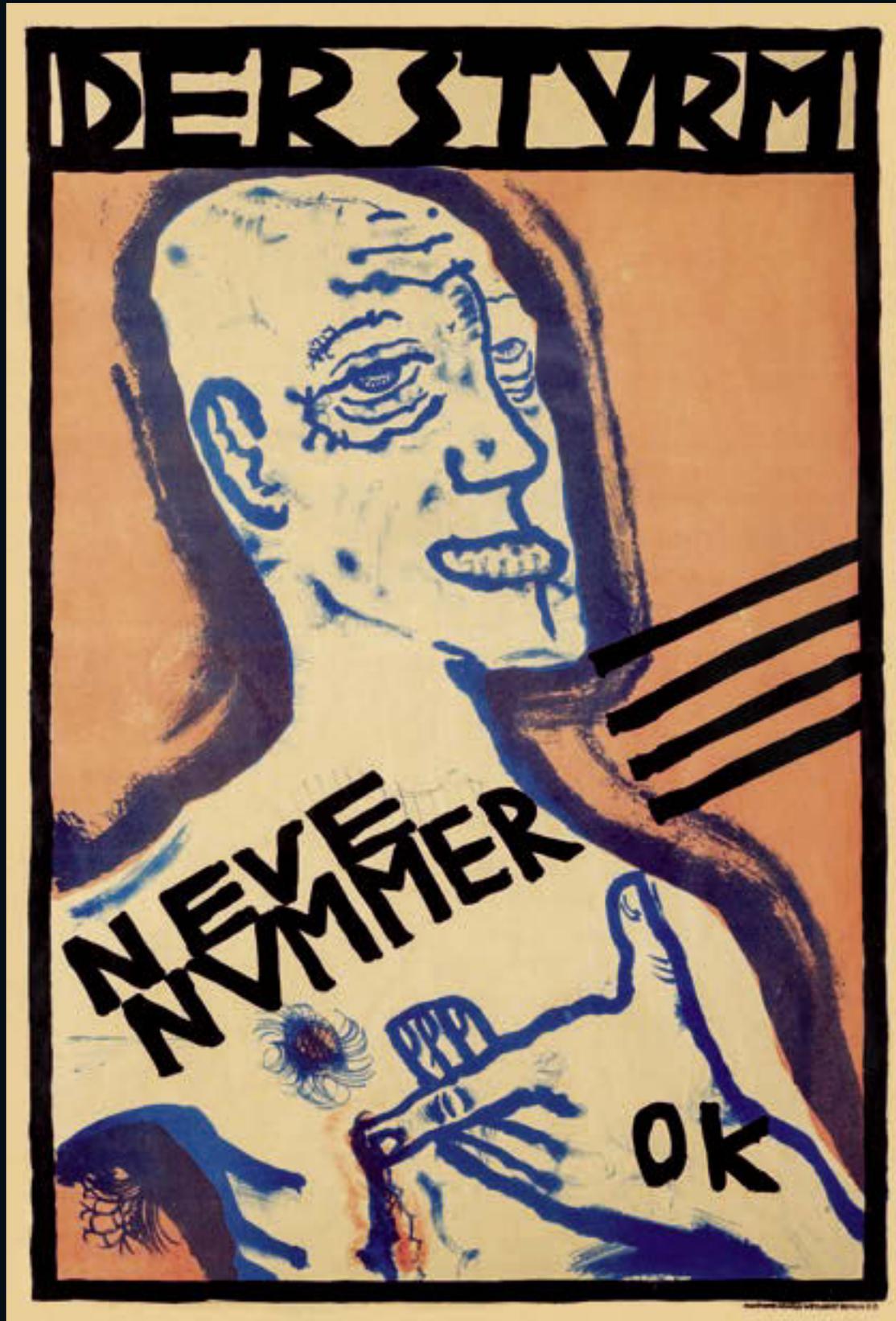


DEGENERATE ART

THE ATTACK ON MODERN ART
IN NAZI GERMANY 1937



**NEUE
GALERIE**
MUSEUM FOR GERMAN
AND AUSTRIAN ART
NEW YORK

DEGENERATE ART

E N T A R T E T E



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DEGENERATE ART

THE ATTACK ON MODERN ART IN NAZI GERMANY, 1937

Edited by Olaf Peters

Preface by Ronald S. Lauder, foreword by Renée Price

With contributions by

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Karsten Müller

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Ines Schlenker

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Karl Stamm

PRESTEL

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FRONTISPIECE: Cover of the exhibition brochure
"Degenerate Art," Munich 1937. Photograph:
Hulya Kolabas, New York

PAGE 6: Adolf Hitler examining confiscated
German masterpieces in the collection depot
for the "Degenerate Art" exhibition, Köpenicker
Strasse 24, Berlin, January 13, 1938.
Photograph: Heinrich Hoffmann

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PREFACE

When I was growing up in New York in the 1950s, I never fully understood the concept of degenerate art. I started going to The Museum of Modern Art at the age of 12, when I became fascinated with nineteenth- and twentieth-century modern art. I recognized that some works might appear controversial...but degenerate? Who on earth, I thought, had the right to separate artists from one another and especially to belittle them with a term like degenerate?

It wasn't until the 1980s, when I saw a show on "Entartete Kunst," or degenerate art, that I finally grasped the concept and its ramifications. I knew about the book burnings, the persecution of Jews, and, like all of us, I knew about the Holocaust. But until I saw that show, I never realized the full extent of the Nazis' destructive intentions when it came to redefining art and artists.

In that one show, I saw how the Nazis vilified some of the world's greatest artists and began the frightening process of separating them from others. It was here that they decided which art was correct and which painter (or musician or writer) was not acceptable. And from there, it was easier to move on to separating human beings.

"Entartete Kunst" was the Nazi's large-scale effort to denounce various genres like Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, and the art of the Bauhaus along racial lines. When artists such as George Grosz, Marc Chagall, Paul Klee, and Vasily Kandinsky were labeled un-German or Jewish Bolshevik, it was all part of Hitler's grand design. All of this was very personal to me. These were among my favorite artists, who first caught my attention at a young age and have never let me go.

But by separating these artists from the state-approved artists, the Nazis would make it easier for ordinary Germans to look the other way when neighbors that they had known for generations simply disappeared. And by telling Germans what art is the right art and what art is subversive, the Nazis could move on to say what people are the right people, what religions are the right religions, and eventually who could live and who would die.

The Nazi campaign against art was manifested in the 1937 "Entartete Kunst" exhibit in Munich. Here, Hitler's chief propagandist Joseph Goebbels helped design the infamous show to prove that there was a Jewish conspiracy to defile German decency through its subversive art. Never mind the fact that many of the 5,000 works of art that were seized by the Nazis wound up in the collections of the top officials of the Third Reich. I could never let go of this great irony; while the paintings were too degenerate for the public to see, they were just fine to hang in Nazi officers' homes. I have always found the old black and white photographs of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels walking into the 1937 exhibit, past so many marvelous works of art, to be particularly chilling. That is when I completely understood the Nazi efforts to manipulate thought.

In this show, we have brought together some of the examples from the infamous 1937 show, which the Nazis deemed degenerate. Although some of the works from that show can be seen in museums around the world and some are in private hands, many have simply disappeared. The recent discovery of 1,400 works of art in a disheveled apartment in Munich is a perfect example of how the dark shadows of “Entartete Kunst” still haunt the world, more than 70 years later. We have also included some of the works that the Nazis deemed acceptable. This allows a better context for understanding the entire scope of the Nazi plan.

I would like to extend my personal thanks to Dr. Olaf Peters, the exhibition curator, for his superb work of this subject. His dedication and incisive approach have produced spectacular results. We all stand to benefit a great deal from the scholarly work found in this book.

