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Ken-ichi and the members of the Executive Committee of the IAA for giving me the opportunity to edit this volume. I am also most grateful to all the contributors for accepting the invitation to partake in this endeavor and to contribute essays in which they discuss some of the central issues of the relationship between aesthetics and globalization. As I implied in this Introduction and as it is also very obvious from the essays that follow, aesthetics is a part and parcel of the current globalization processeses. The same is true of art which is a topic that is very frequently indissociable from our discussions of aesthetics *per se*.

In recent years the *IAA Yearbook* did not appear in printed version but online only. I thought it would be good to have this yearbook in printed form too and have thus asked my friend and colleague Gao Jianping to help in this endeavor. Thus the Chinese Society for Aesthetics and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing have kindly stepped in and have made the printing of this volume possible. It is thus to Jianping, to the colleagues in the Chinese Society for Aesthetics, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, that we owe this publication. For this I would wish to express to all of them my deepest gratitude.

Conceptual Art: A Base for Global Art or the End of Art?

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Global art embraces any type of art, including conceptual, that participates in the art world through cultural exchange or commerce. The exchange is not limited to one-directional transfers from dominant art cultures to minor indigenous sources. Taken in the broadest sense, the term global means worldwide, universal, all-inclusive, complete, or exhaustive. Global art has emerged as an important topic for understanding expansion of the art world to link artistic developments, both international and local, across the entire world.[27] It is of interest to aesthetics, as well as a factor in foreign policy and international cultural exchange and commerce.[28]

During the past half century beginning in the late 1960s, conceptual art has become a staple of artists on every continent. Conceptual art replaces "a perceptual encounter with unique objects in favor of an engagement with ideas."[29] Conceptualism has become a global enterprise to which artists in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, and other parts of the world respectively make important contributions. I find it best, in short, to think of conceptual art as a manifestation that arises in each case in a local or regional setting and not as a movement flowing across borders from a single source.

I shall begin with a brief consideration of the historical origins and main concerns of global conceptual art before turning to some larger questions, to wit: whether conceptual art offers a transcultural basis for art with a common aesthetic perspective, how it contributes to a new aesthetic for the art and culture, and whether it is part of a tendency that would discount art altogether as a feature of culture.

[27] In 2003 (February 9 – May 4) the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis mounted an exhibition, *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age*, to explore how contemporary art is practiced in a global context. Among the questions explored were these: "how global change impacts art, the blurring of lines between disciplines, how a global sensibility takes physical shape." The year long project included programming in the visual, new media, film/video and performing arts and was the culmination of four years of research and planning by a team of scholars and curators from across the world.

[28] Morrie Warshawski, *Going International: Case Statement*, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2000. Internet. This report states that the arts and culture have become a greater concern for foreign policy as economic rather than military competition increases. The report states that art and culture industries (including not for profit and commercial) represented the second largest USA export category, circa 2000.

[29] *Groveart.com, Copyright* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003).

To focus the discussion in an East–West framework, I will examine the conceptual art of Xu Bing (Chinese) and Joseph Kosuth (North American), two representative conceptual artists whose language-based projects address central issues of the global phenomenon. I shall then move to the topic's broader implications which will include a critique of global conceptual art. This combination of a detailed analysis of particular approaches to conceptual art in two distinct cultures, together with a look at broader implications of global conceptual art, will provide insight into important aspects of global art.

First, a brief overview of the evolution of Conceptual art in certain historical precedents among philosophers and artists and a suggestion of its main concerns.

From the earliest times, serious writings about art have recognized polarity of the materials, or form of art and the ideas expressed through them. We find this tension reflected in the Platonic dialogues and in Plato's conclusion that art, especially where the sensuous and the emotions predominate, cannot be trusted as a guide to truth. Still, Plato recognized how deficient a society would be, lacking the intellectual and social values arising from art.

