctioneer, are thus excluded from accounts like Udo Kultermanns *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte* (various editions between 1981 and 1996), or the *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon* (1999, second edition 2007), to name just two examples. Similarly, journalists and art critics are only randomly considered. This broader field, which becomes visible when we think of art historians who are being broadcast,⁴ or perhaps even when we think of those who are elected as Minister of Culture, is basically excluded from the rather elitist concepts of historiography. In other words, the history of art history is as incomplete and biased as is the traditional account of the production, distribution and reception of art: in most cases, only a narrow sample is looked at, reaffirming the canon, and the plain, ordinary, everyday art historian is conspicuously absent.⁵ This is one part of the explanation.

des Zentralinstituts für Kunstgeschichte, Bd. 22), München 2010, pp. 29–40; idem, “Reine Wissenschaft: Art History in Germany and the Notions of ‘Pure Science’ and ‘Objective Scholarship’, 1920–1950,” in: *German Art History and Scientific Thought: Beyond Formalism*, eds. M. Frank, D. Adler, Aldershot 2012, pp. 161–177; idem, “Statt eines Nachworts: Zwei Thesen zu deutschen Museen nach 1945,” in: *So fing man einfach an, ohne viele Worte. Ausstellungswesen und Sammlungspolitik in den ersten Jahren nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, eds. J. Friedrich, A. Prinzing, Berlin 2013, pp. 234–239; idem, “Warum man Lügen glaubt. Kunstgeschichte und Kunsthandel 1945–2016,” in: *Markt und Macht. Der Kunsthandel im „Dritten Reich“*, eds. U. Fleckner, Th. Gaehtgens, Ch. Huemer, Berlin 2017 (Schriften der Forschungsstelle »Entartete Kunst«, Bd. 12), pp. 401–424; idem und S. Kienlechner, “Erhard Göpel im Nationalsozialismus – eine Skizze,” online, 2018:

<https://www.zikg.eu/personen/cfuhrmeister/bib-fuhrmeister/pdfs/Fuhrmeister_Kienlechner-Goepel.pdf> [accessed: June 7, 2019]; see also <https://www.academia.edu/38042275/Erhard_G%C3%B6pel_im_Nationalsozialismus_eine_Skizze>.

⁴ A. Zeising, *Radiokunstgeschichte. Bildende Kunst und Kunstvermittlung im frühen Rundfunk der 1920er bis 1940er Jahre*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2018.

⁵ This incognito commonplace art historian is sharply mocked and ridiculed by the pseudonym author Simplex, “Der Kunsthistoriker,” *Die Weltkunst* 1932, 36(4), p. 4 [I owe this reference to Stephan Klingen, and would like to thank him for that]: “Seine soziale

Secondly, the larger context is not taken into account. With the notable exception of Heinrich Dilly, political conflicts are often believed to be completely external, thus without influence on art history. Generally, for the most part, science and politics are considered to be separate and entirely distinct spheres, and not "resources for each other," as Mitchell Ash put it.⁶ As a corollary, individual activities remain isolated, are not related to larger developments, processes and changes. This is a problem, however, since the political radicalization of the 1930s and early 1940s – in conjunction with the establishment of occupation regimes throughout Europe and the implementation of a policy of ethnic cleansing and industrialized murder – was pervasive and inevitably also affected the humanities in many substantial regards. But the historiography of art history has, with very few exceptions,⁷ either not dealt with National Socialism at all, or has done so reluctantly. One of the results of this repression is the belief that art history was not touched or affected by the totalitarian system before 1945.