What I have learned over the years—what we have all learned since the end of World War II—is that when a country starts to ban art, it moves on to literature, and free speech, and thought. And then it is only a matter of time before the tragedy is complete and the next victims are human beings. We have seen this before and the results are always tragic.

I was born in February of 1944, five months before D-Day. And although I was born in America, had I been born in Europe, I may not have survived. This one equation is something many Jews my age have considered at one time or another. And that is what makes this show even more personal to me.

Seven years before I was born, the Nazis tried to make people believe that this art spoiled the Germanic-Aryan culture. And like almost every other aspect of Hitler’s regime, it was all built on lies. This is what you have to remember as you look through this book: keep the historic impact of Nazism in mind. And remember that just as art was defiled, so were truth, decency, and, ultimately, millions of lives.

Ronald S. Lauder
President, Neue Galerie New York

FOREWORD

Recent events involving the Gurlitt case—the discovery in Munich of a trove of artworks confiscated during World War II—have made headlines around the world. This story of how the Nazis tried both to demonize modern art and to profit from it continues to be a lingering source of fascination and disgust. Many questions remain, including how many missing works might still be recovered, as well as what their ultimate fate will be.

In mounting this exhibition, the Neue Galerie aspires to shed new light on a very dark period of German history. Examining the place where politics and culture intersected in spectacular, brutal, and extreme fashion, we are led to commit again to the values we believe must be defended. What is at stake is no less a fundamental concept than freedom of artistic expression, an ideal that remains at risk even today. Our sincere hope is that, by uncovering the full history of the Nazi attack on modern art, we will help point the way to a future in which such an assault will not be tolerated.

In preparing this exhibition, we have drawn from important past explorations of the subject, especially from Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau's 1987 reconstruction of the official show, followed by the exhibition "Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Smithsonian in Washington, and the Altes Museum in Berlin, organized by Stephanie Barron in 1991. We have also benefitted from a tremendous amount of new research conducted over the past two decades, starting with Christoph Zuschlag's groundbreaking dissertation published in 1995 and continued by the "Forschungsstelle Entartete Kunst" in Berlin and Hamburg until today. Led by our curator Olaf Peters, we have taken a bold, fresh approach to this subject. For this exhibition, we have included both the modern art that the Nazis vilified—masterworks of Expressionism, Cubism, and the like—as well as art officially sanctioned by the National Socialists. This is nothing short of an eye-opening confrontation: between the very human work of artists facing persecution, including Max Beckmann and Oskar Kokoschka, and the idealized visions of those working under the auspices of official approval, such lesser knowns as Hans Schmitz-Wiedenbrück and Adolf Ziegler. The manner of presentation has never before been seen in the United States, yet we feel it makes the vision of the artists labeled as degenerate stand in even greater relief, and the tragedy of their stories resound even more strongly.

Dr. Peters, a valued Neue Galerie board member and organizer of our impressive "Otto Dix" exhibition in 2010, has undertaken diligent research and the patient pursuit of loans. He has helped bring greater understanding to this entire complex subject, and for that we are most grateful. Richard Pandiscio and Bill Loccisano of Pandiscio Co. provided the design direction for both the exhibition and the catalogue. They understood the importance of conveying this story for a new generation, and they have employed great creativity and imagination in their approach. The final result of all these labors is a new window onto history.

I wish to thank the lenders to this exhibition, who graciously agreed to share their work with us. In particular, I would like to note the encouragement and support we received from museums in Germany, as this exhibition confronts painful aspects of the history of that country. I extend my appreciation to Alexander Koch of the Deutsches Historisches Museum; Karsten Müller of the Ernst Barlach Haus; Inge Jaehner of the Felix-Nussbaum-Haus; Hubertus Gassner of the Hamburger Kunsthalle; Thomas Schwark of the Historisches Museum Hannover; Steffen Stuth of the Kulturhistorisches Museum Rostock; Frank Schmidt of the Kunsthalle Emden; Ulrike Lorenz of the Kunsthalle Mannheim; Martin Hentschel of the Kunstmuseen Krefeld; Tobia Bezzola of the Museum Folkwang; Sabine Schulze of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg; Beat Wismer of the Museum Kunstpalast; Philipp Kaiser of the Museum Ludwig; Alexander Klar of the Museum Wiesbaden; Klaus Schrenk of the Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst; Christian Ring of the Stiftung Seebüll Ada und Emil Nolde; Max Hollein of the Städel Museum; Michael Freitag of the Stiftung Moritzburg; and Helmut Friedel of the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus.

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Renée Price
Director, Neue Galerie New York

INTRODUCTION

“Degenerate art”—the slogan stands for National Socialist cultural barbarism, for the destruction of modernism in Germany between the wars, the consequences of which are still felt today.¹ Hitler and his party-liners did not invent the phrase, but they adopted it, intensified it, and derived from it their destructive policies on art.² Our own exhibition attempts to illustrate and document several central aspects of the genesis and creation of that earlier exhibition staged in Munich in 1937. At the same time, the medium of the exhibition has its limits here: we neither wish to nor are able to produce a historical reconstruction, since neither could the methods of the National Socialists be adapted nor could the great works of art be loaned. The catalogue is therefore supplemented with reflections on the genesis and evolution of the discourse on “degeneration” (Peters and von Lüttichau) and details on National Socialist policy on art (Schlenker, Peters, Müller, and Soika and Fulda), presents some lesser known or unknown aspects of the theme (Stamm and Ploil), and addresses the after-effects of the attack on modernism that are felt even today (Heftrig, Petropoulos).

One thing should remain clear in all this: the National Socialist policy did not come out of nowhere. There was a decades-long run-up to it that prepared the ground and developed its own destructive, devastating dynamic in different stages and phases. The changed and even distorted faces of important museum collections, the irretrievable losses of art, and legal relationships that are still disputed today are some of the lamentable effects.

“Degenerate art” is the extreme example of a state-run campaign against modern art as the prerequisite to a parallel attempt to impose the National Socialist conception of art by force. For that reason, we decided to show a few selected examples of official Nazi art to contrast with the “degenerate art” in order to show the aesthetic ideas of the regime and to illustrate the antagonism being dramatized as propaganda at the time. Book burnings and *Schandausstellungen* (exhibitions of shame) were symbolic acts used by the Nazis to defame and ultimately eradicate what they hated and to emphasize their own views. It should also be recognized, however, that art and culture are still at risk presently. Today several state, political, and economic forces are operating more subtly and argue differently but they continue to limit, to varying degrees, the freedom of art. The historical slogan “degenerate art” should still offer occasion to reflect on the freedom of art at present and on the extent to which art, particularly contemporary art, can be considered a cultural asset, a critical authority, or even a provocative alternative proposal to the existing world.

Prof. Dr. Olaf Peters

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¹ For the essential issues on this subject, see Peter-Klaus Schuster, ed., *Die "Kunststadt" München 1937: Nationalsozialismus und "Entartete Kunst,"* 5th ed. (Munich: Prestel, 1998; orig. pub. 1987); Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, "Die Kampagne 'Entartete Kunst': Die Nationalsozialisten und die moderne Kunst," in Monika Wagner, ed., *Moderne Kunst: Das Funkkolleg zum Verständnis der Gegenwartskunst,* 2 vols. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1991), 2:467–90; Stephanie Barron, ed., *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany,* exh. cat. (Los Angeles: LACMA; 1991); Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art of the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams 1994), 136–49; Christoph Zuschlag, "Entartete Kunst": *Ausstellungsstrategien im Nazi-Deutschland* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995); and the series of books by the "Entartete Kunst" research center, initiated by the Ferdinand Möller Stiftung and published by the Akademie Verlag in Berlin (2007ff.). The following title has been announced at the time the writing of this essay was completed: Andreas Hüneke, *Kunst am Pranger: Die Moderne im Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Fink, forthcoming). See also the accounts given by contemporaries of the events: Adolf Behne, *Entartete Kunst* (Berlin: Carl Habel, 1947); Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich,*

ed. Uwe M. Schneede (Berlin: Argon, n.d.; orig. pub. 1949); Franz Roh, *Entartete Kunst: Kunstbarbarei im Dritten Reich* (Hanover: Fackelträger, 1962); Günter Busch, *Entartete Kunst: Geschichte und Moral* (Frankfurt am Main: Societät, 1969); Alfred Hentzen, *Die Berliner National-Galerie im Bildersturm* (Cologne: Grote, 1971).