Like Plato, Hegel in the nineteenth century, recognized the material-formal vs. ideational tension, and he too gave priority to the conceptual over the material. His organization of the ontological and historical development of the arts into symbolic, classical, and romantic modes reflects a preference for idea or Spirit over the material. He specifically esteemed poetry in the romantic mode as the highest manifestation of Spirit in art because its "material" element is language and thus, unlike pigment or stone, originates in mental processes.[30]

Without inviting a lengthy debate over Plato and Hegel, I simply offer as a proposition that conceptual art can be traced, in part, to these rooted notions of Western thought.

[30] Hegel identifies two principal ways in which poetry is superior to the other arts: in its representational powers and in its greater success at molding sensuous forms to the aims of subjectivity (spirit). HAM 960, 966. Curtis L. Carter, "A Re-examination of the 'Death of Art' interpretation of Hegel's Aesthetics," in Lawrence S. Stepelevich (ed.), *Selected Essays on G. W. F. Hegel* (New Jersey: Humanities Press 1993), pp. 11–26. First published in Warren E. Steinkraus and Kenneth L. Schmitz (eds.), *Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, Sussex: Harvester Press 1980), pp. 83–102. I thank Professor Wolfgang Welsch for suggesting a distinction between poetry seen as the highest manifestation of Spirit in art, versus poetry understood as the highest art form in Hegel's aesthetics. Contrary to my view that poetry is the highest form of art in Hegel's aesthetics, Welsch argues that for Hegel, sculpture is the most perfect art form because it represents a balance of the spirit and matter.

I suspect, with no pretensions to certainty, the existence of counterpart elements in Asian aesthetic thinking, particularly in Chan (Zen) Buddhism, may provide nourishment for conceptual art. For instance, Chan Buddhism gives priority to idea over physical object in general and poses a paradox between physical form, which represents one level of truth, and the illusory void state of existence accessible only to the enlightened through contemplation. Zen Buddhists believe that the origins of truth are not grounded in logical or literal answers. Rather truth "must be searched for in the living word."[31]

In any event, what I have spoken of as the tension between material form and ideas in art seems to have reached a barely containable level in the mid-twentieth century with radical effects to be observed in both art theory and art practice. For example, the pioneering work of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, both of whom expressly gave precedence in their work to the idea over its material instantiation in whatever medium, anticipate the conceptual art movement of the nineteen sixties. Joseph Kosuth, the Fluxus artists such as John Cage, Lawrence Weiner, Sol Le Witt and others in the United States later developed variations of this approach. Similar things were happening at about the same time in other parts of the world, for example, in the work of the Art & Language group in England; Vitaly Komar, Aleksandr Melamid, Ilya Kabakov in Russia; Daniel Buren in France; Marcel Broodthaers in Belgium; Irwin and NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) in Slovenia; Wenda Gu and Xu Bing in China; and Matsuzawa Yutaka in Japan among others.[32]

Common Elements of Conceptual Art

Allow me to stipulate at the outset that there is no concensus among art historians on the definition of conceptual art, the roster of its practitioners or even their hallmark practices. As evidence of this state of things as well as for valuable insights, I might suggest a look at the roundtable on conceptual art published in the fall (1994) issue of the journal *October*. The distinguished contributors included Alexander Alberro, Martha Buskirk, Thierry de Duve, Benjamin Buchloh, Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss.[33]

[31] Xu Bing begins his essay, "The Living Word," with a reference which supports the connection of Chinese conceptual art to Chan Buddhism. "The Living Word," translated by Ann L. Huss in Xu Bing, *Words Without Meaning, Meaning Without Words* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution and Seattle and London: University of Washington Press 2001), p. 13.

[32] See *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exhibition catalogue, Queens Museum, New York 1999 for an overview of conceptual art across the world.

[33] "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," *October*, no. 70 (Fall 1994), pp 127–46. Leading art historians Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Alexander Alberro,

Despite the absence of concensus among these experts of modern art history, there clearly exist certain common denominators in the understanding of conceptual art. First, conceptual art aims to disrupt the usual modes of thinking about art and to undermine the status quo in art as well as in the social and political order. Its key strategies include the dematerialization of the art object and privileging of language based art.

Western conceptual art has been, in essence, an assault on the traditional art that is grounded in classical theories of representation, the Renaissance science of perspective and Romanticism's celebration of the individual artist and feelings. Concurrently, it opposes Modernism's commitment to the purity of the art medium and seeks to turn art away from representational, expressive or abstract features of material objects.

