



National College of Art and Design

Critical Cultures

Essay Title: INSIDE OF & OUTSIDE OF ITSELF
Conceptual Art and Lawrence Weiner

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Year of Study: 4th Year 2021/2022

Department: Painting

Are you on the Joint Course: No

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Essay Due Date: 31st of January 2022

Word Count: 6541 words

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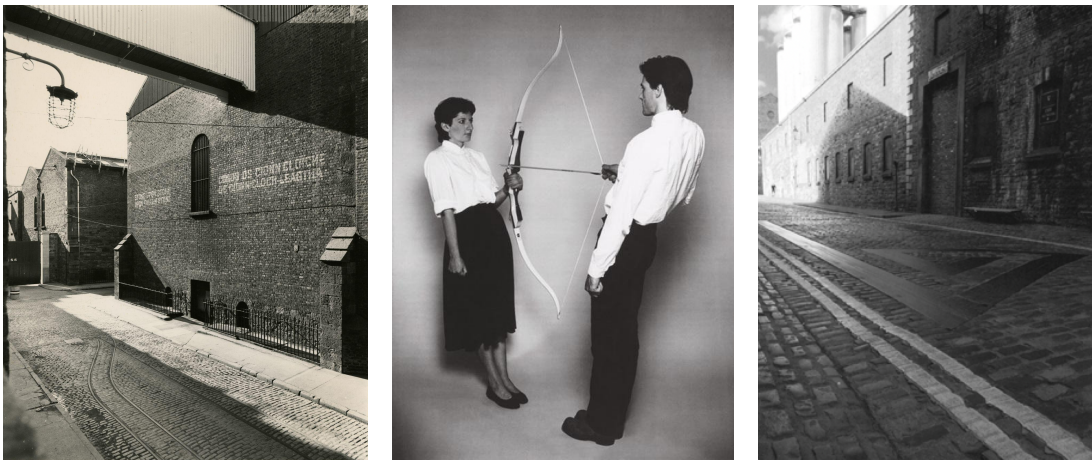
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A sunny Wednesday afternoon in Dublin. It's mid-May and covid restrictions on visual art spaces have recently lifted, with galleries opening to the public for the first time in 5 long months. One of the first exhibitions on my list to see is the much anticipated new solo show from one of the pioneering figures of conceptual art, Lawrence Weiner, his first solo show in Ireland in 28 years, previously showing **"PROJECTS"** at IMMA in 1993. This new show has been sitting behind the closed doors of the Kerlin Gallery since February and at one point seemed likely it may never open to the public.



(From Left to Right Fig. 1, 2 & 3)

Fig.1 Lawrence Weiner, **"STONE UPON STONE UPON FALLEN STONE"**, Enamel on Brick, ROSC' 84, Rainsford Street, Guinness Storehouse, Dublin, 1984

Fig. 2 Ulay and Marina Abramović, **"Rest Energy"**, Still from Performance Video, 4 minutes, ROSC' 80, Dublin, 1980

Fig. 3 Richard Serra, **"Sean's Spiral"**, Steel, ROSC' 84, Sugar House Lane, Guinness Storehouse, Dublin, 1984

I partially know what to expect from the show, sporadically seeing some impressive installation shots of the work on the gallery's website and Instagram over the past few months. But this will be my first time experiencing Weiner's work in person within a gallery setting. Having previously viewed one of Weiner's public works **"STONE UPON STONE UPON FALLEN STONE"** (Fig. 1 & 16), which was installed on one of the brick facades of the Guinness Storehouse at Rainsford Street, for the 1984 edition of **"Rosco"**. A series of exhibitions showcasing contemporary art from international artists held in Ireland every 4 years from 1967 till 1988. Although **"Rosco"** brought art from some of the most influential artists of the second half of the 20th century to Irish

shores including Agnes Martin, Mark Rothko, Joseph Beuys and the very first public performance of “Rest Energy” by Marina Abramović and Ulay, a 4 minute performance where the couple supported each other by holding two sides of a large bow together, with a steel arrow pointed directly at Abramović’s chest (Fig. 2). The exhibitions were often marred with controversy in regards to its spending and the lack of Irish artists represented at the shows. Leaving behind a rather divided legacy as a result (IMMA, 2017). **“STONE UPON STONE UPON FALLEN STONE”** however, still remains visible to this day, having subtly faded over the years, it has harmoniously ingrained itself into its surroundings high upon one of the buildings of the Guinness Storehouse, with much of the passing traffic below completely unaware of its existence along with a similarly subtle steel installation by Richard Serra “Sean's Spiral” (Fig. 3) (located just a stone's throw away, around the corner), a large steel triangular-spiral structure embedded into the cobblestones of Sugar House Lane which can be freely walked upon and driven over. Both pieces seamlessly blend into the locality with Serra using the existing language of the rail lines scattered across the area and Wiener using the language of the signage mural that was in wide use across Dublin throughout the early 20th century. Part of the strength of these works is that they are not instantly recognisable as art. They may not even be viewed as art at all, without some prior knowledge of contemporary art. They fit into the area while also demanding closer inspection, curious objects that serve no obvious purpose. Serra’s sculpture, while appearing as some sort of rail structure at first glance, is completely unusable to any rail system. Meanwhile, Wiener’s mural appears as signage at first sight, but once read is a purposely perplexing piece of text that asks many questions and gives practically no answers back.

