

**CONCEPTUAL ARTWORK AS TYPE:
AN ACCOUNT OF DEMATERIALIZATION IN
CONCEPTUAL ART**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the concept of *dematerialization*, which was introduced by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler to art context, by the means of a new characterization of word-based Conceptual artworks as *types*. Concerning the notion of *dematerialization*, it is argued that the notion itself is controversial and vague. In order to clarify the notion of *dematerialization*, a distinction between art-work and art object, which is dematerialized, is executed. Following this distinction, it is claimed that in the context of Conceptual art, the notion of *artwork* is more proper than the notion of *art object*. In this respect, *art object* is taken as the final product or a part of the *artwork*. Via taking the dematerialization process as a negation of artwork as object qua end product; ephemeral or transient character of Conceptual works; use of words as artistic material into consideration, it is argued that Conceptual artworks are *types*. It is argued that use of words in Conceptual art is one of the main conditions reinforcing the dematerialization process which can be seen in almost every example of word-based Conceptual artworks. Through this characterization of Conceptual *artworks as types*, notion of *dematerialization* is clarified. Finally, it is argued that as the art object dematerializes; in word-based Conceptual artworks, the place of dematerialized art object is replaced by the use of words.

Keywords: conceptual art, dematerialization, artwork, art object, type

ÖZET

TİP OLARAK KAVRAMSAL SANAT İŞİ: KAVRAMSAL SANATTA MADDESİZLEŞMENİN BİR AÇIKLAMASI

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Bu tez, Lucy Lippard ve John Chandler tarafından sanat bağlamına sunulmuş *maddesizleşme* kavramını, sözcük-temelli kavramsal sanat işlerinin birer tip olarak karakterize edilmesi yoluyla inceler. *Maddesizleşme* kavramını ilişkin olarak, kavramın tartışmalı ve belirsiz bir kavram olduğu iddia edildi. *Maddesizleşme* kavramını açıklamak adına, sanat işi ile maddesizleşen sanat-nesnesi arasında bir ayrım yapıldı. Bu ayrımı takiben, kavramsal sanat bağlamında, *sanat işi* kavramının *sanat-nesnesi* kavramına oranla daha uygun olduğu iddia edildi. Bu anlamda sanat-nesnesi, sanat işinin bir parçası ya da bir son ürünü olarak alındı. Sanat işinin bir nesne veya sonuç ürünü olarak reddi, kavramsal sanat işlerinin geçici ve kısa süreli karakteristiği ve sözcüklerin sanatsal malzeme olarak kullanımı göz önüne alındığında, kavramsal sanat işlerinin birer tip (type) olduğu iddia edildi. Kavramsal sanatta sözcük kullanımının, birçok sözcük-temelli kavramsal sanat işinde görülen maddesizleşme sürecini pekiştirdiği iddia edildi. Kavramsal sanat işlerinin birer tip olarak karakterize edilmesi üzerinden *maddesizleşme* kavramı açıklandı. Son olarak, sözcük-temelli kavramsal sanat işlerinde sanat-nesnesi maddesizleşirken, maddesizleşen sanat nesnesinin yerini sözcüklerin aldığı iddiasında bulunuldu.

Anahtar Sözcükler: kavramsal sanat, maddesizleşme, sanat işi, sanat nesnesi, tip

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE.....	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ÖZET	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. PRECURSORS OF CONCEPTUAL ART.....	11
2.1. Duchamp's Legacy.....	11
2.2. Greenberg's Modernism.....	19
2.3. Historical Preliminaries of Conceptual Art.....	22
2.3.1. Fluxus.....	28
2.3.2. Minimalism	34
3. AN OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL ART.....	40
3.1. The Difficulty in Defining Conceptual Art.....	40
3.2. What is <i>conceptual</i> in Conceptual art?	42
3.2.1. Henry Flynt's Account of Concept Art.....	42
3.2.2. Edward Kienholz's <i>Concept Tableaux</i>	43
3.2.3. Sol LeWitt's Account of Conceptual Art.....	44
3.2.4. Joseph Kosuth's Account of Conceptual Art.....	48
3.2.5. Different Accounts of Conceptual Art in Comparison	54

4. CONCEPTUAL ARTWORKS AND DEMATERIALIZATION	57
4.1. “The Dematerialization of the Art Object”	57
4.1.1. Artwork and Art Object Distinguished	68
4.1.2. Reconsidering Dematerialization	70
4.1.3. Conceptual Artworks as Types	71
4.2. Word-Based Conceptual Artworks as Types.....	74
4.2.1. Joseph Kosuth’s Investigation.....	77
4.2.2. Robert Barry’s Something Series.....	82
4.2.3. Lawrence Weiner’s Statements.....	84
5. CONCLUSION.....	88
REFERENCES	98

1. INTRODUCTION

In his canonical essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Martin Heidegger (1975) sets out to pursue the origin of the work of art in order to conceal the essence of the art(work), presupposing the essence of something is what makes this particular something what it *is*. First of all, activity of the artist is indicated as the origin or the source of the work of art. But this indication, as Heidegger (1975) too acknowledges, begets another crucial question: What is the essence or nature of the artist? Origin of the artwork and nature of the artist refer to each other, so claims Heidegger (1975): “The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other” (pp. 15-16).

But this claim is not the end of the story. Heidegger deepens the inter-referentiality between the artwork and the artist via adding another dimension which is a third thing, but prior to them: art. Although the artwork and the artist are necessary for each other’s essences, they are not sufficient for themselves, i.e. they are not the sole support of the other. So “the question of the origin of the work of art becomes a question about the nature of art” (Heidegger, 1975, pp. 15-16). The interrelation between the artwork and the artist opens up in another interrelation which is more complex, namely the interrelation between artwork, artist and art. This interrelation is like a spiral disappearing in the deep darkness of an abyss where every quest for the essence of one component of this interrelation necessitates and presupposes the quest for the other as an inevitable result of *the* interrelation. So the question about

the essence of art seems to overshadow the other two questions concerning the natures of artwork and artist; but is only inferable from the answers to them.

Another point is that art is such a human activity that it cannot be framed or put into boundaries easily. Art's encompassing nature resists definitions, because definitions impose frames or boundaries to art, which will eventually injure the nature of it. Perhaps art's fascinating side stems from this characteristic of art that resists definitions. But lack of definitions and so lacks of frames or boundaries result in the disappearance of the demarcation line distinguishing a particular thing from what it is *not*. In case of such indefiniteness, mind is suspended. In order to prevent this suspension, human mind is already equipped with thinking in frames. Schema is the concept psychologists use for referring these frames. In the presence of unlimited data versus limited mental capacity to process them, human beings already perceive, evaluate, think and eventually act via frames in order to survive within optimal time interval. Through these schemata, human beings both organize their knowledge about the external world and process the information gathered from there. This is why – although the question of “what is art?” is a rhetorical one and art itself is “an epiphenomenon over the class of works” (Binkley, 1977, p. 273) – a question such as this is still being asked.

At this point Claude Levi-Strauss' analogy between objects as works of art and words of a language is worth mentioning. For Levi-Strauss, what makes an object a work of art is not the object itself in isolation; they are certain arrangements or possible relationships between objects which put them in the status of work of art. It is same for words of language argues Levi-Strauss, because words in themselves have almost no significance. Words acquire their senses from the context in which

they are situated or they take place (Morgan, 1994, p. 3). It can be argued that in the most abstracted sense, aforementioned context is language for words and art for objects or artworks. Art as a context in which even mundane objects regarded as artworks is another aspect displaying the importance of questioning the nature of art. If it is possible to push the analogy made between words and objects (artworks) even further, it can be argued that it is possible to seek for a structural character in art like language. At this point, in a Derridian sense, the relation between the structure and its center in terms of art context can be problematized. Derrida's (1980) positioning of center as not a fixed core, but a function triggering innumerable sign-substitutions in the structure of language can be helpful. In this sense, the problem or the flaw with the question of "what is art?" may be its quest for a center "which is by definition unique, constitute the very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality" (p. 352). Since "the centre of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form," but at the same time it "is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it," (Derrida, 1980, p. 352) a quest for the nature of art, i.e. for determining its center as a fixed locus or looking for the truth in art are taken as controversial, impractical, and inconsequential acts. Nevertheless, particularly for the works gathered under the umbrella of contemporary art, the question of "but is it art?" keeps its currency. So as a prelude to this one, the question of "what is art?" keeps its importance.

From the very beginning many art practices can be taken as claims on art; but with Conceptual art, which roughly covers the period between 1966 and 1972, being a claim on art becomes something significant, rather than being auxiliary part of the practices themselves. In this respect, being a type of art on art can be taken as one of the fundamental aspects of Conceptual art. This meta-level character of Conceptual

art, i.e. being a claim on art qua art, must be taken into consideration in evaluating somehow different art status of Conceptual practices. In Conceptual art practices, first and foremost, it is the art in general or conception of art itself which is questioned. It is true that Conceptual art is sometimes considered as anti-art, but this consideration must not end up with the conclusion that Conceptual art is not art at all. Some *anti* aspects of Conceptual practices have their sources on acts such as presupposition of art being identical with aesthetics or restriction of art to formalist art alone, or commodification of the art object. Although Conceptual art has anti-art tendencies in the senses above, it keeps its art status.

Distinctive character of Conceptual art, in this sense, lies in this meta-level character qua art. In other words, in Conceptual art, art is questioned by the means of art again and by the artists themselves. Although it is somehow considered as a philosophical activity, Conceptual art is not identical with philosophy; because it is a type of art, which uses artistic means, though they are different in character when they are compared with conventional art forms such as painting and sculpture. In this sense, Conceptual artwork, which is distinct from traditional art object, has an important role in the investigation of art, because through these artworks which are supported by the art context in which they are placed, art in general is questioned.

Another significance of Conceptual art lies in its transforming effects in traditional conception of art. Along with Conceptual art, crucial changes occur in value and conception of art. Art, which is traditionally considered as aesthetics and linked with sensation and taste of beauty, begins to be considered as something which is not confined to aesthetics anymore. Via its new conception which is framed by Conceptual art practices, art begins to be considered as having also cognitive

dimensions which are due to reflection and intellect. In a way, intellect and reflection on an idea replace taste and sensation of beauty. From now on, art being equipped with reflection and intellect has a new value which is cognitive. Equipping art with this new cognitive level, which can be attributed to Conceptual art, is another dimension in which importance of Conceptual art can be seen.

Although many of the contemporary artists do not call themselves “Conceptual” artists, it is not difficult to follow the traces on contemporary art making, which are left by Conceptual practices. Art making practices against commodification of art, critique of the institutions as monopolies which determine what art is and what art is not, or using concepts, ideas, information as artistic materials can be also seen in contemporary art practices. Art practices in the forms of intervention and appropriation, using words, information data, performance, video or site-specific installations in order to emphasize the art-context as different media are some effects of Conceptual art echoing in contemporary art making practices. In this sense, in order to understand them in a more lucid way, it will be helpful to consider historical roots or socio-political contexts of these contemporary practices in Conceptual art.

Departing from its importance in art history and theory and its continuing effects on contemporary art practices, this thesis explores Conceptual art by focussing on the concept of *dematerialization*, which was introduced by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler to art context in 1967. The concept is examined by the means of a new characterization of word-based Conceptual artworks as *types* departing from Richard Wollheim’s classification of artworks.

Although the concept of *dematerialization* was used by Lippard (2001) in order to give a definition of Conceptual art as “work in which the idea is paramount and the

material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized’” (p. vii), Lippard and Chandler did not point at specific works in order to clarify the concept.

The “dematerialization of art object” is taken as one of the most striking aspect of Conceptual art, yet it is also a controversial and vague notion. Lippard and Chandler used the term *dematerialization* in relation with art object, but the art object in the context of Conceptual art was not clarified. In this sense the notion of *dematerialization* was not clear, either. Since in her 1973 book *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, Lippard included many artistic practices such as artworks, documents, interviews or symposia and many artistic media such as text, map, data based works, photography, video, performance or installation, dematerialization can apply to all of these artistic practices and media (Lippard, 2001, p. 3). In this sense, it is important to give a somehow clear account of this vague notion, in order to put forward the distinctive aspects of Conceptual artworks which are pointed by the concept of *dematerialization*.

On these grounds, this thesis aims at clarifying the notion of *dematerialization* by approaching word-based Conceptual artworks as *types* via stemming from the classification which was proposed by Richard Wollheim in 1968. In order to realize this aim, first of all, a distinction between art-work and art object which is dematerialized is executed. Following this distinction, it is argued that in the context of Conceptual art, the notion of *artwork* is more proper than the notion of *art object*. In this respect, *art object* is taken as the final product or a part of the *artwork*.

Concerning the nature of Conceptual artworks, it is claimed that Conceptual artworks are *types*. Furthermore, this claim is supported by the similarity between two

relations: The relation between idea or concept as artwork and its realization or instantiation as art object and the relation between a type and its tokens. Through this characterization of Conceptual *artworks as types*, the notion of dematerialization is clarified. Finally, it is argued that as the art object dematerializes; in word-based Conceptual artworks, the place of dematerialized art object is replaced by the use of text.

Between 1966 and 1972, there were many artistic practices and media covered under the title of Conceptual art and referred as dematerialized art. This thesis deals only with word-based Conceptual artworks which were produced between 1967 and 1969 which covers “the first and definitive phase of the Conceptual art movement” (Harrison, 2004, p. 51). In this context, word-based works of Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner are examined. Specifically for word-based Conceptual artworks, it is easier to apply the categorization of artworks as types. With its several forms, use of words in Conceptual art is one of the main conditions reinforcing the dematerialization process which can be seen in almost every example of word-based Conceptual artworks, and constituting one of the distinctive characteristics of them. On these grounds, word-based Conceptual artworks are examined. Since Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner were the notable artists of the definitive phase of Conceptual art, who used words as artistic material, their artworks are chosen.

In Conceptual art, the question of “what is art?” has an important significance, because by the means of Conceptual artworks, it is the nature or function, at least, definition of art which is under consideration in Conceptual practices. Since Conceptual art is first and foremost about the definition of art, to give a definition for

Conceptual art in order to answer the question of “what is Conceptual art?” is a difficult task. As Lucy Lippard claims that definitions of Conceptual art vary with the artists beyond them, because it is not easy to identify a distinctive specific medium or technique used in Conceptual art practices (Godfrey, 1998, p. 13). Elisabeth Schellekens (2007), taking Lippard’s claim as a “lofty cliché,” widens the scope of definitions with the claim of “there are, in fact, as many definitions of Conceptual art as there are Conceptual artworks” (n.p.). But despite the difficulty in stating an all-inclusive definition of Conceptual art, Goldie and Schellekens (2007) argue that two different approaches, which are historical and philosophical or Conceptual, can be made in defining Conceptual art (p. xi). According to the historical one, “the term ‘Conceptual art’ refers exclusively to the artistic movement that took place roughly between 1966 and 1972,” claim Goldie and Schellekens (2007, p. xi). In this sense, works, which were produced in this six-year period, are called works of Conceptual art. According to philosophical or conceptual approach, although they were not produced in the stated period, Goldie and Schellekens (2007) maintain that “artworks such as Damian Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), and Gavin Turk’s *Cave* (1991) qualify as Conceptual,” because they have common important characteristics (p. xii).

On these grounds in order to understand the historical significance of Conceptual art and to clarify what is “conceptual” in it, in Chapter Two, historical precursors of Conceptual art is discussed. First, the importance of Marcel Duchamp for Conceptual art practices, due to his pivotal role in the uprising of Conceptual art movement in the 1960s, is examined. This is followed by a discussion of formalist/modernist paradigm of Clement Greenberg who dominated the post-war period of art,

particularly in America. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the significances of Fluxus and Minimalism sharing the same anti-formalist and anti-modernist concerns by means of the artworks of some notable artists of Fluxus and Minimalism.

In Chapter Three, the nature of Conceptual art is discussed through the question of “what is *conceptual* in Conceptual art?” via different accounts of Conceptual art which were proposed by Henry Flynt, Edward Kienholz, Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth.

In Chapter Four, firstly it is argued that the notions of *art object* and *dematerialization* must be clarified in order to answer the question of “what is the proper notion for the thing which is dematerialized?” In order to explicate the notion of *dematerialization* in the context of Conceptual art, firstly a distinction is executed between artwork and art object. Following from the distinction between *process* which means “series of operations in the production of something or actions leading to a specific end” and *product* which means “the result, consequence or destination of process”, a distinction is proposed between work and object. On these grounds, it is claimed that the notion of *artwork* or shortly *work* was more proper than the notion of *art object* in the context of Conceptual art. Following the distinction between the notions of *artwork* and *art object*, and positioning the art object, which is the final product as a part of the artwork, the nature of this artwork in Conceptual context is discussed. Departing from the type-token distinction, it is argued that Conceptual artworks are types. For many Conceptual artworks, in which concept and idea are primary over material form and object, the relation between idea/concept as artwork and its realization or instantiation as art object is considered similar to the relation between a type and its tokens. Through this characterization of Conceptual *artworks*

as types, notion of dematerialization is clarified. Finally, it is argued that as the art object dematerializes; in word-based Conceptual artworks, the place of dematerialized art object is replaced by the use of text. In order to demonstrate and support the arguments which are made throughout the thesis, Conceptual artworks limited to word-based works which were produced in between 1967 and 1969, in “the first and definitive phase of the Conceptual art movement” (Harrison, 2004, p. 51). In this context, word-based works of Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner are examined.

