

Very large exhibitions such as *Bilderstreit* are not beneficial either to art and artists or to the public. They never provide a true sense of what is being done in contemporary art. Most large collections of contemporary art are also not relevant. The large exhibitions of the work of earlier artists, such as the shows now of Degas, and Courbet, are not necessary. Not all, but many museum exhibitions are harmful to the work shown. Most museum collections do not represent the art of the last forty years, if they should, or achieve any other purpose. Most of the activity surrounding art is not useful to it and most of that is harmful. Art is unusual of course but it is also so in a usual way: artists have very little control over their own activity, and less all the time. And strangely they don't seem to want control. In this they may for once reflect the society: most people don't want control of their affairs and less so all the time.

The shortest history as it concerns large exhibitions and collections in the last forty years is that art at the earliest point was by definition individual, therefore hard to sell and understand, and the purpose since, not always considered, of most dealers has been to find art that is easy to sell and to understand, and, of most museum personnel, art that is easy to show and understand. Of course this subverts real art and sets up a separate category of song and dance.

One conclusion for others, for the public, that can be made in regard to art is that it should be considered, even a little, in the same way in which it was made, which is that it should be thought about, decided upon, judged. Good work is not made by the shotgun approach. Vast exhibitions and collections, usually shotgun, are an abrogation of responsibility, a responsibility which should be interesting. In the 1950s and 1960s in New York people laughed at Joe Hirshhorn for buying eight at a time of an artist's work, almost any artist's work. He played it safe; he machine-gunned the field for signs of life. This bizarre attitude became standard. And now such as Saatchi and Panza are heroes ("heroes" have been revived recently).

The large exhibitions, which of course are like the art fairs, most large collections, and many museum exhibitions are part of the art business. The public and also young artists, not being able to know better, begin to think that the art business somehow has something to do with art. Commerce is not art. Education is not art. Being paid for living on art is not art. As I've written, honest small businesses, as some galleries are, provide necessary money for artists. These galleries are easy to recognize as businesses and their prosaic activities are hard to turn into a new kind of "art" or other "hype." Whatever real money there is for art comes from sales in the galleries. It doesn't come from large and expensive shows or from discount-store collectors. Neither does it come from central governments, also shotgunning. Machine-gunning.

In other words *Bilderstreit* and its attitudes, stated or implied, are not those of the artists, or whatever it says on TV after the show, and are essentially the attitudes of entrepreneurial commerce, even in contrast to plain commerce.

Entrepreneurial commerce and the entrepreneurial bureaucrats in government, being unproductive, need justification, which means that they must search for reasons for having and spending money, which always involves an appeal to the public good, which usually includes an invocation of public kitsch, that is, public ignorance. Finding and using these fake purposes subverts art and architecture and causes these purposes to be used more and more in lesser and lesser matters, finally making it impossible to do directly anything worthwhile. In thinking and in expenditure *Bilderstreit* is an example of this. Undoubtedly it's expensive; just the catalogue, which becomes in storage one of many, is expensive. Can artists get this sort of money to do their work?

This discussion leads directly to the main economic and political issue of this time, which is that largeness is thought to be better, thought to be the goal: enlightened, fair, efficient, cheaper, democratic. Large institutions are none of these.

Large central governments and large businesses have been tremendously destructive in this century and yet are never blamed. In the United States they say that the Cold War is over, even that "we won it." No one says that now it's proven that the central government endangered and impoverished the people for forty years for nothing.

The large exhibitions are attempts to incorporate art into the large structures. *Bilderstreit* is the corporatizing of art. Art is pretty small. "Small is beautiful." *Klein ist schön*. The large exhibitions and collections are attempts to show that art can be institutionalized after all, that it's O.K., that it isn't subversive. And that it's part of the same economic system. And the same educational and cultural system. And then what better can happen for the entrepreneurs than that the art fairs, the large exhibitions, and the large collections actually, finally, modify art? And then where are we? A new, "neo," reactionary art for the masses doesn't benefit anyone. But clearly such an art is being made now. This work is not more broad but narrow. It makes a new category of art, a specialization which must not be attacked. It has institutional defenses. The more you push art into mediocrity, the more special it becomes, since only exclusivity, the type, protects it. This is against the general relevance of good work and against a careful relation of art and architecture, which is very important now.

