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Oral history interview with Lawrence Weiner, 2019 Mar. 25-28

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Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lawrence Weiner, on March 25 and 28, 2019. The interview took place in Weiner's studio in New York City, and was conducted by Liza Zapol for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art Project.

Lawrence Weiner and Liza Zapol have reviewed the transcript. Weiner's corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LIZA ZAPOL: Ready?

LAWRENCE WEINER: *Één, twee, drie, vier, vijf, zes, zeven, acht, negen, tien*. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. *Eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, sechs, sieben, acht, neun, zehn*.

LIZA ZAPOL: Okay.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Okay?

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: There's a trick that somebody taught me once, from radio: If you count to ten in three languages, you've covered more or less whatever forms your mouth is going to make.

LIZA ZAPOL: The range of all of the vowels and consonants.

LAWRENCE WEINER: In fact, it's not true, they say, but it's a nice thing to do.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, it is nice and it was nice to hear it. So, as we begin today, I will do a formal introduction, but I wanted to also just say—like I said before—oral history is engaged in how an individual makes meaning, so I would like to understand more about how you make meaning, the foundations of your thought.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Ask.

LIZA ZAPOL: So as long as you're willing to engage in an explorational—

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm willing to do it. Don't worry so much, don't apologize.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes. Yes, yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And I apologize already, for the noise that's going to come up in the middle of it, but it will be nice.

LIZA ZAPOL: No worries, no worries.

LAWRENCE WEINER: We're waiting for this walker that I bought.

LIZA ZAPOL: Okay. This is Liza Zapol, interviewing Lawrence Weiner at your home and studio in New York, West Village, on March 25, 2019, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And this is card number one. If I can just ask you, first, to introduce yourself, to say your name in your own voice, and where and when you were born.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Lawrence Weiner is my name and I was born somewhere in Manhattan—in a hospital, and I don't remember which one—and grew up in the South Bronx. [00:02:09]

LIZA ZAPOL: Great.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's it.

LIZA ZAPOL: So, South Bronx.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes.

LIZA ZAPOL: If you can tell me a little bit about where you grew up, about your home and what it was like.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, I'm one of those lucky people. My parents—the early part of my life I don't remember very much, but it was not bad. My father was in the war and my mother was sort of making do. I don't know how. But essentially until then, it was pretty easygoing. My parents were very nice to me. They were not successful. They were not unsuccessful, so it was okay. There was food on the table all the time, but you had to work for it. I don't have a lot of reminiscences of childhood.

When we moved to the South Bronx, because of my father trying to make more money or make a living, it was rather unpleasant. And it was unpleasant until I was about 15. But it was more unpleasant trying to engage in the world because we had McCarthy and we had situations that were not particularly nice. Very much like we have now: suburban people taking over the world and they don't know what to do with it.

LIZA ZAPOL: So tell me—I'm going to pause just for a second because I'm hearing your necklace.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, I can take it off. [Removes his necklace.] [00:04:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: These are Chinese?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, they're Chinese gold. I used to have—it's very odd for me. I used to have Chinese gold in my ears, lots of it, but you have to keep taking it out when you're taking all those tests. And I miss having them in my ears. But I like Chinese gold.

LIZA ZAPOL: This is a pig, a tiger, and—

LAWRENCE WEINER: A pig, yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: A dragon?

LAWRENCE WEINER: And a heart.

LIZA ZAPOL: And a heart, dragon.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It depends though. There's one upstairs—whatever is the animal of the month.

LIZA ZAPOL: You mentioned that your father was in the war. Was he placed on the West Coast, or was he—did he serve?

LAWRENCE WEINER: He was in the South Pacific.

LIZA ZAPOL: In the South Pacific, I see. And did he come back with any stories about the war? What was your understanding?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, he was part of those groups of men that didn't talk about it afterwards. They spoke nicely about their colleagues and they sometimes tried to keep up with them, but they never spoke about the other part. Once my father said something to me, and that was it. He said he was not—he had a little trouble. They wanted him to be in officer's training and he said no, and they persisted.

But I had the same problem when I was young. They wanted me to go to Coast Guard Academy—and that was when I was 16, 17—or else I would go to reform school. I didn't deserve reform school and I didn't deserve the Academy. It was just because I didn't approve of certain things that I was constantly being arrested, and I was below age and being arrested at demonstrations. They can't hold you when you're very young, they can only put you someplace. [00:06:01]

LIZA ZAPOL: Just to understand, then, where the politics came from—were your parents political in any way, in terms of socialists?

LAWRENCE WEINER: My parents were very humanistic and not at all political. They were political but they were living at a time when it was not a good idea to be political. The United States government did not approve of people who believed that children should get breakfast, because then you're competing with them. I never quite thought it, but it's about your postal code. That children with certain postal codes are not supposed—the reason they closed the Black Panthers down was they gave breakfast to children. Now, those assholes living in the suburbs really thought that if the kid got breakfast it was going to be some kind of a conflict with their children. And then it turns out now—and then we'll leave this behind—it turns out now, that they bribed anyhow. In fact, their children were not any stupider or any smarter than anybody else's children. That's [laughs] what becomes so hilarious. That's where racists go mad and classists go mad. It's because percentagewise, there's smart kids in each group and there's dumb kids in each group.

LIZA ZAPOL: Who were your group of friends when you were growing up?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was very romantic. It was the Russian Revolution and it was American Revolution and it was the Wobblies [Industrial Workers of the World] and it was all of that. My growing up was pretty much the standard—everything romantic and everything dangerous, fine, and also anti-nuclear, which was New London, which was the submarine pens. [00:08:13]

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, so what was that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: The people protested and you got arrested, nothing much more. You got hurt when you got arrested maybe, because some of the people who arrested you were not nice. And the others were just doing what they do.

LIZA ZAPOL: How did you get involved in anti-nuclear protests?

LAWRENCE WEINER: They taught me to read. Once I read, it became that it was not a good idea. [Laughs.] And after this cancer treatment, I know it's not a good idea.

LIZA ZAPOL: Do you remember any of the [air-raid drills], under the desk, hiding from potential bombs?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, that! They tried that for a while. Air raids, they called it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, the air raids.

LAWRENCE WEINER: By that time I was cutting school so much, I never had very much to know about it. And then I went to a high school that you could cut, as long as you made up the work.

LIZA ZAPOL: You went to Stuyvesant.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I went to Stuyvesant.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, and it was—

LAWRENCE WEINER: All boys, all boys.

LIZA ZAPOL: —a condensed schedule at that time.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, you've heard this from other people. At 7:30 or something in the morning and you were out by 12:00, so you could have an eight-hour job, which is what most of the kids I knew had.

LIZA ZAPOL: When you got into Stuyvesant, were you on a particular track? Was there something that you were interested in there? Or were you cutting class? Was it not of interest?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Cultural things. Cultural things, and also sometimes making money, which was, you know, important.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you have good teachers there? Were there particular teachers you remember? [00:10:01]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I was very lucky, I had very good teachers and I had teachers with, like—but I was extremely lucky. The earlier parts of my education I don't really remember that well, but when I reached high school it was like—it was a new world.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were some of the teachers that you remember, and what did they teach you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Jesse Lowenthal, who was involved in—at that point, I was using him for Joyce because he was doing—he was a literature man. And—what's his name?—somebody who was involved with quantum, who had gotten fired from Northwestern because he believed that horrible thing that Americans don't like, that people should be fed and they should have a place to live, even if they didn't come from the right postal code. And we're back where we started.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The nicest thing is that all those people who did the wrong thing to people, they're nowhere, they got nowhere. They're selling used cars. It's strange, isn't it? They destroyed everything and they still weren't good enough to get what they had stolen, they were like kids—I could hotwire a car, I don't know how to drive. They were, like, in the same situation: They could hotwire a car, they could kill the person who did it—like they did with all the taxi drivers here, when the Russians came in—but they couldn't drive, they didn't

know how.

LIZA ZAPOL: So, you know how to hotwire a car. Did you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I did.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, it doesn't work now, by the way. Not with the whole electrical systems in cars.

LIZA ZAPOL: How did you learn that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: In the street, the same as everybody else. My father had a little candy store, so anything that went down in the neighborhood went down there. And that was hotwiring cars and stealing the keys out of police cars and things. [00:12:14]

LIZA ZAPOL: Were you a part of a gang? Was there a gang?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. One of the things that you learned when you were a kid was when somebody said, "Oh, listen, Lawrence, do this for me, and then you don't have to work for a couple days," thank you but no. You just don't do it. And if somebody tries to force you to do it, you move or you just leave. You just don't come out on the street that day. No, I was not—it was a different kind of gang violence then anyhow.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was it like?

LAWRENCE WEINER: The gangs had checks and balances in them, and they don't any longer.

LIZA ZAPOL: So what was the rule of the streets then?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It depends upon what neighborhood you were in.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. So, where you were?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Where I was, was a combination of Morrisania and, yeah, basic Italian American mafia, who was not anti-intellectual and is not against school and things but they are tough. And then across the street there were some others, people from Polish mafia, and they didn't amount to much because there was no checks and balances. They went too far, they got greedy, and once you kill the cow, you can't milk it any more. You turn somebody into a heroin addict and there's not much you can get from them. So all you can get if you turn somebody into a heroin addict—it's the same problem with the art world—you turn somebody into doing something that's cheating, and they're not good to you anyhow. It makes no sense whatsoever. [00:14:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: Where was your parents' store, in terms of the local—

LAWRENCE WEINER: At 149th Street and Southern Boulevard.

LIZA ZAPOL: And in terms of the local politics of these various—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Totally neutral.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. On neutral territory.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was the place where the people coming back from Korea and the police would get a little drunk. It was a place where you left the guns when somebody was bombed, and it was a place where you took care of things. It was just a little store.

LIZA ZAPOL: And you worked there?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, God, did I.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were your jobs?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Opening, counter, unloading the trucks—soda cases and things. Just normal jobs of running a place. I don't really believe in child labor. It bothers me. But it's—I even stop going to shops when I see somebody's family helping out a little bit too much. Go to another shop, because that means they're being forced. By necessity, very often.

LIZA ZAPOL: At what age do you think—do you remember at what age were you required to go there?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Nine. Nine!

LIZA ZAPOL: What happened?

LAWRENCE WEINER: My parents moved from where we were living to where we were living for the store, and that was it.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see. You were just expected to be a part of it.

LAWRENCE WEINER: There wasn't much choice.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did you resist?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, of course I resisted, I'm a kid.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] So was there time for play?

LAWRENCE WEINER: What do you mean?

LIZA ZAPOL: You know, childish games or—your games and playing.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. If you needed money and they needed somebody that was in good shape, you could get—you would work, you could play rugby for the Irish or—make money. [00:16:04] Totally against the law, but make money. I wasn't that good in basketball, I just had a letter. But anything you did, you did for money.

LIZA ZAPOL: So jobs were in the store. But were you paid in your parents' store?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't remember.

LIZA ZAPOL: No.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I was paid. My parents were nice to me.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't think you understand what working-class means. It means you work. It doesn't mean your grandfather had a job. [Laughs.] That's a problem there.

LIZA ZAPOL: I wonder, though, just what—you know, what was your relationship to that space, to the family business?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You wake up sometimes in the morning, you go and you have long conversations out in the street with the newspaper deliverers, because they [my parents] were always short of money, so you always had to have somebody talking to you. I was the consigliere essentially. I functioned as a consigliere. My father was popular, he was a nice man, and he helped a lot of kids, but I was a consigliere. I would go and talk to them and maybe let them wait two days for the money and you would still get the newspapers. I don't really want to go into this.

LIZA ZAPOL: It's okay.

LAWRENCE WEINER: You know something, it's so long ago.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, yeah. And—

LAWRENCE WEINER: And the times are so different.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's also a part of the landscape of the city, what you're describing.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I think it's the same, true for—I think my mother grew up in the back of a luggage store in Harlem, because her mother was running the store or something. I don't really know, I never got that story straight out of her.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what was your mother like? Did she also work in the store? [00:18:01]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Towards the end, yes, she had to. But previously—let's see, she was—both my father and my mother were the youngest of large families. My mother sort of made it through high school. She had brothers who would have put her through high school and then of course she married my father, who was a grocery clerk. And that was a standard basic thing of people, you just didn't get anywhere. He had ambitions but they were not

easily met.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were his ambitions?

LAWRENCE WEINER: At one point he wanted to invent televisions and things. He was very good in mathematics.

LIZA ZAPOL: How was that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It didn't.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, it didn't. The war—remember all these people were split. Alice's mother, her parents—the war took these people away. They were gone for three to five years. It's very hard to reestablish your existence when you don't have a background. You have a familial background maybe. My parents not much, but others do.

LIZA ZAPOL: So if they were the youngest of these large families, were there aunts and uncles around as well?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I never knew them. My parents were off on their own. I never figured out that. My mother had a brother that she liked, but he died. And the brother, I think he was the one that took me to the hospital one time when I was a kid—you know, hernias—named Louie, but he died. I met some of them but not many.

LIZA ZAPOL: What did he die of? Do you know?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Cancer. Everybody died of cancer in those days.

LIZA ZAPOL: So, and then as your—I'm trying to understand if there were cousins or other family around. [00:20:05]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No.

LIZA ZAPOL: No. Yeah, so it was really you and—

LAWRENCE WEINER: —and anybody that I knew from the neighborhood, so the unions and things like that.

LIZA ZAPOL: The unions, then, did that come from your work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No.

LIZA ZAPOL: How did you get to—

LAWRENCE WEINER: My beliefs, but that was about it. Anyway, I was muscle. There is a use for a kid that unloads trucks. They were usually very strong physically. Not that they want to be, particularly. [Laughs.]

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, so you started working very young.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, but they didn't know that it was bad for you. They thought it was good for you.

LIZA ZAPOL: So you were unloading trucks, and what kind of things were—what was the cargo?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Soda, seltzer, all sorts of heavy things in boxes.

LIZA ZAPOL: And when did you start working in the docks?

LAWRENCE WEINER: That was a long—that was easy. I used to get these phony papers and then they turned out to be temporary, and I could go and I could get—I had to look older, because you had to be grown up and I wasn't. But I was big. I would just go down to the shape-up—like you see in the movies, it hasn't changed any I don't think—and you stood there and somebody pointed for you and if you had been—you know, you would help somebody's daughter finish their homework or son finish something and—"Oh, God, give it to the kid," and I was the kid and I worked for a while. That was easy work.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was it?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You get 15 minutes off every hour, just unloading bananas, anything nobody wanted: concrete, which ripped your back up, and bananas, which were scary—it never happened to me, but snakes and things like that in the bananas, that never happened. [00:22:09] And then at the end of the day you would give

some money to some man who was sort of retarded but he was part of the whole mafia thing, and you had to give him a quarter for every hour you worked or something, and that was how he made his living. I found it so—nothing to learn from it. From a social standpoint, there's nothing to learn from it. It's like the art world, where they just copy and there's nothing to learn. So I lost interest.

LIZA ZAPOL: And was that here on the West Side?

LAWRENCE WEINER: East Side.

LIZA ZAPOL: On the East Side, okay.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, East Side. The East Side was concrete and then the West Side, up further, was cruise ships. But you really couldn't get near them, the union was very strong. But there was always a little work here and a little work there and everybody was—I hate to say this—everybody was maybe tough but they were nice, and when they stopped being nice, there was not much you could tell anybody because you were beaten to a pulp.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did that happen to you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, happily. Banged around a bit, but nothing to the extent of being turned into a vegetable. That's what the common consensus at the time was: take the kid and turn him into a vegetable. You're taught as a kid: when you see anybody kick somebody in the head, burn their car. Because that's what the people used to do, they used to drive in, pick up kids and kick them in the head, because if you keep kicking a kid in the head, he is no longer a terrible, smart kid. People are frightened of each other desperately. In the art world too, they're frightened of things. I remember the resistance to the kind of work that I was doing was insane, it made no sense. [00:24:03] Nobody asked them to pay attention, it wasn't getting in any place, but they were virulent about it.

LIZA ZAPOL: And what shape does that take?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Verbal. Going to an opening with other artists and standing there and somebody walking over and saying, "You guys are not welcome here." French & Company and things like that, it was common. You went to see a show of somebody like Barnett Newman, and Barney you knew and all of that, but the gallery that they were showing in did not want people like you in the place. So we built our own world.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Which is what the point was.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes. [Laughs.] So, I want to get there.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I'm leading up to it.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] You are.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Get out of this growing up in the city and all of that, and hitchhiking through the South and getting involved with—everybody that was in New York was involved in civil rights or they weren't.

LIZA ZAPOL: How was your understanding of race growing up in the Bronx? What was your interaction with people who were different, of difference race?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know, I was a slum kid. I used to go to Harlem to eat and to music, and I didn't have any real problems about it. There was a little problem with the Hispanic community because certain of the Hispanic community was violently against education for men, because men should be married and having children, and if they weren't, they were *maricón,* they were faggots. Well, that led to some difficulty. That led to, at least for me, as—you didn't speak Spanish, which is a pity, but you couldn't. The minute you did you were in that cabal and you were finished. [00:26:09] As a kid where I grew up, not everybody. So you ended up speaking Caribbean French, since the black people were civilized. That's what you were taught, and *misgaiten* [ph] were not civilized.

LIZA ZAPOL: Was this at the candy store? Was this on the docks? Where were you interacting with—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Everywhere.

LIZA ZAPOL: Everywhere.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I also used to work for other people, to write papers for their kids.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, you mentioned. What was that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Just papers for their kids, I could write a paper. [They laugh.] No, I'm very serious, it was common in those days.

LIZA ZAPOL: So you would do homework or help them with it?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, yeah, especially if they had gotten into college and they needed somebody who knew who James Joyce was. And by the time I was Henry's age, 13, I knew who James Joyce was.

LIZA ZAPOL: When you were at Stuyvesant?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, what was I, 13, at Stuyvesant, I think? Oh, yeah, it must have been, because I graduated when I was 15, 16. Yeah, it must have been 13.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. And then, were you also studying art at Stuyvesant?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. No, no, no.

LIZA ZAPOL: Was there some studio art?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I didn't study art. It never even came up until I had to decide whether I would go to college or not. And then it just—I didn't want to go into these places with people that knew less about contemporary art than I did, but I didn't know a lot. I discovered a lot of things in the opening of the Museum of Modern Art in the '50s.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. [00:28:00]

LAWRENCE WEINER: They gave out tickets to slum kids.

LIZA ZAPOL: And so that's how you—

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, that was how I moved from the Metropolitan to that.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Yeah. What was that—what did you see at the Metropolitan? What were some of the works that you remember there?

LAWRENCE WEINER: All the things that were there. Rubens, Rembrandt, and the Italian painters. They all meant a lot to me, but the people that you met in the museum were not interesting. When the Museum of Modern Art opened up, we discovered that, gee, there were even pretty girls who came, they didn't—it was interesting.

LIZA ZAPOL: And at the Met—what inspired you to go to the Met in the first place?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was there.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: We went to the Museum of Natural History and—and again, these split sessions left you with some time in the afternoon before you went to work. You didn't go to work until the evening.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did your parents go to see art at all?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, no, no, not at all.

LIZA ZAPOL: Cultural activities? Music?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, they couldn't, they were in the store all the time.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, yeah. Did they listen to music?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, my mother—my father's favorite popular entertainer was Nat King Cole and my mother's was Pearl Bailey, which was I think pretty common for anybody you'll talk to.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Right, right, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: There was something so dignified about Nat King Cole and something so poignant about Pearl Bailey, that they couldn't get into Billie Holiday. They could do it but they really preferred the Pearl Bailey.

LIZA ZAPOL: And what was the difference, for you, of Billie Holiday?

LAWRENCE WEINER: One was about life experience and the other was about life. Okay? Life experience was not what they wanted, not when your neighborhood is rampant with everybody getting—those were the days when they grabbed kids and jabbed needles in them, to get them hooked on heroin. [00:30:10] How else could you—you know, you're raising—there's a good expression. It's a Jewish expression, which is interesting: "If you don't teach your child a skill you're raising a thief." And then it turns out it's not just a Jewish thing, it's every single ethnic group has the same saying: either you teach your child a trade or you're raising a thief.

LIZA ZAPOL: Were you raised Jewish? Was that a part of your—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Not particularly.

LIZA ZAPOL: No.

LAWRENCE WEINER: My parents were totally—I mean, yeah, they knew they were Jewish, but totally assimilated. Both my parents were born and raised in New York City.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, and their relationship during the war to Europe, was there any relationship?

