


# Symptoms of Interference, Conditions of Possibility

Ad Reinhardt • Joseph Kosuth • Felix Gonzalez - Torres

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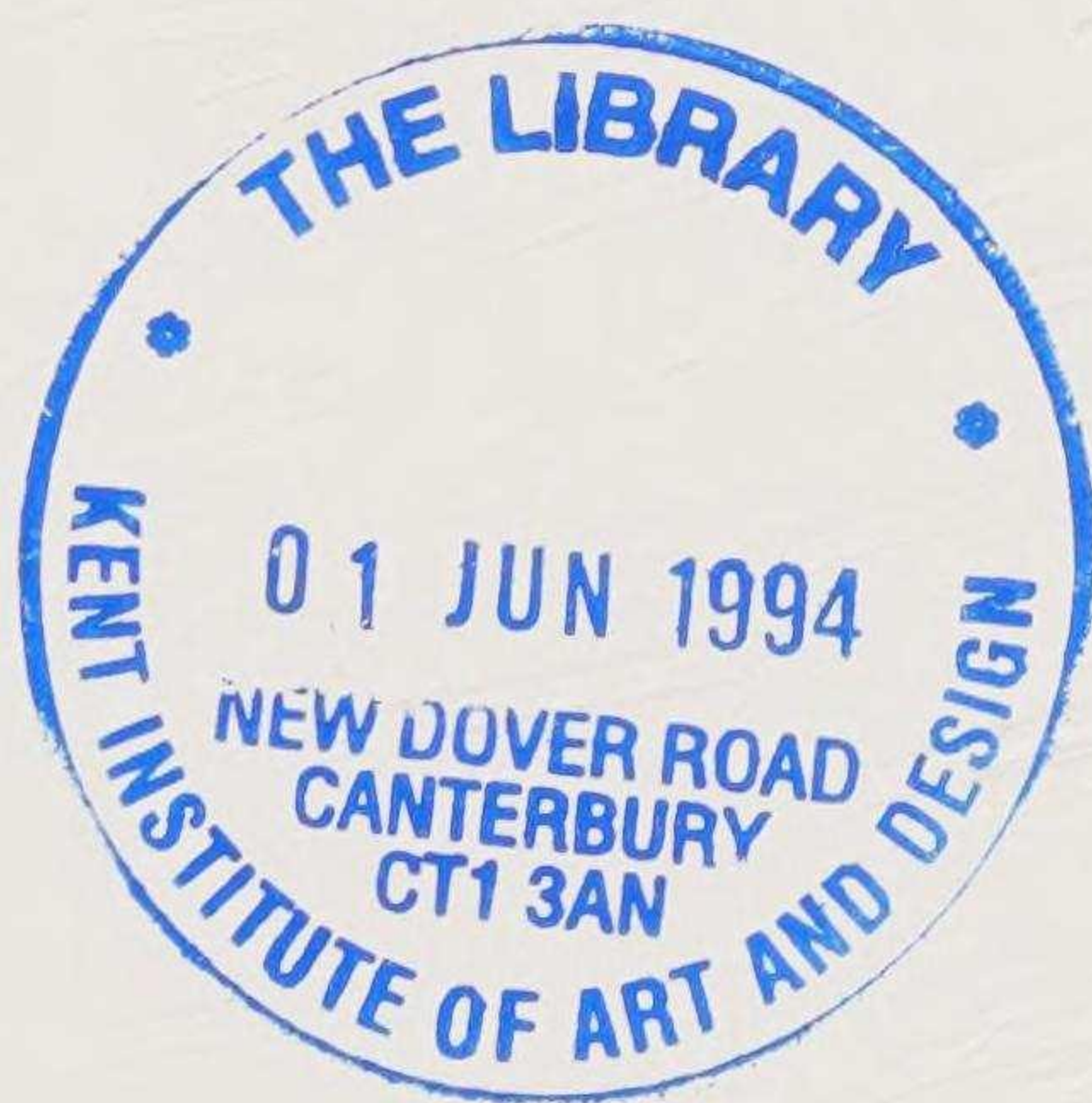
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# Symptoms of Interference, Conditions of Possibility

Ad Reinhardt • Joseph Kosuth • Felix Gonzalez - Torres



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## Negativity, Purity, and the Clearness of Ambiguity Ad Reinhardt, Joseph Kosuth, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres

*Ad Reinhardt's paintings, for many of us, were a kind of passage. His contradictions were the contradictions of modernism being made visible to itself. After Reinhardt, the tradition of painting seemed to be in the process of completion, while the tradition of art, now unfettered had to be re-defined.<sup>1</sup>*

Joseph Kosuth, 1980

In 1964 Ad Reinhardt was invited to lecture at the Cleveland Art Institute, where Joseph Kosuth, then nineteen years old, had enrolled as a student. Although the talk was not recorded, nor its manuscript preserved, it is tempting to speculate what the young Kosuth might have heard that left an indelible impression upon him, leading him to seek the elder artist's friendship and guidance, and subsequently inspiring him to cite his work in theoretical writings. The tenor of an article published by Reinhardt in the February 1964 issue of *Art News* may well be indicative of the subject of his Cleveland lecture. Entitled 'The Next Revolution in Art (*Art-as-Art Dogma, Part II*)', the essay propounded Reinhardt's signature terse and often acerbic attack on the superficiality of contemporary culture and its devastating effects on the production and reception of 'high' art. Composed as a manifesto, the text proclaims the "inalienable right" of each

separate art form to exist in its most essential state, entirely uncontaminated by the market and its constant fluctuations in aesthetic taste, as well as by the endless exigencies of the 'real' world. "The one, eternal, permanent revolution in art," Reinhardt exclaimed:

... is always a negation of the use of art for some purpose other than its own. All progress and change in art is toward the one end of art as art-as-art . . . Art-as-art is always a battle cry, polemic, picket sign, sit-in, sit-down, civil disobedience, passive resistance, crusade, fiery cross, and non-violent protest . . . Art-as-art is a creation that revolutionizes creation and judges itself by its destructions. Art-as-artists value themselves for what they have gotten rid of and for what they refuse to do.<sup>2</sup>

Reinhardt's rhetorical strategies — oxymoronic reversals of standard art-world tropes and tautological reductions of modernist doctrines — clearly inspired Kosuth in his own early formulations, which now foretell a career-long investigation of the means through which art acquires its definition as art, its cultural significance, and its commercial value.

