Actualization and Deactualization in Art Studies
The Experience of the Institute of Art History

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Abstract

What is a national theoretical tradition in art history? Description of the history of art theory is based on the experience of the Russian Institute of Art History (The Zubov Institute), which was founded as a private educational institution and became a center of art studies. In fact, art theory and art history was actualized in Russia largely thanks to the Institute of Art History. Valentin Zubov and his colleagues had introduced a new viewpoint on the history of art as an important and independent science with its specific place in Russian humanities. On the example of the Institute we examine the change of attitude to the science about art in the 1920-1930s, mostly under ideological pressure. The paperscrutinizes the process of actualization of a new branch of knowledge and its deactualization in the time when sociological method and Marxist theory became the basis for Soviet art studies. Thereby deactualization makes a non-ideological art theory one of cultural exclusion zones. Chang of scientific pragmatism in the field of art studies transforms its grammar and, in fact, destroys art studies themselves.

1. Introduction

Art studies in Russia have a fairly short yet complex history. In the Soviet Union, the official understanding of art history manifest itself through a policy of reward and prohibition in respect of certain research areas and entire methodological schools of thought, as well as through attempts to either support or

1 In this paper I do not intend to recount the history of art studies in Russia; my goal is to describe those episodes which highlight so-called “zones of cultural exclusion”, as well as to study the mechanisms generating these zones (mechanisms which are universal and can be applied to the whole range of cultural phenomena). This paper is the special edition of the article which was published in Russian in “New Literary Observer”, 133, 3: 86-100 (translation by Maria Semykolennykh).
close down the main institutions dealing with art studies. These actions were not random: in my opinion there was a certain pattern to the ebb and flow of interest in art scholarship, a pattern that included attempts to use art studies as an ideological tool, or to reject them as an economically unsound and “awkward” field of knowledge.

2. The actualization of art studies in Russia

To study the very essence of art does not mean to study artists’ biographies or descriptions of artworks: the acknowledgement of this trivial statement is the basis for the understanding of the content of art studies. The need for European academic art scholarship had ripened unhurriedly; a whole range of other academic disciplines – history, philosophy, aesthetics – should have been sufficient to deal with the theoretical issues of art (including art history) and creativity. Artists and architects themselves committed their observations and comments (based on their own experience) to paper, resulting in theoretical treatises and practical manuals which nevertheless could not cover all the questions and problems of art, its development, patterns, matters of taste etc. Little by little, the “artistic material” that had been accumulating for centuries – the historical and cultural discoveries made by the Europeans, the development of various art institutions (museums, art galleries), the long-lasting tradition of collecting and, as the result, the formation of the art market – created the need for the comprehensive analysis of the laws of art as well as its historical and theoretical aspects. Going beyond the retrospective interpretation of art monuments from the distant past, and not limiting itself to the elaboration of their classification, periodization and description (in other words, to the archeology of art), this comprehensive analysis was to evolve into art history as an academic discipline. Many European scholars, starting from Johann Joachim Winckelmann, worked to make the discipline ever more comprehensive; in the 19th century, such researchers as Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, Karl Schnaase, Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Walter Horatio Pater, Gottfried Semper, Jacob Christoph Burckhardt, Adolf von Hildebrand etc. elaborated the main principles allowing the development of a new academic discipline, namely art studies.

This new discipline arrived in Russia after a lengthy delay, and while a certain independent history of Russian art studies exists, it is full of obscure subjects and peculiar gaps. For many years, the work conducted by the Institute of Art History (Zubov Institute), which was the leader of the theoretical art studies in our country, went almost unacknowledged: “It existed, it was attended, it participated”. The work of the Department for Theory and History of Visual arts and Architecture is the least well-known of all, and is represented by a rather disparate collection of materials, archival data and memoirs. “The information about this Institute, whose very special role in the cultural life of Petrograd in
the 1920s is well-known, was chiefly sourced from memoirs published in the émigré press in the 1960s, and the Soviet press in the 1970s. Information about the Department for Visual Arts is particularly scarce: although its time before the Revolution and in the first years of Bolshevik rule is covered in literary memoirs and essays, its work during the 1920s is significantly more obscure (some information is provided by collected articles from 1924 and 1927), while after 1929-1930 there is no information available whatsoever about the Department for Izo, as it was called by that time. Reference to biographical and archive materials reveals that information about the scholars who worked at the Institute, or about the periods of their lives when they worked for the Institute, is also extremely limited. At the moment it is not my intention to highlight this episode of the Institute's history, which I am sure will find its own researchers. In my opinion, the most significant questions of this complex history are as follows: which questions were raised by the Institute of Art History scholars, what answers did they find, and have the ideas from that time managed to “weather the storm” and be further elaborated in another historical period, or have they lost their importance?