LAWRENCE WEINER: None whatsoever. Yeah, Europe. Most people's neighborhoods, their fathers were in the war, either in Europe or on the Pacific.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That was their relationship to Europe. As far as the mother culture, as it's called—I don't know. [Misinformed. Danish, English, Canadian, Irish, German, French, Spanish. –LW] Alice grew up around people who had Scandinavian multicultural—involved in the States but they were Americans, and some of them were revolutionary, from the revolution. And they were very ethnically Danish and things. My parents not.

LIZA ZAPOL: Not socialist, not in that—

LAWRENCE WEINER: My mother could read and write Yiddish, I think. But she could do that for German too. She stopped studying. She was a reader. Her life went a little wrong, the Second World War and the economics.

LIZA ZAPOL: You said she was—she went through high school so she was more educated.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, she went through high school, she did well. In those days, for a girl to get through high school was a big deal. [00:32:02]

LIZA ZAPOL: Did she have a sense—did you have a sense of her regrets about what she could have done?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I did not have a close relationship with my mother.

LIZA ZAPOL: Her name was Toba?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Toba.

LIZA ZAPOL: And your father's name was?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Harold. Harry, Harold.

LIZA ZAPOL: But you didn't have a close relationship?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, until later. And that's when—I think that I was almost 16, I said I was going to be an artist, and that was that classic line of hers: "Lawrence, you'll break your heart. Art is for rich people and women only, and it's never going to change." And you know something? She was right, it never will change. The only way, if you come from a lower class—now, in this generation—is if you're an exotic. Now, who the hell wants to be an exotic? Just because you happen to be black or Hispanic or green, you don't want to be exotic, you want to get either picked on or credit for what you do. No, it's all exotic now and it's not working, the system. In the art world it's not working at all, we're losing people left and right that would have been interesting to bring in.

LIZA ZAPOL: And losing them to what?

LAWRENCE WEINER: To nothing. I don't know what they end up doing. They end up teaching. You know, like they have no choice. You want a family? You have to have money. If you don't come from the right scene either ethnically—a support structure or something else, a family support structure—you don't have anything. You may as well teach.

I didn't teach and I had to make that choice, because I didn't think that teachers—I think that you can't be a good teacher without being an authority. You have to have authority. You can't be an artist and have authority, it never worked. [00:34:06] I know people who made it work. It never worked for me so I didn't do it.

LIZA ZAPOL: So in terms of your sense of authority, of what an artist should be, I think what I've been hearing also may be rooted in some of your own sense of politics, is that possible?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know if that's politics. Human rights is not politics. What an artist should do is make art. I don't know what it's supposed to look like. And if you do know what it's supposed to look like, why are you bothering? [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: How did you get involved in the unions? You said you did just by being around it. But what—how did you then come to understand some of the philosophies of socialism?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, reading, talking to people. The area that I lived in had a lot of Merchant Marines in it. Merchant Marines read books in those days, they really did. I remember the joke, I said how come you read so much? He said, "Well, I first had to get this Norwegian book, *English for Sailors* and once I started to read the *English for Sailors* book, I got involved in reading other books." And that's what he said. And then I realized that that's really pretty close to the way everybody finds everything. I got involved in certain things because my mother had a copy of, you know, *Nana*, from Zola, or *Jean-Christophe*. Yeah, okay, so then let's see what else happened there and let's see who else is there, and then there was Conrad.

As far as that goes, I don't know why I made my choices to be on the Left rather than on the Right. Because the Right was paying much better. Yeah. Especially if you were muscle. [00:36:06] But I did, but it's not a big deal. I have a thing about people that grew up in the United States and were not involved in civil rights. That's their problem. I don't want to hear about it. Why? You either did it or you didn't do it, and that's it. If it didn't bother you that little girls couldn't go to school in the South, little black girls, then it was your business, it didn't bother you. But if it did bother you, you would go down there with a baseball bat and take people in and get their names in the register, so when segregation was over, the Army could put them back in the school.

LIZA ZAPOL: Where did you go when you went South?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and did a stint in some various other places that I knew well.

LIZA ZAPOL: Do you have any particular stories of what you remember there?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. Most of my life was doing the right thing, and do you know who helped me most? The same as it helped everybody else of my generation. Men who looked like Elvis Presley driving trucks, who didn't particularly like black people, but they didn't like segregation, and if you were being chased by some—what they called "crackers"—they would get you in the truck and get you out, and nobody would stop them because they looked like them. [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: So you got rescued a couple of times.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Lots and lots. My whole life is the kindness of strangers, [laughs] I'm very serious.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But really, the kindness of strangers. There are people out there—this country is a strange one—who basically just do not approve of certain things, but they don't want to participate. But they don't approve. [00:38:10] So if there's anything they can do to help, they step in.

LIZA ZAPOL: They pick you up in their truck.

LAWRENCE WEINER: They take you out of the state, which is a big deal, or they grab little kids in the street and they take them to someplace they know is safe, like a church that's safe for kids of the wrong color.

LIZA ZAPOL: So at what age did you stop living at home?

LAWRENCE WEINER: About 14, 15.

LIZA ZAPOL: And where did you—

LAWRENCE WEINER: I was out of the house by then. I was living—I had been already to California, I had been to the Arctic.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see.

LAWRENCE WEINER: By hitchhiking.

LIZA ZAPOL: And you went up to the Arctic. That was on boats?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I went up to the Arctic on land.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Then you had to hitch a ride on a boat. But I went up on land, hitchhiked.

LIZA ZAPOL: What took you? Why did you go? Why did you want to travel?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, I was interested in—I literally was interested in what you would call Eskimo life, or—not the Indian as much as the Eskimo, and the only way to find out about it was to go there.

LIZA ZAPOL: And what did you find?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, let's see, I fell in love at one point. I don't know what I learned. I really don't, I just know I did it. And the same with the South, there was music and there was things like that, you went down there. New Orleans as well.

LIZA ZAPOL: You found these different cultures.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Different cultures. It's different neighborhoods. You know, even if you went to buy firecrackers and you were living in one part of the South Bronx, you cross into Morrisania, you were in another country and the shooting began. I mean, that's—you were not supposed to be in the other parts of the country. [00:40:11] That's the one thing you should never tell a kid: "You're not supposed to be there."

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's the first place they go, and why would I be any different than any other kid? I'm very serious about that.

LIZA ZAPOL: But it's interesting because, right, we were taught about the borders of where we can go.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And you knew them instinctually. Sometimes, when you're in Chicago, you got hurt because you didn't understand that it was on one corner and then another corner. Chicago was the place I could never figure out. I used to have to stop there on my way to Denver for the *Big Table* thing and, oh, God that was—you never knew if you were standing in the right place. [Denver was a big literary community. –LW]

LIZA ZAPOL: What happened?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You can get killed, you would get hurt. It didn't happen to me but it happened to people I knew. Just for being in the wrong place.

LIZA ZAPOL: So you're—all the way from South Bronx, you were traveling up to the Arctic and back.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah and then to Mexico. Why not?

LIZA ZAPOL: Hitchhiking, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah. It's different now. Even my daughter, I think just—she's 50 now, the hitchhiking sort of ended at that point, when she was entering into the world. She had to find people with cars, but even that was the same. Why? Didn't you hitchhike when you were a kid?

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-mm [negative]. No.

LAWRENCE WEINER: How did you get places?

LIZA ZAPOL: I would ask for rides to get around from friends.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I didn't know people with cars.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. And I would stay put a lot. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, okay, well I didn't. [00:42:00] I was fascinated—I was so impressed by the Pacific

Northwest, looking at it. It was just gorgeous.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was—just the landscape of it?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, the landscape. And also that you could pick up work on tuna boats.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, so tell me about the boats, tuna boats.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Tuna boats, the albacore boats. It was mostly Portuguese American fishermen. And they liked the beatniks because they read and they were—and they just sort of liked them, and they were reliable and they didn't steal, and they needed tough guys because there was a lot of piracy on the tuna boats. People would steal people's catches by guns, and so they needed people who were not afraid of guns and things. How was it? It was scary work for me, I don't know about other people. Because it's a series of hooks on a spinning thing, and you're in the middle of it. And they pull out things like sharks, and then you have to go in with a club and hit them in the head and then they submitted—[whistles]. A boat would pull in, somebody that had gotten onboard—[pops tongue]. They're scary because they're big creatures, and I'm not really a very brave person.

LIZA ZAPOL: But you're doing a lot of brave things at that age.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Doing a lot of dangerous things. But you don't—there's a difference: people who do it that it doesn't matter, and there are people who are frightened, and I was scared shitless most of the time. But I did it. Otherwise it won't get done.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The same with the making of art. You do it, you make the show and you show it, and then you listen to the insults. What are you going to do, stop doing it? [Laughs.] [00:44:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: So you put yourself out there. You're still exploring the boundaries.

LAWRENCE WEINER: You put what you do out there. Don't you still do that? Everybody should be doing that all their life. I mean, I'm not that old—I'm only 77—and still do things that are a little risky but so what. They're not physically risky because I'm not up to it any more.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were your jobs? So you were working with hooks or clubbing? What were your jobs on the boats?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Pulling. Pulling lines and stacking fish in the ice. I grew up doing ice for the little stores, so I knew how to chop ice and things. Whatever it was that was necessary.

LIZA ZAPOL: You've said that you learned about the service industry, kind of being on the—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Through my parents, waking up in the morning and having to make what they called coffee-and, which was coffee with something for these people going to work every morning, 5:30, six in the morning, fried eggs and things like that. Normal, just like it is now. No, I don't know, that's not true. There are places still in New York that are like that, but the majority are not, okay.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, right. And in terms of being on the boat, you also had some various jobs. Were you in the galley or were you also—

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I wasn't in the galley.

LIZA ZAPOL: No, not in the galley at all, okay.

LAWRENCE WEINER: A wiper.

LIZA ZAPOL: What does that mean?

LAWRENCE WEINER: There's oiler and there's wiper on the engine, that's the two lowest. And I was a wiper, that's the lowest. You cleaned and you did all the things in these big, *boom boom boom* engines. Talk about taking your life into your hands. And the stench of oil. And it was like 110 degrees. But it was good. It was a better job than working in a 7-Eleven.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were you dreaming about at those times?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Girls.

LIZA ZAPOL: What did you see in the future? [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Girls. You mean career?

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, or—yeah, about your future. [00:46:00]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I didn't have any problem with career, my romanticism carried me over. In those days, choosing to be an artist was choosing to be an artist. It had really no ramifications that you were going to make it. Rich and famous was a nice idea, but it was a relative idea. Sorry, I mean, that is the intriguing part of trying to make some kind of an oral thing, is to explain that it really and truly was not exotic. It's only exotic for a graduate student but it's not exotic for the person in it. And if you looked carefully now, even people working in McDonalds, there are kids who have other visions, but they have to have a job.

And that was my feeling, is you had to work. When I went to California, you know, I could go out and basically you would go—I would go where there were—like in North Beach—beatniks. But I would be looking for work, but the work would usually sometimes just be cleaning cars or something, but you had to find work. But you went to your kind of people to look for work, and the other people went to their kind of people to look for work.

LIZA ZAPOL: How did you know about the beatniks, or what intrigued you about them? And what happened when you found them?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, some very good writers and some very nice people. They hung out around here as a matter of fact, Jane Street especially. So that was it, and to the extent that—oh, God, one night my daughter and I were in a bar down the block and Gregory Corso came in—and I know Gregory from years—and was sitting there and we got in an argument about something about art, and Kirsten interfered and she looked up and he said, "When your father was your age"—she was about 15—"he was such a fucking pain in the ass you couldn't believe it." [00:48:02] That's the extent of it. People were different than they are now. There was no careers, ah-ha, none whatsoever. Most of the men could not be hired in the universities because they wouldn't sign the loyalty oath. I come from the only high school in New York City that refused to sign the loyalty oath—

LIZA ZAPOL: Wow.

LAWRENCE WEINER: —and we got our diplomas. I have no idea how it happened but it worked. I'm very proud of that.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was your understanding of what was happening with McCarthy?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Understanding?

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: You don't really want to know what I thought. But it's that these people, they grew up nowhere, knew nothing, came from stock that was nothing, went out of their way to get anybody who would basically give a kid breakfast. Because that's what it amounts to. Yeah, McCarthy was just these sad people, there's Father Conklin—I mean, these are people that were in part of America and they're garbage. And now we have them as the president and his family.

LIZA ZAPOL: It's the legacy.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I can't wait, because the minute it's over, there are people who are going to do it—and it's not sort of nice but they're going to do it—they're going to put those kids in jail forever. Not the parents, because McGlugGlug [Weiner's name for Melania Trump –LW] will get away with it. The only thing they can get her on is if she slept with somebody to get her parents a green card, which she didn't, that's it. But the rest of them, I would be very—I don't like anybody to go to jail, that's the problem. I don't believe in capital punishment. I don't mind a murder. I mean, killing is okay, but when a state executes somebody I can't take it.

But, you know, people kill each other all the time. [00:50:02] I grew up in a place where—where we lived on Bowery, Kirsten can tell you, she would come out the door and on her way to—I would take her to the school bus on Bleecker and Bowery, she's say, Oh that's Mr. [Mūller's –LW] house, he's dead isn't he? Of course his jacket was hanging on the Johnny pump. She knew all the bums. They were sleeping in our doorway and things, but they were dead all the time.

LIZA ZAPOL: Death is around.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That was around. Yeah. I'm not doing you very well, am I?

LIZA ZAPOL: You are, you're doing well [laughs]—you are. I'm thinking about—you said that you spent some time being locked up for your—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Thieves were around. And I was lucky. For some reason my social conscience hit when I was very young. There's not much you can do with a 14- or 15-year-old that—the cops don't really want to do anything to you because you didn't do anything that endangered them. You stood for something that endangered their wives and their mothers and their fathers, but not them. They didn't care less if the cop next to them was green, you know, or yellow or black, it really didn't matter as long as they knew that that cop was not going to hurt them.

LIZA ZAPOL: So where were you—were you in New London, was that a place where you were?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, I went to New London to protest and we got whacked over.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right. Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: We were out of our depth. We hadn't come up against disciplined—

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LAWRENCE WEINER: —sort of disciplined troops. These were people that had been in the Coast Guard and the Merchant Marine. They were disciplined, and they would come in, they would round you up, slap you around and turn. So that if you had brains, you would run, because they were not going to shoot you.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Most of them didn't carry guns.

LIZA ZAPOL: They would just do a lot of damage.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, God, did they do damage. But that's life, it's better that you came up against them than you came up against other people.

LIZA ZAPOL: And these were the anti-nuclear protests.

LAWRENCE WEINER: These were the anti-nuke protests. "Better red than dead" sounded good.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Linus Pauling, isn't it? Linus Pauling said, "Better red than dead." I don't know why I remember Linus Pauling—

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: —but I remember Linus Pauling, and Dr. Spock. I have a sign that Dr. Spock wrote.

LIZA ZAPOL: Really?

LAWRENCE WEINER: From the war. He went to the little store my father was working in, and left it when he goes by. It was his neighborhood and he knew—I don't know how he put it together and he said, "Give this to your son, Lawrence." And it was a sign: "Why are we in Vietnam?"

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: People were okay. Quite exciting. A lot of people got hurt in Vietnam. And that was really—if you want to look at the art world now, they're desperately trying to clean out the art world of people, very much the way suburban people had this thing with the draft board: inner city men who were in college would be drafted immediately, because they were going to be competition for their children. [00:02:06]

LIZA ZAPOL: For jobs.

LAWRENCE WEINER: For jobs.

LIZA ZAPOL: So tell me, what was your experience around Vietnam? That was much later, you were already working.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I was not—I was out of that court, just anti-Vietnam. I mean, just the protests and things like that. But essentially, I was in the belief pattern that both the French and the Americans had done something amazing, their intellectual community had stopped wars.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Okay. What can I say?

LIZA ZAPOL: Right. [Laughs.] So, I want to go back a little bit to—you're going to the Met, you're going to MoMA, you're—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Frick.

LIZA ZAPOL: The Frick.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I love Van Dyck.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. That's interesting, I haven't heard stories about that. What were your experiences at the Frick? Where would you sit in front?

LAWRENCE WEINER: They were just—most of my experiences were nice. You know, like, you're there and you're at the wrong time and you're the wrong kid and you look up and there's somebody standing there and they say, "What do you want?" I say, "I want to see the Van Dycks." "Oh, go on, hurry up."

People were—I have no horror stories. The horror stories usually were people who drove in [to the Bronx], the ones that jumped out of cars with bicycle chains and things, hitting baby carriages, running over dogs and people. There were strange people, I don't know what their problem was. I mean, they had enough parking up there. I don't know what else they need. They don't need very much except a place to park.

LIZA ZAPOL: That is—you're right, I mean, you've talked about how much violence there was growing up, and it sounds like there was so much violence.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Intense. I'm not the only one who remembers.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But I walked away okay, and I didn't do anything that I'm ashamed of. [00:04:02] I wasn't tough enough [they laugh] to do anything that I'm ashamed of, okay?

LIZA ZAPOL: That's good. You've talked about the Giacometti, *The Palace at 4 a.m.*, being in front of that.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes. You did your research.

LIZA ZAPOL: Tell me about that work and what it spoke to you, or said to you.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's only this big. And it—I don't like anthropomorphic sculpture, but it was anthropomorphic sculpture and it built a microcosm that became a macrocosm, and I liked it very much. That was it. And it meant something to me. If he can do that and it ended up in the museum, then I can do anything. Ira Joel Haber was somebody that I always thought was like my Norman Rockwell from my group, was Ira Joel Haber building these little dioramas.

LIZA ZAPOL: You've talked about the mise-en-scène of that moment.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Exactly, and from then on it was win-win.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, so what did it do to you? Can you describe the feeling of looking at it?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No.

LIZA ZAPOL: No.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I really and truly—I've tried my own little way, sometimes even getting stoned and trying to figure out what emotionally I was feeling. It was all a big mix-up. Happily, there were things to see. I mean, I'm fascinated right now—there's a scene in *Casablanca* where they're in the thing and they're saying, "Knock on wood." That has been a major concern for me. The other stuff, you know, [whistles] that's all fine, but this was really strange and it stuck.

And I was lucky, I grew up in New York, I went to high school downtown. [00:06:01] My high school was on 15th Street and First Avenue, the Five Spot was on St. Marks Place. It's a 10-minute walk, and they let you in as a kid. You just learned to like boiled beer, because you could afford—you saved your money, you could buy one bottle of beer, sit at the bar, but you can't—you had to have that bottle of beer. When it was gone, you'd better order another one or get out.

LIZA ZAPOL: Nurse it [laughs] as long as you can.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And you would hold onto it, but sweaty hands, watching performances that were just exquisite. Your beer boiled.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Talk about some of the performances you saw and what that did to your thinking.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Jazz was a big deal. Also, the people like Monk. And then later on, remember, I was at Slugs when Ornette Coleman played his first classic saxophone. Slugs was nothing but a storefront, you know. What did it do? Again, how can I tell you? It made me interested in joining that group, meaning people who did things that hadn't been done before.

LIZA ZAPOL: What did Ornette do? What did you hear that day?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, the music? Who the hell remembers.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, seriously, sometimes you would go to three clubs in a day, and go to work.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. But it was that sense of new.

LAWRENCE WEINER: A sense of new and sense of good. [00:08:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: What else was happening downtown?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Everything, you name it. The San Remo bar, with the man with his oral history, Maurice. How do you know all of this, by the way?

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Well I know about that, about—

LAWRENCE WEINER: About Maurice?

LIZA ZAPOL: About the oral history of the world. [Joe Gould –LZ] [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I didn't know anybody—I was just going to explain there was this man.

LIZA ZAPOL: Tell me about him. Tell me about everything.

LAWRENCE WEINER: He had long white hair and a big gray coat, rain or shine, summer or whatever, and he didn't have a place to live. So everything was in lockers in 42nd Street in Grand Central. I was at the San Remo, he would hang out.

LIZA ZAPOL: What sort of conversations would you have with him?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't remember.

LIZA ZAPOL: He was—

LAWRENCE WEINER: He was fine. I knew a lot of crazy people.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: He wasn't crazy.

LIZA ZAPOL: Okay.

LAWRENCE WEINER: He was living in a paranoid world but everybody was paranoid at that time. Everybody was getting fired from their jobs and life was not comfortable. Mediocrity was its own reward. Mediocre people were trying desperately to clean up their world. Happily they didn't succeed. Okay? But it's a matter of not succeeding, but I don't know what you make of the whole thing. I don't know how much—I'm lucky I grew up where I grew up, but at the other point, there are things that I never got to know because I couldn't, because I had to work. So I never could be any good at sports. The only sports I was good at were really heavy, brutal sports.