Non-conceptual, traditional artists produce work intended for aesthetic appreciation or perhaps simply as decoration. Conversely, conceptual art – just as it challenges the non-conceptual artist – challenges the "cultivated, sensitive, intellectual, aesthetic dilettante" spectator-patrons traditionally associated with such art.

Conceptual art calls for new approaches not only to making art but to rethinking art's functions, the theories that explain and assess art, and the modes and institutions devoted to its display. It suggests that the aesthetic theories based on principles of representation, expression, and formalism are constructions tied to the earlier manifestations of art which are now outmoded. Conceptualism's principal strategy, dematerialization, asserts the primacy of ideas over material and admits into art any form of materiality.

Duchamp elevated everyday objects with his *readymades*, and Donald Judd's minimalist art consists of objects, neither painting nor sculpture, with highly polished surfaces and shapes resembling manufactured objects. Duchamp was suggesting that the usual skill based art-making technologies were only one way of making art and not essential. Judd was attacking the usual limits of traditional painting and sculpture by replacing them with his own conceptually based objects. Generally, conceptual artists welcome forms that do not resemble other art forms, whether those be traditional or anti-traditional.

Thierry de Duve, Martha Biskirk and Yve-Alain Bois gathered to consider the lines of influence from Marcel Duchamp to later conceptual artists such as Robert Morris, Joseph Kosuth, Dan Graham, Sol Lewitt and others. The main outcome was their inability to agree upon either Duchamp's role, or who among the various artists advanced in the discussion in fact was truly a conceptual artist.

Language as a Vehicle for Conceptual Art in the West

Following a direction implicit in Hegel, conceptual art has turned increasingly, but not exclusively, to language as its principal mode, or rather to words, but not words in the usual sense. Feeding this trend, in the 1950s the analytic philosophers attempted to separate the concept of art from the discussion of actual works of art. Concepts and ideas became the focus of analytic aesthetics. Given these developments in philosophical aesthetics, it is not surprising that artists like Kosuth, following the analytic philosophers A. J. Ayer and Ludwig Wittgenstein, argued that art works are analogous to analytical propositions, or *are* analytical propositions.[34] Kosuth, in his essay "Art After Philosophy," holds that the role of an artist is as much philosopher and critic as it is producer of art.[35] Writing about conceptual art in 1970, Kosuth called it a form of inquiry embracing "the investigation of the function, meaning, and use of any and all (art) propositions … within the concept of the general term 'art.'" One task of conceptual art is the framing of art propositions in order to introduce fresh ideas and subsequently influence other artists. These propositions are framed in linguistic terms. Still Kosuth acknowledges that certain earlier innovations in visual art might also be considered art propositions. A Cubist masterpiece of the early 20th century introduced new ideas and influenced later art. But the same painting in our time is no longer progressive. It is a relic of historic or aesthetic interest.[36]

In choosing concepts over images Kosuth joins the host of Enlightenment influenced thinkers whose preference for concepts has persisted in the effort to diminish the role of aesthetics and sustain doubts about art as a form of knowing. Images in art transmit the type of sensory information central to aesthetics and to art based on materiality. In the end Kosuth also does not eliminate the material object but only shifts the focus; the object still communicates the idea and does not actually disappear.

There are three main problems with Kosuth's radical linguistic conceptualism. First, he separates art from the tradition of art history by abstracting art from its medium, form, materiality, and

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[34] Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1991), p. 19.

[35] Joseph Kosuth, *Introductory Note to Art-Language*, first published as "Introductory Notes by the American Editor," in *Art-Language* (Coventry) vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1970), pp. 1–4. Reprinted in *Art After Philosophy and After*, p. 39.

[36] Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," p. 19. It is not clear how visual inventions of artists correspond to the linguistic propositions of conceptual art.

visual realization. Second, he collapses the distinction between art and art criticism, leaving conceptual artists to function as their own interpreters and judges. Third, he eliminates the principal means of distinguishing art from other forms of symbolism by emphasizing its logical (propositional) state over its material objectivity.[37]

However, he undercuts the force of his own propositional element by insisting that art is an autographic rather than a system based type of symbolism. As autographic symbolism, art is a product of the stipulating power of the individual artist produced independently of rules. Logical propositions are normally grounded in a linguistic system with rules. Hence, the analogy between analytic propositions and art propositions fails.