² On National Socialist art policies, see also Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1963); Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner: Studie zum Machtkampf im Nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem,* 2nd ed. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006; orig. pub. 1970); Walter Rischer, *Die nationalsozialistische Kulturpolitik in Düsseldorf* (Düsseldorf: Triltsch 1972); Reinhard Merker, *Die bildenden Künste im Nationalsozialismus: Kulturideologie-Kulturpolitik-Kulturproduktion* (Cologne: DuMont, 1983); Klaus Backes, *Hitler und die bildenden Künste: Kulturverständnis und Kunstpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Cologne: DuMont, 1988); Jan-Pieter Barbian, *Literaturpolitik im "Dritten Reich": Institutionen, Kompetenzen, Betätigungsfelder* (Munich: dtv, 1995); Volker Dahm, "Nationale Einheit und partikuläre Vielfalt: Zur Frage der kulturpolitischen Gleichschaltung im Dritten Reich," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 43, no. 2 (April 1995): 221–65;

Glenn R. Cuomo, ed., *National Socialist Cultural Policy* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995); Thomas Mathieu, *Kunstauffassungen und Kulturpolitik im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zu Adolf Hitler u.a.* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 1996); Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art and Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1996); Richard A. Etlin, ed., *Art, Culture, and Media under the Third Reich* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2002); Hans Sarkowicz, ed., *Hitlers Künstler: Die Kultur im Dienst des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2004); Joan L. Clinefelter, *Artists for the Reich: Culture and Race from Weimar to Nazi Germany* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2005); Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia, eds., *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change* (New York: Berghahn, 2009).



Iwao Yamawaki, *The Attack on the Bauhaus*, 1932, color photomontage. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin

PART ONE

■ FROM NORDAU TO HITLER

■ “CRAZY AT ANY PRICE”

■ PLATES I

FROM NORDAU TO HITLER

“DEGENERATION” AND ANTI-MODERNISM BETWEEN THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE AND THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST TAKEOVER OF POWER

Olaf Peters



DEGENERATION, DECADENCE, AND THE STRUGGLE OVER GERMAN ART

Over the course of the nineteenth century, concepts such as decadence and degeneration increasingly found their way into both cultural criticism and scientific discourse. Both strands are sometimes interwoven and superimposed in arguments and over the years resulted in an explosive mixture. The National Socialists reduced this discourse to racist themes and instrumentalized it as a constitutive component of their propaganda for the policy of extermination created by the “Third Reich.”¹ In the face of its inhuman consequences, the latter could in turn be partially rationalized “scientifically” and implemented by its perpetrators against this backdrop. It was, however, a long and at times contradictory road to get there.

A seventeen-year-old son of a rabbi in Pest (part of Budapest) in the second half of the nineteenth century adopted the revealing pseudonym Max Nordau [Fig. 1]. He wanted to appear to be a German author and at the same time pointedly distance himself from both his Jewish background and the Magyar majority of Hungary. Simcha Südfeld, alias Max Nordau, published his successful book *Entartung* (*Degeneration*) in two volumes in 1892 and 1893.²

It quickly went through several printings and was translated into several European languages.³ Nordau was not the first to apply the concept of “degeneration” to art, but he popularized the slogan on the foundation of several earlier works, by the physician Cesare Lombroso of Turin, among others. As a student of the famous Parisian neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, Nordau, who was a trained physician, diagnosed degeneration as a mental illness. He claimed it was caused by rapid changes to modern civilization, to which his contemporaries could not adequately adapt. Critique of the metropolis and romanticism of agriculture had come together in Nordau’s earlier work: “Nature demonstrates to man that he cannot live without farmland, that he needs the fields just like the fish needs water; man sees that he perishes when he tears himself from the soil, that only the farmer reproduces himself uninterrupted, remains healthy and strong, while the city dries up the marrow of those who live there, makes them ill and infertile.”⁴ From this Nordau even concludes that “the city dweller represents a human type that is fated to perish.”⁵

Nordau classified the norm as healthy and the deviant as sick. It is crucial for our context that Nordau regarded the most advanced modern art and literature, almost without exception, as sick, as degenerate, and hence in need of change. In the German-speaking world, Wilhelm Schallmeyer had written about degeneration (*Entartung*) before Nordau, publishing his *Über die drohende körperliche Entartung der Kulturmenschheit* (On the Imminent Physical Degeneration of Cultured Humanity) in 1891, thus ringing in the Social Darwinistic path to breeding and selection.⁶ This made him the father of *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene) in German, which was concerned about *Volks-gesundheit* (health of the people), although he did not employ racist or anti-Semitic arguments.

Both Schallmeyer and Nordau expressed their theses in an age that was euphorically influenced by faith in progress and science and above all on the basis of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. The reception of Darwin became problematic and even dangerous when it was interwoven with anti-Semitic tendencies, as was the case with Eugen Dühring, who in 1880 discussed the Jewish question as a “question of race, morals, and culture.” “Degeneration” soon became the stigma of the Jewish people understood as a race, since they had to be rigorously separated from the “body of the people” because of their symptoms of degeneration and the risk of infection.⁷ Max Nordau, by contrast, tried to decouple anti-Semitism and the discourse on “degeneration” by using the term much more broadly and intending it for modern civilization in general. Indeed, the anti-Semites seemed “degenerate” to Nordau; according to Christoph Schulte, Nordau tried to defeat them with their own weapons.⁸ In the process, however, he too used the term “stigma” in reference to physical symptoms.

Nordau made the entire artistic and literary avant-garde the central target of his diagnosis and turned the traditional cult of the genius—which had often stylized the genius as a saturnine melancholic—into its opposite: “I do not share Lombroso’s opinion that highly-gifted degenerates are an active force in the progress of mankind. They corrupt and delude; they do, alas! frequently exercise a deep influence, but this is always a baneful one. [...] They are guides to swamps like will-o’-the-wisps.”⁹ Modern art and literature thus seemed to him to be the products of character deficits (blinding and deception). Moreover, they were consequences of civilization in large cities, symptoms of “degeneration” caused by the metropolis, and were also phenomena of a relatively small, incestuous, sickly upper class. They could afford the luxury of a decadent avant-

1. Max Nordau, 1849, photograph. © Michael Nicholson/Corbis

garde, as embodied with particular radicalism in the Symbolism of the likes of Charles Baudelaire and Joris-Karl Huysmans. Other outstanding “decadent” individuals, such as Richard Wagner, Henrik Ibsen, and Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Nordau accused of “ego mania,” were seen as “hopeless cases.” In Nietzsche’s case, this could be connected to his mental breakdown in 1888 and subsequent insanity. According to Nordau, the public could, at best, begin therapy, since it was not psychologically unwell but merely exposed to devastating influences and above all to tendentious art criticism. It was, therefore, all the more necessary to separate normal society from art and art criticism.