LIZA ZAPOL: Like rugby, you were saying.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Rugby, somebody offered me money to play and I wouldn't have to work that weekend, and I didn't know what it was so I went to the library and looked it up. Something about lateral passing intrigued me. And I get along with Irish people, so. [00:10:04]

LIZA ZAPOL: What do you mean when you say brutal sports?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Like if you make an error, you can get your collarbone broken or something. Not because somebody is mean but because it's dangerous, that's it. But I really don't remember. I was 14 years old. Do you know how long ago that was? You know? We haven't even gotten to the—

LIZA ZAPOL: To the art. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: To the art.

LIZA ZAPOL: Tell me about Jackson Pollock and about seeing his work.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I never met Jackson Pollock. He was long gone before I was—

LIZA ZAPOL: But the work at MoMA.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, that was—looking at that, I realized something that was not popular to say because everybody was being intellectual, but I had read all the intellectual people, right up to the Structuralists. The Structuralists in the '50s were reading engraved and mimeograph sheets, *Cahiers du Cinéma*. I used to go to 42nd Street, borrow from them a dictionary, and dig through *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Where was I? I lost my train of thought.

LIZA ZAPOL: *Cahiers du Cinéma*, going through and reading about the Structuralists in there. We were talking about Jackson Pollock at MoMA.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was a star map. It was totally existential. It wasn't to do with art history because his art history concepts were very much [in a mocking accent], "blah blah, to be a writer, blah blah." I don't know, it impressed me, but not romantically. There were other people much more romantic, like Mondrian, for me. Mondrian was very romantic, a very courageous artist. And Pollock was a good artist, a very important artist. But yeah, I got involved in that and some of the other people around Pollock.

LIZA ZAPOL: Talk to me about Mondrian, then. Was it his life or his work? What was—[00:12:06]

LAWRENCE WEINER: The work.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I didn't know much about the life until I found it in books. It was his work. You watched it from the seascapes to here to there, and there was something so brilliant about the whole thing. He didn't have a good life. He got his up with Robert Rauschenberg. There was a *Gemini Gel* party and it was something to do with Rauschenberg, and Rauschenberg stood up and said, "Mondrian is buried in Brooklyn, did you know that?" Most people didn't. And he looked up and he said, "And I bet you they buried him on a slant." Meaning, "You people are so mean, I know how mean you are, I come from a loving Southern family and I just know what mean is."

LIZA ZAPOL: That's a good Rauschenberg story.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's beautiful, the whole audience went mad. I wasn't there but it was repeated to me. Rauschenberg was a very important artist, especially an important person on the scene. We lived next to each other for 20-some-odd years. He was on Lafayette Street and I was on Bleecker and Elizabeth.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: He always had food. A lot of the people I visited when I was a kid was not out of any kind of admiration, it was they had food. I used to babysit for people in the art world because there was food in the refrigerator. [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: Who would you babysit for?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Mangold, Sylvia and Bob, and lots of people you don't know. But if they had food they had food. Winnie Watkins.

LIZA ZAPOL: And this was during that period also, after you were 15, when you said you were—[00:14:03]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I was gone, I was out in the world.

LIZA ZAPOL: Out in the world, yeah. So you were sleeping—

LAWRENCE WEINER: At one point—Elliott Lloyd just died, it's a pity. At one point, I was sleeping in very much—like in the doorway, or not doorway, in the hallway of a building that they were all living in on the Bowery. There were lots of people sleeping there. Nobody had a place to go. But then I don't know, it all worked out. And it got better when I went to California. That's the other thing is that—how do you explain it? I just went through this in Savannah. How do you explain to somebody what it's like to be a kid, know you should be going to San Francisco and knowing nobody there, not having any money and having eight dollars in your pocket and putting your thumb out? And you had a duffel bag and in it was stonecutting tools and flares and things like that, and you were hitchhiking. There you were. I don't know how I did it.

LIZA ZAPOL: And then you got there and you—

LAWRENCE WEINER: You got there and slept under bridges and doorways for a while, until you can figure out something to do. And again, kindness of strangers. Bob Levine picked me up in a bookshop and I said, "I'm looking for work." And he said, "Hmm, can you do my basic carpentry?" And I said no, and he said, "Well, I can teach you." I didn't know how to do basic carpentry, I still don't. But so I worked on sets for a while and that gave me enough money to get a rooming house, six dollars a week.

LIZA ZAPOL: And you were out there—this is after Hunter or this is before?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, Hunter is something else, Hunter was—I was not committed to going to school, I really wasn't. [00:16:02]

LIZA ZAPOL: You're learning so much from—

LAWRENCE WEINER: —everything. And also philosophy, though I was not particularly involved in it.

LIZA ZAPOL: But you were studying—okay.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah?

LIZA ZAPOL: I mean, I'm curious how you came to understand or read about linguistics and child developmental psychology. Was that through Hunter or was that later?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, that was through the street, really and truly. I didn't really like Konrad Lorenz's concept, his thing was too anthropomorphic for me. So I got more involved with Piaget. There was a strange invention called a public library.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I'm very, very serious.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: If you didn't know something and you had the time and you can get up early enough in the morning, before you went to work, you would go to the library and look it up. The people working in the library, the librarians, were very helpful to everybody, at least that I remember.

LIZA ZAPOL: Where was your library?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Ottendorfer at one point, on Second Avenue. And then 42nd Street. And then the Ottendorfer closed and they let everybody keep the books that they had taken out, which was cheaper than taking them in.

LIZA ZAPOL: So that's how you discovered Piaget.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. I discovered Piaget because—oh, where did I discover it? Probably a magazine or something. "An apple is called an apple because the name apple was written down inside the apple." It sounds profound now but then it was just shocking. And it's true, an apple was named an apple because the name apple—there was no other logical reason for it, unless you wanted to get into Latinate, and Latinate doesn't rate since it came in so late and it was mostly illiterate people. Most of the Bishops were illiterate. [00:18:11] They only memorized it all and they did it very much like [inaudible]. They had it memorized but they couldn't really discuss it because they didn't know the next step.

LIZA ZAPOL: This idea [of Piaget], wasn't that around the earliest developmental stage for children was—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Piaget, the big fight between Piaget and Chomsky.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, but that they—the earliest stage is that children don't know the difference between the name and the—

LAWRENCE WEINER: —and the thing.

LIZA ZAPOL: And the thing, and they got conflated.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But you know something? I make work that there is no difference. So, okay, maybe I'm childish.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I hope.

LIZA ZAPOL: And when you say an apple is an apple, are you also speaking about Cézanne? Is that—

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, not in relation to—Cézanne was important but not for the apple.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Why was Cézanne important?

LAWRENCE WEINER: His understanding of a contractual space, that there was a basis of what representational space was, and that's what interested me. Painterly skills, anybody can acquire them.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But this understanding of space, or towards reality, a kind of reality? No.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's all reality. No, it really is. It's all reality of some sort. You don't think it was? Or do you think it was? I had this long conversation for the Archives of American Art in California, all about reality. And there was a poetess from the Poets Walk, but they don't have any record of it anywhere. [00:20:00] We looked. Everybody that was in California at the time remembers, because I did a big piece downtown, copper, and through—I've forgotten the poetess's name, but she was nice to talk to. She was an older woman.

LIZA ZAPOL: We'll have to—

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, you—they can't find it anywhere.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah we did look, but I will—maybe with some more details that will be helpful. But yeah, you were saying it's around this concept of reality.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The ancient concept of reality, yes. We only know reality. All the rest of it we don't know. We think we're saying, "Oh, this is real, this isn't real, this is"—but that's nonsense, we know reality and that's all we know. And I don't think that's bad.

LIZA ZAPOL: Do you think there are changing notions of reality?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, there's notions of the usefulness of reality. The reality stays the same, but as you went from street to schools to graduate schools, reality didn't change at all. But the notion of how to use it did.

LIZA ZAPOL: And for you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm not academic, I don't know. It turns out I'm reasonably well educated but I'm not academic.

LIZA ZAPOL: But the relationship of your work to the real, or to what is.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, yeah, it's useful.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I have nothing against the academy. It's useless but it isn't—no, it's true. The purpose of the academy is to have an answer and, at the least, a solution. But the purpose of art is to not have an answer, it's to question. [00:22:05]

LIZA ZAPOL: Truly.

LAWRENCE WEINER: So they don't make sense to me.

LIZA ZAPOL: Truly. So, what's this—you were saying the argument between Chomsky and—

LAWRENCE WEINER: It wasn't—he didn't have an argument. He was nice to me when I was doing that digital project at MIT, HOMEPORT. We tried to set up a big meeting with Chomsky. He was very nice on the phone but we never got it together.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see.

LAWRENCE WEINER: He wasn't really interested. My Left was a working-class Left and he didn't believe in a working-class Left. He believed in something else.

LIZA ZAPOL: What do you think he believed in?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Academic Left.

LIZA ZAPOL: You've spoken before about Chomsky in terms of—

LAWRENCE WEINER: I loved Chomsky. I went and got the copy of the first, the Mouton book [*Syntactic Structures*], a long time ago. But his social politics, that's not what life's about. [Lawrence points his finger.]

LIZA ZAPOL: In terms of finger-pointing.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Not just finger-pointing. There was just too much finger-pointing for me.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, yeah. His ideas around grammar, universal grammar.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That I don't agree with anymore. I did in the beginning, that there was universal grammar and all of that. It doesn't seem to hold water anymore.

LIZA ZAPOL: Why not? How did that change for you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Because as you learn more languages—he used the learning of languages to understand the universality of it, and I began to see that it was just about where you happened to be at that given time. And that was about it, there was no tie. It wasn't the dolphins. It wasn't a dolphin from the North Pacific and a dolphin from the South Pacific could talk to each other. Human beings can't. They have to find another common ground, another language. [00:24:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: It's too culturally specific?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's very culturally specific in our day and age, because we know other cultures in our day and age. Nothing is exotic. Maybe outer space might be exotic, but nothing is exotic. In the days of Chomsky, when he was formulating this unit, everything was really sort of exotic. Konrad Lorenz was even considered an intelligent person. Of course, he understood the ducks. I don't know where I got all this stuff.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] What do you mean when you say Konrad Lorenz?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Meaning the anthropomorphic concept of humanism. You want the humanism but you don't want the anthropomorphic part. And you don't want somebody saying how much they understand it as opposed to somebody else understanding it. It's not a competition.

LIZA ZAPOL: Do you consider yourself humanistic?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, but I consider myself socially conscious. Not that I do very much about it that works. But still, at least the intention is there, as opposed to lack of intention.

LIZA ZAPOL: So then, this idea of the name being connected to the thing itself, this connects later as we're going into your work and your art. I want to check in with you and see how you're doing. Shall we continue?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I guess. What time is it? Oh, two o'clock.

LIZA ZAPOL: Would you like to take a pause?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know. I'm worried about everybody getting something to eat.

[END OF TRACK weiner19_digrec_track02.]

LIZA ZAPOL: You had mentioned that when you were on the boats, you were dreaming about girls.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Wasn't everybody? Dreaming about boys or dreaming about other girls?

LIZA ZAPOL: Well, that's I guess what you do when you're on a boat. When did you start dating, when were you —

LAWRENCE WEINER: I never dated, I come from a different background.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, so what was it?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was slow—what do you call that—escalation of things. I remember, you know, making love on the radiators in the winter. [Dog barks, brief interruption.]

LIZA ZAPOL: So—and that was when you were a teenager, living not at home?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, when I was old enough to get an erection, [they laugh] whenever that was. I really don't remember, but obviously it was old enough to keep the other person interested.

LIZA ZAPOL: And who was your first love?

LAWRENCE WEINER: A girl named Madeline. It was quite an affair, it lasted a good three or four days.

LIZA ZAPOL: Who was she?

LAWRENCE WEINER: She was just a girl in the neighborhood that I thought was pretty. And a man named Sheldon Crockmuller thought she was pretty too. That tooth is from a baseball bat because he wanted her.

LIZA ZAPOL: You lost your tooth?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I didn't lose it. It's been brown for my whole adulthood.

LIZA ZAPOL: And that was—what happened?

LAWRENCE WEINER: A fight over a girl.

LIZA ZAPOL: And then what happened with her?

LAWRENCE WEINER: He won. [Laughs.] And she and I did it on the sly. But everybody was doing it on the sly in those days. [00:02:02] I don't remember how old I was, about 14 or 15.

LIZA ZAPOL: And who were you dreaming about when you were on the boat?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Anybody that happened to come on, depending upon where the boat was going, or depending upon whether I was hitching or something. When I went to the North, I was dreaming about an Inuit girl. When I went to the South, I was dreaming about somebody who said, "Would you like another cup of coffee?" and my heart would shake. The same as everybody else. Seriously. My passions were—I still did this for the Phaidon book, the biography book, I made a stencil that said, "Long division is sensual, short division is visceral," and it's true. So it was mostly short division.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: As far as art went, I don't know. I still to this day don't know why so many talented people were so kind to me, because I was just a loudmouth kid I think, but they were very kind and very patient.

LIZA ZAPOL: Who was patient with you in these early years?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You name it, everybody was patient with me. Right down to the point—once we were at the Hirshhorn and the curator, at that time, of drawings looked up at Alice at the dinner and said—Alice said, you know, "I've known him since he was 14," and it was true, and we talked about our meeting in a bar at 14, and I was friends with this blind lawyer and we would meet in the bar and we would talk. I don't know, people were very, very—the kindness of strangers, it's not a joke for me. People were very, very, very open to each other. [00:04:07] It was a smaller world then, I remember too.

LIZA ZAPOL: What would you talk about? Anything?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Aesthetics.

LIZA ZAPOL: Aesthetics.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Aesthetics. Politics. Contraception, since a lot of your time was taken up taking girls to Margaret Sanger, which was dangerous at the time because there were all of these strange women coming from

church with sticks that used to beat up on girls going to Margaret Sanger. You know where Margaret Sanger was? It was like a tunnel. It was the most horrible street.

LIZA ZAPOL: It was here in the Village, right?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, no, it was when it was uptown.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see. Where was it?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Where the tunnels go. It was on one of those streets when you drive up to the Holland Tunnel, on one of those streets up there. Then later they had the building down here. But that wasn't there. That was more Speyer's [ph] than it was Sanger. That was animals. Because I think Merrill Wagner bought that building at one point and it was, like, haunted by the animals.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I got my first dog from Spire's [ph] uptown. No, I got it from the pound.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did you grow up with dogs, with animals?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, no. No animals.

LIZA ZAPOL: No? This is when you were in the—

LAWRENCE WEINER: That was when I was living on—it must have been—

LIZA ZAPOL: On Bleecker.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know the date. It was really, like, early, I went to the pound and there was a dog that had given them some trouble but it was—sort of seemed nice. And I had the dog for 12 years before it got run over. And it never bit anybody, anybody. And he was a tough dog. [00:06:04] It wouldn't have occurred to him. When my daughter was born, he was so resentful, so angry, but she put chopsticks in his ears and he never bit, which is not bad. And if somebody went anywhere near the blanket on the floor—[exhales]

LIZA ZAPOL: He would defend her.

LAWRENCE WEINER: [Growls.] But real.

LIZA ZAPOL: I'm interested in the steps that get you back to New York, but we're still kind of on the West Coast or back and forth.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I had no choice but to come back to New York.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were some of these—you talked about having these conversations around aesthetics. You were at the Cedar Bar, the Cedar Tavern.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Dillon's [on University Pl. –LW] and the Cedar, until the Cedar closed. And Dillon's was okay and then there was the Wagon Wheel. You went from bar to bar, wherever they would have you.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then you went west. And was that where your first work happened?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. That was the first show, in Mill Valley. Oh, she was the loveliest girl. I'm very serious about that. I had to make a choice because she had money, and she offered if I would stay with her and she would build a house in Mill Valley. And I didn't.

LIZA ZAPOL: What brought you—why did you make that decision, or what happened?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Because I was more interested in making art than I was in making a house. Okay. It was that simple. There was no other reason. But you couldn't do both.

LIZA ZAPOL: Was she what brought you to Mill Valley? No?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. [00:08:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: Why did you choose that location in the park?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know, to tell you the truth. I was living in North Beach and I don't know how to drive, so I had to get people to drive me out to the country, and that was Sausalito and going across the bridge.

And I really don't know what brought me there but then I realized it was a state park. And I had some leftover explosives from working my way across the country, so I went and collected up people and we went in cars and went to the state thing in Mill Valley and made the piece, got busted. They were very nice and the records are very funny about it. We meant no harm.

LIZA ZAPOL: The records of when you were arrested?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah. The public library did some work. People kept coming and asking but nobody had a camera. It's so funny, it's part of their history and nobody had a camera so it's—whatever they tell you is probably true. [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: This is another one of those "however it gets told."

LAWRENCE WEINER: However it turned out it happened, and it was true, and how they read it, more power to them.

LIZA ZAPOL: So why did you have these explosives from traveling across the country? I don't understand that.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Every once in a while you get picked up by a farmer and you could read and you were quiet, and they would say things, if I could clear stumps, and, you know, "Oh come with me," and they would go to a general store and you get a blasting license. They would pay for it and then you would work for them for a couple of days, and then you would move on and you take the ones you hadn't exploded. I carried that flare that's in that thing, from Holland, in my suitcase! Times were very different. On Icelandic Air. [00:10:04] But in my suitcase was these shafts that were just really flares.

LIZA ZAPOL: So yeah, so you're walking around with [laughs] these explosives, or flares.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Anything, flares, and blasting caps.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes. [They laugh.] So you took them with you west.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I took—no, I got them in the West.

LIZA ZAPOL: For the Mill Valley, you had already gotten them as you were traveling?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I picked them up along the way.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see. And then—yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The ones I took to Holland, I bought in an Army and Navy Store. Blasting caps too. You know, on Canal Street or something. Was it Canal? Yeah, Canal, it was an Army-Navy Store.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was happening in terms of Happenings or performances? You know, what was inspiring you in San Francisco, that you wanted to take part in this?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, in San Francisco.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, or in—yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The Batman Gallery people, Bruce Conner and those people, interested me. It didn't last. They were so politically right wing that it was difficult for me to deal with. But it was fun. It was beautiful out there, Jesus. And life was so much softer, really soft.

LIZA ZAPOL: In what way?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You could live rough if you wanted. The weather was just right. Even the winter because it's cold in San Francisco but it's nothing near New York or Chicago or Toronto.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did that make people's thinking different?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I have no idea.

LIZA ZAPOL: Or work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No idea. I was on a track. I really don't know.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were you on a track? What do you mean?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I was trying to figure out how to objectify what I was trying to present to people, and I was making paintings. [00:12:03] There's one upstairs, I bought it at auction. I don't know, I was trying to find out who I was and what I was.

LIZA ZAPOL: When did you start painting? Or how did you—what were your first works?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Bad Abstract Expressionist paintings that I thought were just exquisite, and they weren't. And then I developed this kind of objectified making, with the *Propellers* and things like that. I don't know if it was—but it was important to me. I have no idea how I built those paintings. They're big and I built the structures all myself. I don't know how, but I did.

LIZA ZAPOL: And who was looking at those early paintings? The abstract—

LAWRENCE WEINER: People at the same stage in life that I was. David Diao of all people, as well. Yeah, yeah. I knew David since then.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I just realized that, David and Jeanie [Blake –LW]. Not any more Jeannie but I like David. No, the same people; everybody was sort of connected in this really odd way.

LIZA ZAPOL: And what was—so the *Propeller* paintings—but there was a shift from the Abstract Expressionist work. I'm trying to—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Please, just don't worry.

LIZA ZAPOL: —to go into the *Propeller* paintings, some of these. What happened in between?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Well, first I showed them in '64, I guess, in Manhattan and New York. And it no longer was satisfying me. I tried to build other paintings. [00:14:02] They were fine, they were doing well. I mean, I would even be able to sell something here and there, and not a lot of money but sell something. It just wasn't fulfilling, what I was trying to do and something happened and it just moved along and there we go.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What were the—let's see, at what point—in '68 was when you did *Staples, Stakes, Twine, Turf*.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Is it?

LIZA ZAPOL: I believe, at Windham College.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, sure, why not.

LIZA ZAPOL: *A Series of Stakes Set in the Ground at Regular Intervals*. Was that sort of the departure? It seems like you're going back and forth, from working in space and the canvas.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, I was going back and forth and trying to determine what design meant and what it didn't mean politically. I remember it, everybody else seems to remember it, but I think it was normal.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: You know what I'm saying?

