

**PLEASE
PAY
ATTENTION
PLEASE:
BRUCE NAUMAN'S
WORDS**

WRITINGS AND INTERVIEWS

BRUCE NAUMAN

EDITED BY JANET KRAYNAK

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EDITED BY JANET KRAYNAK

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

GIVEN THE BREADTH of his career and the widespread recognition of the significance of his art, Bruce Nauman has conducted relatively few interviews over the course of the past thirty-five years. Unlike many of his artist colleagues who also began their careers in the sixties, Nauman has refrained from participating in the critical discourse surrounding his art. He does not write criticism, has never been active as a public speaker, and has spent limited time within the recognized centers of the contemporary artworld. The resulting impression is one of silence.

In contrast, words—indeed language—are everywhere in Nauman’s art. There are words that scream at the viewer, and words that flash on and off in bright neon tubing; there are words that are assembled into ponderously long, descriptive titles, and others that are presented alone as stark messages in otherwise empty fields of white paper; there are words that are spoken back and forth by actors on video screens, and words that are recorded on audiotapes. Indeed, the incorporation of language was not only foundational to the formation of Nauman’s diverse aesthetic but continues to play a significant role in its development.

The question that arises is how can an artistic practice of so many words be made by an artist of so few words? Perhaps, however, this is a flawed approach, in that rather than the *quantity*, the focus should be upon the *quality*—that is, the nature or types—of words the artist chooses to circulate in public. From this perspective, Nauman’s reticence—his reluctance to control the discourse—may reveal insight into both the function and

meaning of language in his art. This is the subtext of the current book, which, beyond an anthology of documents, represents an investigation of Bruce Nauman's words.

The artist's reputation as a reluctant speaker, moreover, has been compounded by the limited availability of his interviews; many of them appeared in obscure or now out-of-print journals, and some have never been published in the first place. As an archival resource, this book counters Nauman's reputation for silence by demonstrating both the historical and critical value of those interviews that do exist. On the other hand, it seeks to offer an interpretive perspective, investigating the models of language operative in Nauman's art: the subject of the critical essay that serves as the book's introduction. While the issue of language and the "linguistic turn" of artistic practices since the sixties has been addressed at length in the literature, in this essay I argue that the discussion has largely been framed through a structuralist or semiotic model, leading to certain conclusions about the nature of language—and its function in the visual arts. In approaching language through the notion of the "speech act" or performative utterance, however, a different perspective emerges, one crucial in understanding the larger significance of Nauman's art and its historical legacy.

Following the introductory essay is the first archival section, consisting of a selection of Nauman's "writings." The word here is placed in quotes as, by their very inclusion, the interpretive question of what constitutes an artist's "writing" is raised. Given the nature of Nauman's textual production, which largely falls outside the domain of traditional artists' writings, this issue is doubly complex. Nauman's writings consist not of biographical musings, critical or philosophical essays, or reflective reviews.

Rather, they belong to diverse and multiplicitous genres: from dialogues, transcribed from video/audio works; prose texts, written as components of architectural installations; instructions or proposals for objects or per-

formances to be made; to texts that constitute artworks in their own right. They are variously didactic, informational, literary, and even “poetic.”¹¹

In the critical essay, an interpretation of these writings is explored, but here some explanation regarding the criteria for their inclusion is warranted. As language is a ubiquitous component in Nauman’s artwork, the book does not simply reproduce every instance in which it appears; indeed if sculptures, neon signs, video pieces, audio works, drawings, and prints were all taken into account, this number would be in the hundreds. Rather, what are reprinted here are those writings the artist himself previously published—in magazines, brochures, or posters—as well as those that he otherwise considers to function autonomously as text or writing. In keeping with the nature of these writings—which, in many cases, have highly intentional graphic or visual formats—they are reproduced in this book as faithful to the originals as possible. In cases where the original texts have been lost or were not otherwise available, an approximation of their appearance has been made. Each writing is accompanied by annotations, explaining their original contexts and formats, as well as other pertinent information.

