

ARTHUR DANTO AND DONALD KUSPIT: INTERVIEWS ON CONTEMPORARY ART AND ART CRITICISM

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In the titled book *La critica dialogada. Entrevistas de arte y pensamiento (2000-2006)* (Murcia, 2006) I published fifteen interviews with some of the most distinguished art historians, philosophers and art theoreticians of our contemporary art scene such as Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, Douglas Crimp, Thomas Crow, Arthur Danto, Hal Foster, Serge Guilbaut, Rosalind Krauss, Donald Kuspit, Luccy Lippard and Griselda Pollock.

The book was born fruit of the need to provide a new format to the different existing works of "artistic literature" as source of theoretical study of art. A format that we have endowed with a biographical aspect and even autobiographical. And that we have wanted, due to conceptual affinities, to focus in the evolution of the theoretical thought from the first indications of the deactivation of the formalistic system of the "high modernity" until the thought born among the poststructuralism and the school of Frankfurt.

As Michael Diers pointed out, we are in the face of a "fashion" (that of the interview as authoritarian voice in the contemporary art) that seems to be in tune with the "conversational" society that dominates the public expression under what Guy Debord describes as the "society of the spectacle".

It is under this dialogic concept of "laboratory" and to interdiscipline that we would want to present our two interviews carried out in this case to two highly regarded art critics Arthur Danto and Donald Kuspit that, beyond their conceptual differences, think that the modernity is a problematic project that had to be rewritten or, at least, to proceed to its deconstrucción. The search of contents under a common situation of "pluralism" might be the common denominator of the interviews carried out to Donald Kuspit and Arthur Danto that coincide from their different positionings -Kuspit nearer to the symbolic dimension and Danto from the defense of the interpretation as a way of meaning- in an ethical conception of the art criticism. Both interviews have also in common their distance from the journalistic genre to be situated half way among the reflexive text, the comment and the philosophical discussion. And in both cases, the critical activity would be more than an act of judgment, an act of perspicacity whose task would consist in distinguishing in the present the signs of the future.

INTERVIEW TO ARTHUR DANTO

AMG. *As a person who has lived and worked as an art critic in two different “eras” (in the modernism and currently postmodernism, multicultural, and global world), how could you define the changes in the profile of an art critic or in the activity of art criticism in between these two “eras”?*

ACD. In truth I have not exactly lived in both these eras as an art critic. My first piece of art criticism was published in *The Nation* on October 24, 1984, which falls, according to my concept of the period, squarely in the post-modern era. Before that, I wrote only philosophy, and though my writings often described works of art, it was always for the philosophical ideas the art suggested, rather than in the spirit of criticism as I later practiced it. My criticism, so far as I am in position to judge it, is neither modernist nor post-modernist, and I think both kinds of are based on misleading ideas. Modernist criticism is formalist, while post-modernist criticism is relativist - not that these are necessarily in opposition to one another. My objection to formalism is that it tends to imply that formalism is all there is to criticism. My objection to post-modernism is that it tends to imply that there are no universal truths about art. Post-modernists base this belief on the radical pluralism that has overtaken the art-world in recent decades. I am entirely a defender of radical pluralism (the term was invented by William James), which may make it seem that I am in fact post-modernist myself. But I am, to the contrary, an essentialist, and my project as a philosopher of art had been to nail down a definition of art that covers all cases, western and non-western, contemporary and traditional. So I am entirely anti-relativist.

AMG. *In which sense do you think posmodernism has changed the view of reading, interpreting and making sense of the artwork?*

ACD. There are, of course, what we think of as post-modernist hermeneutics, by which I mean, more or less, post-modernist ideologies that entered the discussion in the seventies - feminist, multi-culturalist, and then the various ethnicities. And since there was work produced in terms of these ideologies, we have to apply the proper hermeneutics in order to identify their meanings. But it is still meaning, however ideologized. And it has to be embodied. So in a way, not a step has been taken since Hegel's formula in his *Aesthetics*, which I cite in its brief entirety: "What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but our judgment also, since we subject to our immediate consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another." And he concludes: "The *philosophy* of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for purposes of knowing philosophically what art is."

