



LAWRENCE WEINER
CRISSCROSSED
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To accept that language, whether written, spoken, or drawn, is already substance before it is applied as such to become artistic material, allows us—at the least—to assert its plasticity. Above all, it allows us to understand that, whatever our language, time, or culture, we cannot escape form. Furthermore, we are faced with another observation, inherent to what happens in the immediate here and now, that concerns the reflexivity of the language: it seems to us less evident that a graphic or sound material can be reflexive, i.e., that it can refer to its own form, and, simultaneously, to elements that are not entirely contained in it. This amazing ability of linguistic signs to refer to themselves and to things that are not comparable to them, even if well known, does not cease to be amazing. The wondrous thing about it is due to what in linguistics is called the transparency and the opacity of the sign: on the one hand, when paying attention to characters and letters we don't really access meaning; and on the other hand, whenever we focus on meaning, we tend to forget the material dimension. The sign both hides and unveils the signified thing. In the case of artworks where the poetic function of the language prevails, this duplicity is strongly reduced, making us hesitate between sound, image, matter, and idea.

In the immediate experience—and contrary to what is usually stated, but without provocation—the artworks by Lawrence Weiner are visual works. Their format, scale, layout, colors, and their use of space and distance, all refer us to a situation where the material, the physical, and the tangible are dominant. Even more accurately, they impose themselves as a bodily experience. Paradoxically—and always in the immanent experience—corporeality is not in their substance, but in what their forms say. Only in the tangible presence of these artworks can we understand that the intellectual relation (supposedly the only kind of relation) ultimately resides in our body. To understand that without incorporation (learning something) there can be no comprehension, we only need to imagine completely unknown words or letters. There is a simple reason for this: because it is made of matter, form, and texture, language models our being, our body, our hearing, and our sensitivity. This modeling, or even better, this plasticity cannot be purely intellectual.

The image and language artifacts we produce serve as representations of something. Once we perceive what is represented, these artifacts disappear or are discarded because, according to a peculiar dualistic criterion, the intelligible is more valued than the sensible. Avoiding the opposite excesses of matterism or physicalism, concrete, visual and sound poetry highlight the sensible and the perceptible in the tangible presence of the text's forms, sounds, and words—its corporeality—and thus render language as an act of perception. The artworks by Lawrence Weiner are presented in a concrete situation, or, more precisely, are seen in an indicial or indexical relation to the viewer, in the here and now of the psycho-physical relation. It is in this sense that the perceptual experience cannot be solely intellectual, but mostly corporeal, integrating the sounds and the temporality produced by what we are seeing/reading. This verbal-vocal-visual field possesses an ideal facet, but one that is inevitably connected to the language's corporeality. I guide my perception in and through language because the action of perception is in itself constituted of materialized language. However, the relation we have as we enter the exhibition space is precisely a non-immediate materialization, because we are simultaneously reading words that resend us to indicial parameters—'placed/colocado', 'to reach/para atingir', 'wheresoever/seja onde for', 'here is it not', 'under/debaixo'—which are apparently related to the actual position of the words and sentences on the wall, as well as to the reader/viewer's situation—while simultaneously keeping the possibility of describing other situations, that are not referred to in the here and now. The walls where we can read, as if in a reflection, 'Here is it' and 'Here is it not', perfectly

represent that situation, because it is precisely that situation where we can understand the 'here' as literal (these words on this wall), but also as concerning to something that is situated in some other context.

The line drawn around the sentences calls our attention to something we shouldn't forget, or highlights the fact that what we are reading is both present and not present. As we said before, it is both transparent and opaque. We are not dealing with the invisible, inaccessible or unintelligible, but with the non-complete, non-total access (transparence) to meanings. Because I cannot stop myself from thinking that 'here is it' could also be referring to the wall where I see painted 'Here is it not', and that in turn this last sentence refers to the other wall, and that both sentences refer to the entire exhibition, or to the building, maybe even to the street, or to an undefined and indeterminate context that cannot be, obviously, comprehensive.

All that is painted on the walls mediates our access to the dimensions, scales, colors, visual features, and to the situations inherent to the words and phrases themselves—as in 'crisscrossed/entrecruzado'; and 'placed on either side of the light/colocado em ambos os lados da luz'—, in the sense that what is read designates—if it doesn't explain or construes—the experience we are having. What we experience is mostly shaped by language, which indicates, designates, and points to what is happening: for example, the fact that we are reading something that deals precisely with the situation in which we are, and we are precisely doing what these same words indicate and designate. We are not, after all, seeing or perceiving reality, but what these sentences say about it. Let us imagine that, changing only a color in the installation (here in black), the red or the green, for example, the experience of thinking about (an undetermined) something that is 'placed on either side of the light' and something that is 'colocado em ambos os lados da luz' is certainly not the same, as the change in color (because of the codes intrinsic to a specific culture) would make us not only see or imagine a different thing, but would also not refer to the same thing—if we are indeed dealing with a 'thing'. Evidently, what is 'colocado' or 'placed' can be the words and letters, but also the color (the black), or even time and space—starting with the simple space of the wall, the time of reading/seeing, that is, the reference system necessary to materialize this or any other experience.

When we are proficient enough in two or more languages, we know (by experience) that different languages assign us to different times and different spaces; they can shift our bodies and minds into different contexts. Thus, we know that when living within or through a language we do not have the same body as when we express ourselves or act in another language. It is because of this that Lawrence Weiner's artworks are, among many other things, representations of the body present.

Jacinto Lageira

The artist would like to give gracious thanks to Jacinto Lageira, José Roseira & Delfim Sardo for their admirable courage in translating the work into Portuguese.

Lawrence Weiner work is presented in several private and public collections worldwide.

BORN 10 FEBRUARY 1942 BRONX NEW YORK

**ART IS THE EMPIRICAL FACT OF THE
RELATIONSHIPS OF OBJECTS TO OBJECTS
IN RELATION TO HUMAN BEINGS & NOT DEPENDENT UPON
HISTORICAL PRECEDENT FOR EITHER USE OR LEGITIMACY**

LAWRENCE WEINER