The perplexing and questioning nature of these works is often a key trait of conceptual art pieces. Later, this text will return to look at Wiener’s Kerlin Gallery show and Rosc mural, but firstly it is worth exploring the term “Conceptual Art” itself. An often contentious label that can be met with dismay among some. This is in part to the use of the term to describe practically any piece of art, which has led to its definition becoming increasingly vague and contested over the years, rather fittingly taking on many concepts in itself. Wiener himself is not particularly fond of the label, feeling the term is somewhat divisive and exclusionary, believing that all art is driven by a concept or idea as he explains in an interview at the Savannah College of Art

and Design “I don't understand it. It was coined by a group of artists, some were interesting, some were good, some were not good. They were afraid that what they did would not fit into society and that they might want to have a kid or live a normal life like people, and so they had to have a department in the university for it, and what could they call it? Art that wasn't the art that came before. So they called it ‘Conceptual Art’. But it also said that they were intelligent, that they were special, they were intellectuals. Now I’ll be damned, I’m sorry you can't make a painting without first figuring out the size, the colour, stretching the canvas, putting it together and putting something on the surface. There is no hierarchy in art and the conceptual artists in their academic nonsense tried to make a hierarchy, and what they did was they lost some of the talented people of their generation.” (The Savannah College of Art and Design, 2019, 2mins). Similarly, Joseph Kosuth takes an equivalent stance, writing “All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually.” (Kosuth, 2003, pp.856).

However, generally speaking, the term is used to describe an artwork that fits into the conventional category of “Conceptual Art” which Tony Godfrey succinctly describes as “Conceptual art is not about forms or materials, but about ideas and meanings. It cannot be defined in terms of any medium or style, but rather by the way it questions what art is. In particular, conceptual art challenges the traditional status of the art object as unique, collectable or saleable. Because the work does not take a traditional form it demands a more active response from the viewer, indeed it could be argued that the conceptual work of art only truly exists in the viewer’s mental participation.” (Godfrey, 1998, pp.4). So although the term is somewhat hard to pin down, it can be expected to loosely describe an artwork guided by a concept or idea, with often varying levels of aesthetic importance placed upon the work depending on the artist.

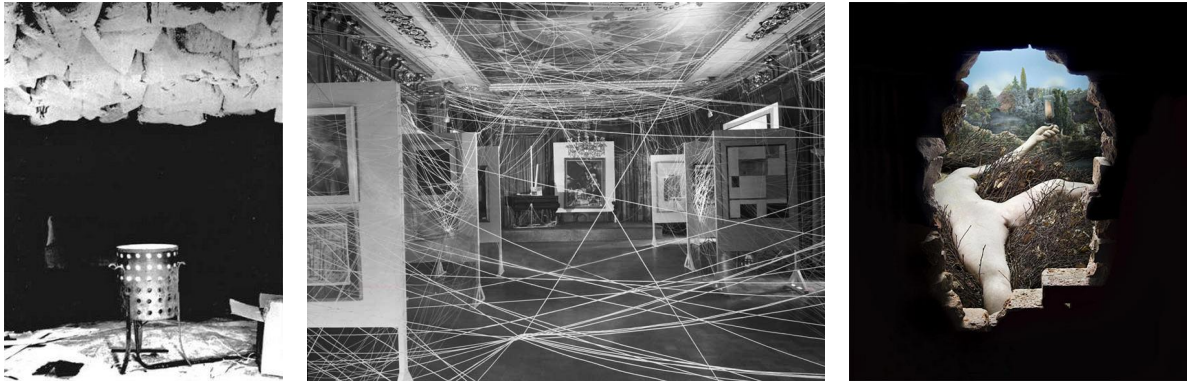


Fig. 4 Marcel Duchamp, "Fountain", Porcelain, 1917
Photographed by Alfred Stieglitz

"Conceptual Art" is also commonly used to refer to the Conceptual Art movement from the 1960s onwards to the 1970s, which advocated for the creation of concept and idea driven work above the traditional and aesthetic values of art at the time. Focused primarily around New York but also scattered across the world. The movement shares many similarities with the Fluxus movement of a similar time, which both followed on from the foundations of the Dada movement of the 1920s, which was known for its rejection of formalism in favour of nonsensical work that challenged the traditional values of art (Melick, 2014, pp.64, 80, 160). One of the artists at the forefront of the Dada movement was Marcel Duchamp, often credited with creating the first well known piece of conceptual art, with his famed and perhaps notorious work "Fountain" (Fig. 4). An upturned porcelain urinal signed and dated under the pseudonym "R. Mutt 1917". A piece of "Readymade" art, a term used by Duchamp to describe a work of art that began as "an object from the outside world which is claimed or proposed as art, thus denying both the uniqueness of the art object and the necessity for the artist's hand" (Godfrey, 1998, pp.7).