You can see that I am searching for the meaning, and then searching for the mode of embodiment - what Hegel calls "presentation" - but that is how it is when dealing with interpretative hypothesis. From this perspective, the method of art criticism as I practice is much like science, in the sense that in science, one infers to the best explanation of the data. It is in the nature of such inference that it can be wrong and is always subject to revision.

AMG: *Could you define or specify your own strategy as a art critic and in which sense would you recommend it to the young generations interested in art criticism?*

ACD: Of course I would recommend the strategy I have just outlined to the young generations interested in art criticism, and indeed I feel that it is, given the nature of art works today, inescapable. I think of Clement Greenberg as the paradigm modernist art critic, whose method in a certain sense was quite the opposite of mine. He saw criticism as defined by the presence or absence of quality in art, which he felt one simply got to know on the basis of some immediate experience. He counted, so to speak, on possessing a particularly acute eye, and his claim was validated by the unquestioned truth that he saw quality in Jackson Pollock to which other critics of the time were blind.

Greenberg's unquestionable taste failed him when it came to Minimalism and Pop Art in the mid-sixties, and Post-Modernist art in general. He had no way of dealing with it. Minimalism was "small stuff." Neither it nor Pop "has yet shown itself capable of major art." His taste failed him because the goodness of the art had little to do with taste or with aesthetic judgment.

This is where I enter the picture, with my 1964 paper, "The Art World," in which aesthetics played no role whatever. I think the art to which it was a response marked a new era in the philosophy of art. The good eye of the critic was of no use in connection with the great question Pop raised, as to why Warhol's Brillo Box was art - or if you like, fine art - while the ordinary Brillo boxes were either not art or merely commercial art. All this being said, there is certainly something to Greenberg's aesthetic practice, despite the limitations that were revealed by the extraordinary turn taken by the history of art in the 1960s and since. There is a kind of experience with which most people are familiar, which Greenberghian episodes parallel. This is the experience of being attracted to somebody in an immediate way and, in the extreme case, falling in love with somebody at first sight, on the basis of how the person looks. This happens with paintings a lot. In *The Abuse of Beauty*, I describe falling in love with one of Robert Motherwell's *Elegies for the Spanish Republic*, just on the basis of seeing it, without knowing anything about who painted it or what it meant. There was something that drew me to the painting. It does not always happen, but it happens enough. Recently I visited the Miami art fair - acres and acres of art. When I got back to the hotel, my wife asked how it was, and I said it was a very good show with a lot of good art. Then she asked if there was anything I loved, and that stopped me in my tracks. There was nothing I loved, nothing in which I had so to speak "fallen in love." The best one could ask of it was a certain kind of intellectual love, to use an expression that occurs in Spinoza's writings. I think, by contrast, that for a modernist critic, if one did not fall in love, it was inferior work. I think Hilton Kramer is a modernist critic who sees nothing to love in most art today and accordingly wants to say that it is not really art.

AMG: *How do you define your own position as an art critic in regard to a kind of criticism created by journalists and in the other extreme by strong theory?*

ACD: I have a great deal of sympathy with journalistic art critics, who need to work under rather strong deadlines, and especially have to deal with exhibitions that are in one or another way newsworthy. Critics at the *New York Times*, for example, have to write a certain number of reviews each week. I am relatively free in that sense - I don't have to write each week, and do not have to concern myself with newsworthiness. My concern is, loosely speaking, with art that seems to me to make some sort of culturally important statement - art, the understanding of which helps us understand ourselves as part of the same culture as it. That is what Hegel would call art that expresses "objective spirit" of our times.

"Strong theory," I gather, is more or less what is simply called "theory." That is a canon of texts, basically deconstructionist, which define the human sciences and are mainly ideological. These date from around 1970, and include the writings of Derrida, Foucault, and then a body of writing in feminist theory, queer theory, and the like. They are theories of interpretations, driven, as a general rule, by activist agendas. I do not count my philosophy of art as part of "theory" for this reason: it has no activist agenda. It enjoins no program of political action. It is not concerned with what I have called "deep interpretation" in any way whatever. Most of

what concerns me is available to ordinary men and women, in the sense that it does not require theory to be explained or understood.

AMG: There are a number of people who make complaints about the lack of "criteria" in order to evaluate artworks and to discern the goodness and the badness. Would you defend nowadays a return to judging works of art?

