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**J. DERRIDA AND J. KOSUTH: THE TYRANNY OF THE LETTER
OR ART FOR PHILOSOPHY**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on analysing Jacques Derrida's aesthetic thought with reference to the conceptual art of Joseph Kosuth. The examination of Derrida's aesthetics in the context of conceptual art is based upon, *inter alia*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Margins of Philosophy*. American conceptual art is regarded as a sign of a peculiar language crisis diagnosed by the French philosopher. The paper examines Derrida's dialectics of presence and absence, the infinite and the temporal in the context of colour and plane. Negation of negation (line) forms space, states Derrida. Analogously, the negation of traditional art forms conceptual mental space. I analyse the implications of Kosuth's theoretical statements with reference to his volume entitled *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, preceded by J.-F. Lyotard's introduction. Kosuth's *Art as Idea as Idea* aims to engage and confront thought, language and artworks. Devoid of the attraction of colour and governed by the rigorous logic of the line and typography, the aesthetic value of Kosuth's concept of idea defines not only art after philosophy, to refer to Kosuth's terms, but also art *for* philosophy.

Keywords: *parergon*, interdisciplinarity, conceptual art, *difference*.

At the outset of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, one finds an apostrophe to language and writing, an announcement of a closure, and an affirmation of a beginning. The rhetorical mastery of this introduction has been appreciated by many critics. In relation to this passage, Christopher Johnson notes: "The Exergue is an extremely dramatic piece of writing, with a very strong sense of historical conjuncture. It announces the closure of an epoch, or at least our emergent apprehension of such a closure, and anticipates a monstrous future." (Johnson 2011, 3). This future, according to Derrida, will be determined by the 'problem of language'. Being the silent and secret witness of any meaning-negotiations process, language has never directed its critical and ironical potential against itself in a more apparent manner than today. It has posed a problem to itself, a problem that would have to be reformulated and solved within the very system that generated it. As Derrida phrased it:

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However the topic is considered, the *problem of language* has never been simply one problem among others. But never as much as at present has it invaded, *as such*, the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogeneous discourses, diverse and heterogeneous in their intention, method, and ideology. [...] It indicates, as if in spite of itself, that a historico-metaphysical epoch *must* finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon. (Derrida 1997, 6)

The role and significance of language and its critical analysis have become, in contemporary times, a fundamental issue, shaping a variety of fields and discourses, and perhaps most surprisingly, the domain of visual arts – as well. In particular, it has left a mark on the work of Joseph Kosuth, an artist born in 1945 in the United States (Toledo, Ohio), and thus fifteen years younger than Jacques Derrida. The suggested (not explicit however) relationship between an American artist and a French philosopher is the topic of the considerations raised in this paper.

Joseph Kosuth, regarded as one of the main representatives of American conceptual art, has made a radical attempt to re-examine the relationships between art, language, and philosophy. His famous statement that “art emerges as philosophy made concrete” (Schwarz 1989, 121) may indirectly indicate his debt to Derrida’s thought. Although Kosuth never explicitly referred to Derrida as the source of his inspiration, it seems to exist some (not very clear, although discernible) traces of his influence. As evidence for this correspondence, one could consider the inclusion of quotations from Derrida as elements of autobiographical photo-collages exhibited in Soho Photo Gallery in 2000. The thread of Kosuth’s philosophical interests, which he himself sanctioned, saying repeatedly that “philosophy is now closer to art” (Schwarz 1989, 23), leads directly to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of language games and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis. These two approaches, at least, have been indicated by Kosuth directly, as the source of his philosophical and artistic inspiration. Yet, neither the philosophy of Wittgenstein nor Freud’s psychoanalysis expose the significant role of writing, which links Kosuth’s art to Derrida’s philosophy, constituting an important component of both systems. In this light, art of the American artist is not, paraphrasing his own wording, “philosophy made concrete” (Schwarz 1989, 45), but rather a concrete philosophy of a concrete philosopher – Jacques Derrida.

Kosuth explicated his artistic decisions in the aesthetic or philosophical statements that took the form of complex treaties, articles, interviews and commentaries to his exhibitions. His most famous publications were collected in a comprehensive anthology titled *Art after Philosophy and After. Collected Writings 1966-1990* (published in 1991), preceded by a preface by Jean-François Lyotard. It is a unique collection of essays that constitute philosophical accounts and explanations of his artistic experimentation. Another source of Kosuth’s thought used in this paper is a volume of interviews: *Joseph Kosuth:*

Interviews. 1969-1989. It seems that the very attitude of the artist-philosopher is worth considering for the light it throws upon the nature of his interest in the re-evaluation of already existing patterns and divisions.

The radicalism of Kosuth's attitude as an artist-theorist or anthropologist, as he would be willing to identify himself, involves abandoning painting or other traditional forms of imagery in art in favor of the textual, and this radical gesture should be regarded as an innovation in the field of interdisciplinarity. He remarks upon his critical involvement as follows:

If being an artist today means questioning the nature of painting, for example, then the nature of art cannot be questioned. If an artist accepts painting, or sculpture, he or she accepts the tradition which accompanies it. [...] Painting is a kind of art, and if that is accepted, the traditional separation between painting and sculpture established by European culture is also accepted. What however is the function and nature of art? Let's imagine that the forms of art are a language. We can say then that a work of art is a kind of proposition about art presented within the context of art. Works of art, in this perspective, become what is called in philosophy analytic propositions, that means tautologies, or in other words, pure repetitions from a pragmatic point of view. (Schwarz 1989, 55)

The discussion on theory that frames art brings up Derrida's topic of *parergon*. Kosuth's publications from the 60s and 70s indicate the potential of research and creativity which lies in the interdisciplinary understood as a parergonal relation of art and philosophy, theory and practice that will become the main focus of my argument.² Moreover, I will examine the work of Kosuth in the context of Derridian concept of writing, with additional reference to Lyotard's introduction. The analogy between the significant role of language (especially in Derrida's concept of writing), and almost entirely language-textual nature of Kosuth's art will be crucial in my argument.

The issue of transdisciplinarity in postmodernism, despite the allegations of its anti-intellectualism, fascination with mass culture and the aesthetics of kitsch, seems to become, in this light, rather a response to diversity and stark contrasts. This uniquely postmodern urge to exceed the limits of narrow disciplines and to enclose theoretical reflection derives from the Renaissance tradition of universality. Not indifferent to intellectual stimuli, Kosuth's approach to artistic creation requires first and foremost an appropriate attitude of an artist who may undertake theoretical inquiry to conceptualize his

² Derridian topics of the *parergon* and the frame bring up the discussion on the mutual relationship of the visual and the narrative in Kosuth's approach. In 'Within the Context: Modernism and Critical Practice' Kosuth states: "It is through making the effort to *see* that our 'frame of discourse' is *itself* made visible, as it limits and defines the visible. Our frame of discourse is with us; we make it as we try to leave it. When we pretend to have left it, we speak in ignorance as it speaks through us. It is in seeing it that we confront it, in terms which force its alteration. It is such 'alterations' which, within an engaged understanding such as art, suggested a critical and emancipatory enterprise." (Kosuth 1991, 168).

intentions. Therefore, the modus of artist-theorist-philosopher should be recognized as one of the norms possible in contemporary times.

