The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

ART AFTER PHILOSOPHY AND AFTER

Collected Writings, 1966–1990

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This book was set in Trump Medieval by DEKR Corporation and printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kosuth, Joseph.
Art after philosophy and after : collected writings, 1966–1990 / Joseph Kosuth : edited with an introduction by Gabriele Guercio.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-262-11157-8
1. Kosuth, Joseph—Aesthetics. 2. Conceptual art—United States.
I. Title.
N6537.K65A35 1991
701'.17—dc20 90-24722
CIP

To C.L.

ART AFTER PHILOSOPHY

PART I

The fact that it has recently become fashionable for physicists themselves to be sympathetic towards religion . . . marks the physicists' own lack of confidence in the validity of their hypotheses, which is a reaction on their part from the anti-religious dogmatism of nineteenth-century scientists, and a natural outcome of the crisis through which physics has just passed.

A. J. Ayer

. . . Once one has understood the Tractatus *there will be no temptation to concern oneself any more with philosophy, which is neither empirical like science nor tautological like mathematics; one will, like Wittgenstein in 1918, abandon philosophy, which, as traditionally understood, is rooted in confusion.*

J. O. Urmson

Traditional philosophy, almost by definition, has concerned itself with the *unsaid*. The nearly exclusive focus on the *said* by twentieth-century analytical linguistic philosophers is the shared contention that the *unsaid* is *unsaid* because it is *unsayable*. Hegelian philosophy made sense in the nineteenth century and must have been soothing to a century that was barely getting over Hume, the Enlightenment, and Kant.[1] Hegel's philosophy was also capable of giving cover for a defense of religious beliefs, supplying an alternative to Newtonian mechanics, and fitting in with the growth of history as a discipline, as well as accepting Darwinian biology.[2]

First published in *Studio International* (London) 178, no. 915 (October 1969), pp. 134–137; no. 916 (November 1969), pp. 160–161; no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 212–213.

He appeared to give an acceptable resolution to the conflict between theology and science, as well.

The result of Hegel's influence has been that a great majority of contemporary philosophers are really little more than *historians* of philosophy, Librarians of the Truth, so to speak. One begins to get the impression that there "is nothing more to be said." And certainly if one realizes the implications of Wittgenstein's thinking, and the thinking influenced by him and after him, 'Continental' philosophy need not seriously be considered here.[3]

Is there a reason for the 'unreality' of philosophy in our time? Perhaps this can be answered by looking into the difference between our time and the centuries preceding us. In the past, man's conclusions about the world were based on the information he had about it—if not specifically like the Empiricists, then generally like the Rationalists. Often, the closeness between science and philosophy was so great that scientists and philosophers were one and the same person. In fact, from the time of Thales, Epicurus, Heraclitus, and Aristotle to Descartes and Leibniz, "the great names in philosophy were often great names in science as well."[4]

That the world as perceived by twentieth-century science is vastly more different than the one of its preceding century, need not be proved here. Is it possible, then, that in effect man has learned so much, as his 'intelligence' is such, that he cannot *believe* the reasoning of traditional philosophy? That perhaps he knows too much about the world to make those *kinds* of conclusions? As Sir James Jeans has stated:

> . . . When philosophy has availed itself of the results of science, it has not been by borrowing the abstract mathematical description of the pattern of events, but by borrowing the then current pictorial description of this pattern; thus it has not appropriated certain knowledge but conjectures. These conjectures were often good enough for the man-sized world, but not, as we now know, for those ultimate processes of nature which control the happenings of the man-sized world, and bring us nearest to the true nature of reality.[5]

He continues:

> One consequence of this is that the standard philosophical discussions of many problems, such as those of causality and freewill or of materialism or mentalism, are based on an interpretation of the pattern of events which is no longer tenable. The scientific basis of these older discussions has been washed away, and with their disappearance have gone all the arguments . . .[6]

The twentieth century brought in a time which could be called "the end of philosophy and the beginning of art." I do not mean this, of course, strictly speaking, but rather as the 'tendency' of the situation. Certainly linguistic philosophy can be considered the heir to empiricism, but it's a

philosophy in one gear.[7] And there is certainly an 'art condition' to art preceding Duchamp, but its other functions or reasons-to-be are so pronounced that its ability to function clearly as art limits its art condition so drastically that it's only minimally art.[8] In no mechanistic sense is there a connection between philosophy's 'ending' and art's 'beginning', but I don't find this occurrence entirely coincidental. Though the same reasons may be responsible for both occurrences, the connection is made by me. I bring this all up to analyze art's function and subsequently its viability. And I do so to enable others to understand the reasoning of my art and, by extension, other artists', as well as to provide a clearer understanding of the term 'Conceptual art'.[9]

THE FUNCTION OF ART

The main qualifications to the lesser position of painting is that advances in art are certainly not always formal ones.

Donald Judd (1963)

Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture.

Donald Judd (1965)

Everything sculpture has, my work doesn't.

Donald Judd (1967)

The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.

Sol LeWitt (1967)

The one thing to say about art is that it is one thing. Art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else. Art as art is nothing but art. Art is not what is not art.

Ad Reinhardt (1963)

The meaning is the use.

Wittgenstein

A more functional approach to the study of concepts has tended to replace the method of introspection. Instead of attempting to grasp or describe concepts bare, so to speak, the psychologist investigates the way in which they function as ingredients in beliefs and in judgements.

Irving M. Copi

Meaning is always a presupposition of function.

T. Segerstedt

. . . the subject-matter of conceptual investigations is the meaning *of certain words and expressions—and not the things and states of affairs*

themselves about which we talk, when using those words and expressions.