Most interestingly the work was never actually exhibited. Its status as a groundbreaking artwork is partially dependent on its rejection from the inaugural show of the "Society of Independent Artists" (of whom Duchamp was one of the founding board members) at New York's Grand Central Palace. Submitting the work anonymously under the fictitious artist Richard Mutt. Despite the promise that all works submitted with their submission fee paid would be shown, the work was removed prior to opening, after the board narrowly voted for its exclusion,

considering "Fountain", not art, but rather a piece of indecent sanitary ware. Duchamp later resigned from the board in protest to its removal. Believing the board carried out an act of artistic censorship that functioned against the show's initial jury free principles. Duchamp later took "Fountain" to be photographed by one of the leading figures of photography at the time Alfred Stieglitz (Tate, 2021). This photograph, story and somewhat performative aspect of "Fountain", as well as its initial concept have become inseparable parts of the work. It is not just a physical object, perhaps even the object itself has become irrelevant to the work, with the original urinal rather appropriately remaining missing to this day. The work has gone through a process of dematerialisation (an important development within conceptual art), only activated within the realm of the viewer's thought. With limited edition replicas sold by Duchamp in the 50s and 60s, now shown in several museums across the world today, merely acting as a physical storytelling device for the history of "Fountain". The physical embodiment of satire testing the seriousness of institutions and boards of the time and questioning the foundations of what art was and its traditional values and boundaries. Duchamp's claim that if an artist calls something art, then it is art, was truly radical at the time. That essentially an idea or concept can manifest anything into art, regardless of whether it is a strong piece of art, it is art. Before this moment viewers of art "had just assumed that art would be either a painting or a sculpture." (Godfrey, 1998, pp.6). A turning point in art history that slowly changed the perception of what art was, whilst laying the groundwork for future artists to create work that further questioned art's meaning and purpose. As Herbert Molderings describes, Duchamp's readymades "did not provide answers to questions but rather objectified the process of questioning itself" (Molderings, 2012, pp.72).



(from Left to Right Fig. 5, 6 & 7)

Fig. 5 Installation shot of "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme" exhibition in Paris, showing Marcel Duchamp's "Twelve Hundred Coal Bags Suspended from the Ceiling over a Stove", 1938

Fig. 6 Installation shot of "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition in New York, showing Marcel Duchamp's "His Twine", 1942 photographed by John D. Schiff

Fig. 7 Marcel Duchamp, "Étant Donnés" (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas), Mixed-media assemblage: wooden door, bricks, velvet, wood, leather stretched over an armature of metal, twigs, aluminium, iron, glass, plexiglass, linoleum, cotton, electric lights, gas lamp, motor, 242.6cm x 177.8cm, 1946-1966

It is also worth noting that Duchamp's body of work throughout his life somewhat resembles the development of art throughout the 20th century. Beginning as a painter, challenging the traditional values of painting through cubism. Later developing the readymade as a concept after growing tired of purely "retinal art". Before gradually taking leave from art, focusing on chess from the mid-1920s onwards, with only occasional involvement in artistic projects such as various films and several exhibitions including the 1938 "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme" in Paris where he showed his "Twelve Hundred Coal Bags Suspended from the Ceiling over a Stove" (Fig. 5) and the 1942 exhibition "First Papers of Surrealism" in New York where he showed his mile of string titled "His Twine" (Fig. 6) (Hopkins, 2014). Arguably laying the groundwork for installation art (O'Doherty and McEvilley, 1999, pp.69). However, most interestingly he did continue to make art in private, making one of his final pieces "Étant Donnés" (Fig. 7) from 1946 to 1966 in almost complete secrecy. A large sculptural assemblage / tableau of a naked woman lying within a lush picturesque landscape, the scene only viewable through a pair of peepholes located in a large wooden door (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009). A surprising turn of events that saw a return to aesthetic consideration within Duchamp's work. A kind of conceptually driven aesthetics, merging concept with the

visual. A way of working that has seemingly become the de facto for most contemporary artists today.

Conceptual art is often inseparably related to the development of anti-aesthetics. The importance or lack of importance of aesthetics has often been a contested debate, with many conceptual artists becoming somewhat disillusioned with the relevance of aesthetics. Artists such as Kosuth in his essay "Art after Philosophy" perhaps arguing for an end to aesthetics in favour of ideas and concepts. "It is necessary to separate aesthetics from art because aesthetics deals with opinions on perception of the world in general.", "Aesthetic considerations are indeed always extraneous to an object's 'reason to be'. Unless of course, that object's 'reason to be' is strictly aesthetic." (Kosuth, 2003, pp.854). "Aesthetics, as we have pointed out, are conceptually irrelevant to art.", "For these colours and shapes are the art's 'language', not its meaning conceptually as art." (Kosuth, 2003, pp.856). Although to see no conceptual value in aesthetic consideration seems somewhat rigid in thought. How can something so complex be broken down with such certainty? Perhaps it is even wrong to separate something as intertwined as aesthetics and art? Possibly like space and time they form two parts of the same intrinsic thing, only separate within our minds, unable to physically exist without the other. Even the decision to completely avoid aesthetic choice or to go so far as to make completely dematerialised art is in itself, an aesthetic choice "It is hard to see in principle how any work could be genuinely non-aesthetic even if it employs anti-aesthetic means." (Lamarque, 2007, pp.11) (likewise the choice to make anti-conceptual art is in itself a conceptual decision). Something can be said about Duchamp's eventual return to visual art. There is an inexplicable draw to aesthetics, something that cannot be explained through rational logic, something unquantifiable, even nonsensical perhaps, but deeply experiential occurring when we engage with visual art. As Donald Kuspit beautifully attempts to describe "It is a delicious, if brief, taste of critical freedom not unlike what D. W. Winnicott called an 'ego orgasm' – a eureka-like experience of restorative 'creative apperception' involving the conscious feeling of being intensely alive. It transforms alienation into freedom and adversaries into criticality." (Kuspit, 2004, pp.11), "In short, aesthetic experience leads to the realization that social identity is not ingrained – not destiny – nor the be-all and end-all of existence. It is not the source of individuality, but rather precludes