Part II, forming the book’s second archival section, includes interviews the artist conducted from the very beginning of his career to the present: the first from 1966 and the last, December of 2001. This section includes two previously unpublished interviews and others that were first published in journals that, for a variety of reasons, now have limited public access. The interviews are arranged chronologically and annotated with relevant contextual information and a brief introduction to their contents. While instances of repetition occur, with Nauman revisiting topics and statements made on other occasions, I have chosen to include all extant interviews that were available. For one, given their relatively small number, each interview merits entry into the historical record. More significantly, however, such repetitions are themselves meaningful, underscoring concerns that continue to preoccupy the artist over a lengthy period of time. As one aim of the book is to demonstrate the conceptual and philosophical continuity

of what appears, on the surface, to be a radically differentiated artistic practice, such echoes of ideas underlying seemingly unrelated works bear interpretive significance. In this sense, documentation intends also to function as commentary.

The interviews are reprinted here as they were first published—that is, in edited form—even when original, unedited manuscripts were available. Not only does this result in a more accurate reflection of the genre of the interview (which, despite its pretense to “natural” conversation, is always a construct in some respect), but it also allows for different authorial voices to be represented, thereby enriching the interpretive perspective for the reader. Supplementary information, clarifications, and other comments, however, are added as editor’s notes to assist the reader throughout this section of the book. In this part and in part I, editor’s interpolations appear in brackets []. All notes are by the editor unless otherwise indicated.

I AM EXTREMELY GRATEFUL for the assistance of the many people and institutions who helped me gather materials and permissions, and otherwise supplied important information for the book. First, I want to offer my sincere gratitude to Bruce Nauman, who not only supported the project and gave me permission to use his written and visual materials but also allowed me the freedom to shape the book’s contents and editorial perspective. Such a hands-off approach is highly unusual and reinforces those qualities in his art that compelled me to write about it in the first place. From the beginning of this process, Juliet Myers, Nauman’s invaluable assistant of seventeen years, has been a constant source of help and information, serving as an important liaison, gracefully accommodating my many requests. I am very thankful for her ongoing support and for generously lending me materials that were crucial for the finished publication.

Equally, I owe a very large debt to all of the contributors and other individuals who granted me permission to reprint the interviews; without their

generosity, this book simply would not exist. As the number of Nauman interviews is small, each one makes a valuable contribution to the creation of a historical archive; thus I am doubly grateful for their willingness to make their work available for this publication, which I hope will serve many researchers and readers to come.

In addition, there were numerous individuals who, over the course of the book's development, contributed in many ways. First, I want to thank the staff of Sperone Westwater Gallery—Angela Westwater, David Leiber, Karen Polack, Rachel Foulon, Michael Short—for their multifaceted support. Karen deserves special mention for taking on the time-consuming task of organizing and assembling a large portion of the photographic materials and answering my numerous inquiries. I am also grateful to Donald Young and Emily Letourneau of Donald Young Gallery in Chicago, and Sabrina Gschwandtner at Electronic Arts Intermix in New York, for their kind assistance in acquiring various photographic materials.

Dorothee Fischer of Konrad Fischer Galerie in Düsseldorf generously provided me with an original copy of a poster containing one of Nauman's writings, as well as details of its original installation. Thanks also to Barbara Castelli and Diana Turco of the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, for providing other textual materials.

In my lengthy search to track down the original copyright holders and various other individuals, a number of people gave me their welcome assistance: the staff of Nancy Hoffman Gallery in New York; Dave Dymant at Art Metropole in Toronto; Jean Beckner and Candace Lebel at the Honnold/Mudd Library, The Claremont Colleges, in Claremont, California; Steven Leiber, of Steven Leiber, San Francisco; Bob Monk, formerly of Lorence-Monk Gallery, New York; and Caroline Weaver at the Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C. I also want to acknowledge Ann Gale at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Jean-Christophe Castelli of Castelli Graphics; and Jon Hendricks, curator of The Gilbert and Lila Silverman

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The origin of this book, and the ideas developed in the introductory essay, was my doctoral dissertation, and I am enormously indebted to the insights and advice of my advisers, Yve-Alain Bois, Michael Leja, and especially Benjamin Buchloh.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to Alex Alberro, who encouraged me to send my proposal for this book to The MIT Press, providing the incentive to put into form what then existed as an idea. At The MIT Press, thanks to Lisa Reeve for answering many questions along the way; to Derek George for his thoughtful and beautiful design; and to Sandra Minkinen, who has been a dedicated and generous editor. The final shape of the book owes much to their untiring efforts. Lastly, I am extremely grateful to Roger Conover, who enthusiastically supported the book from the outset, provided me with the opportunity to pursue it, and had the patience to see it through.