Perhaps Kosuth's main accomplishment in "Art After Philosophy" (1969) was to further Duchamp's separation of art and the aesthetic. Both Duchamp and Kosuth insisted that the choice of artistic means depends on intellectual considerations rather than on aesthetics. Their views, however, do not deny the presence of aesthetics, only its relevance.

Conceptual Art in China

The emergence of conceptual art in China parallels its ascendance in the West. Although the Chinese artists were aware of developments in the West, and in part were influenced by Western Dada and conceptual art, the primary driving forces in the development of Chinese conceptual art were indigenous. Hence, conceptual art in China is not a product of a historically evolving artistic *avant-garde* characterized by innovative experiments, as it is in the West. Nor is it based in Western analytic philosophy. Instead, the roots of Chinese conceptual art are based mostly in the evolving circumstances of Chinese culture. In mainland China, for example, conceptual artists were influenced by Chan Buddhism "which encourages an ironic sensibility and rejects the privilege of any one doctrine in the search for enlightenment,"[38] as well as by the Chinese artists' responses to their political and social climate.

[37] Peter Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," in Michael Newman and John Bird (eds.), *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books 1999), p. 59.
[38] Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with Anti-Conceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s–1980s*, catalogue, Queens Museum of Art, (New York: Queens Museum of Art 1999), p. 127. According to Gao, conceptual art received two translations in mainland China: guannian yishu ("idea art") referring "to the general meaning of things in a particular context," and gainian yishu ('concept art') which refers "more narrowly to a specific notion or definition." Gao suggests that "Chinese conceptual art is more accurately described as guannian yishu."

Also influential have been the ideographic character of the Chinese language and the fact that modern Chinese art has frequently been linked to social concerns. Language projects have played an important role in Chinese conceptual art, with artists like Wenda Gu, Wu Shan Zhuan and Xu Bing producing conceptual works based on the manipulation of traditional Chinese characters.[39] But, they do not attempt to reduce language to propositions. They generally retain the visual as a complement to ideas in their art.

In China the main developments in conceptual art include language-based projects, anti-art projects, and performance and media art. The work of Xu Bing illustrates in greater depth the differences between conceptual art in the West and the East. This work can be summarized as an examination of Chinese culture through its written language, whose ideograms are the vehicle of deeply imbedded aesthetic and other cultural messages. Xu Bing, unlike Kosuth, who rejected the visual and the asethetic, uses materially based images to enhance the conceptual aspect of his work. Another difference is that Xu Bing directs his socially purposeful art at the broadest possible audience. His art is intended to serve.

Xu Bing began as a printmaker. For a long time during the Cultural Revolution, he lived and worked alongside village people. During this period, he experimented with block prints and developed a unique series depicting village lives that became the *Five Series of Repetition* (1987). The experiments with printmaking in this series reflected his interest in conceptual art issues.

His most important conceptual piece, *Book From the Sky* (1987) consists of four books printed using more than a thousand characters, all of them invented by Xu Bing and unreadable, but familiar in their likeness to traditional Chinese characters. The monumental intent of *Book from the Sky* is suggested in its original title, *Xi Shi Jian*, or *An Analyzed Reflection of the World – the Final Volume of the Century*.[40]

According to a Smithsonian exhibition catalogue featuring Xu Bing's works, "the open books were displayed on low platforms with panels of text mounted on pillars and walls, and three long scrolls that ran up the wall and then draped on swooping arcs down from the ceiling."[41] The evident aim was to motivate viewers to