Stellung ist unklar. Seiner Ausbildung nach gehört er zu den oben Zehntausend, seinen Verdienstchancen nach zu den unteren sechs Millionen. Zuerst jeunesse dorée, dann Budgetequilibrant. Der Kunsthistoriker ist schmückendes Beiwerk am Volkskörper. ... Ehrgeizige junge Männer heiraten Damen aus der Schwerindustrie und werden Politiker. Wenn Kunsthistoriker reich heiraten, bleiben sie Kunsthistoriker. Daraus folgt, daß dieser Beruf erstens gesellschaftsfähig, zweitens nicht ohne Reiz sein muß. Es müßte der kunsthistorischen Disziplin einmal ein Politiker entwachsen, damit der Staat sieht, daß er sich auch hier eindecken kann. ... Der Kunsthistoriker ist ein wurzelloser Mensch. Er ist zu allem fähig und macht aus diesem Zustand labiler Tatkraft eine kokette Permanenz. Er hätte die Möglichkeit, den dahinsterbenden Universalismus zu retten, stattdessen wird er meist ein Jahrfünftspezialist. Er scheitert an seiner zügellosen Freiheit. Der Kunsthistoriker ist der unter Sterbliche verirrte Zeremonienmeister der Musen. Damit erklärt sich auch seine Einstellung zur modernen Kunst: die rührende Verständnislosigkeit eines alten Tanzlehrers neuzeitlichen Tänzern gegenüber. Der Kunsthistoriker ist eigentlich als Parkwächter für ein goldenes Zeitalter gedacht. Er wartet auf dessen Anbruch."

⁶ M. Ash, "Wissenschaft und Politik als Ressourcen für einander," in: *Wissenschaften und Wissenschaftspolitik. Bestandsaufnahmen zu Formationen, Brüchen und Kontinuitäten im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. R. vom Bruch, B. Kaderas, Wiesbaden 2002, pp. 32–51.

⁷ While a few studies have been devoted to those art historians who had managed to emigrate, we lack critical assessments of those who remained and continued to work as professionals in various fields. In the series "Schriften zur modernen Kunsthistoriographie," for instance, only the first volume (out of eight published so far) explicitly addresses art history in the "Third Reich" (eds. O. Peters, R. Heftrig, B. Schellewald, Berlin 2012). Similarly, very few articles in the 20 issues of the important online *Journal of Art Historiography* (<<https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/>>) are concerned with art history or, more generally, with writing about art in Germany during National Socialism.

Indeed, this assumption goes back right to 1945 and the immediate postwar years, when no need was seen for change or transformation. Thus, a recurring topos of the denazification trials in the three western occupation zones is the pledge for a categorical difference between art history and (Nazi) politics: Hugo Kehrer (1876–1967), member of the NSDAP since 1933, who had dedicated a book on El Greco in 1938 to both Franco and Hitler, would thus argue that by definition an art historian immersed in medieval iconography could hardly even be aware of the contemporary world – an argument that was successful in convincing the jury that he should be exonerated, with the result that he simply continued his studies and remained a prolific author (his last monograph on Velazquez' *Meninas* was published in 1966).⁸

It is thus the deliberate dissociation of art history from the everyday world of political systems that permitted continuity. As Herbert von Einem (1905–1983) – himself a protagonist with a fairly straight career during National Socialism, and also a versatile and compelling interpreter and spokesperson after 1945 – put it in 1948, in the opening lecture of the First German Art Historians Meeting in Brühl near Bonn: “Many others have stayed in Germany, have quietly kept the torch of genuine spirit and true science at home, and passed it on to younger people” (“Viele andere sind in Deutschland geblieben, haben in der Heimat still die Fackel echten Geistes und echter Wissenschaft gehütet und sie an Jüngere weitergegeben ...”)⁹ This suppressive narrative may be subsumed as: Free, good and true scholarship was not tainted, was not disfigured by or harmed because of Nazi politics and persecution, but continued and was even transmitted to the next generation; attempts of the totalitarian system to influence, control and shape the discipline were ineffective – in short: Why ask for change at all, now?