NOTE

1. "Poetic," however, as Nauman once described: "When language begins to break down a little bit, it becomes exciting and communicates in the simplest way that it can function: you are forced to be aware of the sounds and the poetic parts of words." Quoted in Christopher Cordes, "Talking With Bruce Nauman," reprinted in this volume, p. 354.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

Throughout the book, due to their frequent appearance, the following abbreviations are used for the catalogue raisonnés of Nauman's art (references to catalogue entries of individual Nauman works are indicated by the abbreviation followed by the catalogue number). The reader is encouraged to consult these sources for complete documentation, including illustrations, of Nauman's work.

DCR (Drawings catalogue raisonné)

van Bruggen, Coosje, Kaatje Cusse, Michael Ortoleva, and Paul Tanner, eds. "Collected Drawings by Bruce Nauman." In *Bruce Nauman: Drawings, Zeichnungen 1965–1986*. Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 1986.

PCR (Prints catalogue raisonné)

Cordes, Christopher, ed., with the assistance of Debbie Taylor. *Bruce Nauman: Prints 1970–1989, A Catalogue Raisonné*. New York: Castelli Graphics, Lorence Monk Gallery, Donald Young Gallery, 1989.

WCR (Walker Art Center catalogue raisonné)

Benezra, Neal, Kathy Halbreich, and Joan Simon, eds. *Bruce Nauman: Exhibition Catalogue and Catalogue Raisonné*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994.

BRUCE NAUMAN'S WORDS

JANET KRAYNAK

IN 1968, BRUCE Nauman produced a spare sculptural installation, consisting merely of a square room, measuring ten-by-ten feet, and a single tape recording. Empty of objects or other notable physical details, the small, enclosed space is nonetheless full, resonating with the sounds of a voice that derisively chides “get out of my mind, get out of this room.” With speakers buried into seamless wall surfaces, the source of these sounds remains hidden, yet the disembodied voice, with the alarming directness of its commands, seems to talk to *me*, as the viewer, telling me—*ordering* me—to “get out.”

Get Out of My Mind Get Out of This Room is one of a series of hybrid architectural works Nauman produced in the late sixties and early seventies. In these environmental sculptures, sound, light, and video imagery are variously incorporated, yielding mediated spaces in which the viewer is made to perform a range of sensory tasks: moving, viewing, listening, and so on. In so doing, processes of perception—visual, physiological, and physical—are heightened, and the distinction between seeing with the eyes and experiencing with the body is collapsed. As such, *Get Out* might aptly be described an experiential sculpture, one which furthers the minimalist engagement with the operations of sense perception.

But I want to consider more closely the particular components constituting *Get Out*: specifically, the nature of its sounds. Not simply ambient noise or illegible cacophony, they are *linguistic* sounds—that is, words,

given voice by the artist performing them for a tape recorder, changing the volume and speed of delivery with each repetition, “*GET OUT OF MY MIND GET OUT OF THIS ROOM, . . . get out of my mind, get out of this room. . .*” *Get Out*, I propose, is work about language.

To describe *Get Out* in terms of language is, admittedly, counterintuitive or, at least, not what obviously may come to mind, particularly in the context of late sixties art. During this period, there were numerous and diverse language-based practices; yet in the historical reception, what is most frequently referenced is a particular strain of “linguistic” conceptual (and later, neoconceptual) art.¹ Moreover, language pieces are more often than not understood to be *text* based, in which linguistic signs entirely displace visual ones. Such “antivisual” works, however, are then paradoxically attributed a set of common visual or even stylistic characteristics: reductively spare, dry in tone, and void of perceptual pleasures. Language, in this framework, is viewed as occupying the realm of the purely immaterial or ideational—or, at least, referencing only itself.