ACD: Clement Greenberg appealed to Kant's aesthetics in addressing the question of criteria. Two of Kant's claims give particular support to Greenberg's practice, which came to typify aesthetic attitudes that prevailed in the New York School. First, Kant argued that judgments of beauty are non-conceptual, and secondly that they are universally valid, that is, they are in no sense merely personal. Greenberg rarely spoke of beauty. His interest was in what he termed "quality" in art, which meant that his views could not easily be extended to the aesthetics of nature, which would of course have been of central interest to Kant. "Quality in art can be neither ascertained nor proved by logic or discourse," Greenberg write. "Experience alone rules in this area - and the experience, so to speak, of experience." Everybody has to discover the criteria of quality for himself. They can't be communicated by word or demonstration. Yet they are objective, only not amenable to words. You have to find out for yourself by looking and experiencing.

Greenberg was, I think, concerned mainly with painting and sculpture up through their modernist versions. He did not think one had to know anything of the kind that art history concerns itself with, in order to be right or wrong about art. Indeed, he believed that modernism had opened up the possibility of appreciating "all sorts of exotic art that we didn't 100 years ago, whether ancient Egyptian, Persian. Far Eastern, barbaric or primitive." What makes art good has nothing to do with historical circumstance. He once boasted that though he knew little about African art, he would almost unfailingly be able to pick out the two or three best pieces in a group.

Greenberg was exceedingly uncomfortable with post-modernist art, which began to take center stage in the mid-sixties. It did not meet the criteria of the judging eye he claimed to possess. Consider connoisseurship in drawing. Its criteria do not work for the kind of deliberately bad drawing one may encounter in contemporary galleries. It can be bad drawing but good art, depending upon what the artist intends to convey. Only interpretation will help us determine whether art is good or not. That is the world we must work in as critics. That means that one must make an argument that something is good or bad in the absence of criteria.

AMG: Do you think criticism has to have a pedagogical function? Addressed for the general public or not?

ACD: I think the main function of criticism is pedagogical - to teach viewers what the art I think it important for them to know about is itself about. That means I am, as a critic, to explain what the work means, and why the meaning is set out the way it is. There is naturally a question of why the artist - why artists in general - don't set their meanings out directly, in words say, rather than by means of things. Well, I think embodiment lends force to the content communicated, making art itself a branch of rhetoric. If I have had an impact as an art critic, it is because of my endorsement of pedagogical ends. This is something for which I - and other critics who follow my practice - have sometimes been attacked. Indeed, this conception of criticism has been characterized as a crisis in criticism. Critics should make comparisons between who is better and who is best. I think that is fine for judging wines or cheese, but not art.

AMG: How do you think should be the function of the art critic in regard to political, social aspects? There are a number of voices that think the analysis of internal questions of the work of art (quality for instance) is obsolete and now it urges to deal with external (political for instance) questions. What do you think about?

ACD: That the analysis of “internal questions of the work of art” is obsolete would mean that criticism, as I practice it, is obsolete - but that means that art itself is obsolete. We all understand that art has causes - political, economic, religious. But art can be an effect of such causes only with reference to its “internal” properties. Otherwise, it is merely a thing, and as a thing, would not have the causes it does. Stalinism, for example, felt, following Marx, that art is among the things that express the basic productive structures of the society. It “reflects” the interests of the proletariat. But what precisely is reflection? It refers us to content and, in terms of socialist realism, celebration. It celebrates the virtues of working men and women, paints the evils of capitalist society in one set of colors, the virtues of socialist society in another set of colors. Of course, it might be a critique of art that art critics are needed at all, since (I suppose) socialist realist art should be transparent, and not need the mediation of explainers like myself. It should speak immediately and eloquently to those whose interests it celebrated. Malevitch was hounded because his art was “bourgeois.” These illustrate the approach to art of Theory and its deep interpretation of what art is about. But Theory precisely requires clarification of “internal questions” or it could not get off the ground. So I think the issue is philosophically ill defined. It takes positions that are complimentary as though they were alternatives. Marxism, just for example, requires that art have content if it is to be explained through economic causes, since it is precisely the content that is to be explained.