From the very beginning of its existence, the Institute of Art History was a unique institution for Russia, if only for the fact that it was a private institute located in a private house, the Zubov Mansion in St Petersburg. In spite of that, the Institute was able to attract an extensive audience, and to organize regular teaching of art history. But it seems that its principal contribution to science was the actualization of art studies in Russia. Not merely the appearance, but the active introduction into academic and cultural use of scientific knowledge that was wholly new to Russia took place unexpectedly over the space of a few years, chiefly thanks to the efforts of Valentin Zubov.

From 1905 to 1908, the young count Valentin Platonovich Zubov studied art history at Heidelberg University under the tutelage of Henry Thode, in Berlin under Heinrich Wöfflin, and in Leipzig under August Schmarsow. Zubov himself wrote that at the time he was amazed by the very existence of art studies as an academic discipline, and the possibility to seriously and meticulously analyze works of art.

During this period, Zubov and two like-minded men conceived an idea to establish an institute in Russia for the professional academic study of the theory and history of art. They took as their example the State Institute of Art in Florence, which Zubov visited in 1908 and 1909. “There was then, and there still is today, a German Institute of Art History in Florence, consisting mainly of a

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2 Kumpan (2014: 8).

3 “At that time the Swiss scholar Heinrich Wöfflin taught art history. As a scholar, he bore no resemblance to Thode. The latter was too superficial, while with Wöfflin I soon understood, that his level of teaching was too high for me” (Zubov 2004: 93).
rich collection of books on Italian art, where scholars and students can work, and papers are delivered from time to time,” thus did Zubov later remember his amazing and inspiring experience. He bought thousands of books, mostly written in foreign languages, and so laid the foundation for his intended library; he also purchased two “magic lanterns” for the projection of slides onto a screen: the rise of new scientific knowledge usually entails the invention of new tools, and magic lanterns and slides literally became these new special tools.\(^5\)

For a number of reasons, Valentin Zubov realized the idea of such an institute alone. After a bureaucratic prelude, the Institute of Art History was established as a library (where courses which were also read) on the ground floor of the Zubov’s mansion on St. Isaac’s Square. The Institute’s foundation was announced in “The Old Years” periodical in March 1912. It is worth noting that, in the following extract, the proposed field of study for the Institute was clearly described: “…Its aim is to provide all interested parties with the opportunity to study the history of art, at the moment chiefly Western art, as a self-sufficient (emphasis added. – A.T.) – not subsidiary – discipline. The founders intend to read lectures, prepare papers and organize collaboration…”\(^6\)

It is appropriate here to examine more closely the differences between the Institute of Art History and other Russian institutions where the history of art was studied. The Institute was intended from the start to pursue art studies as a “self-sufficient”, i.e. independent academic discipline:

> If art truly exists, and is nowadays going through a difficult period of transition from one epoch to another, then it is especially important to study the logically consistent processes which take place in art within its independent existence, to develop the methods of research into the main elements of art, and to introduce a clear and intelligible terminology for art studies.

The Institute fulfilled this main mission (at times overcoming great difficulties in the process) and is still endeavouring to fulfill it to this day.

The Zubov Institute became the first specialized scientific institute in Russia to work in the field of art studies. It did not, however, follow the example of the State Institute of Art in Florence, as Zubov himself had expected: in 1916 the Institute was granted the status of a state institute of higher education, with studies of the visual arts and architecture supplemented by new fields of research:


\(^5\) It seems that Zubov followed the example of the Wolflin’s art history workshop in the University of Berlin: it is known, that by 1910 Wolflin “owned 250 files with illustrations and 15 000 lanternslides” (Bazin 1994: 411).

\(^6\) Zubov (2004: 95).

\(^7\) Bogaevsky (1924: 62).
music, literature and theatre, with each discipline having its own faculty. The Institute of Art History acquired a defined structure: its elements were divided according to academic disciplines and research subjects, but all components retained the ability to cooperate with each other. In the course of the Institute’s history, these “components” have been renamed a number of times: in 1921 the faculties were called “divisions”, and in 1926 they became departments. Since 1931, the institution which replaced the Institute of Art History has had five sections (for the studies of literature, theatre, cinema, visual arts and music), and those which survived the subsequent reorganization became sectors, a term that is still used to this day.