Vestiges of Reinhardt's doctrinal 'art-as-art' statement are more than apparent in Kosuth's initial conceptualist creed 'Art as Idea as Idea', which he began to employ in 1966 as the subtitle to his 'investigations' of art as a propositional construct. Kosuth has never denied his intellectual debt to Reinhardt; on the contrary, he has often paid tribute to Reinhardt's rebellious moralism, his insistent interrogation of art interpretation, and his ultimate faith in art's transformative potential. In 1967, when Kosuth, along with Christine Kozlov and Michael Rinaldi, founded the Lannis Gallery — an alternative space in New York later renamed The Museum of Normal Art — he inscribed Reinhardt's 'art-as-art' dictum on the entrance wall of the space.<sup>3</sup> And in May of 1968, when Kosuth organized an exhibition at the Lannis Gallery entitled *Fifteen People Present Their Favourite Book*, he included a book given to him by Reinhardt prior to his death less than one year before.<sup>4</sup> One of the earliest exhibitions conceived as a (quite literal) demonstration of art's cerebral side, it featured the contributions of a number of artists who would soon be associated with what was then a burgeoning 'movement' — Conceptualism. Apart from Kosuth, the exhibition included books lent by Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Robert Smithson. The fact that Reinhardt was posthumously identified with Conceptual art practices during the late 1960s and early 70s has troubled recent critics, who are, it seems, deeply committed to preserving his status as one of the foremost painters of monochrome canvases.<sup>5</sup> In their minds, Reinhardt is categorized as one

of the final practitioners of modernist self reflexivity, no matter how reluctant he might have been to accept this designation. He is rightly credited with producing an entirely non-objective art form in which the definitive parameters of its genre are made explicit.

By minimizing the experiential limits of painting to such an extent that only its fundamental components remain apparent, Reinhardt (along with Frank Stella) appeared to have taken Clement Greenberg's concept of modernism as a systematic programme of reduction, purification, and self-evaluation to its logical conclusion. The fact that Reinhardt rejected Greenbergian theory – he spurned all theories of art except his own – as much as Greenberg repudiated his paintings<sup>6</sup>, has not deterred contemporary critics from attempting to prevent members of a younger generation – Kosuth, in particular – from claiming him as their mentor and their theorist.<sup>7</sup>

However, my purpose in writing this essay is not to posit Reinhardt as a proto-Conceptual artist, nor is it to establish an art-historical trajectory that bridges Reinhardt's 'black' canvases of the 1960s to the Conceptual-art strategies of the 1990s as a pre-ordained teleological progression. Rather, I am accepting as my premise the fairly mundane but simple truth that artists are influenced by other artists, regardless of an earlier generation's original 'intentions'. The present exhibition *Symptoms of Interference, Conditions of Possibility* can thereby be interpreted as a demonstration of aesthetic and theoretical inspiration made manifest through three generations of artists: Ad Reinhardt, Joseph Kosuth, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Thus, in the spirit of this tripartite presentation, I will comply with Reinhardt's own dictum, "Artists come from artists, art forms come from art forms, painting comes from painting"<sup>8</sup>, as well as to an observation that Kosuth made in his precocious 1969 essay, *Art After Philosophy*:

