

# The Kitchen Center for Video and Music

Water fills space without compromising its own specific density, and LAWRENCE WEINER's 39-minute *Do You Believe in Water*, played back for three weeks at The Kitchen where it was initially videotaped, attempted to fill that L-shaped space with its pressures. In the anteroom the visitor found

WITH RELATION TO THE VARIOUS MANNERS OF USE:

WITH PINK, VIOLET, SILVER

(HAVING BEEN BROUGHT TO PASS)

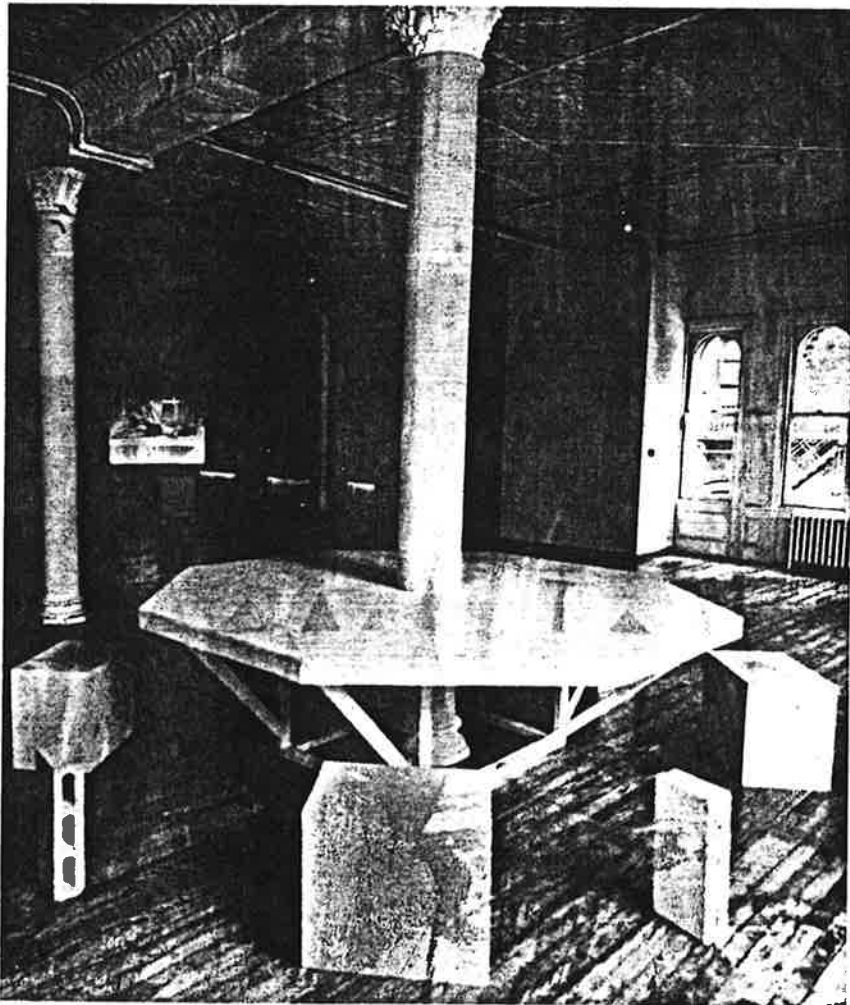
on the wall in large letters.

On the near wall of the main room a small video monitor was playing the continuously run color tape. But the sound source was a large audio monitor on the other side of the room and, just around the corner, the tape was simultaneously projected by videobeam onto a screen. The space represented on the screen, directly behind the viewer, was one of the Kitchen's floor-to-ceiling pillars painted pink and surrounded by a waist-high pink octagonal wooden plat-

form. A set of objects had been symmetrically placed around the platform, the same objects and platform the people on the screen are moving about: two violet square boxes, a rectangular silver box, and two cinderblocks whose smooth sides have been painted pink, but whose tops and perforated sides retain their usual color (silver or, less romantically, battleship gray).