To raise money for a large exhibition, ultimately even for a large collection, since that involves taxes, there has to be the appeal to the good of the public, which in addition to kitsch is always their education in art. And the education is always false. They are taught the judgment of the organizers, always an attempt to be fashionable as in *Bilderstreit*. The best work of the time is never seen together. The organizers promote work they favor; they regard art as a "scene," anything that occurs. In New York City examples of this are the annuals of the Whitney Museum of forty years ago, as well as now.

Paintings by Pollock, Newman, and Rothko were few among artists not known now. The art magazines then had and still have a similar proportion. How can this be education? It is very unpleasant to even be in such indiscriminate and crowded rooms. Work is always crowded together. Its public is taught the opposite of the way art should be seen. This enforces, as the art fairs display, the idea that art is only commerce. It enforces the already strong attitude shown in all public spaces, and in architecture, that everything visual should be complicated. This desire for confusion and complication exceeds the reasons I can think of. The most obvious is that it is taken for a sign of wealth. All government and corporate buildings and complexes are complicated. All interiors are crowded, including the houses of the rich. This attitude seems to be the same as that of the nouveau riche after the middle of the last century. A room now may contain only “modern” art and furniture and yet be as overstuffed as Queen Victoria. Perhaps there is a nouveau riche style. And of course this is imitated by the not so rich. The large shows teach this; it’s a lesson in horror vacui, which the Athenians thought was a Corinthian disease. There is also plenty of overblown and overstuffed art. The problem for bureaucrats, as I’ve said, is how to get an art in accordance with their desires, how to force art into the context of the nouveaux riches living from vast and overblown governments and corporations. These expand, and need an image, perhaps of a busy balloon, and the public, the people, contract.

The large exhibitions teach the public that art is elsewhere and not in their homes or at work or in their own “public spaces,” that art is “other,” as Ortega y Gasset said. Art is something you go to see, not that you live with. It’s a fashion in New York City to “gallery hop” on Saturday afternoon in your limousine, if you have one, buying a little if so. Ortega y Gasset said:

Pero lo más grave en esa aberración intelectualista que significa la beatería de la cultura no es eso, sino que consiste en presentar al hombre la cultura, el ensimismamiento, el pensamiento, como una gracia o joya que éste debe añadir a su vida, por tanto, como algo que se halla por lo pronto fuera de ella, como si existiese un vivir sin cultura y sin pensar, como si fuese posible vivir sin ensimismarse. Con lo cual se colocaba a los hombres – como ante el escaparate de una joyería – en la opción de adquirir la cultura o prescindir de ella. Y, claro está, ante parejo dilema, a lo largo de estos años que estamos viviendo, los hombres no han vacilado, sino que han resuelto ensayar a fondo esto último e intentan rehuir todo ensimismamiento y entregarse a la plena alteración. Por eso en Europa hay sólo alteraciones.

But the most dangerous aspect of the intellectual aberration that this “bigotry of culture” signifies is not this; it consists in presenting culture, withdrawal into one’s self, thought, as a grace or jewel that man is to add to his life, hence as something that provisionally lies outside of his life and as if there were life without culture and thought – as if it were possible to live without withdrawing into one’s self. Men were set, as it were, before a jeweler’s window – were given the choice of acquiring culture or doing without it. And it is clear that, faced with such a dilemma, during the years we are now living through men have not hesitated, but have resolved to explore the second alternative to its limits and are seeking to flee from all taking a stand within the self and to give themselves up to the opposite extreme. That is why Europe is in extremities today.

The large exhibitions enforce the very strong attitude among museum personnel, those assembling large collections, and some dealers, especially in New York City where many of the post–World War II commercial attitudes began, that the serious effort to make art by many artists is just a “scene,” one

thing after another, one “style” after another. The point of an exhibition is usually to establish a kind of work on the “scene.” To this end everything is used and debased. Usually those to be established are local, despite the proclamations that the exhibition is national or international, so that the work of foreign artists becomes tokens: alien, bad, minor, other, anything negative. Of course those to be established are of the moment, therefore the history of art and all prior artists dead and even alive are adjustable to the negative, or to the positive if there’s a resemblance. The clichés of art history, themselves questionable, are wildly used to support the argument. The thought of art history strongly needs the examination that philosophy has provided science and even history. Art history still shows its beginnings in commerce and uses slogans for conclusions. Its clichés of influences, movements, groups, and followers, even if true, are not so interesting. Its superficial sociology and philosophy are used to promote the marketable and to support or damn elsewhere as needed. Having listened to quite a few sales pitches I’ve concluded that both the seller and the buyer are capable of only two clichés, enough for the sale. It is, for example, some sort of argument that an artist has a hundred followers. These remarks are token selling points, token seriousness, and token reasons for big shows. Again it’s the exaltation of the periphery: everyone living from art is more interesting than the art.