G. H. Von Wright

Thinking is radically metaphoric. Linkage by analogy is its constituent law or principle, its causal nexus, since meaning only arises through the causal contexts by which a sign stands for (takes the place of) an instance of a sort. To think of anything is to take it as of a sort (as a such and such) and that 'as' brings in (openly or in disguise) the analogy, the parallel, the metaphoric grapple or ground or grasp or draw by which alone the mind takes hold. It takes no hold if there is nothing for it to haul from, for its thinking is the haul, the attraction of likes.

I. A. Richards

In this section I will discuss the separation between aesthetics and art; consider briefly Formalist art (because it is a leading proponent of the idea of aesthetics as art), and assert that art is analogous to an analytic proposition, and that it is art's existence as a tautology which enables art to remain 'aloof' from philosophical presumptions.

It is necessary to separate aesthetics from art because aesthetics deals with opinions on perception of the world in general. In the past one of the two prongs of art's function was its value as decoration. So any branch of philosophy which dealt with 'beauty' and thus, taste, was inevitably duty bound to discuss art as well. Out of this 'habit' grew the notion that there was a conceptual connection between art and aesthetics, which is not true. This idea never drastically conflicted with artistic considerations before recent times, not only because the morphological characteristics of art perpetuated the continuity of this error, but also because the apparent other 'functions' of art (depiction of religious themes, portraiture of aristocrats, detailing of architecture, etc.) used art to cover up art.

When objects are presented within the context of art (and until recently objects always have been used) they are as eligible for aesthetic consideration as are any objects in the world, and an aesthetic consideration of an object existing in the realm of art means that the object's existence or functioning in an art context is irrelevant to the aesthetic judgement.

The relation of aesthetics to art is not unlike that of aesthetics to architecture, in that architecture has a very specific *function* and how 'good' its design is is *primarily* related to how well it performs its function. Thus, judgements on what it looks like correspond to taste, and we can see that throughout history different examples of architecture are praised at different times depending on the aesthetics of particular epochs. Aesthetic thinking has even gone so far as to make examples of architecture not related to 'art' at all, works of art in themselves (e.g. the pyramids of Egypt).

Aesthetic considerations are indeed *always* extraneous to an object's function or 'reason to be'. Unless of course, the object's 'reason to be' is strictly aesthetic. An example of a purely aesthetic object is a decorative object, for decoration's primary function is "to add something to so as to make more attractive; adorn; ornament,"[10] and this relates directly to taste. And this leads us directly to 'Formalist' art and criticism.[11] Formalist art (painting and sculpture) is the vanguard of decoration, and, strictly speaking, one could reasonably assert that its art condition is so minimal that for all functional purposes it is not art at all, but pure exercises in aesthetics. Above all things Clement Greenberg is the critic of taste. Behind every one of his decisions there is an aesthetic judgement, with those judgements reflecting his taste. And what does his taste reflect? The period he grew up in as a critic, the period 'real' for him: the fifties.[12] Given his theories (if they have any logic to them at all) how else can one account for his disinterest in Frank Stella, Ad Reinhardt, and others applicable to his historical scheme? Is it because he is ". . . basically unsympathetic on personally experiential grounds"?[13] Or, in other words, their work doesn't suit his taste?

But in the philosophic *tabula rasa* of art, "if someone calls it art," as Don Judd has said, "it's art." Given this, formalist painting and sculpture activity can be granted an 'art condition', but only by virtue of its presentation in terms of its art idea (e.g. a rectangularly-shaped canvas stretched over wooden supports and stained with such and such colors, using such and such forms, giving such and such a visual experience, etc.). Looking at contemporary art in this light, one realizes the minimal creative effort taken on the part of formalist artists specifically, and all painters and sculptors (working as such today) generally.

This brings us to the realization that formalist art and criticism accept as a definition of art one which exists solely on morphological grounds. While a vast quantity of similarly looking objects or images (or visually related objects or images) may seem to be related (or connected) because of a similarity of visual/experiential 'readings', one cannot claim from this an artistic or conceptual relationship.

It is obvious then that formalist criticism's reliance on morphology leads necessarily with a bias toward the morphology of traditional art. And in this sense such criticism is not related to a 'scientific method' or any sort of empiricism (as Michael Fried, with his detailed descriptions of paintings and other 'scholarly' paraphernalia would want us to believe). Formalist criticism is no more than an analysis of the physical attributes of particular objects which happen to exist in a morphological context. But this doesn't add any knowledge (or facts) to our understanding of the nature or function of art. Nor does it comment on whether or not the objects analyzed are even works of art, since formalist critics always by-

pass the conceptual element in works of art. Exactly why they don't comment on the conceptual element in works of art is precisely because formalist art becomes art only by virtue of its resemblance to earlier works of art. It's a mindless art. Or, as Lucy Lippard so succinctly described Jules Olitski's paintings: "they're visual *Muzak*."[14]

Formalist critics and artists alike do not question the nature of art, but as I have said elsewhere: "Being an artist now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art. If an artist accepts painting (or sculpture) he is accepting the tradition that goes with it. That's because the word art is general and the word painting is specific. Painting is a *kind* of art. If you make paintings you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art. One is then accepting the nature of art to be the European tradition of a painting-sculpture dichotomy."[15]

The strongest objection one can raise against a morphological justification for traditional art is that morphological notions of art embody an implied *a priori* concept of art's possibilities. But such an *a priori* concept of the nature of art (as separate from analytically framed art propositions or 'work' which I will discuss later) makes it, indeed, *a priori:* impossible to question the nature of art. And this questioning of the nature of art is a very important concept in understanding the function of art.