AMG: *The critic’s ethics. How you would define the critic’s ethics in our “artworld”?*

ACD: The critic’s ethics is defined through the pedagogical nature of criticism. That means, if interpretation is inferring to the best explanation, it must indeed be the best explanation - not the explanation one would prefer. That means in particular that if it helps to talk with the artist about what he or she was attempting to do, one should not cut oneself off from that priceless source of information. Modernists might call this fraternization. If the critic’s “good eye” gives all the information he or she needs, there might be reason not to fraternize, especially if the critic and the artist should become friends, since that could lead to conflict of interest. How is that to be dealt with? I suppose by “full disclosure.”

AMG: *Could you make a valuation about the leading role between the critic and the curator in the cultural industry (international biennales, big shows, and so on)?*

ACD: These days the line between artists and curators is increasingly porous. By that I mean that as the definition of the curator has changed from someone who looks after a collection - “keeper,” to use the British term - to the independent curator who has to conceive of an exhibition and then undertake to get it funded, curators have become more and more artists who work in the medium of works. Harald Szeeman, Jan Hoet, Mary Jane Jacob are good examples of conceptual curators in this sense. Fred Wilson obviously has considerable curatorial gifts, when you think of his work “Mining the Museum.” Joseph Kosuth organized a wonderful show on censorship, just working with the resources of the Brooklyn Museum. More and more, the exhibition is the basic unit of critical interest, if one thinks about it. In reviewing such shows as the Whitney Biennials, for example, one has increasingly to take into account what point the curators are attempting to make through the works they have chosen and how they have organized them. Sometimes, reviews of these shows are like laundry lists of individual works, which means either that the critic has failed to grasp the thesis of the show, or that the curator has missed a substantial opportunity, and has created a collection of trees rather than a forest. More and more, then, it seems to me that the curator has become the defining personality of the art world, and inevitably a very powerful sort of personage. The great logician, Gottlob Frege, said that a word has meaning only in the context - the “Zusammenhang” - of a proposition. Philosophically, I have sometimes thought, parodying his

thesis, that a work has meaning only in the context of an exhibition. A curator is someone who looks at a work from this perspective, thinking: how can I use this in a show?

AMG: How do you think about the “cultural consensus”? What would be your alternative to the generalized “consensus” that seems to be favorable to the homogeneity against local and particular differences?

ACD: I have not heard the expression “cultural consensus” used, but I see what people must mean by it when the contrast is made between homogeneity as against “local and particular differences.” Obviously, the term must be generally synonymous with globalization, and it is pretty clear that it is hard to discuss it objectively and dispassionately if this is so. My own view is that the notion of homogeneity is likely to be understood roughly in term of uniformity - like MacDonald hamburgers, to cite the paradigm villain in discussions of globalization. Just as it is too easy to demonize MacDonald’s, it is easy to sentimentalize its opposite, where one looks for the authenticity of local cultures, as one used to with folk art uncontaminated by mainstream culture. But we live in the world we live in. Everyone knows everything about everything. Artistic literacy is quite high. The “writers” who used to put their “tags” on the sides of subway cars had been taken on museum trips as school children, and knew about Pop art and Picasso, and were inspired by Keith Haring.

AMG: How do you define our current artworld in regard to the “end of art”?

ACD: Globalism brings us to the end of art - an idea I first introduced twenty years ago. I have to say that the grounds for claiming that we are in an end-of-art situation have evolved since 1984, but the essential idea was that we have reached the end of a certain narrative that I now realize was a narrative of western art. I think the narrative ends with post-modernism, when anything whatever can be art. The whole concept of truth-to-medium has vanished, just as the ideal of artistic purity has. Alas, this has not happened in politics, where ethnic cleaning remains a hideous agenda, justifying genocides everywhere. But globalism in politics must sooner or later overcome this, as people of all races and religions learn to live together as in the great cosmopolitan centers of the world. And I think it fitting that pluralism in art, which entered the artworld in the eighties, should have done so in the great cosmopolitan complex in which I have been lucky enough to live, namely New York. But it has to happen sooner or later everywhere, as it has in the great Western cities - Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Paris Barcelona, Milan .