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 132. Gu Wenda's conceptual art piece, *The Pseudo Characters* examines in a skeptical mode language's capabilities for revealing the essences of things.
[40] Britta Erickson, *Words Without Meaning, Meaning Without Words: The Art of Xu Bing* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institute and University of Washington Press 2001), p. 38.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

reflect on and question written language as a guide to social and political realities and perhaps to experience the characters as beautiful forms independent of their meaning. Xu Bing's "impossible texts" forced viewers to disengage from their usual relationship to the symbols of language. Literate Chinese viewers responded with incredulity and confusion. They were unwilling to believe that the texts could not be read, or that someone would invest so much effort to create the unreadable. For some viewers the experience is reported to have triggered deep emotional reactions. For Westerners unfamiliar with Chinese language the full impact is out of reach. But the work is nevertheless moving. Its sheer monumentality and beauty as an image transcend language barriers. In this instance, the artist succeeds in evoking a conceptual response to the work without sacrificing the aesthetic information contained in the images.

Xu Bing understands that language is a key to being human and thus the center of both national identity and intercultural investigations. He has continued to explore this theme in numerous projects across the world. Among these is *Square Word Calligraphy*, based on a new form of writing combining Chinese and English and suggesting the power of language both to unify people and to isolate. Here the cultural positioning of the viewers is reversed. English speaking people were able to read the language, but non-English speaking Chinese could not.[42]

Like many global conceptual artists, Xu Bing has created installations across the world. His recent work *Classroom Calligraphy* (1995), shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London and later at the Smithsonian Institute's Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., in 1999 is an interactive piece. Visitors to the exhibition were invited into a classroom setting and given instructions and materials for creating their own Chinese characters.[43]

Xu Bing's approach to global conceptual art using language aims to engage the public and reintegrate art and society, where Kosuth's propositional art reinforces the alienation associated with abstract Modernism.[44] Xu Bing has taken conceptual art beyond the narrow circle of theory and he seeks to engage the consciousness of the entire global population. While drawing significantly on

[42] *Ibid*., p. 55.
[43] *Ibid*, p. 69.
[44] As Charles Harrison has observed, American abstract modern art of the 1940s and 1950s represented the furthest point of an historical development in the history of art resulting in the "maximum of expressive capacity attainable with the minimum translatable content." See Charles Harrison, *Conceptual Art and Painting* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press 2001), pp. 219, 220.

language, his art reincorporates the visual image and the aesthetic in an effort that may heal the break between past art and conceptual art. His approach is supported by contemporary media theory's claim that information processing will be increasingly visual in the future because images produce a higher information density than concepts.[45]

Xu Bing and Joseph Kosuth have taken different paths with respect to art and social activism. In *The Artist as Anthropologist* (1975), Kosuth goes beyond the pure conceptualism of his earlier period and emphasizes the need for artists to be aware of the social contexts in which their art functions.[46] Xu Bing attempts to engage ordinary people in his projects throughout his career. His *Ghosts Pounding the Wall* (1990), as well as his block prints of village life, seek to heighten awareness of and invoke critical reflection on the role of art and language in shaping the social order. Many other conceptual artists believe that the role of the artist extends beyond the intellectual. Michael Thompson, a British conceptualist, has recently proposed that conceptual art is in part a struggle for control over the main symbols of society involving "a naked bid for power at the very highest level – the wrestling of power from the groups at present on top of the social structure."[47]

Both Kosuth and Xu Bing aspire to some degree to influence their societal environments. Yet global conceptual artists, including Kosuth and Xu Bing, have had little success as social activists. And this should not be surprising because their mandates as artists are generated from an autographic, self-stipulating base. While informed in part by the respective social contexts, theirs is only one version of "the good life" and depends ultimately on the subjective consciousness of the artist. The artist's voice, albeit an important one, is only one in shaping, and critically examining the values of a society and tackling the larger societal concerns. Artists as individuals acting independently rarely command the political and economic power necessary to execute major social change.

Outlook for Global Conceptual Art

[45] Norbert Bolz, "Rethinking Media Aesthetics," in Geert Lovink (ed.), *Uncanny Networks: Dialogue with the Virtual Intelligentsia*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England 1995) pp. 25, 26.
[46] Joseph Kosuth, "The Artist As Anthropologist." First published in *The Fox* (New York) vol. 1, no. 1 (1975), pp. 18–30. Reprinted in *Art After Philosophy and After*, pp. 117, 118.
[47] Michael Thompson, "Conceptual Art: Category, and Action," *Art-Language*, vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1970), p. 82. Thompson viewed conceptual art as a struggle over the main symbols of society, involving "a naked bid for power at the very highest level – the wrestling of power from the groups at present on top of the social structure."