Only from the area around the platform is it possible to see both video screen and video monitor at the same time, but most visitors tended to drift toward the screen, drawn by its movie like size, and the greater aural clarity near the audio monitor. Weiner's earlier videotape, *A First Quarter*, was originally shot in video, then transferred to film. From the evidence of this exhibition, when people have a choice between two electron guns, they'll choose the one whose results look like a movie projector.

The tape's performers have far greater difficulties than its spectators. Six individuals have been grouped into



Lawrence Weiner, Installation view, the Kitchen, 1976.

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three pairs. Before the piece began each pair was given specific instructions, different from and unknown to the other two pairs. Like the old *Truth or Consequences* ploy, the teams weren't aware they'd been given mutually antagonistic directions. Suzanne Harris and Norman Fischer were requested to construct with the pink, violet, and silver objects; Robert Sterns and Steve Blutter were told to be destructive; Ann-Sargent Wooster and Madeleine Burnside were asked to make love to each other on the platform.

The performers introduced themselves to the camera and began to move the objects around: one team stacking them up, the other taking them down. Carlotta Schoolman's video camera moved intimately around the performers, occasionally panning outside of the immediate performing space. Weiner, out of camera range throughout the performance, mixed seven audio channels inaudible to the performers but a permanent part of the tape. Three inputs were from the three lavalier microphones distributed among the teams; other channels consisted of Weiner reading the piece's text, a prerecorded question-and-answer session with Alice Weiner on belief in water, and New Guinea chanting music. These components never become entirely clear. What emerged as Weiner adjusted the gain of various channels were fragments from different worlds: "Why do you keep your clothes on?" "Do you believe in art?" "With a gun a man was pink." With the camera at such close range and the confusion of voices it's often not even possible to know which performer or prerecorded voice said a particular phrase.

As each team figured out what the others were up to, patterns of aggression became more distinct. Sterns, who was asked to "direct" Blutter—presumably a reflection of Stern's daily role as The Kitchen's executive director—challenged the constructive team, saying "This is my place, I know where things belong." The destructive team found particular zest in attempting to kick blocks out from under Harris and Fisher, who, in turn, found an aggressive outlet for their "construction" by temporarily blocking the two lovers from the camera's view.

Near the tape's end, the two teams on the floor began to tire of their roles, having "brought to pass . . . the various manners of use." The work began to break down into play. Sterns and Blutter sat cross-legged on the floor to begin a children's head-tapping game while

Harris and Fisher watched nearby. Only the two women on the platform, who gradually shed their clothes and some of their camera-shyness, continued to think of things to do next. The performance ended abruptly, with Weiner reading the New Guinea album credits.

In using other vehicles along with language for his ideas, Weiner is testing his often-repeated emphasis on the idea as the work. As he noted in *Art in the Mind*, 1970, "There is no correct way to construct the piece as there is no incorrect way to construct it." But it's one thing to limit one's constructions to the printed page and another thing to live with the loose ends of one-shot performance (for how could Weiner, by his own valuation, reshoot a scene or edit down tape)? In 1971 he realized on tape his book *Causality: Affected and/or Effected*: an individual on screen read the book while two voices on the sound track, one voice male, the other female, took turns reading the text. A year later *A First Quarter's* incongruencies of sound and sight tracks, disruption of traditional male and female roles, variance between directions seen on the wall and the actions carried out, generated perceptual dyslexia.

The tensions in *Do You Believe in Water* are confusing because Weiner is hazarding the presentation of ideas in spontaneous performance, a bold move on his part. Despite that spontaneity, the dispassion Weiner cultivates in his work became infectiously dispirited in actual performance. Though that's probably beside the point as far as he's concerned, for me it's a point to be taken up. No performance, of course, has any particular obligation to maintain the spectator's hard focus at all times; but the dryness of Weiner's Q.E.D. answered its own title too firmly in the negative.