In addition to Kosuth, one can refer to other American artists drawing inspiration from their philosophical inquiry, such as Mark Rothko – known for his fascination with Kierkegaard, and Barnett Newman – a painter, but also an author of essays on contemporary aesthetics, including *The Sublime is Now* (“Tiger’s Eye”, December 1948). On the other hand, in 1990, a philosopher – Jacques Derrida – was involved in curating an exhibition (*Memoirs of the Blind*) for the Louvre Museum. Those attempts to cross the borders separating disciplines and (Kantian) faculties suggest not so much the desire for totality, but rather certain reluctance to closed forms.

I. The Crisis and the Heyday of Language

The self-reflexivity of language, or metalanguage, has become the distinctive motto of the postmodern era. So far, the mechanisms of language seem to have worked efficiently enough so that the resistance of the matter of language has been an issue solely relevant to poets, scientists, and fools. Nowadays, however, as Derrida claims, the links of this previously efficient communication device do not move as soundlessly as before. The deconstructive rust has revealed what had constituted a stylish framing of meaning. In other words, the signifier has become more perceptible than the signified; or else, the frame dominated the content. This shift has taken place not so much through the process of intensification, but rather through weakening and disintegration since, according to the principles of deconstruction, weakness attracts more attention.

Revealing the invisible patterns of language structures, Jacques Derrida’s thought elucidated the problem of language as such. The very act of pointing to the potential weakness of language, through inscribing this issue in the matter of the textual, has been, at the same time, an act of perpetuating and validating the problem of writing as a guarantee of coherency among the variety of postmodern jargons. Notably, *The Program* begins with an observation:

By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing. By a hardly perceptible necessity, it seems as though the concept of writing [...] is beginning to go beyond the extension of language. (Derrida 1997, 6-7)

Derrida depicts the state of contemporary “historico-metaphysical epoch”, as such which “*must* finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon” (Derrida 1997, 6). Elaborating further, he claims:

It must do so not only because all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language finds itself recaptured within that play but also because, for the same reason, language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self-assured, contained, and *guaranteed* by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it. (Derrida 1997, 6)

The devaluation or crisis of language is also a symptom; even more so, it is a symptom of language being menaced in its very life, which turned into a state of intensified activity threatened by the potential ultimate exhaustion of strength.

Paradoxically – as Derrida points out – too much attention devoted to a single aspect may indicate certain weakness of this point. Crisis which has affected language caused it to become “helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment its limits seem to disappear.” (Derrida 1997, 9) As a result, language has torn new transitions to subjugate new territories, and one of these newly seized domains is art. As Derrida remarked in 1988:

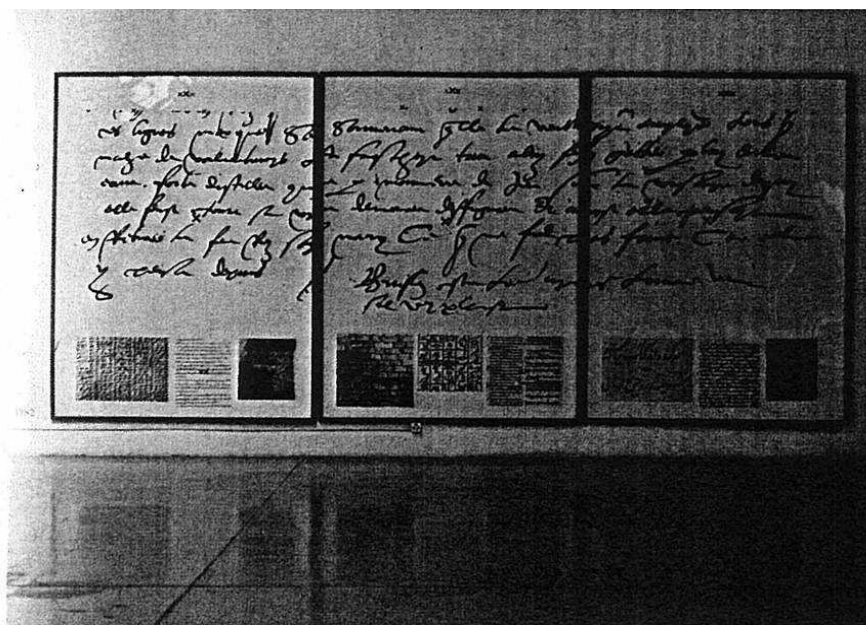
I wanted to recall that the concept of the text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic representational symbolic ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call ‘text’ implies all the structures called ‘real’, ‘economic’, ‘historical’, socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that ‘there is nothing outside the text’. (Gaston 2011, XXII)

In this context, his most famous claim that “there is nothing outside of the text” could be paraphrased in Kosuth’s manner: art is never outside the text or there is no art outside of the text. If Kosuth’s art has become a certain parole of language³, perhaps this suggestion reveals a deeper source of permutations occurring in and around language. In the relation art-philosophy, the theoretical component, having as yet only a subordinate function with respect to the first element of the dominant artistic practice, was rehabilitated and placed at the focal point. A similar shift has affected the dichotomy art/writing. This change, in turn, seems somehow equivalent to the reversal of the speech/writing order observed by Derrida. Furthermore, Derrida points to a certain crisis of writing itself. The anticipated death of the book can lead to its rebirth in newly created forms, some of which are already present – as Derrida writes – in fields such as biology (and the discovery of the genetic code writing), cybernetics, policy, military, and, most interestingly, “pictorial, musical, sculptural ‘writing’.” However, he makes no references to specific manifestations of this phenomenon in art. Therefore, the following analysis could fill this gap.

³ Kosuth defines the terms *langue* and *parole* as follows: “Philosophical (theoretical) language is (momentarily) a *parole* within the *langue* of art.” (Kosuth, 1991, 162).

It seems that by inscribing Kosuth's linguistic art in the philosophical discourse on the crisis and domination of writing, the relationship of art and philosophy appears closer, as confirmed by art as well (which, according to Kosuth's plan, was to become the future form of philosophy). Certain universality and significance of these processes is reflected by the fact that a phenomenon described in French philosophy echoed and was almost immediately confirmed in American, and then British art (Language Art) of the 60s and 70s. Theory and experiment in art were in an unprecedented vicinity not only due to the thematic convergence. Possibly, art itself fell victim to this turn, because it is theory that subdued art rather than *vice versa*. However, this temporary victory is marked by overprinting the graphic abstraction of a letter in a concrete matter of art.