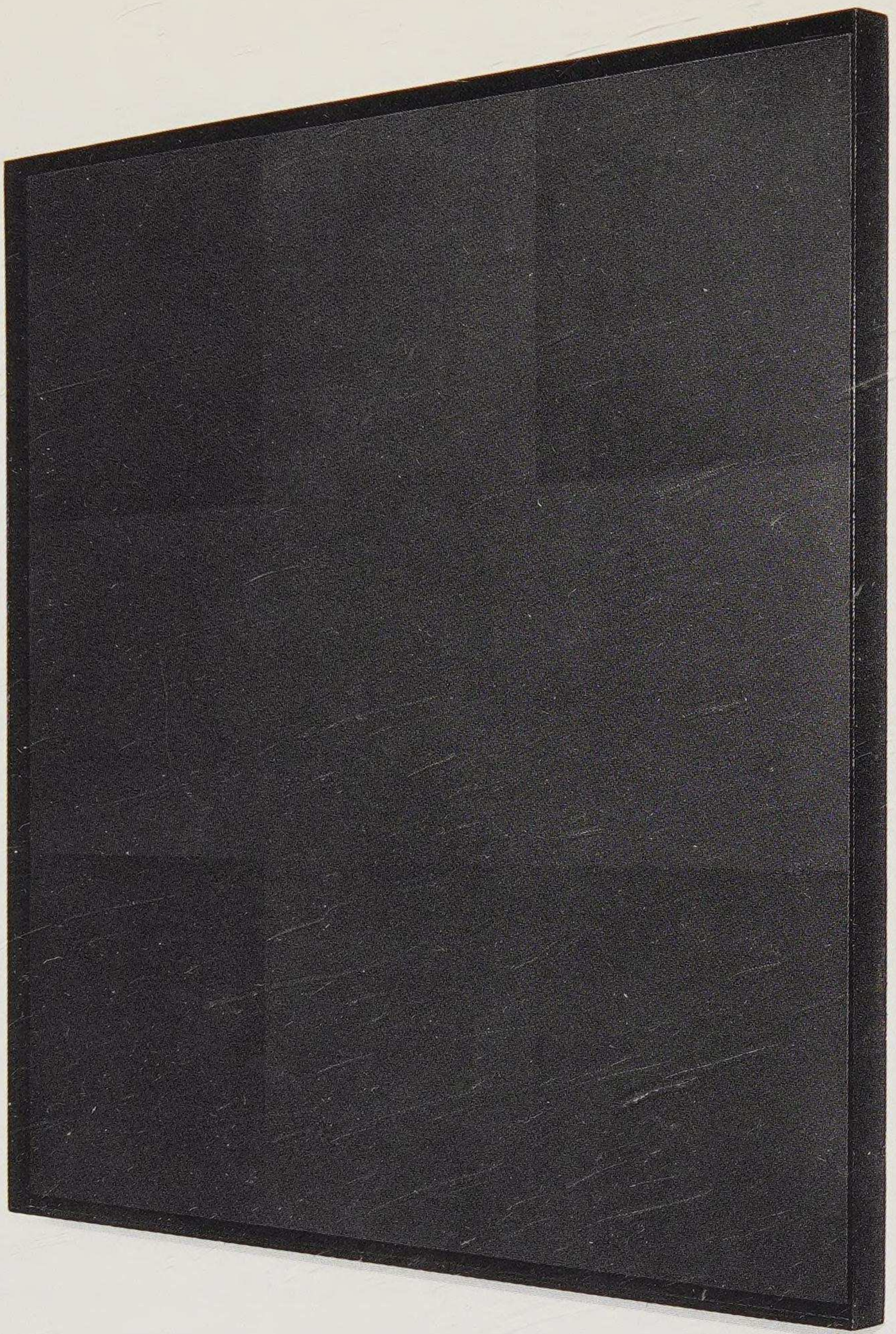
Art 'lives' through influencing other art, not by existing as the physical residue of an artist's ideas. The reason why different artists from the past are 'brought alive' again is because some aspect of their work becomes 'usable' by living artists. That there is no 'truth' as to what art is seems quite unrealized.<sup>9</sup>

The title of the present essay is derived from a term paper written by Kosuth and Kozlov in 1966 for the School of Visual Arts in New York, which they entitled *Ad Reinhardt: Evolution into Darkness—the Art of an Informal Formalist; Negativity, Purity, and the Clearness of Ambiguity*. Its lyrical quality suggested to me a way of structuring the following text, one which would embrace the overlapping and interrelated

aspects of the three artists' oeuvres without adhering to a linear, art-historical narrative. Hence, the essay will progress by topics –History, Negation and Space –the investigation of which will in all cases but one invoke all three artists. With intermittent evocations of cultural history, philosophy, biography, literature, and semiotics, the text will map a transdisciplinary terrain in which the art and ideas of Reinhardt, Kosuth, and Gonzalez-Torres circulate. In reading this essay, and seeing the exhibition it accompanies, one will traverse a polyvalent topography marked by specific points of convergence, instances of coincidence, and 'conditions of possibility'.

## Historical Perspective/Perceiving History

On the occasion of his retrospective at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966, Reinhardt composed his own biographical chronology for the exhibition catalogue. An amusing, if somewhat mordant, survey of key (and not so key) events in the artist's life, the chronology also includes major episodes in world history, as well as landmarks of modern art. The entry for 1948, for instance, records the following incidents: "Helps found Artists' Club but doesn't help paint walls or sweep floors;" "Israel gains independence;" and "Talks at 'Subjects of the Artists' School on 'Detachment and Involvement' against all involvements." Critics have interpreted Reinhardt's flippant juxtaposition of his own career with select historical milestones as a dismissal of art's significance in light of global-scale occurrences. In response to Reinhardt's chronology, for example, Barbara Rose wrote that "art is revealed as a matter of small consequence –another way of saying that the value of art is incomparable and comes only from itself."<sup>10</sup> But another reading of Reinhardt's strategy is equally viable, if not, perhaps more true to the artist's objectives. His inclusion of cataclysmic world affairs in an 'artist's biography' –a standard feature of any one-person exhibition catalogue – bespeaks the impossibility of divorcing cultural endeavours from the social and political context in which they are pursued. However hermetic Reinhardt's 'black' paintings may be, it is wrong to presume that they were created in a vacuum. The kind of profound abstraction that he advocated should, at least, be partially understood as a product of and reaction to the climate of Cold War America. Reinhardt himself, despite his isolationist rhetoric, was actively engaged in political and social issues throughout his life. During the early 1940s, his writings and political cartoons appeared in the socialist newspapers *The New Masses* and *PM*. And, though he served as



a photographer in the Navy during World War II, he adamantly opposed America's involvement in Vietnam, participating in organized protests and donating work to benefits for civil rights activities and anti-war campaigns.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the emergence of a 'conceptual' art form during the late 1960s — as a rigorous and subversive exploration of the culturally-determined definition of what constitutes a work of art — cannot, in any effective way, be thought of separately from the social and political upheavals of the time.