Finally, art is used to fix all that’s wrong with the society, mainly by mildly guilty officials. It has occurred to some that diversity might be equated with democracy and that the presence of diverse styles of art might be used as an example of cultural virtue, leaving largeness to standardize everything else. The large exhibitions are false democracy, even false diversity, since the real one is seldom present. Democracy is a matter of politics in particular places. It’s a cheap shot to require a small, unusual, and expert activity to pretend to a democracy which is steadily being destroyed elsewhere. This is

a pretense for the public, who go home, especially in this case, saying, “Look at all those different artists fighting it out.” Back to TV of course. This also is a token, token democracy, and as a falsification and a subversion of a real and independent activity, against democracy, which should be real economic and political conflicts settled peacefully, with compromises, on their own grounds, real conflicts in real places. If you live and work in the capital you don’t want this; it’s better to grant money for *Bilderstreit*.

As someone said in the early Renaissance: “The corporations are a centralization of production power just as the authority, the government, is a centralization of political power in a governmental and class society.”

In order to clarify the problem, which is one of whether you want to look out or not, I include some notes with their dates.

18.2.87

The industrial revolution occurred two hundred years ago but the industrial civilization is just beginning. So far it’s not been a good beginning, but the civilization will happen nevertheless and can be bad, to the point of not being a civilization, to barbarism, or mediocrity, which perhaps is the real barbarism, or good, which is unlikely. The nineteenth century was an amplification of the old society, a transition, but not a new society. The old society died in World War I. Since then a lot of the wars and troubles have been about the formation of the new society. It’s not that the society is in a later phase of this or that grand scheme, or necessarily declining on plan, or afflicted by a technical invention, but is in a beginning in which much is new and unknown, in which some alternatives are known and most are unknown.

The occurrence second to the worst – nuclear war – can be that the new civilization will resemble the old.

There were two classes, the military aristocracy and the peasants, and there can be two classes, a wealthy bureaucracy, partly military, and an industrial peasantry, which includes the lower bureaucracy. There was not much of a middle class until the industrial revolution and there may not be much of one, since the real middle class, now the old middle class, constantly shrinks. Most of the people who think that they have become middle class have not, either economically, politically, or intellectually. Among everything that is steadily devalued are also the classes, which is sad considered broadly and humanely, but which too is satisfying if you don't like the idea of classes and laugh at the gullibility required to ascend in them. Most people are becoming industrial peasants, *contadini industriali*, fed, housed, and provided with a few symbols. A commercial culture is being made for them. The desirable alternative is that the new civilization be without these great divisions. And that it have a real culture, not two classes, the richer selling the poorer what it was sold similarly before it became rich.

A culture is being made as the two classes crystalize. Even mediocrity needs some sort of art and architecture. Or, another way, there will always be art and architecture, since visible things are not neutral, but these may be bad. The danger is that all good art and architecture will not even be peripheral as now, but will disappear. The culture being formed is excessively, redundantly commercial. It's circularly commercial. The rich, the entrepreneurs eulogized by Reagan and the upper management, whose previously routine bosses have now become "CEOs," a new category of glory, make what they think the "people" will buy, which is what the people have to buy, since there is little choice. But the rich actually like the stuff they produce. In this they are not cynical enough. The rich now were not always rich. They were the peasants, sold, as I said,

similar goods. There has been time enough. Since it cannot invent, the commercial culture mines real art and architecture, and science and everything else, including history. This commercial culture is becoming the only culture, the "real" one, if it succeeds in taking that word. The present real art and architecture may disappear under the constant pressure, now extending through the whole century, of appropriation and debasement.

2.4.86

There is a great deal of activity surrounding art, but little that is constructive, little with a sense of purpose, in contrast to purposes, uses. Most artists have a sense of purpose; they must have to make art. Their purpose, though, is a swift creek running into a swamp. Most of my work which is sold is small and portable. I like these small works a lot and many have led to larger works. Some have also come from larger works. But almost all of my attempts, and certainly proposals from others, to make large works have failed. All schemes involving more than one work have been disasters. There is a devious impulse but there is also a negative one that is very strong and growing. Even the idea of doing something constructive is disappearing in the United States. If you propose doing something there are always several reasons, quickly counterposed, ready at hand, immediately, as to why it can't be done. The negative reasons are instant; the positive ones require some time to think about them. Even to find them. Yet the demands for irrelevant action, busywork, are also immediate and insistent. Most of the activity surrounding art is due to superficial purposes irrelevant or harmful to it.