individuality.” (Kuspit, 2004, pp.13). Kosuth's theory on the relationship between aesthetics and art seems to completely avoid the experiential power of art or maybe lacks belief in it. “The whole world is there to be seen, and the whole world can watch a man walk on the moon from their living rooms. Certainly art or objects of paintings and sculptures cannot be expected to compete experientially with this?” (Kosuth, 2003, pp.859). But perhaps art can compete with these things? But maybe only so, if it embraces both the conceptual and experiential. Even Kosuth continues to make aesthetic choices within his work, most notably in his neon work. Although he may argue that these visuals are essentially unimportant to the concept of the work, it would seem they are not unimportant enough to completely disregard altogether. Art is in many ways a merging of the philosophical world with the visual experiential world. Surely it has the potential to offer us some of the most worthwhile experiences available to humankind. But perhaps not through concept alone. After all the cognitive and visual experience are not mutually exclusive “rejection of aesthetic value as a legitimate artistic goal, effected in order to elevate the role of the cognitive, rests on the assumption that a genuine emphasis on the latter somehow requires a rejection of the former.”, “Clearly not; The history of art is full of cases where artworks have both aesthetic and cognitive value.”, “What is more, a work’s aesthetic value may well strengthen and intensify its cognitive value, and vice versa.” (Schellekens, 2007, pp.73). To purposefully disregard the visual and experiential world seems to be the artistic equivalent of willingly shooting yourself in the foot, “it is no good, then, for conceptual artists to try to reject the aesthetic simply by stressing idea over perception.” (Lamarque, 2007, pp.10). Arguably one of the main shortfalls of purely conceptual art, as Arthur Danto describes “art having finally become vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought about itself, and remaining, as it were, solely as the object of its own theoretical consciousness.” (Shusterman, 1987, pp.653). Surely it would be more engaging to create conceptual art that embraces the experiential world? Using aesthetics as a vehicle for concepts to transverse into the viewer's mindscape, a process Duchamp called “Aesthetic Osmosis”, a transference from artist to spectator through the inert matter of the artwork, which can heighten the meaning and impact of the work (James, 2015, pp.268).



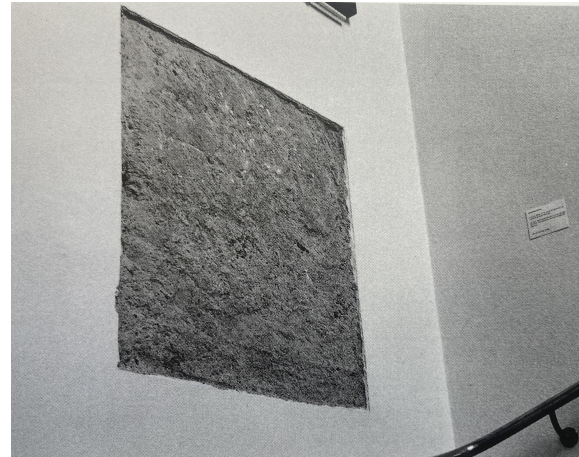
(from Left to Right Fig. 8 & 9)

Fig. 8 Lawrence Weiner, "Propeller Painting", Oil on Board, 16.5cm x 15cm, 1963

Fig. 9 Lawrence Weiner, Installation shot of "Removal Painting", Spray Emulsion on Canvas, 259cm x 122cm, 1968

Returning to Lawrence Weiner. It is worthwhile giving some context to his life and work. Because although this essay acts in some ways a critique to Weiner's gallery based work, it does not intend to reduce the importance of the art he has produced through much of his life. With particular emphasis on his early and mid-career, as Weiner's work was quite revolutionary at the time. Arguably standing as one of the most important artists of the 20th century, becoming one of the main proponents of language and concept based art and influencing countless artists to come after him such as Barbara Kruger, Christopher Wool, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Glenn Ligon, Jenny Holzer and Liam Gillick to name but a few (Alberro and Zimmerman, 1998, pp.59). However, what this essay does find fault with is the stagnation and commodification of Weiner's work throughout his later career, as well as its placement within the gallery setting, which this essay hopes to argue is a lesser venue for Weiner's work when compared to his public work and the various other platforms he has used throughout his career.