In the conclusion of the essay *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing*, Derrida praised Hegel for highlighting the role of writing in a philosophical discourse. As he pointed out, it was Hegel who "reintroduced [...] the essential necessity of the written trace in a philosophical discourse – that is to say Socratic – discourse that had always believed it possible to do without it: the last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing" (Derrida 1997, 26). One could also apply Derrida's remarks to the relation of art and philosophy, as Kosuth's conceptualism has made apparent. Notably, Kosuth's *Art as Idea as Idea* concerns the essential necessity of a written trace in a work of art. Therefore, Kosuth would be one of the first artists of a new variety of art – the art of writing.



II. Thought Is Art

“Thought is art,” (Lyotard, 199, XVI) notes J.-F. Lyotard in his introduction to *Art after Philosophy* – Kosuth’s theoretical statement on conceptual art. The relation of art and philosophy is close in Kosuth’s art since “words are revealed as things (as expressed by the Hebrew word *davar*), signifiers are grasped as enigmas, writing is set down as a material thing” (Lyotard, 199, XVI), according to Lyotard. Furthermore, in *Art after Philosophy* Kosuth claims that “language in art is no longer as invisible as it used to be – this is something basically culturally philosophical” (Schwarz 1989, 24). Art and theory, object and text, used to function as parallel and correlate, yet separate mechanisms with no common part. Kosuth’s proposition was radical: to eliminate one of them – that is a representation and to replace it with the other – analysis, which is always modified by the context. This decision was all the more surprising since it has been taken by an artist, the subject of reduction being art (at least in its present form). With regard to traditional art he speaks in an interview titled: *A arte mundo* from 1987 in the following words:

Where do we begin? We begin with a meaning giving/making context always and already provided. With art there is the potential for working directly within a fabric of meaning giving/making systems, but this is denied by a traditionalized art where the form speaks in advance of what the artist wants to say. The forms of authority of a traditionalized practice beget, repetitiously, not only their own forms, but the authority to make them. (Schwarz 1989, 117)

If a result of this shift is art devoid of aestheticism, it also imposes new rules of perception. If art is an extension of our experience, **one needs to acquire a new skill of experiencing texts as artworks**. In Kosuth’s work, this takes a form of dictionary definitions printed on sheets of paper, or quotes placed on walls, the floor, and the ceiling of a gallery. The recognition of the hegemony of text allows him to use images only as a supplement and an ironic reflection on the function of reproduction in art (as in the case of the famous photograph of a chair confronted with its photograph and its dictionary definition). Perception of art, defined by Kosuth as art after philosophy, involves an act of deciphering or contemplating the interplay of “the relations between the relations” (Schwarz 1989, 43), which reveals the cultural weight of writing as that which transcends the borders defined by old schemes of beauty or individual talent. Even more interesting is Kosuth’s self-directed questioning, as he strives to redefine the notion of an artist (that is also his own role) in such a way as to take over the role and the competence of a linguist, a philosopher, an anthropologist, and a psychoanalyst.

Rejecting the decorative function of art, Kosuth points to a new transgressive form in artistic creation that finds its materialization in writing. Notably, the theoretical record of his thinking is an integral part of his creative

explorations, and the new form of art, the birth of which he advocates, appears to depend on language not less than philosophy or science. In his famous interview from 1970 entitled *Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea* Kosuth states:

Inherent in the artist's intentions are his ideas, and the new art is dependent on language not much less than philosophy or science. (...) I had used definitions in a different kind of work using objects inspired by philosophy I had been reading. (...) I realized that I could use the definitions alone involving my dilemma about formless form – in other words, by just presenting art as idea. (Schwarz 1989, 13-14)

In this paradoxical way, research undertaken by Kosuth in two important and independent fields of art and philosophy was comparable. Interestingly enough, Derrida's privileging of the materialization of the spoken word and Kosuth's parallel dematerialization of art seem to reflect a common thesis on the fundamental role of writing, both in art and in philosophy.

Not only in *Of Grammatology* does Derrida rethink writing with reference to a universal code of articulation of *différance*, but he also defines writing as a guarantee of the internal consistency of anthropology (notably, anthropology is also Kosuth's main point of reference). Derrida quotes Leroi-Gourhan's definition of anthropology based on treating the ability to write as an interpretation of universal progress.

As Derrida notes:

Since "genetic inscription" and the "short programmatic chains" regulating the behavior of the amoeba or the annelid up to the passage beyond alphabetic writing to the orders of the logos and of a certain *homo sapiens*, the possibility of the *grammè* structures the movement of its history according to rigorously original levels, types, and rhythms. But one cannot think them without the most general concept of the *grammè*. (Derrida 1997, 84)

The language itself, in its present form, constitutes only a certain "phenomenon, an aspect, a species of writing" (Derrida 1997, 8). Should conceptual art be considered a transitory mode, a species of Derrida's writing? This point of view shows that a sight horizon unexpectedly turned into a horizon of thought. It seems that one should locate Kosuth's art within this horizon, being careful not to neglect its philosophical undertones.

In *The Outside and the Inside* Derrida examines the acts of aggression of writing, through which "the tyranny of writing goes even further. By imposing itself upon the masses, spelling influences and modifies language. This happens only in highly literary languages where written texts play an important role." (Derrida 1997, 41). The tyranny of the letter observed by Kosuth reaches equally deep, enclosing the field of mass art. It is a massive, anonymous crowd on the streets of big cities, such as New York, that is the intended audience: the viewer and the reader of Kosuth's surprisingly balanced formulas that are often deployed on billboards, buildings' facades, or in press advertisements. In this

way, the predictions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, quoted by Derrida, came true in the twentieth century, in a surprising context of the visual arts.

III. The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing

With regard to the fundamental role of language in his art, Kosuth says:

It was the system of language itself which I felt held great implications when considered in relation to art which interested me. I've been very wary of using words as objects – concrete poetry and that sort of things. It's been thinking about language as a cultural system parallel to art which makes it useful, both in theory and in practice. [...] I've been working on games and other meaning generating systems. [...] So instead of working with the relations between objects, or forms, like most art. I'm trying to do work with the relations between relations. The work with common objects was a simple start, but those works are static. I want this work to be more dynamic – **less of an illustration and more of a text.** (Schwarz 1989, 43)⁴

In this section, I will show how, in the work of Kosuth, thinking becomes art, and words become the counterparts of color (according to Lyotard's interpretation) or the visual perception – a synonym of mental recognition.

Fragmentary though never intentionally finalized, Kosuth's projects necessarily require the act of completion. They correspond to the idea of a Derridian text based on a movement between an entity and its parts, the signifier and the signified, presence and absence. Kosuth's art, which often consists of displaced quotes, confirms Derrida's claim concerning the "exhaustion" of the book as a form, which "exposes the surface of the text." The exposed surface of the text, devoid of narrative continuity, turned out to be, unexpectedly, an interesting material for experimentation in the visual arts. Notably, Kosuth's installations seem to have developed around the idea of the deconstructed book.