The final chapter is reserved for conclusions, an overview of ongoing effects of Conceptual art in contemporary art making practices and suggestions for further research in those terms.

2. PRECURSORS OF CONCEPTUAL ART

2.1. Duchamp's Legacy

Although his “creative act” took place approximately fifty years ago, the French artist Marcel Duchamp's experience and experimentation with his readymades are taken by several Conceptual artists and art theorists, as precursors of Conceptual practices, which were on stage during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1917, when he submitted a urinal turned upside down and signed with the pseudonym “R. Mutt” as a work of art to the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, the thing that Duchamp turned upside down was not only an industrially produced porcelain urinal, but also the whole course of art history. The reason of this turn and the examination of Duchamp's experience with his readymades, particularly with *Fountain* (1917), will be the main themes of this section.

Fountain (1917) was a great impact on people who assumed that “art would be either a painting or a sculpture” and made them think of “what art actually was” (Godfrey, 1998, p. 7). The exhibition committee of the Independents' Show rejected it claiming that it was a non-art object, because it was immoral and an example of plagiarism and it was “a plain piece of plumbing” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 817. Yet

“via the reception of the documentation of its *failure*,” *Fountain* came to be considered as art (Osborne, 2002, p. 27).

In this context, the insertion of *Fountain* into an art context, followed for the first time with a published statement concerning its aim (Ades, Cox, & Hopkins, 1999, p. 147), was a provocative act in a two-fold sense. First of all, *Fountain* challenged the traditional conception of art object which is either painting or sculpture. It was simply a urinal and in this sense it was neither painting nor sculpture in conventional terms. Moreover, there was no “artist” beyond the object, i.e. *Fountain* was an industrially produced everyday object lacking the uniqueness implying an artist’s touch. In another sense, *Fountain* “violated” art’s association, almost identification, with aesthetics. As being an outcome of aesthetic indifference, *Fountain* had nothing to do with aesthetics.

When the word *readymade* came to his mind, it was 1915 and by then Duchamp had three of them, namely *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *Pharmacy* (1913) and *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915) (Duchamp, 1961, p. 141). *Bicycle Wheel* consisted of a bicycle wheel which was mounted upside down onto a kitchen stool. It was an example of the assisted readymade or in Duchamp’s own words “readymade aided,” meaning the original object undergone a change originating from the artist. *Pharmacy* was another illustration of the assisted readymade. It was a reproduction of winter landscape bought by Duchamp who added “two small dots, one red and one yellow, in the horizon” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 819). But *In Advance of the Broken Arm* was different from the first two readymades in the sense that it was an unassisted one. *In Advance of the Broken Arm* was a snow shovel bought from a hardware store. There was no modification related with the object, but, for the first time, Duchamp added

an inscription which read “In Advance of the Broken Arm/(from) Marcel Duchamp 1915,” to the object (Ades et al., 1999, p. 150). The importance of the inscriptions for Duchamp will be discussed later, but at this point a particular importance concerning the inscription of Duchamp’s 1915 work should be noticed: The word *form* which was put into parenthesis indicated that “though the object came from him [Duchamp] it was not made by him” (Ades et al., 1999, p. 151). In other words, Duchamp implied the *already made* status of the object emphasizing that what he did was to choose this particular object and put a “verbal colour” on it (Ades et al., 1999, p. 151). In the expression of “verbal colour,” it is possible to see the allusion made by Duchamp concerning his verbal/visual distinction which will be discussed later. In addition to these three readymades, there was also a galvanized iron bottle drying rack titled *Bottle Rack* (1914), but Duchamp did not mention this object in his 1961 lecture, “Apropos of ‘Readymades’,” given at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, where he gave his account of the readymade.

The term *readymade* stands for “an object from the outside world which is claimed or proposed as art, thus denying both the uniqueness of the art object and the necessity for the artist’s hand” (Godfrey, 1998, p. 7). By being an object resulting from the *choice* which was “never dictated by aesthetic delectation” and “based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 819), the readymade – *prima facie* – “was *not* a ‘work of art’” (Osborne, 2002, p. 27), but a mere ordinary object which was claimed as “art.” Duchamp’s choice of an ordinary object from the outside world, which does not depend on visuality in terms of aesthetics is important, because his nominal act of claiming as “art” mainly stems from this choice. So the choice of the artist is what

makes the ordinary object an art object, but not object's aesthetic quality as a demarcation principle between art and non-art.

Is the readymade a work of art then? It is obvious that whether it is a work of art or not depends on how art is defined. For Duchamp, rather than a work of art, the readymade is a sort of irony (Ades et al., 1999, p. 151). Since a work of art begs a definition of art beforehand and there is a lack of essential and universal definition concerning "art," the readymade advances on the conception of "trying not to define art." Although readymade, as a work of art, seems to be proposing a new definition of art, it is actually aiming something different. By being an object from the outer world, the readymade is blurring the boundary between an art work and the rest of the things which are not considered art. This blurring is not an attempt to define art in positive terms, it is actually an act that is preventing the definition of what an art object is on aesthetic grounds. By being "a form of denying the possibility of defining art" readymade is a thing which Duchamp called art (Ades et al., 1999, p. 151).

The ordinary character of readymade as an everyday object based on the criteria articulated by Duchamp is crucially important in its placement in an art context, as a factor emphasizing the ironic contrast between "handcrafted visual objects for 'retinal' pleasure" (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 804) and objects devoid of uniqueness and artist's touch, implying "a complete anesthesia" (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 819). Duchamp's use of the term *anesthesia* reflects his pursuit of lack of sensation, especially in terms of visual, behind his choice of proper readymade. For Duchamp, it is a difficult act to choose an object lacking the "'look' [of being art]," which will be the outcome of "no aesthetic feeling" (Tilghman, 1984, p. 82). Along with

emphasizing the contrast between an art object and a mere object, the criteria beneath the choice of the readymade also direct the focus from the art object to the art context. So the art object of traditional aesthetic understanding cannot “exist in isolation of its context” anymore (Morgan, 1994, p. 1). Thus with the readymade, Duchamp invites the viewer to contemplate on the origin of the uniqueness of the art object distinguishing it from other objects. The question now is whether the uniqueness is “something to be found in the artwork itself, or in the artist’s activities around the object” (Archer, 1997, p. 10).

According to Joseph Kosuth (1991), with his first unassisted readymade, Duchamp is the first to raise the question of “function of art,” changing “the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function” and to give art its own identity (p. 18). Hence the shift from morphology to function, i.e. change from “appearance” to “conception,” is the beginning of both “modern” art and “conceptual” art, so argues Kosuth (1991): “All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually” (p. 18).

Although Kosuth reads the association between Duchamp and Conceptual art in terms of the readymade, Duchamp’s claim of “getting away from the physical aspect of painting” and “recreating ideas in painting” in order to put it “at the service of the mind” or his interest in ideas, rather than mere visual products (as cited in Godfrey, 1998, p. 27) again can be read as proto-Conceptual ideas in the context of painting prior to the readymade. What Duchamp pursues is to get rid of the physical aspect of painting and to put it into the service of the mind by recreating the ideas in it. The notion of “physical aspect” can correspond to both the visual character of painting and the artist’s touch behind it. But there is also another aspect for Duchamp, which

is the mental one corresponding to the “internal workings of the artist’s mind” (Ades et al., 1999, p. 151). In the sense of mental aspect, titles of paintings and afterwards inscriptions attached to readymades are crucially important for Duchamp.

Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2) (1912) too was criticized because of its title and its use of the inside of the canvas, and was withdrawn from the Salon des Indépendants by Duchamp himself. It was argued that the painting resembled Futurism rather than a Cubist painting and its title was too literal. Moreover, writing the title inside the canvas was taken as being inconsistent with a Cubist painting. Thus Duchamp was asked to make the proper changes in the painting in order to be exhibited, but he refused and withdrew his painting from the exhibition (Godfrey, 1998, p. 25). After a while, Duchamp quit making paintings and headed toward the readymade, but as an irony of fate, one of his readymades, arguably the most notorious one, *Fountain* would be rejected five years later, but this time in New York.

Duchamp’s emphasis on the mental aspect of painting rather than the physical one, the importance he gives to the title of the painting in order to recreate ideas in it and finally using the title inside the canvas can be seen as justifications for the claim that roots of Duchamp’s proto-Conceptual practices can be traced back to his Cubist paintings. Thus, Duchamp’s distinction between verbal and visual as the manifestation of his conception of non-retinal art begins with his paintings and continues with his readymades. In fact Duchamp uses the term “non-retinal” – long before the readymade – in order to criticize the growing tendency of 19th century French painting in decoration (Morgan, 1994, p. 2), but his advocacy of non-retinal art as his criticism of visuality related with aesthetics is fortified with the readymade.

At this point, it is not difficult to figure out why Kosuth is so eager to see the change triggered by Duchamp as the beginning of “modern” art as well as “conceptual” art. But prior to elaborating further on this issue, it will be proper to discuss why Kosuth takes the readymades, but not paintings of Duchamp as the point of departure.

Beyond his choice of the readymade as the point of departure lies Kosuth’s (1991) criticism of Formalist art which was the “leading proponent of the idea of aesthetics as art” (p. 16). Therefore along with Kosuth’s, Conceptual art’s criticism of Formalist – in a sense Modernist – art will be discussed later in this chapter. While Kosuth is considering Duchamp as the first artist who poses the function of art as a question and thus giving art its own identity, he presupposes that “[i]f one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art” (p. 16). This presupposition, though it is controversial, is very important in Kosuth’s line of reasoning and his evaluation of Duchamp. In the process of “self-identification of art,” Kosuth acknowledges the importance of Cubist works, but argues that in comparison with Duchamp’s readymades they are “timid and ambiguous” (p. 16). They are so, because they cannot question the nature of art. Why they cannot do so lies in the fact that they are a “*kind* of art” in a classical sense they are paintings. For Kosuth, accepting painting or sculpture means accepting the nature of art stemming from the tradition based on the “painting-sculpture dichotomy” (p. 16). Since the Cubists or Duchamp, who once made paintings, accept painting, they cannot question, but rather accept the given nature of art. Nevertheless with his first unassisted readymade, Duchamp chooses an ordinary object which is neither painting nor sculpture and puts it into an art context with the claim of art, so he pioneers the act of questioning the nature or function of art as surpassing the traditional dichotomy. At this point, why Duchamp with his

readymades is taken as a precursor of Conceptual art or the “conceptual” themes beyond Duchamp’s experimentation with his readymades can be discussed all together in more detail.

Firstly, Duchamp shows that works of art need not to be painting or sculpture. There may be other kinds of art, though they are not conventional. So art is not limited to painting-sculpture dichotomy. By choosing an ordinary, everyday object which is irrelevant to traditional understanding of art object possessing unique and irretraceable character underscoring an aesthetic judgment, Duchamp gives way to question the identification of art with the aesthetics and thus the nature or function of art.

Secondly, Duchamp points out that when it is the art object in question, it is not the object that took the adjective “art” as a qualifier, but it is the context, i.e. art context, into which the object is introduced, which brings the art status to the object. Therefore, the artist begins to be evaluated not only by the art object as the final product, but also by his/her intentions constituting the context into which the final product is introduced. In other words, in evaluating what is art and what is not, not only the work of art but also the processes before and after the work of art begin to be taken into consideration. Consequently, language via written inscriptions and artist’s statement via language begins to gain importance, because they (re)contextualize the artwork.

As Duchamp acknowledges, inscriptions are important characteristic of the readymade not in the sense of “describing the object like a title,” but in the sense of “carrying the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 820).

In this respect “The readymades are art, not painting, not sculpture and not something interspecific straddling both,” says Terry de Duve (1996, p. 269). Moreover de Duve (1996) argues that the readymade is either art or nothing, in other words it reduces the art in general to its essential, i.e. to its necessary and sufficient, conditions; thus readymade “is the work through which general modernism is achieved” (p. 96). Nevertheless according to de Duve (1996), Kosuth’s interpretation of Duchamp as the patent owner of making art in general as an artistic category is not true. De Duve (1996) claims further that Kosuth’s misinterpretation substantially stems from Greenbergian articulation of modernism (p. 95). In this sense, it is important to conceive formalist/modernist criticism of Clement Greenberg who dominated the post-war period of art, particularly in America.

2.2. Greenberg’s Modernism

Taking Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic model as his point of departure (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 2), Clement Greenberg published his renowned essay, “Modernist Painting” in 1961. For every artist who acknowledges or rejects it, “Modernist Painting” in which Greenberg gives his view of history of painting in the context of flatness, is “a sort of aesthetic Organon” (De Duve, 1996, p. 201).

A discipline’s twist upon itself in order to criticize itself via its own characteristic methods is the essence of Modernism, claims Greenberg (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 755). This self-critical attitude in Modernism is what distinguishes it from other – isms. Since the self-critical attitude of a discipline is specific to the discipline itself, it is difficult to talk about modernism in a general sense. The specificity drawing the boundaries separating a discipline from the others becomes the core of modernism,

so that modernism precludes interdisciplinarity (De Duve, 1996, p. 207). The only sense of specificity is not a discipline's act of criticizing itself with its own characteristics, but also the discipline's aim for this act, which is to give the account of what is unique and irreducible in it. Greenberg equates this uniqueness with the nature of the medium of the discipline itself (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 755).

In this context, the notion of "purity" is a key concept for Greenberg's articulation of Modernism. For Greenberg, who keeps the distinctions between different types of art and distinctions between different media of same particular art in mind, "purity" of each art stems from its independence from other arts. For an art or a medium to be "pure," borrowed effects from other arts or media must be eliminated (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 755). Hence what Greenberg wants to establish is an autonomous art which "remains true to its medium" via "purifying its means" (as cited in Hopkins, 2000, p. 37).

Hopkins (2000) argues that "Greenberg's conception of 'Modernism' as synonymous with formal completion or inviolability ... was to fuel a mutually self-aggrandizing tradition of painting and art criticism in the 1950s and 1960s" (p. 29). At this point, self-criticism or self-critical activity – which is another core concept of Greenberg's understanding of Modernism – comes on to the scene. Self-criticism of each art leads to self-definition of it in the sense that self-definition means "purity" (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 755). So Greenberg channels the artists to "concentrate on critiquing that particular medium alone" (Godfrey, 1998, p. 87). But Greenberg's emphasis on particularity of art or medium, in other words restriction of self-critical activity to a particular art or medium alone, makes Greenberg's Modernism also a restricted one.

Therefore critical and reflexive focus characterizing modernism is directed to essential characteristics of painting in particular (Archer, 1997, p. 41). When the subject matter is painting as a particular art, “flatness” (two-dimensionality framed by the rectangularity of the canvas) is what is unique to the nature of painting’s medium. It is also irreducible. In other words, “flatness” is “something you could not abandon without altering the very nature of the medium” (De Duve, 1996, p. 250). Since “flatness” is peculiar to painting, it is the focus of modernist painting, argues Greenberg (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 756).

Like two-dimensionality’s uniqueness to painting, three-dimensionality is peculiar to sculpture as a particular art form. In the context of two and three-dimensionality, Greenberg argues that in order to preserve its autonomy, painting must get rid of everything that it shares with sculpture (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 756). Again, Greenberg, who opposes the “flatness” of painting to the “three-dimensionality” of sculpture (De Duve, 1996, p. 235), emphasizes the boundaries distinguishing particular forms of art in the context of autonomy as well as specificity.

Considering Greenberg’s formulation of content and form relation, de Duve (1996) makes a distinction between content and subject matter of a work of art in the sense that while content or quality – another term that Greenberg uses synonymously with content – refers to what a work of art is about, subject matter is the medium, specifically for modernist art. On these grounds, form of an art work makes its subject matter visible and shows the way to its content as well (De Duve, 1996, pp. 209-210). Importance of form stems from the importance of the medium with respect to modernist art, because the nature of the medium, which is at stake in

modernist art, and particular art's reflection on medium become apparent by means of form.

At this point, why formalism and modernism are discussed together can be explained. Formalism, which was developed in the early 1900s by Clive Bell and Roger Fry, bases itself on aesthetic response that is accessed by sight alone. Its main emphasis is on formal characteristics of the art work such as "line, colour, tone and mass" (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000, pp. 11-12). These formal characteristics of art work are anything which do not belong to the art work's content, thus have to belong to its form. Through the dichotomy constructed between form and content, formalism positions artistic significance at the level of form implying visual qualities rather than content including intellectual elements (Crowther, 1997, p. 172). Since the medium is the true subject matter of (modernist) art, and "as a methodology of art criticism, formalism means that form and subject matter are the only things one can talk about" (De Duve, 1996, p. 214), modernist art is affiliated with the formalist one. Considering the framework constructed by Greenberg, it is easier to handle Duchampian and other anti-modernist avant-garde practices of the 1960s from which origins of Conceptual art can be traced.