The function of art, as a question, was first raised by Marcel Duchamp. In fact it is Marcel Duchamp whom we can credit with giving art its own identity. (One can certainly see a tendency toward this self-identification of art beginning with Manet and Cézanne through to Cubism,[16] but their works are timid and ambiguous by comparison with Duchamp's.) 'Modern' art and the work before seemed connected by virtue of their morphology. Another way of putting it would be that art's 'language' remained the same, but it was saying new things. The event that made conceivable the realization that it was possible to 'speak another language' and still make sense in art was Marcel Duchamp's first unassisted readymade. With the unassisted readymade, art changed its focus from the form of the language to what was being said. Which means that it changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function. This change—one from 'appearance' to 'conception'—was the beginning of 'modern' art and the beginning of 'conceptual' art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually.

The 'value' of particular artists after Duchamp can be weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of art; which is another way of saying "what they *added* to the conception of art" or what wasn't there before they started. Artists question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art's nature. And to do this one cannot concern oneself with the handed-down 'language' of traditional art, since this activity is

based on the assumption that there is only one way of framing art propositions. But the very stuff of art is indeed greatly related to 'creating' new propositions.

The case is often made—particularly in reference to Duchamp—that objects of art (such as the readymades, of course, but all art is implied in this) are judged as *objets d'art* in later years and the artists' *intentions* become irrelevant. Such an argument is the case of a preconceived notion of art ordering together not necessarily related facts. The point is this: aesthetics, as we have pointed out, are conceptually irrelevant to art. Thus, any physical thing can become *objet d'art,* that is to say, can be considered tasteful, aesthetically pleasing, etc. But this has no bearing on the object's application to an art context; that is, its *functioning* in an art context. (E.g. if a collector takes a painting, attaches legs, and uses it as a dining-table it's an act unrelated to art or the artist because, *as art,* that wasn't the artist's *intention.*)

And what holds true for Duchamp's work applies as well to most of the art after him. In other words, the value of Cubism is its idea in the realm of art, not the physical or visual qualities seen in a specific painting, or the particularization of certain colors or shapes. For these colors and shapes are the art's 'language', not its meaning conceptually as art. To look upon a Cubist 'masterwork' *now* as art is nonsensical, conceptually speaking, as far as art is concerned. (That visual information which was unique in Cubism's language has now been generally absorbed and has a lot to do with the way in which one deals with painting 'linguistically'. (E.g. what a Cubist painting meant experimentally and conceptually to, say, Gertrude Stein, is beyond our speculation because the same painting then 'meant' something different than it does now.)) The 'value' now of an original Cubist painting is not unlike, in most respects, an original manuscript by Lord Byron, or *The Spirit of St. Louis* as it is seen in the Smithsonian Institution. (Indeed, museums fill the very same function as the Smithsonian Institution—why else would the *Jeu de Paume* wing of the Louvre exhibit Cezanne's and Van Gogh's palettes as proudly as they do their paintings?) Actual works of art are little more than historical curiosities. As far as *art* is concerned Van Gogh's paintings aren't worth any more than his palette is. They are both 'collector's items'.[17]

Art 'lives' through influencing other art, not by existing as the physical residue of an artist's ideas. The reason why different artists from the past are 'brought alive' again is because some aspect of their work becomes 'usable' by living artists. That there is no 'truth' as to what art is seems quite unrealized.

What is the function of art, or the nature of art? If we continue our analogy of the forms art takes as being art's *language* one can realize then that a work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context

of art as a comment on art. We can then go further and analyze the types of 'propositions'.

A. J. Ayer's evaluation of Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic is useful to us here: "A proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience."[18] The analogy I will attempt to make is one between the art condition and the condition of the analytic proposition. In that they don't appear to be believable as anything else, nor about anything (other than art) the forms of art most clearly finally referable only to art have been forms closest to analytical propositions.

Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context—as art—they provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art. Thus, that it is art is true *a priori* (which is what Judd means when he states that "if someone calls it art, it's art").

Indeed, it is nearly impossible to discuss art in general terms without talking in tautologies—for to attempt to 'grasp' art by any other 'handle' is to merely focus on another aspect or quality of the proposition which is usually irrelevant to the art work's 'art condition'. One begins to realize that art's 'art condition' is a conceptual state. That the language forms which the artist frames his propositions in are often 'private' codes or languages is an inevitable outcome of art's freedom from morphological constrictions; and it follows from this that one has to be familiar with contemporary art to appreciate it and understand it. Likewise one understands why the 'man on the street' is intolerant to artistic art and always demands art in a traditional 'language'. (And one understands why formalist art 'sells like hot cakes'.) Only in painting and sculpture did the artists all speak the same language. What is called 'Novelty Art' by the formalists is often the attempt to find new languages, although a new language doesn't necessarily mean the framing of new propositions: e.g. most kinetic and electronic art.

Another way of stating in relation to art what Ayer asserted about the analytic method in the context of language would be the following: The validity of artistic propositions is not dependent on any empirical, much less any aesthetic, presupposition about the nature of things. For the artist, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. He is concerned only with the way (1) in which art is capable of conceptual growth and (2) how his propositions are capable of logically following that growth.[19] In other words, the propositions of art are not

factual, but linguistic in *character*—that is, they do not describe the behaviour of physical, or even mental objects; they express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art. Accordingly, we can say that art operates on a logic. For we shall see that the characteristic mark of a purely logical enquiry is that it is concerned with the formal consequences of our definitions (of art) and not with questions of empirical fact.[20]

To repeat, what art has in common with logic and mathematics is that it is a tautology; i.e., the 'art idea' (or 'work') and art are the same and can be appreciated as art without going outside the context of art for verification.

