

Lawrence Weiner's "Statement of Intent": Comparing Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth *

OSAWA Yoshihisa

Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo

Abstract: Lawrence Weiner is well-known as a conceptual artist in America. He worked on a piece in 1968 that had a long title and linguistic feature. In the latter half of the 1960s in America, conceptual art became active, and famous manifestos such as "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" by Sol LeWitt or "Art after Philosophy" by Joseph Kosuth were published one after another. Weiner is one of those artists who expressed their attitudes related to conceptual art. He presented his "Statement of Intent" in the catalogue for *January 5–31, 1969* show organized by Seth Siegelau. It is stated as follows: 1. The artist may construct the piece; 2. The piece may be fabricated; 3. The piece need not be built; Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership. This paper aims to consider his "Statement of Intent," comparing Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth who emphasized artist's idea or concept especially among conceptual artists. Through this consideration, I suggest as follows: while Weiner transfers the main role of the artist to the receiver, which is different from LeWitt and Kosuth who consider artist's idea or concept as the most important thing in art, he has some aspects in common with them.

Keywords: conceptual art, artist's intention, dematerialization, receiver, responsibility for the work

Introduction

Lawrence Weiner (1942–2021), a widely recognized American conceptual artist, has a long working career from the early 1960s until his later years. He began his career by creating craters in a desert park of California, followed by a series of paintings *Propeller* and *Removal*, and a work with a long title that seemed to place more emphasis on language such as *One pint gloss white lacquer poured directly upon the floor and allowed to dry* produced in 1968. The late 1960s was a time when conceptual art was flourishing in the United States, and prominent manifestos such as Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967) and Joseph Kosuth's "Art after Philosophy" (1969) were being published in rapid succession. The basic stance underlying these manifestos was that the artist's concept prior to the creation of the work is significant, and that the work is the realization of the concept, and therefore the artist's actual work and aesthetic concerns are irrelevant.

Weiner was also one of those who adhered to such an attitude at the same time. In the catalog of exhibition *January 5–31, 1969* organized by Seth Siegelau in 1969, Weiner presented a

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"Statement of Intent" that would accompany subsequent exhibitions of his work. In this statement, he gives the following instructions. 1. The artist may construct the piece; 2. The piece may be fabricated; 3. The piece need not be built; Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership. At first glance, this could be seen as a declarative statement that emphasizes the artist's intent for the work. By contrast, however, it can also be read as a complete transfer of the artist's role to the recipient. How can we fully understand such declaration? This paper examines Weiner's "Statement of Intent" by comparing it with those of LeWitt and Kosuth, who emphasized the importance of the artist's ideas and concepts more than any other artists in the field of conceptual art.

This paper is organized into four sections. The first section outlines their basic ideas on the importance of artists' ideas and concepts in LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" and Kosuth's "Art after Philosophy." The second section draws the outline of Weiner's "Statement of Intent" by referring to previous studies on the subject. The third section highlights some points that have not been *hitherto* noted in the previous studies, thus focusing on key concepts such as "public freehold," "aesthetic fascism," "ownership," and "responsibility," drawn from several Weiner's interviews. The fourth section considers the differences and commonalities between Weiner, LeWitt and Kosuth. This is accomplished by referencing additional texts by LeWitt and Kosuth in order to enhance the argument. Through this analysis, the paper demonstrates that, akin to LeWitt and Kosuth, Weiner maintains his subjectivity as an intentional artist while abolishing the traditional role of artist/viewer fundamentally.

1. Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" and Joseph Kosuth's "Art after Philosophy"

1.1. Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art"

First, let us examine the main points of Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" published in *Artforum* in 1967. LeWitt begins his argument by declaring "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."¹ In other words, in conceptual art, it is the idea or concept that is important, and the process of bringing it to realization as a work of art is merely a mechanical process that is carried out according to a plan. This idea led to the dispelling of the traditional view of the artist as an artisan. As LeWitt argues that conceptual art "is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman,"² it is also important to note that such art is meant to engage the viewer intellectually, not emotionally. To put it another way, "it is the objective of the artist who is concerned with conceptual art to make his work mentally interesting to the spectator, and therefore usually he would want it to become emotionally dry."³ Additionally, in LeWitt's view, expressionism

¹ Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967), p. 80.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

“deter the viewer from perceiving this art,”⁴ and is incongruent with conceptual art, which aims to be intellectually engaging.