My overall sense is that we have entered a new era, and that new eras are always heralded by changes in art. Our era began in the sixties, initially in art, with the overcoming of boundaries between art and life. 1964, the year of the Brillo Box, was the Summer of Freedom in the American South and the challenge from youth, made manifest by the arrival of the Beatles. By mid-sixties, overcoming the gender gap became the manifest sign of cultural change, and by 1968 politics and economics had emerged. Radical feminism and gay liberation marked the seventies, and art schools began to institutionalize pluralism by no longer teaching skills. I now think the history of post-traditional art was essentially the slow birth of pluralism, which made it possible for more and more artists from more and more countries to enter the art-world, and more and more people to become artists. There are 200 international art events - Biennials, Triennials, Art Fairs - every month. There is no center, every day is a new beginning. It is an amazing time, and I am glad to have lived to see it.

INTERVIEW TO DONALD KUSPIT

AMG. As a person who has lived and worked as an art critic in two different “eras” (in the modernism and currently postmodernism, multicultural, and global world), how could you define the changes in the profile of an art critic or in the activity of art criticism in between these two “eras”?

DK: In modernism, aesthetic and cultural values, and the value of art itself, seemed clear, however debatable. In postmodernism, nothing is clear--everything to do with art is open to interminable discussion. Uncertainty rather than certainty reigns. It is no longer possible to be definitive: to have a decisively closed reading, an absolute idea of value, a linear historical narrative of “advance,” a rigid hierarchical system of significance. In postmodernism the canon has collapsed, and the collapse reverberates back onto modernism: there is no such thing as modernism, but rather a pluralism of modernisms, each with its particular concerns and values, and each addressed to a different audience. We are truly in what André Malraux called the “museum without walls”--a museum in which no artists have a place of privilege, and every artist, however ostensibly innovative, is simply one factor in an ever expanding field of artistic operations and audience participation. Indeed, in postmodernism the audience has as much importance as the artist--an idea already anticipated by Marcel Duchamp, who described “The Creative Act” (1946) as a collaboration between artist and critic. The critic’s interpretation is as much a creative construction as the work of art. Artist and critic have complete parity; both are dependent on the larger context of ideas and the society in which they work. Even more, in postmodernism the critic views the artist the way the artist views the model, namely, as a creative opportunity--a view that was already stated by Oscar Wilde at the end of the 19th century. But while the possibilities of critical transformation of art have expanded enormously in postmodernism, the imprimatur of the market counts more than any critical interpretation and evaluation. In postmodernism the market has become the major determinant of art’s meaning and value, thus usurping critical consciousness, which is a tragedy for both art and criticism. Both have become peculiarly impotent--encapsulated and neutralized--by the popularity and importance that money confers. Art has entered the capitalist mainstream: more than ever, its exchange value matters more than its use value--its value for consciousness, emotion, subjectivity, and more broadly culture. Decades ago Meyer Schapiro noted that the spiritual and economic value of art tended to be confused. Today the economic value of art confers spiritual value on it, at least for the public at large.

AMG. In which sense do you think postmodernism has changed the view of reading, interpreting and making sense of the artwork?

DK: In postmodernism the work of art can no longer be regarded as a self-sufficient and/or autonomous entity but rather as a vector that is the result of psychosocial forces beyond its control. In modernism the artist imagined he was in complete control, and the critic had to follow the guidelines laid down by this egoistic control. In postmodernism we realize that the artist’s production is controlled by the system of belief, expectation, and meaning in which he lives and works. This opens the way

for the critic to study the work of art as a specimen and expression of that system rather than as an end in itself. Even the idea that modern art is “revolutionary”--overthrows the system of traditional art--is informed by the modern idea of sociopolitical revolution. There is no escaping the system, which closes down and devalues as many creative possibilities as it opens and legitimates. This suggests that there is nothing special or privileged about the artist: he or she is not the “antenna of the [human] race,” as the modernist Ezra Pound thought, but another all too human member of it, with his or her particular experience and understanding. It also suggests that the work of art is one cultural and historical event among many, which invariably influence its shape and meaning.

AMG: Could you define or specify your own strategy as a art critic and in which sense would you recommend it to the young generations interested in art criticism?