LIZA ZAPOL: It was normal to explore, in some sense.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was normal to do things, yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: You said what’s a sign and what it meant. What do you mean when you say that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: What's a sign and what does it mean? When you make a red stripe, what does it mean? It's like Barnett Newman, what's the meaning of the yellow and the red? That's what I was trying to determine. Wasn't everybody else at the same time? You weren't there.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did it feel that way?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, pretty much. It was just sort of normal.

LIZA ZAPOL: And then when did you feel like you hit something?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I still haven't felt it. I haven't hit anything yet. I figured out how to make work that was useful for other people to figure out where they were and what was happening, but I don't think I've hit it, or I hope not.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. I'm wondering—[00:16:03]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm not being nice by the way. I'm serious.

LIZA ZAPOL: No, I understand that's not the language. It's about—

LAWRENCE WEINER: The intention.

LIZA ZAPOL: —about making meaning. When did the term conceptual start being applied to your work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, that. I don't know, but they did do it to everybody. There was one or two people—and I'm not going to name the names—that were frightened to death that they weren't going to make it and they had to teach, and in order to teach you had to have a department, so they called themselves conceptual artists, so they would have a separate department. There's no other reason for it, it doesn't make any sense. The conceptual artist is the one that has the most children.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: And there were some of those artists who traveled across the United States leaving babies behind at every graduate school they came to. Dennis Oppenheim is one of them. A nice man, and some of his kids were nice, but there were too many. [They laugh.]

[Note: The following section is referring to Windham College show. –LW]

LIZA ZAPOL: So this sense—I'm curious about *A SERIES OF STAKES SET IN THE GROUND AT REGULAR INTERVALS* and what you were experimenting with there, and what happened with that work.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, I don't know if that—that's some sort of fantasy that everybody tells everybody. Their football players had a game on it—it wasn't against the work—and they broke it apart and then everybody got all upset, and I didn't get particularly upset. It was either that—you see, I come from a different kind of a background. If somebody had done something like that, you kill them. I was not in the mood to kill anybody or wanted to—students, over the work. You walk away from it if you're not happy. [00:18:02] I began the realization that it seemed to mean something. People talked about it, even though it wasn't there anymore, so that was it. That's pretty simple.

LIZA ZAPOL: The idea has been presented.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And then it became obvious to me that as long as you can present it, it didn't matter how. Either you built it, you didn't build it, you put in language, you didn't put it in language, as long as it wasn't a secret.

LIZA ZAPOL: So yeah, just to explain further, that work was in—it was in a grid pattern out in a field.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was in a grid pattern out in a field; it was exactly what it said it was.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes [they laugh], right. And then it became—it interfered or somehow, with the—

LAWRENCE WEINER: They didn't even—maybe didn't even notice it. They thought it was planting, and they had no—the football team did not really care about planting, and they had no way of knowing it was art. Robert Barry, of that—was filament across from building to building, and nobody noticed that either. Then they began to notice it again. That's life.

LIZA ZAPOL: What do you mean, then they began to notice it again?

LAWRENCE WEINER: When they later found out it was part of their history, then they got interested in it. Until then, it had no use for them. It was just another thing, it was like my Robert Whitman thing, where I think Robert Whitman did the greatest performance ever by climbing up the ladder and dropping the feather. No games. I didn't know what it meant at the time, but I know the Happenings. That was beautiful, it was brilliant, but nobody paid any attention to it until afterwards, so it's the anecdote that carried itself. [00:20:01] Once you realize that it's the anecdote, then just do your work. That's why I use print. Publish it and then show it in a show and do things, but as long as it's down in a book or in a newspaper, it will be fine. It eventually will bring itself to light.

LIZA ZAPOL: So the idea of that piece then survived in some way.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No it wasn't the idea, the piece itself survived.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: It wasn't the idea of the piece, the piece itself survived.

LIZA ZAPOL: The piece itself, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Isn't that interesting? It did it all by itself. It didn't need art history to make it that way. It is that. That's a material fact. Art is not a metaphor. It's a material, empirical fact. Why am I remembering that? That was the California lectures. Oh, God, that was the '60s as well.

LIZA ZAPOL: That was what you spoke in the California lectures.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That was the California lectures, yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: Was that at the same time or around the same time as the *Statement of Intent* that you—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, in '68 or something, but I'm not sure when it was. The *Statement of Intent* was just almost like the packaging. It just told people what they were getting. Instead of making a whole, "You didn't know, you didn't know," tell them what they're getting. Tell them that it's each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist. Let the person using it decide how to use it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Can you read the *Statement of Intent* for me?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, sure. They use the word "piece" here but that's fine. "The artist may construct the piece, the piece may be fabricated." [00:22:00] Okay, that's all pretty—"the piece need not be built, each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the condition." I can't read without my glasses. I don't—because this is different than the other one.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, is that glasses? I'll try this. [Receives glasses from his assistant.]

LIZA ZAPOL: It evolved, right?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, it evolved. Okay. "Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition or as to what the receiver, upon the occasion of receivership." Receivership means whenever you know it or accept it or things like that.

LIZA ZAPOL: And "you" being whomever.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I'm not the receiver; I'm the maker.

LIZA ZAPOL: You're the maker and "you" is whom ever is receiving.

LAWRENCE WEINER: They'll figure out how they want to take it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It still holds today.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, it does.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Each to their needs, each to their necessities, each to their abilities.

LIZA ZAPOL: Is it also to the person who acquires the work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, but anybody that reads it acquires it. Accepting responsibility for it is something else. But acquiring it, it's open for acquisition and that's important. But as far as the reception, as receivership that they have a responsibility for, they have to accept responsibility. They have to stand up. It's like *Public Freehold* work of mine, not use my name to validate it and say it's art. And they can have it, but they always use your name and then they've—then they cheated, and if they cheated it doesn't count. [00:24:07] There's no reason to cheat in art.

LIZA ZAPOL: Why? Why?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Because it starts off having no monetary value and by the time it's all finished it doesn't have any monetary value because entered into the culture. Okay.

LIZA ZAPOL: I'm curious, and maybe we can talk about this more next time, is that sense of being—what you were saying in the beginning, of [your] being outside or being seen [as an outsider –LZ] where people reacted violently or aggressively to your work.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Ah. They were quite, at various times in various countries, quite aggressive. I don't know why they were so frightened. But those are the people now who make retrospectives of it.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's not a joke.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Yes. Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The best thing, if you want advice for a young artist: If you think it's worthwhile for other people to know about it, just keep doing it, whether it's comfortable or not, and whether it's worthwhile or not is not about your career, it's about the thing itself. Does that no longer exist in the world, or does it exist in the world and it has a purpose? That sounds so pretentious, but do you know something? Almost—this is what the interesting thing with this is. Almost everything that you think is right sounds pretentious to begin with. Don't know why.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] But you were also saying [regarding] this violence of being on the outside, and then now, it's successful if [the work is] aggressive in some sense, to culture, right?

LAWRENCE WEINER: [00:26:12] Yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: That then they're forced to accept. No? Not forced. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, not forced, I'm not forcing anybody. You know, I think that what I do is very, very socially responsible and important, but if you never heard of it and you don't know about it, you can live a very nice life, honest and truly. It's not like penicillin. [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Can we cut today?

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes. It's a good place to stop.

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LIZA ZAPOL: This is Liza Zapol—it is March 28, 2019—for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution Oral History Project. I'm here with Lawrence Weiner and this is our second session. You were just talking about projects and community in New York, and various responses to it. I thought that was an interesting topic. Can you describe the project you were working on and then your comparison with other people?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Most people did things because they were asked to, because a friend or somebody was ill or somebody was in a protest and got busted. In fact, I don't think it was exotic. There was a community in New York City, so if you needed a cameraman, very often you could find one with a camera. If a sound engineer you needed, they turned up. And if the project was worth it, they worked for whatever you could pay, and if it wasn't they would say, "No, can't do it, I've got a family to support." But I had very little problems putting together projects. Maybe my desires were mild compared to what people were being taught they needed in order to do something, which it turned out of course they didn't. That was what was so funny about it all.

LIZA ZAPOL: But you were saying that when you were working in particular communities, that you felt that you were—that there was a challenge from—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, some communities did not want you in them. But I think that's from any neighborhood. And that's what I said, and each person who ever came up against resistance, whoever, what the neighborhood was, that's the ethnic group that was against them. No, in fact it wasn't any ethnic groups, it was everybody against everybody. [00:02:00] They were fighting out for their culture. You can't have a mom and pop culture that doesn't change although you've changed the location, unless you change the culture.

LIZA ZAPOL: You were saying that you—compared with Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer, that they had also had these kind of—

LAWRENCE WEINER: They always had a little bit of—but then Merce got that place in Westbeth and it just went on and on. It was okay. Yvonne did quite well and then she made movies, as people do.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, right. So—

LAWRENCE WEINER: I was lucky enough to be in a generation—which is the only time I'll use it—that allowed everybody to do what they were trying to do and if they fell on their face they fell on their face.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, and what—when did you feel like you fell on your face?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Most of the time. No, I'm really serious. Now, looking back, it all looked like it was a lot of bravado. And bravado is better than hubris. It is.

LIZA ZAPOL: What's the difference?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, bravado is that you did something and then you want credit for it. Hubris is that you are convinced that you are capable of doing it and you want the reward.

LIZA ZAPOL: So, I'm interested—I think last time we left in the late '60s, was where we were.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's right. Just—no, middle '60s.

LIZA ZAPOL: Middle '60s, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Now let's get to the late '60s, and that was interesting.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. You started exhibiting in Europe also, you know, as soon as—around the same time as you were exhibiting in New York.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes. No. [00:04:00] Yeah, a little bit. Yeah, pretty much.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mid-'60s. What was your first trip to Europe? Do you remember that and what your impressions were?

LAWRENCE WEINER: 1963. Of course Kennedy got assassinated, that's why I remember it, because we arrived—I went to be in a show that Leon Golub instigated, to protest the fact that the Peace Accords were all signed in Algeria, and they were still pulling Arab people out of the Seine. It was still terrible to be an Arab at that point. So we made a show and a lot of artists were in it. And of course there was no money, but the woman I was living with [Susan Rossi –LW] had a little bit of money from an accident. And between that and a train pass, made it to Europe, first trip. Stopped in Glasgow. The flight was to Glasgow, that was all we could afford. And then somebody gave us a hitch ride in an airplane. Stewardesses, they were moving a plane to London, and in London found a cheap place, and from London took the train and went to Paris, and that was the beginning of the end. Okay?

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] How so? How was Paris the beginning of the end?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Paris was standing in the street at three o'clock in the morning. All the hotels we could afford were closed. And luckily, a man came along and he was a priest from Boston who was stationed to Paris. And he said, "Oh, you need a place to sleep." It seems it was common. And we slept on the floor of the school and we woke up and there were all these smart kids speaking French. And then we found an Algerian hotel during the day and was able to check in and then start working on the show. [00:06:07]

LIZA ZAPOL: And what was your impression then, of the Arab-French relations, being in Paris?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm a spoiled person. You can't ask me that because I'm a New Yorker and any kind of enslavement, any kind of hierarchical pushdown, turns my stomach and I get violent. So I don't really know, there was no reaction. I didn't like the idea.

LIZA ZAPOL: What work did you present there?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, something that sort of looked like a cross between bare bones and John Chamberlain. I don't know, it was paper on stretcher bars. I don't know, it was more of a protest than it was anything else, but it was art. And then I did a few drawings and things which got placed around here, in Paris. Everybody was much more open in those days than you can imagine.

LIZA ZAPOL: Then you continued to go back to Europe. Was there something—

LAWRENCE WEINER: You got invited.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I did that show for Wide White Space. I was supposed to be doing the first show for Wide White Space. And then in Amsterdam, when I went for *op losse schroeven* [Square Pegs in Round Holes], Konrad Fischer turned up and said, you know, "Hello." "Hello." "Do you want to make a show for me?" "Who are you?" "Konrad Fischer." "Yes." And that was it.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: And then he arranged to drive—because there was no money—drive from Amsterdam, where they had given me $100. I slept on [Jan] Dibbets's floor. He was very kind about it. He drove me to Dusseldorf, and in Dusseldorf I started to work on the translations for the show, and then got on a plane again and went to Berne for the *Attitude* show [*When Attitudes Become Form*]. [00:08:11] I came back from Berne, to Dusseldorf, made the show and got back into an airplane and came to New York.

God knows what kind of airplane. It was usually in those days taking it to—sometimes where you would have to go to Brussels and find somebody, no joke, with a carnation in their lapel, and then they can get you onto Tarom Airlines or something. Alice and I flew with Kirsten, my daughter, on Tarom in places like that. You could not even imagine, where the plane was taken over by priests and anybody else got shoved in a corner. They put children in the rack. And big men with big silver crosses. They couldn't have been gold.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, so at that time also is when you—in 1967, you met Alice at Max's Kansas City. What is that story? How did you meet?

LAWRENCE WEINER: How did I meet? Well, I think I had a phone by then. I think John Chamberlain called one morning—he was living on 13th Street—and he was going to come over and I said I didn't have any—I really didn't have any coffee or anything else to offer him. I was dead broke. And he said, "Come to me." So we went to his place and then we went out and I wanted to go to a movie, we went to go to the movies. I figured he had enough money to cover me; he didn't. These were hard times and strange times. But we could go to Max's Kansas City in the middle of the afternoon and sign. [00:10:00] So we went, got a little bit tight, and I never made passes at waitresses. They trapped people, as much as you want to you don't.

But something happened and we ended up, Alice and I, making out in the front of the restaurant. I have no idea why, some sort of [whoosh sound]. Then she had a date that night so I said, "Okay, I'll come back." I went home, I spoke with the woman I was living with, and said I would go and find out what's going on. I went up to Max's afterwards, when her shift was off, and there were people waiting to say, "Don't do this," because it was the wrong match. I was supposed to find somebody with money. That's what was going on at the time. It didn't work, so we went off on some sort of a date. She had an old car. And somehow or another, we're living together and everything worked out well, with all the other people involved. Okay, that's all, so that was that, 1967.

And then after a while, Alice had mentioned she was thinking we should have a kid. It took us a year talking about it. It's a serious thing, I'm very old fashioned: If you make them you raise them, if it's possible. I mean, if you can. If it's not possible then, you know, you still can do it. It's been—yeah, so we sort of get along. And Europe was a possibility. I keep getting invited to make shows. And somehow or other, through Seth Siegelaub, I had a key to an apartment in Amsterdam, and we went there and from there it just developed up.

[1970–1975 –LW] And I bought this boat, because there was no way—we couldn't afford to rent. We didn't have any security or anything, but you can buy a boat. [00:12:09] We bought a boat from some sailors. They were robbing the boat every day but so what? They were taking off machines and things like that. But [I] get paid for it a little bit, to make a show somewhere, have some money, and then you would go to the post office, get a stamp, put it on, sign it, and we would pass it back and forth. And then eventually we had a boat to live in.

We were living in this boat with no heat and no running water and no electric. And we lived on it for a long time before we got electric. And that was done by chance, the kindness of strangers. No running water until quite recently. And you fill up the tanks and you use it and run the motor and whatever. There was no motor really, we would cut everything off. But the boat was good and then I kept Bleecker Street, and then somehow or other, I was going to make a movie in '75. So it was at [speaks German]. And so that meant that Kirsten and Alice could come.

[1975–1976 –LW] And we had—for the first time in my life and Kirsten's life we had central heating, which was rather interesting. The first six months in Berlin, working—we were in Stresemannstrasse, which was near the crossover at Checkpoint Charlie, and then six months in [Claus] von Stauffenberg's villa, which I was involved in, and I used to swim in the morning in the reservoir. You were allowed, if you were a resident, to swim in the reservoir. [00:14:00] I guess you became clean if you lived in the neighborhood, I have no idea.

So that was it, but as far as the work goes, that all came about with Seth [Siegelaub]. Because I had been showing around in coffee shops in New York. I mean, the normal stuff that people did, little shows here and there, but was not running it at an enormous space. And then I somehow or other was in Provincetown for some reason, but footloose. I didn't have a place or anything. I was walking along on the street and somebody says, "Hello, Lawrence." And I looked out and I said hello. And it was some guy I did not know but I knew his name. [Seth Siegelaub] He offered me a beer. I sat down, we ended up having a beer, and he said could he come and visit me on Bleecker Street? How he knew where Bleecker Street was, I didn't know. I said, "Sure," and then we got it together and he was opening a space on 56th Street, selling rugs to pay for it. He knew a lot about Oriental rugs. And we made these shows and had this friendship sort of. And then I showed with Fischer. I began to show, and Yvon Lambert did the book in '70. It all just worked out. It just was, I must say, a bit uncomfortable at times.

LIZA ZAPOL: What do you mean, uncomfortable?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Well, if you don't have a backup, you don't have backup. You spend all your time putting together work and then there's nothing to eat. So it was a complicated game, but I sort of made a decision not to teach. I did seminars. Nothing against school or people, but it wasn't for me. There's a problem here. [00:16:04] In order to be a good teacher of anything, you have to have authority; in order to be an artist, you can't have authority. Other people have solved their dilemma, but it was a dilemma that I could never figure out how to solve.

LIZA ZAPOL: Tell me about some decisions that you made, or some difficult decisions you made, around economics. You talked about—the last time off the record you said, you know, when you were expecting a child, you had to make some decisions.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: So tell me—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Friends of mine stepped in and they got somebody to offer me a temporary position, or a position—I really don't remember, it's a long time ago—in a school in New York. And I said "Yeah, okay, but I'm going to go to the *Attitude* show. When I come back, and it will be like two weeks or something, three weeks"—and they got nasty. And I thought, "Oh, gee, these are the people I'm going to have to decide that—fuck them." Pardon me, but the hell with it, it's not worth it. And then I made a joke about genteel poverty and I meant it.

Alice and I sort of managed okay with Kirsten. Somebody once looked at Kirsten and said—she's upstairs, I think, you can ask her. It must have been complicated because there were places with no heat. She looked up and she said, "I've seen photographs of me and I'm laughing a lot and playing a lot, so I guess it couldn't have been that bad." Who remembers? It's just so long ago. It's 50 years ago.

LIZA ZAPOL: You talked about—and this was in a letter to the *Brooklyn Rail*, about Berne, that at that moment, "It gave a mapping to a cosmos and the lasting results of the show are more about the dynamics of the melding of artists that found themselves in the midst of other artists with a mindset that allowed for coexistence." [00:18:12]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, all the work that was in the *Attitude* show had been seen and was invited, from Keith to this one to this one to this one. It was not ground-shaking. It was ground-shaking for people who didn't know. Well, there's always people who don't know and that's what you make public things for, so that there are people who didn't know can know. That was the first time a lot of artists came together, and it meant for New York artists to find out how easy it was to have been European artists at the time, or find out that Ohio spent more money on their artists in New York than you made, you know, in a year. And they all bought lofts for them in New York.

You began to see what this influence of culture is, and what are they fighting for? Are they fighting to put their child into a low-paying job? Because that's what the male or female artists were put into. I don't know but they were fighting. They were spending more money to set them up as artists than most artists made. It was an interesting conversation for me. I began to realize the importance of culture, and then my commitment then to stop just organizing and protesting, and do it with art, change the world. It's a nice idea.

LIZA ZAPOL: You've talked about that conflict that you had for a while about whether to be political.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, not whether it could be political. Whether the politics were for a group, a small group of individuals, or whether it was the whole culture you were trying to change. And let's chalk it up to the fact that I was young and I would just go for the whole culture. [00:20:05] It might have been the wrong choice but I did it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Can you talk about that dynamic of the melding of those artists [from *Attitudes*], or in particular any artists?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't like to crit other artists in. As I said, my relationship with other artists is reasonably good. I'm not into competition. I make something that most people don't want to even think of making.

LIZA ZAPOL: Who are you—who are some of the people—when you say, "I was exhibited with these people," who are some of the people who you were regularly exhibited with, and how did that change over time?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, this group from Chicago—Elliott Lloyd and Peter Passuntino—they were all showing there in this Chicago school, which was essentially some kind of a mixture of Degas and God knows what. It didn't interest me, the people interested me. That's who I was showing with: whoever invites you, whoever lets you in the coffee shop.

LIZA ZAPOL: But then with Seth it became—with Seth Siegelaub, it became a particular group in some sense.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, no, no.