2.3. Historical Preliminaries of Conceptual Art

Departing from Clement Greenberg's account of modernist painting in which material objectivity, medium specificity, visuality and autonomy are advanced as four characteristics of the art work in a modernist frame, Peter Osborne (2002) puts forth four "lineages of negation," each of which is "the product of successive and overlapping revolts" against aforementioned characteristics of the art work, that take

place prior to Conceptual art and subsumes in it as strategic characteristics shaping Conceptual art (p. 18). Robert Morgan, too, brings forward a similar view. According to Morgan (1994), there is already a diverse avant-garde experimentation against the conception of gestural painting based on modernist formalism. Therefore, Morgan (1994) argues, Conceptual art may be taken as “a summation of these experimental avant-garde forms that emerged in the 1960s” (p. xiii).

Among the “lineages of negation” which Osborne introduces, “the negation of material objectivity” and “the negation of medium” are helpful in considering the precursors of Conceptual art.

“[T]he negation of medium” corresponds to the temporal character of “performance-based ‘intermedia’ acts and events” which take place in Happenings and Fluxus practices through music and dance.

“The negation of material objectivity” is against the medium specificity or “generic conception of objecthood” in Osborne’s own terms. This negation finds its roots in the history of Minimalism (Osborne, 2002, p. 18). Thus, whereas the first negation implies Fluxus orientations of Conceptual art, the second one points to Minimalist ones.

In his examination of prior movements and practices that open the way for Conceptual art, Osborne (2002) makes a notable distinction between their priorities with respect to Conceptual art. While “Fluxus-type of performance-based ‘intermedia’” practices have chronological priority, minimalist practices have a critical one. Their common ground is the fact that these practices are mainstream articulation of modernism which is substantially based on Greenberg’s writings. Followed from different types of priority, Osborne (2002) argues that it is the critical

priority that discloses the conceptual character of the chronological one (p. 19). Although they are opposed to each other, Godfrey (1998) also claims that Fluxus and Minimalist practices of the early 1960s are the movements from which Conceptual art of the late 1960s derives (p. 100).

On the contrary, for Lucy Lippard (2001), an important critic of that period, the question of sources is a sore problem. Lippard (2001) who points out Duchamp as “the obvious art-historical source,” discusses the European kind of Fluxus as the most obvious exception. As the precedents of Conceptual art, Lippard (2001) refers to Marcel Duchamp, Ad Reinhardt, Jasper Johns, Robert Morris and Ed Ruscha (p. ix). When it comes to Minimalism, Lippard (2001) acknowledges that Conceptual art emerges from Minimalism, though their basic principles are different (p. xiii).

Charles Harrison (1991) also does not see Minimal art as the only source of Conceptual art. What he points out as possible antecedents of Conceptual art, which are prior to Minimalism, are readymades of Duchamp and Happenings along with practices of Pop Art as a development stemming from the readymades. Fluxus practices, Yves Klein’s and Piero Manzoni’s activities in Europe have already begun to shake the Abstractionism and offered non-Abstractionist forms. Nevertheless, Minimalism is acknowledged as “the most coherent and the most powerful avant-garde discourse of the mid-1960s” by Harrison (p. 45). Although Harrison (1991) positions Conceptual art as “post-Minimal” practices in which objects contingently illustrate or demonstrate ideas (p. 47), Harrison also acknowledges the works of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns; Duchamp and Dada influence through writings of John Cage and Fluxus practices as the antecedents of “new work” which

will be offered by Minimal art as a challenge to mainstream modernism which is largely based on Greenberg's writings (p. 37).

So in accordance with this framework, prior to examining Fluxus and Minimalist practices as precursors of Conceptual art, it will be proper to look at some important names such as Allan Kaprow, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

Through John Cage's lectures at the New School of Social Research in New York, Duchamp's ideas become more accessible to the American art of late 1950s and early 1960s. Yoko Ono, Allan Kaprow, George Brecht, George Maciunas and Robert Rauschenberg are among the participants of Cage's lectures (Morgan, 1994, p. 11). Thus Cage is the "prime-mover in disseminating Duchamp's ideas in America" (Hopkins, 2000, p. 41).

Allan Kaprow who begins his career as a painter is the ideologue of the Happenings which are "complex sensory environments, bordering on theatre in terms of vestigial narrative content and the use of 'props', but soliciting spectator participation" (Hopkins, 2000, p. 104). Through collages, large-scale assemblages and Environments, Kaprow becomes the leading man behind the Happenings (Morgan, 1994, p. 11). What Kaprow pursues via Environments of Happenings is a transformation of "Pollock's emphasis on painting as a bodily act" to "staged engagements with objects of everyday life" (Osborne, 2002, p. 193) as well as "an extension of Rauschenberg's 'Combines'" (Hopkins, 2000, p. 105). What is important about the Happenings with respect to Conceptual art is the usage of written scripts. Unlike Conceptual art, scripts that give way to the performances are not so crucial for the meaning of the performance. In other words, documentary character of the scripts does not have an important role in understanding the performance.

They are not more than documented evidences of the performances taken place (Morgan, 1994, pp. 11-12).

It is with Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns that anti-Abstraction practices reach their apogees. Prior to his ideas of “combine,” in the early 1950s Rauschenberg makes monochrome paintings such as *White Paintings* (1951), *Black Paintings* (1951-52) and *Red Paintings* (1953) (Osborne, 2002, p. 58). Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* of 1951 reflects “a pronounced discomfort with Abstract Expressionist bombast.” Through his *White Paintings*, Rauschenberg breaks the “Modernist assumption of self containment” (Hopkins, 2000, p. 42). Osborne (2002) argues that monochromes of Rauschenberg function as “tabula rasa” which is devoid of “the individuality of brushstrokes,” for “recording on their surface varying light conditions and the shadows cast on them by spectators and performers” (p. 58).

Rauschenberg’s idea of “combine” which is a hybrid of painting and sculpture is a milestone in this respect. The idea of “combine” which is “object-plus-canvas composites” comes out when Rauschenberg sees a white butterfly trapped in the thick black paint on the canvas (Strickland & Boswell, 2007, p. 160). By means of his combines, Rauschenberg implicitly argues that with respect to art, a found object such as a tire or stuffed animal; or elements of painting such as paint or canvas have the same worth. As reminiscent of readymades, combines question the fictitious borders between art (object) and non-art (object). In this sense, Duchamp’s readymades are “brought into a realignment with fine art practices in constructions fusing everyday object, painting, and sculpture” by Rauschenberg (Hopkins, 2000, p. 44).

Beneath the combines lies a more ground objective that Rauschenberg, yet implicitly, identifies the non-art or found objects with “life” and tries to overcome the distinction between art and life or exclusion of life from art. Rauschenberg believes that using the objects from the “real” world makes the picture more “real” like (Strickland & Boswell, 2007, p. 172). At the end of the day, painting is an issue of two-dimensional surface consisting of length and width. The third dimension, namely depth, is extrinsic to the painting and is created as a mere illusion. Along with this, Rauschenberg sees the canvas in an unconventional manner that flatness of the canvas is not used for creating an illusionistic depth or space in a representative fashion, but rather surface of the canvas is a literal surface on which object can be added thus a platform of creating a real space or depth as an element of three-dimensionality.

In this context, according to the critic Leo Steinberg, transparency of the surface of the painting, which facilitates the visual experience, is rendered into the opacity enabling the surface for operational process (Batchelor, 1997, p. 15). Thus Rauschenberg emphasizes the flatness of the painting in a different way, i.e. like an operational surface on which any object can be added. Thus Rauschenberg’s emphasis is contrary to Greenberg’s emphasis on flatness quo an essential property of painting. Rauschenberg’s emphasis on flatness as an operational surface violates the specificity of painting in modernist terms and begins to weaken the borders between painting and sculpture. On these grounds, Rauschenberg’s “combines” set the stage for Minimalist practices.

Like Rauschenberg, being influenced by both Duchamp’s readymades and Cage’s chance operations, Jasper Johns too is interested in the familiar objects such as flags

and maps in order to surpass the distinction between art and reality (Strickland and Boswell, 2007, p. 173). For Alexander Alberro (1994), Johns has an important role in connecting the Duchamp-Cage link with visual arts and later on with Fluxus (Buchloh et al., 1994, p. 139). With his *Flag* of 1954-55 in which the American flag is the “subject” of the painting or collage (Hopkins, 2000, p. 58), Johns sets forth his statement of the painting as an object. At this point, again, a reference to readymades is explicit. In *Flag* (1954-55), “neither the surface nor the representational element of the work predominate but are equalized, emphasizing both the work’s purely object” (Osborne, 2002, p. 59). Being a kind of collage, *Flag* is made via “an unusual technique in which encaustic (pigment mixed with hot wax) was laid over a base of torn newspaper fragments” (Hopkins, 2000, p. 60). Thus names such as Allan Kaprow, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns open up the way for Fluxus and Minimalism.

2.3.1. Fluxus

Although Osborne (2002) gives Fluxus a chronological priority with respect to Conceptual art and sees the Fluxus-oriented and performance-based “intermedia” art as the first works of Conceptual art “in which a work’s meaning was rendered independent of the visual properties of its material presentation” (p. 66), he also acknowledges the exclusion of Fluxus-related works from the repertoire of Conceptual art (p. 19). Litz Kotz (2007) also discusses the relation between Conceptual art with linguistic and performative practices of Happenings and Fluxus as one of the vexing problems of giving the account of Conceptual art’s emergence (p. 175). Fluxus’ “basis in musical modernism” and “difficulties of documentation

inherent to performance-related works” are among the reasons that Osborne (2002) gives for why Fluxus-related works are excluded (p. 19). Since anti-modernist avant-garde practices of the 1960s substantially focus on modernist criticism in the context of painting-sculpture dichotomy and performance-related works are – in a sense – irrelevant with the first wave of Conceptual art, in which language is used as an artistic material, exclusion of Fluxus, whose basis is found particularly in music and which is overtly performance-based, makes sense.

However as an important point worth considering, Kotz (2007) argues that the use of language as an artistic material has its roots within the earlier “profusion of text-based scores, instructions, and performance notations that surround the context of Happenings and Fluxus” (p. 175). Acknowledging this relation with Fluxus is what makes “conceptual” uses of language more intelligible, claims Kotz (2007, p. 175). Similarly Osborne (2002) reads the relation between Fluxus and Conceptual art in terms of the “‘intermedia’ between scores/instructions, performances and documentation” in the sense that “*multiple* yet disjunctive mediations between different forms of art,” i.e. intermedia relations, directed to the same target like other avant-garde practices of the 1960s as well as Conceptual art, namely medium-specific modernism (pp. 19-20).

Although in a different manner which is stated above, Fluxus practices set up the stage on which the nature or function of art can be questioned via the question of “What can be art?” prior to its further elaboration by Conceptual artists (Godfrey, 1998, p. 106). Osborne’s further elaboration of performance-based Fluxus events supplemented by “scores” or documentation implies another characteristic aspect of Conceptual art, which is implicit in Fluxus practices, namely dematerialization.

According to Osborne's claim, performance and its disappearance along with time might be taken as "dematerialization' or dissolution of objecthood into time, through movement" (2002, p. 20). In opposition, supplementary medium documenting the performance, usually photography, in a way "rematerializes" the action (2002, p. 20). By implying the similarity between a "performance of a composition" and an "experimental action" whose outcome cannot be foreseen, John Cage argues, "A performance of a composition which is indeterminate of its performance is necessarily unique. It cannot be repeated. When performed for a second time, the outcome is other than it was" (as cited in Morgan, 1994, p. 9). Cage attributes the uniqueness of performance to its un-repeatability in time and this un-repeatability, in turn, is attributed to the impossibility of grasping the performance "as in object in time" (as cited in Morgan, 1994, p. 9). Thus, when it is compared with "action" which Cage links with the "non-knowledge of something that had not yet happened," "recording" of the action, providing the "knowledge of something that happened," "has no more value than a postcard" (as cited in Morgan, 1994, p. 9). In his articulation of the "performance of composition," three themes come forth, viz. written composition, performance of it, and recording of the performance. Performance of composition distinguishes from the first and third themes due to its ephemeral and unrepeatable nature. The recording of the performance has no significant value, because although it exhibits the specific uniqueness of the performance, it cannot portray the generic uniqueness of the performance quo performance. On these grounds, written composition gains importance with respect to documenting the performance with its uniqueness based on "the principle of indeterminacy." But the main emphasis is still on the performance itself which is unrepeatable, unique and ephemeral contrary to an object in time.

Through his reading of the score as the “score-event” which stems from the event-score, Osborne (2002) emphasizes the importance of the score in terms of Conceptual art. By both its content and visual form, the score – when it is rendered into language – becomes an instruction. In this sense, when the score is carried into the context of visual arts, the instruction becomes a type of Conceptual art, claims Osborne (p. 21). Unlike the score-event, event score consists of simple actions as well as ordinary objects from daily life that are recontextualized as performance. Event score is also a text that can be taken as proposal or instruction for actions. Hence, event score is an instruction for transforming “the temporality of performance into the physicality of an object” (Osborne, 2002, p. 70).

If the instruction piece, or in Osborne’s own term, the score-event is taken as a type of Conceptual art, Osborne claims that Yoko Ono’s *Instructions for Paintings* (1962) and Robert Morris’ *Card File* (1962)¹ may be evaluated as the first works of Conceptual art. But concerning the *Instructions* of Yoko Ono, Osborne (2002) adds that at the beginning Ono has no consideration of exhibiting the instructions in an isolated fashion (p. 22). In this context, Osborne compares these instructions with another Fluxus-related artist Le Monte Young’s *Compositions* of 1960 in the sense that they are publishable as scores and yet they are not “exhibitable in a gallery context” (2002, p. 22). But the *Instructions* are soon exhibited in Sogetsu Art Center, Tokyo, in 1962. In order to avoid the “personalism of her own hand” and their reception as “calligraphic displays” Ono wanted the instructions to be typed in Japanese characters, but since she could not find a typewriter with Japanese characters, they are written in Japanese. On these grounds, Osborne (2002) thinks

¹ Robert Morris’ 1962 work *Card File* was first exhibited in 1963 at the Green Gallery, New York (Osborne, 2002, p. 68).

that the *Instructions*, which were published also in English, may be taken as “the first wholly language-based works of visual art” (p. 22).

Another candidate for being among the first work of Conceptual art, for Osborne, is *Card File* piece. *Card File* of Robert Morris, who was a Fluxus artist for a period and afterwards Minimalist, is a self-referential piece of a library card file which consists of 44 index cards arranged in alphabetical order recording the operations of the artist in its conception and construction. On each card, which has the labels such as “Considerations,” “Dimensions,” “Time” etc., there is a typed remark articulating the artist’s thinking process involved in each step along with date, time and cross-references. Due to its self-referential character enabling the conception and construction of the piece to be articulated and its linguistic nature, *Card File* is taken as one of the first true Conceptual works by some critics (Godfrey, 1998, p. 108, Osborne, 2002, p. 68).

In parallel to Osborne’s claim, critic Lucy Lippard (2001) sees *Card File* as one of the “influential pieces that anticipated so-called conceptual art to a great degree” (p. 27) along with *Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal* (1963). Evaluating it as “epitome of self-reflexivity” and as constituting “the conclusive moment for abstract painting in the early 1960s,” Buchloh (1994) also claims that *Card File* is “constitutive for the beginning of Conceptual art in the American context” (pp. 115-116). Concerning the *Card File* piece, Alberro also argues that it can be seen as “a work, which critiques the traditional author-viewer interaction models in favor of a highly participatory model” (Buchloh et al., 1994, p. 131).

Buchloh (1990) who interprets the piece in terms of Duchamp’s readymades also argues that *Card File* suggests a reading of the readymade in terms of its structural

and semiotic definition (p. 116). Osborne (2002) agrees with Buchloh and says that the piece as a new form of assisted readymade is incorporating “a self-enclosed system denoted by written signs” (p. 68). On these grounds, concerning the *Card File* piece, Rosalind Krauss argues that Duchamp’s use of writing is transformed into an “auto-referential system” differing from his use of notes (Buchloh et al., 1994, p. 130).

Along with Ono and Brecht, Fluxus-related artist La Monte Young’s *Compositions* of 1960 are other works which Osborne interprets in terms of scores. La Monte Young’s engagement with Fluxus is a result of his correspondences firstly with John Cage, and right after with George Maciunas in 1960. Before these correspondences, Young’s works are in twelve-note technique or serialism of Arnold Schoenberg from which he soon breaks off (Osborne, 2002, p. 64). Following his encounter with Cage’s works, Young begins to use non-traditional sounds stemming from actions such as dragging furniture. What Young wants to question is the nature of music as well as the nature of time and his *Compositions* of 1960 are the results of these two quests. Departing from Cage’s principle of indeterminacy, *Compositions* are “if not necessarily unhearable or unimaginable, arguably unplayable” (Godfrey, 1999, p. 101). As an illustration, *Composition #10* – in a sense a reminiscent of his previous work *Trio for Strings* – is an instruction stating that “Draw a straight line and follow it.” Another one, *Compositions #5* has a longer form of instruction which directs to

[t]urn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area. When the composition is over, be sure to allow the butterfly to fly away outside. The composition may be any length, but if an unlimited amount of time is available, the doors and windows may be opened before the butterfly is turned loose and the composition may be considered finished when butterfly flies away (Godfrey, 1999, p. 101).