As Derrida states in the conclusion of the section entitled *The Signifier and Truth*:

The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, as I shall specify later, against difference in general. If I distinguish the text from the book, I shall say that the

⁴ Although Kosuth distances his art from experimental poetry, one can trace some correspondences between Kosuth's art and par example San Francisco Language Poetry of the 60's, termed by Fredrick Jameson an exercise in discontinuity and a play with an open disjunctive form.

destruction of the book, as it is now under way in all domains, denudes the surface of the text. (Derrida 1997, 18)

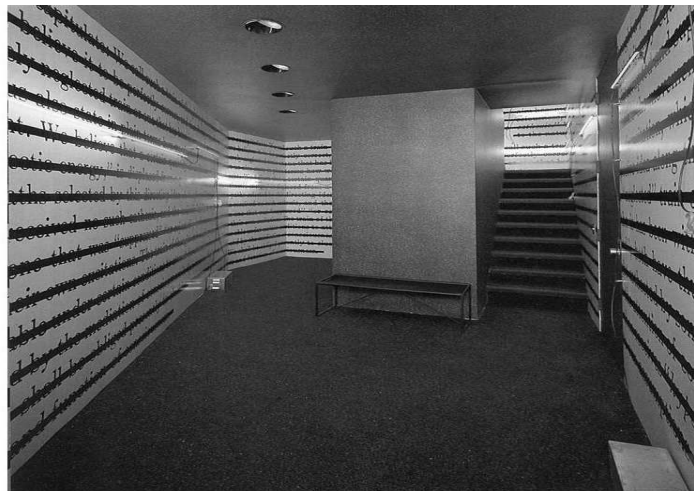
Deconstruction of writing does not only reveal its weakness, on the contrary – it emphasizes and highlights the conflict described by Derrida in terms of force, violence, desire and commitment. Deconstruction of the book, the idea of writing as such, triggers even more mysterious and centrifugal energy which disappears into fragmented structures, such as quotations used in the works of conceptual art. In this way, the diagnosis of Derrida seems to be prophetic for Kosuth's textual art.

Although art requires a surface, the surfaces of the canvases or walls (as it is the case of Kosuth's installations) are seldom appropriated by writing. In this sense, the work of the American conceptualist is very innovative, being at the same time illustrative in relation to Derridian apology of writing.

Moreover, the fragmentary nature of the narrative in Kosuth's art seems to have been imposed by the currently dominant model of perception. It is an involuntary perception composed of specific, relatively short-lived, acts of sensory perception rather than a coherent narrative. Deconstructing the unity of a text by isolating sentences (which can be absorbed both visually and mentally), Kosuth undermines the idea of a rigid boundary between art and language or between art and its criticism. The language of his art is a materialized language; its value and shape are also not indifferent to the reader's eye. Kosuth's *art after philosophy*, according to his own formulation, is an art that engages both the eye and the mind, stimulates the search for perceptual harmony, and the logic of the (deconstructed) narrative. In other words, it is an art that one can contemplate while reading.

The moment of coincidence, when the letter freezes in its material form takes place, according to Lyotard's commentary to Kosuth's writings, both after and prior to philosophy. Thus, sentences become events of the same category as with any art of visual and tangible structure. In the introduction to the main collection of Kosuth's essays titled *Foreword: After The Words*, Lyotard draws attention to this very moment, in which thought itself becomes art and the intangible gains a time-space based existence in a form of the materiality of the letter. In a metaphorical way, Lyotard creates analogies between the role of individual words and the meaning of color in paintings. Radically rejecting decorative nuances of color as a form of art, Kosuth replaces the matter of painting with the matter of words and its graphic expression. A new form of art – in his view – is to be based on a game of harmony or disharmony of interdependances, always considered in a wider social, cultural, and historical context (hence Kosuth's often-repeated phrase: relations between the relations). In this perspective, Kosuth's art is allegorical through the figure of association of color with word games. "Words are the medium for language, as color for the

visual perception, or sounds for the hearing” as Lyotard notes (Lyotard 1991, 20). Implanted in the domain of the visual, alien to them, words become silent, as the silent irony of writing, which Derrida describes in *Différance*. Isolated sentences gain the material, time-space based existence, the temporary presence in the here-and-now, and lose some of their adherence to presence postponing mechanisms of semantics. What is the correct reading of Kosuth’s extensive theoretical comments on his own linguistic creativity? – asks Lyotard, suggesting that, like any interpretation of language art (and thus also his and mine) is nothing more or nothing less than a next figure of language, superimposed over a writing-based gesture of Kosuth. The final conclusion drawn from these parallels is the paradoxical statement that since language is art, art theory is also art. *Art after Philosophy* postulated by Kosuth, turns into quasi-philosophy – as Lyotard notes and, consequently, philosophy or theory take over many of the functions and privileges traditionally belonging to the domain of art. Kosuth repeatedly indicates that modern art is a contemporary and future mode of thinking, arguing that the dominant role of the philosophy, in its hitherto known form, has come to an end. In the future, the helm of thinking will be taken by a new form of intelligent paraphilosophical art. The predicted transformation of art into philosophy and, conversely, philosophy into art should not take the form of a simple scheme based on a reversal. A new expected quality will be rather closer to what Derrida describes as a fundamental necessity of the trace of the philosophical in the language of art.



Negation

Derrida’s *différance* lies in the difference between creativity and thought, and at the same time it transgresses it to appear in ever new forms of art and

reflection generated by its own dynamics. In this section, I will demonstrate how the gesture of crossing out places the concept of being and the concept of writing in a certain vicinity. I will pose the following question: should Kosuth's conceptual art, viewed from the perspective of Derrida's philosophy, be considered a new (albeit temporary) resurgent form of writing? For Derrida, language is an extremely privileged medium of discovery and concealment. Using such phrases as: "the dead letter" (Derrida 1997, 17) or "Western metaphysics [...] as the domination of a linguistic form," (Derrida 1997, 23) Derrida points out that semantics and etymology of the Greek word "be" was the basis for Heidegger's philosophical thought.

Heidegger occasionally reminds us that "being," as it is fixed in its general syntactic and lexicological forms within linguistics and Western philosophy, is not a primary and absolutely irreducible signified, that it is still rooted in a system of languages and an historically determined "significance," although strangely privileged as the virtue of disclosure and dissimulation; particularly when he invites us to meditate on the "privilege" of the "third person singular of the present indicative" and the "infinitive." Western metaphysics, as the limitation of the sense of being within the field of presence, is produced as the domination of a linguistic form. To question the origin of that domination does not amount to hypostatizing a transcendental signified, but to a questioning of what constitutes our history and what produced transcendentality itself. Heidegger brings it up also when in *Zur Seinsfrage*, for the same reason, he lets the word "being" be read only if it is **crossed out** (*kreuzweise Durchstreichung*). (Derrida 1997, 23)

In this context, art deriving from the language system may be seen as proximate not so much to philosophy as to the truth of being, manifesting itself through the forms of language. While privileging poetry seems to be characteristic of Heidegger, Kosuth strongly rejects associating art with the lack of precision and metaphorical language experiments typical of poetry. In this way, however, he makes his art even more mysterious. The social context – the confrontation with a popular audience, and the mechanisms of everyday life, and – emphasized by Kosuth repeatedly – anthropological aspects, in fact point to aims that are wider than just purely aesthetic.