On the other hand, let us consider why art cannot be (or has difficulty when it attempts to be) a synthetic proposition. Or, that is to say, when the truth or falsity of its assertion is verifiable on empirical grounds. Ayer states:

> . . . The criterion by which we determine the validity of an *a priori* or analytical proposition is not sufficient to determine the validity of an empirical or synthetic proposition. For it is characteristic of empirical propositions that their validity is not purely formal. To say that a geometrical proposition, or a system of geometrical propositions, is false, is to say that it is self-contradictory. But an empirical proposition, or a system of empirical propositions, may be free from contradiction, and still be false. It is said to be false, not because it is formally defective, but because it fails to satisfy some material criterion.[21]

The unreality of 'realistic' art is due to its framing as an art proposition in synthetic terms: one is always tempted to 'verify' the proposition empirically. Realism's synthetic state does not bring one to a circular swing back into a dialogue with the larger framework of questions about the nature of *art* (as does the work of Malevich, Mondrian, Pollock, Reinhardt, early Rauschenberg, Johns, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Andre, Judd, Flavin, LeWitt, Morris, and others), but rather, one is flung out of art's 'orbit' into the 'infinite space' of the human condition.

Pure Expressionism, continuing with Ayer's terms, could be considered as such: "A sentence which consisted of demonstrative symbols would not express a genuine proposition. It would be a mere ejaculation, in no way characterizing that to which it was supposed to refer." Expressionist works are usually such 'ejaculations' presented in the morphological language of traditional art. If Pollock is important it is because he painted on loose canvas horizontally to the floor. What *isn't* important is that he later put those drippings over stretchers and hung them parallel to the wall. (In other words, what is important in art is what one *brings* to it, not one's adoption of what was previously existing.) What is even less

important to art is Pollock's notions of 'self-expression' because those *kinds* of subjective meanings are useless to anyone other than those involved with him personally. And their 'specific' quality puts them outside of art's context.

"I do not make art," Richard Serra says, "I am engaged in an activity; if someone wants to call it art, that's his business, but it's not up to me to decide that. That's all figured out later." Serra, then, is very much aware of the implications of his work. If Serra is indeed just "figuring out what lead does" (gravitationally, molecularly, etc.) why should *anyone* think of it as art? If he doesn't take the responsibility of it being art, who can, or should? His work certainly appears to be empirically verifiable: lead can do and be used for many physical activities. In itself this does anything but lead us into a dialogue about the nature of art. In a sense then he is a primitive. He has no idea about art. How is it then that we know about 'his activity'? Because he has told us it is art by his actions *after* 'his activity' has taken place. That is, by the fact he is with several galleries, puts the physical residue of his activity in museums (and sells them to art collectors—but as we have pointed out, collectors are irrelevant to the 'condition of art' of a work). That he denies his work is art but plays the artist is more than just a paradox. Serra secretly feels that 'arthood' is arrived at empirically. Thus, as Ayer has stated: "There are no absolutely certain empirical propositions. It is only tautologies that are certain. Empirical questions are one and all hypotheses, which may be confirmed or discredited in actual sense-experience. And the propositions in which we record the observations that verify these hypotheses are themselves hypotheses which are subject to the test of further sense-experience. Thus there is no final proposition."[22]

What one finds all throughout the writings of Ad Reinhardt is this very similar thesis of 'art-as-art', and that "art is always dead, and a 'living' art is a deception."[23] Reinhardt had a very clear idea about the nature of art, and his importance is far from being recognized.

Forms of art that can be considered synthetic propositions are verifiable by the world, that is to say, to understand these propositions one must leave the tautological-like framework of art and consider 'outside' information. But to consider it as art it is necessary to ignore this same outside information, because outside information (experiential qualities, to note) has its own intrinsic worth. And to comprehend this worth one does not need a state of 'art condition'.

From this it is easy to realize that art's viability is not connected to the presentation of visual (or other) kinds of experience. That this may have been one of art's extraneous functions in the preceding centuries is not unlikely. After all, man in even the nineteenth-century lived in a fairly

standardized visual environment. That is, it was ordinarily predictable as to what he would be coming into contact with day after day. His visual environment in the part of the world in which he lived was fairly consistent. In our time we have an experientially drastically richer environment. One can fly all over the earth in a matter of hours and days, not months. We have the cinema, and color television, as well as the man-made spectacle of the lights of Las Vegas or the skyscrapers of New York City. The whole world is there to be seen, and the whole world can watch man walk on the moon from their living rooms. Certainly art or objects of painting and sculpture cannot be expected to compete experientially with this?

The notion of 'use' is relevant to art and its 'language'. Recently the box or cube form has been used a great deal within the context of art. (Take for instance its use by Judd, Morris, LeWitt, Bladen, Smith, Bell, and McCracken—not to mention the quantity of boxes and cubes that came after.) The difference between all the various uses of the box or cube form is directly related to the differences in the intentions of the artists. Further, as is particularly seen in Judd's work, the use of the box or cube form illustrates very well our earlier claim that an object is only art when placed in the context of art.