Weiner was born in the Bronx, New York in 1942 to a working class couple Toba and Harold Wiener, who ran and owned a Sweet Shop in the neighbourhood. After finishing high school Weiner briefly studied Philosophy and Literature at Hunter College, New York before dropping out and deciding to hitchhike across America (Artforum, 2021). Shortly after, deciding to begin his journey as an artist, leaving behind small sculptures on the roadside throughout his travels. In 1960 while still on his travels, he made an important breakthrough in his artistic development, creating "Cratering Piece" in a national park in California's Marin County, a truly radical work for the time. While countless teenagers may have been messing with explosions throughout the world, to simultaneously detonate a series of TNT explosions at the 4 corners of a plot of land and to announce the craters as works of sculpture was completely unheard of. Weiner later returned to New York and made a series of paintings retrospectively called "Propeller Paintings" (Fig. 8), abstract works based on the TV test-pattern shown on off-air channels at the time. Made using a wide variety of different paints such as "Silver paint, aluminium paint, sculpmetal, commercial enamels, crap I found out on the street, paint that I invented myself. Anything." (Buchloh, 1998, pp.9). Weiner then began his "Removal Paintings" (Fig. 9) in 1966, creating rectangular canvases and removing notches from them. As a way of removing his hand from the work, Weiner would mechanically paint these using a spray gun and compressor, as well as further removing his control by allowing the receiver of the painting to choose the proportions of the painting, colours and size of the removal. Additionally, these works were all sold at the same price regardless of size, as Weiner believed each painting to be of equal importance and effort, seeing each piece as an expression of a single concept. (Alberro and Zimmerman, 1998, pp.43). An idea that would inform much of his work to come. Weiner later stopped painting altogether stating that "I began to realize that I could no longer just say that this painting was not a unique object, because it was accepted as a unique object" (Weiner and Norvell, 2004, pp.26).



(from Left to Right Fig. 10 & 11)

Fig. 10 Lawrence Weiner, "STAPLES, STAKES, TWINE, TURF", 34 stakes, Staples, Hemp Twine, 15cm x 2135cm x 3050cm, Windham College, Vermont, 1968

Fig. 11 Lawrence Weiner, "A 36" X 36" REMOVAL TO THE LATHING OR SUPPORT WALL OF PLASTER OR WALLBOARD FROM A WALL", 91cm x 91cm, Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, 1969

Returning to land art in 1968 Weiner showed the work "STAPLES, STAKES, TWINE, TURF" (Fig. 10) on one of the lawns at Windham College, Vermont. A large installation measuring 70 feet wide and 100 feet in length, consisting of 68 twine squares organised into a gridded rectangle (7 squares wide, 10 squares in length with two squares removed from one of the corners, similarly to his previous removal paintings) with the twine stapled to stakes hammered into the ground. Weiner came to a realisation after the piece was partially damaged by some college students, who cut the twine so they could continue to use the lawn to play touch football. "Weiner realised that it ultimately did not matter: The word or instructions were sufficient. Art was for him not the making of objects as an end in itself, but was about 'the relationship of human beings to objects and objects to objects in relation to human beings'." (Godfrey, 1998, pp.166). Weiner also came to the conclusion that he did not want to impose an authority onto places with structural forms. Crucial developments that eventually led to the creation of his text based work. Later that year in 1968 Weiner created his first artist book "STATEMENTS" which featured 24 short written statements of works, split into 12 "General Statements" (such as cratering piece now appearing in written form as "A field cratered by structured simultaneous TNT explosions") and 12 "Specific Statements" which differed in their exactitude (for example "One 106" X 16" slab of "Dow HD 300" styrofoam sunk flush with the ground"). With some of these pieces being previously made or constructed after

publication, and some never made. For instance, “A removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wallboard from a wall” was later constructed by Weiner as “A 36" X 36" REMOVAL TO THE LATHING OR SUPPORT WALL OF PLASTER OR WALLBOARD FROM A WALL” (Fig. 11) for Harald Szeemann’s seminal group show “Live In Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form” held at the Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland in 1969, an incredibly influential exhibition that redefined the role of the curator and how art was shown, with the involved artists making their work on site. Earlier that year Weiner further expanded on the concept surrounding his work publishing the first iteration of his **“STATEMENT OF INTENT”**.

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
(Weiner, 2004, pp.21)

The work had at this point essentially become dematerialised into a replicable idea, although Weiner himself may disagree with this, seeing language as a form of material, referring to his work as sculptures, citing his medium as “Language + the Material Referred to” (Alberro and Zimmerman, 1998, pp.46-47). His **“STATEMENT OF INTENT”** declared that the work does not need to exist outside of its written statement, it doesn't matter who makes the work if it is to be physically built, nor does it necessarily have to appear a certain way or be situated in a specific place. As long as the statement is followed, every form of the work is equally valid, whether written, spoken, physically built etc. From this point onwards Weiner began to work regularly with text. Firstly writing or painting the statements onto walls, using freehand lettering (Fig. 12) as well as tracing different typefaces onto walls using stencils and projectors. In addition to painting, Weiner also began to use printed vinyl wall stickers onwards from about the late 80s (Fig. 13, 14 & 15). From the mid-80s onwards Weiner’s favoured font became “Franklin Gothic Extra Condensed” (shown above in **“STATEMENT OF INTENT”** and throughout text, were accurate), as well as

occasionally using stencil inspired typefaces. Eventually designing in his own font “Margaret Seaworthy Gothic” (Fig. 13, 14 & 15) sometime around the late 90s, gradually becoming his preferred font by the early 2000s.