But the artistic preoccupation with the problem of language in the sixties is not unique, as it represents one example of a more generalized linguistic turn experienced across disciplines during the period. While in art history there has been a tendency to homogenize “language” as an all-encompassing critical term—and to focus most attention upon the structuralist or semiotic model²—in linguistic theory, philosophy, and literary criticism it represents a subject of dispute, one that reached a critical crux in the late sixties. In interpreting Nauman’s *Get Out* as a work about language, therefore, I intend in this essay to raise the very *question* of language, as well as its historical significance. Specifically, I want to introduce an account not often considered with regard to the linguistic shift in the art of the sixties: namely, language understood as *speech*.

The reference to speech here may seem unremarkable, as *Get Out* is composed literally of spoken words: rather than scripted as text, words



fig. 1.1

Lip Sync, 1969. Videotape (black and white, sound), 60 mins., to be repeated continuously. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

are recited by the artist on a tape recorder. Throughout Nauman's work, in fact—and in contrast to the perceived reticence of the artist himself as a speaker, as an artist *without* a public voice—there is a recurring use of specifically verbal language: from the 1969 video *Lip Sync* (fig. 1.1) in which Nauman, sporting large headphones, mouths the phrase “lip sync” over and over; and the dual video monitor piece *Good Boy Bad Boy* from 1985, in which two actors recite a series of interrelated statements; to the elaborate, multipart audio-video installation *World Peace (Projected)* (1996), in which a cast of individuals, seen on different screens, recount a series of phrases. The notion of speech being addressed here, however, does not intend to imply a simple (and false) dichotomy between speech and writing, or even a literal understanding of these terms. Rather what I am referencing is a particular model of language, encompassing both written and spoken signs, based upon the *speech-act*.

IN A SERIES of essays, written from the 1920s to the time of his death in 1975, Russian theorist and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin develops an

idiosyncratic approach to the problem of language, focusing upon its aspects as speech.³ Central to Bakhtin's analysis is his concept of the "utterance," which includes both spoken and written language and can be a simple statement, an entire novel, a lengthy treatise (or, perhaps, a work of art). What defines the utterance is not a set of stable or intrinsic formal characteristics but its operational logic. The utterance, Bakhtin emphasizes, is not an autonomous unit but always arises, either directly or indirectly, in response to another utterance. As he writes, "any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe." He continues,

And [the speaker] presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances—his own and others'—with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation to another (builds on them, polemicalizes with them, or simply presumes they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances.⁴

As opposed to the mechanics of language, Bakhtin stresses the intersubjectivity of linguistic exchange. While a system of language can be identified, its meaningfulness is predicated upon an uncontainable relay of saying and responding—just as the meaning of Nauman's *Get Out* resides not in its words but in my response as a viewer (in whatever forms that response may take, even silence) to them. Rather than "language" in the narrow sense, the utterance is part of Bakhtin's broader concept of "dialogue": a *metalinguage* (his term) that takes into account putatively non-linguistic factors, such as the situation or context in which linguistic acts occur, and the subjectivity of the speakers who utter and receive them.

Bakhtin's approach to the study of language represents a striking (and intentional) departure from traditional linguistics, formalism (such as that

of his contemporary, Roman Jakobson), and in particular, the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure whose *Course in General Linguistics*, published posthumously, is the origin of modern semiotics.⁵ Saussure, in contrast to Bakhtin, is concerned with the total system of language—what he terms *langue*—over and above the individual speech-act or the *parole*. As Saussure writes, “A language system, as *distinct* from speech, is an object that may be studied independently.”⁶ Discounting the significance of the individual speech-act, Saussure traces the laws governing *all* utterances (i.e., the total semiotic system) whose limits essentially form the limitation of communication and meaning. His is a general theory of language, which investigates “the nature of signs” (composed of the signified and the signifier) and “the laws governing them,” as Saussure explains, and *not* the enactment of these signs in life.⁷ In short, Saussure’s system eliminates what Bakhtin considers central: namely, the effects of the speech-act, including its interpretive force as it enters into specific contexts, as well as the role of the response.⁸