Although *Compositions* #5 and #10 have nothing to do with traditional use of sounds, they are about the definition of music implying Cage's "use of 'silence' as being an integral component of music" (Morgan, 1994, p. 10). Especially in the sense of sound or "silence" as a result of butterfly's movements or casual sounds arising from the activities of the participants – if there are any – in the room, *Compositions* carry the issues of sound-silence-music and duration-action-time to a higher, more conceptual level. Furthermore the issue of sound/silence seems secondary to movements or activities in the sense that first of all, the sound or "silence" is the result of these movements or activities; and second of all they are the activities of performers or audiences which constitute the integral part of the composition. "It may be of any duration" is an important characteristic of *Compositions* and in this context, action-duration-time issue and its conscious experience come forth. So *Compositions* also questions the performer-audience relation and place of audience with respect to performer and to the work. On these grounds, according to Godfrey (1998), Young is claimed "to be the first Conceptual artist" (p. 102).

2.3.2. Minimalism

"Minimalism," "Minimal art," "ABC Art," "Serial art," or shortly "Minimalist" is a pejorative label applied to works of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt and Carl Andre, which are identified mostly with sculptural endeavor (Archer, 1997, p. 44). When the subject matter is Minimal art, which has the critical priority with respect to Conceptual art (Osborne, 202, p. 19), criticism of Modernism becomes apparent and the relevance with Conceptual art is more comprehensible.

According to critic Barbara Rose, along with Kasimir Malevich's monochrome squares, Duchamp's readymades blurring the line between an art object and common object in terms of uniqueness are historical poles of Minimalism (Archer, 1997, p. 44). Along with Rauschenberg and Johns, Frank Stella is another name who has considerable effects on Minimalism. Frank Stella's use of symmetry as discordant with the compositional relations in the modernist understanding of painting is one of the points of departure from which minimalist "unitary" forms are originated (Osborne, 2002, p. 24). Frank Stella states that painting is an object which is self-sufficient, so what Stella wants to do is to emphasize the self-sufficiency via producing a painted flat surface and nothing more. He wants to overcome the illusion of space in the representational painting (Strickland and Boswell, 2007, p. 171). For Stella, self-sufficiency of painting implies its objectness, meaning flat surface of the painting or canvas is just a surface, in other words just another object, but "not a metaphor of a body or space within the picture" (Batchelor, 1997, p. 16).

What Minimal art of the mid-1960s sets forth are neither paintings nor sculptures, though it is closer to the latter. In this sense Minimalist practices, first of all, do not depend on "conventions of a specific medium" (de Duve, 1996, p. 225). Thus, "neither painting nor sculpture is the only forms of art" is the core statement behind these practices. Minimal art shows that there are alternative media in art and this act is an important challenge against Greenberg's understanding of Modernism which does not allow inter-specificity (de Duve, 1996, p. 227). According to Greenberg, this commitment with the third dimension is related with practices blurring the line between art and non-art (Archer, 1997, p. 44). To be specific or being either painting or sculpture and devoid of any elements belonging to the specificity of the other form, is the condition of being generic or being art. Mixed forms resulting from

Minimalist practices create problems for both painting and sculpture. In this respect, association of “high art” with aesthetic value and quest for this couple within the arts of painting and sculpture are overthrown by Minimalist practices (Harrison, 1991, p. 37). The apparent contrast between Minimalism and the work of preceding generation, viz. Abstract Expressionism, which is highly promoted by Greenberg, also acknowledges this point. Whereas the work of the latter has a subjectively expressive content in an emotional fashion; the work of the former looks “monochromatic, engineered, impersonal” (Archer, 1997, p. 46). With respect to artist’s touch, Minimalist works are devoid of uniqueness in the sense that works are not always made by artists themselves but somebody else who works in accordance with the instructions proposed by the artist. In this sense, the uniqueness of the Minimalist work lies in the fact that although they are not made by the artists for once, the instructions are performed for only once. Thus Minimalist works do not refer to anything that is exterior to them. So they are not representational or metaphorical. The title *Untitled* may also be interpreted in this context that this title prevents a work’s subordination under a title or name (Archer, 1997, pp. 53-54).

Concerning Donald Judd’s essay entitled “Specific Objects” of 1965, de Duve (1996) argues that it is “the major ‘theoretical’ manifesto of Minimal art” (p. 230). Judd’s “Specific Objects” blur the line distinguishing painting and sculpture by being both colored objects which are hung on the walls like paintings and objects having one more dimension, the third one, like sculptures. Although works of Judd, who states that “The new work obviously resembles sculpture more than it does painting, but it is nearer to painting” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 114), remind of painting and sculpture by combining different aspects of these particular forms. They are neither painting nor sculpture, but “specific objects” for Judd. They have the qualities pertaining to

specific art forms of modernist understanding, but they are not specific and thus contra modernist (de Duve, 1996, p. 231).

For de Duve (1996), Michael Fried's 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood" is the best analysis concerning Minimal art (p. 239). Like Greenberg, Fried too acknowledges the distinction between particular art forms and the distinction between art and non-art as crucial in terms of modernist paradigm. Fried also emphasizes the importance of specificity, i.e. the autonomy of individual art forms, and nonsense of generic, i.e. mixing different art forms, via stating "What lies between the arts is theatre" (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 824). In Fried's lexicon, the word *objecthood* corresponds to the objectness of the Minimalist works and the term *literalist* stands for the term *minimalist*. Since it blurs the line between art and non-art, Fried reads the notion of *objecthood* as the non-art condition. Therefore autonomous painting or sculpture is not *essentially* an object, but readymades or minimal works stressing the objecthood boldly do not only violate the autonomy of particular art forms but also violate the distinction between art and non-art (Batchelor, 1997, p. 65). In parallel with Batchelor, Fried uses "literalism" in contrast to "abstraction" which is the principal form of Greenberg's Modernism in the 1950s (Harrison, 1991, p. 40). Ironically, there is another reading of "abstraction" as a result of its rejection of composition. This Minimalist rejection of composition is another dimension of Fried's opposition to Minimalism. "Hollow" character of the Minimalist work, particularly of works of Judd and Morris, and its non-referential abstractness are what Fried rejects in Minimalism. On these grounds, Minimal art is a "literal" one for Fried (Archer, 1997, p. 60).

In this respect, Fried argues that “literalists” make the art theatrical by offering objects, which are neither painting nor sculpture, but “a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art” (Harrison & Wood, 1993, p. 825). For Fried, the theatre is not a kind of art, but a negation of art, which violates the autonomy of particular art forms (Batchelor, 1997, p. 65).

As an example of Minimalist effect on Conceptual art, de Duve points out the influence of Donald Judd on Kosuth’s “Art After Philosophy,” which Kosuth also acknowledges in aforementioned work that with Kosuth’s formulation or understanding of Conceptual art, generic character of “specific object,” into which specificities of painting and sculpture resolve, begins to force the limits of objectness (De Duve, 1996, pp. 244-245). At this point Harrison (1991), who is in agreement with de Duve, states that “Minimalists proposed a qualitative change ... a shift from painting and sculpture to ‘objects’, and subsequently from objects to ‘post-objects’, the ‘Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations - Information’” (p. 44). According to Osborne (2002), via art ideas, objects are reconstituted via Minimalism. This reconstitution consists of a shift of objects’ belonging. In this sense objects no longer belong to “the history of either painting or sculpture, but the technologies of industrial production” (p. 24). So argues Osborne (2002): “Process-based conceptual Minimalism ... pushed Judd’s modernist reduction one stage further: from reduction to ‘objecthood’ to reduction to idea” (p. 26).

Through this trajectory, Harrison (1991) argues that both “Conceptual art” and “dematerialization” are the secondary consequences of the qualitative change proposed by Minimal art. As a possible nuance between Minimalism and Conceptual art, “making art objects” in Godfrey’s own terms may be suggested.

When Godfrey is comparing Minimalist works with Duchamp's readymades, he evaluates the former as less radical. Although they are less radical in a sense, their ordinariness blurring the distinction between things in art status and things in their ordinary status forces the viewer to consider object-environment relation as well as their positions with respect to this relation (1998, p. 112). Godfrey (1998) thinks of a relation between the concept in the artist's mind and its result in the viewer's mind as self-reflection. Objects as a result of the concept in the artist's mind create the atmosphere in which the viewer can question the relation between the object quo object and the environment in which it is placed. As being another part of this environment, viewers consider themselves. According to Godfrey, viewers being put into play with the work, which is an important characteristic of Conceptual art, can be already seen in Minimalist works of early the 1960s. Hence, especially in American context, common argument finding the roots of Conceptual art in Minimalism makes sense (Godfrey, p. 114).

Nevertheless, for Osborne (2002), linguistic character of Conceptual art as a signature style does not appear in the Conceptual work stemmed from the Minimalist practices. Minimalist negation of medium as a specific form of either painting or sculpture in favor of "objecthood" is "less concerned with language than with ideal systems of logical, mathematical and spatio-temporal relations" (Osborne, 2002, p. 23). Osborne (2002) positions the importance of language with respect to Minimalism not in its use within the artworks, but in the "awareness of the role of *critical discourse* in the production and experience of art" (p. 23).

3. AN OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL ART

3.1. The Difficulty in Defining Conceptual Art

Since it is a “widely differing phenomena within a time span, not ... a ‘movement’,” as Lucy Lippard (2001, p. 5) puts it, it is almost impossible to give a precise and all-inclusive account of Conceptual art. At this point, David Batchelor’s (1997) remark about Minimalism is taken as valid for Conceptual art, too: “[G]roup names like Minimalism do not just serve to homogenize bodies of work which might be only superficially alike; they simultaneously detach that work from other material which may be superficially different” (p. 7). In this sense, Lippard’s claim that since it is not easy to identify a distinctive specific medium or technique used in Conceptual practices, definitions of Conceptual art vary with the Conceptual artists beyond them makes sense (Godfrey, 1998, p. 13). Elisabeth Schellekens (2007), who reads Lippard’s claim as a “lofty cliché,” widens the space of definitions by claiming “there are, in fact, as many definitions of conceptual art as there are conceptual artworks” (n.p.).

Apart from this difficulty as a result of various forms of works and medium-use, which can be gathered under the label *Conceptual art*, to give a coherent account of Conceptual art via a definition includes a more fundamental difficulty which can also be taken as ironic. Since it is first and foremost about the definition of art, or in

broader terms, about the nature or function of art, the adjective *conceptual* seems to qualify or describe a notion whose definition is at stake, namely *art*. In this respect, self-reflexivity becomes one of the most prominent characteristic features of Conceptual art in problematizing traditional presuppositions about what art(work) is and who an artist should be through different media and techniques used in Conceptual practices. But it is this important feature of Conceptual art which also deepens the irony in the sense that self-reflexivity is not peculiar to Conceptual works alone and can be traced in many Modernist artworks in which artists must aim at critiquing their particular artistic medium in which they work (Godfrey, 1998, p. 77). Thus the notion of self-reflexivity becomes a common ground of Modernist practices and Conceptual practices which are loaded with anti-modernist tendencies.

The common ground with its rival is surpassed by Conceptual art by widening the scope of self-critical activity to art-in-general in the sense that while in modernist framework self-critical activity is restricted to particular forms such as painting and sculpture, in Conceptual art questioning the nature of painting by means of painting turns out to be questioning the nature of art by use of different media and techniques. Thus Conceptual art's emphasis on the ideas, meanings, and processes against modernist paradigm emphasizing the forms, materials, and objects changes the trajectory of art itself from being art of the senses to being art of the mind in which reflection overshadows appreciation and transforms art itself into an open concept.

On these grounds in considering a coherent account of Conceptual art, the notion of *art* is important as the notion of *conceptual*. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, it is its being *conceptual* that makes Conceptual art *Conceptual art*. So the question of "what is 'conceptual' in Conceptual art?" gains importance.

3.2. What is *conceptual* in Conceptual art?

In order to seek a coherent account of Conceptual art, it will be proper to begin with views of the artists who used the term *conceptual art* for the first time. This – in a sense – genealogical approach will be helpful in considering different views and understandings of artists who have different artistic tendencies such as Fluxus and Minimalism, concerning Conceptual art. On the other hand, according to Benjamin Buchloh (1990) there are four contestants, namely Henry Flynt, Edward Kienholz, Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth, who used the term *conceptual art*, though first two of them used “concept art” instead of “conceptual art” (p. 108).

3.2.1. Henry Flynt’s Account of Concept Art

The term *concept art* was coined by Henry Flynt who was an avant-garde musician and activist who was known with his association with Fluxus and Conceptual art. Flynt used the term *concept art* in his 1961 essay, “Essay: Concept Art.” This essay was published in “An Anthology of Chance Operations” which was edited by La Monte Young in 1963. Concerning the *concept art*, Flynt argues that he is “the originator of concept art, the most influential contemporary art trend. In 1961 I authored (and copyrighted) the phrase ‘concept art,’ the rationale for it and the first compositions labeled ‘concept art’” as cited in (Buchloh, 1990, p. 107).

In his essay “Essay: Concept Art,” via an analogy of the relation between music and sound as its material, Flynt argues that “‘Concept art’ is first of all an art of which the material is ‘concepts’. Since ‘concepts’ are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p.

820). The scope of the term as being used by Flynt includes works of Fluxus artists such as George Maciunas, George Brecht and Yoko Ono (Morgan, 1994, p. 118).

Though for the first time it was Flynt who emphasized the concept art, concept and language relation, major participants of Conceptual art such as Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner who used “language” as a signature style of Conceptual art, denied “any historical connection to or even knowledge of the Fluxus movement of the early 1960s,” argues Buchloh (1990, p. 107). Nevertheless, when the subject-matter is “concept art,” Flynt’s dealing with concepts more than with art itself is acknowledged (Morgan, 1994, p. 119). Via arguing in this way, Morgan (1994) positions the “concept art” as advocated by Flynt in the teachings and writings of John Cage. But the main importance of Flynt lies in the fact that Flynt envisions “the connection between ‘nonmaterial’ art and certain speculations in modern philosophy” and provides “a logical basis for tying elements of Fluxus art together with Kosuth’s ‘Proto-investigations’ of 1965” (Morgan, 1994, pp. 13-14).

3.2.2. Edward Kienholz’s *Concept Tableaux*

The other contestant credited with the first use of the term is Edward Kienholz for whom Roberta Smith (1981) argues that “[t]he very term Conceptual Art [is] [...] originally coined by the [...] Edward Kienholz in the early 1960s” (p. 261). What Smith wants to imply are Kienholz *Concept Tableaux* series of 1963. From 1963 onwards, Kienholz begins to produce his *Concept Tableaux* series consisting of a concept, a title plaque, a possible drawing of the concept/work, and a possible construction of the concept/work. For these series to be realized, first of all purchaser is offered a concept, in other words instructions for a piece of work and a

title plaque. If the purchaser wants to commission the work, she pays for the drawing of the work which is included in the instructions. If she wants more, she makes an extra payment and gets the work made, or realized. *State Hospital* (1966) and *The Portable War Memorial* (1968) are two examples of these concept tableaux which can also be taken as the first Conceptual art works. But much of the works of Ed Kienholz remained only “concepts” (Godfrey, 1998, p. 92).

3.2.3. Sol LeWitt’s Account of Conceptual Art

By means of his two publications, namely “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (1967) and “Sentences on Conceptual Art” (1969), Sol LeWitt is yet another candidate among the ones who used the term *conceptual art*. By being different from Flynt’s *concept art* and Kienholz’s *concept tableaux*, Sol LeWitt, for the first time, uses the term *conceptual art*. The context in which LeWitt uses the term is also important in the sense that his use of the term and his explication of it through his essays have an important role in framing what Conceptual art is, because what LeWitt proposes concerning Conceptual art is very close to general understanding of Conceptual art, but interestingly LeWitt uses the term in two different forms. While *conceptual art* with lower-case “c” implies LeWitt’s own works, the term *Conceptual art* with upper-case “C” indicates conceptual art in general (Lippard, 2001, p. 5). Concerning this point, Morgan (1994), who reminds the period of six years between publications of Flynt and LeWitt, argues that “[t]he term ‘concept art’ should not be confused with that of ‘conceptual art’ as delineated by Sol LeWitt in his ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’” (p. 13).

In his “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” LeWitt gives his own articulation of Conceptual art. Hence, for LeWitt, conceptual art is a kind of art in which “the idea of concept is the most important aspect of the work” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 822). In this definition, LeWitt seems to depart from the works subsumed under this label.² In the footnote which he adds for his definition of Conceptual art, LeWitt indicates the changeable nature of concept along with the process of execution in other forms of art apart from the conceptual one (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p. 16). This footnote attains its importance from LeWitt’s evaluation of *execution* in the sense that execution in conceptual art, for LeWitt, is “a perfunctory affair” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 822). So in his two years later essay “Sentences on Conceptual Art” (1969), LeWitt argues that “once the idea of the piece is established in the artist’s mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 827). Whereas “[i]n other forms of art the concept may be changed in the process of execution” (Alberro & Stimson, 2000, p. 16), in conceptual form of art, since the execution is perfunctory, all of the decisions and adjustments concerning the concept are made prior to execution (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 822).

This manner of positioning the concept prior to execution does not mean that concept is unalterable through the execution, but means that execution is already done in accordance with the concept which is proposed beforehand. Therefore, concept is not determined by the execution of it, but in a sense realized. In other words execution supervenes on the concept, so it is “perfunctory.” The difference between the concept and execution, intellectual and formal aspects of the work, and priority of

² According to Irving Sandler (1988), as LeWitt views it in 1967, “Conceptual art could range from an object generated by an idea, or exist in the gap between verbalization and visualization.” So illustrations of works from artists such as Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, Mel Bochner, Eva Hesse, Edward Ruscha and Dan Graham accompanied “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (p. 345).

the concept in relation to execution are the reasons behind the primacy of the concept over execution.