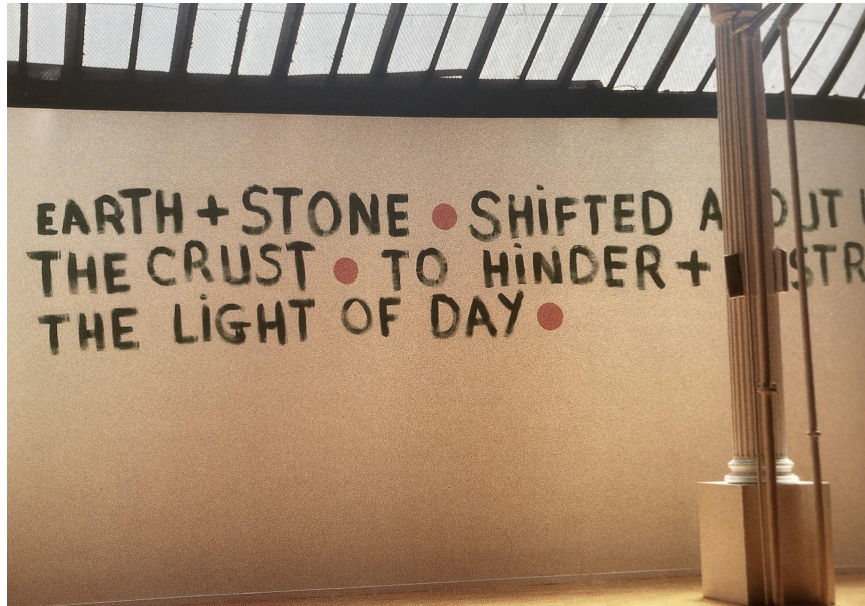


Fig. 12 Lawrence Weiner, “EARTH + STONE SHIFTED ABOUT UPON THE CRUST TO HINDER + OBSTRUCT THE LIGHT OF DAY”, Paint on Wall, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, 1984 / 1985

Weiner’s work, although conceptually driven, is not anti-aesthetic by any means, often viewing aesthetics as an inseparable part of art. So much so that he partially fell out with Joseph Kosuth over disagreements relating to aesthetics and politics. Referring to Kosuth and his ideas on aesthetics in an interview as “a totally uneducated person.”, “You can’t take the aesthetics out of art. Art is essentially the use of aesthetics, either for metaphorical purposes or for pure materialist purposes. To talk about art without talking about aesthetics means you’re not talking about art.” (Weiner and Morgan, 2004, pp.102) and describing their falling apart as “I think the man is corrupt. We were perfect friends for 4 or 5 months. Something went wrong about the aesthetics. I am not a logical positivist, I am a hard-core American socialist. And at one point we split. He decided he wanted to be an academic artist, he wanted to join the system that he claimed he was against, and he became a teacher” (Weiner and Guerra, 2004, pp.336), “Kosuth and I disagree politically about ways, directions and reasons.” (Weiner and Perrin, 2004, pp.407).

For Weiner aesthetics are a necessary vehicle for his work, wanting to present his statements in their best light “I could install this work here, but this woman could probably do it much better than I can now. 40 years ago, there was no choice, it was as far as my skill goes. My ego isn't that large. I know it works, but if somebody can do it even better, and if they're willing to do it, or they're willing to earn money doing it. If they do it better, let them do it better, because the point is to present it the best way possible.” (Weiner and Ando, 2015, 22min).

One of the most fascinating things about Weiner's aesthetics is its moral considerations. Ethics are a key focus within much of his work with morality, aesthetics and concept all seemingly somewhat inseparable “Art is about the morality of culture” (Aranda, Gillick, and Weiner, 2018, 1min). The starting point for the work is to present an altered arrangement of the world around him “You only make art because you're not happy with the configuration that the world is presenting to you, right?” (South London Gallery, 2014, 6mins). It's worth remembering that Weiner was developing his work during an incredibly turbulent and divided time in America, with rampant racial discrimination (segregation was only banned in 1964 and Black women were only given the right to vote in 1965) the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), Vietnam war (60s till mid-70s), Multiple assassinations including John F. Kennedy (1963), Malcolm X (1965) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1968). One of the work's main objectives is to remove the systems of hierarchy, using the work as a means to place different materials and structures alongside each other, presenting them in such a way as to make apparent “A stasis of lack of hierarchy.” (Weiner and Wolfson, 2015, pp.45). “I want to screw up people's lives, I want to change their logic structure. I want them to see the world closer to the things that I observe,” “I want it to affect their basic existence. I really want and I'm still idealistic about it - that if somebody can realise that if there's no hierarchy between gold and lead and stone and wood, they can't justify racism in their mind as a generalisation.” (Weiner and Wolfson, 2015, pp.47). The obscure and vague meanings of the work stop you in your tracks, encouraging you to question the existing world and your relationship to it “I want to present a logic, That will let them see their place in the world in a different way” (South London Gallery, 2014, 11mins). “The work has no metaphor, and in having no metaphor. It leaves it open for people to use the work to make a metaphor to suit their needs and their desires” (Louisiana Channel, 2014, 3min).