The appearance of these new departments made the Institute universal in its approach to art studies and at the same time absolutely exceptional. Regardless of the differences between disciplines, researchers working on all types of art were guided by the same methods and principles: special attention was paid to the intrinsic value of artworks, the forms of all artworks was subject to obligatory study, and a certain degree of freedom of interpretation was permitted. “The employment of new scientific methods in art studies, including experimentation, the elaboration of a specialist language for the description of specific works of art, the drawing of new and previously uninvestigated works of art into the sphere of research,” this was the study course for all the Institute’s departments.\(^8\)

3. The ideological control of scholarship and the problem of the deactualization of art studies

During the period of transition and while under the ideological control of the state, the Institute of Art History was unable to maintain the purity of principles established by its founder. In this situation, the Institute faced a problem familiar to employees of state research institutions even today: “clients” (i.e. those who bear the main financial costs, in this case the state) want to dictate the programme of research work, meaning that the interests of “self-sufficient” or standalone science are not a priority and are not even recognized as important. The events which took place in the history of the Institute from the second half of the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s can be divided into two principal vectors: 1) a period of repression of “self-sufficient” art studies and 2) a period of aggressive reorganization (liquidation) of the Institute as the institution conducting such study. These measures represented two governmental strategies of

\(^8\) Kumpan (2014: 13).

\(^9\) In the renovated Institute of Art History, this principle allowed all the researchers working with “new phenomena” to be brought together into a separate sector: the Sector for the Topical Problems of Artistic Culture (created at the beginning of the 1970s as the Sector of Aesthetics and Sociology of Arts).
deactualization: the removal from the existing cultural space, and “the deprivation of one or other phenomenon of the opportunity to transmit its image”\(^{10}\).

Up until the end of 1924, the Institute of Art History, still headed by its founder Zubov, had maintained the nature of its research work, its existing structure, staff, system of administration, along with the unity of its academic curriculum and research programme. Its research topics, listed in the collected articles published by the Division for the History of Visual Arts, entitled *Tasks and Methods of Art Studies*,\(^{11}\) covered almost the whole world (both West and East) and the majority of the principal periods of art history.\(^{12}\) Moreover, as the authors of this collection noted, all these topics were united by a common goal: to arrive at a description not of separate works of art, but of “the evolution of artistic forms”\(^{13}\) or, in other words, to investigate the laws of artistic form. This field of research work was represented by the following papers: the *influence of Western styles on the formation of Russian style* (Dmitry V. Aynalov),\(^{14}\) numerous works dealing with Greco-Roman antique portraits (Oscar F. Waldhauer),\(^{15}\) the *gothic architecture of brick buildings in northern Germany* (Vladimir N. Rakint), the *development of gesture in French painting in the 19th century* (Ida M. Nappelbaum), papers on Islamic works of art (Vasily V. Bartold), *Art theory and its separation from art history* (Vladimir A. Golovan\(^{’}\)), *On the most ancient Greek coins* (Alexander N. Zograph)\(^{16}\), and many more besides. At the same

\(^{10}\) Malinov and Troitsky (2014).

\(^{11}\) Bogaevsky, Glebov *et. al.* (1924).

\(^{12}\) Here are some examples of these works: the *influence of Western styles on the formation of Russian style* (Dmitry V. Aynalov), *Art theory and its separation from art history* (Vladimir A. Golovan\(^{’}\)), *Russian landscaping art in the 18th and 19th centuries* (Vladimir Y. Kurbatov), *On the interrelationship between the ancient oriental, Greek and Roman arts and the contemporary art of central and northern Europe* (Boris V. Farmakovsky), *Buddhist painting* (Mikhail Z. Krutikov), *The development of gesture in French painting in the 19th century* (Ida M. Nappelbaum), *On the question of the significance of the principle of style to art theory* (in reference to the work of Hildebrand) (Nadezhsda S. Voytinskaya) and others (Bogaevsky, Glebov *et. al.* 1924: 187-188).

\(^{13}\) Ivi: 5, 185. Let us not criticize too severely the term “evolution”, which nowadays is considered absolutely inappropriate: during the 1910s and 1920s its use was not only a matter of good form, but also evidence of an author’s progressive views. It can be replaced by the expression “the life or development of artistic form”: in this sense the problem is still considered to be important.

\(^{14}\) One of Aynalov’s best-known works, his *Studies on Leonardo da Vinci* was published only in the year of his death (Aynalov 1939). He worked on this subject while still a full member of the Institute of Art History.

\(^{15}\) Later on Waldhauer brought these papers together and wrote the fairly well-known book *Essays on the History of the Antique Portrait*, published in 1921 (Waldhauer 1921) and 1938 (Waldhauer 1938). The second volume was published posthumously, in the same year that Waldhauer’s widow was arrested on a political charge and executed by firing squad.

\(^{16}\) Alexander Nikolaevich Zograph was a world famous expert in Ancient numismatics. He summarized the results of his research work in the volume entitled *Antique Coins* (Zograph 1951).
time, objects of art were studied at the Department for Theory and History of Arts, which was established at the St. Petersburg University Faculty of History and Philology in 1863 (at Moscow University a similar department had been founded even earlier). The Academy of the History of Material Culture was also engaged in the description and investigation of works of art objects, although as a rule they regarded artworks as historical evidence, and even more importantly there was no theory of art as an independent discipline to be employed for the investigation, analysis and interpretation of the evidence. Thus demand for the Institute’s work was strong, and attracted a wide audience, with some of the students going on to become full-time members of staff.