One of the figures, 'rhetorics of writing', or technical procedures, which may indicate some unobvious relationship between Derrida's and Kosuth's thought is the gesture of crossing out. Do horizontal black lines obscuring regular text letters painted on the walls in the project *No Exit* have solely aesthetic or compositional function, or are they a 'merely negative symbol'? (Heidegger 1958, 31) As a proper interpretation of this gesture, one may point out similar procedures indicated in the paragraph quoted above, where the word "being" is crossed out. These deletions are apparently significant and purposeful, perhaps more important than the literal meaning of words, because they reveal the matter of "the final writing of an epoch" (Derrida 1997, 23). Beneath the blurred lines the presence of the transcendental signified disappears – while

remaining clear. The sign – blurred and destroyed, as Derrida writes – unveils through its disappearance.

It seems meaningful that the gesture of crossing out occurs in the late works of Kosuth. The work of deconstruction, although discreetly and originally present in his work from the beginning, unfolds gradually, with an increasing uncertainty as to its own direction. The movements of deconstruction always result in a transformation of existing structures that causes tremors. Derrida asserts, “they are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures” (Derrida 1997, 24). Therefore, the gesture of crossing out is revealed in the late work of Kosuth to emphatically confirm its inner deconstructive nature. This project was initially based on the difference between the discourse of writing and its artistic representation, and as a result of even more consistent permutations, it revealed the difference of discourse in relation to itself. Thus, the gesture of crossing out becomes “the principle of death and of difference in the becoming of being” (Derrida 1997, 25) and art. Following Derrida, one can argue that conceptual art transgresses the immediate presence of the sign.

In the context of Kosuth’s often repeated phrase (relations between the relations), the word “between” becomes a synonym of difference. It is in it and through it that the deconstructive nature of Kosuth’s writing is disclosed. In-between the text and its negation, this gesture reveals its irrationality, being described by Kosuth almost in terms of a scientific experiment. However, the purposelessness of this action marks the difference with respect to the research of an anthropologist, psychologist or sociologist, to whom Kosuth often compares himself. This difference is Kant’s “purposefulness without a purpose,” which, as a universal feature of art, is adequate also in relation to the art of this American artist, notwithstanding his quasi-scientific statements about the practical application of his analysis of art. In his late projects Kosuth more explicitly deconstructs the idea of writing, possibly, influenced by Derrida’s well-known statement: “*différance* is”. (Derrida 1982, 6)

The basis of this comparison is a very significant role of writing in both concepts. Writing preserves that which has become blurred in speech. It has a potential of universality, and due to its visual presence, becomes an easy subject of artistic experiments. In Hegel’s account, according to Derrida, the best spirit of writing is writing of the spirit, which he defines further by referring to the concept of the sublime. The space of writing seems refined, because “all that by which it sublimates space and sight, all that makes of it the writing of history, the writing, that is, of the infinite spirit relating to itself in its discourse and its culture” (Derrida 1997, 25) – Derrida claims.

IV. Lines, Billboards and Gaps

Kosuth's goal of seeking what art means outside the traditional frame provided the possibility to observe how art acquires meaning. Even though Kosuth insists on the significance of meaning in his experiments, one could also analyze his art as a tribute to or a manifestation of the privileged function of writing. The aim of Kosuth's early work was a diagnosis of a general crisis of art. As a result of his rejection of the limits of representation, he relocated art within the context of language and society to reveal the linguistic foundations of culture. In his remarks on Wittgenstein, Kosuth states that: "drawing out the relation of art to language began the production of language whose very function it was to *show* rather than to *say*." (Kosuth 1991, 248) Although Kosuth strongly emphasized the conceptual aspect of his work, rather than its visual graphic component such as design, the physical presence of the text (specific arrangement of letters and words, black and white lines surrounding the void) has always remained a significant factor and a distinctive feature of his work. The tyranny of the letter, observed by Derrida, has, in this way, become more apparent at a much deeper level as it conquered the domain of mass media and influenced the language itself, altering it in the same way that it had altered art.

One might venture to place the need for further transformation of writing within the future history of art. Kosuth's insistence on the graphic linearity could rightly be seen as parallel to several of Derrida's arguments concerning aesthetics, such as the concept of linearity. Inherent in every scheme of historical development, the linear model of presence should, according to Derrida, always be considered in relation to the unfolding of presence as differentiation. Each occurrence of difference is possible only as a result of the confrontation of two entities or points. As Derrida notes, the relation of two points in space or time requires a description in terms of line and a linear scheme. Once started, the process inevitably leads to a differentiation of linearity, because the restitution of unity and thinking about entity will be possible only on the assumption of the concept of line. The process of linearization and the notion of line itself imply certain restrictions that are felt as a limitation at the same time as the possibility of line emerges, further defined by Derrida in terms of: "discernibility, distinction, separation, *diastem*, spacing." (Derrida 1997, 18). In this light, Kosuth's graphic articulation of his idea of art as language becomes an attempt to recapture this original linear nature, both in its material and abstract terms. In the later sense, the linearity of writing implicates the linearity of the visual. In Kosuth's late work, where linearity becomes a significant issue, re-thinking of Wittgenstein and, perhaps, Derrida's philosophy marks a shift from an analytic to a more dialectical approach. After this shift of emphasis, Kosuth aims for art that would reflect the

deeper structure of language, defined further as “relations between the relations.” (Schwarz 1989, 43) Moreover, he depicts the model of those relations in an apparently linear manner, as a series of events conjoined by the linear movement of sense production. As he explains his work:

There are no intrinsic meanings in an object or image, the meaning is always in relationship to society, in relation to what preceded it with what it is sharing, and in relation to what follows. It is in the series. We have one word, maybe this one, flowing to the next and then to the next, and we have a sentence and then another one and then, always this sentence, and the next one, and this paragraph, and the one that followed which become this text, which is part of several conventions that make up that discourse and this one... Our thinking is a process, as is our art, and that is how we should see it. (Schwarz 1989, 133)⁵