Nordau’s summary was crushing when he observed: “We stand now in the midst of a severe mental epidemic; of a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria, and it is natural that we should ask anxiously on all sides: ‘What is to come next?’”¹⁰ But as a committed Darwinist, he could also predict that the weak, the “degenerate,” would necessarily perish over the course of further evolution. His apocalyptically colored talk thus held out the prospect of recovery, even though, in his view, the new era was not yet clearly emerging. “Degenerates, hysterics, and neurasthenics are not capable of adaptation. Therefore they are fated to disappear. That which inexorably destroys them is that they do not know how to come to terms with reality.” And later Nordau writes: “The hysteria of the present day will not last. People will recover from their present fatigue.”¹¹ The consequences of this process for the evolution of art that Nordau imagined are often overlooked. In his view, art would cease to exist, since those who support it would have to make room for an increasingly rational humanity for whom art would no longer be a form of expression. For Nordau, art becomes an atavism and, at best, the more intensely emotional members of the

population would still pursue it, namely, women and children. He combated art in favor of science; as an irrational symptom of psychological illness, it had to give way to the progressive process of rationalization.¹² With this sketch and prognosis, Nordau was also articulating his fundamental unease with aesthetic modernism. The latter increasingly withdrew into itself with its artistic methods and strategies, becoming increasingly autonomous, self-reflective, and hence increasingly distant from the general public, which did not wish to follow the accelerated aesthetic development.

But this unease turned into action: When “degenerate art” had to be battled rigorously, Nordau equated the modern artist with a criminal: “It never occurs to us to permit the criminal by organic disposition to ‘expand’ his individuality in crime, and just as little can it be expected of us to permit the degenerate artist to expand his individuality in immoral works of art. The artist who complacently represents what is reprehensible, vicious, criminal, approves of it, perhaps glorifies it, differs not in kind, but only in degree, from the criminal who actually commits it.”¹³

In addition to the issue of moral-spiritual degeneration, another issue, which, despite Nordau’s effort to put it in context in the quotation that follows, could be superficially connected to the first, had fatal consequences: the supposed proof of degeneration in the form of physical stigmas and physiognomic features as lasting changes.¹⁴ It is significant here that Nordau spoke of stigmata as enduring changes and did not use the term “symptom,” which refers to a temporary change caused by disease: “Degeneracy betrays itself among men in certain physical characteristics, which are denominated ‘stigmata’ or landmarks—an unfortunate term derived from a false idea, as if degeneracy were necessarily the consequence of a fault,

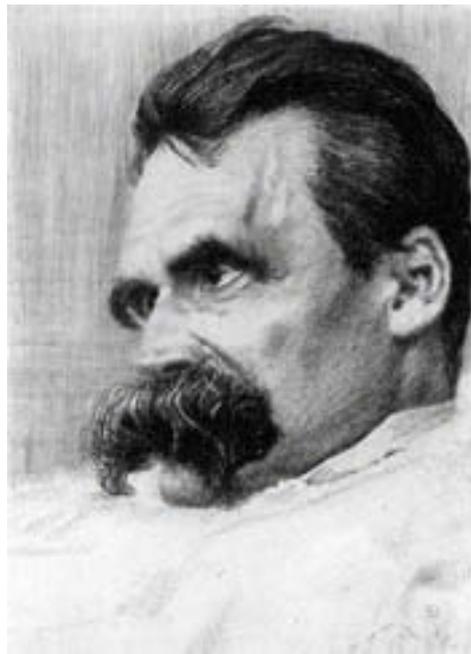
and the indication of a punishment. Such stigmata consist of deformities, multiple and stunted growths in the first line of asymmetry, the unequal development of the two halves of the face and cranium; then imperfection in the development of the external ear [...] further, squint-eyes, harelips [...], etc."¹⁵ Nordau extended physical degeneration to include mental degeneration and postulated that the mental faculties of the degenerate are "stunted, others morbidly exaggerated."... "That which nearly all degenerates lack is the sense of morality and of right and wrong."¹⁶

This is precisely what the National Socialists would return to again and again, beginning in the 1920s, when they combined art, morals, politics, and eugenics in their propaganda in order to mobilize the existing resentment of an avant-garde that had become incomprehensible and to defame the modern artist as a morally depraved, perverted subject, or a racially inferior alien. However, all of the bases for this intensification were already present in the late nineteenth century—from Max Nordau and also from Friedrich Nietzsche—and only had to be simplified to serve as instructions for action. Nordau had already suggested a therapy: "Such is the treatment of the disease of the age which I hold to be efficacious: Characterization of the leading degenerates as mentally diseased; unmasking and stigmatizing of their imitators as enemies to society; cautioning the public against the lies of these parasites."¹⁷ But for him the difference between illness and health was still "not one of kind, but of quantity."¹⁸

Nietzsche was for Nordau a madman, suffering from "ego mania," and a sadist [Fig. 2]. He saw the last of these manifested in Nietzsche's philosophemes of master morality and of cruel hardness. In his polemic attempt to come to terms with Richard Wagner, Nietzsche had ad-

ressed *décadence*, which he regarded as a symptom of his time.¹⁹ In the process, he broadly identified cultural phenomena—alcoholism and the emancipation of women, democracy and nihilism, among other things—with biological phenomena. In our context, Nietzsche was significant insofar as he established a connection between aesthetic decadence and biological degeneration. He was not necessarily original in that respect, as when he took up the thesis that "civilization brings with it the physiological decline of a race."²⁰ But it was precisely the "ascetic ideal" as advocated by Christianity that was so fateful in Nietzsche's view: "I know of hardly anything else that has had so destructive an effect upon the *health* and racial strength of Europeans as this ideal; one may without any exaggeration call it *the true calamity* in the history of European health."²¹

Nietzsche was also significant with regard to degeneration and decadence and with regard to what could be called a philosophical precursor



2. Hans Olde, Friedrich Nietzsche, 1899, etching



3. Cover of the catalogue *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* (First German Autumn Salon), Galerie Der Sturm, Berlin 1913

to eugenics. His thinking and language could encourage inhuman policies if they were taken literally and implemented. A statement of his from the autumn of 1880 read: “Causing the lamentable, deformed, degenerate to die off must be the trend! Not maintaining them at any cost! As nice as the attitude of mercy toward our unworthy and helping the bad and the weak may be, on the whole it is an exception, and humanity as a whole would become vulgar in the process.”²² Nietzsche advocated regulation of sexuality, restrictions on marriage, and prostitution with the specific goal of strict selection in reproduction that would prevent the breeding of the sick and criminals. “Go through the streets of its large cities and ask yourselves whether these people should reproduce!”²³ As part of his elitist philosophical project, he argued for activist sexual policies that took aim at degenerative tendencies, that overstepped the boundary with human breeding, and whose goal was the “improvement of the race.” Decades later, the National Socialists took a comprehensive look at this in their attempt to “realize the utopian” when planning the breeding and the extermination of entire peoples using forced sterilization and mass murder.²⁴

Concepts of “art specific to a race” would become more important for future discussions of the status of modern art in Germany than Nordau’s or Nietzsche’s cultural criticism and concept of “degeneration.” Foremost was not the critical view of the evolutionary path of the modern era—about which Nordau and especially Nietzsche had made notable observations—but rather the attempt to define positively a “German” or Nordic art that rejected modernism and took aim against the dominance of French art. So the problems focused on issues of art criticism and policies, which concerned, first, the question of German art in relationship to leading French art, and a reevaluation of traditional German or

Nordic art (the age of Dürer, Rembrandt, and Romanticism). After the famous Holbein dispute of 1871, the question of German art in the sense of a specific aesthetic had been acute. Holbein’s *Darmstadt Madonna* was revealed as a “German painting,” rather than an Italianate copy from the seventeenth century. The theses of the “Rembrandt German” Julius Langbehn and Henry Thode’s *völkisch* (racial national) art history intensified the discussion with an anti-French and increasingly Germanophile verve,²⁵ in some cases manifesting aggressively expressed efforts to achieve a German art that was “true to type.” This notion was sometimes ideological (anti-French, nationalist, *völkisch* /racist), sometimes tied to fundamentally different aesthetic ideas, and sometimes linked to specific economic interests when it came to the use of acquisition budgets on foreign artists.