In paraphrasing Eimen – simultaneously a source, an example, and a rhetorically forceful guide who indeed was able to shape the course of historiography for decades to come – in this provocative way, it is my intention to distill the formative notions of German art historians in the immediate postwar years. Only if we understand their contemporary frame of reference and their own idea of ‘coming to terms with the past’ are we able to fully

⁸ A more detailed account is available in Ch. Fuhrmeister, “Kontinuität und Blockade,” in: *Kunstgeschichte nach 1945. Kontinuität und Neubeginn in Deutschland*, eds. N. Doll, R. Heftrig, O. Peters, U. Rehm, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2006, pp. 21–38.

⁹ H. von Einem, “Eröffnungsansprache,” in: *Vorträge der ersten Deutschen Kunsthistorikertagung auf Schloss Brühl 1948*, Berlin 1950, pp. 9–15, hier p. 9. Quoted after N. Doll, “Der Erste Deutsche Kunsthistorikertag 1948,” in: *Kunstgeschichte im Nationalsozialismus. Beiträge zur Geschichte einer Wissenschaft zwischen 1930 und 1950*, eds. N. Doll, Ch. Fuhrmeister, M. H. Sprenger, Weimar 2005, pp. 325–337, here p. 330.

analyze what happened. It is important and worthwhile to investigate these various strategies of *not* addressing questions of compliance, complicity, guilt, liaison, and participation, since the influence of these art historians cannot be overestimated: They, in turn, formed and trained the next generation, and partly the next but one generation. In transmitting their views to their pupils, explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, they also permeated their own mechanisms, modes of behavior and value systems. That said, the seemingly purely historiographical problem inevitably extends to our own professional existence today, as we are also faced with the challenge of situating our profession (and professional identity) within and vis-à-vis the political context of the 21st century. Essentially, this tension connects the different historical dimensions – the postwar situation and the recent tendencies of historiographical research – within a critical analysis of both.

The third reason, interrelated with the two mentioned above, is the high degree of continuity. In sharp contrast to spring 1933, when before or after the infamous "Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums" on April 7, 1933 (Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service / Law to Re-establish the Civil Service) the overwhelming majority of Jewish art historians were dismissed from their positions as teachers, professors, conservators, curators, or directors, or were forced out of business in the case of Jewish art dealers, antiquarians, coin dealers andsoforth soon after, who subsequently then either fled the country or were deported, we have no comparable exodus or shutdown with regard to 1945. For instance, only very few German art historians with a strong affiliation to National Socialism were initially permanently excluded from professorships: Albert Erich Brinckmann (1881–1958), Wilhelm Pinder (1887–1947), Hubert Schrade (1900–1967) and Alfred Stange (1894–1968)¹⁰. Brinckmann had anyhow reached retirement age in 1946, Pinder died in 1947, and both Schrade and Stange had prolific postwar careers, with Schrade being appointed professor in Tübingen in 1954, and Stange publishing about two dozen monographs and countless articles before his death. After a short time, none of them saw the purportedly radical break of the 1945 deeply affect their status as art historians.

As a matter of fact, both Schrade and Stange soon joined the Association of German Art Historians (Verband Deutscher Kunsthistoriker e.V.) that

¹⁰ Cf. F.-L. Kroll, *Intellektueller Widerstand im Dritten Reich. Heinrich Lützeler und der Nationalsozialismus* (Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen und Reden zur Philosophie, Politik und Geistesgeschichte, Bd. 51), Berlin 2008, pp. 12–13.

had been founded in 1948, along with Otto Kümmel (1874–1952), the author of the infamous Kümmel Report (1940), Felix Kuetgens (1890–1976), the museum director in Aachen from 1923 to 1955, and Walther Bernt (1900–1980), an expert on Dutch art who had delivered expert opinions on private collections that had been confiscated – to name only three very different art historians.¹¹ After 1945, it was of no importance that Kümmel and Kuetgens had held high official positions in the Nazi era.