29.12.86

The collection of art is the only idea of most supposedly interested in art. Galleries sell to collectors and museums,

these together three of the main adjuncts to art. Sometimes, the best within commerce, galleries sell art to individuals interested in art. There are other social and historical reasons for the collectors, both private and public, but the main one is not to lose money; they may even make money. However, investment depends on good judgment and a stable society, the first rare and the second doubtful, so that investment in art seems naive. It's curious to see tough self-made businessmen, proud to be tough and habitually using their toughness on a new interest, be so ignorant and gullible. Simple acquisition by collectors and museums is very far from most of the circumstances of art in the past. Another reason for such acquisition is that the single work, usually a portable painting, is easily precipitated as an idea of culture and isolated from its circumstances and meaning. It becomes an easy symbol of culture and money. Involvement with art is a more complicated idea – and then there are always those damned artists.

EINAI KAKO NA MIMΕΙΣΑΙ ΤΟ ΚΑΚΟ ΚΑΙ ΑΚΟΜΑ ΝΑ
ΜΗΝ ΠΡΟΣΠΑΘΕΙΣ ΝΑ ΜΙΜ ΗΣΑΙ ΤΟ ΚΑΛΟ
– ΔΗΜΟΚΡΙΤΟ

It is a bad thing to imitate the bad, and not even to wish
to imitate the good.
– Democritus

I received four documents in English on *Bilderstreit*, which I assume will be printed in the catalogue, readily available. Most remarks in these reflect the attitudes I've described. These attitudes are not new and the arguments have been used for forty years at least, though the archetypal corporate executive Charles of Anjou also may have used them. It's hard to believe in new stupidities. *Westkunst*, all Documentas, American international shows, such as they are, Pompidou

displays, and so on have published mishmash (also a good Middle Western word) catalogues of nonsense. But just as the situation in art has grown and declined, these remarks seem airier and worse. Opportunism and self-serving in favor of one group of artists has become normal. The confused argument against the supposed determinism of the history of earlier art is normal. Invoking a new determinism to support your side is standard. A new determinism is used to defeat an old one, an undeclared one to defeat an ascribed one. Largeness is on the side of conservatism so that the shows have always favored the backward, as they did Johns and Rauschenberg in the 1960s, even now. So it's not surprising in the fact but in the extent of the conservatism that *Bilderstreit* supports the work of Baselitz, Penck, Kiefer, Lüpertz, Immendorff, and so on, “Neo-Expressionist” painting painted in West Germany. (“Conservatives” are no longer conservative, that is, what was good in the past is no longer present.) The four documents are thoroughly surprising-frightening – shocking – in that many arguments for these artists and this exhibition are nationalistic. This especially bothers me because the United States has become even more conservative, in the same false way, recently confirmed by the election. The United States is deep into its Brezhnev era. Art and the public do not benefit from art used for nationalistic purposes. Art has been generally and for two hundred years certainly international within Europe and its colonies. It's now international, like science, in all industrial countries. It's very reactionary to try to make it national, at this point against many of its main concerns. The complex other side of this is that artists come from particular places and have to deal with what they know. But what they know is elsewhere too. I have a general idea that attitudes are recognized and elevated as they and their subjects are dying, something of a form of intentionality. Nationalism is apparently strong but practically and economically somewhat weak. There are larger forces and organizations. There is Europe in 1992. There are

the corporations, highly opportunistic, not national. Nationalism has been a very destructive attitude, still is, and has been mostly illusion, as are large structures, and if dying it may fight, as usual. A war between nations would destroy the corporations for a while. Otherwise it's going to be hard to convince the English to attack Coca-Cola. We don't need or want a German art for West Germany – East Germany? It's as silly as painting saints and Madonnas. There are several remarks about “American” art in the documents which I'll discuss later. For now, as I've written before, no one thought, everyone denied – Pollock, Newman – that they were making “American” art. There is no American art. If there were it would have to be social realist, or capitalist realist. I don't think even very bad fashionable painters, like Schnabel and Salle, wave the flag. But probably in *Bilderstreit* someone will wave it for them. Which flag? Let's see. Schnabel?