The conflicts over Hugo von Tschudi’s acquisition policy for the Nationalgalerie in Berlin from the early 1890s;²⁶ the so-called Böcklin debate (1905) over a contemporary “painting of ideas” in contrast to sensualist Impressionism;²⁷ the Vinnen Dispute (1911) over the acquisition of a painting by Vincent van Gogh;²⁸ the debate over the prominent position of the contemporary avant-garde at the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne in 1912²⁹ and at the first “Deutscher Herbstsalon” (German Autumn Salon) by Herwarth Walden, journalist and owner of the Galerie Der Sturm, in 1913³⁰ stand out in particular [Fig. 3].³¹ This was about, first, German museums taking up the thesis of Julius Meier-Graefe’s *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Modernen Kunst* (Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics) and seeking to represent the course of that development with important works of French painting in German collections. There was an effort to document adequately the evolution of modern art since Édouard Manet, which necessitated referring

back to French modernism. Acquisitions of major works by Manet (Berlin, Mannheim, Munich) and Van Gogh (Bremen, Hagen) and progressive policies of acquisition and exhibition on the part of German collectors and museum officials (Eduard von der Heydt, Harry Graf Kessler, Karl Ernst Osthaus, and Hugo von Tschudi) overshadowed German artists, as some of them saw it. That led to the Vinnen Dispute around 1910–11, a controversy over aesthetics and art policies that reflected a struggle over economic distribution.

These phenomena cannot be discussed in detail here, but it seems important to point out that the crucial intensification of the climate concerning art policies took place prior to World War I and coincided with the establishment of the so-called avant-gardes and isms in art. Their presentation—for example, at the exhibitions by the Neue Münchner Künstlervereinigung (New Munich Artists' Association) and the Blauer Reiter in Munich—in particular prompted verbal responses from critics and the public that were extremely harsh, even violent, and sometimes the works of art were attacked physically.³² This explains why the National Socialist action to destroy modern art chose 1910 as the cutoff date for the confiscation of works from German museums. The symbolic year of 1910 marked the manifestation of an at times aggressive, even iconoclastic avant-garde (Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism: 1905–09), the disputes over art policies concerning the acquisition of modern art for German museums, and epochal survey exhibitions (Berlin, Bremen, and Cologne), some of which disturbed the bourgeois audience for art. Despite some notable impulses in the late Wilhemine period, greater openness to international modernism and the avant-garde only began to be observed from the time of the Weimar Republic, leading to important acquisitions of High Modernism

and the German avant-garde (Expressionism, Neue Sachlichkeit and Bauhaus, Constructivism) in Berlin, Essen, Halle an der Saale, Hannover, Mannheim, and other German cities. The lack of understanding on the part of the general public and the fact that this opening took place against the backdrop of the new democratic state and after the defeat in a world war helped the National Socialists to conceive their agitation against modernism as a mobilization of resentment and a denigration of democracy.

Modern art was contemptuously labeled art of the so-called “system era.” Whatever had been created around 1910 and had been collected after 1918 was subject to this verdict. That is why on June 30, 1937, Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda under the Third Reich, granted authority from Adolf Hitler to Adolf Ziegler, president of the Reichskammer der Bildenden Künste (Reich Chamber of the Fine Arts), to “select and impound works of German art of decline since 1910 currently in the possession of the Reich, the states, and the communes, from the fields of painting and sculpture, for the purposes of an exhibition.”³³ Hence the National Socialists established the year 1910 as a symbolic date. They identified all of the art produced by the avant-gardes after that date as “degenerate art.” By doing so they shifted this incriminated field, contrary to Max Nordau, clearly into their own present, while reviving Wagner and Nietzsche, whom Nordau had denounced as “degenerate.”

THE MOBILIZATION OF RESENTMENT

Modernist art could describe itself in a positive way as decadent and “degenerate” when it wanted to underscore its particular idiosyncrasy and aesthetic subtlety. Degeneration could then, as Peter-Klaus Schuster remarked about the end of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, refer to making something noble or sublime or to the

subjective-artistic as a particular form of sensitivity. The advocates of *völkisch* art opposed precisely this bourgeois attitude of aestheticism. Art should be accessible to the people and easily understandable. For the National Socialists, German art was supposed to represent the creative values of the German people. Indeed, Hitler attributed to art the task of creating a monument to the people and following the “life laws” of the people, stating in 1937: “Therefore I want, when I speak of German art, [...] to see the standard in one’s own people, its essence and life, its emotion, its sensations and their development in its development.”³⁴ And when it came down to defining “German art,” the dictator took refuge in a quotation: “Being German means being clear.” This clarity was supposed to be easily understood, corresponding to a racially homogeneous people and propagate its values and worth. Hitler’s intellectually flimsy concept of clarity as the “essential feature of German art” was the characteristic of true art: expressly opposed to complexity, intellectualism, and even ambiguity. Thus Hitler unceremoniously ended an aesthetic debate within his party that had flared up again and again as part of the necessary history leading up to the symbolic act of an exhibition of shame in 1937.

The beginnings of National Socialist art policy reach back to a time in which the NSDAP was a splinter and protest party that scarcely played a role politically.³⁵ At the NSDAP Party Conference in Nuremberg in 1927, guidelines for cultural policy were passed with the goal of winning over “intellectual creators” to the Nazi movement. The supposed head ideologist, Alfred Rosenberg, was assigned this task, but he addressed “nationally known personalities” with little success. The founding of the Nationalsozialistische Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft (National Socialist Scholarly Society) was announced in January 1928. Even today, we

scarcely know anything about what it was, as it was not very prominent. That same month a founding charter was written for the Nationalsozialistische Gesellschaft für deutsche Kultur (National Socialist Society for German Culture), which later became the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur (Militant League for German Culture).³⁶ In addition to Rosenberg, its members included the treasurer of the NSDAP, Franz Xaver Schwarz; the business manager of the NSDAP, Phillip Bouhler; the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler; and Gregor Strasser [Fig. 4].

The founding charter clarified the objectives and ideas of the organization that would become the Kampfbund. It presumed a general decline and a profound national crisis. Culture and morality appeared to be massively threatened, and it was necessary to join ranks to halt the feared further decline. The NSDAP wanted to focus the palpable discontent with modernity in order to activate a potential for protest that would concentrate in an organization close to the party. To that end, the obvious connection to the party was played down, and the Kampfbund no longer openly acknowledged that it belonged to the NSDAP and removed the words “National Socialist” from its name. The description of its programmatic goals were flowery and general: “The society is setting itself the goal of enlightening the German people about the connections between race, art, science, and moral and military values.”³⁷

Over the course of the text the reader is offered a mixture of cultural and political wishes, mythologized values, and educational intentions, all with little intellectual grounding but intended to address as much as possible all those who did not feel they were represented by the forms of advanced modernity. Vague conspiracy theories and racist basic attitudes characterize its program; there is a clear desire for education



4. Alfred Rosenberg (left) and Adolf Hitler during a parade of the SA, Munich, 1923. Photograph by Heinrich Hoffmann

and influence on schools and universities. The Kampfbund was not focused solely on the fine arts but also incorporated radio, film, theater, and literature and established various departments for them as part of its internal structure. The Kampfbund was the product of Rosenberg's hybrid intellectual ambitions and the effort of the Munich clique around Adolf Hitler to secure a kind of monopoly on ideology. It was initiated by longstanding NSDAP members such as Himmler and Strasser. It was supported by representatives of the *völkisch* movement such as Adolf Bartels and Paul Schultze-Naumburg of the Heimatschutz (homeland protection) movement.³⁸ From Bayreuth came the Wagner clan around Eva Chamberlain, Winifred Wagner, and Daniela Thode—representatives of the cultural elite that the Kampfbund wanted to address above all.³⁹ Hugo Bruckmann, a right-wing publisher from Munich, was central; through him the party established contacts with the propertied and educated bourgeoisie of the city of Munich.⁴⁰ This enabled the party to lose some of scent of a political pariah it had acquired after the amateurish putsch attempt of 1923.