Notwithstanding its years of successful work and active existence, the Institute, which could boast the best experts in Russian and Foreign arts, had by the beginning of the 1930s almost slipped into obscurity, not counting the less than generous coverage in the contemporary press. There was almost no activity ongoing in the field of the Institute’s studies of visual arts and architecture, and before long the State Institute of Art History (Gitt, as it had been known since 1924) in the building on St. Isaac’s Square was replaced by the Leningrad Division of the State Academy of Art Studies (Gais).

This change, along with the Institute’s definitive departure from its initial idea (as well as from its main objective, i.e. the study of artworks chiefly in terms of the development of artistic form) was connected with full-scale changes to the Institute’s administration, academic staff and structure. These events were officially termed “reorganization”, but contemporaries remembered them as a “closure”. Only after the publication of Lidiya Ginsburg’s memoirs in 1990 did it become clear that the objective of this operation had in fact been to abolish and dissolve the Institute.

The pressure placed on the Institute by state and party management was slow in making itself felt: annual inspections uncovered with increasing frequency a variety of shortcomings in the Institute’s work. At first these were slight reproaches (“lack of coordination between different departments” and “disregard..."
for the studies of modern art”) and the problems could be solved by the creation
of small sub-departments, which had almost no effect on the structure of the
Institute. After the resignation (and emigration) of Valentin Zubov, the post of
director was filled by Fedor I. Schmit, an academician and Byzantine scholar. His
name is associated with the assiduous introduction of the sociological method
into art studies, along with the application of Marxist analysis and a class-based
and ideological position to research into works of art, – i.e. he is associated with
the faithful execution of the ruling party’s orders. The discipline had ceased to
be “self-sufficient”, but it had not become completely “supplementary”. At that
time the “supplementary” function was fulfilled by a separate department of the
Institute, namely its social committee or SocCom, 20 which aimed to ensure the
development of sociological method and its application to the Institute’s work.
It is evident that the sociological method is perfectly compatible with the scien-
tific approach to studying a work of art: it merely transforms the methodology
and analyzes it from the standpoint of class and ideology. Was it possible to
conduct such an analysis without ruining an artwork’s characteristic features?
Schmit made a sincere attempt to find a theoretical solution to this problem:
in 1926 he published the paper “Problems of Methodology in Art Studies”,
which in 1927 was followed by a pamphlet “Subject and Limits of Sociologi-
cal Art Studies”. 21 In these works, Schmit tried to make this “methodological
turn” more scientific. Moreover, in his monograph “Art. The Main Problems
of Its Theory and History” 22 he played the role of defender of art theory (while
substituting it with his own modernized version, which probably was meant to
satisfy the leaders of the party):

We demand a collectivist theory of art, which will not individualize or split art up
into thousands of unconnected manifestations, and which will not destroy the possi-
bility of an integrated and theoretical art history and applied artistic policy; we want
a theory of art that serves the purpose of life and work, not “pleasure” or “interest”. 23

With amazing flexibility, Schmit here speaks for the interests of art studies
(passing it off as “ours”) and at the same time contrives to label European art
studies (which he criticized on several previous pages) as “a science meant for
pleasure or interest” – and it was European art studies that had laid the foun-
dation for the creation of the Institute of Art History.

According to the thinking of the Institute’s administration, the SocCom would
unite all the divisions, with each representing its own discipline and preparing

20 Kumpan (2009).
21 Schmit (1926, 1927).
22 Schmit (1925).
23 Ivi: 17.
papers, which would also include insights into the new methodology. In practice, it appropriated the results of research work conducted by other divisions (departments) – those which met the requirements of sociological method (folklore expeditions, research into public festivities, popular art etc.) – and additionally served as a forum for discussion between advocates of formal method and “Marxist” art studies, which was still possible at that time. By 1929 the SocCom, which had expanded greatly thanks to a number of sections and committees, had nevertheless been abolished: sociological method had been adjudged useless and replaced by a new artificial concept allegedly belonging to art studies – the “Marxist method”.