The different effects between the “turning points” of 1933 and 1945 materialize more clearly if we look closer: 253 art historians are covered in Ulrike Wendland’s *Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil. Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler*, published in 1999 in two volumes. However, as she explained in the introduction (pp. XI, XV–XVIII), Ph. D. art historians who did not continue to work as art historians after the completion of the Ph. D. dissertation are not included in the handbook (another 10), nor are non-German art historians who went into exile from Nazi-occupied Europe (4), nor those who emigrated without having finished their studies (21), nor those who are more properly defined as archeologists or as specialists for Islamic Art (15). The many scholars with important contributions to art history but without a formal training or education in art history (55), art dealers without training (19), and the roughly 40 art historians whose biography or fate is not known or researched well enough are likewise not included in the handbook. Suffice to say at this point that 250 constitute basically 1/4 (one quarter) of all art historians active in 1933,¹² and if these additional 125 or 165 that were not included for the reasons given above would also be included, we are much closer to 1/3 (one third) of the discipline. As a matter of fact, since archival material that was unavailable for decades has become accessible in the past years, as have genealogical databases, we can now certainly refine the criteria Wendland established and followed, and augment and expand her data. The Düsseldorf art dealer Max Stern, for example, that she had grouped in the category of “not having finished the studies,” had indeed received his doctorate from Bonn University

¹¹ Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, Deutsches Kunstarchiv, Verband Deutscher Kunsthistoriker, I, B-2/1.

¹² According to Karen Michels, “Exil von deutschsprachigen Kunsthistorikern und Kunsthistorikerinnen,” in: *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. U. Pfisterer, Stuttgart & Weimar 2003, pp. 90–93, here p. 90; cf. M. Warnke, “Totalitäre Ideologien und Kunstwissenschaft,” in: *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. U. Pfisterer, Stuttgart & Weimar 2003, pp. 357–359, here p. 358.

(published in 1930)¹³, and is today without any doubt considered to have been a persecuted professional.¹⁴

That having been said, the processes that started in 1933 and in 1945 are not equivalent, and definitely do not mirror each other: following 1945, neither a 1/3 nor a 1/4 nor even 2% of the discipline were permanently excluded, expelled and either murdered or forced into exile. The postwar years in both East and West Germany, in both the Soviet and the American, British and French zones, vehemently suggested and stressed discontinuity, while in fact continuity prevailed.¹⁵ This continuity took many different forms and was operative on many levels. In the West German Ministry of the Interior, the percentage of former members of the NSDAP in the higher echelons (head of division, and above) was continuously above 50% and reached a peak of 66% in 1961.¹⁶

Very often, German art historians who had held official positions before 1945 would have to undergo a short phase of suspension, participated in denazification processes that usually ruled them to be "bystanders" ("Mitläufer") or exonerated them entirely, and would then reintegrate, like Kurt Wilhelm-Kästner (1893–1976), professor in Münster until 1936, in Greifswald from 1937–1942 (being rector from 1938 to 1942), and in Hamburg from 1942–1945 and again from 1950–1966. This suspension was a long interval, similar to Ernst Buchner, who had directed the Bavarian State Painting Collection from 1933–1945 and again from 1953–1957.

In other cases, such as Heiner Dikreiter (1893–1966), Director of the City Art Gallery in Würzburg from 1941 to 1966, uninterruptedly, there was no break. Similarly, Dagobert Frey (1883–1962) never stopped: after his professorship in Breslau/Wrocław from 1931–1945 so aptly analyzed by Sabine Arend¹⁷, he went first to Vienna, then to Stuttgart, where he taught as a professor from 1951–1953 until he retired at the age of 70.

¹³ M. Stern, *Johann Peter Langer. Sein Leben und sein Werk* (Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte Westeuropas, Bd. 9), Bonn 1930.

¹⁴ Cf. <<https://www.zikg.eu/projekte/projekte-zi/stern-cooperation-project>> [accessed: June 7, 2019].

¹⁵ K.-S. Rehberg, G. Panzer, F. Völz, "Einleitung," in: *Beziehungsanalysen. Bildende Künste in Westdeutschland nach 1945. Akteure, Institutionen, Ausstellungen und Kontexte*, eds. G. Panzer, F. Völz, K.-S. Rehberg, Wiesbaden 2015, pp.1–12, here p. 5.