LIZA ZAPOL: No? No.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That slowly developed. Okay, people got invited in and invited out. But he had a place on 56th Street and Paul Bianchini had a place on 57th Street, and one was sort of like rich. He was not, it didn't matter. All the artists would go back and forth from the Bianchini thing, where many of the artists were interesting, to Seth Siegelaub, who had interesting people. But that was about it. There was no real money involved. With Seth, you know, 50 bucks for the materials or something. But it worked. Again, I don't really know how. [00:22:01] A lot of the time was people working, you know, having jobs in department stores and things like that. Jessica Diamond was working in a department store.

LIZA ZAPOL: Were there people who you wanted to be exhibited with but weren't? Or found your way, you know, with particular dealers or so on?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, there weren't—the art world was a little different. Dealers were different people than they are now. Not better or not worse, they were just different. The stakes were different. No, I was—there were places sometimes where you would go to see the show of a colleague and you would go in with another couple of artists and they would say “You guys are not welcome here,” and it was for a Barnett Newman show or something else. It depended upon the location but nobody paid that really much attention. You just—you would still—if they were serving drinks you would have a glass of wine. Your feelings get—you have to learn how to shield your feelings. And then later, if you'll notice, a lot of artists become really mean, miserable bastards because it all had built up and it's like pack ice. And others, it still goes off the back of their head or they know how to handle it.

LIZA ZAPOL: How was it for you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm so used to being able to go and organize. It was fine. I didn't really grow up with very many hatreds of artists, I really didn't. Most artists were quite nice. The people backing them, family and university and country, sometimes were not. That's all. [00:24:04]

LIZA ZAPOL: Can you think of an example?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, not that I want to give. The problem is, is that we're looking at something that's, like, over 50 years ago.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And to redress that somebody hurt your feelings badly or somebody made it that you didn't eat for a couple of days 50 years later is just not anything. After what we have seen in our world, with the whole thing of the Second World War, the Pacific, how evil people are towards each other—gee, that was just, you know, that wasn't even a slap in the face, that was just spit in the eye. [Laughs.]

LIZA ZAPOL: You mentioned the houseboat, or the boat, in Amsterdam, and you told an interesting story that I read about trying to explain yourself as an artist to the other people who lived there. Can you tell that story?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Well, you know, you were going to be living in their community or in a community where there's no locks on the door. I mean, there's locks on the door but anybody can kick in a boat. So it was all very—everybody was sort of wanting to know about the other persons that were living tied—their boats tied to each other. And I explained what I did and all of that, and then it was a book we had done that I had with me, and I gave it to somebody and I didn't realize that they were really not literate, but they liked the idea that I was so

serious about it that they tacked the book up on the wall as a gesture.

LIZA ZAPOL: It sounded like, in the other description, that it had been a prolonged conversation where it felt like it wasn't successful at first.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, it went on every day. You had to maintain rapport. And I was going off trying to make money, being in small shows in Europe, and I had to leave both Alice and Kirsten on the boat. [00:26:07] If the relations were not perfect, it was not comfortable. But if the relations were fine, it was what it was. It was like a French movie about living on a boat. [Laughs.]

LIZA ZAPOL: And why in particular were you in Amsterdam? What is that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Just by virtue of friends. I had some friends there and it looked like a place to be. And at that time, the politics were such that I wanted my daughter to grow up with one foot in the old world and one in the new, and at that moment, Amsterdam legally was very progressive and very not-this and not-that. It slowly became like everybody else. What are you going to do? What are you going to do when they come for you? [Leonard Cohen song. –LW]

LIZA ZAPOL: So when did you become aware of particular collectors, or build relationships with any particular collectors?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, let's see. I've had very good relations with a lot of people that were interested in things, and I guess you call them collectors but I'm not sure. From the Herman Daled to the van Eelens [Harriet and Herman van Eelen were Dutch art collectors. Herman is Belgian. Then they were Herman and Nicole Daled. –LW] to all of the people that turned up—and they were people who did something; one was a doctor and the other was an actor or a model. But I don't know when it was—from the very beginning—I mean, I got to the *Attitude* show because the man, Raymond Dirks—who was Wall Street Against the War [an anti-Vietnamese war group –LW], one of those people—he came up with a credit card so I could get on the plane, through Seth. Otherwise, there was no other way. [00:28:08]

I mean, I left for a lot of shows I went to with very little money in my pocket, and at one point a child coming or a child had come, and it was very nice. It almost was a stand-up for artists, that artists too could raise children and do things and be artists; they didn't have to be something else. It was easy for me psychologically—not physically, because I come from a background where sure, you're going to a good high school, sure this, but you still have to work every day at a job you didn't want, and you didn't have the money to—you know, when you went to a jazz club, you could buy one beer.

LIZA ZAPOL: So growing up with that work ethic—or not even ethic, just working —

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, necessity.

LIZA ZAPOL: Necessity. How did that translate to your daily life as an artist? What was and is your routine?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Run, run, run, take a puff or two. [Take a drag or two: The Velvet Underground. –LW]

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, really and truly, it was like you fit it in. Then one morning, I think I woke up on Bleecker Street and I just didn't feel like getting dressed and going downtown and trying to get into a shape-up to unload a ship, or unload a—I don't even remember if it was a railroad car or a ship, but those are the two things that they let you unload. And I just said, "No, I've spent my whole life having two jobs. Why?" And I just didn't go for the shape-up. And that was the beginning of the end I guess. I just decided, "Oh, I'll manage." [00:30:05]

LIZA ZAPOL: Around when was that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't remember the date. I'm very bad on dates.

LIZA ZAPOL: I'm wondering if that was in the '60s or '70s, after you had Kirsten.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, '60s.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, '60s.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The '50s. No, but it was almost '60—yeah '60—because I went to California and did that piece.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, I see, I see.

LAWRENCE WEINER: So it must have been the late '50s.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I graduated high school, it turns out, in 1958. And I thought I had graduated in '59 and I never figured out how it all worked. Then, yeah, it must have been in the late '50s.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, okay. But then, in terms of your routine as an artist, in a day, let's say—we're thinking of when you were in Amsterdam: What would a day look like?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It depends upon when. Okay, what would it look like? Going to a pump in the railroad yard—you're getting water and pouring it in a tank—laying things out, making appointments and walking most of the time. But, nothing, you just worked. You had a table, or you didn't have a table, whatever you needed at the moment. If you had no heat you had no heat so it was cold, but I in New York had no heat besides a potbellied stove for a long time, and you had to go on the street and find wood and cut it, the skids from trucks and cut them down with a handsaw. Have you ever tried to cut maple? Don't. [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: Is maple what they used on the trucks?

LAWRENCE WEINER: The ones with the sap running through.

LIZA ZAPOL: So it was also wood for the houseboat as well. [00:32:04]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, we had oil at one point and we had coal at another point, and we had—oh, we had everything imaginable, until now we have gas.

LIZA ZAPOL: You talked about Konrad Fischer—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes.

LIZA ZAPOL: —and meeting Konrad Fischer. So, tell me about—I mean, you talked about meeting him. Can you tell me anything more about that relationship? Or whether that was—

LAWRENCE WEINER: He showed a lot of people whose work I liked and who I knew—from Smithson to Carl Andre to Sol LeWitt—so I don't really know, it was a comfortable—he left me at his house and he went on to do something, a show with somebody, and I worked on the translations and all for their forthcoming show before I went on to Berne. It was—yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: And you also worked with Art & Project as well?

LAWRENCE WEINER: That was initially—yeah, the Art & Project came about because Coosje van Bruggen had written a letter saying, "I have friends in Amsterdam who want to talk to you." I communicated with them and they were really just wonderful to work with. Adriaan van Ravestein and Geert van Beijeren, that was his name. But he [Geert] was the librarian in the Stedelijk, and Adrian's father had been a diplomat in [Iran and later, –LW] in Japan and all. So between the two of them, they had it sorted together, and then they showed Stanley Brouwn and they showed other people who were not being shown, and then they showed a panoply of international artists. They did well. Not very much money or anything but that's not the point. It's a necessity but it's not the point. [00:34:03]

LIZA ZAPOL: So, we're talking about the about-ness, but not so much about the work, so I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about sort of—we spoke about the *Statement of Intent*. Why did you start to use words as material or immaterial, material?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It seemed to transcend the—its material material—and the realization that a piece of wood in Denmark is not milled the same way as it is in Japan but in fact they both float. So by the use of language and being able to adapt it to the language, you could make work that could travel around the world without being exotic.

LIZA ZAPOL: You said before that you think in nouns.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes I do.

LIZA ZAPOL: What does that mean?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I think in nouns.

LIZA ZAPOL: What does that sound like?

LAWRENCE WEINER: A lot of people think in nouns by the way.

LIZA ZAPOL: So what does that sound like?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You can't speak it, it's not Pig Latin or something.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: When you look at a subject, you see it's essentially "red chair," "floor,"—it's all nouns for me. Then I have to figure adapting it. It's all done instantaneously but you adapt what you're thinking into fitting into the situation that you find yourself in, and that's thinking in nouns. So the material is more important to me than the reading of it, "What is it used for?" If somebody even says "machine gun" to me, I built them, I know how to put them together, I think of it as a thing. And then I worry about what it is, because if you know what it is before you figure out what it is, you're taking a societal read on something. [00:36:00] If you look at something and somebody says,"That's a such and such," and you know it's not, there's nothing to say, that society says that's a such and—no. Look, what is it? And then you can turn around and figure out what it is. That's the way we make work, the way I make a show.

I'm working on a show for Japan and it's a curious thing, I won't make my decision about what material I'm interested in. The show for Sardinia, I know I want to use this sort of like vacuum sump pump idea that water has—that out of nowhere it just drops, you know, there's a hole in the sea. I don't—that's really fascinating, to build things to make a hole in the sea.

LIZA ZAPOL: So when you say you want to work with it, what does that mean?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'll look at it and see how it relates to what I'm—how it relates to each other. The last show I did in Japan was about water, and it was okay. But it takes me a while to decide where I'm going to put my feet. And the nice thing with water is that you can't put your feet in the same running water.

LIZA ZAPOL: So how do you figure out the material for Japan? How are you—

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know.

LIZA ZAPOL: How are you thinking about it? Or what are you looking at?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know, I'm looking at a few things. Okay? I'm looking at bamboo and water, things that essentially don't have a substance. I make a specific object that has no specific form, so why should I limit myself to a specific form because I'm interested in a material?

The whole Dia show that I did was about my fascination with the idea that concrete is measured in metric distances; it's not measured in weight. [00:38:00] It's not five pounds or 50 gallons of concrete, it's six yards of concrete. Now that's something else, that's where a society has literally said, "Only its use is of importance, not what makes it," which is interesting, which is maybe why there's so much bad concrete in the world.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, there is. Too many bad—many kids die because they build these schools out of concrete that just is not there. They use the concrete to make mahjong blocks.

LIZA ZAPOL: This is interesting because you've talked about the language being something that can translate across cultures, but at the same time finding something that is culturally—or a material that might mean something within that culture.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Very often materials mean something in a culture, but that doesn't mean when you start working with them you have to do anything other than be aware of that. That's like, you know, the old thing of Stalin, it just means "steel" in Russian. But it doesn't, it means something else, so I tried to choose that you only use what it means. Red as well as green as well as blue. It's not a joke. It's a big deal.

It's like the same thing I'm doing for Phaidon, where there's a little stencil that goes in their 50 years of Phaidon or 30 years or whatever it is, that long division is sensual, you can go adding, and short division is visceral. Bang, bang, that's it. Slam, bam, thank you, ma'am. It's short division. And long division is a sensual relationship with things. It doesn't have to have a moral sense, just a nomering that it's a different thing is enough. [00:40:04]

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, and the nomering in relationship to the essential nature of the material.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's interesting because you don't know the essential nature of the material until you try to make something with it. You can understand it as physics, you can understand it as biology, but until you try

to use it, it means nothing to you. And so you try to fry an egg, it's all—you know, it's an egg.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Eggs can do lots of things.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's right. What was it? "The incredible edible egg." It was an ad on small television—I don't remember how long ago it was—the incredible edible egg.

LIZA ZAPOL: Within your—there are many elements, then, beyond nouns in your language or lexicon.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh yes, that's a matter of degree, then. A lot, a little, less, more; those are things that you use once you've determined what materials you're throwing on the table. And those also have cultural meaning. When you say "a few," a few in one language means three, in other language it means more than two, in another language it means only multitudes. It's okay. I don't find languages that interesting, I find cultures interesting. And in order to understand some cultures, you have to understand some of the languages.

LIZA ZAPOL: So for example, working now in Japan, how do you find out some of the meanings of a translation?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Trust. I ask, and I judge whose answer I believe. [00:42:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: How do you find the trusted translators?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Luck. Again, the kindness of strangers is totally opportunistic. My entire existence is: somebody presents something, and it looks like it means something to me, and I run with it. And if they help, then—you know. That's why I like the idea of rugby. It's a lateral pass, you can't pass forward. You basically have to do it in conjunction with somebody else. I'm very much involved with—I don't like the "genius in the ivory tower" thing.

LIZA ZAPOL: So are you talking about collaboration and sorts?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I'm talking about an awareness that you're part of a culture. That's not collaboration, but when somebody thinks that it's them against the world, that's something wrong. You only exist in a relationship to the context that you find yourself in. Well, that context is something you can have something to do with. If you wake up in the morning, each to their necessities and each to their abilities, you stop being—you have judgments, you hate, you this—but in fact it doesn't affect the quality of somebody else's life. That's where you have to stop, you have to sometimes say to yourself, "What I'm saying does not affect the quality of their life so therefore they can go to hell by telling me I can't say it." If it does affect the quality, which is like what we had under some kinds of Eastern European countries and what the Nazis did, that's something else that changes the quality of life. The other just means emotionally you don't accept it already. [00:44:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: So you're a part of this culture here, in the ways in which you're in dialogue with people in—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Over what I do.

LIZA ZAPOL: —Japan, over what you do.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Over what I do.

LIZA ZAPOL: How are you in dialogue with all of these people? Or how were you? Let's say we're talking about—in Amsterdam, there seems to be a kind of a playful—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Where is the playful?

LIZA ZAPOL: —conversation—

LAWRENCE WEINER: With who?

LIZA ZAPOL: —that is evolving.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's not so playful, not playful at all. It's inherently serious business about a culture. You're taking away somebody's dream by showing them another reality. Well, that's rather a heavy responsibility, you know, taking away somebody's dream. They believe this and they were able to function quite well on that, and you come along and you present this, and that's not that. I'm sorry if I'm sounding funny, but this is not that. And you are asking somebody to give up their idea of beauty, their idea of value, in order to at least entertain yours. Not accept but entertain, even. That's very aggressive.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, and how do you know—or what is the goal there?

LAWRENCE WEINER: The goal there is that you're looking—I have a thing where if all material can be registered as equal, then it's very hard to justify racism. Or pixels; they don't really care what color they are or how big they are or where they came from, and you mix pixels together and they make something; well, that means that there's no hierarchy. [00:46:11] If there's no hierarchy, you can transpolate that somebody who believes in a hierarchical religious basis—meaning there's somebody in charge—goes to hell if they use a cell phone, because the cell phone is all based on no hierarchy of pixels. It's that simple.

Now, art is the same thing. It's green as well as red as well as blue. There is no hierarchy of what a painting should look like or a sculpture should look like or what a "should" should look like, and whatever "should" is. Could you shed "should"? [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: Can I not should? Can I—how do you know that you are successful in changing culture?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, you can see it. It's pretty obvious. Whether you were right or not is another story, and that's up for grabs; that's the chicken without a head running down the road. I don't know but you can see it, you can see things enter into a culture. Designers have it easier because you can see right away what they've picked up, but in fact art is the same thing.

LIZA ZAPOL: Well, you've said before that you drew inspiration from various designers as well.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Don't use the word "inspiration."

LIZA ZAPOL: Or acknowledge them as historical precedence to your work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, they did something of that that you would like to do. They did it before you and they did it probably better, until you come along and then you might do it better.

LIZA ZAPOL: I'm interested in talking a bit about some of that lineage of historical precedence.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Sure, speak, yeah. [00:48:04]

LIZA ZAPOL: Like El Lissitzky or Piet Zwart, can you talk about how you became aware of their work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: El Lissitzky?

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Where did I find the first El Lissitzkys? God knows. But I liked El Lissitzky as a draftsperson, Piet Zwart as well. I just did a book with Jonathan Ellery, who is Browns. I find designers interesting people, and they take responsibility. And there's an engineering aspect of it that suits me as an artist, but it's not what I do. I'm useful for designers and designers can be useful for me, but essentially I'm not a designer. I'm giving a moral precept of how to find yourself standing in the milieu of the world; how do you want to be there? Not what you want to end up getting, or doing, or things.

I was interviewing a young person the other day—I don't know, as a favor, I thought—and the person was quite intelligent, quite everything, except kept telling me what they wanted. And I kept thinking to myself, "Why are you telling me this?" Because they saw me as a dominant culture, and I don't see me as a dominant culture. Maybe I do on bad days, but essentially I don't want to see me as a dominant culture. Is that making more sense?

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE WEINER: Because, yeah, with a lot of things I know I'm right, but there's no matter to be right. Nobody gets, nobody—it's not win-win. I like cultural things that are totally win-win or destroy, make it no longer feasible to think that way. [00:50:02] It's almost impossible for you to think hopefully of slavery. It would not—you know, you can talk about it intellectually but down deep, you wake up in the morning and you do not really inherently believe in slavery. That's pretty damn good. I mean, yeah, Harriet Beecher Stowe, bless your heart. I'm very serious, by the way.

Well, that's what the whole purpose of art is. Mondrian was all about the idea that a sense of order gave you a sense of liberation. Of course you saw the earlier paintings on the beach and then you saw what it built up, and then you saw what Mies van der Rohe took from it, which didn't translate that well; living in cubicles doesn't seem to work. I don't know what does but that doesn't. I grew up in cubicles, I know they don't work. They're better than a majority of the people not living anyplace, but not much.

LIZA ZAPOL: Can you also talk about Brecht and the ideas of perhaps agitprop, or what you find useful within Brecht?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Agitprop, it depends on what it's about. Remember, I'm of the age—I was stuck with people until 1964 who really thought it was legal to separate people by color. Legal! Moral! Their God said, "Do it!" Well, you know, sorry, I don't mean to offend your grandmother but your grandmother's God blew it. Yeah.

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LAWRENCE WEINER: People, when they look at any kind of material and don't bring their other hierarchy with it, it's very hard for them to justify the things that you don't want to do. But there's things that you want the results; you want to feel safe around the people you don't feel safe around, but you can't go as far as they want you to. Isolating and humiliating and things, but at the same time, I don't know the answer for it. I know that I present a macrocosm—a macrocosm not a microcosm—in the work that I do that very rarely allows for the wrong things to be done. It allows for vulgarity, this and that, and nobody—it doesn't have to be perfect, it's not holier-than-thou, but it doesn't allow certain things to even enter into the conversation: gold, silver, values. I love the idea of what the value of something is that has no value. Silver is as good as gold as far as transmitting electricity, that's about it. It's also—I like Chinese gold, soft gold.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right. You showed me that necklace.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, and my earring, but I can't because of these tests.

LIZA ZAPOL: It's interesting just hearing you talk about—obviously we're talking a lot about material and objects, relationships and spatial relationships as well.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Spatial relationships are genuinely totally emotional. How far, how much is enough, how far is far. [00:02:00] They're important, they're philosophical, but they're just emotional. Six meters and five meters is not emotional; one's longer than the other. [Laughs.] Or, maybe it's not, one's got more centimeters than the other. Because we're talking about form. You know the television that we have, there's no reason why the computer should look like a television. It was a mistake in the beginning and once they got into the building of it, they're stuck with it. And essentially, there's no logical reason why you're stuck with this big credenza, but we are. And nobody will unthink it because the whole financial structure is built on building the chassis and the inside and everything else. Okay, there's no tubes but the—you know. I don't know why it looks that way but it does. I like television.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Do you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I do. I'm busy and television sometimes give me two things to think about when they present the news. The first is whatever is the dictum of the area, which is not necessarily true, but then you get to see something and you can put together another thought by seeing it, and that's being an artist, is you could—just by bringing together a piece of wood and a piece of stone, and putting them butt to butt, you get to get another insight into things that say it might not be enough. Now it turns out that it was probably enough to say it, that there is a discrepancy butt to butt, between stone and steel.