A few examples will point this out. One could say that if one of Judd's box forms was seen filled with debris, seen placed in an industrial setting, or even merely seen sitting on a street corner, it would not be identified with art. It follows then that understanding and consideration of it as an art work is necessary *a priori* to viewing it in order to 'see' it as a work of art. Advance information about the concept of art and about an artist's concepts is necessary to the appreciation and understanding of contemporary art. Any and all of the physical attributes (qualities) of contemporary works if considered separately and/or specifically are irrelevant to the art concept. The art concept (as Judd said, though he didn't mean it this way) must be considered in its whole. To consider a concept's parts is invariably to consider aspects that are irrelevant to its art condition—or like reading *parts* of a definition.

It comes as no surprise that the art with the least fixed morphology is the example from which we decipher the nature of the general term 'art'. For where there is a context existing separately of its morphology and consisting of its function one is more likely to find results less conforming and predictable. It is in modern art's possession of a 'language' with the shortest history that the plausibility of the abandonment of that 'language' becomes most possible. It is understandable then that the art that came out of Western painting and sculpture is the most energetic, questioning (of its nature), and the least assuming of all the general 'art' concerns. In

the final analysis, however, all of the arts have but (in Wittgenstein's terms) a 'family' resemblance.

Yet the various qualities relatable to an 'art condition' possessed by poetry, the novel, the cinema, the theatre, and various forms of music, etc., is that aspect of them most reliable to the function of art as asserted here.

Is not the decline of poetry relatable to the implied metaphysics from poetry's use of 'common' language as an art language?[24] In New York the last decadent stages of poetry can be seen in the move by 'Concrete' poets recently toward the use of actual objects and theatre.[25] Can it be that they feel the unreality of their art form?

We see now that the axioms of a geometry are simply definitions, and that the theorems of a geometry are simply the logical consequences of these definitions. A geometry is not in itself about physical space; in itself it cannot be said to be 'about' anything. But we can use a geometry to reason about physical space. That is to say, once we have given the axioms a physical interpretation, we can proceed to apply the theorems to the objects which satisfy the axioms. Whether a geometry can be applied to the actual physical world or not, is an empirical question which falls outside the scope of geometry itself. There is no sense, therefore, in asking which of the various geometries known to us are false and which are true. In so far as they are all free from contradiction, they are all true. The proposition which states that a certain application of a geometry is possible is not itself a proposition of that geometry. All that the geometry itself tells us is that if anything can be brought under the definitions, it will also satisfy the theorems. It is therefore a purely logical system, and its propositions are purely analytic propositions.

A. J. Ayer[26]

Here then I propose rests the viability of art. In an age when traditional philosophy is unreal because of its assumptions, art's ability to exist will depend not only on its *not* performing a service—as entertainment, visual (or other) experience, or decoration—which is something easily replaced by kitsch culture and technology, but rather, it will remain viable by *not* assuming a philosophical stance; for in art's unique character is the capacity to remain aloof from philosophical judgements. It is in this context that art shares similarities with logic, mathematics and, as well, science. But whereas the other endeavors are useful, art is not. Art indeed exists for its own sake.

In this period of man, after philosophy and religion, art may possibly be one endeavor that fulfills what another age might have called 'man's spiritual needs'. Or, another way of putting it might be that art deals analogously with the state of things 'beyond physics' where philosophy had to make assertions. And art's strength is that even the preceding sentence is an assertion, and cannot be verified by art. Art's only claim is for art. Art is the definition of art.

PART II
'CONCEPTUAL ART' AND RECENT ART

The disinterest in painting and sculpture is a disinterest in doing it again, not in it as it is being done by those who developed the last advanced versions. New work always involves objections to the old. They are part of it. If the earlier work is first rate it is complete.

Donald Judd (1965)

Abstract art or non-pictorial art is as old as this century, and though more specialized than previous art, is clearer and more complete, and like all modern thought and knowledge, more demanding in its grasp of relations.

Ad Reinhardt (1948)

In France there is an old saying, 'stupid like a painter'. The painter was considered stupid, but the poet and writer very intelligent. I wanted to be intelligent. I had to have the idea of inventing. It is nothing to do what your father did. It is nothing to be another Cézanne. In my visual period there is a little of that stupidity of the painter. All my work in the period before the Nude *was visual painting. Then I came to the idea. I thought the ideatic formulation a way to get away from influences.*

Marcel Duchamp

For each work of art that becomes physical there are many variations that do not.

Sol LeWitt

The main virtue of geometric shapes is that they aren't organic, as all art otherwise is. A form that's neither geometric or organic would be a great discovery.

Donald Judd (1967)

The one thing to say about art is its breathlessness, lifelessness, deathlessness, contentlessness, formlessness, spacelessness, and timelessness. This is always the end of art.

Ad Reinhardt (1962)

Note: The discussion in the previous part does more than merely 'justify' the recent art called 'conceptual'. It points out, I feel, some of the confused thinking which has gone on in regards to past—but particularly—present activity in art. This article is not intended to give evidence of a 'movement'. But as an early advocate (through works of art and conversation) of a particular kind of art best described as 'Conceptual' I have become increasingly concerned by the nearly arbitrary application of this term to an assortment of art interests—many of which I would never want to be connected with, and logically shouldn't be.

The 'purest' definition of conceptual art would be that it is inquiry into the foundations of the concept 'art', as it has come to mean. Like most

terms with fairly specific meanings generally applied, 'Conceptual Art' is often considered as a *tendency*. In one sense it is a tendency of course because the 'definition' of 'Conceptual Art' is very close to the meanings of art itself.