In terms of social class, the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur was composed disproportionately

of members of the educated bourgeoisie. It did not initially strive to become a mass cultural organization, and in 1931 it had only around a thousand members. Rather, Rosenberg's goal for the Kampfbund was to bring educated circles closer to a party that had a reputation as "primitive" and that they would otherwise have been inclined to reject. They tried to break into the milieu of university professors, artists, and intellectuals as well as higher-ranking civil servants. This was achieved more through personal approach and not through sweeping propaganda. This indirectly provided the party with an opportunity to present itself to these circles as a serious political force that was trying to shake its reputation for violent conflict in the street. In the Kampfbund's early history, the public lectures it organized played a central role. Around 1929–30 it was able to hitch its wagon to renowned scholars who were conservative but not necessarily *völkisch* in their orientation and thus acquire a touch of seriousness, even the appearance of intellectualism. These speakers included the economist Otmar Spann, Paul Schultze-Naumburg, the musicologist Alfred Heuss, and briefly even the famous art historian Heinrich Wölfflin.⁴¹



5. Paul Schultze-Naumburg, 1919, photograph

One crucial moment for the future perspectives of National Socialist art policy was the NSDAP's joining the governing coalition in the state of Thuringia. Thanks to the direct involvement of Adolf Hitler, in early 1930 the party managed to join a coalition. Dr. Wilhelm Frick, who until then had been the leader of the NSDAP in the Reichstag, became minister of the interior and education in the new cabinet in Thuringia. The fifteen months that followed anticipated in many ways the party's later takeover of power in 1933 and has therefore often been described as a test case.⁴² And they did not mince words, as when Fritz Sauckel, Gauleiter (regional party leader) of Thuringia, held forth that they wanted to destroy the present state. Frick quickly announced an enabling act intended to support the fight against "Marxist impoverishment" and noted: "Organized subhumanity has reigned in Germany for twelve years now. The rule of the inferior is the necessary consequence of the corrupt parliamentary democratic system. You can see that from the circumstances we experience today with a shudder. The German people as a whole has become an enslaved people today, the coolie for the entire world, and if we want to change these circumstances, we have to return to the buried sparks of German strength, to our race, to our people. Therein lie the strong roots of our energy, not in a vanishing generation."⁴³

Measures were taken in cultural policy such as the introduction of *völkisch* school prayers to indoctrinate the youth. Erich-Maria Remarque's antiwar book *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) and the film based on it were banned; the latter decision was later upheld by the Filmoberprüfstelle in Berlin. The substitute teacher and race researcher Hans Günther was appointed to the Universität Jena, which the university must have regarded as an affront. His inaugural lecture—at which Hitler ap-

peared—was spectacularly orchestrated. The aforementioned Heimatschutz architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg, whose arguments were increasingly unrestrained in their racism, was appointed to head the art schools of Weimar [Fig. 5]. His activity perhaps deserves the most attention in connection with the ad hoc measures of the National Socialist minister Frick. Schultze-Naumburg stood for a turn toward the traditional in German architecture after 1900 that has often been subsumed under the label *Heimatschutzstil*. The term refers to a movement in architecture that strove for a regional architecture using local materials and taking into account the existing topography. These ideas were popularized in the highly influential volumes of Schultze-Naumburg's *Kulturarbeiten* (Cultural Works), which were initially published in *Der Kunstwart* and then in book form, and could be found in nearly every educated home. They often made comparisons and juxtaposed right and wrong ways to build.

Kunst und Rasse (Art and Race), Schultze-Naumburg's 1928 book, brought the author to the attention of the National Socialists and provided visual material and arguments for the later *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) action. Its double-page spreads are therefore very revealing, because they radicalize in perfidious ways antithetical juxtapositions of good and bad that had already been explored prior to World War I [Fig. 6]. It was also important that the author could isolate art from the population, so that special measures against modernism also promised success. After all, Schultze-Naumburg postulated, very much in the spirit of Nordau: "The body of the people is physically and mentally different in orientation and healthier; only today's art is one-sidedly focused on manifestations of decline and degeneration."⁴⁴ A second edition of *Kunst und Rasse* was published in 1934, praising what had been

achieved thus far under Hitler's rule, especially the fact that Jews had been driven from their positions of power and that the doctrine of genetic health and racial anthropology had been made the basis of the new state. Concerning eugenics, Schultze-Naumburg noted with satisfaction: "The eradicating of the inferior is no longer an ideology remote from reality but has been embodied in the laws and thus become reality."⁴⁵ It should not be forgotten today that Germany was not alone in this, and Schultze-Naumburg could even appeal to the North American model with regard to eugenics.⁴⁶ It is also remarkable that Schultze-Naumburg clearly recognized that "probably only under pressure from the state" would the mass of the population accept the racial idea as "a given fact and carry it out with appreciation."⁴⁷

The significance of genetic health is also clear from the fact that Schultze-Naumburg postulated the depiction of the healthy human being who represents the "Nordic type" as the supreme goal of art and denied across the board that the Weimar Republic had an interest in this theme. A lengthy quote can help illustrate with its contemptuous diction the evil National Socialist spirit:

The most important artistic task has always been the depicting of the human type, which we encounter in paintings and sculptural works not only as dominant but also as dominating us. We are struck by an essential feature, namely, that in the times of the Republic the depiction of the Nordic human being was encountered only as a very rare exception and even then overwhelmingly only in lower manifestations of it. Depictions of human beings were dominated by foreign, exotic features. But even within this type we observe a strong tendency not to depict the more noble

manifestations of it but unmistakably precisely those that almost distort primitive man into the grinning mug of the animalistic cave dweller. At the same time we see everywhere a preference for and emphasis on manifestations of degeneration familiar to us from the army of the sunken, the sick, and the physically deformed.



The methods chosen for depiction, which are, after all, highly characteristic of their time in any art, point more or less to a physical and moral low. If we were to identify the symbols that are expressed in the majority of paintings and sculptures from that time, they are the idiot, the whore, and sagging breasts. You have to call a spade a spade. It is a veritable hell of subhumans spread before us here, and we exhale when we leave this atmosphere to step into the pure air of other cultures, especially antiquity and the Renaissance, in which a noble race struggled to express its desires in its art. We can only presume that our reader is

6. Paul Schultze-Naumburg, spread from *Kunst und Rasse* (Art and Race), Munich and Berlin 1938 (1st Ed. 1928), pp. 116–117

*familiar with the art that until very recently filled our exhibitions and the chambers of horrors of our museums and about which advertising executives issued their ceaseless cries of "unprecedented!" This book cannot disseminate them but only revive the memory of them and evoke the idea of the world into which the authors of these images tried to lead us.*⁴⁸

This quotation brings to light central concepts: the identification of the Weimar Republic with "degenerate art" that betrayed a Nordic ideal of beauty; the idea of the subhuman, associated with so-called primitive cultures, the physically or mentally ill, and marginal social existence; the idea that the success of modernism was due to a corrupt and manipulative art world; and the alternative image of a "Nordic art" that follows the tradition of antiquity or the Renaissance.