Dissent in the 1960's — against racial and sexual inequity, against late-capitalist political hegemony, and against imperialism at large — often took the form of intervention, as a kind of social activism from within. The most memorable example of this being student-staged 'sit-ins', in which they seized and occupied academic buildings, often holding their own classes. The predominant instigation to such forms of protest was a general distrust of authority, a suspicion of all conventional regimes of power. Within the art world this spirit was manifested in radical formal and theoretical strategies that led ultimately to the critical rupture with modernism rehearsed by Conceptual art. Hal Foster situates the beginning of this break with the artistic past in Minimalist practices, which he describes as "Janus-like", in that Minimalism operated as both the culmination of modernist, purist aesthetics and the commencement of a post-modernist self-reflexive criticism that involved an examination of the institutional and discursive conditions of art itself.<sup>12</sup>

From the start, Kosuth recognized the critical potential of Minimalism — he quoted Donald Judd seven times in *Art After Philosophy* — but rejected the movement's reliance upon the morphological necessity of the art object. "Being an artist now," explained Kosuth at the height of the 1960s:

... means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art. If an artist accepts painting (or sculpture) he is accepting the tradition that goes with it. That's because the word 'art' is general and the word 'painting' is specific. Painting is a *kind* of art. If you make paintings you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art...<sup>13</sup>

The analytical dimensions of Kosuth's early brand of Conceptual art also reflect the intellectual climate of the times, at least in terms of what was then an emerging

validation of Structuralist thought in the United States. Described (albeit disparagingly) by Frederic Jameson as the replacement of 'philosophy' with 'theory', Structuralism operated as an essentially ahistorical mode of inquiry aimed at the textual structure of Western culture's canonical writings.<sup>14</sup> The result, according to Jameson, was the conception of a 'metaphilosophy', which hovers over an existing text and, instead of grappling with its metaphysical claims to truth, it critiques and extrapolates from the levels of discourse embedded there. From the beginning, Kosuth argued that traditional philosophical analysis had reached its end, and proposed that it be replaced with a 'meta-art,' which, in the spirit of Structuralist methodology, would work to demystify and destabilize the rarefied position of the art object. "If we continue our analogy of the forms art takes as being art's *language*," he explained, "one can realize then that a work of art is a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment on art".<sup>15</sup>

By 1975 Kosuth had rethought many of the historically autonomous, culturally-detached implications of his formative writings and Conceptual art projects. In the essay *'The Artist as Anthropologist'*, he argues against his initial contention that art can be analyzed as a proposition independent from the culture in which it is validated and free from the artist's own agency within that culture. Inspired by his readings in Marxism and radical anthropology, Kosuth was incited to realign his more hermetic theories of art's existence as a language with an understanding of the artist's complicity in utilizing that language, manipulating its signs, and thus making meaning. From then on, Kosuth has advocated a socially-engaged art, one that actively challenges culture's pretense of objectivity. His large-scale installations — collaged constructions of appropriated texts, objects, and images seen most recently at Documenta and the Venice Biennale — investigate how meaning is entirely contingent on the context in which it is presented and the manner in which it is perceived.

Kosuth's kaleidoscopic installations are not unrelated in intent and effect to those produced during the 1980s and early 1990s by the politically-motivated artists' collective, Group Material, of which Felix Gonzalez-Torres is a member. In response to the art world's privileging of the artistic personality over the capacity of art to convey meaning, Group Material orchestrated mosaic-like installations containing works by numerous, culturally-diverse artists. The exhibitions they conceived were polyphonic explorations of such pressing social issues as democracy, housing,

education, consumerism, and AIDS. This particular kind of cultural activism reflects the crisis in representation precipitated during the 1970s by Post-Structuralist theories that announced the 'death' of the author, contested the notion of 'originality', and challenged the patriarchal, heterosexual hegemony of language itself. It is against this theoretical background that Gonzalez-Torres's content-laden appropriations of Minimalist, Post-minimalist, and Conceptual art strategies must be understood. By infusing his objects and installations — which morphologically recall an earlier generation's reductive aesthetic — with allusions to some of today's most trenchant concerns, he fulfils Kosuth's directive for a socially engaged art reinforced by an awareness of art's role in the production of cultural meaning. Gonzalez-Torres's employment of pre-existing, now aesthetically acceptable styles to convey his subversive critiques of social injustice is a form of cultural intervention, a critical disruption from within the contemporary canon.

This strategy of intervention can be better observed when compared to the earlier art forms that have been appropriated in the service of cultural critique. The juxtaposition between Reinhardt's self-authored chronology and Gonzalez-Torres's 'date' works is particularly instructive. Reinhardt's parodic biographical exercise was, at the time of its creation, interpreted as mere 'documentation', as tangential to his artistic enterprise. But, because of Conceptual art's deployment of linguistic analysis and its use of language as a medium through which to demonstrate the discursive foundations of art, a younger generation inherited the freedom to use words as a viable alternative to image-making. Therefore, Gonzalez-Torres's various inventories of disjunctive historical incidents and private moments, followed by the year of their occurrence, can and actually do constitute his art. Conceived as empty sheets of black paper captioned with lists of disparate events and diverse social phenomena — *Alabama 1964 Safer Sex 1985 Disco Donuts 1979 Cardinal O'Connor 1987 Klaus Barbie 1944 Napalm 1972 C.O.D. or Bitburg Cemetery 1985 Walkman 1979 Capetown 1985 Water-proof mascara 1971 Personal computer 1981 TLC* — these 'date' works use now conventional Conceptual strategies to mimic the idea of an 'Artist's' chronology. More importantly, however, in the over-arching equivalency of everything listed in these works, Gonzalez-Torres is underscoring a crucial reality in today's world: that the personal cannot be divorced from the political and, more importantly, that the political cannot be divorced from the personal.



Text panel on the wall, containing several lines of small print, likely a caption or historical context for the adjacent photograph.