“*Bilder*” means painting, which doesn't mean my work or that of many others. It doesn't apply to most of the good work done since 1960, which by this title is put in an adverse position. Clearly the exhibition is one of painting, as usual, but there is almost no good painting. A lonesome instance of good painting is the work of Agnes Martin. “*Bilder*” also means image. For several decades no first-rate work has been an image. An image is a social product. Art, unfortunately, becomes that, but is not that. New art is new, is unknown, and cannot be an image, the product of time and familiarity. Images, whether in art, as in much current painting, or in architecture, as in “postmodern,” cannot be made. Advertising can make them if you can believe them. But art and architecture have larger concerns.

As to “*streit*,” good work opposes good work. The argument is in the resolution of the work. There is no real dispute between good work and bad. Bad work merely joins all the other things that hinder the development and making of good work. Heisenberg quotes Bohr: “The opposite of a correct

statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.”

Artists have a great deal of trouble without further efforts by anyone. Of course they disagree. That disagreement should be discussed more than it is. The conflict of *Bilderstreit* is not that but one of the art market. There's a great tendency now for the politics and fashions of the art market to become institutionalized. The exaltation of this periphery, of the periphery of any activity, is a sign of the decadence of that activity. Recently a great deal has been written about the supposed drama of the art market. If you know the situation, this is a joke. Most artists don't share or want this trivial turbulence. It's nasty to give artists the *streit* to promote an extravaganza.

It's a liberal attitude that *streit* is fine elsewhere, but not at home. The United States Government thought this throughout the Cold War. This is one of the major differences between the American “liberals” and the American “conservatives.” The liberals want a Pax Americana at home and a Bellum Americanum abroad; the conservatives want war both places. Neither liberals nor conservatives are such as they were, which is also a characteristic of much recent art.

I want to particularly quote and criticize some of the remarks in the four documents. All of the text is unmanageable but as an example here is most of the “Short Information” and my responses.

Bilderstreit presents an unusual panorama of visual art on an area covering 10,000 sq.m. with 1000 works of 100 important and influential artists.

Such a “panorama” is standard now and to me horrifying and depressing, the hell, and Hel, of art. The quantity cannot be comprehended. There are not one hundred first-rate artists in the world and many will not be in this exhibition anyway. And as I said earlier, “influential” is mostly the cant of art history.

Important? Then, the organizers of large exhibitions never consider the difficulty of installing the work, which is always done hastily and carelessly. If a work involves space, is other than a painting or an object, they virtually invent the arrangement, falsifying the work. This is a problem with large collections also. Some collectors' eyes are bigger than their stomachs; there's a Spanish word for this, "*panzada*." This shows contempt, a strange and vindictive contempt, for the art and the artist.

... famous "*Westkunst*" exhibition (1981).

I've never heard of a result from *Westkunst* or any mention of it except as another mass debasement.

Bilderstreit tells us something about "images," a story of contradictory artistic concepts.

If there are no images in good work, there is no conflict. Warhol painted images but then his work is mediocre.

Bilderstreit shows the chronological coexistence of different visual forms of expression that have developed since 1960 when the European artists started to break down the dominance of American art in Europe.

This is a typical sentence, ambiguous, since several unrelated assertions are made at once, as well as some that are false. It's not clear whether or not different "forms of expression" developed only since 1960. They were diverse throughout this century. Therefore what is the point? Apparently it's to enforce the idea of European artists breaking down American dominance as well as to pull the Europeans together. Of course here and throughout "American art," as the organizers call it, is used as a whipping boy. Searching for words for the attitudes

of *Bilderstreit* is to search for words from what used to be called the "underworld": one word I know in German is *Hochstapler*. Of course European art was damaged by the war and of course it recovered afterward, to be nearly as diverse as it had been. What did "American art" have to do with this? "American art" was never dominant in Europe. The issue is false. All countries are still exclusive in art and are suspicious of art from elsewhere, therefore some react with yells of coercion. This exclusiveness produces bad art. Some artists in North America for a time made the best work. This work was acknowledged, although not sufficiently. As the casual use of large-size shows in present painting, the work of Pollock, Newman, Rothko, Still, and others is not yet understood in Europe. These artists were not supported in New York City where they lived and certainly they were not backed by the United States Government, as is accused. All were poor; most didn't live long enough to benefit from the new art market. Art done in the United States has nothing to do with American imperialism. Artists opposed the American War. There is plenty of evidence. It's mean to ignore this, especially when, once again, as in the 1950s, opposition to war and to aggression at home and abroad is small and beleaguered. As in France, England, Germany, and Italy, in the United States the public and some artists are chauvinistic. Not enough European work is shown there. I remember few were interested in Yves Klein's work. Some Europeans are sensitive about any "American art" in Europe. But knowledge has to be known. European artists were in New York during the war, and before that much was learned from European art. It was simply "Art." They said so. Pollock said that the present work "didn't come out of the blue." Many in Europe were upset when Rauschenberg won the prize in Venice. But if you want to call a show an international one, you have to face the consequences; even the Pope is Polish.