While such theoretical debates in linguistic philosophy may seem digressive, they bear important implications for an understanding of the problem of language in the art of the sixties and, as such, in Nauman’s practice. In the wake of structuralism’s dominance in the late sixties, previously suppressed models of language were reconsidered or given serious recognition for the first time; among these recovered theories were those of the so-called pragmatic philosophers, including J. L. Austin, and the late Ludwig Wittgenstein.⁹ Additionally, Bakhtin’s writings, which were until then largely unknown outside of a small academic circle, were first translated into English in 1968, leading to more widespread critical attention.¹⁰ While significant differences exist among these thinkers, what unites them—and, I propose, what links them to the logic of Nauman’s art—is a *common focus upon the speech-act*. The domain of speech-act philosophy brings attention to precisely those aspects that structuralist and formalist linguistics cast aside—material context, human action, and subjectivity—and as

such, to what the art historical reception has suppressed in its assessment of language-based artistic practices.

This is not to suggest that Nauman was either aware of these discussions or performed a literal reading of them in his work.¹¹ Nevertheless, I maintain that throughout Nauman's art an ongoing investigation of language can be found: one predicated, however, less upon the rules and laws of the semiotic sign than upon the workings of the speech-act or the "utterance."¹² Nauman's artworks themselves constitute "work utterances," to borrow Bakhtin's phraseology: engaged in an ongoing conversation with past and present work (both his own and that of others) and not just in the visual arts but in literature, philosophy, dance, music, and film as well. It becomes imperative, therefore, to hear what they have to say.

Consider *World Peace (Projected)* (fig. 1.2), the video installation mentioned briefly above. A series of images is projected onto the walls of a room: there is a woman smoking a cigarette; a man in front of a set of microphones; a woman at a lectern; a bespectacled man; a younger woman; and two women who perform sign language. Shot from a range of camera angles, the projections variously depict only the face or part of the torso; some are in an enlarged close-up while in others a wider view appears. On the soundtrack for each videotape, the same set of phrases—based upon different combinations of the verbs "talk" and listen," appended by a shifting list of pronouns—is spoken: "I'll talk to you. You'll listen to me. You'll talk to me. I'll listen to you. . . . They'll talk to you. You'll listen to them. I'll talk to them. They'll listen to me," and so on. From one speaker to the next, tone, emphases, and volume oscillate: some are loud, screaming the phrase in a short clip; others are soft and halting, deliberating between the phrases in a reassuring manner. By virtue of the formal shifts in the speech patterns and bodily gestures—from dragging on a cigarette, to cocking the head gently to one side, to signing—the phrases' meanings radically change, signifying either a threatening affront or a bid for peace and reconciliation.



fig. 1.2

World Peace (Projected), 1996.
5 videodiscs, videodisc players,
video projectors, six utility carts
(color, sound). Room size 30 × 60 ft.
maximum. Courtesy Sperone
Westwater Gallery, New York.

fig. 1.3

World Peace (Projected), 1996.
Collaged Polaroids and pencil on
paper. 22¼ × 30½ in. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.



In *World Peace*, words are given a voice, that is, an individual expression that shapes and transforms them. Through the simultaneous presentation of contrasting voices, the contingency of this process—what Bakhtin terms the “dialogical situation”—emerges. What results is a visual (and aural) refutation of Saussure’s premise that “language itself is not a function of the speaker. It is the product *passively* registered by the individual.”¹³ In contrast, *World Peace* vividly demonstrates the active creation of meaning through the vocal performance. To appropriate the words of one commentator, who is speaking about Bakhtin’s utterance but could very well be describing Nauman’s installation: “In every act I impart something new to it, something particular to me. Tone bears witness to the singularity of the act and its singular relation to its performer.”¹⁴ Similarly, *World Peace* displays a collection of vocal performances in which the qualities of the sounds, the gestural idiosyncrasies of the speakers, change from screen to screen: a pattern that is playfully encapsulated in a collaged drawing of Polaroids Nauman made for the installation (fig. 1.3). Indeed, rather than audibly enunciating the messages, two depicted performers transmit them through the physical gestures of sign language, encapsulating the implied embodiment of the utterance as well as its sense of intersubjective address because one would never sign for oneself.