Schultze-Naumburg's 1928 book (which had a third edition in 1938), set the direction and was partially implemented in specific policies. In Thuringia on April 22, 1930, a decree was published with a shocking title that can only trigger mockery and disbelief: "Wider die Negerkultur für deutsches Volkstum" (Against Negro Culture for the German People). The supposedly harmful influence of jazz was considered as a reason to establish censorship, and it also involved a drastic tightening of trade regulations. In the future, its approvals were supposed to follow one-sidedly the only vaguely determinable feeling of the German people and were meant to be controlled by the police. Culture thus became a police matter. The vague formulation of the necessary moral or artistic reliability opened up the possibility of banning people from certain professions.

The takeover and destruction of the former Bauhaus in Weimar was another crucial signal

of a shift in art policy and became a symbol of the reckoning with Weimar modernism. After taking over the university in Weimar, Schultze-Naumburg dismissed the two last remaining members of the Bauhaus: Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Ernst Neufert. The Bauhaus had been driven from Weimar in 1925 and relocated in Dessau, where it was able to operate for several more years and then moved to Berlin briefly. Weimar—the birthplace of the hated democracy—was chosen as the symbolic site of a settlement of disputes and regeneration; the National Socialists tried to act like the saviors of German culture and place themselves in the tradition of German classicism of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller.⁴⁹

The museum policies of the new rulers were also purely destructive. Under their aegis began the first state-ordered "purgings" of museum collections. In response to a verbal instruction from Frick, who had sought counsel from Schultze-Naumburg on the matter, the abstract and realistic works were removed from the modern department of the Schlossmuseum in Weimar and placed in storage. Around seventy works by artists such as Otto Dix, Lyonel Feininger, and Paul Klee were affected [Fig. 7]. The press indicated that it was an "objective" measure rather than a political one, as the art removed had nothing in common with a Nordic-German essence. The mention in the National Socialist *Völkischer Beobachter* that these outrageous events were just a beginning was not taken sufficiently seriously in light of the action. There was a reaction of public shock but in general it was not sufficient to alter the policy. The new cultural policy culminated in the summer of 1930 in the destruction of the Bauhaus teacher Oskar Schlemmer's frescoes in the staircase of the Kunsthochschule Weimar. During the school recess, the work that had been conceived in 1923 by Schlemmer and several

Verzeichnis
der Werke in den Museen, Kirchen, Schulen, etc.
am 1. April 1933

A. Gemälde und Zeichnungen

1.	van der Velde	Leinwand, Öl	Staatliche	Opfer
2.	van der Velde	Bildnis des Reformators	"	"
3.	"	Bildnis des Reformators	"	"
4.	"	Das Bildnis	"	"
5.	Arnold Böcklin	Leinwand, Öl	Leipzig	Städt. Museum
6.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
7.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
8.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
9.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
10.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
11.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
12.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
13.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
14.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
15.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
16.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
17.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
18.	"	Stadthaus	"	"
19.	Albert Dürer	Leinwand, Öl	Staatliche	Opfer
20.	W. Schickel	Leinwand, Öl	"	"

21.	Paul Elstl	Öl auf Holz	Leipzig	Städt. Museum
22.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
23.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
24.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
25.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
26.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
27.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
28.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
29.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
30.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
31.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
32.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
33.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
34.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
35.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
36.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
37.	"	Leinwand, Öl	"	"
38.	Richard Wagner	Öl auf Holz	"	Opfer

B. Skulpturen

39.	Carl Schwan	Stein	Staatliche	Opfer
40.	"	Stein	"	"
41.	C. Schwan	Stein	"	"
42.	Carl Schwan	Stein	"	"
43-45.	C. Schwan	Stein	"	"
46-48.	"	Stein	"	"
49.	Frank Schwan	Stein	"	"
50.	"	Stein	"	"
51.	"	Stein	"	"

52-54.	Johann Schwan	Stein	Staatliche	Opfer
55.	Carl Schwan	Stein	"	"
56.	Carl Schwan	Stein	"	"
57-58.	C. Schwan	Stein	"	"
59-60.	C. Schwan	Stein	"	"
61.	Carl Schwan	Stein	"	"
62.	C. Schwan	Stein	"	"

Bauhaus students for the vestibule built by Henry van de Velde was destroyed. Schultze-Naumburg had the frescoes whitewashed and the reliefs knocked off: a first act of National Socialist iconoclastic cultural barbarism.⁵⁰ There was resistance within the party expressed in response to this policy. In the *Nationalsozialistische Briefen*, edited by Otto Strasser, Winfried Wendland called Schultze-Naumburg "reactionary," which sent Adolf Hitler into a rage, since he regarded it as an attack on the Führer principle. In a direct confrontation with Hitler in May 1930, Otto Strasser denied racist criteria as the basis for policy—including art policy. Hitler, by contrast, stated categorically, even at this early period: "You haven't the slightest idea about art, Mr. Strasser [...]. There is only one eternal art that has validity: namely, Greco-Nordic art. There are no revolutions in the field of art. Nor is there any Italian, Dutch, or German art; it is even nonsense to speak of Gothic art [...]. Anything with any claim at all to the name art can only be Greco-Nordic."⁵¹ Thus it was really already decided that modernism would have little chance in the future when faced with Hitler's limited ideas. In fact, however, that was not clear within the NSDAP until 1937, with the opening of the "Entartete Kunst" exhibition.

THE DESTRUCTION OF ART

When the National Socialists took power in 1933, the pent-up aggressions of Hitler's supporters were discharged, and there were outbreaks of spontaneous violence everywhere that simply could not be channeled. It was not much different in the area of culture than in their approach to domestic political enemies, and the most visible expressions of this were the spontaneous *Schandausstellungen* (exhibitions of shame) organized by local supporters of the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur in cities such as Dresden, Karlsruhe, and Mannheim.⁵²

7. List of the confiscated artworks from the Schlossmuseum Weimar, 1930



8. Installation view of the exhibition "Kunstbolschewistische Bilder," Kunsthalle Mannheim 1933, George Grosz's, *Portrait of the Writer Max Herrmann-Neisse* from 1925 can be seen hanging at the far right [see Cat. No. 52]

Mannheim's Kunsthalle in der Weimarer Republik was one of the most interesting museums in the Weimar Republic, thanks especially to the forward-looking activities of Fritz Wichert and Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, but in no time at all it was irretrievably destroyed by the National Socialists. Hartlaub was dismissed on March 20, 1933, and Otto Gebele von Waldstein, head of the NSDAP local group in Mannheim, was named assistant head of the Nationaltheater and the Kunsthalle and made the director's representative until 1936. Because of an internal conflict, he was obliged in 1934 to describe his activity, and he listed: "(1) Investigating the management of the Kunsthalle, which until now has been seriously contaminated and (2) uncovering and eliminating the systematically pursued bolshevist art policy and the communist promotion work. (3) By order of party member Mayor [Carl] Renninger to organize a show in which (a) cultural bolshevist tendencies and (b) the waste of municipal funds on the Jewish art trade were to be demonstrated."⁵³ Von Waldstein was so precise in his fulfillment of these tasks that he first sought out help, consisting of three figures: the Mannheim painter Karl Strohner; the curator and later director of the Schlossmuseum, Gustav Jacob; and the art historian August Beringer. The last of these is particularly interesting in our context because he was close to the Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft (German Arts Society) in Dresden⁵⁴ and the Kampfband für

deutsche Kultur. Moreover, he was a friend of the painter Hans Adolf Bühler, who had organized a spectacle in Karlsruhe similar to the *Schandausstellung* in Mannheim. Already on April 4, 1933, just a little more than two months after the Nazis took power, the exhibition "Kulturbolschewistische Bilder" (Cultural Bolshevist Images), a harbinger of the exhibition "Entartete Kunst" in 1937, opened at the Kunsthalle in Mannheim. Thanks to a list of the works and photographs, we know quite precisely what the exhibition, which was shown on the second and third floors of the Kunsthalle Mannheim, looked like [Fig. 8].