LIZA ZAPOL: I'm interested in how you began putting words on a wall. How did that happen?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, that. I usually—in the early days, I would just put it on a piece of paper and speak it or put it in chalk on the wall, in a doorway. But I think that was just a one-day—Panza di Biumo, a nice man by the way, and his wife. [00:04:18] No, seriously, I used to like to go through the cathedral in Milano with him. Knowledgeable businesspeople. People who go to work every day are usually quite nice, [laughs] surprisingly. And he had an architect installing part of his collection. I think the architect said, "Can we put it on the wall?" or put it on his papers, but I think they put it on the wall. I went and saw it and it was misspellings and all, but I thought, "Hey, that's interesting," and from then on it developed.

It had not really—I chalked on the wall for people, and then the design concept became something and then things began to mean things to me so I didn't any longer—I had trouble with the typeface. I don't like Helvetica because it carries with it the whole story; it sold itself out. It was the Quisling of decent design because Quisling was a good communist, the guy who sold out Norway. He was interesting, he wasn't stupid, but he sold it out and that's what I thought that Helvetica did. So I found things and it wasn't enough, so I don't know how I got it together but I designed another typeface that I thought was elegant but didn't have authority, and that's what I've been using. I haven't had the—perhaps I haven't had the need, but I haven't had the time to start working on another thing because there's only capital letters. It takes a long time.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was the process of building a new typeface? [00:06:02]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I wish I knew. It took so long because you can't do it alone and you do it with machines that you can't use, and the people that are helping you know how to use sometimes and other times they have to invent it as well. But somehow or other you decide what you want to try to do, and it works. I have no idea. I

wouldn't know how to do it. It's like somebody says, "How did you get your work into the world?" The times are so different that it really doesn't make sense to discuss it at all.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did that experience of seeing, in Panza—with the work with Panza—in situ, being so different from a work of art that moves, you know? Can you tell me about that decision to put things on the wall?

LAWRENCE WEINER: There's a difference between—well, you know, I see all painting as sculpture because it's off the wall. This was something that was pretty—I mean, logically of course there's a little—but essentially, yeah, it was a thought, and from that thought, you know, acorns grow and it wasn't very far from the tree, so it wasn't very brilliant. And then from then on, I started to design the installations for people. And then I realized I'm building a mise-en-scène, why not? The only reason I was attracted to movies was that you could build a mise-en-scène of what you were trying to present, you were in control. Well, a mise-en-scène in a gallery installation or on the street or in public is a mise-en-scène; it's presenting it in a context that you feel it's okay.

LIZA ZAPOL: We spoke about that in relation to the Giacometti and Cornell last time, you know this—[00:08:01]

LAWRENCE WEINER: More Giacometti than Cornell. Cornell—I still to this day think Cornell—it's interesting, it's beautiful to look at, but if you don't know the hidden meaning of all of the images, you don't get it. And since they don't tell the mass public what the images mean, their use doesn't work. That's my feeling.

LIZA ZAPOL: I mean, you said something before—in '72, in a conversation with Willoughby Sharp, you said, "Art is highly specialized, like theoretical physics."

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: And then in '90 you said that some of the works involved an acceptance of materiality that depended on your knowledge of the philosophical implications, but then you retracted that statement. You know, so in terms of what you're saying—I bring it up in relationship to Cornell. You said that, you know, you need to know something to understand the work.

LAWRENCE WEINER: There's no such thing as self-taught. How do you teach yourself something you didn't know.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right. So it sounds like that was an ideological shift for you.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, it was more of a wakeup, reality call.

LIZA ZAPOL: How did that come about and what do you mean when you say that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I think it was more of a rejection of the people who were putting themselves off as pundits; that if they were so sure, why couldn't they go any further? I don't know. You know, there's a problem here of the distances of time.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And also the extingencies [ph]. There were times during Vietnam that what people were saying was not quite rational but it was totally emotional. You had no control. You were part of a country that was running away like a headless horse. [00:10:00] Now we have the same thing. That's why I don't know how you're supposed to look at Israelis and Palestinians and Turks and Kurds, when the—it's so horrendous that you lose your temper when you're doing it, and that's what happened with a lot of these things aesthetically. A lot of the academy was pushing a kind of a—"Let us regulate horror, let us say that it's more important to have it this way in a school than to have people that are dying out in the field." And in fact it isn't. They're about the same. The trouble is, is if you have it in a school, the person can get up and walk out. If you have them dying in a field, they can't get up and walk out. I don't know how you arrange all of that, but for me the work that I do is all about that. It's all about building a mise-en-scène that might confuse, might offend, but in fact it does not ruin the existence of another person. Whatever that constitutes, ruining or not ruining, I don't know.

LIZA ZAPOL: In the '70s, you were also making many films. You sort of got involved more—

LAWRENCE WEINER: I made quite a few films in the late '70s. Well, early '70s for the feature, and then lots of video in between, and then later films. And they were home movies, you can't—they're not Straub.

LIZA ZAPOL: But it sounds like it's also—in some way it's another sort of—another work, another way of extending your ideas, your language.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's a matter of—I started to make movies because I didn't want to write magazine articles. And some of the people in my—Bob Morris was a great magazine writer, Smithson was a great writer. [00:12:12]

I am not a writer and so I'm better off making the movie, putting the mise-en-scène of how I wanted to present the emotional thing. I mean, mediocrity is its own reward. It's a big deal for me. And that's what we had in our world: mediocrity was its own reward, it didn't do anybody any good or any—it did a lot of harm but it didn't do any good. So I made movies instead of journalism. And then every once in a while I did journal things, like the fashion things I did with Michael H. Shamberg, against the Shah [of Iran]. It wasn't against personally, it was like, "Let's keep things in context," because that was dreadful.

LIZA ZAPOL: Talk to me more about that.

LAWRENCE WEINER: There was—all of our friends were being—you know, there was a lot of money involved and I just didn't want it—I mean, I had nothing against, personally, this Sharina [ph] or whatever the hell her name was [Empress of Iran]. But in fact, it was a time when I did not think it was proper for us to be running around as artists just for little shekels, for some money. It was not right. But a lot of people did it and the collection that's in there is gorgeous, beautiful art. It was nothing against the art. I just didn't want to participate so I didn't. Tony Shafrazi, really, I mean, was a friend and I still just couldn't bring myself to get involved. I was even annoyed when they let the books go for a *documenta*. There has to be a point where you say you ought to be able to get rewarded for the good work you've done without having to take it from somebody who did something bad to somebody. [00:14:06] I don't know how you work that out.

Now, if anything to do with this archive thing, I'd like that down, I'd like to know: When we talk in terms of morality, are we talking in terms of cultural morality, aesthetic morality? Because that would make certain artists more important than other artists, because they didn't accept the world as it came. I'd say that was a bit dubious. Let's stop making so many rules about what you would have to do to be a good person. I don't know where that begins and it ends as an artist. I do know that I don't like to cheat. The few times I have, I got no satisfaction from it, same as with S&M. If you don't get pleasure from S and you don't get pleasure from M, then maybe it's not for you.

You can justify anything, rationalize anything. At my age, I'm at a point where many of the things that I'm involved in didn't exist before we got involved—I and the other people around got involved. That puts you in some sort of a strange position. I think you can manage as an artist without being a guru. I really do. It's the most important. That's why I didn't like what happened with the Structuralists. They all became gurus, but the people that they were copying or learning from all turned around and said when it worked, when it didn't work, they didn't have any problem. But when they said it didn't work, they said, "No, we won't accept it," because they already had a department and they already had a professorship on something that somebody that made it said didn't work. [00:16:00] Didn't say that the people who made it were wrong or crazy, it said it didn't work.

Like Salvarsan, *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*. I just saw that recently on television for some kind of coverage that never mentioned it before. It was a movie by what's his name [William Dieterie], Edward G. Robinson plays Paul Ehrlich. I find that interesting.

LIZA ZAPOL: You mentioned it last time.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's a big deal for me because the man was still a hero, but if you got the clap you wanted penicillin. It sounds like a kinky thing. It's the truth, though. Why do you have to negate somebody because you've gone further? Give him a kiss on the cheek for getting you there. And this was art too. Why do they have to do that, to have to negate somebody in order to make room for the next? And it's—the next is in line with each other and there's no way out.

LIZA ZAPOL: Do you feel like that's happened to you in any way?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I was—you know, I was a fast gun and, oh, I still regret things I had said in public. They weren't bad, but when somebody asks you what you thought of them because you were attacking them, and you said they were a buffalo, it turned out they weren't a buffalo, it just was I was a little faster than they were, that's about it. Not righter, a little faster.

LIZA ZAPOL: In the '80s—we're moving along—you continued to work in the same manner.

LAWRENCE WEINER: More or less, yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: More [laughs] or less. I'm interested in your relationship to Jean-Hubert Martin. [00:18:02] It seemed like you traveled together.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Jean-Hubert came with me to New Guinea. They wanted me to be in *Magiciens de la terre* and I wanted to—I said, "Yeah, okay, I'll go to New Guinea," because I was interested in Papuan culture. And they said, "Okay, we'll send you there," and I said, "No, no, you go with, or else I don't go. Let's make this serious." And so we went.

It was an interesting—I was supposed to be working with artists there. I got there and I realized they knew what artists were, the people that lived there. They were not particularly interested one way or the other, but I was doing these drawings and making this book, and I was doing a Filofax [notebook –LW] in the field, and I didn't want to. I just said, "No, no, let me do what I'm doing in public and you do what you do in public, and maybe if there's something that comes together, fine, but otherwise not." And we went through this whole area. We were out on the Sepik River, we were into real—wild places. But I would be working and they all knew what art was. They used different material, maybe—for the black they used old batteries and things—but yeah, I learned a lot from it. And that's what I realized, that anybody can understand it. That's what the "*Nau Em I Art Bilong Yumi*." It's pidgin: "Now him it art belongs you me." Us, it belongs to us.

That came about out of that, and then I'd like to put it up on buildings and people stand still who said they can't understand, they can't understand. No, no, no if you look at it you can understand it. If you don't look at it you can't. [00:20:00] It's like the *MOI + TOI & NOUS*. If you don't get it, you didn't get it. If you don't get it, what can I do? You know, that kind of thing. That was nice because when they asked me to do that it was to get rid of *ne touche pas*. Why give people ideas that they can touch? [Laughs.]

LIZA ZAPOL: *Ne touche pas* the art? *Ne touche pas* what? *Ne touche pas*?

LAWRENCE WEINER: *Ne touche pas*. It was against the violence: Don't touch those people, stop hitting them. The French can get a little bit involved. Nothing like the Russians though.

LIZA ZAPOL: How so?

LAWRENCE WEINER: The French stop at killing their opponents. Humiliation is enough. The Russians, it's, they're gone or they're not, they're either there or they're not there, now you see it now you don't. Other cultures too, I don't mean to pick on those two. Belgian, this one, that one. I mean, by the time you're all finished—and the United States especially. The United States is capable of having 15 wars going on at the same time.

LIZA ZAPOL: Do you identify as an American artist?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm an American artist. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for being born in New York. I wouldn't have had an opportunity, ethnically or otherwise. But yeah, I did very, very much, being an American artist—has a responsibility, but that doesn't mean that I don't—I don't know how to explain it, I'm not particularly caught up in American ethics. Although, "Each to their needs and each to their abilities" is a basic cause for me. And that's not American. [Laughs.] It's very un-American. [00:22:08]

LIZA ZAPOL: In the '80s, both of your parents passed away—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes.

LIZA ZAPOL: —your father and mother.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: Your father in '82 and your mother in '87?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, when I premiered a film, I was in Genoa when my father died. I was in New Guinea when my mother died. Not a very filial son.

LIZA ZAPOL: Had you continued to have relationships with them into adulthood?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, yeah, relationships, yes. I had relationships but I didn't have anything—you know, other than the guilt level and time and things like that, I didn't have much to do with. They were—I don't know what they were interested in. They meant well, by the way. So I didn't have horrible parents.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was their relationship or their impression of you as an artist?

LAWRENCE WEINER: They didn't have one. They never came to a show of mine. Okay? Even when their granddaughter was in a movie, they didn't. And we arranged—which we didn't have money—we arranged a car to pick her up, my mother up; my father had died. She couldn't do it. That was the day that they had specials on the provisions when somebody came from the department to help. Okay, you know.

LIZA ZAPOL: So I'm—I mean, I'm going through some various moments in these years.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, please.

LIZA ZAPOL: But I'm also happy for you to bring up, you know, particular moments—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Put it in a geographical context and then I'll remember what I did. [00:24:06]

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes. Can you describe a dry period for you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: A what?

LIZA ZAPOL: A dry period, a period where you weren't sure what to do next.

LAWRENCE WEINER: If I told you the truth you wouldn't believe me, that it's a dry period every five days or so. I have a lot of trouble justifying continuing going sometimes, to myself. So it's a continual process of questioning. I hate it, I wish it weren't.

LIZA ZAPOL: Has it always been that way?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I think not. Other people say yes, that I've always had the same problem. And I don't think I shouldn't have the same problem. That's what I get paid for, is to deal with that problem.

LIZA ZAPOL: And what are the questions?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Why are you participating in this aesthetically? What in fact are you trying to say? What are you saying in terms of the situation as you see it in front of you? And you can add on everything else you want to know.

LIZA ZAPOL: Is it emotional?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm totally emotional. Even choice of color of installations is emotional. Why not? If you weren't supposed to have emotions you wouldn't have them. [Laughs.]

LIZA ZAPOL: You've spoken about your work as essential experience. And the way you're describing your emotional aspect of making choices feels connected.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes. Yeah, it's all emotional. Sometimes a work of art will take your breath away, when you realize the implications of what that person figured out. [00:26:05] Wow. I'm serious. No, there's no specific instance. It happens to me, like, daily. I'm literally *verbaas* or, what is it? Surprised, at how somebody got something so right.

LIZA ZAPOL: When was the last time that happened to you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: A couple of days ago.

LIZA ZAPOL: What were you looking at?

LAWRENCE WEINER: The relationship of one color to another. It was—okay, it was like, could I really see the difference in the old joke about, "You can tell a European film because it was blue and you can tell American film because it was yellow, and it was only because the Europeans had lost the right to use the blue." Other than that, no other reason, there was no aesthetic for it. That's where—those are the things that interest me, is when you're dealing with knowledge that had nothing to do with anything, but it means a lot. Chabrol would not be Chabrol if it had Ektachrome, as a matter of fact it would look pretty thin. And that's why Fassbinder is so great. Fassbinder looks okay in Ektachrome, because it's all about something else.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did you watch film as a kid growing up as well?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I think that was a little later. I discovered the movie theaters on 42nd Street that were open all night. And they played films, Fabricio, on and on and on. A lot of films, *Italiana Brava Gente*, you saw it on 42nd Street, in Italian, with some kind of botched up subtitles, but often not bad, not that badly botched. And yeah, that was lucky for me. [00:28:14] That's what I meant about, if I hadn't grown up in New York I wouldn't have known anything. And the New York Public Library was very good about things.

LIZA ZAPOL: Well, let's talk about, then, your public library. You had the *Learn to Read Art* show.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, yeah, we did a show there, that was wonderful.

LIZA ZAPOL: I was looking at—I was there in their special collections, looking at some of the books. They have a big collection of your books.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I know, Robert Rainwater put it together. He died, I heard. It's a pity.

LIZA ZAPOL: Can you talk about what that means, "learn to read art"?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It was a mistake. The intention is correct. Somebody I was working with in books had asked about an opinion or something or other, about art, or art books. I don't like telling people to do things and that's the problem. I did it and it works, and we'll leave it, but it's—learn to read art, there must be a better way to say it. Art is readable. Whatever it is, it worked.

LIZA ZAPOL: It worked but you feel like it doesn't align with, it's too—

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's too definitive. But at the same time, it did more good than harm, because "learn to read art" makes it like, "Okay." There were a lot of people making work that they said was not art, and of course it was art. Not me. I mean, I'm Teflon on those things. [Laughs.] I don't know why but I am. [00:30:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: Looking back, do you feel like your work presents itself in periods or does it seem seamless?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I see it as seamless but it comes in big blocks.

LIZA ZAPOL: How would you describe those blocks?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Opportunity. It's that simple. I found myself being offered a show in Berlin, didn't want to do it so I said, "Take the money and let me make a movie." And because the man running the program had been a sportswriter, he said, "Sure, run with it."

LIZA ZAPOL: And that was *A Second Quarter*?

LAWRENCE WEINER: *A Second Quarter*, which is a very dicey movie. it's very complicated. I don't know what we're looking at sometimes; it's a home movie, it's not a home movie. The camerawork is very good, same as *Plowmans Lunch*. I don't know what it is. [Laughs.] I know I was impressed about being able to go out on a 90-foot sailboat in force nine winds and shoot a movie, after having a car crash with Sandy Walker that I had—I got seasick all the time. They claim that it was, like, when we shot the movie, I was really holding it and we were out on this water, and the next thing I knew is we got into Den Haag, into the harbor, and as we were coming in they all, the whole crew, looked up and said I turned green. The minute I no longer was responsible for all of those people, I started to heave, you couldn't believe it. But then it shows you that that's what people transcend. But it doesn't take it away. [00:32:00]

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] No, you had the underlying—once you—

LAWRENCE WEINER: That was it.

LIZA ZAPOL: —once you no longer had the responsibility. What was the car crash?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, that's that opera that was in Berlin and in Bonn: *The Society Architect Ponders the Golden Gate Bridge*. And it was about people who had resentment. He tried to commit suicide with me in the car, because he got upset because I hadn't been someplace for, like, years. We were in a café, coming in from the city, and the woman from the place remembered me as a kid, and he got freaked because the girl was pretty. And oh, he just crashed his car into somebody, into another car. And the motor came up into the seat, but we were okay. I had to teach myself how to talk without the lower lip. *C'est difficile en français. Vraiment. Mais c'est possible. Allemand, c'est pas une grande problème.*

LIZA ZAPOL: *C'est plus difficile en français parce que—*

LAWRENCE WEINER: *Par la bouche. Beaucoup de la* [ph] *français c'est complètement avec la bouche. Allemand c'est une autre chose. Allemand c'est presque hollandaise. Mais français c'est complètement bouche.*

LIZA ZAPOL: That must have been devastating.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No. I had to learn to do—they put me on a plane right away, a week, five days later, to go to Zurich, to make that show. So I had to teach myself on the plane, in economy, with a little mirror, how to form things.

LIZA ZAPOL: You just kept going. [00:34:00]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Well, I had no choice. Not that I didn't have a choice but I mean, in my head I had no choice. You committed to do it, you do it. It's not their fault that you were with somebody who got drunk and crashed a car.

LIZA ZAPOL: And what happened to him?

LAWRENCE WEINER: He got off. They wouldn't even—the trial was a disaster; I couldn't even get expenses. I think three days after the trial was over, there was a headline, he crashed another car. Again, he blamed it on the Mercedes I think, or on the—but his girlfriend was burnt into a crisp in the passenger seat and he claimed she was driving, because he was a walker. She was driving but she was in the passenger seat. It was done. It's a pity she died. I don't know, I never met her. He just went on and on, I don't know what he's up to now. He was Diane Blell's ex-husband, the photographer.

LIZA ZAPOL: So, I mean, it's interesting. Talking about your physicality, you've talked about your strength, your rebuilding. I'm curious about kind of the embodied or disembodied nature of your work, how you might describe that.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's all something that anybody is capable of doing. There's nothing special ever, I'm careful about that. I mean, real super skill, that kind of thing, that's fine. But essentially anybody that took the trouble to do it could more or less do it. Therefore, the work that you're putting out is available to all if they're willing to do it. [00:36:11] That's the only heartening thing about these sentimental nonsense things on television, with people with diseases and things, that manage to go on. I think it's great, that's what human beings are about. I'm sorry, that errs on the side of win-win.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] It does.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And that's what art is about. Art is about showing a perception of the world where you aren't in the Sun, that it's open to anybody if they're willing to take the trouble. They may not do it fantastically, they may not do it gracefully. But in fact, it gets into the possibility of anybody seeing your work, anybody that can get into these museums and see some people's work, is that it is possible. And that's it, that's all you want. You want somebody to think, "Oh, I can do that."

LIZA ZAPOL: You've talked about that term, where you are in the Sun or your place in the Sun, before. Where does that come from, that idea? What does that mean to you?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Everybody has a problem when they're growing up; rich, poor, indifferent, green, yellow, black. But what you're shooting for is something that you think is worthwhile, walking down the runway correctly. That's your place in the sun. Where if you're never given a chance to get up and sing, how does anybody know whether you can or you can't? That's a place in the sun. Well that's what art does. All art. An Oskar Schlemmer, a this, a that, it doesn't matter. Let somebody looking at it—dealing with it, feeling it, emoting it, it doesn't matter what form it takes—that they think, "Oh, that's what—I can do that." [00:38:12] That's all you make it for publicly. And once they think they can do it, the next one comes along who can do more.