Though he points out the concept as the most important aspect of the work in conceptual form, LeWitt does not relate the importance of concept with being theoretical. According to LeWitt, conceptual art “is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 822). Moreover, LeWitt argues against the association of conceptual art with mathematics or philosophy (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 824). In order to emphasize this remark, in the first sentence of his “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” LeWitt says that “Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 826). On these grounds, for LeWitt, “conceptual art is not necessarily logical” and “ideas are discovered by intuition” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 822)

Another distinction which is made by LeWitt is the distinction between conception and perception. For LeWitt, functions of conception and perception are contradictory, because while conception is a “pre-fact” determining the execution, perception is a “post-fact” following the realization (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 824). It is apparent that conception-perception distinction stems from the conception-execution or realization distinction. Based on his primary distinction between conception and realization, LeWitt further argues that in parallel with being the most important aspect of the work, “[t]he idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 825). At this point, what LeWitt makes a further elaboration on the issue via arguing that the important aspect of the work is not only the concept which is executed, although it may not be realized, the idea is still “as much a work of as any finished product” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 825)

and keeps its importance. In other words conceptual aspect of the work is not only the most important aspect, but also the most primary one in the sense that in order to be the most important part of the work, it does not need any other aspect. The significance of this claim lies in the implicit presupposition that in conceptual form of art, concepts or ideas implementing them are already works of art, though they do not have physical forms as a result of their executions. Moreover this line of thought will eventually find its echoes in complete dematerialization of the art object.

Since it is the concept which is the most important aspect of the work, LeWitt states that “[c]onceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than this eye or emotions” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p.826). Accordingly, primacies of concept, idea and process over form, objects and end product, respectively, are emphasized. LeWitt’s conception of Conceptual art is an art of the mind, rather than an art of the senses; thus reflection is substituted with pleasure.

At this point it is important to note that the terms *concept* and *idea* are not synonymous for LeWitt. While the term *concept* “implies a general direction,” *ideas* are the components of the concept. By means of ideas, concepts are implemented (Lippard, 2001, p. 77).

Since LeWitt presupposes that conceptual content of the work does not need the expressive one, viz. physicality, he believes that in order to engage with the mind of the viewer rather than the senses of her, any element directing the focus of the viewer to the physicality of the work will be improved or converted into an idea by the conceptual artist (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 826).

According to Alessandro Alberro (2000), in “the first manifesto of conceptual art,” namely “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” LeWitt underlines the difference between

expressionist and conceptual forms of art so that in expressionist form of art, art work is executed via rational decisions in the course of execution; but in conceptual form of art, decisions are made in advance of execution (p. xx). Apparently this does not make decisions, which are made prior to execution, irrational; but LeWitt implicitly associates irrationality with conceptual form of art by means of arguing explicitly that “formal art is essentially rational” (Lippard, 2001, p. 88).

3.2.4. Joseph Kosuth’s Account of Conceptual Art

Along with Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth was the last name which Buchloh points at as the possible candidates who uses the term *conceptual art* for the first time. According to Buchloh (1990), Kosuth claims that in his “Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14,” he uses the term *conceptual* for the first time (p. 108). But the main text in which Kosuth gives his account of Conceptual art is in fact his 1969 essay “Art After Philosophy.” Alessandro Alberro (2000) refers to Kosuth’s formulation of Conceptual art as “linguistic conceptualism” which is substantially affected by logical positivism of A. J. Ayer (p. xvii).

In “Art After Philosophy,” prior to setting forth his own understanding of Conceptual art, Kosuth makes a crucial preliminary distinction between aesthetics and art. The importance of the distinction Kosuth makes lies in the fact that from now on it will be easier to break the affinity between art and visual or material form in order to argue for a type of art which is “mental” rather than visual. This distinction is not only his tribute to Marcel Duchamp before whom Kosuth (1991) argues that art is only minimally art, but also the main tenet of his conception of art (p. 16). Identification or at least relation of art with aesthetics is a result of formalist

understanding of art, claims Kosuth (1991, p. 16). Following his distinction between art and aesthetics, Kosuth makes a somehow problematic analogy between art and analytic proposition, which can be taken as another crucial step in his account of Conceptual art. There seem two possible problems related with this analogy. The first of them may be labeled as the methodological problem, i.e. the problem with making an analogy between a general or an umbrella term such as *art* and a specific type of philosophical statement, namely *analytic proposition*. And the second problem is, though it is based on a reading of Kant through Ayer, Kosuth's limited reading of *analytic proposition*. The source of the methodological problem is Kosuth's several uses of the terms *art* and *work of art* as if they are synonymous. Later on in his essay, Kosuth emphasizes the propositional character of the art work (1991, p. 20), but when he is first formulating his analogy of art-analytic proposition-tautology, the term Kosuth uses is not his analogy of art-analytic proposition-tautology, the term Kosuth uses is not *work of art*, but *art* (1991, p. 16). It is important to note that Kosuth is not unaware of the general character of the term *art*. While he is presenting his criticism of formalism, Kosuth argues that via questioning the nature of painting as a specific form or "kind" of art, one cannot question the nature of art, because "the word art is general and the word painting is specific" (1991, p. 18). Although Kosuth begins his important analogy with the term *art*, soon he incorporates the term *work of art* in place of *art* (1991, p. 20). Nevertheless, based on his analogy between art and analytic proposition, Kosuth makes a further claim and states that art has a tautological character (1991, p. 16). This further claim, which will be soon discussed in detail, muddies the water even more.

For Kosuth, "habitual" act of seeing a conceptual link between art and aesthetics stems from accepting the decoration as a function of art. Via constructing another

connection between aesthetics, decoration and taste, Kosuth argues that understanding of art as aesthetics is a result of formalist account of art and criticism which he identifies with the writings of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried (pp. 16-17). According to Kosuth, the problem with formalist art is its definition of art, which is based on morphological similarity with traditional understanding of art stemming from conventions of painting and sculpture. In this sense, via putting its emphasis on morphological grounds, i.e. on a restricted view of morphological similarity with traditional conventions of art, formalist criticism misses the “the conceptual element in works of art,” so formalist art is “a mindless art” (1991, pp. 17-18). Kosuth strongly opposes to formalist articulation of art on morphological grounds, because this articulation, first of all, presupposes a conceptual connection between art and aesthetics and secondly positions the function of art in a mere act of decoration. Since “questioning the nature of art is a very important concept in understanding the function of art,” claims Kosuth (1991, p. 18), he wants to get rid of the “habitual” association of art with aesthetics. Based on his opposition of formalist art, Kosuth discusses the importance of Marcel Duchamp in the history of art in the sense that with Duchamp and his nominal act of presenting *Fountain* (1917) as an art work, “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” (1991, p. 18).

On these grounds Kosuth asks “What is the function of art, or the nature of art?” and gives his own answer by the means of pursuing his analogy between art (work) and analytic proposition (1991, p. 19). According to Kosuth’s definition, “a work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as comment on art” (1991, pp. 19-20). The kind of proposition which Kosuth implies is the analytic proposition

which is borrowed from “A. J. Ayer’s evaluation of Kant’s distinction between analytic and synthetic” (1991, p. 20). Since being different from the synthetic proposition, validity of which depends on experiential facts; validity of analytic proposition depends solely on meanings or definitions of terms it contains. Whereas synthetic proposition has an a posteriori character, i.e. its validity stems from experience; being a priori, i.e. being prior to experience, is the basic characteristic of analytic proposition. This characteristic of analytic proposition securing its independence of experience, constrains its validity to the terms or concepts, which are included in the proposition, so that experiential facts have nothing to do concerning the validity of analytic propositions. This characteristic of analytic propositions allows Kosuth, who departs from Kant’s claim of analytic propositions, which contain explicit concepts, are tautological, to state that works of art are analytic propositions and they have no correspondence with matters of fact (1991, p. 20). In this context, Kosuth continues, “[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” (1991, p. 20). Since in accordance with Kosuth’s conception, every particular work of art is a definition of art, Kosuth implicitly justifies his use of *art* as being synonymous with *work of art* like using the definition of the word instead of the word itself. Nevertheless via stating “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” (1991, p. 21), Kosuth once again emphasized the identity between art work and art. At this point although he does not use the term *conceptual*, what Kosuth speaks of are Conceptual works of art that are in fact definitions of art in the sense that they are about the nature or function of art. By means of pointing to the artist’s intention, Kosuth implies Duchamp’s nominal

act of unassisted readymade and explicitly references Donald Judd's statement of "if someone calls it art, it's art" (1991, p. 20). At this point Kosuth fuses the use of language with his account via stating 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" (1991, p. 20). At this point it is important to note that Kosuth's use of the word *language* is not merely literal. Based on his articulation of work of art as analytic proposition which "is not dependent on any empirical, much less any aesthetic, presupposition about the nature of things" (1991, p. 20), what Kosuth aims is to dismiss the relation between art work and factuality, i.e. aesthetics. In other words, art works as being analytic propositions possess not factual, but linguistic character in that "they do not describe the behavior of physical, or even mental objects, they express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art" (Kosuth, 1991, p. 21).

Based on these grounds, Kosuth (1991) sets forth his definition of Conceptual art in the "purest" way as being an "inquiry into the foundations of the concept 'art', as it has come to mean" and adds that "the 'definition' of 'Conceptual Art' is very close to the meanings of art itself" (pp. 25-26).

In this context, according to Kosuth (1991), along with his own works done around 1966, first examples of "purely" Conceptual art were the works of Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin who were the former members of the Art & Language group, which was founded in around 1967 in the United Kingdom (p. 27). The importance of Art & Language in the history of Conceptual art does not only lie in their conceptual oeuvre, but also in production of texts concerning the nature of art and art objects. As being the distinguishing character of these texts, it is important to note

that these texts produced by the Art & Language group were not merely publications, but they were “presented in and art context as analytic arguments about the nature of art objects and assertions about art” (Alberro, 2000, p. xviii). Alexander Alberro (2000) explains this phenomenon as “declarative methodology” in which status of artworks stems from the “nominal, metalinguistic act of asserting their ‘art context’” (pp. xviii-xix). Thus, textual works of the Art & Language group have two-fold function in the sense that they are both works in “art context” and texts asserting this context. This is why, for Kosuth (1991) who argues that “a work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as comment on art” (pp. 19-20), i.e. because of art work’s propositional character concerning the nature and function of art, works of Atkinson and Baldwin are the “pure” Conceptual art works.

With respect to Art & Language and Kosuth, Alberro (2000) argues that while Kosuth departs from the rejection of formalist art and criticism, Art & Language’s point of departure is Minimal art’s use of materiality (p. xix). In parallel with Kosuth who points at the *Air-Conditioning Show* (1966-67) of Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin as an example of “purely” Conceptual work, Alberro (2000) states that Kosuth’ advocacy of meaning against language finds its manifestation in the work of Atkinson and Baldwin, which shifts the “cognitive emphasis of the artwork from material vehicle to conceptual content” (p. xix).

In this context, Alberro (2000) refers to Kosuth’s aesthetic theory, which is also accompanied by works of Art & Language group, as “linguistic conceptualism” (p. xvii). This model of conceptualism, Alberro (2000) continues, became the dominant one after its formulation (p. xx).

3.2.5. Different Accounts of Conceptual Art in Comparison

At this point, it will be proper to discuss the similarities and differences between aforementioned accounts of Conceptual art in order to clarify what can be distilled when the differences are isolated. This will be helpful in understanding “what is ‘conceptual’ in Conceptual art?” and if it is possible to give a lucid definition of Conceptual art, how it does sound.

First of all, it is not a difficult task to grasp that although they seem similar; Flynt’s and Kienholz’s uses of *concept* are intrinsically different from LeWitt’s and Kosuth’s uses of *Conceptual art*. This point must be stressed, although Flynt’s and Kienholz’s *concepts* are chronologically prior, with respect to their critical importance in relation with the history of Conceptual art is not so. Despite the other labels such as *Idea* or *Information Art* (Stangos, 1981, p. 256), it was the label *Conceptual art* which saves its validity as being the true name for the movement. In this respect, roles of LeWitt and Kosuth; and their accounts of Conceptual art, respectively become apparent.

When Henry Flynt used the term *concept art*, due to his linkage with Fluxus group in which, what he referred were the pieces from George Brecht and Yoko Ono (Sandler, 1988, p. 343). As a result of this exemplification, Flynt’s essay orientation towards first of all music, and then mathematics and eventually art is acknowledged (Harrison, 2004, p. 50). At this point it is important to note that the major figures of first wave of Conceptual art, which is named as “linguistic conceptualism” by Alberro (2000, p. xvii), such as Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner deny any historical linkage with Fluxus (Buchloh, 1990, p. 107). But, in this respect, Robert Morgan (1994), who acknowledges Flynt’s connections with the Fluxus

group through experimental music of La Monte Young, argues that interpretation of “concept art” as Fluxus was largely a misinterpretation (p. 118).

Ironically, although Kosuth dismisses an account of Conceptual art which is Fluxus-oriented, his correlation of art with logic and mathematics in terms of tautological character (Kosuth, 1991, p. 21) seems reminiscent of Flynt whose character of “mathematician qua artist” (Morgan, 1994, p. 118) is highly reflected on his writings. Like Kosuth, who correlates art with logic and mathematics, Flynt points at the parallelism between art and science, but at the same time acknowledges that they should not be made in order to illustrate the other (Morgan, p. 119). On the contrary, LeWitt emphasizes that the importance of concept in terms of Conceptual art is not related with being theoretical via arguing that conceptual art “is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 822). In this context LeWitt opposes the correlation of Conceptual art with mathematics and philosophy (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 824).

In this manner, rationality/irrationality issue concerning the accounts of Conceptual art proposed by LeWitt and Kosuth can be discussed. For LeWitt, “[c]onceptual art is not necessarily logical” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 822) and so “Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p. 826). Since Conceptual art is intuitive, but not theoretical or illustrative of theories, leaping to conclusions which cannot be attained by logic can be possible, in this sense for LeWitt, Conceptual art is not rational. Thus, Alberro (2000) interprets LeWitt’s aesthetic theory in opposition to Kosuth’s. According to Alberro, “rational mode of artistic production” is an important characteristic of

Kosuth's aesthetic theory; but in LeWitt's, artistic production does not necessitate "rational thought" (p. xx).

Artistic production and artistic subjectivity are the two points which Alberro considers while he distinguishes between rational and irrational modes of artistic production. For Kosuth, since a work of art is a proposition and a definition of art, intention of the artist has an important role in production of the work. In this respect, Kosuth (1991) argues that "artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art" (p. 20). But in LeWitt's articulation of artistic production, artist cannot preserve her privileged status, because the work follows "a mechanical, impersonal, quasi-mathematical serial sequence," which evacuates "the notion of unique artistic subjectivity" (Alberro, 2003, p. 38). Since the role of artist as an agent is suspended in LeWitt's mode of artistic production, Alberro evaluates it as irrational.

Because of the crucial differences between aforementioned accounts of Conceptual art, it is a difficult task to specify the *conceptual* in Conceptual art. But as a common ground, primacies of concept, of idea and of process over a material form as an end product are emphasized by all of the accounts that were discussed above.

4. CONCEPTUAL ARTWORKS AND DEMATERIALIZATION

4.1. “The Dematerialization of the Art Object”

Apart from the accounts which are discussed in Chapter Three and somehow complementary to them, Lucy Lippard, a critic especially associated with Conceptual art in the late 1960s, proposes another account emphasizing dematerialization of the art object as a defining factor.

In their 1967 essay “The Dematerialization of Art,” Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, for the first time, suggest the term *dematerialization* in relation with art. According to Lippard and Chandler, an ultra-conceptual art with an emphasis of the thinking process emerges as a response to anti-intellectual and emotive art-making processes of the 1940s and 1950s. Taking it as a trend, for ultra-conceptual art, they argue that it provokes a profound dematerialization of art *as objects* and makes a projection stating that if this ultra-conceptual trend will continue to prevail, “it may result in the object’s becoming wholly obsolete” (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p.46).

Prior to moving into the details of that essay, it will be proper to underscore certain notions used by Lippard and Chandler. First of all, instead of the term *conceptual art*, Lippard and Chandler use the term *ultra-conceptual art* in order to distinguish the art practices taking place in the late sixties from “[m]inimal painting and sculpture, earthworks [...] in the early sixties as abnormally cerebral” (Lippard,

2001, p. vii). Lippard mentions the difference between conceptual and ultra-conceptual art six years later at the beginning of her 1973 book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. In this book, Lippard also refines the expression of “the dematerialization of art” in the sense that it acquires a more detailed version qua “dematerialization of the art object.” But it is still difficult to follow what Lippard and Chandler want to mean via the notion of *dematerialization* and what they want to imply via the word *art object*. So natures of both dematerialization and art object seem to be left in the dark.

Although the term *dematerialization* literally implies the loss of apparent physical substance or the process of becoming immaterial, Lippard and Chandler’s use of the concept in the context of conceptual art is not identical with its dictionary definition.