A total of sixty-four paintings, two sculptures, and twenty graphic works were shown in the two spaces. They included works by Jankel Adler, Willi Baumeister, Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, James Ensor, Paul Klee, Emil Nolde, Oskar Schlemmer, and others—fifty-five artists in all. Works of Expressionism and Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) were particularly affected. The presentation of the exhibition was significant. All the works were removed from their frames; the frames were taken from them as signs of esteem and protection. It was also striking that they were hung more or less randomly. They were labeled with brief mentions of the name of the artist, title, year of acquisition, purchase price, provenance, and in some cases the race of the artist. This was clearly an attempt to manipulate public opinion, since, for example,

the purchase prices were not adjusted for inflation. The connection between an art market supposedly contaminated by Jews and ridiculous prices, for which tax funds were misappropriated, was supposed to seem evident. There was also a macabre, almost medieval demonstration: Marc Chagall's *La prisée (Rabbin) (The Pinch of Snuff [Rabbi])*, 1923–26, now in the Kunstmuseum Basel [Fig. 9], was carried through Mannheim in a procession that passed Hartlaub's home. Then the painting was exhibited in a display window, with a note that one could see here where tax monies went.

In parallel with this "exhibition of bolshevist art," an exemplary room of desired art was set up, where naturally the aforementioned Mannheim painter Karl Strohner was represented, who had eagerly contributed to this *Schandausstellung*. However, it also included a still life by Franz Xaver Fuhr, who was also being shown in the "exhibition of bolshevist art." This is just one of the repeatedly observed failures or inconsistencies, which in this case can perhaps be explained by the rush to organize the exhibition. In general, it is important to emphasize briefly here the internal inconsistencies, some of which led to several experts publicly distancing themselves from the exhibition, as well as subsequent changes to the exhibitions, which also suggest improvised and poorly coordinated action.

It is also important to discuss the exhibition's title briefly, since the concept of artistic or cultural bolshevism was employed with far-reaching consequences. It was a way of linking art, "Jewish pettiness," and Marxism/ bolshevism that had already been tried out during the Weimar Republic. It was the central keyword of both Bettina Feistel-Rohmeder (Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft) and Alfred Rosenberg. Paul Renner, a pioneer of modern typography, responded to this terminological construct with a small text

published in 1932.⁵⁵ In it Renner mercilessly exposed the incongruent arguments of the enemies of modernism and also addressed the paradigmatic cases of the Werkbund housing development in the Weissenhof district of Stuttgart and the "test case of Thuringia" described above. After 1933 exhibitions of "degenerate art" and "artistic bolshevism" became a fixed feature of ideological, anticommunist, and anti-Semitic propaganda shows like those in Munich in 1936 and 1937 [Figs. 10 and 11].

Those who went into battle against Weimar modernism with the nonword "cultural bolshevism" had no scruples in the stormy phase of the so-called "National Socialist revolution." Just as the brawling troops of the SA on the street treated political enemies with unrestrained brutality, the local Kampfbund supporters used the vacuum that existed after the Nazis took power to rush ahead with their own actions. The laboriously asserted appearance of seriousness was shed in favor of an urge to action that had been pent up over years of agitation and was



9. Marc Chagall, *Die Prise (Rabbiner)/The Pinch of Snuff (Rabbi)*, 1923-26, oil on canvas. Kunstmuseum Basel (formerly Kunsthalle Mannheim), exhibited in room 2 of the "Degenerate Art" exhibition, Munich 1937. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



10. Installation view of the exhibition "Der Bolschewismus: Grosse antibolschewistische Schau" (Bolshevism: Large Anti-Bolshevik Show), Munich 1936. This section was entitled "Kulturbolschewismus" and included work by George Grosz, Paul Klee, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Max Beckmann among others

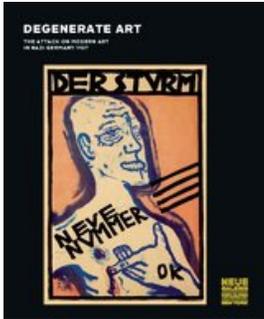
11. Max Eschle, poster for the exhibition "Der Bolschewismus: Grosse antibolschewistische Schau" (Bolshevism: Large Anti-Bolshevik Show), Munich 1936, colored lithograph. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, München



now being discharged. It seemed as if it were the voice of the people. In essence, however, it was about the personal careers of those who had been neglected. And in the case of this political street fighting and anti-Semitic ruckus, the majority of the public was repulsed either by the brutality or by the amateurish inability of the protagonists, which was immediately expressed by conflicts within the party.

Be that as it may, the actions mentioned here mark the first phase of the National Socialist takeover in the cultural field. They were local, ad hoc measures, not centrally controlled, and they certainly met with criticism and a lack of understanding. One person who watched the whole affair with growing suspicion, and would later be a central figure responsible for the "Entartete Kunst" exhibition, was Joseph Goebbels. He had agreed on short notice to give his notorious speech at the book burning on May 10, 1933,⁵⁶ but that speech made one thing clear above all: the future did not lie in these revolutionary, more or less spontaneous actions but rather in "bureaucratic system and official control."⁵⁷ Goebbels was using part of the state's power and giving himself an important advantage over Rosenberg, who placed his faith in the party and whose power began to fade with the beginning of the Third Reich. The Kampfbund became increasingly insignificant, even though the number of its members increased by leaps and bounds.

Goebbels is a key figure to any understanding of National Socialist cultural policy, not least because of his contradictions and opportunism [Fig. 12]. Goebbels did not by any means conform to the ideal of the National Socialist leader: he was handicapped and liked to play the intellectual. His reputation within the party was due to his activities as a brilliant orator, political columnist, and nefarious tactician. He proved



Olaf Peters

Degenerate Art

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Während der NS-Diktatur in Deutschland wurde ein großer Teil der modernen Kunst als „entartet“ diffamiert und die Künstler und deren Förderer aufs Massivste verfolgt. Verfeimt wurden Werke, die nicht mit den nationalsozialistischen Idealen und volkspädagogischen Interessen vereinbar waren. Die Verurteilung erstreckte sich auch auf kommunistische und jüdische Künstler und auf nahezu alle großen Kunstströmungen: Expressionismus, Dada, Neue Sachlichkeit, Surrealismus, Kubismus und Fauvismus. Verfeimte Künstler waren u. a. Max Beckmann, Paul Klee, Otto Dix, Lovis Corinth, Max Ernst und Oskar Kokoschka. Degenerate Art beschreibt die 1937 in München stattfindende Ausstellung Entartete Kunst, die den Angriff auf die moderne Kunst in Gang setzte. Sie wurde in der Nähe vom damaligen „Haus der Deutschen Kunst“ gezeigt, in dem zeitgleich die erste Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung stattfand, die Künstler ausstellte, die vom NS-Regime offiziell anerkannt waren. Weitere Themen im Buch sind die Entstehung und Entwicklung des Begriffs „Entartete Kunst“, Details zur nationalsozialistischen Kunstpolitik sowie die Nachwirkungen des Angriffs auf die moderne Kunst.

 [Der Titel im Katalog](#)