1.2. Joseph Kosuth’s “Art after Philosophy”

For the next step, I would like to review the main points of Joseph Kosuth’s “Art after Philosophy” written in 1969. Kosuth, like LeWitt’s approach, shares the perspective that the artist’s concept or idea is the most important aspect within their work, and that expressionism is totally irrelevant to conceptual art. However, Kosuth’s viewpoint diverges from LeWitt’s in a significant manner for two reasons. In the first, Kosuth considers conceptual art as a result of the historical development in contemporary art after Marcel Duchamp. “This change—one from ‘appearance’ to ‘conception’—was the beginning of ‘modern’ art and the beginning of ‘conceptual’ art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually.”⁵ Here, the term “appearance” pertains to the discussion of color and form in artworks based on sensory and empirical aspects. Since Duchamp, art has shifted from formalism, which concerns the visual qualities of a work, to the realm of “conception.” Kosuth elucidates this shift by stating: “A work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as a comment on art.”⁶ Second, drawing upon A.J. Ayer’s explanation based on Kant’s classification, Kosuth defines this proposition as an “analytic” rather than a “synthetic” one.⁷ That is to say, it is not based on sensory or empirical aspect, but is presented in the context of art, based on various propositions about art.⁸ In fact it is the artist, not the viewer or critic, who presents these propositions. Therefore, a work of art “is the presentation of the artist’s intention.”⁹ A concrete example of this is exemplified in the case of Pollock given by Kosuth. He claims, “If Pollock is important it is because he painted on loose canvas horizontally to the floor. What isn’t important is that he later put those drippings over stretchers and hung them parallel to the wall.”¹⁰ It means that Pollock did not just paint on a vertical canvas stretched on a wooden frame according to convention, but he painted on a horizontal canvas on the floor, “presenting his intention” to make it a work of art.

Furthermore, in alignment with LeWitt’s standpoint, Kosuth echoes a similar perspective on expressionism. Following the above quote, Kosuth states, “What is even less important to art is Pollock’s notions of ‘self-expression’ because those *kinds* of subjective meanings are useless to anyone other than those involved with him personally. And their ‘specific’ quality puts them outside of art’s context.”¹¹

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy,” *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969), p. 135.

⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Note that Kosuth’s quotes from Ayer as helping to explain his own argument, concerning the basic distinction between analytic/comprehensive propositions, and that he declares his argument is only an “analogy” to it (ibid.).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

1.3. "Idea," "Concept," and "Intention" in LeWitt and Kosuth

Having discussed Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" and Joseph Kosuth's "Art after Philosophy," we need to turn our attention to the meaning of "idea," "concept," and "Intention." This is because, while they are used synonymously, "idea" and "concept" have a special connotation that differs from "Intention," and the difference is a matter that should be noted in relation to their own positions.

First, LeWitt's perspective on conceptual art. In his discussion of conceptual art which I quoted above, LeWitt initially uses "idea" or "concept" interchangeably, in an equal manner.¹² However, in his "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1969), LeWitt gives the following stipulation: "9. The concept and idea are different. The former implies a general direction while the latter is the component. Ideas implement the concept."¹³ He continues "10. Ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form."¹⁴ In other words, concept and idea are considered here to be as the relationship between the whole and its parts; ideas are considered to be an important factor in carrying out the concept and bringing it to fruition as a work of art. Then what is the case for "intention"? LeWitt does not specifically give comments like "idea" or "concept," but this does not mean that the word "intention" is inappropriate in his text, as he says "The physicality of a three-dimensional object then becomes a contradiction to its [conceptual art's] non-emotive intent."¹⁵

Next, there are three types of words in Kosuth to be reviewed. Unlike LeWitt, he does not give them any definite definition. However, if we note that Kosuth's works from the late 1960s such as *Titled*, which is subtitled "Art as Idea as Idea," we can perceive that "idea" was an important concept for him. In an interview with Jeanne Siegel, Kosuth was asked about the meaning of the subtitle, and he answers that he intended to show the creative process by doubling the term "idea," while simply "art as idea" would be a reification of the idea.¹⁶ From the statement, we can assume that the word "idea" given to him implies the creativity of the artist who produces a work of art. And as for "concept," despite even if no special stipulation is given to it, it can be understood as meaning "This change—one from 'appearance' to 'conception'—was the beginning of 'modern' art and the beginning of 'conceptual' art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually."

