

Name: Molly Summerfield

Student Number: 2005138

Module Title and Code: Research in Context (ADAD5003)

Course: Fine Art: Studio Site and Context (BA)

Research in Context Lecturer's Name: Gwenllian Beynon

Question: From the series of FINE ART MAKING research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2-500 word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

Word Count: 2364

From the series of 'FINE ART MAKING' research strand lectures, the theme 'Image, and Text' provoked curiosity in the pioneering world of Conceptual Art. Conceptual Art is a process, rather than simply a material. It challenges us to explore beyond the first perspective and to form elaborate ontological questions. With an inquisitive mind, it makes us question; Is this art?. With Image, and Text, the question we would also ask would be; What is the artwork doing by adding these functions together?. Conceptualism is more of an intellectual inquisition rather than aesthetic pleasure, or, fundamentally, a revisionary feature of the mind rather than senses in the law of metaphysics. It raises questions about the importance of aesthetic value, or whether aesthetics should have any relevance within Conceptual Art. Furthermore, it is an innovation prioritizing an idea over execution, a semantic representation. Conceptual Art sets up debates and controversy, and whilst it may be relevant and refreshing, it can also be viewed as distasteful and generally undermining craftsmanship. There is a rejection of traditional art forms that highlight the dematerialization of objects. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler (1968) elaborate this point further in their article '*The Dematerialisation of Art*':

Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as an object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object's becoming wholly obsolete. (...).

Whilst the object is presented with verisimilitude, it is about looking beyond the fundamental subject, more the idea of the object. With government policies and society, it plays a huge dissatisfaction with its socio-political dimension. Conceptual artists do not only challenge the audience, but they challenge themselves through

philosophical meanings. There is now a better understanding of why objects or images are used. This leaves us to ask the question; why is 'language' used within conceptual art? This essay will discuss the works of Joseph Kosuth, Marcel Duchamp, Barbara Kruger, and other conceptual artists that use 'Image, and Text'. This essay will also go more in-depth on ontology, semiology, and linguistic anthropology. Considering that conceptual art is based around forms of ideas, it is hugely linked to philosophy, therefore, will explore philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Sigmund Freud, and more.



Fig.1

Joseph Kosuth, (1965), *One and Three Chairs*.

Firstly, Kosuth focuses on 'Image, and Text' within Conceptual Art, and with a particular focus, this essay will draw attention to one of his most famous works *One and Three Chairs* (1965). At first glance, we are ultimately faced with a simple wooden chair questioning its true purpose and existence within conceptual art. With full curiosity, the simple chair has been cleverly selected and assembled as part of three representations setting up an object of debate. The three alternative representations are a manufactured, a photograph, and a copy of a dictionary word. This composition of an object, image, and words creates a platform for exploring new meanings. 'Thus, it is... a working out, a thinking out, of all the implications of all aspects of the concept of art' (Joseph Kosuth, 1965). To understand the linguistic nature of art propositions, we are asked to decipher the subliminal sentences by exploring the representation itself: to instinctively know what a 'chair' is, and how we conceive, communicate, and concept. Each reveals its distinctive properties. Kosuth studied linguistic anthropology which is the relationship and understanding of objects and how language can influence and affect our social behavior. This is where the understanding of 'Text' appears. Another example of Joseph Kosuth's use of linguistic anthropology appears in his other work *Clock (One and Five)*, (1965-1967).



Fig 2.

Joseph Kosuth, (1965-1967) *Clock (One and Five)*

This is another example of where 'Image, and Text' is used effectively within Conceptual Art. Again, he uses the three-way code through the use of object, machination, and time. What is interesting about this piece is that the original clock that has been photographed has to be rephotographed and be identical taking in the surrounding wall and the lighting. This piece uses linguistic anthropology through using English and Latin. Further on in the essay explains the use of 'Investigations', however, here *Clock (One and Five)* uses *Proto-Investigations* which consist of an object, the photograph of the object, and a printed definition of the associated word.

The photo of the clock must be identical to the clock and its surrounding wall. The lighting and reflections on the clock and in the photo of the clock should also be as close as possible.

(Kosuth in a letter of 15 October 1974, quoted in Alley 1981, pp.400–1.)