Bilderstreit does not present the history of different styles; the individual sections of the exhibition are presented as a creative area of artistic conflicts. One section of the exhibition deals with the most important figures of inspiration, those artists of classical modernism who directed the impulses for the art of the '60's.

“Creative area of artistic conflicts” is of course schmalztz – a good New York word. One device of this paragraph is to categorize and defeat everyone but the heroes supported. The other is the use of a malign and a benign determinism, the first to set up and knock down “classical modernism” (what is it?), to pigeonhole certain art while, second, invoking their history to support the organizer's heroes. The terminology is false and destructive: again, “classical modernism,” “directed the impulses”? And how did the 1960s come to be so remote?

The main and most extensive part of the exhibition deals with a controversy which has been fully recognized only recently; the conflict between such contradictory movements like minimal and conceptual art, figurative and abstract painting.

This is laughable. Is it new that different kinds of work disagree? This is just an excuse for a show under the guise of “new scholarly research has shown...”

In one of the sections dedicated to the more modern areas of art *Bilderstreit* shows how the younger artists express new aspects of this controversy about the “image.”

This is the punch line, the apotheosis together of half a dozen very dull and derivative “Neo-Expressionist” painters, who are not even so young, some I think the age of those

of us enshrined and buried back in the dark but “influential” 1960s; certainly many the age of those “important” in the dawn of the 1970s. The Renaissance is planned for the 1990s. The first international exhibition of six German painters will take place in Renaissance Center in Detroit. If that's a little narrow for those granting the money, Schnabel may not be too obtrusive and an *Italiano povero*.

In the remaining three documents there is more about 100 artists with 1000 works in 10.000 square meters and what that does for the world.

Cologne namely, has become the most significant art center in Germany since the opening of the new Wallraf-Richartz-Museum/Museum Ludwig.

This should be offensive to artists in Cologne. I've never heard of this cause and effect; large museums and collections have never caused anything, and in fact are parasites on art.

The main railway station, the Cathedral, the new museum, the Hohenzollernbrücke, the Rhine and the fair pavilions form a unique ensemble of architectural focal points dating from different centuries. It is just this amalgam of urban developments, which represents a simultaneity of various inventions of various origin, that is reflected in the most recent artistic production.

This has always been one of my main examples of what is wrong with architecture and city planning. The new construction is an insult to the Cathedral and should be demolished. This example is exactly what should not happen. It doesn't represent diversity or dispute but abject thoughtlessness. Two other monstrous archetypes of museum architecture are M. Pompidou, of which the Modern Museum in New York is his backside, and the new National Gallery in Washington,

a hotel lobby and its boutiques, as I've written. If anyone loves this type of architecture, they needn't worry, because criticism does nothing to halt its construction.

Special events like the show "Jackson Pollock and Young American Painting" (1958/59) on view in different European metropolises, the appearance of a new figuration in exhibitions like, for instance, the "New Realists" organized by Sidney Janis in New York in 1962, or the re-evaluation of particular aspects of the works of Matisse and Malevich, for example, which had been ignored or neglected up to the beginning of the sixties indicate breaks and rejections that contradicted the established notion of the history of modern art.

This is exactly what isn't going to be done. This will be used only to shuffle everyone, some down, some out, and some up.

As early as the fifties the visual arts recorded like a seismograph the political and economic changes after World War II which were then to be taken up again during the sixties.

"Seismograph" is a laughable exaggeration. The visual arts record little about the society, among other reasons because there is little to record in a very slow society. And because it is not the job of art to "record" political and economic changes.

The subsequent art history is a mélange of hypocritical double determinism and is self-serving. The whole discussion of Duchamp and Picabia, Corbusier and Taut and Häring is merely supportive art history. It's a common sophistry to say now that artists are free to take from earlier artists. They always were. Every art student does.