To sum up, it is clear that LeWitt and Kosuth considered the presentation of ideas and concepts by the artist as the most important aspect of the artwork, which is intellectual in the case of LeWitt and conceptual in the case of Kosuth. The reasons why, they are intellectual and conceptual are, because they are irrelevant to one's emotions or the senses. What makes the two texts different is the perspective from which they are viewed. While LeWitt's text focuses on the way ideas are created and realized as works of art without the handiwork and subjective concerns

¹² LeWitt, op. cit. p. 80.

¹³ Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," (1969) in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 106.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁵ LeWitt, 1967, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁶ Joseph Kosuth, "Art as Idea as Idea: An Interview with Jeanne Siegel," in Gabriele Guercio(ed.), *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 47.

of the craftsman artist, Kosuth's text emphasizes that the presentation of the artist's concept or intention represents a historical development in contemporary art since Duchamp, and that this is demonstrated within the context of art. In spite of these all differences, as I have repeatedly noted throughout this chapter, the manifestoes *et cetera* are of greatest importance regarding the idea, concept, and intention of the work by the artist. Then question arises: what is subsequent to Weiner's "Statement of Intent" made its first appearance in conjunction with LeWitt's and Kosuth's texts, and what Weiner presented for his next show? In the next chapter, I will describe its outline through analysis of previous studies.

2. Previous Studies

Weiner's "Statement of Intent" first appeared in the catalog of exhibition *January 5–31, 1969* organized by Seth Siegelau in 1969. There were eight pieces of artworks consist of language. To cite a couple of examples, *Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can* (1968) (hereafter abbreviated the work as *Two minutes*); *Field cratered by simultaneously exploded 1/3 lb. TNT charges* (1968). *Three minutes of forty pound pressure spray of white highway paint upon a well tended lawn. The lawn is allowed to grow and not tended until the grass is free of all vestiges of white highway paint* (1968) (hereafter abbreviated the work as *Three minutes*) and other works were shown. At the end of the catalog page devoted to Weiner, the "Statement of Intent" is presented, which has subsequently been included adjunct to his exhibitions.

1. The artist may construct the piece
2. The piece may be fabricated
3. The piece need not be built

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership¹⁷

This declaration is a kind of guideline for understanding Weiner's works. Here, it is stated that each of the listed conditions is "equal and consistent with the intent of the artist," and it seems that Weiner is adhering to his own intent as an artist. At the same time, it also states that "the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership," seemingly leaving the artist's role to the recipient. According to this guideline, for example, the Weiner of *Three Minutes* may or may not actually produce the work. If not, the recipient may produce it or it does not necessarily have to be produced and so forth. How did previous studies on Weiner interpret his "Statement of Intent"?

2.1. Free Discretion of a Work

Anne Rorimer focuses on the "Statement of Intent," especially on the freedom of the physical realization of the work. "By means of this statement, the artist stipulates that the actual, physical realization of any one of his works is not a requirement but an option left open to the

¹⁷ Lawrence Weiner, *January 5–31, 1969*, exh.cat. (New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969), unpaginated.

discretion of any perceiving subject, including the artist.”¹⁸ Coupled with its form of language, this stipulation in the treatment of Weiner’s work, she tries to summarize his work with the following characteristics even further. Rorimer states as follows. “Although work by Weiner may in principle be materially constructed, in all cases they must first be registered in the mind’s eye. Because of the manner in which they are embodied in language, they are never conclusive descriptions subject to one static mode of being constructed. Infinitely open-ended, they have the potential for being visualized and/or realized in count-less ways and contexts.”¹⁹ To put it another way, Weiner’s works can be physically constructed, but what comes first is that they are conceived in his imagination, and then embodied in language. However, as they are expressed in the abstract form of language, their actualization can occur in innumerable ways, depending on the method and context. For example, in the case of *Two minutes*, there are countless ways in which this work can be actualized, relying on the floor on which the paint is sprayed directly, the colors of the paint, the distance and angle between the sprayer and the floor, and even whether or not the window is open to allow wind to enter during the spray process. The reason why Weiner’s work does not lead to one particular conclusion is that it is an abstract form of language, and its guideline, the “Statement of intent,” leaves the work open to the recipient’s own free will and discretion.