In his 1968 essay “Concerning the Article ‘The Dematerialization of Art’,” Terry Atkinson states his doubts about Lippard and Chandler’s usage of the word *dematerialization* and argues that their use of the term is metaphorical. Although Atkinson acknowledges that use of the term in a metaphorical way is not necessarily problematic, he also claims that the process of dematerialization as it is described by Lippard and Chandler does not meet the processes, which they describe in relation with dematerialization (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p. 52).

Departing from the dictionary definition of the term which emphasizes the deprivation of material qualities, Atkinson has the claim of “when a material entity becomes dematerialized it does not simply become non-visible” (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p. 52). At this point, via opposing becoming non-visible to becoming invisible, Atkinson further claims, “it [dematerialized object] becomes an entity which cannot be perceived by any of our sense” (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p. 52).

In this context, Atkinson explains why he thinks that Lippard and Chandler's use of the word is metaphorical. Accordingly, if there is a dematerialization processes occurred, then there must be no material trace. But if what is called dematerialization is the usage of immaterial entities in order to demonstrate ideas, then dematerialization in this context is used in a metaphorical context (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p. 52).

What Atkinson wants to imply is the difference between visibility degrees of entities or materials, which are used in art objects, which cannot be named as dematerialization. Thus, Atkinson considers the artworks, which Lippard and Chandler use to demonstrate their ideas, and argues that with only a few exceptions what Lippard and Chandler speak of as artworks, are art objects (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p. 52). Atkinson seems to differentiate art object from artwork and argues that although they are either solid, liquid or in gas-state, all of the art objects are in a material state. In this sense, concerning these art objects one cannot speak of dematerialization in a literal sense, but only in a metaphorical way. At this point it can be argued that Atkinson's use of the term is exceedingly literal.

Because of its comprehensiveness, in other words several meanings which are implied by the term, Lippard and Chandler's understanding of dematerialization can be evaluated as metaphorical, but the notion of *art*, both in the statements of "the dematerialization of art" and in "the dematerialization of the art object," is decisive for the use of the term in the sense that Lippard and Chandler's usage must be somehow metaphorical because what they talk about as dematerialized objects are not literal objects, but artworks. The metaphorical character of the term *dematerialization* stems from the notion of *art*. As implicitly being put by Atkinson,

examples proposed by Lippard and Chandler for demonstrating the dematerialization are not art objects in traditional matter-states. So what Lippard and Chandler want to emphasize is not simply any deprivation of material substance, but a change in traditional understanding of the art-work as a shift from material form to the idea.

According to Lippard and Chandler, “conventional art media are no longer adequate as media to be messages in themselves” (Alberro & Stimson, 2000, p. 49); art works such as words and signs conveying ideas are not things in themselves as end products, but they are representative of things. For such artworks, the work as final product is not an end itself, but a medium for transmitting pure ideas (Alberro & Stimson, 2000, pp. 48-49).

For Lippard (2001), Conceptual art means a “work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized’” (p. vii). This definition of Conceptual art by Lippard also sheds light on what she might mean via the notions *dematerialized* and *dematerialization*.

Through this definition, it is not difficult to understand that in Conceptual art, there is a change in the paradigm of conventional or traditional understanding of artwork for which material form and art object as end product is primary. But in Conceptual art, concept over form, idea over object and process over product are emphasized. In this sense, formal characteristics of the artwork that are substantially based on its materiality lose their primacy and the concept or the idea beneath the materiality gains importance. Thus idea becomes paramount. When the idea takes the lead, the material form does not only turn out to be secondary, but also becomes a means for transmitting ideas that are primary. So the conventional or traditional art media, i.e.

paintings or sculpture, are not proper media in Conceptual practices, because art objects in the form of painting or sculpture are already ends-in-themselves. But in Conceptual art, the artwork is not confined to the art object as an end product, because art object which is “looked-at” is present only for conveying the idea which is “read-about” (Alberro & Stimson, 2000, p. 54). Thus in Conceptual art; the material form is a means of transmitting ideas and it is “secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized’” (Lippard, 2001, p. vii).

Contrary to Terry Atkinson’s literal reading of dematerialization, dematerialization does not mean inexistence or absence of the object that means something perceptible through the senses, i.e. a material thing. But – in a sense – it means disappearance of traditional art object, i.e. painting and sculpture.

Departing from Lippard and Chandler’s understanding of dematerialization suggesting primacies of concept, idea, process and art context over form, object, product and art object, respectively, it can be argued that material usage becomes unpretentious in the sense that actual making of the art –object, artistic skill or artist’s touch lose their significance.

On these grounds, dematerialization can be taken as different types of negations. Firstly it can be taken as the negation of art as *aesthetics* in the sense that cognitive value corresponding reflection becomes primary and aesthetic value corresponding sensation turns out to be secondary (Schellekens, 2007, n.p.). Thus Conceptual art becomes the art of the mind instead of being the art of the senses.

Secondly, dematerialization can be taken as the negation of artwork as object/end product. As it is mentioned above, when Lippard and Chandler first uses the term *dematerialization*, they use it in relation with *art*, i.e. “the dematerialization of art.”

When Lippard completes her book entitled *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* in 1973, she uses the term in relation with art object. Although Lippard makes a refinement concerning the usage of dematerialization, she does not explain the significance of this refinement and what art object and dematerialization mean in detail. Since Lippard's 1973 book is "basically a bibliography [of excerpts, statements, art works, symposia] and list of events, arranged chronologically" (Lippard, 2001, p. 3), Lippard makes somehow an "ostensive definition" by demonstrating artworks/art objects, but does not explicate what an art object is. This lack can be taken as one of the difficulties in understanding what Lippard calls dematerialization process.

At this point, it is important to note that in the preface of her book, Lippard acknowledges the inaccuracy of the term *dematerialization* in the sense that "a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as 'material,' as a ton of lead" (Lippard, 2001, p. 5). But she also indicates that since there is a lack of better term, she continues to use it in order to imply the "deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)" (Lippard, 2001, p. 5).

Nevertheless, in her essay "Creativity and Conceptual Art," Margaret Boden (2007) argues in favor of Lippard's usage of the term and reads the "dematerialization of the art object" as a kind of reinforcement of Conceptual art's emphasis on ideas rather than sensory perception (p. 225). Therefore, dematerialization stands for the dominance of ideas linked with intelligence on materiality linked with sensory perception. So dematerialization is a kind of process in which ideas take the lead and become primary, and materiality loses its traditional status and becomes secondary.

David Davies (2007) also argues in this fashion. Davies (2007) claims that for Lippard, when it “dematerializes,” the “art object” does not disappear, but it becomes more elusive (p. 146). As an example of the “dematerialized art object,” Davies gives Robert Barry’s 1969 piece, *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking: 1:36 p.m., 15 June 1969, New York* and argues that for an “art object” such as Barry’s, there are no formal, physical, or material qualities in traditional sense on which the audience can focus on in order to appreciate the work. In other words, the “object,” say printed text on paper or painted text on wall, does not function as a traditional art object. The emphasis of the work is not on its material manifestations, but on its articulation of artistic statement or propositional content (p. 140).

Robert Barry’s 1969 piece is a proper illustration of the dematerialized work on several grounds. First of all, either as a printed text or painted wall on which the sentence “All the things...” is written, there is an object. This presence of object implies that dematerialization does not mean inexistence or absence of an object in an ordinary sense. Nevertheless when it is considered as not an ordinary object, but as an art object, it is not difficult to argue that Barry’s piece as art object is quite different from a painting or a sculpture as an art object in a traditional sense, because aesthetic value of traditional art object, which is based on the material qualities or formal qualities, does not have the same significance in relation with Barry’s piece. Instead of aesthetic value corresponding to the senses of the viewer, cognitive value corresponding to the mind of the viewer takes place. As Atkinson states, instead of an art object that is “looked-at,” there is an idea which is “read-about” (Alberro & Stimson, 2000, p. 54).

Moreover, the presence of the (art)object is a means of conveying this idea. In this respect, because of the deprivation of conventional materiality on aesthetic grounds, Barry's piece is a dematerialized art object. Since in conveying the idea of "All the things..." whether the statement is written on a steel or glass plate, or on a white paper with black letters, or vice versa has no importance and the minimal requirements are enough in order to transmit the idea, how the piece as art object looks like has no significance.

Furthermore, say the printed text on paper as art object is somehow necessary for conveying the real issue with the work; it is not the work itself, because it is only a part of the work. In other words, "all the things, say, Robert Barry knows but of which he is not at the moment thinking: 1:36 p.m., 15 June 1969" cannot be confined to the sentence "All the things..." which is written on the paper or painted on the wall. The main point of the piece, roughly, is not the material form through which it is possible to get the idea, but rather it is the intellectual content or the idea itself. It is this intellectual content that is both actual and significant part of the work and it is not on that paper or wall. Nevertheless it is still difficult to locate this actual and significant part of the work because of its immaterial status.

As illustrations of total "dematerialization of the art object," Tony Godfrey (1998) discusses the works of Ian Wilson, Christine Kozlov. Ian Wilson, who uses spoken words or language as art form, aims at purely verbal artworks, which he calls "oral communication "and later on" discussion and chooses to speak the words aloud in the galleries, and does not want them to be recorded. In order to avoid "any vestigial materialization" and preserve the transient nature of the spoken word, Wilson neither

writes the words on paper nor lets them to be recorded either as a film or audio (Godfrey, 1998, p. 164).

When Burn's "oral communication" is compared with Barry's piece, it is not difficult to grasp that one cannot speak of an art object in the sense of Barry's printed text or painted wall. Even as documentation in a written, recorded or filmed form, there is no trace of any art object. For this work, artistic material is only words in spoken form. With respect to visuality, Burn's work is non-visual and in this sense it bypasses the retinal correspondence between traditional art media and viewers. The only way of perceiving Burn's work is the sense of hearing. In this context, it is straightforward that Burn's work implies a complete dematerialization of art object. In addition to lack of art object in any sense, artistic material in non-visual form, as a result of the absence of documentation, Burn's work is not permanent, but only transient in nature. This transitory nature of the work can be taken as another manifestation of its dematerialized character.

In her work *Information, No Theory* (1970) Christine Kozlov also works with sound, but this time in the presence of a tape recorder. Although the tape recorder can be taken as an object (Godfrey, 1998, p. 164), what it is recording existed only for two minutes, because it is equipped with a continuous loop tape recording the audible sounds (Lippard, 2001, p. 80). So "what was recorded was constantly being erased" in two minutes (Godfrey, 1998, p. 164). For Kozlov's work too, neither artistic material nor medium is conventional. Already in this sense, Kozlov's work is a dematerialized one. Furthermore presence of the tape recorder must not be confused with the presence of Barry's printed text in terms of being an art object, because although the tape recorder is involved in the work, its significance does not lie in its

being a visual part of the work. The importance of the recorder lies in its recording capacity so that Kozlov's work is somehow documented. It is *somehow* documented, because the last recorded piece ceases to exist in two minutes. In this sense, Kozlov's work shares a similar transient nature with Burn's work and this is another reason why it is evaluated as a dematerialized work.

Even from these three Conceptual works which are mentioned above, it is not difficult to infer that boundaries separating the (art)work and (art) object are not explicit. In order to make these boundaries to be more explicit, at least for each works one by one or at most in a general sense, meanings of notions aforementioned above must be clarified. Since the expression of "dematerialization of art object" – one way or another – presupposes an art object that undertakes a dematerialization process, it will be important to understand the nature of this art object. If there is a dematerialization process, it will be comprehensible only by the means of comparing different statuses of the notions mentioned above in conceptual and conventional senses. At this point again it is important to note that a sound account of "dematerialization of art object" begs for clarification of at least two terms that are *art object* and *dematerialization*, respectively. Since the process of dematerialization – to take place – needs an art object, the nature of art object in both conventional and conceptual senses must be clarified. After this clarification followed by a comparison of these senses, "dematerialization of art object" as so-called signature and yet controversial process of conceptual art can be made to be more intelligible.

Comprehensibility of the term *dematerialization* is substantially based on the clarity of the concept of *art object*, because if there is a dematerialization process ongoing for works which are gathered under the label of *Conceptual art*, what is

dematerialized is the art object itself. Thus, it is important to elucidate what the art object undertaking the dematerialization is.

On the other hand, specifically for the Conceptual artworks, it is not an easy task to determine the boundaries of the artwork or art object. Although Conceptual art's historical coverage is roughly between the years 1966 and 1972, works which were produced are largely diverse. As Anne Rorimer (1999) puts it, along with independent use of language and photography with or without documental intent, use of alternative representational systems or different media such as maps, numbers, film, video, performance and site-specific installations is one of the most prominent characteristics of Conceptual art (p. 11).

On these grounds, it was quite difficult for Lippard and Chandler to perform an ontological study of hundreds of art objects or artworks in a categorical manner for explicating dematerialization along with gathering up many periodicals, exhibition catalogues, artworks, interviews and statements in an anthological fashion. At this point, it must be also noted that what Lippard and Chandler want to put forward, when they use the term *dematerialization*, is not to make an ontological claim which will concern all of the Conceptual artworks produced in that period. In this sense, taking the concept of *dematerialization* as a blanket term which covers all of the works may be misleading. Yet, Lippard and Chandler use it as somehow a general characteristic of art objects which were produced during the years between 1966 and 1972 in order to give their working account of conceptual, information or idea art.

But nevertheless, along with acknowledging its difficulty stemming from aforementioned reasons, in order to clarify the notion of *dematerialization* and its demonstrations through the works, some remarks concerning the ontology of

Conceptual artworks will be proposed. In addition to these remarks, another claim pertaining to the relationship between use of the text and dematerialization process in Conceptual art will be set forth.

In this context, although there is no clear cut distinction proposed between work of art, artwork, art object or art piece both in general and in terms of Conceptual art, my starting point will be making a distinction between artwork and art object, which is specifically in the context of Conceptual art.

4.1.1. Artwork and Art object Distinguished

Prior to proceeding, it will be proper to give some preliminary remarks preceding the distinction between artwork and art object. Almost all accounts of Conceptual art which are discussed in the previous chapter emphasize the primacies of concept and idea over form and object. These two primacies eventually results in the third one which is the primacy of process over end product. Therefore concerning specifically Conceptual artworks, it is not difficult to infer that importance of concept and idea over form and object results in a negation of art object as an end or final product. In other words, these primacies reinforce the third one and the notion of *process* becomes prominent.

In this respect, art object loses its importance in relation with both being final and being a product. In Conceptual art, art object is not important anymore as an “end-in-itself,” because it transforms into “a means” of conveying the idea which is paramount. It is not important as being a product, either, because it is the process which is prominent now.

The distinction between *process* which is defined in Macmillan Contemporary Dictionary (1986) as “series of operations in the production of something or actions leading to a specific end” and *product* which is defined as “the result, consequence or destination of process”, can be used as a stepping stone in making a distinction between work and object. Equipped with its connotations such as activity, action, performance or act towards the production or product, the term *work* – when it is compared with the term *object* – is more accomplishing in fulfilling the idea of primacy of process over product. On these grounds, the notion of *artwork* or shortly *work* is more proper than the notion of *art object* in the context of Conceptual art.

Via this refinement concerning the notions, synonymous use of *artwork* and *art object* is intended to be bypassed, because the notion of *art object* with its connotations such as end, product, result and materiality is quite convenient in corresponding the traditional forms of art such as painting and sculpture. Object-status of Conceptual artworks is not identical with object-status of traditional art objects. Whereas art objects in conventional fashion are physical objects fulfilling an aesthetic function with their material or formal qualities; artworks in Conceptual fashion lack both being a physical object as a final product and fulfilling an aesthetic function.

At this point, it is important to note that although a distinction between artwork and art object is set-forth, art object does not cease to be with respect to Conceptual art in the sense that Conceptual artwork includes art object as a part of itself. In other words, artwork in Conceptual context is a process of which art object is only a part as a product. In this context, what the viewer “looks at” as art object is only a part of the

artwork in Conceptual context. So art object is a product as a means of transmitting the idea which is the work itself.

4.1.2. Reconsidering Dematerialization

The notion of *dematerialization* can be reconsidered on these grounds. First of all, the core of the work is the idea or concept, not material form. Secondly this core of the artwork is not confined to what the viewer “looks at” as an art object as a final product. Thus, the idea permeates into the process. This situation can be taken as another interpretation of dematerialization.

Since Conceptual art is the art of the mind rather than the art of senses, or it is art as ideas rather than art as objects, difficulty in locating the artwork arises. If Conceptual artwork is in the level of ideas and not in the level of senses, where does it locate? The easiest answer for this question is to point out the art object to be “looked at.” But the real work in fact lies in the level of ideas which are “read about” through the object. In this sense, art object as a part of artwork becomes a vehicle through which the artwork is grasped or realized.

After making a distinction between the notions of *artwork* and *art object*, and positioning the art object which is a final product as a part of the artwork, it will be proper to discuss the nature of this artwork in Conceptual context.

4.1.3. Conceptual Artworks as Types

In discussing the nature of Conceptual artwork in general, Richard Wollheim's categorization of artwork in his 1968 book *Art and Its Objects* is taken into consideration. In his categorization of artworks, Wollheim makes a preliminary distinction between artworks as physical objects and art works as types.