DK: I believe that to be a sophisticated critic one must be highly educated, more particularly, have in depth knowledge of at least some aspect of the human and social sciences, and certainly of art history, cultural history and intellectual history. One also has to have a certain amount of scientific and technological knowledge to deal adequately with certain kinds of art. I believe that one must bring as much of this knowledge as seems relevant to bear on the contemporary art one is engaging. It becomes the perspective from which one analyzes and interprets the art, articulating its meaning and value as well as one can--always self-critically bearing in mind that it is one’s particular perspective. There is no universal transcendental perspective: the critic, like the artist, is bound by the system. However, the critic tends to be more conscious of the system than the artist--sees it through a “wide[r] horizon of understanding,” to use Baudelaire’s words--in part because of his or her education, in part because he or she does not completely identify with art, as the artist tends to. The artist, because he or she wants recognition and success, is more dependent on the system than the critic, who can never have the same social recognition and economic success. Thus the artist tends to conform to the dictates of the “scene,” even if what it dictates is nonconformity and unconventionality (invariably socialized into stereotypes). Also, criticism is usually regarded as secondary to art because it is supposedly not as creative--which gives the critic a certain creative freedom.

On a practical level, my strategy is to discover the psychosocial ideas that inform the particular art I am dealing with, demonstrating the dialectical relationship between the ideas and the art. This involves what Peter Gay calls “reasoned relativism,” namely, comparing, implicitly or explicitly, works from the same field of artistic operations, and sometimes works that seem far away but that have a certain relevance to the work in analytic question. The critic must have as much information about the art as possible, whether from external sources or from the artist, but must sift it for what seems, from his or her perspective, especially relevant to the art.

In short, the only thing I would recommend to young critics is to become as educated as possible and look at as much art as possible, comparing very different kinds of art along the way. Above all, do not automatically assume that any art is “better” than any other art because the market says so. One must rise above the prejudices and presuppositions of the times, however partisan one may finally become. Take every art seriously before

deciding that some art is more serious than other art because it affords a more serious experience and demands more serious understanding.

AMG: How do you define your own position as an art critic in regard to a kind of criticism created by journalists and in the other extreme by strong theory?

DK: Both journalism and strong theory discourse have their shortcomings. The former tends to be thin on ideas, the latter tends to reduce works of art to illustrations of ideas. The theory often gets in the way of the perception of the particularity of the art, dismissing its sensuous givenness as trivial, while journalistic excitement about some particular trendy art tends to blur understanding of it by approaching it from a narrow horizon of belief. But both have their uses--journalism at its investigative best affords rich information, strong theory at its most acute affords significant insight--which is why I think a balance between them is necessary. Journalism can deteriorate into popularization, strong theory into exclusivity, arrogance, and jargon, thus losing the larger, interested audience that journalism tries to engage. No doubt one can never satisfy the intellectual pretentiousness of the self-appointed cognoscenti and the larger public's wish for information and useful understanding, but both journalism and strong theory discourse can be arenas for the serious consideration of art. I refuse to privilege one over the other. The problem is to deftly integrate them without losing the accessibility of journalism and the mindfulness of strong theory.

AMG: There are a number of people who make complaints about the lack of "criteria" in order to evaluate artworks and to discern the goodness and the badness. Would you defend nowadays a return to judging works of art?

DK: There is indeed a serious lack of criteria for the evaluation of contemporary art--which is why people tend to fall back on its market value, as I have suggested. It is part of the general problem of unclarity about standards of excellence in postmodern civilization, where supposedly "anything goes." (This idea is a "reductio ad absurdum" of John Maynard Keynes' theory that any decision to buy something is "rational" from the perspective of economics.) In art, this partly has to do with the multitude and overlapping of genres and cultures--radical pluralism--and with a deeper anxiety about the meaning and value of art at a time it seems to be assimilating to mainstream entertainment, that is, the conformist culture of popular stereotypes. Either art resists this commercial popular culture, which is an instrument of capitalist ideology, or joins and emulates it, as Andy Warhol did and as a good deal of contemporary art would like to do. Art that appropriates the skin-deep glamour and crowd appeal of commercial imagery gives itself the cachet of mindless acceptance. The problem is compounded by the abundance of art. More art seems to be made these days than ever before, all the more so because of the mass production of artists by MFA programs, many with different notions of the requirements for becoming an artist. Nonetheless, however grateful one is for all the interesting art being made, one abandons critical consciousness if one foregoes the task of making some difficult judgments, buttressing them with art historical arguments as well as arguments in favor of the timeliness of certain human values. I don't think aesthetic judgment is ever disinterested, but always involves a reading of human interests. The

critic, then, must try to develop criteria of evaluation that take into consideration art values and human needs, the former being harder to discern than the latter.