## The Affirmation of Negativity

Reinhardt's posthumously collected writings and interviews read as a litany of negative aphorisms. And his canvases — muted black squares with barely visible cruciform shapes — “come as close to nothing as painting can.”<sup>16</sup> Reinhardt's strategy of perpetual denial echoed his conviction that modernism itself was a “negative progression”, that abstraction evolved as a series of subtractions, and that he was creating the last or “ultimate” paintings.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of his vocabulary, however, he was not advocating the end of painting: “If I were to say that I am making the last paintings,” he once explained, “I don't mean that painting is dying. You go back to the beginning all the time anyway.”<sup>18</sup> Reinhardt's relentless negation was, in essence, affirmative, for he had great faith in painting's potential to transcend the contradictory rhetoric that has surrounded it since the advent of modernism. As Yves-Alain Bois aptly suggests in his study of the artist, what Reinhardt hoped to realize in his painting recalls the aspirations of Negation Theology, an ancient method of thought — evident in Plato, Neo-Platonism, and early Christianity — employed to comprehend the Divine by indicating everything that it was not.<sup>19</sup> For example, within Platonism, this method often took the form of a simultaneous negation of contrary entities in order to prove that God transcends all opposition. Reinhardt must have been aware of this mystical side of negation: in unpublished notes from 1965 relating to his ‘black’ paintings, he transcribed a quotation from the medieval Neo-Platonist Nicholas of Cusa:

How needful it is to enter into the darkness and to admit the coincidence of opposites/ to seek the truth where impossibility meets us.<sup>20</sup>

A correlative ‘theology’ of negation may also be found in the second agenda of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, in which he analyzes that which cannot be said, that which falls outside of language, that which, by necessity, is omitted from speech:

Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it — logical form. In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say, outside the world. Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in

them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language. Propositions *show* the logical form of reality.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, it is specifically what is not said that enables reality to be spoken of. According to Wittgenstein, the things that cannot be put into words but “make themselves manifest”, constitute what is mystical.<sup>22</sup>

For Kosuth — who has been highly influenced by Wittgenstein’s thought — art can never *speak* about anything but an articulation of its own existence. However, he believes that it has the capacity to *show* what cannot be said. In his multiple-artist installations, such as the 1989 *Das Spiel des Unsagbaren: Ludwig Wittgenstein und die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* at the Vienna Secession and the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Kosuth demonstrated how meaning can be produced through the *play* — the juxtapositions of and collisions between — examples of things which are essentially ‘unspeakable’. By intermingling the works of some seventy artists and select quotations from manifold sources, Kosuth created interactive situations in which exhibition viewers were made acutely aware of the contextual nature of interpretation.<sup>23</sup> For his exhibition *The Play of the Unmentionable* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1991, Kosuth brought the same principles to bear, but this time exploring the realm of the ‘unsayable’ in terms of the encroaching threat of censorship in the United States. In response to Right Wing assaults on the funding policies of the National Endowment for the Arts and the ensuing threat to freedom of expression in that country, Kosuth curated an impressively divergent installation of paintings, sculptures, photographs, and objects drawn from the museum’s different curatorial departments: the criteria for inclusion consisted in the fact that at one time or another every item could have been construed as ‘questionable’, ‘inappropriate’, or ‘shocking’.<sup>24</sup>

A ‘play’ of the ‘unmentionable’ is also enacted in Gonzalez-Torres’s art through the subtitles he often assigns to his otherwise ‘untitled’ works: (*Perfect Lovers*), (*Lover Boy*), (*Double Fear*), (*Death by Gun*), (*Placebo*), etc. For him, “the work is untitled because ‘meaning’ is always shifting in time and place . . . ‘meaning’ is created once something can be related to personal experience.”<sup>25</sup> What Gonzalez-Torres has consistently intimated through the subtitled subtexts of his works is exactly what has been repressed from the vocabulary of modernist art, the vocabulary of authority:

homoerotic pleasure, the outrage of the 'Other', the vicissitudes of the body, and the despair of illness. When thought of collectively, Gonzalez-Torres's paper 'stacks', candy 'spills', strings of lightbulbs, and billboards come to constitute a visual elegy, a poetic lamentation for that which has remained unsaid for far too long. But as there exists affirmation in negation, Gonzalez-Torres's art may be read, rather, as a celebration of a newly articulated, and long overdue, cultural narrative.

## Public and Private: The Spaces Between

Kosuth's earliest *Investigations* (subtitled *Art as Idea as Idea*) included photostats of dictionary definitions of words such as 'water', 'meaning', and 'idea'. Accompanying these enlarged definitions are certificates of documentation and ownership (not intended for display) indicating that the photostats can be refabricated again and again for exhibition purposes. Despite Kosuth's efforts to prevent these works from being received as aestheticized objects — in his programmatic attempt to subvert the preciousness of the unique work of art and its privileged place in the museum — the photostats were too easily confused with paintings. Therefore, in his next series of *Investigations* dating from 1969, he switched presentational strategies entirely by utilizing the mass media. Appropriating entries from Roget's Thesaurus in various languages and presenting them in conventional advertising spaces — billboards, banners, and newspapers — Kosuth was able to demonstrate the contextual and conceptual aspects of art without generating any residual, collectable object. In this action, Kosuth was one of the first American artists to implement public modes of information dispersal as a way to circumvent the institutionalization and commodification of art. In its immediate visual accessibility and wide-scale exposure, such work promoted a democratization of the art experience, one that, no doubt, proved inspirational for a younger generation of artists including Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, who took their feminist, language-based art directly to the streets.