What, then, has been the outcome of global conceptualism? Denial of the materiality of art, while not leading to the end of art, does bring us again to questions over the confusion of art with ordinary objects. For it is increasingly difficult to distinguish the ideas prominent in the "new clothes" of conceptual art from the practices of communications, political actions, and fashion. Displacement of aesthetic symbols by linguistic propositions must now be reconsidered. Aesthetics will retain a prominent place in the enrichment of increasingly global symbol systems including the arts. Actually, the displacement of aesthetics and image based art in favor of linguistic facility and political activism has already subsided as art continues to reinvent itself in new forms and rediscover viable local art that does not fit the definition of conceptual art. Similarly, the influence of visually oriented media aesthetics will surely reinforce the role of images over concepts in the near future of art.

There are other concerns. In assessing the emergence of global conceptual art, it is important to recall that the quest for globalism is itself a product of hegemonic economic and political ambitions made possible by expanding commerce and the revolution in communications technology of the late twentieth century. Yet there is little danger of successfully implementing conceptualism through coercion. Minor cultures continue to struggle to retain indigenous features in their art that rely on culturally specific materiality and practices, and opt for exploring new means of communicating their significance beyond originating locales. Furthermore, artists in dominant cultures have already moved on to embrace new experiments and recycle old ideas outside the realms of conceptual art. New developments in media arts featuring narrative elements have emerged in urban settings, while painters and sculptors enjoy a revival of interest in the materiality of their art across the world. These developments act as a counter force against hegemonic global encroachments and provide alternatives to conceptual art.

Kosuth's attempt to eliminate the distinction between art itself and art criticism (such efforts parallel the efforts of analytic philosophers to eliminate the distinction between aesthetics and art criticism) has been largely unsuccessful. There is an operational need for separating the functions of art production and interpretive criticism, for it is gratuitous of artists to attempt to interpret and critique their own work. The absorption of critical functions into art production systems is already abandoned for the most part as the reductivist tendencies of conceptual art are reconsidered. Moreover, the texts of critics have not resulted in a substantial body of memorable art. Even when packaged and framed, as in the exhibitions of Art & Language, they do not entirely satisfy the need for meaningful art.

Global conceptual artists, especially those who adopt the political agendas of post-modern cultural theory, criticize both the traditional practices and institutions of art, as well as political and economic aspects of the society in which the art is produced. Their critiques of art institutions have had relatively little success. In this context, the conceptual artists' economic survival often comes to depend on the very institutions of art and society against which their critique is directed. The institutions of art remain strong. Their problems are not those that concern conceptual artists. If anything, the conceptual art movement has largely been embraced and appropriated by arts institutions. Its artists show their work regularly in museums and galleries and may soon advance to the auction houses. At the core of the problem is a dilemma of cultural economics. On the one hand, conceptual artists look to existing institutions of art and society for support, while adopting a revolutionary stance aspiring to undermine those same institutions.

A close look at the matter raises other questions. Itinerant conceptual artists, as well as non-conceptualists, from many nations – typically based in New York, Paris, or Berlin – travel endlessly from art festival to art festival across the world until they are replaced by the latest global art superstars. Similarly, their principal audiences are made up of art world nomads who typically travel from festival venue to festival venue, to participate in festivals organized by independent curators often without roots in any local culture. The result is a small circle of mainly self-perpetuating projects supported by international sites that hope to advance their economic and cultural standing by association with "world class" art events. The biennials and related global festivals from Venice to Tokyo to Sao Paulo to Paris make an endless chain of such events. The principal result is a disengagement of the practices of art from any other aspect of a local culture and a failure to attract audiences outside the narrow circle of art world professionals and specialists. These are apolitical events with little meaning for the cultures that produced the artists, or the places where they are held apart from their economic impact.