AMG: Do you think criticism has to have a pedagogical function? Addressed for the general public or not?

DK: Yes, criticism should have a pedagogical function, and should be addressed to the general public as well as the already-in-the-know cognoscenti. Unless criticism communicates to the generally interested public, with no loss of the integrity of its ideas and values, it will become an academic ideology, that is, an instrument of indoctrination rather than of enlightenment.

AMG: How do you think should be the function of the art critic in regard to political, social aspects? There are a number of voices that think the analysis of internal questions of the work of art (quality for instance) is obsolete and now it urges to deal with external (political for instance) questions. What do you think about?

DK: I think the critic should be a general intellectual (with no loss of erudition), and as such must engage the political and social aspects of art. But this hardly means that the internal logic of a work of art--more broadly, formal questions--are beside the point. There is still some--more than some--meaning to the idea of a well-constructed work of art, and in fact I think that if it is not formally subtle its "message" will lose subtlety, indeed, reduce to ideological sloganeering. Blatantly communicating the "message" rather than aesthetically embedding it in the work of art indicates that the artist is mindlessly mouthing the message without insight into its implications. Society is saturated with competing political and social "messages"; the question is what difference art makes in communicating and understanding them. It is their artistic rendering--their aesthetic individuation and nuancing--that matters, not the "message," which is usually familiar, indeed, often an expression of reified consciousness, that is, a biased cliché. It is its artistic handling that will bring this dead message alive, for better or worse. Activist artists want to effect social change, but why not enter the political arena to do so, for it is only there that one can do so realistically? Art can only change the perception of individuals, not society as a whole. Activist art may be politically and socially correct, but it must have aesthetic quality if it wants to be taken seriously as art, not as a banner waving in a propaganda war.

AMG: The critic's ethics. How you would define the critic's ethics in our "artworld"?

DK: The critic should not collect art, although he may accept a work of art if it is given in the spirit of friendship and gratitude, not to buy his consciousness. I know of critics who have sold their minds for a bowl of porridge--that is the ultimate unethical act. It is simply not an option for critics to approach art as an investment property, whatever his or her insider knowledge and the temptations of the market. Every effort must be made to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. It is the only way to avoid compromising oneself. Beyond that, the only ethics is to be

honest about where one is coming from intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

AMG: Could you make a valuation about the leading role between the critic and the curator in the cultural industry (international biennales, big shows, and so on)?

DK: Today collectors rather than critics and/or curators are the dominant power in the art culture industry. International biennials, big shows, etc. are forms of cultural tourism, currently the trendiest kind of tourism. One might say that they are art theme parks--just as Auschwitz has been turned into a theme park to draw the tourist euro. Their tragedy is that they don't create the intimate reflective space necessary to critically view art.

AMG: How do you think about the "cultural consensus"? What would be your alternative to the generalized "consensus" that seems to be favorable to the homogeneity against local and particular differences?

DK: So-called "cultural consensus" tends to be manufactured and enforced by vested interests. The only thing that can counteract it is ongoing, turbulent pluralism, in which art is a matter of conflicting neighborhoods. In the contemporary situation homogeneity is an illusion. Just as all politics is local, as an American politician said, so all art is local, that is, based on particular historical, emotional, and social experience. But there is undoubtedly cross-pollination and interbreeding, if only because, in the postmodern world, everybody is able to easily look over his or her shoulder at what everyone else is doing, thanks to international communication and the abundance of information available. The issue is to maintain one's difference--or perhaps to invent it--despite the tendency to the pseudo-universality of consensus, or else to strive for such pseudo-universality within and without compromising one's difference. Both are impossible predicaments. The problem is to individuate within the collective without losing relevance for collective concerns and without capitulating to them.

AMG: How do you define our current artworld in regard to the "end of art"?

DK: There is more postart, as Allan Kaprow presciently called it--art that blurs the boundary between imaginative art and everyday life (to the detriment of art)--than aesthetically significant art in the contemporary artworld. No doubt this has to do with the fact that it is easier to make postart--all one needs to do is give a little "assist" (Duchamp's word) to everyday life to do so--than to make aesthetically imaginative art. That requires craft, the transformational cunning of dialectical reason, a respect for formal as well as inherently human values, and an acute sense of the collective unconscious in both its sociopolitical and personal manifestations.