¹⁶ Cf. *Hüter der Ordnung. Die Innenministerien in Bonn und Ost-Berlin nach dem Nationalsozialismus*, eds. F. Bösch, A. Wirsching (Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der deutschen Innenministerien nach 1945, Bd. 1), Göttingen 2018.

¹⁷ S. Arend, *Studien zur deutschen kunsthistorischen „Ostforschung“ im Nationalsozialismus. Die Kunsthistorischen Institute an den (Reichs-) Universitäten Breslau und*

Moreover, Erika Hanfstaengl (1912–2003), assistant to Walter Frodl (1908–1994) in the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral in Udine 1943–1945, started to work for the American Central Art Collecting Point in Munich only a few weeks after she had left her office in the south that was also responsible for control and shipment of cultural artefacts looted from Jewish owners. Even very high-ranking officials like Hermann Voss (1884–1969), Hitler’s special representative for the new museum in Linz (“Sonderbeauftragter des Führers”) 1943–1945, did not experience serious conflicts, but continued to work as an art historian, attributing works, advising museums, and receiving public funding from the German Research Foundation from 1957–1964.¹⁸ This enumeration could continue, and would necessarily encompass all fields of the discipline, all institutions, all media, and all levels.

What is to be learned from this autopsy? What does this assessment tell us? Investigating the effects of “1945” for art history we need to acknowledge the fact that the history of art history has not been critical enough. Generations of scholars have overlooked the obvious, have omitted relevant data, have not challenged – and this is the primary task indeed: to always question traditional narratives and beliefs, customs and habits, myths and legends – the existing historiography. To construct “1945” as a rupture, break and disruption served the political purposes of distancing the postwar society from National Socialism. Without any doubt, this suppression of the past was successful.

The result of our investigation remains contradictory and unsettling, however. To differentiate between what is known, what is believed, and what really took place is a quintessential step. But this brief overview raises an important question: If the continuity was so strong, ubiquitous and overwhelming, why did Germany and German art history gradually change, after all? When exactly did change occur, or start, and when did it become manifest and perhaps irreversible? Was it during the 1950s, or only in the 1960s? Certainly, it was not in 1945.

Posen und ihre Protagonisten im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Politik, Diss. HU Berlin 2009, online with almost 1000 pages and more than 4000 footnotes: <<https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/16871>> [accessed: June 7, 2019].

¹⁸ K. Iselt, “Sonderbeauftragter des Führers”. *Der Kunsthistoriker und Museumsmann Hermann Voss (1884–1969)* (Studien zur Kunst, Bd. 20), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2010.

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"1945" AS A TURNING POINT IN GERMAN ART HISTORY?
CHALLENGING THE PARADIGM OF RUPTURE AND DISCONTINUITY

Summary

The historiographical article looks at "1945" as a turning point, inquiring whether the end of both the Second World War and National Socialism also implied a radical break for art history in Germany. In evaluating both contemporary perspectives (like Herbert von Einem's opening lecture of the First German Art Historians Meeting in 1948) and recent historiographical studies, the paper questions the concept of "Stunde Null" or "hour zero," and intends to challenge the established paradigm of rupture and discontinuity. Arguing for a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the transformation processes in the postwar situation, three major reasons are identified why simplistic categorizations often prevail: (1) a very narrow definition of the art historian in the history of art history, (2) the disjunction between the humanities and the larger political context, which allow the individual to imagine himself/herself untainted and uncompromised by ideology, and (3) the high degree of continuity, in particular if compared to the radical changes that took place in 1933. The article thus resumes that the idea of "turning points" deserves further differentiation, and calls for the integration of the political dimension into historiography. Essentially, the challenge remains to distinguish between factual processes, false or fraudulent labelling, and symbolic gestures.

Keywords:

Coming to terms with the Nazi past, historiography, history of art history (in Germany), issues of post-totalitarian academia, art and politics