It should be noted that these methodological trends, founded on the perception of art from the standpoint of class and ideology, bore little relation to classical sociology of art (Kunstsoziologie) and to its conception of the artistic environment in particular. Furthermore, the Department for Visual Arts reluctantly complied with the requirements of sociological method. Evidence of these half-hearted attempts to toe the line can be found in the themes of papers: *The Museum of Classical Sculpture in the Light of Sociology* (Oscar F. Waldhauer) and *The Museum of the Ancient Orient in the Light of Sociology* (Vasily V. Struve).24

Another attempt to mold the Institute to new circumstances and ideological objectives consisted in the creation of a modern art committee for each of the Institute’s divisions (departments). This may seem sensible, but for the fact that “modern art” was of course regarded as “our art”, i.e. mass or Proletarian art. Luckily for the visual arts, Nikolay N. Punin was appointed head of the Committee of Modern Art, however in 1929 he was persecuted by the press as “Anti-Marxist”: instead of Proletarian art, his work focused on the “World of Art” (“Mir iskusstva”), Impressionism and the Avant-garde.25

But it seems that the clearest evidence of the dramatic changes to the Institute’s programme is given by the proceedings of a Marxist seminar (Research Seminar on the Theory of Historical Materialism with Regard to Art Studies) which took place under the auspices of the SocCom from 1926 to 1930.26 Attendance of this “Marxist seminar” was obligatory for post-graduate students, and the papers delivered during its sessions tended to criticize books, articles and research papers in the field of art studies (including those written by the Institute’s academic staff) from the “Marxist-Leninist” point of view. This legitimized another way to increase ideological pressure.

There were also numerous changes to academic staff during the years of the Institute’s reorganization. Those who were not eager to provide “renewed” art studies with the “Marxist-Leninist” methods were usually threatened with dis-

26 For details see: Kumpan (2014: 42-47). The author relies mainly on archival data.
missal. Many researchers from the Department for Izo lost their job: in 1929 Dmitry V. Aynalov retired, at the end of the 1920s Vladimir A. Golovan’ left the Institute and was arrested, and at the beginning of 1930 Nikolay A. Kozhin, the academic secretary of the Department for Izo, and Vera M. Ermolaeva, who worked at the experimental laboratory within the same department, were both dismissed. By the end of 1930, several scholars who had somehow managed to keep their places right up to that time, were ousted, including D.A. Schmit, M.V. Pavlinova, Lydia A. Durnovo and Zinaida I. Sokolova. In this way, professional art historians were isolated from the Institute and deprived of the possibility to conduct their research (as if this wasn’t already difficult enough in these unfavourable circumstances).

In spite of the desperate attempts of the Institute’s administration to “adjust” it to the limits imposed by the authorities (the administration was endlessly adding and removing different departments, committees and sections, supervising the themes of papers and meticulously preparing accounts in the Marxist “spirit”), it was still unable to maintain its previous state.

An inspection conducted by the governmental commission in the end of 1929 demonstrated that the Institute is in fact “a nest of anti-Proletarian ideology”. This has required Glavnauka to change the character of the I. (Institute’s) work. Some Marxists have joined the Institute’s academic staff, and preparation for a drastic transformation of the Institute is underway.

It is noteworthy that literature, visual arts and cinema were considered to be the most hostile, while music and theatre gave significantly less cause for concern, as we can see for example from the following quotation:

At the beginning of the 1930s, the dramatic politicization of culture and art began. Labeling, accusations of opportunism, aestheticism, formalism, revisionism and so on and so forth, as well as endless reprimands and reorganizations, were signs that the end was near. The Institute was crushed and shredded; several fields of research work were abolished (including studies on literature, visual arts and cinema).

27 During the 1930s Aynalov, along with many of his colleagues, was imprisoned; later on he was rehabilitated.

28 Vera Michailovna Ermolaeva, an avant-garde graphic artist and illustrator found herself in the Institute of Art History in December, 1926, after the merger of the Department for Izo and GInKhUK (State Institute of Artistic Culture), where she had been the head of the Laboratory of Colour. After her dismissal from the Institute she was arrested twice, and in 1935 she was imprisoned for anti-Soviet activity (the organization of, and participation in, apartment exhibitions). She was executed in 1937.

29 Uhmylova (1930: 535-536).

The Institute survived as a research institution, but the actual conception of art studies which had underpinned it had been repressed. Luckily, the second most important element of the Institute of Art History, namely its library, which had once given rise to the Institute’s other departments, remained intact.

4. The Institute after the Institute. Did Absorption spell Destruction?

Following the dismantling of the Zubov Institute of Art History in the form it had from 1912 to 1930, its conception and methods were left in peace for some time: this was the period of alleged respite (“alleged”, as at that time the Institute had another existence beyond the borders of official art studies – in other respects the state of affairs was not particularly tranquil). As for the Institute’s name (ГИИ), it was also confiscated and subsequently assigned to another research institution entirely. At that time there was the ГАИ (Государственная Академия искусствознания, the State Academy of Art Studies) in Moscow, which had been created on the basis of the ГАKhN (Государственная Академия художественных наук, the State Academy of Artistic Sciences). The Institute, or rather the sad remains thereof (by this time, political purges and staff transfers had resulted in the significant changes of the Institute’s academic staff) was merged with the Academy. The structure of this new institution was in many respects a replica of the Institute of Art History, which – according to the Sovnarkom’s resolution issued on April 10th 1931, when the Institute “was merged along with four other Moscow research institutions” – “traditionally united efforts of scholars working in different fields of studies”.