One and Three Chairs, (Kosuth, 1965) explores Roland Barthes's (1977) theory of semiotics *Image, Music, Text*, which suggests the difference between a literal sign and its implied meaning by denoting and connoting. It also provides another type of symbolic meaning through his concept of the *Photographic Paradox*. Kosuth's (1965) installation avoids the use of any traditional media and has links with the Dada practice of Marcel Duchamp who questions the assumptions of what art should be. The Dada movement was heavily influenced by the First World War in Zurich. The war questioned every aspect of society at the time, and that included the world of art. Dada artists became rebellious in the sense of destroying traditional artistic values and replacing the old with the new. Marcel Duchamp was one of the main leading artists during the time of the Dada Movement who will be explored more further in this essay. However, relating back to the avoidance of any traditional media, Conceptual Art is more about the idea of the object, not merely just the visual. It is the combination where thought, vision, and language act on one another. Objects and ideas; meticulous monogamy. Marcel Duchamp highlights the embarkment of the basic process demanded by conceptual art.

One and Three Chairs, holds fundamental questions leading to Plato in *An Introduction to Plato's Theory of Forms* (2018), that the chair is not just a linguistic

and visual representation but merely focuses on the idea of a 'chair' rather than the physical representation. Plato believed in the ideal and the phenomena, and that the platonic realism of objects exists in their form of ideas. For example, there are millions of different chairs including the ones destroyed and built yet remains a single 'idea' of a chair. Plato believed that 'Forms are abstract subjects', however, Aristotle on the other hand, believed that 'every form is a form of something'. We can see how Plato capitalized the term 'Form' considering it is a property. Aristotle doesn't perceive it this way.

By observing the connection between an object and a subject we can examine the idea of epistemology. This suggests that there are two separate levels of reality that the metaphysical distinction between that 'being' to something that is ontologically inferior by presenting itself as 'real'. Joseph Kosuth presents us with objectivist and subjectivist epistemology. Objectivist epistemology is assuming that reality exists outside the individual mind, meanwhile, subjective epistemology is expressing a range of language and symbol systems.

The way that *One and Three Chairs* has a relationship between art and reality relates to Rene Magritte's (1929) '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*'.



Fig. 3.

Rene Magritte, (1929), *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*.

Art will never be so realistic to become a reality, but a representation of it. Kosuth also applies the same discourse to *One and Three Chairs* by asserting aspects of language. Joseph Kosuth: an artist and an anthropologist define art as 'a linguistic-like depiction of culture.' This obsoletes the aesthetics and questions the language of art, considering it more like an artistic proposition. Kosuth's works are also influenced by Sigmund Freud's '*Psychoanalytic Theory*'. He took part in the exhibition '*Sigmund Freud and the Play on the Burden of Representation*' (2014-2015). The title itself plays on the psyche of conceptual art. It suggests that Conceptual Art is not about the importance of the presentation of the object or subject that is being observed, but more importantly, it is the representation: the idea. This insinuates the lack of importance aesthetics play within Conceptual Art. It is almost protecting art from becoming a decoration, or fashionable, and is more of intellectual activity.

Joseph Kosuth regards Conceptual Art as becoming an 'Investigation,' which is a term that Kosuth borrowed from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. 'I felt philosophy could only survive through Art' (Joseph Kosuth).

Tautologically, Kosuth approaches one single concept and creates three different perspectives by a three-way code. He raises questions about the validation of traditional art forms that navigates the commercialization of the object. The chair no longer becomes a practical use to one that typically sits on, but something that is now analyzed and observed.

Kosuth combined the idea of Plato's theory and was influenced by Marcel Duchamp's, *Fountain*, (1917). They both cleverly turn an ordinary manufactured object and interpret it in some way. However, Duchamp referred to his works as 'readymades',



Fig.4.

Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, (1917)

Following the subject of Marcel and the Dada Movement, Marcel Duchamp had a big impact on Joseph Josuth's art. This, '*Fountain*', Marcel Duchamp, (1917), actually led us to the question, What is Art?. '*Fountain*' is also one of Marcel Duchamp's most famous works and is noticed as an 'icon' of the twentieth-century. of Marcel Duchamp submitted his work of art anonymously under the name of 'R.Mutt.' When the artwork was reviewed, observers thought it was submitted by a plumber. Nonetheless, 'the *Fountain* was not made by a plumber but by the force of imagination.' Dadaists wrote a journal, calling it '*The Blind Man*' (1917), investigating the anonymous 'R.Mutt case' and was later turned into a piece of art.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an oi'dinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object. (Anon., 'The Richard Mutt Case', *Blind Man*, New York, no.2, May 1917, p.5).