Weiner also regularly emphasises in interviews his avoidance of placing a perception of authority on his work “An artist is never supposed to assume authority.” (Tate, 2009, 2min). Often phrasing his statements in the past tense as “To use the imperative would be for me fascistic... the tone of command is the tone of tyranny” (Alberro and Zimmerman, 1998, pp.49). As well as often bringing up his disdain for the font “Helvetica”, describing it as authoritarian and rigid. “I don’t like Helvetica. It stands for a kind of modernism that I don’t believe in. It stands for an optimism that led us into World War II. The Museum of Modern Art uses Helvetica, and Helvetica seems to be the typeface chosen by most academic artists, artists who basically think that if they can find a little place in the world, they can teach there forever.” (Weiner and Ekeberg, 2004, pp.332), “It’s one of the typefaces that I absolutely detest. It’s totally authoritative, it in fact does not adapt itself to things, and all information that comes out of Helvetica is saying exactly the same thing. It’s telling you that this is cultural, this is intellectual and this is intelligent. I’m rather afraid that words don’t start off being cultural, intellectual or intelligent.” (Millman, 2008, 3min).

Site-Specificity is also an interesting topic within the context of Weiner’s work. Although the work can appear site-specific, often resonating with their surroundings as if it were made for it, even making reference to it. Practically none of the work is made for no one site “Site-Specificity. I don’t understand it. If someone says to me ‘Lawrence, we have a city and we’d like you to deal with it,’ then that’s a context. So I’ll say, ‘look, this is what I’m working on at the moment; this is what I can do best right now, because it’s the thing that is closest at hand, so I’ll place it within your context. Let’s go for it.’ And I try to do the best job that I can.”, “but I’m not going to change the work for them”, “It’s not site-specific: it comes out of a studio practice.” (Weiner and Obrist, 2004, pp.423). The work is made in the studio in such a way as to be generally adaptable to any situation across the world, it could almost be considered anti-site specific, aiming for his work to be “capable of being moved from London to Tokyo, to anyplace else, without being exotic” (South London Gallery, 2014, 50min). The work is allowed to find a global context or relationship to their site through the reference of general materials found across the world. “I was working all over the world building things, which is a real privilege but one of the responsibilities is that what you’re doing does not become exotic. All the work that I do has to do

with materials that are available to everybody.” (Louisiana Channel, 2014, 2min). Giving his work an ability to “function regardless of what culture they found themselves in” (Tate, 2009, 0mins). For example “**STONE UPON STONE UPON FALLEN STONE**” may appear to be referencing the materiality of the brickwork of the Guinness Storehouse. But it only finds this relationship to site through the worldwide ubiquity of stone itself, not through any site-specific reference or alteration within the work. Perhaps a more appropriate term for the site-work relationship for Weiner would be “Site Adjusted” work, coined by Robert Irwin as “Here consideration is given to adjustments of scale, appropriateness, placement, etc. but the ‘work of art’ is still either made or conceived in the studio and transported to, assembled on, the site.” (Irwin, 2009, pp.43-44). Weiner also does not differentiate between gallery and public space. Seeing sites regardless of their context as purely platforms to present his work to an audience. “South London Gallery, The Tate, it doesn't really matter where it is, commercial gallery, It's a platform, It's a place where people can get up and sing”, “Every single venue is a platform”, “When you have a song to sing or whatever it is, and somebody will give you a decent stage and decent sound system, you get up and do the best you can” (South London Gallery, 2014, 4min). However, this seems to somewhat avoid how drastically the gallery setting can change the context and experience of viewing the work.



(from Left to Right Fig. 13, 14 & 15)

Fig. 13 Lawrence Weiner, **"PUT WITH THE OTHER THINGS"**, Language + the Materials Referred to, Dimensions Variable, 2020, Kerlin Gallery 2021, Dublin, 2021

Fig. 14 Lawrence Weiner, **"HELD JUST ABOVE THE CURRENT"**, Language + the Materials Referred to, Dimensions Variable, 2016, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, 2021

Fig. 15 Lawrence Weiner, **"IN LINE WITH SOMETHING ELSE"**, Language + the Materials Referred to, Dimensions Variable, 2020, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, 2021

Upon reaching the top of the Kerlin Gallery's stairs, you are confronted with a void of space. The Kerlin could be considered the textbook definition of a white cube gallery space, being a large rectangular room with high ceilings, concrete floors, no windows and hidden ceiling lights smoothly lighting the whole space with practically no visible shadows. It is both a blessing and a curse. While offering a completely blank canvas for artists to work with. If left empty, the space can become vapid to a degree, with no architectural features to fall back upon. It seems hard to warrant this emptiness in 2021 with minimalism arguably being explored to its fullest extent by the late 70s. The show features three of Weiner's statements installed on 3 of the gallery's walls using vinyl stickers, the remaining wall left blank. The texts shown concurrently in English and an Irish translation. The English text, placed above the Irish text, slightly overlapping each other, cancelling out the colour where they meet. A vibrant contrasting red and blue, that beautifully stand against the white of the gallery wall. **"PUT WITH THE OTHER THINGS"** (Fig. 13) with English text in red and the Irish text in