But the reasoning behind the notion of such a tendency, I am afraid, is still connected to the fallacy of morphological characteristics as a connective between what are really disparate activities. In this case it is an attempt to detect stylehood. In assuming a primary cause-effect relationship to 'final outcomes', such criticism by-passes a particular artist's intents (concepts) to deal exclusively with his 'final outcome'. Indeed most criticism has dealt with only one very superficial aspect of this 'final outcome', and that is the apparent *'immateriality' or 'anti-object'* similarity amongst most 'conceptual' works of art. But this can only be important if one assumes that objects are necessary to art—or to phrase it better, that they have a definitive relation to art. And in this case such criticism would be focusing on a negative aspect of the art.

If one has followed my thinking (in part one) one can understand my assertion that objects are conceptually irrelevant to the condition of art. This is not to say that a particular 'art investigation' may or may not employ objects, material substances, etc. within the confines of its investigation. Certainly the investigations carried out by Bainbridge and Hurrell are excellent examples of such a use.[27] Although I have proposed that all art is finally conceptual, some recent work is clearly conceptual in intent whereas other examples of recent art are only related to conceptual art in a superficial manner. And although this work is in most cases an advance over Formalist or 'Anti-Formalist' (Morris, Serra, Sonnier, Hesse, and others) tendencies, it should not be considered 'Conceptual Art' in the *purer sense of the term*.

Three artists often associated with me (through Seth Siegelaub's projects)—Douglas Huebler, Robert Barry, and Lawrence Weiner—are not concerned with, I do not think, 'Conceptual Art' as it was previously stated. Douglas Huebler, who was in the *Primary Structures* show at the Jewish Museum (New York), uses a non-morphologically art-like form of presentation (photographs, maps, mailings) to answer iconic, structural sculpture issues directly related to his formica sculpture (which he was making as late as 1968). This is pointed out by the artist in the opening sentence of the catalogue of his 'one-man show' (which was organized by Seth Siegelaub and existed only as a catalogue of documentation): "The existence of each sculpture is documented by its documentation." It is not my intention to point out a *negative* aspect of the work, but only to show that Huebler—who is in his mid-forties and much older than most of the artists discussed here—has not as much in common with the aims in the *purer* versions of 'Conceptual Art' as it would superficially seem.

The other men—Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner—have watched their work take on a 'Conceptual Art' association almost by accident. Barry, whose painting was seen in the *Systemic Painting* show at the Guggenheim Museum, has in common with Weiner the fact that the 'path' to conceptual art came via decisions related to choices of art materials and processes. Barry's post-Newman/Reinhardt paintings 'reduced' (in physical material, not 'meaning') along a path from two-inch square paintings, to single lines of wire between architectural points, to radio-wave beams, to inert gases, and finally to 'brain energy'. His work then seems to exist conceptually only because the material is invisible. But his art does have a physical state, which is different than work which only exists conceptually.

Lawrence Weiner, who gave up painting in the spring of 1968, changed his notion of 'place' (in an Andrean sense) from the context of the canvas (which could only be specific) to a context which was 'general', yet all the while continuing his concern with specific materials and processes. It became obvious to him that if one is not concerned with 'appearance' (which he wasn't, and in this regard he preceded most of the 'Anti-Form' artists) there was not only no need for the fabrication (such as in his studio) of his work, but—more important—such fabrication would again invariably give his work's 'place' a specific context. Thus, by the summer of 1968, he decided to have his work exist only as a proposal in his notebook—that is, until a 'reason' (museum, gallery, or collector) or as he called them, a 'receiver' necessitated his work to be made. It was in the late fall of that same year that Weiner went one step further in deciding that it didn't matter whether it was made or not. In that sense his private notebooks became public.[28]

Purely conceptual art is first seen concurrently in the work of Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin in Coventry, England; and with my own work done in New York City, all generally around 1966.[29] On Kawara, a Japanese artist who has been continuously travelling around the world since 1959, has been doing a highly conceptualized kind of art since 1964.

On Kawara, who began with paintings lettered with one simple word, went to 'questions' and 'codes', and paintings such as the listing of a spot on the Sahara Desert in terms of its longitude and latitude, is most well known for his 'date' paintings. The 'date' paintings consist of the lettering (in paint on canvas) of that day's date on which the painting is executed. If a painting is not 'finished' on the day that it is started (that is, by 12:00 midnight) it is destroyed. Although he still does the date paintings (he spent last year travelling to every country in South America) he has begun doing other projects as well in the past couple of years. These include a *One-hundred year calendar*, a daily listing of everyone he meets each day

(*I met*) which is kept in notebooks, as is *I went* which is a calendar of maps of the cities he is in with the marked streets where he travelled. He also mails daily postcards giving the time he woke up that morning. On Kawara's reasons for his art are extremely private, and he has consciously stayed away from any publicity or public art-world exposure. His continued use of 'painting' as a medium is, I think, a pun on the morphological characteristics of traditional art, rather than an interest in painting 'proper'.

Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin's work, presented as a collaboration, began in 1966 consisting of projects such as: a rectangle with linear depictions of the states of Kentucky and Iowa, titled *Map to not include: Canada, James Bay, Ontario, Quebec, St. Lawrence River, New Brunswick* . . . and so on; conceptual drawings based on various serial and conceptual schemes; a map of a 36-square-mile area of the Pacific Ocean, west of Oahu, scale 3 inches to the mile (an empty square). Works from 1967 were the *Air conditioning show* and the *Air show*. The *Air show* as described by Terry Atkinson was, "A series of assertions concerning a theoretical usage of a column of air comprising a base of one square mile and of unspecified distance in the vertical dimension."[30]

No particular square mile of the earth's surface was specified. The concept did not entail any such particular location. Also such works as *Frameworks, Hot-cold,* and *22 sentences: the French army* are examples of their more recent collaborations.[31] Atkinson and Baldwin in the past year have formed, along with David Bainbridge and Harold Hurrell, the Art & Language Press. From this press is published *Art-Language,* (a journal of conceptual art),[32] as well as other publications related to this enquiry.