2.2. Decentering the Artist

In addition to the above, the “Statement of intent,” also raises some questions about the traditional artist/audience relationship. Alexander Alberro makes three points regarding the issue. First, it places the Weiner and the receiver equally in the production of the work. It is “thereby abolishing the traditional notion of artist-centered production.”²⁰ Second, it prompts to “diminish the distance between beholding and production”²¹ by involving the viewer in the production of the work. Third, Weiner’s works “destabilize the myth of the authority and authorship,” and “the work thus represents a method of art production, distribution, and consumption with a degree of egalitarianism that is virtually unprecedented in the history of twentieth century art.”²² Alberro also relies on the third condition in the “Statement of Intent” and the sentence appended at the end, he particularly focuses on the third point by commenting: “Now one of the explicit conditions of the work is that it need not be built, and the decision of whether to actually give the piece physical form is left completely up to the viewer, or in the terminology of Weiner at the time, the ‘receiver.’”²³ In his commentary on this quote, Alberro notes that “only a couple of years earlier than Weiner, Roland Barthes theorized (and called for) this transition from author to reader in ‘The Death of the Author,’”²⁴ thus succeeding in drawing an analogy between Weiner and Barthes. Alberro’s

¹⁸ Anne Rorimer, “Siting the Page: Exhibiting Works in Publications—Some Examples of Conceptual Art in the USA,” in Michael Newman and Jon Bird (eds.), *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Alexander Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966–1977,” in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1999), p. xxiii.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. xxxiii.

particular focus on the “Statement of Intent” is therefore should be regarded as the homogenization of the artist/viewer role and the de-centering of the traditional image of the artist as author.

3. “Statement of Intent”: From the Background

In this chapter, I will first look at the background of the free discretion of works by recipients and the de-centering of the traditional image of authorship as discussed so far, focusing on the key concepts of “public freehold,” “ownership of works,” and “aesthetic fascism.” I will then clarify Weiner’s idea of “responsibility of the recipient,” which has a different resonance from the claims made in these key concepts. Finally, I will summarize his intentions in the “Statement of Intent,” and discuss his subjectivity as an artist himself who bears those intentions.

3.1. Public Freehold

In an interview with Patricia Norvell in 1969, Weiner described *The Xerox Book* as the most successful exhibition he ever participated so far at the time. *Xerox Book* was organized by Seth Siegelau in 1968, with seven writers collaborated and each of them was given 25 pages. Weiner recalls it as a “public freehold” work, and gives the following reasons. “Anybody who purchased *The Xerox Book* owned the piece. It’s called public freehold for me.”²⁵ In other words, *The Xerox Book* is a publicly published publication, and anyone who wants it can buy it (though most copies are limited). Since it is not a catalog for an exhibition, but a magazine exhibition intended to be an exhibition *per se*, the purchase of the book constitutes ownership of the work. Thus, for Weiner, a work with “public freehold” is one whose ownership is open to the public, and *The Xerox Book* is a good example of such intention reflected in his early work.²⁶

The meaning of Weiner’s “public freehold,” however, is not a kind of work that can be freely purchased and owned. In an interview with Lynn Gumpert in 1987, Weiner was asked about the origin of the term, and he responded as follow. “In places like Britain which are autocratic, people can’t own property; they can only lease it from the state. Common property that’s owned by people [...] become[s] public freeholds. It’s a comment on the fact that art is essentially authoritarian in the sense that if you want to own it you have to buy it and there is no ‘art for the people.’”²⁷ Weiner adds the adjective “public” to the term “freehold,” which refers to the permanent ownership of real estate in England, and gives the meaning of something public that can be owned by anyone to it. In Weiner’s view, the art world is authoritative where there is no “art for the people,” so the concept of “public freehold,” or the free and permanent ownership of a work by anyone without purchasing is therefore important for him.

²⁵ Lawrence Weiner, interview by Patricia Norvell, in Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (eds.), *Recording Conceptual Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 105.

²⁶ In the same interview, Winner cites “The Xerox Book” as an example of his “public freehold” work, as well as “Crater Piece,” a crater formed by TNT on California land, and a work exhibited at Windham College (*A SERIES OF STAKES SET IN THE GROUND AT REGULAR INTERVALS TO FORM A RECTANGLE TWINE STRUNG FROM STAKE TO STAKE TO DEMARK A GRID A RECTANGLE REMOVED FROM THIS RECTANGLE*).