blue. On the opposite wall, the colour scheme becomes reversed with **“IN LINE WITH SOMETHING ELSE”** (Fig. 15), showing English in blue and Irish in red. Lastly, **“HELD JUST ABOVE THE CURRENT”** (Fig. 14) is shown in silver text and features a flowing black line that travels around the left-hand side of the text, intersecting it towards the middle. Supplementing the main gallery show are 3 collage pieces in the smaller office / gallery space for sale as “price upon request”. It's all rather pristinely installed with a great amount of consideration and effort put into the show. However, a sense of disappointment can't help but fall upon me. Although the work carries out all its objectives of encouraging the viewer to ponder upon their relationship to their surroundings. A niggling thought keeps occurring that somewhat removes me from the work. The presence of the gallery, the effect of the white cube as Brian O'Doherty explains, where “Art exists in a kind of eternity of display”, “there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has had to died already to be there.” (O'Doherty and McEvilley, 1999, pp.15). The work feels not of this world, ungrounded and separate from modern society. “Things become art in a space where powerful ideas about art focus on them.” (O'Doherty and McEvilley, 1999, pp.14). The work is no longer by Lawrence Weiner the artist, but Lawrence Weiner “A Towering Figure in International Contemporary Art” (Kerlin Gallery, 2021). It struggles to separate itself from the hierarchies of the art world. Hampering its ability to successfully level hierarchies. How can it? When the work is now operating as part of and possibly furthering the hierarchical structure of the art world. An incredibly elitist structure, only really operating within the first world, with most galleries almost exclusively visited by the upper and middle classes (not including artists). Weiner's work has essentially become a recognisable brand amongst the art world elite. Galleries and Museums alike, keenly aware of using this brand as a way to establish themselves within the art world and raise their reputation. The format of Weiner's work, travelling across the world from solo show to solo show with very little noticeable change since the early 2000s. “When we talk in terms of the art world, and somebody looking for a place within an art world, they are beholden, then, to maintain that structure and the position it was when they entered. Or else they're going to lose their place in the hierarchy.” (Gillick and Weiner, 2006, pp.10). The pursuit of recognition, frequently at the expense of low paid arts workers in often insecure temporary positions “The accumulation of prestige, contacts, and information by those who are ‘international’

and jet around constantly, is routinely won off the backs of those left behind, the assistant, adjuncts, and other lower ranking and less well known professionals.” (Relyea, 2013, pp.13). The statement format coincidentally functions perfectly within global capitalism. Endlessly replicable text that likewise can be endlessly sold. Quickly able to churn out work using the same format, once the right words are found. The 3 collages located in the office / gallery space seem to have been made more so for commercial purposes rather than artistic merit. As Weiner says somewhat harshly “Every piece of art changes your whole perception of the rest of the world for the rest of your life. And if it doesn’t, then it’s not art, it’s a commodity” (Gillick and Weiner, 2006, pp.20). They function partly as an instantly recognisable status symbol for those acquainted with contemporary art, available at the right price. The “price upon request” listed on the artwork sheet, a kind of manufactured secrecy to give an impression of exclusivity, a reminder of the commercialization of the art world. “Art has been subtly poisoned by social appropriation, that is, the emphasis on its commercial value and its treatment as upscale entertainment, turning it into a species of social capital.” (Kuspit, 2004, pp.8). Commercial galleries in particular can often be perceived as unwelcoming (often mistakenly) by those not acquainted with them. The Kerlin Gallery itself (although having an array of friendly staff) can hold an air of exclusivity and mysteriousness, being located down a somewhat dingy looking lane, needing to press an intercom to enter, opening the door to be greeted with a long intimidating staircase. The work has in many ways become part of the traditional structures that it initially challenged. Showcasing a mostly empty room, it feels somewhat unaware of today's circumstances. The constant and rapid decline of art spaces throughout Dublin under increasing pressure from rising rents. Creating an increasingly competitive environment over the use of exhibition space. Global art stars have become somewhat of a problem in this context, taking up much of the calendar at major museums / galleries. Perhaps, a more interesting show could be made by pairing an artist up with Weiner, putting the leftover space into use, while creating new dialogues with the work. However, it seems the accumulation of prestige in the form of the solo show has become prioritised in today's art world, with the group / collaborative show, unfortunately, seen as a lesser achievement.



Fig. 16 Lawrence Weiner, "STONE UPON STONE UPON FALLEN STONE", Enamel on Brick, ROSC' 84, Rainsford Street, Guinness Storehouse, Dublin, 1984

However, this is not to take away from the magic of Weiner's public work. When presented outside of the gallery, the work thrives on a new ambiguity. It does not get initially read as art straight away, it is allowed to be itself and nothing more. Creating new relations and interpretations to its situation. Adapting over time as the piece gradually fades and its surroundings change. It is inviting and non-hierarchical, interacting with an audience outside of the art world, with most interactions becoming chance encounters by passersby. It no longer takes up scarce gallery space but transforms unused space into a site of contemplation. Encouraging you to notice and see the world around you differently. The work grounds itself in reality and society and becomes real. It is not trying to prove anything or demand anything from you. It offers us a moment of reflection if we so choose to accept its invitation. Something we could perhaps use more of in today's world.

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FAR ENOUGH AWAY AS TO COME READILY TO HAND

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Fig. 14 Coll, M. (2021) Lawrence Weiner, "**HELD JUST ABOVE THE CURRENT**", Language + the Materials Referred to, Dimensions Variable, 2016, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, 2021

Fig. 15 Coll, M. (2021) Lawrence Weiner, "**IN LINE WITH SOMETHING ELSE**", Language + the Materials Referred to, Dimensions Variable, 2020, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, 2021

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