This reinforces the 'idea' of the object and Duchamp's Dada movement.

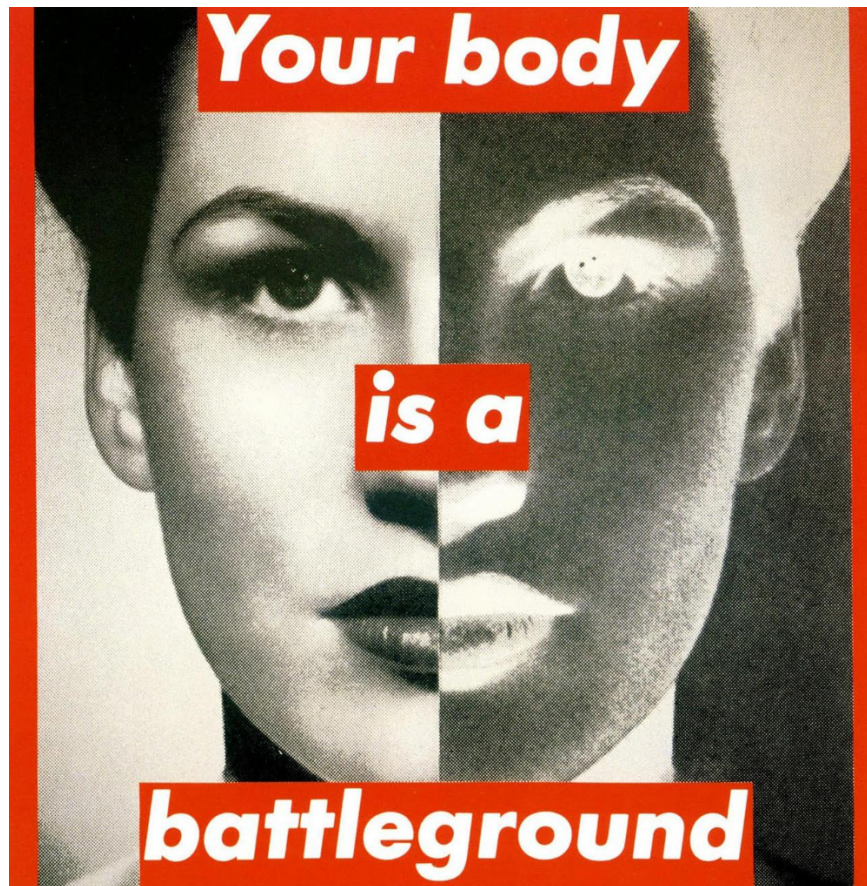


Fig.5. Barbara Kruger 'Your body is a battleground', (1989)

Barbara Kruger is also a Conceptual artist that follows the form of 'Image, and Text.' Although Barbara Kruger is a Conceptual Artist like Kosuth and Duchamp, and her artwork might be similar by using 'Image, and Text', the message and ideas behind her work are very different. Kruger often addresses cultural issues like consumerism, identity, power, and often focuses on the idea of beauty and aesthetics. The picture presents us with two split symmetrical juxtaposing images almost as if a mirrored reflection. The immersed opposing negative image highlights the stereotypical depiction of women by society. 'Your Body is a Battleground' is a depiction of a woman's face split into two, almost asymmetrical from a normal portrait to the use of

negative photography. The negative photography is almost a backlash on the negativity that society has on the portrayal of women and the idea of beauty. This creates a juxtaposition between the text and the image. This could possibly suggest that the female body is the 'Battleground', that they constantly have to fight for their natural beauty and not what society stands for as ideal. It's all commercialised and like abjects are manufactured, women are manufactured. This is highlighted by the conventional beautiful woman. Barbara Kruger addresses and interprets heated political issues that arise in a society, criticizing the objectified standard of perfectly lined symmetry that women are adhered to and perpetuated by media and advertising. The media holds a huge image in the objetification of women. This is significant when the objectification of women in Barbara Kruger's work insinuates the 'male gaze' feminist theory (Laura Mulvey) from her famous essay '*Visual Pleasure and Narrrative Cinema*'. The 'male gaze' theory screams voyeurism and is the sexualization of women for a male viewer. Barbara Kruger intellectually challenges the media and advertising industries which contributes to both the system of social stereotypes and the perpetuation of systems of inclusion and exclusion of society. Society seems to have a huge expectation when it comes to the idea of beauty or aesthetics. The connection that all these Conceptual Artists have in common is the constant criticism of aesthetics and what the 'ideal' beauty standards should be. These artists constantly challenge society to break these conceptions. Viewers were quick to criticize that objects aren't aesthtically pleasing to the eye, but then they are also quick to criticize the looks and beauty standards of women. Is this not reinforcing the objectification of women? Objects are merely just objects. However, women are human beings. On the other hand, these ontological questions that are raised can be answered considering the understanding and context of the history of

