LAWRENCE WEINER INTERVIEW

Lawrence Weiner is interviewed by Harris Sullivan of CJCH T.V. during Mr. Weiner's visit to Halifax in April of 1969. Students of N.S.C.A.D. present who participated in the discussion were, Paul Jeddrie, Murray Whynott, Bill Powers and Al McNamara. This transcription was taken from a film made of the procedings at the North West Arm.

Mr. Weiner has just completed his piece,

One Standard Dye Marker Thrown Into the Sea

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WEINER: The involvement is that by my accepting the responsibility of it as art, by designating it as art, it becomes art. You can't say it's not. You can say it's bad art or it's good art depending upon it's relevancy to you, but the idea of a dye marker in the sea is just as much art as the idea of a blot of paint on canvas or the idea of some biomorphic form sitting in the middle of a public square.

SULLIVAN: You're throwing away any concept that skill is involved because you must confess there is no skill involved in throwing a dye marker.

WEINER: There is an intellectual skill, if you want to call it skill. I'd much rather not call it skill, but there's something that's thought about, something that's worked on. There's just no technical skill involved. But there's no unique object. The whole point is that I'm dealing in art which does not make a unique object.

SULLIVAN: There is no lasting quality to it?

WEINER: Oh, I think it's lasting. You'll remember what the dye marker is about just by watching it. I mean, I hope you do. I know I do. And I think the young man jumping in to get the sack [referred to later on] the dye marker came out of is a very good case in point. Because when asked what you have after it's done, what does the college have, all it will have is a souvenir of a process, it will be like having an artist's brush ... it's a souvenir. It's nothing. It's not art. It has no relevance. [Paul Jeddrie, a student, jumps into the water to retrieve the dye marker. He climbs out of the water, puts on his jacket and hat, and then sits on the bank with the other students.]

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SULLIVAN: Why did you jump in, Paul?

JEDDRIE: Well, I wanted to get this and I think I'll make a presentation or a donation on my behalf, as Mr. Weiner suggested, to the college's permanent collection.

SULLIVAN: [addressing the group of students] What do you think of that demonstration today? Do you take it seriously?

JEDDRIE: I thought it was wild ... nice colour!

SULLIVAN: Do you consider this an expression, or a form of art?

JEDDRIE: I don't think I would have participated in it if I hadn't.

SULLIVAN: How do you feel about Lawrence's view of art ... I suppose you could call it "radical" art?

WHYNOTT: Well, some of them I'm very, like, in favour with and they're along my way of thinking, but otherwise, definitely out. I mean, my concept of painting ... he thinks painting shouldn't be all social. I think painting can be social. I mean, Picasso ... some of his work was social.

SULLIVAN: I was impressed by the beauty of the dye marker in the water. It was something ... like, I wasn't expecting it. But you seem to de-emphasize the actual beauty of these events, especially, like, the dye marker.

WEINER: Oh, they're beautiful! There's no getting away from it. But it's not the art. The point is, that's an extra, added attraction. Almost anything that man does, if you look at it in the right context, will be beautiful or interesting. That doesn't generally concern me. I give the person (or the institution) who's receiving a work of mine

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the choice that: one, I will make it; two, they can make it or have it fabricated; or three, they don't have to have it made at all. Just by the acceptance of this as an art object, because I said it is an art object, it becomes an art object. Just as good as if it's built. It's the same thing, it really doesn't matter.

SULLIVAN: You mention "acceptance". What do you say to the people, let's say qualified people, fundamentalists in art, who say you're just a big put-on?

WEINER: Well, they can say I'm just a big put-on. Let's get it down to this point. A man, if he wants to be an artist, and he's willing to accept the responsibility of being an artist, he can say, "I'm an artist". That's the only qualification. And then you can judge. You can say he's a really bad artist or a really good artist, but you can't say it's not art. It would be like saying a man isn't this or that, he's just an unsuccessful one.

SULLIVAN: Do you think you're a good artist?

WEINER: Well, I don't really think I'd be spending my life doing it if I didn't think what I was doing was worth doing. And that's just common sense.

SULLIVAN: Probably you could get away, make some money at it, and get a lot of attention.

WEINER: You don't get any money.

SULLIVAN: What about the attention you get, because you do get a lot of attention.

WEINER: Nobody paid attention to me for an awfully long time.

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SULLIVAN: Are you making a living off this art?

WEINER: That's not relevant.

SULLIVAN: If I were to go and throw that dye marker into the Arm and call it art, are you suggesting that makes me an artist?

MURRAY: Yes, if you take the responsibility of calling it art, then you're an artist and it's art. If you take that responsibility though. If you want that responsibility.

WEINER: I tell you, you go into the museum or into the park and you see sculpture and things you accept as sculpture and you like them or you don't like them. If you have any education you know aesthetically and you know basically why they're good or why they're bad. Or you think you know. But the more education you have, the more you can deal with it. And yet your parents, not even your grandparents, your parents, if they saw them at your age, wouldn't even know what they were much less know that they were supposed to be art. Which is really quite an interesting thing. It's the same problem you run into with education. Now, I don't know how to drive. I can't go to someone and tell them about cars. I can, but I'd be a damned fool. And they could just not listen. People seem to think that anyone can talk about art. But art requires just as much knowledge to talk about, just as much information and education as anything else.

MURRAY: I think you should learn technical skills at a technical school and the art institutes, colleges, should just be for learning the basic things about art.