Instances of painting and sculpture are put in the category of artworks as physical objects. In this sense, Edward Hopper's 1959 painting *Excursion into Philosophy* or Michelangelo's *David* which is completed in 1504 are artworks as physical objects. The main point of the physical-object hypothesis is the identity between the artwork and the physical object in the sense that when it is *David* which is considered as artwork, the artwork is the marble sculpture which is exhibited in Galleria dell'Accademia of Florence. If this physical object, i.e. marble sculpture, is destroyed, then Michelangelo's artwork, too, is destroyed. The same argument is also valid for Hopper's painting. If *Excursion into Philosophy* somehow ceases to exist, then Hopper's artwork will not exist anymore.

But when musical artworks or artworks of literature are considered the relation between the artwork and its instance which is stated above cannot be observed. In other words, when Miguel de Cervantes' magnum opus *Don Quixote* is considered, it cannot be argued that although there is a physical object as a book is present which stands for *Don Quixote*, it is not identical with the artwork itself. In the context of literary artworks, an identity between the artworks and its copies cannot be argued. In this sense Gregory Currie (1989) argues that "[d]estruction of any copy of the work would not be destruction of the work itself" (p. 4). According to Currie (1989), even for original autograph copy of the work or the "set" of all copies of the same

work cannot be identified with the artwork itself (p. 4). A similar situation can be observed in terms of musical works. Although there are several performances of Chopin's Nocturne in B-flat minor, neither of the performances is identical with Chopin's musical work. According to Wollheim (1980), in terms of musical and literal artworks, physical-object hypothesis does not work, because those kinds of "works of art are not physical *objects*" (p. 74). Via using the term *type* which was introduced by C. S. Peirce, Wollheim (1980) argues that these kinds of artworks are types and eventually copies, instances or performances of them are tokens (p. 75). In other words, literary and musical works are not identical with their instances, but they are distinct from them as a type cannot be identical with its tokens.

For Currie (1989), it is the concept of *authenticity* as being a determinant of aesthetic value, which lies beneath Wollheim's distinction between artworks as physical objects and artworks as types. By the term *authenticity*, Currie points at "the property of being the object originally produced by the artist" (p. 5).

At this point, when Conceptual artworks are considered, where can they be located? Are Conceptual artworks physical objects like paintings and sculptures, or are they types like literary and musical artworks? Again, the same difficulty which was stated in the beginning of this chapter occurs. Because of diverse kinds of medium or representational systems such as language, photography, maps, video, performance and installations, it is not easy to categorize Conceptual artworks. Nevertheless, several projections can be made.

First of all, since Conceptual artworks in themselves are not literary or musical artworks, it seems to be possible to argue that Conceptual artworks are not types. In addition, for many Conceptual works, there are physical objects as end products

which are exhibited like instances of painting and sculpture. Yet, following from the arguments which are made in favor of the distinction between artwork and art-object, and concerning the process of dematerialization, Conceptual artworks cannot be evaluated in the scope of physical-object hypothesis.

When the dematerialization process, which results in negation of artwork as object or end product and negation of artist as skillful agent; ephemeral or transient character of Conceptual works; use of words as artistic material as well as instructions and a form of documentation are taken into consideration, it can be argued that Conceptual artworks are types.

Type-token distinction presupposes the type as an abstract concept and tokens as particular instances of this concept. In this sense, while types are generally abstract and unique tokens are concrete particulars of them. There is an ontological distinction between a type and its tokens, type is “a general sort of thing,” whereas tokens are both “particular and concrete instances” (Wetzel, 2006, n.p.).

Nevertheless, my argument will be that for many Conceptual artworks, in which concept and idea are primary over material form and object, “lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious” (Lippard, 2001, p. vii) in a sense dematerialized material usage is at stake, the relation between idea/concept as artwork and its realization or instantiation as art object can be considered similar as the relation between a type and its tokens.

Although Wollheim, who reads the type-token relation as a form of exemplification in an Aristotelian fashion, denies the independent existence of type apart from its tokens without which the type cannot be seen or heard (Wetzel, 2006, n.p.). Since in Conceptual works, artworks lies in the level of ideas, and execution of art object is

somehow perfunctory, there are Conceptual artworks as types, which can exist independent of their instantiations or exemplification through its tokens.

4.2. Word-Based Conceptual Artworks as Types

Since in Conceptual artworks words is used in several ways such as artistic material, a kind of documentation, or in a manner of instruction, it is easier to categorize the artworks as types. First of all, although Conceptual art works, in which the use of language is apparent, are not literary artworks; use of language or words can be taken as a common ground in order to emphasize the argument in favor of Conceptual artworks as types. In addition, dematerialized character of art objects in Conceptual practices is another aspect which can strengthen the claim of Conceptual artworks as types.

With its several forms, the use of words in Conceptual art is one of the main conditions reinforcing the dematerialization process which can be seen in almost every example of Conceptual artworks, and constituting one of the distinctive characteristics of Conceptual artworks. In this respect, it can be claimed that as the art object dematerializes in one way or another, the place of dematerialized art object is replaced by the use of words. Concerning the notion of *dematerialization*, Peter Osborne (2002) sees the notion itself “as a way of summing up what was historically novel about an art that was dependent upon linguistic means” (p. 29).

According to Godfrey (1998), there is a strong link between the implementation of words by the artist “using words primarily or exclusively by the end of 1960s” and “the ongoing project to dematerialize the art object” (p. 163). In this respect Peter

Osborne (2002) claims that “a significant body of language-based conceptual art of the 1960s and early 1970s aspired to make art out of wholly linguistic means” rather than using language as artistic material (p. 28). In parallel with Godfrey, Sandler (1988) also claims that presenting the ideas in verbal forms as artworks is one kind of dematerialization of object (p. 343). In this context, dematerialization takes place in the level of verbalization rather than the visualization of the idea. Thus, Conceptual art ranging from an idea-generated object to verbalization of the idea itself exists “in the gap between verbalization and visualization” (Sandler, 1988, p. 345). As a demonstration of his claim, Sandler (1988) mentions the wall drawings of Sol LeWitt, which are in fact “verbal proposals executed directly on walls by his associates” (p. 348). Along with their being as verbal proposals, which are decided prior to execution of them, and their executions which are perfunctory, wall drawings of LeWitt between verbalization and visualization. Concerning his use of words LeWitt argues that use of words stemming from ideas about art must not be confused with literature, they are art (Sandler, 1988, p. 349). According to Peter Osborne (2002), LeWitt’s conception as “linguistic paraphernalia of preparatory work and thinking” can be considered in terms of “representation of an art idea” (p. 27). When they are used in art context, texts do not retain their function in literature. When they are put into the art context, texts are equipped with a claim of being artworks in themselves (Osborne, 2002, p. 27). Concerning the text as artworks and texts as literature issue, Lippard (1970) emphasizes the art context and states that it is not the medium or message themselves, but how they are presented and in what context they are presented is the matter: “No art, no matter how much it resembles life, or literature, can call itself anything but art as long as it has been, is, or ever will be shown in an art context” (Lippard, 2001, pp. 188-189).

Charles Harrison (2004) also argues in favor of implementation of words, followed from the “the lack of physically robust material – no expressive brushwork on the walls, no accumulations of three-dimensional stuff on the floor” (p. 51). Harrison (2004) emphasizes Conceptual art’s concern with ideas in the form of texts, plans, diagrams or photographs and states that “lack of physically robust material” or the absence of object are followed “by the recourse to linguistic specification and description” (pp. 50-51). In this manner, Harrison, too, acknowledges the linkage between the use of words and dematerialization of art object. Another important remark in relation to the use of language in Conceptual art which Harrison (2004) makes, is that works which were produced in “the first and definitive phase of the Conceptual art movement” between 1967 and 1969 are good illustrations of the parallelism between the use of language and the process of dematerialization in Conceptual art practices (p. 51).

According to Osborne (2002), when it is used as a “privileged means for the *negation of visuality* as the distinguishing quality of modern art,” using words as a medium gets its most direct character in the sense that a shift is forced in the context of visuality which is fortified by “modernist aestheticism.” When the use of words is at stake, “reading” as a different kind of visual attention substitutes the “looking” and this shift in terms of visual attention has its echoes in the “ontological status of artworks.” So Osborne (2002) claims that language use, at the same time, is “a theoretical model for the ontological status of all artworks as special kinds of ‘statement’ or proposition” (p. 27).

In this respect, examinations of artworks of Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner, which are substantially word-based and from the “definitive phase

of the Conceptual art movement” (Harrison, 2004, p. 51), will be proper in terms of demonstrating the arguments stated in this chapter.

4.2.1. Joseph Kosuth’s Investigations

In order to examine the use of words in Joseph Kosuth’s artworks and to trace the process of dematerialization in them, it will be helpful to summarize Kosuth’s definition of the artwork as proposition.

For Kosuth (1991), “a work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as comment on art” (pp. 19-20). In this respect, Kosuth (1991) continues, “[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” (p. 20). Thus, for Kosuth, conceptual artworks are definitions of art in the sense that they question the nature or function of art.

For Kosuth (1991), “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” (p. 20). In this respect, the crucial point is that Kosuth’s use of the word *language* is not merely literal. Based on his articulation of work of art as analytic proposition which “is not dependent on any empirical, much less any aesthetic, presupposition about the nature of things” (1991, p. 20), Kosuth’s aims is to dismiss the relation between artwork and factuality, i.e. aesthetics. In other words, artworks as being analytic propositions possess not factual, but linguistic character in that “they do not describe the behavior of physical, or even mental objects, they

express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art” (Kosuth, 1991, p. 21).

Joseph Kosuth’s renowned work *One and Three Chairs* is made in 1965, four years before the publication of his infamous essay “Art After Philosophy” is published. *One and Three Chairs* belongs to the groups of works containing *One and Three Brooms* and *One and Five Clocks*. When Kosuth proposes his 1960 *Investigations* which will be discussed soon, he entitles the group respectively as *Proto-Investigations*. According to Litz Kotz (2010), the work combining an object with photograph, and dictionary definition of that object as a photostat equates “language, object, and photograph within itself” (pp. 182-184). Kotz (2010) emphasizes the “quasi-linguistic” character of the work and claims that it is “like the statement ‘this is a chair, presented as art’” (p. 184).

In this sense, Kosuth’s *Proto-Investigations* are good illustrations of artwork as analytic proposition, because they make an art claim of objects such that the tripartite model composed by three objects representing one and the same thing *is* art.

Another point which is worth considering is that although it is not explicit, via use of language in the form of dictionary definition, Kosuth opens the way for his *Investigations* in the sense that chair as *an object* and *the dictionary definition* of chair have equal status in representing *the* chair. In other words, the text itself, without any need of its material manifestation as a photostat, becomes a substitute for the object itself. Although in *Proto-Investigations*, the object retains his position in the artwork, it will not take place in *Investigations*. Via a linguistic or textual means, the object will dematerialize into its dictionary definition alone.

In the context of artwork and art object distinction, for *One and Three Chairs*, art object which is the tripartite model consisting of object, dictionary definition and photograph, is not identical with the artwork itself which lies in level of ideas. *The idea* of chair or *the chair* is the artwork itself, but it cannot be shown qua *being the idea* of chair or being *the chair*. In other words the statement in representing *the chair*, all representations of it have equal status. In this sense, in the realization of the work, what we “look at” is three chairs, but what we “read from” the work also includes the fourth one. In this sense what we “looked at”, i.e. art object, is only a means of conveying the artwork, i.e. the idea concerning the nature of representation. Thus, artwork is not what we see, but rather what we think.

Another aspect of dematerialization occurring in *One and Three Chairs* is that as long as the photograph is the photograph of that particular chair, it is not important how that particular chair looks like as long as it is chair. And as long as it is a dictionary definition of *a chair*, content of definition can vary. The key point is the same artwork *One and Three Chairs* as a type can be instantiated as tokens spontaneously in different places. Since the artwork is not the art object itself, the relation between them is a type-token relation. In this sense, traditional physical object status of the art object is abandoned.

Use of the title as a linguistic means can also be considered, because the title *One and Three Chairs* does not simply imply the art object which is looked-at, but rather the artwork including the idea of chair and the nature of representation is pointed at by means of it.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that *One and Three Chairs* as an artwork as a type needs instantiation or exemplification of itself as art object as a token. In this

respect, *One and Three Chairs* supports Wollheim's claim of the independent existence of type apart from its tokens without which the type cannot be seen or heard (Wetzel, 2006, n.p.).

Kosuth's *First Investigations* produced between 1967 and 1968 have subtitle of *Art as Idea as Idea*. In his interview with Jeanne Siegel, Kosuth (1991) indicates that the subtitle is a reference to Ad Reinhardt who stated that "art is art-as-art and everything is everything else" (p. 47). Kosuth (1991) explicates his subtitle as follow:

'Art as idea' was obvious; ideas or concepts as the work itself. But this is a reification—it's using the idea as an object to function within the prevailing formalist ideology of art. The addition of the second part—"Art as Idea *as Idea*"—intended to suggest that the real creative process, and the radical shift, was in changing the idea of art itself (p. 47).

First Investigations consists of a series of photostats of the dictionary definitions of particular objects such as water and painting; adjectives such as black and white; or abstract nouns such as meaning, universal, time, idea and nothing. Via this series, what Kosuth wants to present is the *idea* of say water, black or meaning. In this sense, the photostat itself is not the artwork, the artwork is the *idea*. Even the words in the definition are not the artwork itself, they only supply "the *art information*; just as the shape and color of a work could be considered its art information" (Schwarz, 1989, p. 11).

It is important to note that *First Investigations*, as being different from *Proto-Investigations*, do not have the physical object and the photograph of it, but only the dictionary definition in order to present the *idea*. In this sense from *Proto-Investigations* to *First Investigations*, there is a dematerialization such that the

physical object and the photograph of it are not contained. In the context of *First Investigations*, the artwork as the *idea* remains, but the art object is reduced into the photostat of dictionary definition. Another dematerialization occurs within the *First Investigations* in themselves in the sense that Kosuth moves from “presenting an abstraction of a particular (water, air) to abstractions of abstractions (meaning, empty, universal, nothing, time)” (Schwarz, 1989, p. 12). Thus Kotz (2010) states that “In this peculiar process of reduction, first a basic material (water) and then a linguistic abstraction (meaning) is pared down to its idea” (p. 186). Again art object as the photostat is not the artwork as the idea. In this sense, art object dematerializes and words themselves are enough to fill the space remained. It cannot be denied that there is an object which is black square with white type, but that object’s formal or material qualities such its colors or dimensions have no significance. So the *First Investigation* with subtitle *Art as Idea as Idea “Meaning”* can be in any color or dimension as an object, but this changes do not echo in the artwork itself, because artwork itself is in the level of ideas, not level of objects.

Since the ontological status of *Art as Idea as Idea “Meaning”* as physical object is irrelevant, this artwork, either, cannot be considered in terms of physical-object hypothesis. All physical instances of *First Investigations* are tokens of the artwork as idea in general and the artwork as the idea of “meaning” in particular. In other words, all of the photostats of dictionary definitions of water, painting, black, white, nothing, meaning etc. are the tokens of the *idea* in general as type and all instances of the photostats of dictionary definition of meaning are tokens of the *idea of meaning* in particular as type.

According to Kosuth, when it is confronted by a viewer, the separation between one's ideas and her use of material in order to convey this idea becomes "uncommunicatively wide" (Schwarz, 1989, p. 12). What Kosuth wants to surpass is somehow impassable gap, so he adopts the means of language "as a more effective means of transmitting a kind of 'art information' that could be increasingly detached from any concrete, material condition" (Kotz, 2010, p. 186). This is another demonstration of the role of the text in the dematerialization of art object.

4.2.2. Robert Barry's Something Series

Robert Barry's artworks which were produced in 1969 are good illustrations of the dematerialized work in several aspects. Again for Barry's artworks, use of words is apparent, while the art object is dematerialized.

Robert Barry's 1969 pieces, *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking: 1:36 p.m., 15 June 1969, New York* which is discussed in the previous chapter; *Something that is taking shape in my mind and will sometime come to consciousness*; *Something which is very near in place and time, but not yet known to me*; and *Something which can never be any specific thing* are considerably similar works in terms of both the use of words and the dematerialization process.

When they are considered with respect to dematerialization, it can be said that either it is typed text on paper, printed text, or painted on wall, there is an object in ordinary sense. And in this sense dematerialization does not mean inexistence or absence of the object. But when it is considered as not an ordinary object, but as an art object, Barry's pieces as art object is quite different from a painting. Although it has formal

qualities such as “typewriting on paper” and given dimensions such as “10.2 x 15.2 cm”, these qualities have no aesthetic bearings as an art object in a traditional sense, whose material form is vital for its aesthetic value. For all of the pieces given above, the actual value is not the aesthetic one in the level of the senses, but the cognitive value corresponding to the mind of the viewer. In addition, the presence of the art object is a necessary means of conveying artwork which is roughly an idea. In this respect, because of the deprivation of conventional materiality on aesthetic grounds, Barry’s pieces are dematerialized art objects. For all of the pieces, whether the statement is written on a glass plate, or printed on a paper has no importance in terms of the artwork.

