

Concepts In
**PER-
FOR-
MANCE**

Ann-Sargent Wooster

**Do You Believe in Water
Lawrence Weiner
The Kitchen**

Lawrence Weiner is gradually becoming known as much for his videotapes and films as for his art works based on the permutations of phrases. Initially, he began making tapes as a strategy to reach a broader range of people. Tapes such as *A First Quarter* employed a visual and aural sandwich where the actors were shown pursuing "normal" activities which sometimes coincided with their reading of the texts. Two voiceover tracks of Weiner reading the text and music were added as a separate layer.

From the onset, Weiner deliberately sweetened the dryness of the texts with displays of physical intimacy. In *A First Quarter* a man was seen as the passive sex object of women. In *Do You Believe in Water*, Weiner's most recent videotape (being shown currently at the

The Interplay of Touch

Kitchen, along with a retrospective of his earlier tapes); the interplay of touch and bodies is between two women.

For the filming of *Do You Believe in Water*, Weiner had built for the first time a special set—a round pink table, two violet box-stools, a silver one, and two cinderblocks painted pink. These objects were left in the gallery for the showing of the tapes, providing another layer of reality. The colors were keyed to Weiner's wall piece accompanying the tape: "WITH RELATION TO THE VARIOUS MANNERS OF USE: WITH PINK, VIOLET, SILVER/HAVING BEEN BROUGHT TO PASS." Surprisingly to me, Weiner sees these colors as being virile, masculine ones.

The tape begins with the self-introduction of the six "players." It rapidly becomes apparent there are two groups—two women (Madeleine Burnside and myself, Ann-Sargent Wooster) and the four others (Steve Blutter, Norman Fisher, Suzanne Harris, Robert Stearns) who divide into two opposing teams. The teams start to play a game, each with a cinderblock as their marker. The game is not played equably; they do not know the rules; nor can they in-

vent rules they can mutually agree upon. Both within a team and between teams they become involved in a dance about exchanges of power.

The two women climb on the table. They interact with the game but are shown as more interested in each other. They are clearly a third team, playing a separate game, that of lovemaking, for which the ritual exchanges are well known. The camera (Carlotta Schoolman) swings between their actions of necking, petting and undressing and the wrangling between the teams in the foreground, who eventually express their feelings of anger and competitiveness towards the couple by walling them in variously with stools or cinderblocks.

At the end of 40 minutes, the camera indicates the women have "won" as it dwells increasingly on the lush expanses of their flesh, evocative of Ingres' paintings of the *Turkish Baths*. The tape concludes with a full frame shot of the women's interlocked figures forming a single continuous contour. Weiner makes it difficult not to read the device of the two opposing types of games as an allegory about the nature of our interactions with the world and to draw the tapes' conclusion that the relationship

between two individuals, physical and otherwise, has the greatest strength.

In this videotape, Weiner's initial *raison d'être* for making the tape is lost. There are seven soundtracks, whose number and complexity are barely discernible by mere listening. The dominant one is of New Guinea tribal music, underscoring Weiner's *leitmotif* of passion. Two tracks deal with the formal aspects of the tape: in one Weiner reads the text for the piece and the second is a conversation with Alice Weiner of questions and responses based on the existential subject. "Do you believe in

water?" There are three additional soundtracks of conversations between various of the participants which occasionally pop into focus but generally have an indistinct slurred quality. With the exclusion of the throbbing drums, one pays little attention to the sound as you are caught up in the tension of the game and the prurient interest aroused by the sensuality of the women.

(Ann-Sargent Wooster has written on various types of art, including performance art, for Artforum, Art News, Arts and Art in America.)



From *Do You Believe in Water*.

The Kitchen Center for Video and Music

Daniel Buren