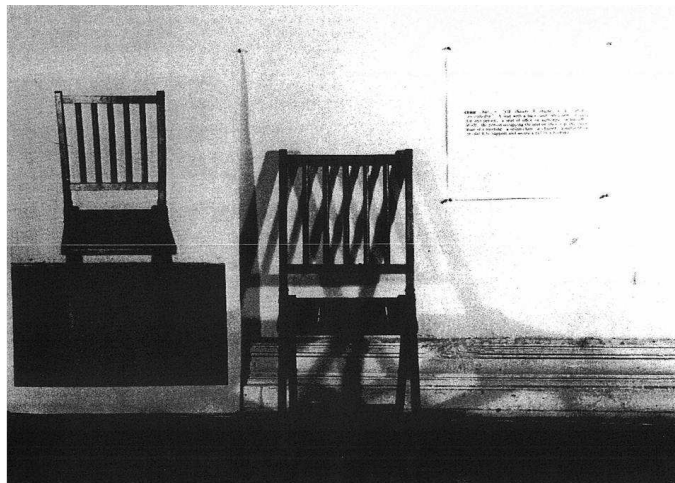
The linear nature of discourse and time also exposes their spacial dimension. Every relation of two points in space or time (past or future), according to Derrida, demands thinking in terms of the linear scheme. Any confrontation of two points is a place of occurrence of *différance*. According to a similar reversal, two seemingly distant movements, with opposite vectors, may become related. Somewhere on the margins of the issue of linearity, there is also a problem of a negative line – a line that plots and crosses. “The negation of negation, the spacial negation of the point is the line,” (Derrida 1982, 42) as Derrida describes it in *Ousia and Gramme*. In Kosuth’s *No Exit* the negative use of line becomes a sign of a radical artistic provocation, the triumph of abstraction over realism. Reversal or cancellation – gestures deconstructing perceptual experience – are acts of embracing an individual object within the abstraction of thought. In a more literal and physical aspect, a line formed by a sequence of letters and words remains the main organizing factor of Kosuth’s arrangements of two- and of three-dimensional compositions. Moreover, linearity of the mental process of reading is conceptualized by Kosuth in linear patterns such as fluorescent lines of neon lights or intentionally exposed electrical wires. This celebration of linearity sometimes leads to the exclusion of the text itself with a radical gesture of crossing out. In such projects as *No Exit*, the dialectical relation between line and text is thematized with regard to their mutual competition for meaning and presence. In Kosuth’s phrasing, the linear cancellation of the text itself creates a dynamic constellation and affects the volatile interface of meaning between the viewer and the artist or the artist and the author.

The second possibility of the circular movement establishing the relation of the final presence to the original presence could be also regarded in the context of the mutual relation of art and philosophy. Deeply rooted in

⁵ A similar concept of certain linearity of the narrative discourse and its perception may be found in the experimental texts of some postmodern authors such as Donald Barthelme’s *Sentence* (a short story composed of one few-pages-long sentence).

philosophy, Kosuth's art finally retreats, revealing a negative space of *différance* and exposing their relation in terms of negative exclusion. Commenting on the work of Kosuth in his famous foreword to Kosuth's *Art after Philosophy*, Lyotard states: "while philosophy would want to speak of the world, it would need to speak of art, as a part of it, if only to deny it." (Lyotard 1991, XVII)

With the main goal of analyzing art as relations to relations, Kosuth, especially in his late projects, explores the complexity of discourse by introducing a deconstructive perspective expressed by the idea of absence. The impact of Derridian concept of *différance*, which is constituted always on the edge of presence and absence, is particularly apparent in Kosuth's project *Zero and Not*. A necessary condition of any presence, similar to the procedure of crossing out, it reveals the context necessary for any act of writing and reading. In his famous installation *One and Three Chairs* (currently in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York), it was presence itself that was problematized or even challenged: from the concrete object, assembled with its corresponding photographic reproduction to a depersonalized dictionary definition. The installation consisted of three elements representing three consecutive steps of a fading presence. Image, word and a photographic reproduction – which, according to Derrida's words – in the same way replace presence of their real counterpart, intrigue with their purposelessness. The purpose here is not the presence or its modification, but the ironic questioning of representation in art. Kosuth's project can also be read as an ironic commentary on the fundamental thesis of structuralism: the division of the sign into the signifier and the signified.



Absence, as Kosuth explains with regard to his use of billboards, has a crucial role in perception and in creating the interplay of relations with the mass culture.

He notes that “the text is made to prevent any identification, and if someone reads it, even quickly, for some time afterward, the entire habitual environment of naturalized ads will become different for that person.” (Schwarz 1989, 57) In this way, according to Kosuth, the play on relations: art/language/context, as well as on the circular logic of absence and presence of discourse becomes an essential part of artistic participation in the social process of signification. On one of the billboards put up in New York in 1979 as part of the project *Text/Context*, Kosuth placed a significant statement, which is quoted below:

What do you see here? The text/sign to the right presents itself as part of something else, something we could normally take for granted. What do you expect to see has been removed, to be replaced by a kind of absence, which attempts to make visible what is unseen. This text/sign would like to explain itself, but even as it does, you continue to try to look beyond it to something else, that meaning which seems provided in advance by a location of which it is already a part. This text/sign wants to see itself as part of the 'real world', but it is blinded by those same conversations which connect you to it, and blinds you to that which, when read, is no longer seen. (Kosuth 1991, 240)⁶

Interestingly enough, the attribute of uselessness distinguishes conceptual billboards from ads. In this respect, Kosuth's projects may be read as a return to Kant's understanding of art as “purposive without purpose” (of practical application). The distinctive feature of the work of art – according to Kosuth – is not so much its aesthetic value, as the lack of clear and pragmatic benefits of its existence in a given public space. Thus, Kosuth's semi-billboards are an excellent implementation of Kant's statement – in this way, art uses forms undeniably belonging to the commercial world and, contrary to the expectations of an average consumer, deprives them of any aesthetic element. Thus the purified form (of a billboard) becomes empty, in terms of practical application, sign, filled solely with an abstract matter of cultural relationships and unfulfilled expectations of the customers. Notably, a new form which is a result of the deconstruction of a poster is constituted by the difference in relation to the original form. The incompleteness of both: presence and beauty, replaced by the presence of sign, offer a possibility of metareflection rather than a purely aesthetic experience. The object of contemplation is Derridian difference between presence and absence, as well as the replacement of presence by the signified (the idea). In the commentary to his project entitled *Zero Not*, Kosuth

⁶ On the accompanying poster in the same project exhibited in New York in 1979 Kosuth placed the following statements: “Can you read this? This text/sign, to the left, expects you to read more than it provides, but it provides more than is needed for it to mean what it does. What it says, how it says it, and where it says it either or separates you from what it is. This text/sign (like other things seen here before it) is trapped by conventions which constitute its conception of the possible in terms which deny what they would want to suggest. Is the relationship of this text/sign to itself any different than this text/sign is to this context? To read this text/sign is to erase that erasure which this must become in order to say more than that which is said here.”