31 Since 1994 ГИИ (Государственный Институт Искусствознания, State Institute of Art Studies) has been the designated name for the Institute of Art History and Protection of Architectural Monuments, founded in 1944 in Moscow. Over the years, its name has changed as follows: until 1961 it was the Institute of Art History of the USSR Academy of Sciences (later the institute was transferred to the authority of the Ministry of Culture); in 1977 it was renamed and became the National Research Institute of Art Studies (ВИИ, Всероссийский научно-исследовательский институт искусствознания); in 1992-1994 it was renamed the Russian Institute of Art Studies (РГИ, Российский институт искусствознания). Throughout the entire history of this institution, its name would serve as a reminder of the original Institute of Art History, but the range of problems and research areas of this institution provided evidence of the governmental interest and support given to the research institute and to art studies in general (naturally, in a form convenient for the authorities).

32 The State Academy of Artistic Sciences (1921-1930) was founded in Moscow by Vasily V. Kandinskiy and Alexander G. Gabrichevsky and supported by Anatoly V. Lunacharsky; its aim was to study theoretical problems of art. It was a research institution. Its destiny was as sad as the destiny of the Institute of Art History: in 1930 the Academy was closed down and many of its members were themselves arrested.

We can link this particular event of the Institute of Art History’s elimination with a general trend of eradicating all humanitarian knowledge that was independent from the Party’s ideology (or non-actual and artificially deactualized). Evidence of this catastrophic situation can be found for example in the famous resolution of the TsK Vkr(b) which was published in the magazine “Under the Banner of Marxism” on January 25th 1931 and was intended to put an end to all philosophical discussions. Another revealing decree of the period, “On the reorganization of literary and artistic associations” (1932), made all artistic associations illegal except for the Union of Soviet Writers, the Union of Soviet Composers and the Ussr Union of Artists. Overall, the abolition of the Institute of Art History as a development following on from the ideologization of art theory was just one of the symptomatic manifestations of the epoch of the “Great Break” (the end of the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s). But for Russian art studies it implied at the very least the loss of its scientific foundation and a core which had united like-minded researchers, a retreat from research work in the field of genuine art studies, a renunciation of both Western experience and the results achieved by the Russian researchers of the past, and the destruction of almost everything of value to the history and theory of art.

The illogical “merging” of the institutes itself demonstrated the thoughtfulness and thrift of the authorities. In December 1926, the Department for Izo was abruptly merged with GlnKhuK34, either to be “renewed” by the fresh, young thought of the avant-garde, or controlled by researchers with “methodologically correct” views who had already worked at the Institute of Art History. It may seem a trivial point, but the measures taken by the authorities revealed their economic approach and intention to reduce the number of research institutions dealing with art-related questions.

We have already said that the Zubov Institute of Art History was founded as the sole Russian institution conducting systematic research work in the field of art studies. But this branch of knowledge was deemed so important that in the 1920s there was a whole network of such institutions in both Moscow and Petrograd specializing in the study of art and architecture. In the beginning and middle of the 1920s, these institutions achieved clear specialization: for example, the Institute of Archaeology and Art Studies35, noted for its officiousness and

34 GlnKhuK (1923-1927) was founded as part of the Museum of Material Culture (with its “leftist”, avant-garde view on the selection of material and organization of exhibitions) in Leningrad and based in the Myatlevs’ mansion on St Isaac’s Square, not far from the Zubov Institute. Headed by Kazimir S. Malevich, GlnKhuK was both a research institution and an artistic association. The leading figures among its staff belonged to the Russian Avant-garde. In terms of its theoretical and practical work, and its intention to bring together experimental and industrial art, GlnKhuK was close to its Moscow counterpart – InKhuK, which had been founded a few years earlier.