Based on the distinction made between artwork and art object as only a perceivable part of it, apart from the minimal and necessary requirements for conveying the idea, how the piece as art object looks like has no significance. Barry’s pieces, in this sense, are more than the art objects that the viewer “looks at.” In this sense, the sentence of “Something that is taking shape in my mind and will sometime come to consciousness” which is typed on paper with dimensions 28x22 cm is not the artwork, but at best is the art object. In fact what the art work is the *something* that is taking shape in Barry’s mind and will sometime come to consciousness. In this sense, artwork is not present. It is an idea, concept, emotion or something which “will sometime come to consciousness.” Thus, artwork is already dematerialized. In act, it does not have any material quality. Although, concerning his intention of using words, Robert Barry says that “I use words in a sense that makes them meaningless, and of course the only way you can make something meaningless is to present it in all of its possible meanings” (Godfrey, 1998, p. 358), words are used to point at or

imply something which is not present yet. It is obvious that only via words, something like that can be realized.

If they are examined in more detail, it is probable to meet surprising art works. For example, for the piece *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking: 1:36 p.m., 15 June 1969, New York*; it cannot be anything “which Barry was not at the moment of 1:36 p.m., 15 June 1969 and in New York”. Although the statement seems to refer to something which is sensible or intellectual transcending the object which the viewer “looks at,” it is in fact nothing. Or for the piece *Something which is very near in place and time, but not yet known to me*, that *something* can be anything which is material or immaterial, and interestingly it is the artwork.

Although he does it in a very implicit way, through the pieces discussed above, Barry questions the being of artwork. As he puts it in his interview with Patricia Norvell, “the actual nature of the work of art is not known by anyone including myself” as cited in (Alberro and Norvell, 2001, p. 96).

According to Osborne (2002), for the pieces mentioned above, words have an important role. Focus of the artwork which is “not the material but the mental realization of its presence” is implied via language (p. 123).

4.2.3. Lawrence Weiner’s Statements

Prior to discussing the *Statements* of Weiner, beginning with his 1968 “statement of intent” will be helpful in that discussion:

The artist may construct the piece.

The piece may be fabricated.

The piece need not be built.

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership (Lippard, 2001, p. xvii).

Weiner's "statement of intent" is important in presenting the core idea behind his works. First of all, the artist himself abandons his authority as an agent on the piece. Artist himself may construct the piece, or may not; the piece may also be constructed by someone else or may not be. For the second case, artist as the agent producing the work is abandoned. Moreover, the piece even need not be built and there is no difference between these three cases.

When *Statements'* instructive characters are considered, the importance of the last case in terms of dematerialization becomes clear.

For Weiner, in terms of *Statements*, the main point is to convey the information, because it is the work which is information. In this respect Weiner argues that "it doesn't matter if it's physically conveyed or whether it's conveyed verbally or orally" (as cited in Kotz, 2010, p. 199). From this quotation, it can be easily inferred that for Weiner, as long as it is conveyed, the medium through which the information is conveyed is not important.

Following from the third case of the "statement of intent" and Weiner's view on information, it can be argued that for both of the *Statements* and their possible realizations, physical status or material existence is irrelevant, because the work itself is information or idea.

Weiner's 1968 *Statement Nr. 017* can be used as the illustration: *Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can.*

Whether this statement is written on a text or on a wall; or is announced by Weiner himself or not does not matter as long as the information in the statement is somehow conveyed. In this sense, the artwork in relation with this statement, first of all, is not the medium itself through which the information is conveyed. In other words, a piece of paper, or a rectangular canvas, or a wall of a gallery on which the statement may be written have the same status as physical objects which may be considered as art object and they are not the artwork itself. Although statement's physical or verbal announcement can be taken as an art object, again for Weiner's artworks, too, art object is not identical with the artwork. First of all, the artwork is the information: "Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can." Although this information is about a material process which may be performed by an agent, qua being information, it is an idea.

Even if the Statement is executed by the artist himself or by another one, the final product of the execution will not be the artwork of *Statement Nr. 017*. The piece may be executed by Weiner with a green spray paint from the height of 50 cm or it may be performed by another one with a white spray paint from the height of 1 m. Although they are different token-performances as executions, as being art objects they have the same status and they are not the artwork, either. The end product of these token-performances which are green and white, respectively are not the artwork either. Shortly, although all of the options and their possible result can be somehow considered as art objects, none of them is the artwork. Where is the artwork then?

Since there is no work of art in a traditional sense which can be pointed at, it is difficult and almost impossible to answer this question. In this context, proposed distinction between idea/concept which is the artwork as a type and its realization which is an art object as a token is applicable.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the concept of *dematerialization*, which was first used by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, is examined by the means of a new characterization of word-based Conceptual artworks as *types*.

Concerning the notion of *dematerialization*, it is argued that the notion itself is not clear, though the “dematerialization of art object” is posited as the signature aspect of Conceptual art. Lippard used the term *dematerialization* in relation with art object, since the art object in the context of Conceptual art was not clarified, the notion of *dematerialization* was not clear, either.

In her 1973 book *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, Lucy Lippard included many artistic practices such as artworks, documents, interviews or symposia and many artistic media such as text, map, data based works, photography, video, performance or installation, dematerialization can apply all of these artistic practices and media (Lippard, 2001, p. 3). So to give a lucid account of this vague notion is important in putting forward the distinctive aspects of Conceptual artworks which are implied by the concept of *dematerialization*.

On these grounds this thesis clarified the notion of *dematerialization* via offering a new characterization for the word-based Conceptual artworks as *types*. At this point

word-based Conceptual artworks imply the artworks in which words are used in an isolated form or within the meaningful sentence, as artistic material.

In order to realize this aim, first of all, art-work and art object which is dematerialized is distinguished. This distinction leads to the claim that in the context of Conceptual art, the notion of *artwork* is more proper than the notion of *art object* and *art object* itself is evaluated as the final product or a part of the *artwork*.

Departing from the considerations such as dematerialization process as a negation of artwork as object qua end product; ephemeral or transient character of Conceptual works; use of words as artistic material, it is argued that Conceptual artworks are *types* by considering Richard Wollheim's classification of artworks in terms of types and physical objects. Furthermore, this claim is supported by the similarity between two relations: The relation between idea/concept as artwork and its realization/instantiation as art object and the relation between a type and its tokens. For many Conceptual artworks, in which concept and idea are primary over material form and object; the relation between idea/concept as artwork and its realization/instantiation as art object is considered similar with the relation between a type and its tokens.

Specifically for word-based Conceptual artworks, it is proper to apply the categorization of artworks as types. In this sense, use of words is taken as a common ground in order to emphasize the argument in favor of Conceptual artworks as types. In addition, dematerialized character of art objects in Conceptual practices is another aspect strengthening the claim of Conceptual artworks as types. In this sense, use of words in Conceptual art is one of the main conditions reinforcing the

dematerialization process which can be seen in almost every example of word-based Conceptual artworks, and constituting one of the distinctive characteristics of them.

Through this characterization of Conceptual *artworks* as *types*, the notion of dematerialization is explicated. Finally, it is argued that as the art object dematerializes; in word-based Conceptual artworks, the place of dematerialized art object is replaced by the use of words.

The arguments are discussed via notable word-based works produced between 1967 and 1969. Since it is the first and defining phase of Conceptual art, this interval is considered as crucially important. At this point, it is important to note that the process of dematerialization is not confined to word-based artworks alone. It is possible to follow the traces of this process in different Conceptual practices which make use of several artistic media. Another important point is that when they used the term *dematerialization*, Lippard and Chandler did not aim at making an ontological claim which would concern all of the Conceptual artworks produced in that period. On these grounds, taking the concept of *dematerialization* as a blanket term which covers all of the works may be misleading.

Nevertheless, Lippard and Chandler used *dematerialization* as somehow a general characteristic of art objects which were produced the years between 1966 and 1972 in order to give their working account of Conceptual, information or idea art. In this sense, dematerialization was not only a means of art making in those years, it was also the main theme of the underlying discourse beneath the critique of commodification of art. Simple, modest and ephemeral material use; refraining from skillful artistic maneuvers stemming from dematerialization as an art making tool is an important aspect of the critique of commodification of art. In order to make sense

of the art practices taking place between early 1960s and late 1970s in socio-political contexts, dematerialization is a key concept.

Conceptual art, even though it is not referred as Conceptual art anymore, is still effective in contemporary art practices in several ways. When analyzed chronologically, the first term that comes up is Conceptualism. Conceptualism, both with its historical and geographical boundaries, is a more encompassing term than the term Conceptual art, which has more definite historical and geographical boundaries.

In order to comprehend the effects of Conceptual art in subsequent art practices including contemporary art and to consider Conceptual art in a larger framework, it will be helpful to underline the distinction between Conceptual art and Conceptualism. In this respect, whereas Conceptual art has its historical delimitations in between the years 1966 and 1972 and geographic delimitations in United States, Britain and Australia; Conceptualism as an encompassing term refers to a global movement including locations such as Japan, South America and Russia and was influential through the 1980s. Before the 1980s, anti-visual character of Conceptual art that can be summarized in its negation of art as aesthetics gave Conceptual art a somehow integrated stance. However, through the 1980s, with the application of mass-media visual forms in addition to traditional artistic media, both disrupted the integration and gave way to the post-Conceptual tendencies (Osborne, 2002, p. 176). In other words, in the early years of Conceptual art, there was a reactionary attitude against traditional artistic media such as painting and sculpture; and this attitude was a distinctive characteristic of Conceptual art.

Along with post-Conceptual practices that emerged in the 1980s, traditional artistic media gained back its currency. Although, in these post-practices it seems like concessions are made from Conceptual art, actually core themes of Conceptual art are internalized and still in effect under the title of Conceptualism. Dematerialization of the art object, institutional critique, and linguistic orientation are prominent among these core themes (Camnitzer, Farver & Weiss, 1999, pp. viii-ix). These core themes of Conceptual art echo in Conceptualism equipped with more political and ideological dimensions. Use of new artistic media such as text, photography, performance based works; site-specific installations; information art, video art, digital art and internet-based art are concrete manifestations of this echo. Through these new artistic media, important aspects of Conceptual art such as intervention and appropriation, which are implicit in the early years of Conceptual art, come forward. By the means of post-Conceptual practices following Conceptualism, one of the main projects of Conceptual art that investigates the boundaries between what is art and what is not art, has incorporated a new task. This new task is to investigate the boundaries between art and public. In this respect, socio-political events that include Vietnam War, black student movement, women liberation movement, effects of the Cold War, decline of Soviet Union, became more and more incorporated in underlying discourses beneath the artworks.

In the context of dematerialization, for the art practices following Conceptual art, it can be argued that dematerialization itself became a tool of art making in a way that art can be more infused with daily life. This eventually leads public character of art to come forth. In this sense, via implementing Conceptual strategies, contemporary art practices become more interested in the socio-political and economic issues. Public character of contemporary art which is based on collaboration as well as

interdisciplinary aspects is inherited from Conceptual practices and Conceptualism in a more encompassing way.

Due to art institutions' determinative power on the status of artworks, Conceptual art's anti-institutional aspect is one of the apparent characteristic of Conceptual art. Through Conceptualism covering the 1980s, this core aspect is also blended with ideological critique directed to power relations in art systems.

Linguistic orientations reinforcing the dematerialization process also cause art and public to come closer and strengthen the interaction between art and its viewers. This reinforcement is a result of a common sphere stemming from language that is used by both the artists and viewers in society. On these grounds politic and public stances which were previously implicit in the early years of Conceptual art come to be explicit in reevaluation these stances with the use of mass-media. Words presented visually in public imply political or ideological struggle in recent practices (Godfrey, 1998, p. 346). As a demonstrative medium taking place in the common sphere between art and public, site-specific installation can be given as an example. In this sense, word-based works of Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner are not confined to the late 1960s.

In 1988, Lawrence Weiner wrapped the statement of "Fire and Brimstone Set in a Hollow Formed by Hand" around a railway bridge in a public art exhibition. Since the statement holds a three-dimensional space, Weiner acknowledges the sculpture-like character of his work. This word-based work is an example of a site-specific installation and it can be read as an example of diminishing of Conceptual art's anti-visual character in the 1980s, because application of Weiner's *Statements* in specific sites becomes visually elegant via application of larger words in color (Godfrey,

1998, p. 357). Like the language, which is used to shift the focus from the object to the context or the discourse surrounding the object itself, site-specific installations direct the focus to the space. In terms of the primacy of art context over the art object, for the site-specific installations too, the effects of the dematerialization process can be seen in post-Conceptual practices taking place in the 1990s. Lawrence Weiner's 1991-1992 *Displacement* Series is an example of linguistic orientation along with site-specific installation as well as dematerialization. *Displacement* Series are intended to draw attention to the physical world in which they are implemented. For this intention, Weiner chooses public sites. Statements that are written on gallery walls, floors or written on exterior walls of buildings seem to have sculptural qualities (Osborne, 2002, p. 186). Another example of site-specific installation which is also word-based is Joseph Kosuth's 1989 series *Zero and Not*. *Zero and Not* consists of different paragraphs from Freud's writings written on the walls of Freud Museum in Vienna. In this work, Kosuth also crosses over the words in order to implicate "the repressed always returns" (Godfrey, 1998, p. 358). In the late 1980s, Robert Barry also begins to paint single words such as "hope", "anxious" and "explain" on walls of galleries. Like Weiner's works, Barry's works, too, become visually elegant in the 1980s. These three examples are illustrations of the argument of traditional artistic media gaining back its currency along with post-Conceptual practices that emerged in the 1980s. Apart from these works, artists such as Felix Gonzalez Torres, Willie Doherty, Tracey Emin are some notable artist who produce word-based works in 1990s.

For specifically site-specific installations, it is important to note that "as a medium, installation is defined by spatial location rather than by the materials that constitute it" (Hopkins, 2000, p. 229). This claim shows that traces of dematerialization can be

followed in one of the most notable medium of art in recent practices in the sense that it is not the material which is used, but the location or site which is implied is important.

Perhaps, one of the most important effects of Conceptual art in recent art practices is that to open way for the use of mixed media. Since one of the major criticism of Conceptual art against formalist modernism is the specificity of the medium, in Conceptual practices of late 1960s and early 1970s was attempted to be surpassed via use of several media simultaneously. Although there is no explicit intention of criticizing the modernist paradigm of specific medium beneath contemporary artworks, use of mixed media is a kind of inheritance which was left from Conceptual practices.

In this respect, Tatsuo Miyajima's *Review Time* and Barbara Campbell's *1001 nights cast* can be discussed as demonstrations of this argument. Tatsuo Miyajima's 1999 *Review Time* is a site-specific installation consisting of 2450 blue LED units. In this work, Miyajima integrated digital art using electronic signs in numeric form and information art referencing the number of deaths took place in the twentieth century in an installation set up. Instead of red, orange or green LEDs, Miyajima uses blue lights in order to represent the death in a dark room. On these grounds, Miyajima's artwork which was commissioned for the Venice Biennale in 1999 use several media such as number as LED units and installation is an example of mixed media works (Osborne, 2002, p. 188).

Another example of mixed media work belongs to Barbara Campbell, an Australian performance artist. *1001 nights cast* is a durational performance piece which took place between 21 June 2005 and 17 March 2008. The performance included live web

streams of the artist reading a short text at sunset of the artist's location. For 1001 days, each morning Campbell reads a news report about the events taking place in the Middle East. Then, the artist selects a phrase from the report and depicts it using water colors. Afterwards, these renderings are posted on the project website in a daily manner for participants, i.e. other artists, writers to write a new story using that day's specific phrase. The limit of the stories is up to 1001 words. Later in the same day, at sunset time, the artist reads out the story submitted by the participant in front of a live webcam which only shows the mouth of the artist reading. A last detail of the performance procedure is that at the beginning of every webcast, the artist reveals the number of the performance via her tongue piercing on which the number of the performance is written. Since the end of the performance, Campbell has only included the rendered water colors, submitted stories and that day's news report under the archive link of the project website. The artist has decided not to include the video broadcasts of the performance and this decision is in line with temporality of performance art. So in this work, there are several kinds of media which are used simultaneously such the news report as a found text, water color rendering of a selected phrase, the project website as a space for interaction, a story as a text provided by the interactivity of the participant and live webcast of the final performance as sound and image. In addition of this mixed media character of the work, there is also a ritualistic aspect stemming from the daily repetition of performance procedure for 1001 days.

In this context, for further studies, the philosophical as well as the political discourse beneath the idea of dematerialization, and socio-cultural conditions which end up with such an idea can be discussed. Through these discussions, socio-political map of the 1960s United States in particular or world in general can be drawn with respect to

this characterization of the art as dematerialized. This reading can provide new insights in evaluating contemporary and recent art practices in terms of institutional critique and different use of media.

Conceptual art has evolved around the question of “what is art?” In this sense, the main prospect of Conceptual art is to define art, but the result was somehow different. While trying to draw boundaries surrounding art, Conceptual practices weakened the boundaries between art and non-art as well as art and daily life. In order to understand the contemporary art making which substantially blur the line between art and non art, it is important to understand their historical preliminaries in Conceptual practices. A research focusing on these historical and sociological which made way to the development of Conceptual art can be instrumental in understanding recent practices.

Another research topic for further studies can be offered around one of the most apparent dichotomies between idea and material or concept and form in Conceptual art. Taking these dichotomies as binary oppositions, a deconstruction can be carried out in order to show the dependencies and relations between concept and material characteristics of visual arts.

In a more local perspective, the effect of Conceptual practices in the contemporary art arena in Turkey can be investigated via the question of why there is a delay of ten to fifteen years in receiving such an important and somehow global art movement in an effective way.

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