In the course of the eighties, the two strategies in question came closer to, or even converged with, each other; this opened up a large variety of new possibilities to the younger generation of artists and enabled them to make use of hitherto unexploited liberties apparent in the late works of Munch, de Chirico, Schwitters and others. Corresponding to the three stages of development outlined above, the exhibition will be divided into three parts and recapitulate three decades of artistic reaction.

This is the invocation of freedom used by all politicians. The freedom to be unfree. "Corresponding to the three stages" is therefore the structure for the apotheosis. Up and away.

In part II, *Why "Bilderstreit"?*, the drama builds. We're getting to the confrontation between Leo Castelli and Mary Boone. Castelli was the first to domesticate art in New York City.

The response of painters like Baselitz or Richter to conceptual or abstract artists like Judd or Flavin, the renaissance of the Italian *avant garde* brought about by the emergence of "*arte povera*" and similar phenomena indicate that, after the historic catastrophe of the war, it was especially German and Italian artists who were able to give European art a new momentum, thus challenging the aesthetic supremacy of the Americans in the Western world towards the end of the sixties.

The terms are wrong and again it's a setup. (If this is translated I'll learn more useful German slang.) The nationalism is awful. The Americans are ugly. Evidently the French didn't do anything after the war, even though now there is no German painter equal to Yves Klein. The English didn't do anything either, even though Richard Long is the best artist in Europe. As in the Axis, Italy is the "fall guy," the "patsy," the sidekick brought in to make the show look virtuous and

international, Germany's Tonto. What does arte povera have to do with the "Neo-Expressionists"? It's prior, it's better, and it's related to those of the dark ages, Manzoni and Fontana. There are a few other countries and artists: Bærtling, Lohse, Schoonhoven, Oteiza.

Part III is ominous and simple, at least clarifying in intent if not reason the previous documents.

For a long time, art historians have taken the year 1945 as a starting point for the description of modern art, as is confirmed by numerous anthologies and dictionaries as well as by the first "documenta" show in Kassel (1955) and the layout of new museums such as the Moderna Museet in Stockholm or the Louisiana Museum in Humlebæk near Copenhagen (both founded in 1958).

1945 is forty-five years into the century, forty-five years of "modern" art. The organizers had more time to think less. Again this is art history according to institutions, not according to art. At every point an aspect is set aside to be ignored, so that finally the simplest conflict can be achieved. "We're gonna bomb the shit out of Qaddafi." Part III is false point by point.

The experience of discontinuity, and the breaks and disruptions in society and culture caused the artists to turn away from the dogma of a generally binding style and replace it by individual attitudes of mind.

The cause and effect is that of a superficial sociology. "The dogma of a generally binding style" is a favorite "postmodern" architectural justification. The supposed oppression of the past is also being used as an argument of freedom for art. For both art and architecture, who in this century has really proposed a binding style? Hardly any artists and only a couple of critics. Art has been very diverse throughout the century. No one

now believes in a "binding style," again an art historical term requiring thought. There isn't anything here to revolt against, but straw men. In architecture "modern" is only a word. The major architects cannot be considered as having one style. Usually the "postmodern" salesmen mean the "International Style," which is a falsification in exactly the same way as "postmodern" and by the same architect, Philip Johnson, who promoted and debased the "style," the work, of Mies van der Rohe as the "International Style." Mies van der Rohe is a great architect and is not responsible for, say, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, who benefited from him. The accusation of dogma is just cheap and fashionable talk of art and revolution. The proof as always is in the work. Look at the earlier art and architecture and look at the "postmodern" architecture and, since they want to join, the "postmodern" artists. I assume that in the pair of Corbusier versus Taut, Corbusier represents all "international modern" architects and Taut and Häring represent the progenitors of "Neo-Expressionism."

All over the Europe of the early sixties, new art movements emerged, represented by artists who proposed ways of seeing and thinking that radically questioned the international style propagated by the Americans who impetuously attempted to set the tone. In Vienna, Paris, Milan, Copenhagen, Düsseldorf, Berlin and, not much later, in Brussels, London, Rome, Turin and Amsterdam, more and more European artists, meeting in small circles often closed to the public, took a stance against the enormous pressure put on them by two generations of American artists and their various modes of expression (Action painting/Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art and Minimal Art).

Bilderstreit escalates and simplifies the simplifications. Now the Americans propagate the international style and

two generations apply enormous pressure. This is a serious perversion of the truth and the rhetoric of conflict is ominous.