²⁷ Lawrence Weiner, “Lawrence Weiner: Interview by Lynn Gumpert,” in Lynda Benglis, Joan Brown, Luis Jimenez, Gary Stephan, *Lawrence Weiner: Early Work*, exh. cat. (New York: The New Museum, 1982), p. 53.

3.2. Ownership of Works

Weiner tries to guarantee the free "ownership" of his works by using the term "public freehold," but what does "own" mean to him? In an interview with Willoughby Sharpe in 1972, Weiner said, "Once you know about a work of mine, you own it. There's no way I can climb into somebody's head and remove it."²⁸ Then Sharpe asked, "How one knows about a work?"²⁹ Weiner replied, "You yourself can be sitting and speaking to me and I can tell you of a work that I've done at a certain time and you can say I like that or I don't like it or I don't understand that and then you."³⁰ In short, to "know about a work" is to understand or interpret it to the extent that one can form an opinion about it and judge whether it is good or bad. Thus, to "own" a work in Weiner's context means not only to physically possess the work, but also to understand and interpret it. If this were not the case, Weiner's desired "freehold" would be limited to those who could actually purchase his work, and his work would not be a "public freehold." He seems to be careful in this regard, and in an earlier interview in 1982, he made a similar statement by saying that "Everything I was making could be owned by anyone who read it."³¹

3.3. Aesthetic Fascism

Weiner's active advocacy of the above-mentioned freedom for anyone to own and interpret his works under the "public right of free ownership" is based on his critical awareness of a type of art that "imposes" a way of reception upon people—to him it is a synonym for "aesthetic fascism." First, let me quote the following statement. "I will of course complain that art which presents itself only in one context is a fascist gesture. I know the word fascist is very loaded, but such art imposes upon people a single condition for receiving it."³² The one context referred to here is the one meaning in which the work is interpreted. In other words, presenting a work in only one meaning is the same as fascist behavior. Weiner also relates this thought to expressionism. "I obviously say that anyone who imposes a unique condition for receivership, for interpretation, for seeing a work, is placing art within a context that is almost 19th century. There is the specific, unique, emotional object produced by a prophet, produced by the only person who can make this. It becomes Expressionist to say: 'I am the only one who can make this work. There's no other viable means of doing it.' I find Expressionism related to aesthetic fascism."³³ For Weiner, expressionism refers to the artistic idea of the unique author as the origin of a work of art. In such ideology, the meaning of a work, even if it can be interpreted in various ways, converges on the uniqueness of its author. As a result, the work imposes only one meaning on the receiver. Weiner's critical awareness of the inability to interpret a work of art is clearly expressed in the term "aesthetic fascism."

²⁸ Lawrence Weiner, "Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam," interview by Willoughby Sharp, *Avalanche* (New York), no. 4 (Spring 1972), p. 67.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Weiner, interview by Gumpert, p. 53.

³² Weiner, interview by Sharp, p. 69.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

3.4. Responsibility of the Recipient

As the above interviews reveal, it is clear that Weiner's strong desire for the freedom of every recipient to own and interpret his or her work in any case. In the "Statement of Intent," this desire is expressed in the increased discretion and role of the recipient, and the accompanying de-centering of the traditional image of the author. However, Weiner's argument is somewhat different from those that advocate freedom and equality in such a loud voice. He refers to the "responsibility" of the recipient. In an interview in 1969, Weiner said the following: "When someone receives a piece of mine, assumes responsibility for the piece [...] They assume the responsibility that this is art as well as I assume the responsibility."³⁴ Also, in an interview with Sharpe in 1972, Sharpe said, "You're saying: Even though I personally feel my work can exist integrally as a statement, I accept the fact that other people would like to have it in another way" to which Weiner replied, "if they will accept the responsibility."³⁵ And he continues "each person will take it in his own way"³⁶ on the condition that they accept the responsibility.