As to the current state of conceptual art throughout the various cultures, it is fair to say that it is mainly anti-aesthetic. Aesthetics here refers to a kind, or quality, of experience that one expects to discover when viewing art of any sort, irrespective of stylistic or cultural variances in its form. Yet not all conceptual artists agree that it is necessary to give up aesthetics. For example, aesthetics is an important part of Xu Bing's transformation of Chinese characters into art. In contrast to Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, another American conceptual artist, insists that aesthetics in inseparable from art. "You can't take the aesthetics out of art," he has said. "Art is essentially the use of aesthetics, either for metaphorical purposes, or for pure material purposes. To talk about

art without talking about its aesthetics means you're not talking about art."[48] Further, the attempts of conceptual art to replace aesthetic experience with logical propositions or rational argument are mainly disappointing for all but a small portion of the audiences for art.

But let us consider again the meaning of the term global in its art context. Global means worldwide, universal, all-inclusive, complete, or exhaustive. The organizers of an exhibition on global conceptualist art, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, organized at the Queens Museum in 1999, took as a premise that global conceptualism is a worldwide phenomenon originating independently in many places in response to local conditions.[49] Still, conceptual art does not provide an aesthetic of universal scope because much of what has been and continues to serve as art (for example representational and modern abstract art), not to mention art from numerous minor cultures, are not typically conceptual art. Moreover, local differences in what is labeled conceptual art challenge any efforts even toward a global conceptual art.

A theory of universal scope in global art must begin with abandoning a single center of the global art world from which normative paradigms emerge. Rather, it is necessary to ascertain that "all cultures in their specificities are included and interwoven in the global system."[50] This reformulation of global art calls for a restatement of the problems concerning minor cultures, as their representation is no longer a question. "What now appears as an actual problem is how to overcome the isolated particularity of a certain local culture" and make its products communicable to the global art community "on levels beyond the pure fascination with other and different."[51] This approach opens up new ways for exploring the universal by searching for universalizing effects of art, whether in major or minor cultures, without engaging merely in exotic exploration.

Finally, is global conceptual art contributing to ending art as a central feature of culture? Art theorists from Vasari to Arthur Danto have talked of the end of art. Vasari believed that art ended for his

[48] Interview with Lawrence Weiner (December 31, 1979) in Robert C. Morgan (ed.), *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective* (Jefferson, N.C. and London, McFraldna & Company Publishers 1994), p. 169.

[49] The exhibition catalogue, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, footnote 2, documents aspects of conceptual art in various parts of the world.

[50] The call to a symposium on "Transglobal Art" held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (December 6–13, 2003), has articulated very well this theme for the near term future of global art. "We can no longer perceive the art world as springing from one center which is producing the dominant paradigm of art as if being the universal one, and that all cultures in their specificities are included and interwoven in the global system."

[51] *Ibid*.

time with the perfection of the means to imitate nature or the ancients (he never resolved which).[52] Hegel suggested that the end of art is linked to its absorption into philosophy. And Danto has argued that art ended with the Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*. The *Brillo Box* sits tantalizingly on the boundaries between object art and conceptual art. As a material object it possesses its own aesthetic properties, but its significance lies in the questions it raises about the limits of representation in art and what counts as a work of art.

It would be easy to assume another "end of art" evolving out of conceptual art's dematerialization of the material art object in favor of ideas. Yet this has not happened. Despite much discussion of the end of art, art continues to flourish, even beyond conceptualism, and art remains a viable part of virtually all cultures. Its manifestations, whether in state-directed cultures, or so-called free market cultures, remain complex, embracing both object-based and conceptual art projects. Major art institutions such as museums and cultural centers compete with a variety of other suppliers of art, including galleries, public art projects, universities, private galleries, auction houses and the private spaces such as the private apartments of individual artists. Any suggestion of the death of art following as a consequence of conceptual art remains premature. Indeed, aestheticians should proceed cautiously with any plans for the end of art, as the future of their own theoretical enterprise itself depends on the continued well being of art.

[52] Vasari. Jonathan Gilmore, *The Life of a Style: Beginnings and Endings in the Narrative History of Art* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2000), pp. 151, 152.