The cultural dichotomy between what is considered public and what is construed as private is central to Gonzalez-Torres's art. His work has always migrated between social commentary and personal disclosure, equivocating between the two realms and obscuring the socially determined distinctions that separate them. In fact, it is this provocative shifting from cultural activism to intimate, autobiographical depiction —



and the subsequent erosion of the boundaries between — that forms the very essence of the work. Whether presented in a cloistered museum environment or in the midst of an urban milieu, Gonzalez-Torres's art consistently confounds one's expectations as to what constitutes a private moment or a public experience. This conundrum is manifest in the artist's 'stack' pieces, which are exhibited as 'sculptures' in museums and galleries, but are actually unlimited editions, in that each viewer may help him or herself to the individual sheets of paper that constitute the work. The 'stacks' (as well as the candy accumulations) are premised on notions of circulation — physical accessibility, public dispersal, and continuous renewal. While they masquerade as discrete sculptural entities — offering their viewers an aesthetic experience of reductive formal beauty — their individual components can be taken freely into the world and used for any number of purposes. Often, each sheet of paper is inscribed with a particular phrase — 'Memorial Day Weekend', for example — or imprinted with a newspaper clipping or, in the case of *Untitled (Lover Boy)*, 1990, is coloured an intense sky blue. The artist's choice of hue — whether it's blue for boys, for Giotto's Arena Chapel, or for Caribbean light — is never divulged. For Gonzalez-Torres, every person's interpretation is valid; the private meaning he prescribes to a colour (or an expression) becomes theirs to personalize once ownership of the paper is assumed.

This intersection of the 'private' and the 'public' spheres occurs most explicitly in Gonzalez-Torres's billboard projects, the first of which he presented in New York's West Village to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion in 1989. Stylistically reminiscent of the artist's other 'date' pieces, this immense black billboard was conceived as an inventory of key events in the history of the gay liberation movement:

People With AIDS Coalition 1985 Police Harassment 1969 Oscar Wilde  
1895 Supreme Court 1986 Harvey Milk 1977 March on Washington 1987  
Stonewall Rebellion 1969

In its unnerving matter-of-factness, this billboard brings to the fore the reality that in the United States, the very private realm of sexual preference has been circumscribed by the public arena, where it is socially and politically legislated. This phenomenon is invoked in another of Gonzalez-Torres's billboards — a haunting black and white photograph of the artist's own vacant, but once shared, bed — which he displayed in twenty-four locations throughout New York City in 1992. While being an emblem of irrecoverable loss — Gonzalez-Torres's long-time lover died from AIDS in 1991 — this

quiet image subtly underscores the fact that any belief in 'the privacy of the bedroom' is a fallacy today. An admittedly eroticized zone, the double bed speaks of desire, shared moments, and sexual intimacy. It does not, however, dictate the gender of its inhabitants. That province belongs to the law.<sup>26</sup>

With his billboard projects, Gonzalez-Torres utilizes the most public mode of outdoor advertising to infiltrate the 'communal' realm in order to speak of the hidden and the disenfranchised. For him, the billboards function as places of passage between the public and private; they demonstrate the fluidity between socially demarcated space, which, in our culture, is predicated on age-old sets of oppositions. As sites of transition, placed in sites of transition, Gonzalez-Torres's billboards reveal that meaning is always a matter of context.<sup>27</sup>

Nancy Spector

I would like to thank Francois Quintin for his assistance with research for this essay.

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This is an abridged version of the essay, which appears in full in the exhibition catalogue published by *Art & Design Magazine*.

## Footnotes

1  
From 'On Ad Reinhardt', in Gabriele Guercio, ed. *Joseph Kosuth: Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966-1990* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 191.

This text was first published in *Cover* (Spring/Summer 1980), p. 10. From a panel with Lucy Lippard, Barbara Rose and Richard Serra at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 1980.

2  
Ad Reinhardt, 'The Next Revolution in Art: *Art-as-Art Dogma, Part II*', in Barbara Rose, ed. *Art As Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 59, 63. Originally published in *Art News* (New York, February 1964); also published as 'Art-as-Art Dogma, Part II', *Art International* (Lugano, March 1964).

3  
For information on Kosuth's early encounters with Reinhardt, see Guercio, pp. xxii-xxiii; xxvii; xi 13.

4  
The book, which is still in Kosuth's library, is *A Short History of Art* by Julia B. De Forest. An illustration of it showing Reinhardt's signature is included in *Joseph Kosuth (Eine Grammatische Bemerkung) (A Grammatical Remark)*, exh. cat. Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1993), p. 43. Kosuth considers this exhibition his first, secret, 'one-man show' in New York. See his essay 'Art After Philosophy', in Guercio, p. 30. This text was originally published in three parts in *Studio International* (London) 178, no. 915 (October 1969), pp. 134-137; no. 916 (November 1969), pp. 160-161; no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 212-213.

5  
See, for example, Yves-Alain Bois, 'The Limit of Almost', in *Ad Reinhardt*, exh. cat. The Museum of Modern Art, New York and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (New York: Rizzoli International Publication, 1991); Benjamin Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art 1962-1969)', in Claude Gintz, ed. *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, exh. cat., 2nd ed. (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989), pp. 41-53; and Thierry de Duve, 'The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas,' in Serge Guibaut, ed. *Reconstructing Modernism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 244-310.

6  
Greenberg described Reinhardt's paintings as all too "familiar-looking and . . . slick." See Clement Greenberg, 'Recentness of Sculpture', in Gregory Battcock ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton), pp. 180-181. originally published in *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, exh. cat. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967.

7  
De Duve and Buchloh seem particularly earnest in their attempts to document that Kosuth's interpretation of Reinhardt's work was a "misreading". See, for example, De Duve, p. 278 and Buchloh, p. 43.