3.5. Intent in the "Statement of Intent" and the Artist's Subjectivity

From what I have discussed so far, it should be clear that "intent" in the "Statement of Intent" does not refer to the idea or concept that an artist gives to a work of art, however it is rather the following: to seek the possibility of producing a work in a broad sense of the word, and its ownership/interpretation to the recipient; moreover, to share the responsibility of judging the work as art with the recipient. It should be noted, however, that it is true that Weiner abandoned the artist's intention for the sake of freedom of reception of the work, but this does not mean that he has completely given up the artist's intention. Weiner's stubborn retention of his intention can be seen in the sentence after the three conditions of the "Statement of Intention," which states, "Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist." The fact that he presents this declaration at each exhibition of his works also suggests that the certain attitude of an artist with an intention will emerge each time. If Weiner did not regard his own intention as important, he would not have added the phrase "equal and consistent with the intent of the artist," nor would he have taken the trouble to present this declaration at every exhibition of his works. Thus, for Weiner, the artist's intent—not the intent of the work as given by the artist, but the artist's intent in handling the work—is important.

4. LeWitt, Kosuth and Weiner

Taking account of what has been discussed so far, LeWitt, Kosuth and Weiner are now can be fully analyzed, and compared for conclusion. In this chapter, I will discuss the differences and similarities among the three. As chapter I has already summarized some of the explanations of LeWitt and Kosuth, I will proceed with the discussion by referring to their other texts in order to strengthen their arguments as written in the introduction.

³⁴ Weiner, interview by Norvell, p. 102.

³⁵ Weiner, interview by Sharp, p. 68.

³⁶ Ibid.

4.1. About the Artist's Intent

In LeWitt, the intention of the work, its idea or concept, is determined by the artist prior to the creation of the work, and is more important than the process of creation or the resulting work. By contrast, Kosuth places emphasis on the intention of the work that the artist presents within the context of the art. Like LeWitt, Kosuth perceives the intention as the most important, but in his 1996 essay "Intention(s)," Kosuth writes, "The reason we don't really consider the paintings by monkeys and children to be art is because of intention; without artistic intention there is no art."³⁷ For Kosuth, the intention of a work of art is important not only for conceptual art but for art in general, and the essay was an announcement for his intention to part company from LeWitt, who insists on the importance of intent in the context of conceptual art.

Weiner is by no means shared the same position as these two. For him, intention is not the meaning of the work as presented by the artist, and he does not aim to impose the work a meaning that is conveyed to the receiver. For Weiner, it is the artist's intention in handling his work, and in this respect, he differs significantly from LeWitt and Kosuth. Nevertheless, they both share the same view on the importance of the artist's intention. Similar to LeWitt, who urges that the artist must precede a priori the idea or concept, Weiner's intention as can be seen in the "Statement of Intent" always precedes the presentation of his work in accordance with, or rather as it is presented incidentally in the venue of the exhibition of his work taking place. It is clear that Weiner considers his intention regarding the handling of his works is most important point above all.

With regard to the presentation of the artist's intentions, I would like to add a comparative analysis of the three artists on the issue of expressionism. In LeWitt's view, the artist's goal in conceptual art is to engage the viewer intellectually; therefore, the idea that the work is an expression of the artist's feelings prevents the viewer from perceiving the work intellectually. In Kosuth's case, the presentation of the intention of the work is accomplished within the context of the art; however, expressionism which deals with the subjective expression of feelings, is by no means important to him. Weiner, like LeWitt and Kosuth, took a critical stance toward expressionism, criticizing severely that it is an "aesthetic fascism." But Weiner's such critical stance somewhat differs from that of LeWitt and Kosuth. In Weiner's case, the work is not a presentation of meaning that belongs to an author as a unique existence. It must be open to free interpretation without any restrictions. Otherwise, the meaning would be imposed on the receiver.

4.2. On Responsibility

LeWitt can be said to consider the responsibility of the artist (as someone involved in conceptual art) in that he places the utmost importance on the artist's ideas and concepts, urging that the artist's purpose is to show them in his or her work. This is also expressed in his "Sentences on Conceptual Art" written in 1969. For example, rather strong assertions such as "6. If the artist changes his mind midway through the execution of the piece he compromises the result and repeats past results"³⁸ and "29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with,"³⁹

³⁷ Joseph Kosuth, "Intention(s)," *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 3 (September 1996), p. 412.

