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'Entartete Kunst' between Schlegel and the Nazis. An Untimely Parallel?

The term 'Entartete Kunst' is quite well known in connection with the Nazi Period of the German history. Its propaganda tended to erase every trace of 'decadent' courses in the history of art embodied in artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse etc. The main goal of this Nazi campaign was to establish a new race-pure Nordic notion of art and so it was a complementary part of general politics of the Nazis. But what is much less known is the fact, that the term 'Entartete Kunst' was originally used by Friedrich Schlegel in his famous lectures about the Ancient Literature, which he held in Austria around 1800 when he was speaking about the late phase of it.

The key goal of my paper is to compare the usage of term 'Entartete Kunst' in Schlegel's work and in the Nazi propaganda. But not in a teleological way of thinking in the sense 'How the History went from Schlegel to Hitler', but in the much more productive way of Adorno Horkheimer analysis. This approach offers a dialectic perspective, which enables to avoid a single-minded conclusions between whether the Enlightenment was an origin of Nazi movement or whether the European Nazi disaster was a twist from the project of modernity. The question must on the other hand goes like this: what conditions were opened in the project of the Enlightened modernity that enabled the articulation of the notion of 'Entartete Kunst' in Nazi Germany? Respectively, in what way can we speak about a continuity or discontinuity between Schlegel's concept and the Nazi notion of this term?

This contribution cannot, of course, offer the full scale analysis, but it can present some key problems of these questions and can illustrate them by concrete examples. This could not only enrich the field of Art History but the interpretations of both the Enlightenment and the Nazi Era in Central Europe.