8  
Rose, p. 56. Originally published as 'Art-as-Art', *Art International* (Lugano) Vol. 6, no. 10 (December, 20 1962).

9  
Guercio, p. 19.

10

Rose, p. 3.

11

Ibid., pp. 171-172.

12

"Now as an analysis of perception," Foster argues, "Minimalism is also an analysis of the conditions of perception." This led, he claims, to a critique of the very spaces in which art is exhibited and the conventional modes of aesthetic display, as well as a denunciation of art's inextricable links to the market. Citing Buchloh's study of the ready-made paradigm in contemporary art, Foster sees Minimalism as one interval in the "genealogy of presentational strategies" that extends from Duchamp. Hal Foster, 'The Crux of Minimalism', in Howard Singerman, ed. *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945-1986*, exh. cat. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1986, pp. 177. See also Buchloh, 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum* 21, no. 1 (September 1982): 43-56.

13

Arthur Rose [J. Kosuth], 'Four Interviews', in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1973), pp. 140-149.

14

Frederic Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s', in Stanley Aronowitz, Sohnya Sayres, eds., et al, *The 60s Without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 193.

15

Guercio, p. 19-20. Perhaps not a directly causal influence – Kosuth was more engaged with the language theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein and A. J. Ayer during the late 1960s – Structuralist strategies were certainly gaining intellectual currency at the time.

16

This statement was made by Priscilla Colt in 'Notes on Ad Reinhardt', *Art International* (Lugano) Vol. 8, no. 8 (October 20, 1964): 32.

17

In an interview with Bruce Glaser, Reinhardt stated, "In reading and rereading and making art history we can see now that there was a negative progression. The still life, landscape, the pure still life and the pure landscape and the pure portrait were negations of all kinds of narrative, mythological, and historical painting." Rose, p. 17. Originally published as 'An Interview with Ad Reinhardt', *Art International* (Lugano) (Winter, 1966-67). Reinhardt did give some of his 'black' canvases titles like *Ultimate Painting No. 39* and *Timeless Painting, 1960*.

18

Quoted in Jeanne Siegel, 'Ad Reinhardt: Art as Art', in *Artwords: Discourses on the 60's and 70's* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.M.I. Press, 1985), p. 27.

19

Bois, p. 29. See also Eric Valentin, 'Avec Reinhardt, libérer le regard', *Art Studio* (TK): 46-64 for a discussion of Reinhardt, religion, and negation.

20

From 'Five Stages Of Reinhardt's Timeless Stylistic Art-Historical Cycle', in Rose, p.10.

21

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 51. The connection between Wittgenstein and Negation Theology was made by P. Hardot, 'Théologie Négative', in *Encyclopedia Universals* Vol. 15, 4th edition (Paris: Encyclopedia Universals, 1974), p. 1094.

22

Wittgenstein, p. 151.

23

In 'The Play of the Unsayable: A Preface and Ten Remarks on Art and Wittgenstein', Kosuth writes, "One of the lessons for art which we can derive from the *Philosophical Investigations* is that I believe the later Wittgenstein attempted with his parables and language-games to construct theoretical *object-texts* which could make recognizable (*show*) aspects of language that, philosophically, he could not assert explicitly. This aspect of philosophy, *as a process to be shown*, resists the reification of the direct philosophical assertion." Guercio, p. 249.

24

For photographic documentation of this exhibition see David Freedberg, Charlotta Kotik, et al. *The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: The New Press, 1992).

25

Quoted from an interview with the artist by Robert Nickas, 'Felix Gonzalez-Torres: All the Time in the World', *Flash Art* 24, no. 161 (December 1991): 87. Gonzalez-Torres's work has other 'hidden' dimensions. For instance, behind each 'graph' in one of his 'bloodwork' series, the artist has included drawings and photographs that will only be seen by the eventual owners of each piece.

26

In the 1986 *Bowers versus Hardwick* case, the United States Supreme Court ruled that even though every person possesses the liberty to maintain the privacy of his or her own home, this right does not authorize a private individual to engage in certain sexual acts that are considered illegal.

27

For more on Gonzalez-Torres's billboards, see Anne Umland, 'Projects 34: Felix Gonzalez-Torres', exh. brochure, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1992.

## List of Works

### Ad Reinhardt

#### **Abstract Painting No. 5, 1962**

oil on canvas

60 x 60" (152.4 x 152.4cm)

Tate Gallery, presented by Mrs Rita Reinhardt through the  
American Federation of Arts 1972

#### **Abstract Painting 1966**

oil on canvas

60 x 60" (152.4 x 152.4cm)

Caldic Collection, Rotterdam

#### **Black on Black No. 8, 1953**

oil on canvas

80 x 60" (203 x 152.4cm)

Galerie Metropol, Vienna

Publications featuring cartoons and writings by Ad Reinhardt kindly supplied by  
Michael Corris. Prints of Ad Reinhardt cartoons courtesy Panicali Fine Art, New York.