proposed an interesting reading of his own work that seems deconstructive in its origin: “cancellation [...] constructs as it erases, suggesting ‘one thing’ (a field of language itself) present, while removed.” (Kosuth 1991, 222) Thus, the spacial arrangement in this project constitutes a part of the writing process proceeding according to the deconstructive mechanisms of interplay between the determinants of presence and absence, constructing and deconstructing at the same time, since it proposes two intermingled orders of discourse. The order of writing juxtaposed against the order of the architectural space creates a specific spatial syntax, based on the architecture of individual exhibition halls. It is emptiness that completes and constitutes this space. Following Derrida’s remarks on the role of incompleteness and anticipation in the discursive, Kosuth pays special attention to discontinuities and openings. In an interview with Henri Ronse (1981), Derrida comments on *Of Grammatology* in the following way: “In what you call my books, what is first of all put into question is the unity of the book and the unity ‘book’ considered as a perfect totality, with all the implementations of such a concept” (Gaston 2011, XVIII). Sean Gaston, quoting this passage in his *Introduction to Reading Derrida’s Of Grammatology*, characterizes the entire collection as “a series of intervals or moving gaps that gesture towards the interlacing oscillations that are recognized here under the name of *difference*” (Gaston 2011, XIX). In this light, it is clear that the critical attention with regard to Kosuth’s work, should be directed to those elements which are absent; in other words, to gaps and omissions (the entrances, exits, views in and out). With regard to spatial discourse Kosuth states: “There is another syntax, also anchored to the world, which is the architecture of rooms which also orders this work.” (Kosuth, 1991, 222) He further evolves this concept in *Philosophia Medii Maris Atlantici*, or, *Re-map, De-map (Speak in the Gaps)* when he defines the artist’s role in six deconstructive terms⁷ of unmaking, defining creation as an act of “leaving out, canceling, ignoring, erasing, misusing, disregarding (...) in order to be able to speak in the gaps.”

⁷ In his project *A Preliminary Map for >>Zero & Not<<* Kosuth employs one more deconstructive practice by turning the exhibited photographs upside-down. This act or event is meant to investigate and to deconstruct the relationships between the viewer and the work, the visual perception and the meaning-making process. Notably, Kosuth describes his projects in the following way: “When viewed >>normally<< the fictive space of the painting permits the viewer an entrance to a credible world; it is the power of the order and rationality of that world which forces the viewer to accept the painting (and its world) on its own terms. Those >>terms<< cannot be read because they are left unseen: the world, and the art which presents it, is presented as >>natural<< and problematic. Turning the image >>upside-down<< stops that monologue; one no longer has a >>window to another world<<, one has an object, an artifact, composed of parts and located here in this world. One experiences this as an event, and as such it is an act which locates and includes the viewer. As an event it is happening now (in the real time of that viewer) because the viewer, as a reader, experiences the language of the construction of what is seen. That cancellation of habitual experience which makes the language visible also forces the viewer/reader to realize their own subjective role in the meaning-making process.” (Kosuth, 1991, 22-23)

(Kosuth 1991, 235) Furthermore, he notes that creative contextualizing or criticism proceeds in a parallel manner. Because contemporary culture suffers from the excess of information, the process of creation has to resort to eliminating. Furthermore, Kosuth's gesture of crossing out may be a reference to the paradigmatic act of erasing in American art of the 50s that is the erasing of one of de Kooning's drawings by Robert Rauschenberg.

V. The Age of Final Solutions

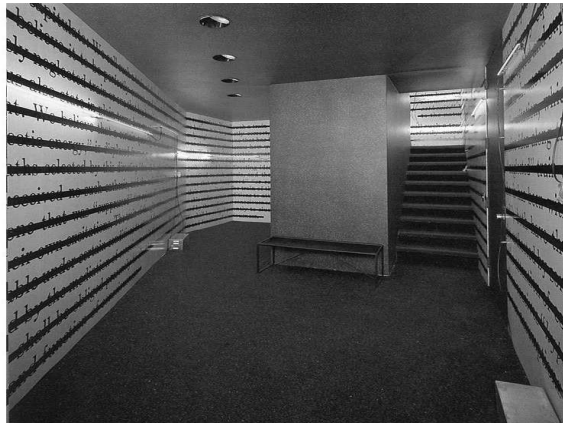
The state of exhaustion manifested itself in various fields on the American ground, par excellence, in the phenomenon of 'literature of exhaustion'. As Derrida states: "never as much as at present has it invaded, *as such*, the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogeneous discourses, diverse and heterogeneous in their intention, method and ideology." (Derrida, 1997, 6) In American literature the crisis, and at the same time the peculiar popularity of language, have been reflected in the aforementioned literature of exhaustion. The very term was introduced by John Barth, an American novelist and essayist, one of the most interesting authors of postmodern American fiction. In his famous essay devoted to contemporary fiction, he diagnoses an exhaustion of narratorial strategies, the repertoire of possible plots, and traditional roles of the story-telling author and a passive reader. Questioning all the traditional reference points would not be complete however without undermining the very basis of any act of writing that is language as such. Language, which, in case of literature, may be synonymous to Derrida's writing, becomes an object of intense experimentation, especially in short prose forms, such as the short stories of Donald Barthelme.

The most radical strategy of the postmodernist writer, the exhausted and deconstructed language of nonsense, exists only as an empty form, though it has lost its primary communicative function and its connection to sense and logic. Devoid of superior rules, postmodern discourses resemble puzzles that can be rearranged in any arbitrary fashion. The reason searching for order, logic, and connections encounters only rudimentary and accidental meanings which arise on the peripheries of all-powerful chaos. An interesting example of a word-play, Donald Barthelme's *Sentence* is composed of one, few pages long phrase. This radical narratorial experiment is reminiscent of the solutions proposed by conceptual artists, Piero Manzoni's *Line of Infinite Length* in particular. In both cases, language or rope/line were isolated and subjected to artistic hiperbolization. The purpose of these action seems to be close to Derrida's concept of *magnitudo* – the unattainable yet extremely attractive imaginary limit of human perception. An age of "final solutions" and "*felt* ultimacies" (Barth 1984, 67), as John Barth termed postmodernism, has searched for what

follows the infinite. The resulting transgression is somehow secondary to the limit determined by the exhaustion of all possible alternatives in the series of problems, creations, artistic means, art disciplines.

A sudden rise and the predicted fall of the linguistic model following the closure of an epoch is depicted by Derrida as an all-embracing process of transformation. As Christopher Johnson notes, a ‘devaluation’ of the word ‘language’ has meant “a subtle displacement within the linguistic paradigm itself” (Johnson 2011, 12). The inflation of the sign “language,” that, as Sean Gaston claims in his *Introduction to Reading Derrida’s Of Grammatology*: “Derrida attempted to counteract or redirect” (Gaston 2011, XVI), has also left a mark on art discourse, and nowhere has this sudden and radical shift towards language made its impact more apparent than in the work of Joseph Kosuth.