35 The Institute of Archaeology and Art Studies in Moscow (1921-1931) was founded by resolution of the GUS (Gosudarstvenny ucheny sovet, State Academic Council) and directed first
conservatism, specialized in archaeology, while the Society of Sociology and Art Theory (OSTI),\textsuperscript{36} which aimed to introduce sociological methods into art studies, focused more closely on mass art. The aforementioned GInKhuK was the institution of choice for those interested in experimental art and the study of the latest trends in the medium. Moscow’s InKhuK, a research institution as well as an artistic association, developed ideas of constructivism and industrial art (even though the practical benefits and social significance, so desired by Glavnauka in its dealings with the Zubov Institute, did not save InKhuK from closure in 1924). By contrast, GaKhN\textsuperscript{37} was exclusively concerned with theoretical work, and if to work in the field of art studies at the Zubov Institute meant to study the theory and history of art, then the Academy of Artistic Sciences endeavoured to piece together the philosophy and phenomenological interpretation of art in its many forms. As was the case with the Zubov Institute, the researchers at GaKhN were preoccupied above all with the problems of artistic form, although the theoretical principles of GaKhN were based not on the experience of European art studies but rather on the synthesis of Russian academic disciplines and contemporary avant-gardist projects:

here the material is the main focus of attention. To say nothing of artists, the Department of Psychophysics, which is home to this group of research projects, is attracting in specialists in exact sciences. Observation of and experiments on the content and processes of artistic work are the main research methods. Any artwork is apprehended as a psycho-physical object in all its complexity. The study of elements of colour and line, sculpture and artistic perception (the perception of space in particular), the laws of construction in organic and non-organic nature, in non-artistic creativity and in a whole range of artistic disciplines (architecture, sculpture, painting, music, plastic movements and literature), the problem of construction in monumental and synthetic art (the synthesis of visual arts and performing arts) – these are the broad problems set by this department of the Academy. These themes are very complex due to their novelty, breadth and the lack of research methods applicable to the study of these aspects of art, but these problems are nevertheless urgent from the point of view of modern art studies.\textsuperscript{38}

So ambitious a plan might have made quite genuine and fruitful progress, if by the end of the 1920s it hadn’t lost its importance for the state. After its

by Igor E. Grabar and then Boris R. Vipper. From 1924 it was the part of RANION, with the disbandment of the latter precipitating its demise.

\textsuperscript{36} The Society of Sociology and Art Theory of the Leningrad Department of Glavnauka (Narkompros Rsfsr) existed from 1925-1929 and was organised into divisions for the visual arts, museology, literature, and the mass-study of art (this last division was a counterpart of the SocCom at the Zubov Institute and united all disciplines).

\textsuperscript{37} See note 31.

\textsuperscript{38} Kogan (1923: 4-12).
merger with the Institute of Art History, GaKhN laid the foundation for a new academy of art studies, Gais, which had no rivals and existed under absolute government control.

Such merger activity is very typical for Russian policy in the spheres of science and culture even today. In 2012, the idea of the creation of a “Skolkovo of the humanities” (i.e. a standalone research centre where scholars working in different academic disciplines could conduct their studies quietly and without any fuss) had great repercussions for the scientific community.39 There were numerous other “optimizing” suggestions of this kind, and the authorities’ standpoint is quite obvious: when “putting” two institutions together, it is not difficult to “put out” something which is not of use to them, besides which it is easier to observe and control the resulting hybrid.

Of the five sections within the Leningrad Gais (literature, theatre, cinema, visual arts and music), the most striking results were achieved by researchers working in the field of theatre studies. During the 1930s, they published a series of research works on contemporary Russian and foreign dramatic art, while the more or less important findings of Leningrad’s research into the theory of the visual arts vanished almost without trace.

One of the most mysterious elements of the Institute’s history is the list of those people who preserved its unique atmosphere and shaped its research programme, i.e. the members of its academic staff. The fact is that the actual concept of a “staff” did not appear at the institute immediately, and what’s more the ratio of research to administrative staff members as well as to freelancers changed constantly and dramatically over a twenty-year period.

We should remember that the Institute’s staff list, which was approved by the State Artistic Committee on the 10th of September 1921, presupposed the existence of 326 staff members, while now, following reductions to staffing, there are only 43 staff members at the Institute, including administrative staff and office workers.40

It is worth mentioning that financial support for the Institute of Art History throughout its existence (the “optimizations” of 2013-2014 included) has always been the cause of a lot of troubles, and this question has been invariably given rise to another: that of the relevance of the research work conducted by the Institute and the importance of its activity in general. The existence of a salary fund and financial support for research work were possible only on condition that the results of such work would in some respects be consistent with the wishes of sponsors, with the state often acting in this role.