LIZA ZAPOL: You talked about the physical experience of seeing something that surprises you.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes.

LIZA ZAPOL: Where does it hit you in your body? How does it feel?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, I'll be damned if I know. I really don't know, I just—oh, my God, it's like, "Oh, here we go." It's like, I hate to go to exhibitions and understand what they are right away. I don't mind taking five minutes. I'm a quick read, I'm a pro, but if it doesn't get me to the point—"What the hell am I looking at?"—I'm not really interested anymore, because I know how to do the other stuff, and this may be showing me something that I don't know how to do.

LIZA ZAPOL: How do you want people to respond to your work? You've said this a bit but—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah. Just to empower them with the fact that they're seeing reality, and it's art. It doesn't have to be, "It's like this" or "It's like that." It's not like anything, it's not a metaphor, it is what it is. That's what I want. And of course I would like people to appreciate me, but it doesn't usually happen; most of my work is anonymous for most people. Okay, I do it because I really feel it's important, but as a human being, [laughs] sometimes you would like somebody to go, "Hey." I happened to be in Glasgow, it was raining and they were cutting into the steps, and all of a sudden somebody walked by and said, "Is that you?" I said "Yeah," and they said—[gestures]

LIZA ZAPOL: Thumbs up.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Thumbs up. [00:40:00] And it made my whole trip to Glasgow worthwhile. Seriously. And the work came out beautiful, but it was somebody looking and thinking, "Okay, that's fine," and they had come

to say, "What are you cutting into this building?" And they changed their mind in the middle. And they said in the middle, they changed their mind. Yeah, it was good.

LIZA ZAPOL: And that was in response directly to the work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's that piece, it goes all the way around, the one with the little girl in the raincoat.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: By chance, that little girl in the raincoat was the daughter of the woman who arranged the installation, part of the group.

LIZA ZAPOL: So it's the text that says, "Somewhere, Somehow," with a line that curls.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, and it goes on for another thing, "Some somebody."

LIZA ZAPOL: I see.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's cut right into the steps of the museum, the best place to put it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Why?

LAWRENCE WEINER: There are people stopping in the street and looking down, and if they didn't want to they could just keep walking. I don't like to hold people by the neck or, you know, grab them. Just do it and people will really surprise you. I'm sorry. The art world has gotten a little weird because it's become suburban and they think everybody is stupid besides their children.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: And I'm afraid, happily, it's not true, most people are not stupid, most people are really quite smart. They may not like the art, they may not have a use for them, but that doesn't make them dumb.

LIZA ZAPOL: The notion of publics, of public, has changed.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, public. No, it hasn't. Who is allowed to—when they raise their hand, who gets picked by the teacher changed, but I think the public hasn't changed all that much. They got off and do things themselves, in clubs and in other places.

LIZA ZAPOL: Do you feel like—I guess what I mean to say is, this sense of public art has shifted in terms of where art is placed. [00:42:09]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, and corporate sponsorship kind of thing. Yes, yes, that's true.

LIZA ZAPOL: And how does that mean—what does that mean to you? When you say "and corporate sponsorship," why do you say that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It means, "Let's keep this straight, I'm doing this big thing as shared." But in fact, the corporate sponsorship has not affected the thing itself. I think you can manage that. You can't be responsible for the morals of everybody. If somebody does something past the red line, okay, then you don't deal with it. It's like—I always feel as an American, I had that problem of being on the road all the time, everywhere from Australia to Japan, all during Vietnam. And as fast as I am to condemn people, I have to take into consideration that there are people who had nothing to do with it, that tried to stop it, but it didn't work. I don't know, I didn't come out hard and fast on that, but I like to see somebody first have a chance, so let's see what they can do. Somebody says, you know, it's the old thing with the American Indian and the doctor and the snake oil person. You know, one is carnival and one is a doctor and one is just the Indian chief. They can save his daughter. First save the daughter and then worry about the politics. As long as they're not being allowed to hurt somebody, let them try to do something positive. Let them fix it.

LIZA ZAPOL: You've spoken, in various ways today, about the political context in which your work is placed. [00:44:02]

LAWRENCE WEINER: There is. Nobody gets out of bed in the morning without a political context. You believe in certain things. You hope to gain because of them, I think. And you hope you get to win, but maybe often it's not necessarily—it's not capable, it's not possible.

LIZA ZAPOL: When did you move from the other house on Bleecker Street—the other apartment—to here?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It wasn't here, it was the top floor. In '92 I guess. I have no idea how we did it, but we did it. We were losing the place anyhow. They were going to sell it to a European. Remember, that was at the time when you had to go through European courts in order to work, because they owned you. Then it got straightened out that there was a little mistake in all of that.

LIZA ZAPOL: How so?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Just buying a building didn't give you rights over the people, but then the British handed over all those people from Hong Kong to the Chinese. Just because an emperor and another empress had signed papers is—that's slavery. And that means that basically, once they did that, that's why nobody cares what happens to Britain now. And it's a sadness because there are so many people from Eastern Europe working in Britain and Asia, and they're not going to be able to now because the European Union is not going to be able to protect them. What a pity. But in fact, they deserve to be destroyed the minute they turned over—they sold people. They're not allowed. You can sell land, you can give back land, but you can't give back the people. And then they didn't accept the British passports of the people from Asia. Yellow people's passports were not as good as white people's, and that is a weird thing for a country to have on their shoulders forever.

LIZA ZAPOL: I mean it's, you're—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Just like slavery, it's forever. [00:46:02]

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, we've talked about slavery and you also—

LAWRENCE WEINER: It won't ever go away.

LIZA ZAPOL: —seem to be talking about empire as well. You know, these different notions of empire.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: But yeah, so place. So coming to here, to the West Village. Talk about what this neighborhood is like to live in, what it is like to live here.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I knew this neighborhood from the time I was a kid. I went to school on 15th Street and First Avenue, remember?

LIZA ZAPOL: Right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Jane Street was where Kerouac was hanging out, there was a whole world that went on here. And then all of the people on MacDougal Street, the folk music scene and all of that, from Tiny Tim to Bob Dylan. What do you mean, "What was it like?"? It was the place to be when you were a kid. And if you were lucky enough to have made some chance contacts with people, and the kindness of strangers towards these young arrogant kids, you were a lucky person.

LIZA ZAPOL: So then moving to this neighborhood, why here?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, because we found it here and I like this neighborhood anyhow. You can walk anyplace, when I was walking. Yeah, it was nice. And it was something—I don't know how we got the house but we rebuilt it anyhow afterwards. Of course we couldn't change anything because of Landmarks, so if you collapse the whole house there's not much you can do. It was not a house to begin with, it was a bakery.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see, right. What was here?

LAWRENCE WEINER: A bakery. The back end connected to things.

LIZA ZAPOL: I see. So it was two separate—

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, lots of places that were all connected, and then it got all broken up.

LIZA ZAPOL: And you worked with LOT-EK, to create the space?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, we brought in LOT-EK and looked at what we were doing, it took a while, and then collapsed the house and built something, and a lot of the LOT-EK things were just really brilliantly executed. And a lot of it was Alice. [00:48:08] Alice saw things, like in Newark Airport, for the back wall, and she figured it all out. So between them and some help from some people from SOM, and some help here, we sort of pulled it together. I have no idea how I paid for it, but we did. Okay? I really don't.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. But it also sounds like at some point here, you went from being very uncomfortable to things

being less so.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, it was very—it was comfortable enough, it just wasn't big enough. And it was falling apart, it was too old.

LIZA ZAPOL: But I mean, in your life.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, my life. Oh, I guess. I really don't know at this point what the—how to explain it. Things were not that bad and they were not that good. Now the physical space is deal-able with. And I remember we got the boat because I went off and went to Paris, made a little money, came back, went to the post office, bought a stamp, paid them money. And we kept doing it until finally one day they took the rope off, boom. There wasn't much left behind but they took the rope off.

LIZA ZAPOL: The rope off meaning to connect—

LAWRENCE WEINER: We were tied to another boat.

LIZA ZAPOL: —to connect to the other boat, yeah. So then it was yours.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Then it was ours.

LIZA ZAPOL: Did you sail on that boat?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, we had immediately—I had worked too much on boats as a kid. I immediately looked at it and didn't want to deal, and we cut the sides for it off. And the motor was a motor you started by putting dynamite in it—boom!—and the motor would turn and then this thing, the [propeller –LW], would go, and you would drop it in the water and it would go and everybody would run on one side and drop their legs on the side, taking their life into their hands, taking a hit against the wall. [00:50:04] It was rather primitive, so we decided it was a houseboat. I was having enough trouble making art. It's the last thing I did. And we had sailor friends, so it was all okay.

LIZA ZAPOL: You would sail with others.

LAWRENCE WEINER: When it was necessary. Sure, when we were sailing. Otherwise, I didn't find sailing around as pleasurable.

LIZA ZAPOL: No, you said—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Engine rooms are engine rooms and I don't know anything about sailboats, nothing.

LIZA ZAPOL: What is the name of the work that's on right now at the Flag Art Foundation—was, *ON BOARD THE SHIPS AT SEA ARE WE*?

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's an aphorism. That's: onboard the ships at sea are we; those people that are being drowned and dying is us. That's the point. It has nothing to do with right and wrong, it has to do with: They are people just like you are, and to stand and watch people drown to protect your borders against what? Poor people? I come from a country that was built on poor people, for its best. New York was poor people, but look what it gave. It gave really the best public universities, no question about anything else. NYU came later for the kids that—could not pass the test to get into a public university, I have no idea. You have to really go out of your way. [Laughs.] But they built schools for those kids.

LIZA ZAPOL: But yeah, this image of the boat—

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LAWRENCE WEINER: It's very romantic.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But I'll say what a kid said to me one day. He said, "I can't look at your life because my father knew you from unions and you lived such a romantic life, how can I think of it?" And I looked at him and I said, "Do you have to have a job?" He said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, so did I. You have a choice: 7-Eleven or something really romantic. And I took the really romantic and it worked out." That's the only answer. You're not better, you're not worse. You had a choice, everybody has a choice. There's romantic work and there's not, and then there's gangster work and criminal work, but I didn't even want to think about that. I had to make a lot of choices on that because I was talented for the other side. It's called a sea lawyer; I took the trouble to read the books.

LIZA ZAPOL: What do you mean?

LAWRENCE WEINER: A sea—you knew what the law was because you read the book. That's all, not because you were smart. [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: You made that choice.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, I made the choice, probably with a lot of advice from well-meaning people, but I made that choice. When I was in San Francisco once, I remember locking myself into a rooming house for a week and reading the entire California Penal Code. Well, they were picking people up, the FBI were taking you off. And then I discovered that I just had to stay out of the sight of the authorities, which was hilarious because I was walking across the city to a place, registering for an unemployment check of $26 that would be delivered in New York, because I was out looking for work. They never found out—and then, when we were living in Holland, the Dutch were always laughing because they would occasionally ask you to send this back, because of the Vietnam thing, I was sort of involved in that. [00:02:01]

LIZA ZAPOL: What do you mean?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You know, people protesting and people getting people to cross borders and things. The government here, I paid taxes and paid rent on a studio and kept it going, came in and out and never had a problem with the border, except once, when I got that order of Lenin from Poland. They took the flowers they had given me, threw them away as we came through. They threatened to cut my shoes open—diamonds and something—it wasn't anything to do with politics it was to do with diamonds, as if I had something to do with diamonds.

LIZA ZAPOL: Why?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Because it was a communist country. Why was I there? It was my own stupidity. They called the gallery and said, "How did he get here?" from the American Embassy. And I answered the phone and I don't speak Polish, and I just said, "Oh? What?" And they said, "Oh, how did he get there? And I said, "I ask." About three or four minutes later I came back and said, "By train," and hung up. Well, they got me when I came through Kennedy—Idlewild or Kennedy. Oh, boy, did they get me.

LIZA ZAPOL: What happened?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I had dysentery and they kept me in a room for hours, no toilet. It was horrendous. They're not nice sometimes. They said, you know—or as the people I was talking to after they let me out and all of that, they said, "No marks?" And I said, "No, no marks," and they said, "Fantastic." Because usually what they do is, even if they have keys, they'll do like they do to cars, they'll rip you. So many people get very angry because you're not believing in what they believe. [00:04:04] Some of the cruelty that you hear about on the border, there's no reason why that man or woman should have been cruel to a kid, the kid didn't even do anything. You know, it was little. They hurt them, they break fingers, they do things to kids. This is a sick country, it really is.

LIZA ZAPOL: This theme of borders is in your work.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Very much.

LIZA ZAPOL: Very much, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It still is.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. Can you talk a bit about any particular works that come to mind?

LAWRENCE WEINER: There's so many that it doesn't come. I really pick and choose, and it's quite specific, it's not alluded to.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Now it's all about border constitutes the change of state.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Change the place, change the state. Change the state, change the value. Yeah. I have a tendency, because of the use of language and things, to get adopted by cultures, which is wonderful because you can get the work up in public places. It's fine and they don't even know who it is, you know, some guy did it. And they'll defend it, and that's what you want out of life. You want somebody to see something you made in their culture, that fits so much into their culture that it's theirs. It sometimes gets ridiculous but it's theirs.

It was like a piece that I had put up in [Ditzingen outside of –LW] Stuttgart, and they were supposed to take it down or pay for it. And they said, "No, no, it's ours, we like it." That's as far as it went, and I tried to use the allusion, "Look if you're making a photoshoot and you borrow a Porsche, it's a nice car but you have to give it back." "No, if you like it you can have it." It's an appropriation, appropriation of cultural things, which was a bad idea in the beginning. [00:06:04] It's a bad idea to appropriate. Use, copy, fine. Appropriate means you own it, and one of the people proposing appropriation stole something from somebody and said that their children didn't have a right to it and *da da da da*, and then somebody copied them and they sued them right away. I don't know what the result of the lawsuit was because it made them so ludicrous that when you saw all of them, "Are you kidding? Stop giggling."

LIZA ZAPOL: This goes back to your idea of *Public Freehold* of—you know.

LAWRENCE WEINER: If you're willing to, there are some works that are not for sale, just arbitrarily. But if you want to use them you can use them, but you can't use my name. That's it. You make things for the public to use, let them use it, but let them not have to steal it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Have you returned to that idea at all?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, it's continual but it's not a lot, because it doesn't work. I forgot that the—I literally forgot just how weird people are. They build a whole structure, they'll take anything from anybody. It bothers me, because it was a nice idea. If you're willing to stand up in the middle of the street and say, "This is art," you had it, you can put it up in your house and it's fine, or on the street. We'll see. It will all work out.

LIZA ZAPOL: What is success? Yeah, we talked about this before but, again, what is success?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, success is something that's almost impossible to get. It's being able to have whatever you need in order to make whatever you want to make at the time. If you need quiet, if you need something. The first question of kids sometimes, when you work with them, from other areas, is. "How did you squeeze in being able to read and do all those things, in a house that was—everybody was television, radio?" [00:08:08] That's the point, so success is being able to have at least a couple of quiet days or something in the studio. That's success. Money, yeah, it's nice to be able to pay your bills. But most people should have the right to be able to pay their bills if they work.

LIZA ZAPOL: And what's a successful work, artwork?

LAWRENCE WEINER: One that enters into the culture, is used by various people, and then after a while they even forget who did it. It's like nobody knows who did what in the Museum of Modern Art but they remember that painting they saw in the Met. That's perfect, that means it worked. They remember it exactly but they don't remember who did it. And in fact, except for the persons themselves that are doing it, it doesn't much matter who did it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, and you've said that.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, I have said that before.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Most of the things I said may sound silly, but in fact, I really believe them.

LIZA ZAPOL: Well, that tension of wanting things to enter dominant culture, but also wanting to be recognized.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, you get a feeling but it doesn't—so that part of you doesn't get—somewhere along the line you build a social world that gives you some kind of credit.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. How would you describe your identity now?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Artist. That's it. A multicultural artist if you want, but artist. I'm an American artist. Even in Holland, where I consider myself an American, but I just happened to find an affinity with Dutch culture at the point. So an American artist who has a studio in Holland, the same as many American artists have studios in France, many French artists have studios in Mexico. [00:10:07] I mean, come now, I thought that was the point of the operation.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, [laughs] it is. It is, of course, but I don't know how you see yourself.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's how I feel.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And I have no relationship to languages and things. You do it to be polite. And there's nothing wrong with being polite.

LIZA ZAPOL: How do you describe your appearance now?

LAWRENCE WEINER: As somebody that's still trying to put themselves together again after—there's a joke: They've sort of cured you of your cancer and now they have to figure out what to do about the—to get you through the cure. Everything is all not working right, that's how I feel. I felt like an idiot when I went out last night to see something, and I couldn't get out of the chair, and they had to—you know, to get into the wheelchair, I couldn't get from one to the other. Some guy had to have—I feel my appearance is pathetic. What can I say? And I'm a vain person, so I was. Now I've learned that vanity is something else; just be grateful you can across the room. I went and bought that thing there, the little ambretta [ph].

LIZA ZAPOL: What's that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: That walker, to try to push it further, because sitting in a wheelchair is not healthy. It makes it possible to do things but it's not healthy.

LIZA ZAPOL: So building strength in a way, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know what I'm building, I'm just trying to get across the room.

LIZA ZAPOL: What is your everyday costume? [00:12:00] I notice—yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Do I have one? [To assistant] Maria, do I have an everyday costume? No, I just wear jeans and a shirt like everybody else. An IHOP—not IHOP, what's it called?—Uniqlo shirt and some—these are my grandson's pants.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I'm serious.

LIZA ZAPOL: And your hat?

LAWRENCE WEINER: That I made for a show called *West*. It was about people coming from the East, living in Holland, in Utrecht. And at the time, they just changed the language in Holland, to not say whatever it was, but they called people from another culture *allochtonen*, "those walking with us," and I got angry. So I just said *dichtbij*—means close-by, and that was the tchotchke that they sold. And that's that, I believe in *dichtbij*.

LIZA ZAPOL: Close-by as opposed to—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, that's it, close-by.

LIZA ZAPOL: —distance?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know. They have to figure out their own way of dealing with this other problem that they all have in Holland about—part of the north doesn't like the south and the south doesn't like the north. They're all—I don't know what their problem is. I have a problem, I happened to like—I liked Holland a lot, I still probably do. I don't like the way they're going right wing. It bothers me, but there's not much you can do about it. The United States has gone totally right wing. So has Britain, with this Brexit thing. So has France.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Italy has always been. Remember Italians and Danes were listed as the great racists by the United Nations for 20 years, and everybody said, "Italy, are you kidding? I had such a good time there!" [00:14:03] They said, "Yeah, that's right." There's nothing you can say. The Danes, nobody believed either, and now it's all come out, how these people are—you know, like in the United States, we have people that are just so vicious about people coming in, and yet their grandparents came in from somewhere. They were not American Indian. [Laughs.]

LIZA ZAPOL: Does this moment change the context in which your work is seen?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, it's the same context as it's always been. I'm old, remember. I grew up with half of the country segregated, with—you're not quite—you hitchhiked into the South, you had to find a white toilet. Because if you used the black toilet, the black people there would get beaten up by the white people living there. So you didn't use it, you went on the side of the road.

LIZA ZAPOL: You were talking about—as we were talking about your costume, you also have a beard and you've always—

LAWRENCE WEINER: More or less. What's left of it from the chemo and from the radiation and all. I don't know why, but it was, you know—I used to say it was because I was working on these Panamanian freighters at night as a kid and there was no water, it was just a hose, so you didn't shave. But no, it wasn't that; it was a choice. Not to become a man. The worst was to be stuck in these places where these people came from nowhere, from the suburbs and they were all gooed [ph] up, these men. They had more equipment with them and more stuff and I didn't get it. I had come from a background with sailors who had a straight-razor, and if they were lucky there was soap. And if there weren't, they would just let it grow. [00:16:00]

You know where the word tar comes from? American sailors, they didn't have the money that the English—for uniforms and things. And they had hair, and they would tie it back and wrap a piece of rag with tar on it to hold it, and they were called tars. I think that's funny, don't you?

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah it is, [laughs] it's interesting.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, I can understand that. I would use a rubber band or tar. When you were up in gale winds holding up the sail, you're not going to worry about a rubber band or a ribbon. [They laugh.]