Christine Kozlov has been working along conceptual lines as well since late 1966. Some of her work has consisted of a 'conceptual' film, using clear Leder tape; *Compositions for audio structures*—a coding system for sound; a stack of several hundred blank sheets of paper—one for each day on which a concept is rejected; *Figurative work* which is a listing of everything she ate for a period of six months; and a study of crime as an art activity.

The Canadian Iain Baxter has been doing a 'conceptual' sort of work since late 1967. As have the Americans James Byars and Frederic Barthelme; and the French and German artists Bernar Venet and Hanne Darboven. And certainly the books of Edward Ruscha since around that time are relevant too. As are *some* of Bruce Nauman's, Barry Flanagan's, Bruce McLean's, and Richard Long's works. Steven Kaltenbach *Time capsules* from 1968, and much of his work since is relatable. And Ian Wilson's post-Kaprow *Conversations* are conceptually presented.

The German artist Franz E. Walther in his work since 1965 has treated objects in a much different way than they are usually treated in an art context.

Within the past year other artists, though some only related peripherally, have begun a more 'conceptual' form of work. Mel Bochner gave up work heavily influenced by 'Minimal' art and began such work. And certainly some of the work by Jan Dibbets, Eric Orr, Allen Ruppersberg, and Dennis Oppenheim could be considered within a conceptual framework. Donald Burgy's work in the past year as well uses a conceptual format. One can also see a development in a *purer* form of 'conceptual' art in the recent beginnings of work by younger artists such as Saul Ostrow, Adrian Piper, and Perpetua Butler. Interesting work in this 'purer' sense is being done, as well, by a group consisting of an Australian and two Englishmen (all living in New York): Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden, and Roger Cutforth. (Although the amusing pop paintings of John Baldessari allude to this sort of work by being 'conceptual' cartoons of actual conceptual art, they are not really relevant to this discussion.)

Terry Atkinson has suggested, and I agree with him, that Sol LeWitt is notably responsible for creating an environment which made our art acceptable, if not conceivable. (I would hastily add to that, however, that I was certainly much more influenced by Ad Reinhardt, Duchamp via Johns and Morris, and by Donald Judd than I ever was specifically by LeWitt.) Perhaps added to conceptual art's history would be certainly early works by Robert Morris, particularly the *Card File* (1962). Much of Rauschenberg's early work such as his *Portrait of Iris Clert* and his *Erased DeKooning Drawing* are some important examples of a conceptual kind of art. And the Europeans Klein and Manzoni fit into this history somewhere, too. And in Jasper Johns' work—such as his *Target* and *Flag* paintings and his ale cans—one has a particularly good example of art existing as an analytical proposition. Johns and Reinhardt are probably the last two painters that were legitimate *artists* as well.[33] Robert Smithson, *had* he recognized his articles in magazines as being his work (as he could have, and should have) and his 'work' serving as illustrations for them, his influence would be more relevant.[34]

Andre, Flavin, and Judd have exerted tremendous influence on recent art, though probably more as examples of high standards and clear thinking than in any specific way. Pollock and Judd are, I feel, the beginning and end of American dominance in art; partly due to the ability of many of the younger artists in Europe to 'purge' themselves of their traditions, but most likely due to the fact that nationalism is as out of place in art as it is in any other field. Seth Siegelaub, a former art dealer who now functions as a curator-at-large and was the first exhibition organizer to 'specialize' in this area of recent art, has had many group exhibitions that

existed no *place* (other than in the catalogue). As Siegelaub has stated: "I am very interested in conveying the idea that the artist can live where he wants to—not necessarily in New York or London or Paris as he has had to in the past—but *anywhere* and still make important art."

PART III

I suppose my first 'conceptual' work was the *Leaning Glass* from 1965. It consists of any five foot square sheet of glass to be leaned against any wall. It was shortly after this that I got interested in water because of its formless, colorless quality. I used water in every way I could imagine—blocks of ice, radiator steam, maps with areas of water used in a system, picture postcard collections of bodies of water, and so on until *1966* when I had a photostat made of the dictionary definition of the word water, which for me at that time was a way of just presenting the *idea* of water. I used a dictionary definition once before that, in late 1965, in a piece which consisted of a chair, a slightly smaller photographic blow-up of the chair—which I mounted to the wall next to the chair, and a definition of the word chair, which I mounted to the wall next to that. About the same time I did a series of works which were concerned with the relationship between words and objects (concepts and what they refer to). And as well a series of works which only existed as 'models': simple shapes—such as a five-foot square—with information that it should be thought of as a one-foot square; and other simple attempts to 'de-objectify' the object.

With the aid of Christine Kozlov and a couple of others I founded The Museum of Normal Art in 1967. It was an 'exhibition' area run for and by artists. It only lasted a few months. One of the exhibitions there was my only 'one-man show' in New York and I presented it as a secret, titled *15 People Present Their Favorite Book*. And the show was exactly what its title states. Some of the 'contributors' included Morris, Reinhardt, Smithson, LeWitt, as well as myself. Also related to this 'show' I did a series which consisted of quotations by artists, about their work, or art in general; these 'statements' were done in 1968.