40 Bogaevsky, Glebov et. al. (1924: 184).
From the very beginning of the Institute’s existence, and later on when he was still director, Zubov had tried to address the personnel issue on his own:

I succeeded in gathering together St. Petersburg’s finest scholars. Some of my friends were willing to participate without any compensation, while I would pay other lecturers out of my own pocket. I wanted to set an example of free education, which I have always considered to be the government’s responsibility.\footnote{Zubov (2004: 96).}

I’ve increased the number of staff members so that the poverty-stricken can have their bread and butter. Moreover, it has provided some people, who would otherwise have been regarded as \textit{lishentsy} (though this term hadn’t been yet coined then), and who, according to Zinoviev, were capitalists who should have been thankful for the very smell of bread, with some social status.\footnote{Ivi: 102.}

At the beginning of the 1920s, when Zubov still headed the Institute, freelancers did almost all the research work, and after his resignation the Institute had to continue with “a sum of money equal to 32 salaries divided between 35 people”.\footnote{Kupman (2014: 20).} Moreover, fifteen of these staff members also had to perform administrative and technical functions, while first and second class researchers worked without any payment at all. We cite all these numbers here to demonstrate that, in the 1920s as nowadays,\footnote{This situation of a drastic reduction in research staff combined with a rapid increase in administrative staff repeated once again not long ago, in 2013, during the period of continuous “optimizations”. See for details: Kumukova (2014); “Mass dismissal etc.” (2013).} many researchers had to wear two hats. That is why when reading the biographies of scholars who worked for the Institute of Art History, we often find mentions of only those places of employment which survived throughout the Soviet period (quite often the researchers were officially employed by these institutions while conducting their research work in the Zubov Institute).\footnote{Dmitry V. Aynalov is almost never mentioned as a long-term member of the Institute’s academic staff. There is no information about his work in GITI, only mentions of his teaching in the Petersburg-Leningrad University, his work for the State Hermitage in the 1920s, and his membership of the Academy of Sciences. In Waldhauer’s biography preceding the second volume of his \textit{Essays on the History of Antique Portrait} (Waldhauer 1938), there is no mention of his work for the Russian Institute of Art History, and only at the end of the essay is there reference to his teaching work (including his teaching in the Institute). Golovan’ is principally known as one of the first researchers who worked in the Hermitage library and then as a lecturer. The biographies of many other members of the Institute’s staff are reported in the same manner.} Thus the names of many scholars are shrouded in obscurity, and their studies carried out within the walls of the Institute, are almost completely unknown to us. In this respect, the Department for Izo,
which was never at the centre of any scandal and made very few publications during the 1920s, is still insufficiently explored. Its history and the biographies of its members hide in the shadows, beyond the borders of the official history of Russian art studies.

5. The reactualization of art studies

There has never been a real Renaissance of art studies in our country, as the discipline has never been officially banned (save for some methods that were considered “hostile” to the Soviet social system) and has therefore in a manner just continued with its existence. In many Russian higher education institutions, students learn the history and theory of arts; research activity in this field is carried out by museums and several research institutes (the State Institute of Art History in St Petersburg, the State Institute of Art Studies and the Research Institute of Theory and History of Fine Arts in Moscow), each of which is notable for its unique research program. It would be at the very least insincere to describe the Sector for Visual Arts and Architecture, which was restored — recreated even — at the Russian Institute of Art History during the 1990s, as heir apparent to the ideas and art studies of Zubov. No matter how much we may want to return to the past, the cultural situation today is completely different: “To remove a ban doesn’t mean to restore a cultural landscape in all its original glory… As a result of this constant regeneration of the tissue of culture, a previously prohibited element becomes alien”. 46 The theoretical study of art is based not only on the works written by scholars from the 19th and early 20th centuries: in comparison with this distant historical period, Russian art studies today benefit from a far more extensive resource of factual and theoretical material. But we should also preserve our understanding of that art history, and this is possible only if we continuously return to the research that was carried out at that time, for example the work of the aforementioned State Academy of Artistic Sciences was recently honored with special attention from both Russian and German scholars at the conference “Russian Art Studies in the 1920s”. 47

However, art studies face the same problem today as they did then: they have to demonstrate their importance. The Institute of Art History is an academic institution, but it has to exist under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture. This situation raises the question of the “cultural product”, which must be produced, as it were, by the Institute. For this reason, a proposal was made recently to work out a system of government orders in the field of art studies. 48 The suggestions

46 Malinov and Troitsky (2014).
47 Podzemskaya (2008); Anashvili (2010).
48 “Medinskiy said etc.” (2013).
made by representatives of the Ministry of Culture as themes for the research work was rather applied research, for example drawing up a collective social portrait of theatre-goers, exhibition-visitors and other cultural events. Another frequent stumbling block is the problem of important and unimportant research issues.\footnote{49} The period from 2012 to 2014 was filled with conflict between the authorities and the Institute’s academic staff,\footnote{50} and the measures taken by the former in many respects resemble those mechanisms of deactualization which had been set in motion during the Soviet period.

Today, the science of art and art history must construct its own positive content to overcome the temptation (and threat) of substitution by other academic disciplines. The borders of art studies are so narrow that its content can easily be replaced and substituted with a more “convenient” concept (as has happened when theory has been substituted with ideology). The discipline of art studies, as a kind of “esoteric knowledge”, has a tendency to disappear from the sphere of actuality, and therefore demands especially careful and reverent treatment.

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