LIZA ZAPOL: But now, you know, around you, this is a time where you go to Williamsburg and you see lots of people with beards, and this sort of—a return to this cultural moment.

LAWRENCE WEINER: There are always lots of people with beards in New York.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: Okay. Uptown it was rich people had beards. Downtown it was Jews and Muslims that had beards. And Hindis, a lot of Hindis. But yeah, I don't think that's my costume. And the reason that I'm—my leg is all swollen up. I had to put on sneakers instead of boots. But they're working, I'm able to walk across the room and it's not that awful looking, but it's not very pretty. It's not a well turned ankle as they say.

LIZA ZAPOL: So, you've been dealing with health, and we can talk as much about this as you want to.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Everybody deals with health. I'm 77 years old.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't consider that part of my criteria. I hope—it's more trouble for other people than it is for me; I have no choice.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But the patience of friends and the patience of people, and the kindness of strangers on the street even—

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, yeah. [00:18:02]

LAWRENCE WEINER: —surprises me sometimes, such a pleasant manner. It makes my making—most of the work I make is not really capable of bringing back money. That morale has been just such a success but there's no money in it. We spend all of our time keeping up with it, and it's just basically given to people, and it works. So with that in mind, I don't know where you're supposed to turn. I really don't.

LIZA ZAPOL: What do you want for the future?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Me? Oh, I hadn't really thought a lot about it to tell you the truth. But off the top of my head, I just want to have more comfortable working circumstances, that the world is not so screwed up that you spend most of your time doing pro bono things because other people are treating other people badly. It would be very nice to be more involved in the joy of making art than rectifying other people treating people badly. But that's what I would like, but it's not going to happen, so, you know. And I'd much rather be doing pro bono for the right thing than a little bit of comfort by doing the wrong thing, personally.

And it's not because I'm a nice person because I'm not. I have a very bad temper and I really can be quite cruel verbally, because I lose my patience. I'm not a good person but I'm not a bad person either. I don't want very much from anybody, except if they do what they say they're going to do, I'd like them to do it correctly. And I'm quite grateful for the kindness of strangers, to tell you the truth. All that hitching around, all that life, being on the road, getting off—you know, trying to get out of Turkey one time, where I had come in—oh, God, I had come

in on a business class ticket. I don't know why. Marina was in the back, Marina Abramović, and she watched this happen. [00:20:16]

They were held up in a line to get through and I just walked through and it was just fine. Except when I went to leave, I didn't have the piece of paper with the stamp on it and I had nobody to call. The American Embassy was closed for holidays. They were closed for holidays! It's not a joke—like Thanksgiving or Christmas or something—they were closed, there was nothing, and it worked by the kindness of strangers. Some police officer walked over and said, "You were working with those kids down on the docks"—you know, the harbor. I said, "Yeah, I'm in the show," and he said, "Yeah, I saw you on the television." I said, "What am I supposed to do here?" He said, "Just follow me." They walked me into the customs part, they searched me, and then the let me go and get my bag, and then they looked in my bag and they said, "Okay, catch your plane."

That's kindness of strangers. That's somebody standing there and saying I could be a pain in the ass or I don't want to be a pain in the ass. And it wasn't because they knew me, it wasn't because I did anything right, it was because they basically were decent people. That's what is so nice about the whole thing. Making art is a very optimistic thing, you take it for granted that most people are decent.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, it's true.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right. Does it require, then, a fundamental belief in humanity?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, and also a knowledge of the reality of things. There are going to be people who bribe to get their kid in school, there are people in the art world who do things that they shouldn't do to get ahead. So what? [00:22:09] That's the point, I'm not—you know, you can't be the moral arbiter, but you can know it and keep it in the back of your head and one day they come to you and say, "Support my cause," and you look at them and say an expletive, and that's it.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] How would you like your work to be viewed in the future?

LAWRENCE WEINER: More or less the way it's being viewed, as long as I can maintain putting things in the public that don't require explanation. And as long as I can do it, it's fine the way it is. It depends upon the work. If the work radically changes then that will have to change, but it hasn't.

LIZA ZAPOL: I think we've been talking about this, but what do you feel like your contributions are to American art?

LAWRENCE WEINER: To American art, or to art art?

LIZA ZAPOL: Art art.

LAWRENCE WEINER: The possibility of making a specific object that doesn't have a specific form. That's good enough. That sort of leaves it wide open for an awful lot of people, because a specific object is a specific object. If you know what it is and I know what it is, then it's a specific object. That's what I want, and enough money to be able to keep going because as you get older, it gets a little more complicated and your responsibilities towards other people gets high. I'm sort of one of those people who really hadn't—Alice, the woman I live with, believes in sort of fulfilling your responsibilities, or trying to.

LIZA ZAPOL: Can I adjust this mic really quickly? [00:24:02] Can you describe what you're working on right now? You've talked about Japan, you've talked about Greece.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm making a show for Japan. And we were talking about—and that's not Greece, by the way. That's—oh, what do you call that? Sardinia.

LIZA ZAPOL: Sardinia.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's Italian.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, of course.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's Italian.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But Sardinia, I'd like to make a piece that takes this area right there, which is all about flows and currents and something and things, and show it. That's it, that's good enough for me. In Mallorca, I'm

going to show mostly drawings and one piece. [Receives list from assistant.] Oh, thank you. I'm making a show at Holstebro in Denmark, in the museum. i8 Gallery, I promised I would make a show in 2020. There's a solo show there, Hubert Winter. I'm doing a public piece for Hubert Winter and for the Vienna Festival, because I was in their original one. Then I'm going to Casa Wabi in Oaxaca to do a piece and a little catalog for kids. [Flipping book pages.] That's Sardinia. And then Oslo, I'm doing a thing. And then Bergen, I'm on the façade of the museum, it will be permanent. And Vancouver in November is doing all the posters. They have the poster archive, and I think there's a lot of them. I'm waiting to hear from Luxemburg. And Glenstone, I'll be there in April. It's the entranceway. We have a card somewhere, a picture, but I'll go there. That's what I see here. [00:26:13]

LIZA ZAPOL: That seems like a lot.

LAWRENCE WEINER: A lot. Yeah, well, that's the way it works.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But it's all, again, things that didn't exist before for anybody, which is a funny thing. Oaxaca is looking interesting.

LIZA ZAPOL: How so?

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's a project with another artist, with artists running it. It's a big deal and I think it's fabulous. I've had such good adventures in Mexico. I did the Zócalo, the major square. It was on the walls, with the whole city, in a corrupt place—the city was the guise, not corrupt, it was really odd, the mayor, and they were just so nice, it was such a good feeling to do the work. It was a hard one for me, but it was such a good feeling and the people worked so well there, in Mexico City.

LIZA ZAPOL: Why was it a hard one?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Physically, it was hard. Well, you're talking about cobblestones, putting vinyl on cobblestones and having people around, ready with bicycle repair kits if a high heel went through it or something. It's just so gratifying, to watch people stand there sometimes and go, [inhales] and then you see and they're not laughing, they're smiling, and then they go on. You have no idea what they thought, but you've made something for their day and you didn't point a finger. I'm so tired of this art made by spoiled brats who point fingers. It doesn't do anybody any good. [00:28:00] You don't tell somebody how not to be finger pointed to, and that's what I'd like from things, that's what I want to be doing. I want to be doing what I do.

LIZA ZAPOL: So based on your good experience in Mexico before, you're looking forward to the Casa Wabi show.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes, I am, and the persons that came, were just such good quality. Yeah, I must say. But I look forward to most of the things I do. Some are a little repetitive, some of the things you do, because you need the money, and it doesn't hurt. It's like art fairs and things: They don't do any good but they don't hurt.

LIZA ZAPOL: You just did a collaboration for Marian Goodman, at the Frieze.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's not a collaboration, that's somebody saying, "We have a booth in the Sook [ph], here's your wall if you want it." That's not collaborative.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Selling it is a collaboration, maybe.

LIZA ZAPOL: Well, not with her but that was also with—

FEMALE SPEAKER: John Baldessari.

LIZA ZAPOL: With John Baldessari, of course.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, yeah, I like that. John's an artist who I like personally, and I've done collaborations with him before.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes, right.

LAWRENCE WEINER: This was a carryover from something we had done at PS1. It seems—from what I heard it was okay.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. Can you talk about those—well, talk about that collaboration with him at PS1 and then—yes,

again.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Well, the two of us stood there and there were all of these artists running around, trying to take space. Luckily, there was somebody working as an art handler there who had it together, and who realized—well, I said, "I can't use paper." The walls were too porous for that kind of paper. [00:30:01] He said, "Oh, we'll use the FedEx paper." You know, the envelopes. Perfect. And we just put our things up and that was it. [Laughs.] The other thing, the book I did with John, we went to Switzerland and we got our person working on the machines and we set up and I did the pictures and he did the words, and yeah, it was a lot of yelling and screaming but at the end of it, it turned out to be okay.

LIZA ZAPOL: Why yelling and screaming?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Disagreements. Both of us are not the easiest people to disagree with.

LIZA ZAPOL: So how do you make your way through that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: You have an argument, like every—normal people do that, they aren't special.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: You know, when you're not royalty and you have an argument with somebody, very often nobody wins but nobody loses. That's the point.

LIZA ZAPOL: I think you described your collaboration also, on the book, with—in a similar way, the recent book with Browns.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, yeah, it was Jonathan.

LIZA ZAPOL: With Jonathan, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It sometimes got really turgid. We don't agree on a lot of things but we came up with a book that we can agree completely with. His idea of a specific object and my idea of a specific object are completely different.

LIZA ZAPOL: How do you get from fundamentally different views—or maybe not fundamentally, but different views—to a place, an object that you agree upon?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know, you do it. How do you do a—how do you dance? You do it. [Laughs.] I really don't know what to say.

LIZA ZAPOL: I think that's perfect. [00:32:00]

LAWRENCE WEINER: And again, it has a lot to do with the attitude of the people when they go in together, because you don't have to change anything.

LIZA ZAPOL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You don't have to change each other.

LAWRENCE WEINER: You don't have to change anything. You have to just figure out what its use is in a particular situation. There is a difference. Adapt is different than change. I don't know, I like to work. I did a nice book with Matt Mullican and [one with –LW] Ed Ruscha, and lots of people, poets, in Paris. *Trois Petits Canards: Une Eau De Vie*, about Paris and French and American existentialism, it worked very well. You don't have to get married in order to do it.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] How—well, I'm interested in a lot of things. I'm interested in your relationship to existentialism.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, obviously it was a major one, coming from where I grew up, and finding things like Genet in a book mobile. A lot of things I came across, and then when I started to hit the bars as a kid, there were people talking about Genet, and talking about this, and there was the Circle in the Square Theater doing Genet. And by the time you were all finished you began to understand that these were people who were on the same tightrope and line that you were. Yours was political and aesthetic—you were making work that people would never show, much less buy—and they were presenting literature and things like that that nobody would read. Well, it turned out they were—the nobodies were wrong. Okay, existential, I think that we are all basically heavily existential, my generation. [00:34:05] Remember *À bout de soufflé*, *Breathless*, was popular and a success financially in New York in 1961, and was not until 1964 in Paris. So, yeah, think about that. That's really odd isn't it?

LIZA ZAPOL: Interesting. Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, okay.

LIZA ZAPOL: Nouvelle Vague was sort of more accepted here.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Nouvelle Vague was accepted there but only academically and amongst important people. Here it was just, the 42nd Street theaters. *General Della Rovere*. I mean, there were kids standing in the street screaming, "Fabricio!"

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm genuinely serious. The same as when they played *Berlin Alexanderplatz* on the public television, the whole thing. Kids were standing in the streets saying, *Ich habe keine Ahnung*, I have no idea, *Ich habe keine Ahnung* the dialect was—they had no idea what it was, they just knew that [Emilie Mieze Karsunke], the character, whenever they said what are you doing, *Ich habe keine Ahnung*. And it was so charming to watch somebody with a Hispanic accent saying *keine Ahnung*, with the roll of the R.

That's what culture is supposed to do. It's supposed to bring people to a point that they begin to understand the universality. The thing that Chomsky didn't get right, that he meant to, was the universality of expression, not of language. I think you'll have to take that out because there are people whose whole life depends upon it being language. It's not, it's expression. [00:36:04] That's my feeling and I've felt it all along. That's why I've basically read more Piaget after I read the whole Mouton thing, I began to look at Piaget at least, *an apple, it apple, non apple, intress.* [speaks German].

LIZA ZAPOL: An apple is an apple.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's called an apple because the name "apple" is written down inside the apple. And that's not so bad. That was a kid who said that, and Piaget was quick enough to pick it up.

LIZA ZAPOL: We were talking about that last time. The name is inseparable from the thing.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's inseparable from something. You can't know it if you don't name it. You can't say, "Oh, the ethereal spirit of"—and they say, "Of what?" The ethereal spirit of the ethereal spirit, that might be good for religion but it ain't going to work for art at all.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: I think I've talked myself out.

LIZA ZAPOL: I think we're in a great place.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Are you okay?

LIZA ZAPOL: I'm good. Is there anything else that you want to talk about or want to share, that I haven't asked you about?

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, not particularly. The work I do is self-obvious. I'm going to be giving a talk that says that "I don't understand why I'm asked to do these talks when the work itself is prima facie, it's right on the surface." But, at least when they pay attention they pay attention.

LIZA ZAPOL: Thank you.

LAWRENCE WEINER: You're welcome. They that go down to the—[Tape stops, restarts.]

LIZA ZAPOL: Go ahead.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, it's right there. It's on the wall, the folded one.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, can you read it again?

LAWRENCE WEINER: "They that go down to the sea in ships." It's biblical. [00:38:01] Meaning, most people live in mountains or in the hills. When you go down to the sea in ships you go down to sea level. That's all it is. It's nothing dramatic. It's not even that they're sinking, they just say it for people who have died and they're dumping in the water. "They that go down to the sea in ships, they're engaged in commerce, hither and yon," it goes on and on and on. I've got it in the notebook somewhere if you want it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah it sounds—I mean, it sounds like death.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's the thing that they do when they put the bodies in the ocean.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: It's a psalm. Somebody found it recently. Jin did, I think, [to assistant] or you did, I'm not sure. I found it as a psalm.

MARIA SPROWLS: Which one?

LAWRENCE WEINER: They that go down to the sea in ships.

MARIA SPROWLS: No, it's from the Bible.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, it's from the Bible.

MARIA SPROWLS: Yeah, it's in—

LAWRENCE WEINER: Psalms.

MARIA SPROWLS: It's a psalm, yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: You were asking—you were wondering who found it, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Oh, yeah, we just talked the way it is.

LIZA ZAPOL: We did, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: People here are quite intelligent. They find things and then they share them, because nothing is worth anything unless you share it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Talk to me—I'm still recording just so you know, because you brought up something, which is your working relationships here.

LAWRENCE WEINER: What?

LIZA ZAPOL: Your working relationships here, here in this space.

LAWRENCE WEINER: They're not bad. They're rather nice, as a matter of fact.

LIZA ZAPOL: Who do you—how many people work here and how does it work?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Well, let's see, Maria is my assistant and she helps other people as well. Jin works up in the archive, which she built with some of [inaudible]. Mary Jo does a lot of research and Kirsten is sort of like the—what do you call it?—honcho for a lot of things to do where there's bank and assistance. And that's it, and, you know, she has her life. That's what I do. And I get along with the people that are working in the galleries as a general rule. [00:40:04] I like people who do their job, that's about it. So that's the working relationship, it's not so bad. Actually, it's better than most of what I see.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, and you were saying that you, you know—

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm the difficulty.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I'm serious.

LIZA ZAPOL: How so?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'm a complicated person. Well, I am. I don't mean to be but it seems I am.

LIZA ZAPOL: You were talking about how ideas—you know, that you can—you're open to ideas from people in the studio.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Well, if you weren't, you'd be a complete idiot, wouldn't you?

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Yes.

LAWRENCE WEINER: If you're walking down the street and somebody says, "By the way, if you go left you can get there twice as fast," and you didn't listen to them, you're—you know.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, right. So again, it's working together in a way.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah, but that's one of the reasons that making movies is important for a lot of artists, not that the movie becomes important. You're in an ivory tower, you're making decisions off the top of your head and you're getting away with it. When you make a movie and you don't have a lot of money, you've got to talk the other person into really believing that it's worth doing. And in doing that, you make your point.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. You've worked with interesting collaborators on your movies as well.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yes I do.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. I notice that Kathryn Bigelow was someone who you worked with on early works.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Kathryn and I worked together for years. And Kathryn and I stayed good friends.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Kathryn is a very good filmmaker.

LIZA ZAPOL: What was that like? You know, I guess she edited and worked with you on some of the—

LAWRENCE WEINER: You won't know what it was like. It was just what it was.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] Yes, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I don't know how to explain it, okay?

LIZA ZAPOL: Okay, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: But everybody was totally involved.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah, yeah. But it's interesting that you say that the film becomes a different method. [00:42:02]

LAWRENCE WEINER: It becomes a necessity to keep yourself balanced and your feet on the ground. Musicians have it better. Musicians naturally can work with each other. Artists, it's a little complicated. But musicians are a dream to work with.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE WEINER: No!

LIZA ZAPOL: Why?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Because they don't say they'll do something if they don't think they can. And if they say they can do it, even if it's hard, they do it the best they possibly can, and they could walk in—the side musicians are fabulous, they walk in and out of other people's dreams. Yeah. All those musicians, you know, who get residuals on something that hit it, they were walking along and somebody needed them and they went into somebody else's dream. Well, that dream then paid off and they get part of it. Most of the time they get nothing and they just do it and it's their job. I've been very, very, very grateful to the people I've worked with in media. But I don't have any pretense about media. It's just what it is.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right. Various media.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Various media.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. Back to this, *they that go down to the sea in ships*.

LAWRENCE WEINER: Yeah.

LIZA ZAPOL: You said it's what they say when they wrap someone up and throw them overboard. Did that ever happen when you were at sea?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Nobody. I've never seen somebody buried at sea. I've been on boats that broke apart and the Coast Guard had to rescue everybody, but no, I've never seen somebody—I've seen bodies in the water because I was up in the North during some kind of a really bad squall, and there was a few fishing boats that were, like, down, and you had to go up—they needed people who could handle it—get the bodies out. Because if they couldn't get the body they would have to wait six years for their family to get the benefits. [00:44:19] So there were people scooping bodies out, and I've done that. But it was just—it wasn't saving anybody. You were

saving somebody, a man's life.

LIZA ZAPOL: Right, yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: No, I'm not an old salt. I did it all because it was the most romantic thing coming up and I was impressed as a kid. My neighborhood had an awful lot of merchant seamen in it, so that sort of got me on to being able to get jobs here and jobs there and do things, and temporary papers and how to get it done at the hire. It was all people that you knew from the street. Because you didn't know it, and you didn't go to the Academy, you didn't go anyplace.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah. I'm interested in this theme of—you've talked about endings as well, right?

LAWRENCE WEINER: What?

LIZA ZAPOL: Endings, right? Endings and beginnings. And here—yeah, what are you—what do you feel—what are your attitudes towards death?

LAWRENCE WEINER: Death?

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I would prefer that at this particular moment to avoid it. That's my only attitude. I was pretty, you know—cancer is always on the edge and I'm around people. I would prefer to avoid it. I don't have any thoughts about it.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: I'd like to do it painless and dignified, that's all.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yeah.

LAWRENCE WEINER: If that's asking too much, I'm sorry. Just painless and dignified. But I would prefer if it was just put off, I'm not ready for it yet. [00:46:08] [Laughs.] As much as I may look decrepit—what is it? *The Rambling Wreck of Georgia Tech*?

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] What is that?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I was just in Savannah and I kept whistling in the back of my head, *The Rambling*—because it was getting me in and out of the wheelchair thing to the car, *The Rambling Wreck of Georgia Tech*.

LIZA ZAPOL: It seems like you've successfully kept it at bay.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's because we had enough capital to keep it going. And again, the kindness of strangers and the kindness of friends. Of course, all I'm interested in is working at this point because that gives me a great deal of satisfaction. It's not my whole life, but an enormous satisfaction about working. So if I can just keep working it will give me enough oomph to keep going.

LIZA ZAPOL: Yes. Alright, thank you again.

LAWRENCE WEINER: That's the best I can do, I'm sorry.

LIZA ZAPOL: [Laughs.] This is great.

LAWRENCE WEINER: And if you look through it, if you have any comments or anything—

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