I have subtitled all of my work beginning with the first 'water' definition, *Art as Idea as Idea*. I always considered the photostat the work's form of presentation (or media); but I never wanted anyone to think that I was presenting a photostat as a work of art—that's why I made that separation and subtitled them as I did. The dictionary works went from abstractions of particulars (like *Water*) to abstractions of abstractions (like *Meaning*). I stopped the dictionary series in 1968. The only 'exhibition' I ever had of them was last year in Los Angeles at Gallery 669 (now defunct). The show consisted of the word 'nothing' from a dozen different dictionaries. In the beginning the photostats were obviously photostats, but as

time went on they became confused for paintings, so the 'endless series' stopped. The idea with the photostat was that they could be thrown away and then re-made—if need be—as part of an irrelevant procedure connected with the form of presentation, but not with the 'art'. Since the dictionary series stopped I began one series (or 'investigations', as I prefer to call them) using the categories from the *Thesaurus*, presenting the information through general advertising media. (This makes clearer in my work the separation of the art from its form of presentation.) Currently I am working on a new investigation which deals with 'games'.

Notes

1. Morton White, *The Age of Analysis* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), p. 14.

2. Ibid., p. 15.

3. I mean by this Existentialism and Phenomenology. Even Merleau-Ponty, with his middle-of-the-road position between Empiricism and Rationalism, cannot express his philosophy without the use of words (thus using concepts); and following this, how can one discuss experience without sharp distinctions between ourselves and the world?

4. Sir James Jeans, *Physics and Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 17.

5. Ibid., p. 190.

6. Ibid., p. 190.

7. The task such philosophy has taken upon itself is the only 'function' it could perform without making philosophic assertions.

8. This is dealt with in the following section.

9. I would like to make it clear, however, that I intend to speak for no one else. I arrived at these conclusions alone, and indeed, it is from this thinking that my art since 1966 (if not before) evolved. Only recently did I realize after meeting Terry Atkinson that he and Michael Baldwin share similar, though certainly not identical, opinions to mine.

10. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1962), s.v. "decoration."

11. The conceptual level of the work of Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Morris Louis, Ron Davis, Anthony Caro, John Hoyland, Dan Christensen *et al.* is so dismally low, that any that is there is supplied by the critics promoting it. This is seen later.

12. Michael Fried's reasons for using Greenberg's rationale reflect his background (and most of the other formalist critics) as a 'scholar', but more of it is due to his desire, I suspect, to bring his scholarly studies into the modern world. One can easily sympathize with his desire to connect, say, Tiepolo with Jules Olitski. One should never forget, however, that an historian loves history more than anything, even art.

13. Lucy Lippard uses this quotation in *Ad Reinhardt: Paintings* [ex. cat.] (New York: Jewish Museum, 1966), p. 28.

14. Lucy Lippard again, in "Constellation by Harsh Daylight: The Whitney Annual" [review], *Hudson Review* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1968), p. 180.

15. Arthur R. Rose, "Four Interviews," *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 4 (February 1969), p. 23.

16. As Terry Atkinson pointed out in his introduction to *Art-Language* 1, no. 1, the Cubists never questioned *if* art had morphological characteristics, but *which* ones in *painting* were acceptable.

17. When someone 'buys' a Flavin he isn't buying a light show, for if he was he could just go to a hardware store and get the goods for considerably less. He isn't 'buying' anything. He is subsidizing Flavin's activity as an artist.

18. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1946), p. 78.

19. Ibid., p. 57.

20. Ibid., p. 57.

21. Ibid., p. 90.

22. Ibid., p. 94.

23. *Ad Reinhardt: Paintings*, p. 12.

24. It is poetry's use of common language to attempt to *say the unsayable* which is problematic, not any inherent problem in the use of language within the context of art.

25. Ironically, many of them call themselves 'Conceptual Poets'. Much of this work is very similar to Walter de Maria's work and this is not coincidental; de Maria's work functions as a kind of 'object' poetry, and his intentions are very poetic: he really wants his work to change men's lives.

26. Ayer, p. 82.

27. *Art-Language*, 1, no. 1.

28. I did not (and still do not) understand this last decision. Since I first met Weiner, he defended his position (quite alien to mine) of being a 'Materialist'. I always found this last direction (e.g. *Statements*) sensical in *my* terms, but I never understood how it was in his.

29. I began dating my work with the *Art as Idea as Idea* series.

30. Atkinson, pp. 5–6.

31. All obtainable from Art & Language Press, 84 Jubilee Crescent, Coventry, England.

32. (Of which the author is the American editor).

33. And Stella, too, of course. But Stella's work, which was greatly weakened by being painting, was made obsolete very quickly by Judd and others.

34. Smithson of course did spearhead the Earthwork activity—but his only disciple, Michael Heizer, is a 'one idea' artist who hasn't contributed much. If you have thirty men digging holes and nothing develops out of that idea you haven't got much, have you? A very large ditch, maybe.

STATEMENT FOR WHITNEY ANNUAL EXHIBITION, 1969

While my work is in an area which could be considered the heir to Western painting and sculpture, I do not consider it either 'painting' or 'sculpture' but rather an 'art investigation'. There are two reasons for this. One is that the word art denotes the general context of my activity, while the word 'painting' and 'sculpture' ascribe particular qualities to the materials used within my art investigation in such a way as to imply a relationship between my art and earlier art on morphological grounds. Secondly, one of the further disadvantages of specific terms such as painting and sculpture is their 'defining' character, and the subsequent limitation of the area of consideration. This limiting would seem to me to be contrary to the nature of art in our time.

First published as "Statement" in *1969 Annual Exhibition* [ex. cat.] (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969).