what influenced the Dada Movement and Conceptual Art. The war was a very ugly, shambolic place and time to live in, hence why there is a possibility that these artists no longer see the importance of aesthetics. Dada and Conceptual artists were heavily influenced by these so-called ugly views, and what they once saw and perceived as beautiful, are no longer beautiful to them. It can take a lot of persuasion and influence of the piece to have an impact on the views of society but in order to understand this type of art, one needs to dig deeper beyond the object and first perception. To explore the philosophical meanings and ontological questions of how and why, with the specific object or image they use. Duchamp used a urinal as a piece of art, an object which we simply just use and many people do not even think about. The urinal consists of absolutely nothing except bodily waste. How can we conceive something as beautiful when it consists of bodily waste? This backs up the lack of importance that aesthetics have on art. Duchamp and Kosuth challenge us with the simple, ordinary, ugly objects that we use every day and challenge us to question an object that we would not even think to stand, observe, and question. These artworks have a powerful play on the human mind and philosophy.

Bibliography

Lippard, L. (February 1968), "the dematerialization of art." *The dematerialization of art*, Art International.

<http://cast.b-ap.net/arc619f11/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2011/09/lippard-theDematerializationofArt.pdf>.

Kosuth, J. (2021) Fig.1, "Artists Rights Society (ARS)." *Artists Rights Society (ARS)*, <https://www.skny.com/artists/joseph-kosuth>.

Kosuth, J. (1965-1967) Fig.2. "Clock (One and Five) English/Latin Version (Exhibition Version)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kosuth-clock-one-and-five-english-latin-version-exhibition-version-t07319>

Kosuth, J (1945–). (2018). In *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Barthes, & Heath, S. (1977). *Image music text*. Fontana.

Hirohisa K. (2019). The Noeme of Photography: The Paradigmatic Shift in the Photographic Theory of Roland Barthes. *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi*, 28(3/4), 7–198.

Howarth, S, Mundy, J, (2015), 'Fountain', Marcel Duchamp, 1917, replica 1964, Tate <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>

Wilber, J, (2018) An Introduction to Plato's Theory of Forms, Owlcation, <https://owlcation.com/humanities/An-Introduction-to-Platos-Theory-of-Forms>

Fig 3. The Treachery of Images, (1929), by Rene Magritte

<https://www.renemagritte.org/the-treachery-of-images.jsp>

Trabattoni. (2016). *Essays on Plato's Epistemology*. Project Muse.

Prinz, Kosuth, J., & Guericio, G. (1993). Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990 [Review of *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*]. *SubStance*, 22(1), 106–108. University of Wisconsin Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3684739>

An Installation by Joseph Kosuth, (2014-2015), *Sigmund Freud and The Play on The Burden of Representation*,

<https://www.belvedere.at/sites/default/files/jart-files/pm-freud-en.pdf>

Duignan, Brian. "Plato and Aristotle: How Do They Differ?". Encyclopedia Britannica, Invalid Date,

<https://www.britannica.com/story/plato-and-aristotle-how-do-they-differ>.

Sauer, J, (2018), "The Language of Art: An Interview with Joseph Kosuth",
ArtDependence Magazine,

<https://www.artdependence.com/articles/the-language-of-art-an-interview-with-joseph-kosuth/>

Fig.4. Duchamp, M, 'Fountain',(1917)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>

Duchamp, M, (1917) 'The Blind Man',

https://monoskop.org/images/6/6f/The_Blind_Man_2_May_1917.pdf

Fig.5. Kruger, B, 'Your Body is a Battleground',

<https://www.thebroad.org/art/barbara-kruger/untitled-your-body-battleground>

Sassatelli. (2011). Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in
Film Culture. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(5), 123–143.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411398278>