³⁸ LeWitt, 1969, op. cit., p. 106.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

we can realize LeWitt's thoughts on the responsibilities of the artist. Nonetheless, this is to some extent different from the tone in which Kosuth discusses the responsibility of the artist.

In "Intention(s)," cited above, Kosuth repeatedly argues for the responsibility of the artist. That is to say, "If Conceptual art means more than a style, its defining difference is established here in the rethinking of artistic responsibility in the production of meaning."⁴⁰ He also states that "the (making) process of putting a proposition (that signifying action which may or may not employ the object, performance, video and text, *et cetera*) 'into play' is only *one* of the responsibilities of the artist."⁴¹ He also comments the following: "The subjective presence which stands behind a work of art and which takes responsibility for its meaning something, which I have discussed here, is what makes it authentic as a work."⁴² Thus, in Kosuth, the artist must take responsibility as the producer of the meaning of the work, situating it in the context of art. By taking the responsibility, Kosuth believes that the artist can authenticate the work in its truest manner.

Finally, in Weiner's view, the responsibility does not only belong to the artist, but must be charged with the recipient equally. This is the key difference of Weiner in comparison with LeWitt and Kosuth, who attribute the responsibility solely to the artist. However, if we replace the artist with the creator of the work of art, Weiner and Lewitt, and especially Kosuth, overlap in that the creator must assume the responsibility for making the work of art. It must be admitted that there is a difference in tone between Kosuth and Weiner in terms of responsibility, and Weiner does not make as strong a statement about the responsibility as Kosuth does.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Lawrence Weiner's "Statement of Intent," comparing it with the ideas of Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth. Weiner's "Statement of Intent," which was accompanied by his exhibitions, differs from the stance of LeWitt and Kosuth took, who consider the artist's ideas and concepts to be the most important aspect of his work, and regard the presentation of such ideas and concepts to be the artist's responsibility. Weiner's "Statement of Intent" rather assigns the role of the artist to the recipient of the work, speaking against the backdrop of ideas such as freehold and aesthetic fascism. However, this is not limited to the free discretion of the work or the de-centering of the traditional image of the artist, as it has been pointed out in previous studies. The recipient of Weiner's work ought to assume responsibility as the interpreter or maker of art. In other words, the recipient must be the responsible subject who makes the judgment and decision that such is art. This attitude is shared by LeWitt and Kosuth in particular, but Weiner distinguishes himself from them by extending the recipient's role. This does not mean that Weiner abandons the artist's intention, and the artist's intention in handling his work is always taken into consideration. The difference between Weiner, LeWitt and Kosuth lies in the difference between the artist's intention in the handling of the work and the intention of the work given by the artist. Although at first glance the "Statement of Intent" seems to be a complete transfer of the artist's

⁴⁰ Kosuth, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 412.

role to the recipient, Weiner still retains his agency as an artist with intention. The "Statement of Intent" may also seem to transfer the role of the artist entirely to the recipient, but Weiner still posits his subjectivity as an artist with an intention, which is the common ground with LeWitt and Kosuth.

Finally, I would like to conclude this paper by presenting a few further perspectives and issues that can be drawn from the above discussion. First is the issue of certificates. While Kosuth pays attention to certificate as a guarantee of ownership of a work and, above all, as something that makes it possible to reproduce the work,⁴³ Weiner who transfers his role to the recipient urged "The piece may be fabricated." Second, because as this paper focuses on Kosuth's early ideas and their context, it did not foreground Kosuth after "The Artist as Anthropologist" (1975), who considers art in a broader social and cultural context that surpasses art *per se*. Kosuth's attitude of immersing himself in a broader context and generating the meaning of a work of art in the realm of art could be compared and examined with Weiner, who sometimes insists on a commitment to culture, shall be discussed in a separate paper.

⁴³ While Kosuth acknowledges the role of his signed certificate as a guarantee of ownership of the work and as enabling its reproduction, he argues that the art is not in the certificate but in the idea itself, which is attributed to the work (Kosuth, *op. cit.*, p. 407). This is in defiance of the idea that the certificate is the original of the work of art. On the other hand, Weiner states that formal proof of ownership is exchanged on paper. He also urges that all reproductions are originals (Weiner, interview by Norvell, p. 102). The relationship and position of the three parties in Weiner's work, i.e., the certificate-like document, the language work produced by Weiner himself and the reproduced work, is open to discussion.