They received decisive stimuli from the German-speaking area on the one hand (Berlin, Düsseldorf, Vienna), and from the Italian-speaking area on the other (Milan, Rome, Turin); these two fertile cultural landscapes formed a dualistic entity, for both had suffered a great misfortune through fascism and for a long time been denied the possibility of a continuous development. The destruction caused by war and holocaust as well as the ensuing division of Europe and the whole world had brought about repressions, considerable shortcomings in all areas of life, and a loss of history and culture. The artists under discussion were compelled to summon up all their intellectual forces so as to create a new world, to uncover what had been repressed, to open up new cultural perspectives and, at the same time, to come to terms with the challenge of the Americans who – in the name of progress and freedom – attempted to seize all the positions of the European *avant-garde*. The solutions they found may sometimes seem arbitrary and violent, but they are an integral part of the “Silly Sixties” and deserve acknowledgement as the most valuable stimuli of this decade.

I’ve already mentioned the Axis. This is a complete falsification of what happened in art in Europe after the war. Again, it’s sophistry to seize the war, which destroyed many countries, as primarily German, perversely as its virtue, as its culture, the source of its new art. As for the Americans, their Government used the argument of “progress and freedom” imperially, nationalistically, as *Bilderstreit* is also doing. The artists were not part of this. As for “seize all the positions” and “solutions” and “arbitrary and violent,” these words are malicious and arbitrary and violent. “Silly Sixties” is stupid and

the rest of the sentence is patronizing. The text is slander. Fortunately little is left. It’s all slanted.

Another important issue to be considered here is the renewal of sculpture brought about by certain painters (“peintres-sculpteurs”), which reached a climax in the eighties.

Amidst thorough meanness the organizers don’t want to miss a detail of promotion for the “peintres-sculpteurs,” the worst ever.

The exhibition “*Bilderstreit*” will go further and also examine the tensions between the “older” generation and young artists of today, especially emphasizing contemporary works that can be conceived of as quotations and fragments.

One last line. They thought an enemy might have escaped and so must shoot the “older” generation, which somehow doesn’t include Baselitz. One last fashionable cliché. “Quotations” and “fragments” are to art what “binding International Style” is to architecture, one positive, one negative; these are virtually slogans. “Quotations” appeals to the freedom to be unfree. The secret is that the artists supported are very unimaginative, very dull, very academic, and ripe for institutionalization. Virtue must be made of their vices. Their absence of imagination must be justified, hence it is all right to “quote” earlier work, which is merely copying, which is to debase the work of others. For this brilliance the organizers malign everyone. And worse, they wave the flag. “*Der Hochstapler.*” “*Sie halten die Fahne hoch.*” In Dutch this is “*Hoog in het vaandel.*” *Bilderstreit* promotes a small fashion by using everything else as a scapegoat. This has been done before. It will be done again, probably by the same organizers for “new” artists. *Die Hochstapler* can’t stand still. This farce is typical and sorrowful. The repetition

of such techniques and falsehoods spreads these ways of thinking among the public, even among artists, and slowly destroys live and serious art. There *is* an enormous pressure, one of stupidity, deceit, and opportunism, by many against a very small number of artists.

The exhibition is for a few painters but the text is for all artists. The attitude toward art and artists is devious, dishonest, mean, and contemptuous. A majority of those who live off of art and many who buy it, museum personnel and collectors, seem to resent art. This is a growing attitude and a strange attitude. It's not only ignorance and carelessness that causes the bad handling of art, the bad installation, the rude and exploitive treatment of artists. There is an intention to do so. I think part of this is a resentment of seriousness and independence, part is the attitude of patronage that even the least interested acquire – pet the dog, kick the dog – and part, especially among the big collectors, is a desire for power. These have to prove themselves superior to the artists by mistreating their work, which they own, including hiring false history to be written. Imagined power over the artists extends to real power over curators and over the collector's milieu. To use the word “perverse” again, it's perverse to use art, one of the most innocent activities in the world, as a base for power. The text of *Bilderstreit* is exploitive, opportunistic, coercive, resentful, and mean. “May the artist's life be nasty, brutish, and short.” “Mean” is a good flat word meaning malicious and vengeful and also meager and petty. I think the best art is broad and generous.

Now that I've written this, we will find out if *streit* can occur at home.

This essay was written for the exhibition *Bilderstreit*, Cologne, 1989, to be published in the catalogue but was not used.

– Donald Judd