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POWERS: Well, this is what Lawrence says. But I'm against that. I think you have to go through the system before you can knock it. Like students, Lawrence says about the students that we have something to hide behind because we can always say that there's an excuse, we're students, say, if we do something wrong. We can just say we're students and everyone says, oh well, okay. But Lawrence says the same thing, I think, in his views, because he's got his own, personal views, say. He doesn't hide behind them and say, "Oh, these are my own views", but it's the same thing as us saying we're students right now.

SULLIVAN: What he's saying is anyone can really be an artist if they make up their mind to do it.

POWERS: What he's saying is just that they're personal views and he's doing his thing. [he laughs]

MURRAY: A lot of things I've been thinking no one else has ever said, so I was scared to say them myself.

SULLIVAN: There are fundamental artists ... I mean, fundamentalists in art, who would say it's just a big put-on. You wouldn't agree with that, would you?

POWERS: No, not at all. No. This is where Lawrence Weiner's at.

SULLIVAN: You see nothing ridiculous about it at all?

POWERS: No, not at all. Definitely not.

SULLIVAN: You mean pouring a gallon of paint ... (indistinguishable).

[The piece being referred to by Mr. Sullivan was entitled, Five Gallons of Water-Based Paint Poured Directly On The Floor, a piece which was

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performed in the gallery of N.S.C.A.D. by Mr. Weiner during his visit.]

POWERS: It's great! It's fantastic! He's doing it and he's getting away with it.

SULLIVAN: Would you do it?

POWERS: No, it doesn't interest me, at this point. I can stand it as a viewer.

WHYNOTT:" Originality in art now is something almost impossible to get and he has it.

McNAMARA: I don't think originality has anything to do with it. It's like technical skills don't have anything to do with art, either, unless you're doing art that involves technical skills. What he's doing is just ... it's something ... and another thing is that it's an idea far ahead of a lot of the things that are going on now. The way he thinks is just in a different space from the way we're thinking.

SULLIVAN: Another negative view of that observation would be that art originality just for the sake of originality surely is not acceptable? Would you agree with that?

POWERS: Originality? Well, I don't think this is more original than anything else, because people have done it before, but Lawrence is just saying, like, he's calling it art. He's saying, "I'm putting that dye marker in the water because that's art." He's saying, "I'm doing it for art." He's saying, "I'm doing it and I'm calling

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it art." And this is the difference between just pouring ... you know, it's been done many times before but not in this context.

[There are shots of two of Weiner's pieces:
1. A wall pitted by a single air rifle shot, 1969.
2. Two common steel nails driven into the floor, one directly in line with the other at a point determined at the time of installation, 1969.]

SULLIVAN: Why would you dislike figurative art?

WEINER: Well, I don't dislike it personally but from an aesthetic standpoint I find it's an unnecessary thing. Perhaps a man can make art out of figurative art but I think it's run itself out. It was quite productive for a very, very, very long time.

SULLIVAN: Well, what about these kids you were talking to who are getting training in art. Would you discourage them against this training?

WEINER: I wouldn't discourage them. I don't think I've been discouraging them speaking to them. I've been giving them different information than they've been given before. I really try to explain to them that it might be a waste of time spending their lives doing a variation on somebody else's art when they could make a contribution making their own art.

SULLIVAN: You didn't go through though, did you, the experience of technical training, did you? Do you have any technical skills in any form of the established art forms at all?

WEINER: It's not relevant. I dislike very much people trying to understand the art, when the art itself is quite simple to understand, by looking at the biography of an artist and taking all the anecdotes

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of the artist and putting this all together, they come up with a picture that has absolutely nothing to do with the art.

POWERS: I agree with what he's (Mr. Weiner) doing here. Lawrence has personal views -- they're all personal views -- on his painting, on painting, period. And the figurative painting Lawrence thinks is dead, I don't at all.

SULLIVAN: You're not saying that a technically good artist is not an artist?

WEINER: I'm not saying anybody's not an artist. I'm not saying anything in those terms. I'm saying that a man makes art with whatever tools he chooses. I just want to judge the art. I don't want to judge the motivation. I don't want to judge the man. I don't care what his politics are. Or anything else.

SULLIVAN: You put the artist who throws a dye marker into the water or empties a gallon of paint on the same level as, say, Andrew Wyeth, who paints beautiful landscapes?

WEINER: I, personally, would put it on a much higher level. If you ask me for artists that I consider on my level I can name many men who still make paintings and many men who make objects, but why bring in Andrew Wyeth just because he happens to be a figurative painter? It's quite unnecessary. I've seen better Andrew Wyeth's in Life Magazine.

POWERS: I believe in his own integrity. I don't think the action itself, like pouring the dye into the water is, well, it completes it. But just the thought of him saying that -- that anyone can do it -- well, I believe in it. Yes.

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SULLIVAN: But anyone could do it, though. Isn't that the point. That there's no real art involved?

POWERS: Anyone could do it after he's made the statement about it. Or after a person has made the statement. But it's just the integrity of the artist that counts, if you believe in what he says and what he does.

SULLIVAN: And you?

McNAMARA: I think it was a lot of fun. I don't think anything's worth doing if it's involved with art unless it's fun in one way or another. But then, fun is another word which means a lot of things. But I enjoy what he's doing a lot more since I participated in this, and I've really enjoyed the whole thing.

SULLIVAN: He says technical skills in art should be secondary and are not necessary.

McNAMARA: Well ... again, it's all a personal view.

WEINER: I prefer that any political views I hold or any social views I hold, I hold as a man, not as an artist. I happen to be an artist, but when I deal with things men deal with, I deal with them as a man. But my likes and dislikes don't come through my art and they don't come from my art.

SULLIVAN: Should there not be some limitations, some standards?

POWERS: Can you define art? Can anyone give me a definition of art?