Commenting on the writings of Becket and Borges, Barth notes that we live in an age of final solutions. Although the exhaustion of possibilities is expressed through negative forms exposing nothing rather than something, it does not mean the end of writing itself. Although, as Barth says, “Nothingness is necessarily and inextricably the background against which Being, *et cetera*”⁸ (Barth 1984, 68), the negative impulse stops just before the fall into the abyss of nothingness or chaos, and, paradoxically, it disperses into a multiplicity of different forms of language, in many small narratives, to use Lyotard’s terminology – narratives that are concerned with the topic of language. As if just before its extinction, language sought to consolidate itself in all possible forms and varieties.



⁸ J.-L. Nancy reads the Derridian ‘grammatological project’ in the horizon of nothingness and opening: “Neither a science nor a philosophy of writing. No assurance, but a surge, a drive that we cannot fail to recognize: the very life of ‘meaning or wishing to say nothing’, life beyond: right here. A pointed thought meaning to say nothing, but which pricks and pierces – which broaches and opens.” (Nancy 2011, 109).

VI. Conclusion

According to the Platonic concepts, representation in art is twice removed from the original idea and the desired presence. Paradoxically, Kosuth's decision to replace an art object itself with a textual idea seems to be a reversal of the Platonic concept of *mimesis*.⁹ In this context, the presence of the word *idea* in Kosuth's main statement: *art as idea* does not seem accidental. Devoid of any metaphysical claims, Kosuth's art as idea could be considered an undeniably postmodern and deconstructive response to ancient aesthetics. In a somewhat circular fashion, Kosuth adds another element to the chain of representation, substitutions, and imitation in art. Notably, this new element is named after the original Platonic one (an idea). The conclusion may be as follows: language art, including Kosuth's art, is another link in the chain of substitution: idea – subject – work of art – idea being a supplement not only for a depicted object, but also for a work of art as such.

1. *Idea*, adopted from L, itself borrowed from Gr *idea* (*idéā*), a concept, derives from Gr *idein* (*s id-*), to see, for **widein*. L *idea* has derivative LL adj *ideālis*, archetypal, ideal, whence EF-F *idéāl* and E *ideal*, whence resp F *idéalisme* and E *idealism*, also resp *idéaliste* and *idealist*, and, further, *idéaliser* and *idealize*. L *idea* becomes MF-F *idée*, with cpd *idée fixe*, a fixed idea, adopted by E Francophiles; it also has ML derivative **ideāre*, pp **ideātus*, whence the Phil n *ideātum*, a thing that, in the fact, answers to the idea of it, whence 'to *ideate*', to form in, or as an, idea.

In addition, Kosuth often recognizes the tautological character of his projects, making it explicit in his commentary entitled *Within the Context; Modernism and Critical Practice*¹⁰: "In art one must speak in a circular fashion; that is, through the attempt of understanding the language system itself: in the process of that circularity the art process shows and is affected by its collective

⁹ In 'The Arbitrary' Derek Attridge points to an interesting parallel in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: "Earlier Derrida had remarked that Plato's account of writing, speech and being or idea was fundamentally the same as Saussure's, but that the philosopher's tone was preferable, being 'more subtle, more critical, more troubled'." (Attridge 2011, 63).

¹⁰ In this text, Kosuth employes a clearly deconstructive metacommentary fragments such as: "this text seems to take itself for granted. It contains the word art or artist 122 times, makes reference to meaning 51 times, mentions culture 41 times, points to modernism 27 times, talks about language 26 times, includes the word context 12 times, and so on." (Kosuth 1991, 166).

character, its historicity, its actual location.” (Kosuth 1991, 145) In *Art as an Idea as Idea* he notes further: “The circularity of this relation employs its own analysis to analyze and simultaneously expose itself.” (Siegel 1985, 49). Notably, it is somehow analogous to Derrida’s observation on the theme of supplementarity, which reads as follows: “it happens so that this theme describes the chain itself, the being-chain of a textual chain, the structure of substitution, the articulation of desire and of language, the logic of all conceptual oppositions (...)” (Derrida 1997, 163).

Although never openly stated, Kosuth’s ironical impulse seems to undermine popular expectations towards art. In certain respects, Kosuth graphically articulates in writing what we would expect to experience. He misleads our perceptual demands, substituting the desired visual experience with a mental one, as happens for instance in the work composed solely of definitions of colors (white, black, grey) translated into several languages. To further reinforce this idea, along with those definitions Kosuth supplies a definition of the word ‘nothing’ and, most importantly, of the word ‘phenomenon.’ Since a phenomenon is “any fact, appearance, or occurrence in consciousness; that which is apprehended by the mind, in contrast to that which really exists, or to things in themselves,” the irony in Kosuth’s installation, inherent in misdirecting the traditionally shaped perception, manifests itself openly. With a paraphrase of Kant’s notions, there comes a possible conclusion of the phenomenal quality of Kosuth’s textual art.

Interestingly enough, the word phenomenon, as defined by Kosuth, also depicts a symptom of a disease, perhaps a deconstructive disease, described by an endless process of supplementation, of which no other trace is available, except for a mere phenomenon of the text. Aiming at distancing himself from art conceived as illusion or representation, Kosuth has had to face certain frustrations. Frustrations which Derrida identified in what he names a psychoanalysis of Jean Jacques Rousseau as a confrontation with “the already-thereness of instruments and of concepts.” (Derrida 1997, 139) Consequently, any radical departure from the traditional aesthetics and the physical presence of an art object is never absolute; it leaves a trace inscribed in language and culture. The gesture of rejection, reflected by Kosuth’s obsessive insistence on abstract categories such as meaning, concept, idea, and self-reflection marks an entry into an indefinitely multiplied structure of his art, which testifies perhaps to the argument that “the graphic of the supplementarity is the origin of languages” (Derrida 1997, 235). Art confronted with its theory and replaced by it, becomes, in Derrida’s words, an entire theory of the structural necessity of an abyss further defined as an endless process of supplementarity. “Originary differance is supplementarity as structure,” (Derrida 1997, 167) as he claims in *Genesis and Structure of the Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Following this line of thought, one notes that, in the process of replacement, Kosuth’s art becomes a

textual substitute for art, a philosopher a substitute for an artist, or else art a substitute for philosophy. Art transformed by language, is confronted with an abyss of abstraction and, paradoxically, somewhat contrary to the Kosuth's assumptions, becomes a testimony of a desire for the presence. Following the logic of both Derrida and Kosuth, one arrives at a conclusion that there is nothing outside the text, multiplied by its own reflections, with art being one of them. With respect to artistic creativity, there seems to be no better formulation of this thesis than that proposed by Derrida. "... [W]hat we call production is necessarily a text, the system of a writing and of a reading which we know is ordered around its own blind spot" (Derrida 1997, 164). Conceptually blind as an artist who willfully makes art a tautological idea that "represents, among other things, a cancellation, a blindness also, and a framed formalism."¹¹ Because, as Derrida concludes, "language is spoken, it speaks to itself, which is to say, *from/of blindness*" (Derrida 1993, 5).

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¹¹ See: Joseph Kosuth, *A Note to Readers* (1991), p. 51.

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