### Joseph Kosuth

*'the Thing-in-itself is found in its Truth through the loss of its immediacy'*

nos. II, III, V, X, XV, 1993 and XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, 1994

photo installation

various sizes

## Felix Gonzalez-Torres

### **Untitled (Public Opinion), 1991**

cellophane wrapped licorice sweets

variable size

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

### **Untitled (Party Platform - 1980 - 1992), 1991**

paper

25½ x 39½ x 7'' (64.77 x 100.33 x 17.78cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

### **Untitled 1987**

framed photocopy

10¼ x 13'' (26 x 33cm)

Collection of Frank Wagner

### **Untitled 1988**

framed photocopy

10½ x 11¾'' (26.6 x 29.8cm)

Collection of Nayland Blake

## Plates

Ad Reinhardt

**Abstract Painting No. 5, 1962**

*Installation view at Camden Arts Centre, page 7*

Joseph Kosuth

*'the Thing-in-itself is found in its Truth through the loss of its immediacy', 1993-4 (detail)*

*Installation view at Camden Arts Centre, page 11*

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

**Untitled (Public Opinion), 1991 (foreground)**

**Untitled (Party Platform - 1980 - 1992), 1991**

**Untitled, 1987 (back)**

*Installation view at Camden Arts Centre, page 15*

Published to coincide with the exhibition

**Symptoms of Interference, Conditions of Possibility**

**Ad Reinhardt · Joseph Kosuth · Felix Gonzalez-Torres**

at Camden Arts Centre, London

7 January-6 March 1994

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We are also extremely grateful to the Caldic Collection, Rotterdam, Galerie Metropol, Vienna and the Tate Gallery, London for lending Ad Reinhardt paintings, to Michael Corris and Carla Panicali for lending the Reinhardt cartoons, and to Andrea Rosen Gallery, Nayland Blake, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Frank Wagner for lending works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

We would also like to thank everybody who has helped to make this project possible, especially Rita and Anna Reinhardt; Nancy Spector of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Andrea Rosen, Michelle Reyes and Monica Thurnauer of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; Peter Boris of the Pace Gallery, New York; Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; Tom Sokolowski of the Grey Art Gallery, New York; Jill McArthur, Renée Padt, Glen Rubasmen and Cindy Smith; Orna Frommer-Dawson; John Purcell Papers; Andrea Bettella, Clare Farrow and Nicola Hodges of Art & Design Magazine; Nicholas Serota and Stephen Dunn of the Tate Gallery, London; Duncan Page of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

*Photographs by Peter White*

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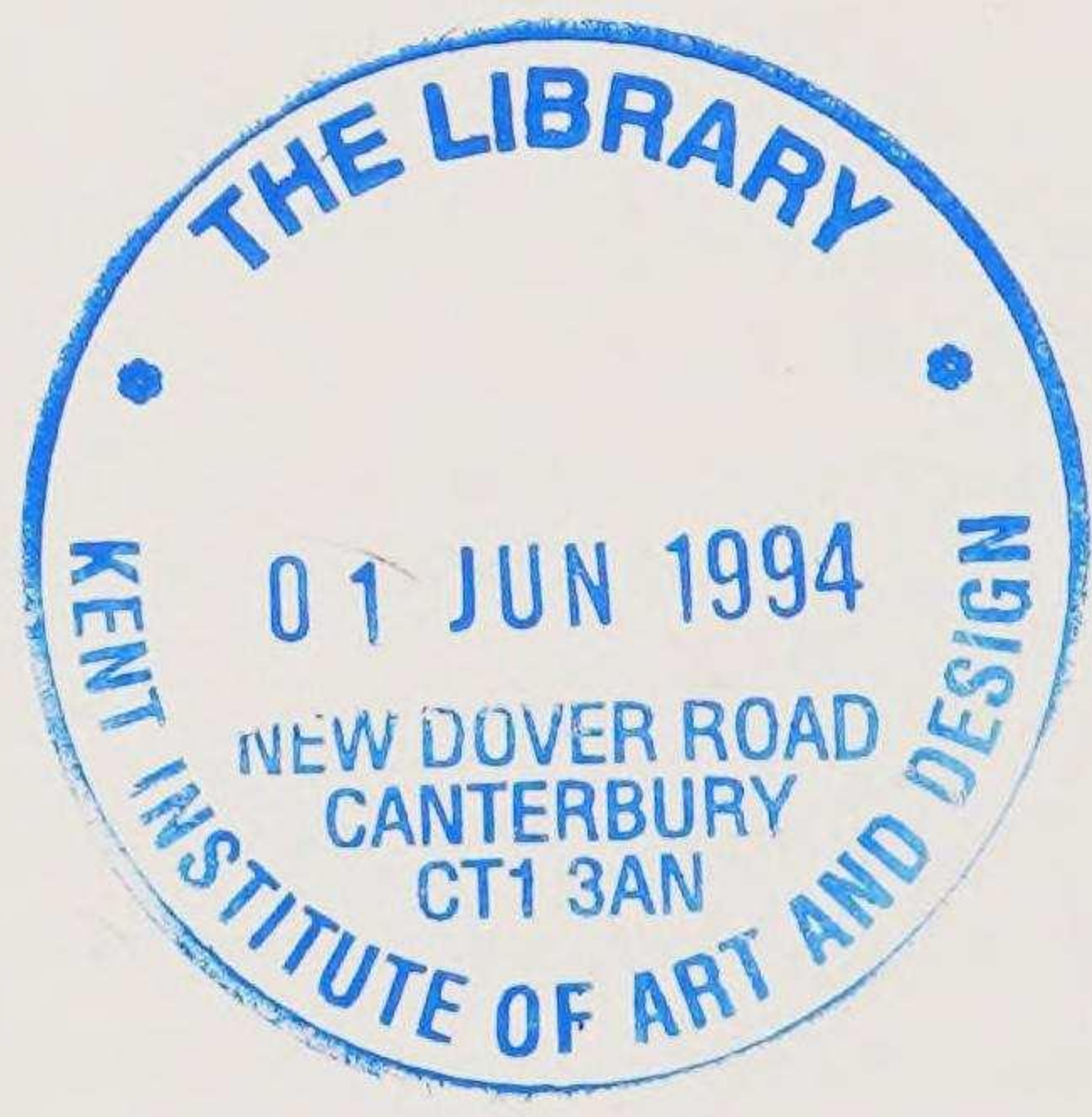
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