World Peace was made by Nauman in the nineties, thus it represents a relatively late example of the artist’s thinking about language; yet it elaborates and in some respects crystallizes long-standing concerns. Over the span of Nauman’s art, and throughout its various forms, from videos to neon signs to installation sculptures, there is a consistent preoccupation not just with language but with what may be thought of as its active life. It is language that *speaks*, not necessarily literally, but in the sense of the utterance, bearing qualities that purely linguistic elements (that is, language in the abstract rather than in relationship to speakers and situations) do not possess.¹⁵

EARLY IN HIS career, during 1966–67, Nauman made a series of photographs that would be assembled a few years later into a single portfolio titled *Eleven Color Photographs* (fig. 1.4). Simple phrases or idiomatic expressions are used to generate a series of activities, which are executed by the artist and then presented photographically. In *Eating My Words*, for example, Nauman is seated at a table, sporting a red checked shirt whose pattern mimics the gingham tablecloth before him. On the table is a plate with pieces of white bread carved into the shapes of letters. His gaze fixed downward, Nauman holds a jar of jam in one hand while the other grasps a knife, ready to spread the sweet, red substance on the bits of bread. The photograph depicts the artist about to consume (literally) a plate of “words”: individual word-bites accompanied by a full glass of milk.

Other photographs in the series are characterized by a similar structure. In *Waxing Hot*, a hand is seen polishing a vertical arrangement of red block letters; *Drill Team* takes a common expression but shifts its referent, presenting a “team” of drill bits, inserted in a neat row “at attention.” In *Bound to Fail*, a body, shown from behind, is tethered with a thick rope; and in *Feet of Clay*, a pair of feet are slathered with a layer of soft, brownish clay.

In these images, figurative expressions are literalized, thus distorting or refracting language’s normative function as a simple means of communicating ideas. Instead, linguistic signs become a source of play, a vehicle with which situations can be created. As such, Nauman’s photographs represent not just clever puns, vividly realized in a palette of bright colors; rather, they define a “performance” structure, one determined not by the body but by language.

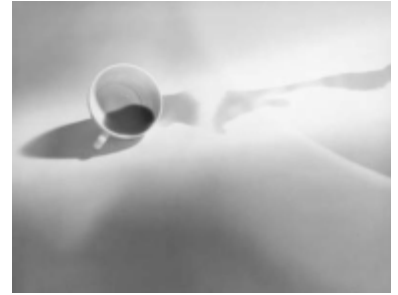
Subsequent work builds upon this foundation, expanding and exploring the creation of performance situations through language. In *Flour Arrangements* (fig. 1.5), a photomontage from 1967, the word *flower* (as in a flower arrangement) is transposed into its homonym *flour*, yielding



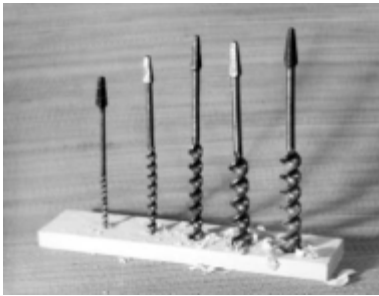
Bound to Fail



Coffee Spilled Because the Cup Was Too Hot



Coffee Thrown Away Because It Was Too Cold



Drill Team



Eating My Words



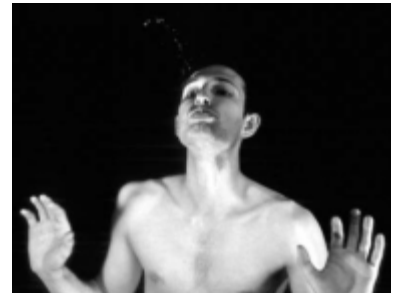
Feet of Clay



Finger Touch No. 1



Finger Touch with Mirrors



Self-Portrait as a Fountain



Untitled (Potholder)



Waxing Hot

fig. 1.4

Eleven Color Photographs, 1966–1967/1970. Portfolio of eleven color photographs, various sizes, all approx. 19¼ × 23 in. Edition of 8. Published by Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

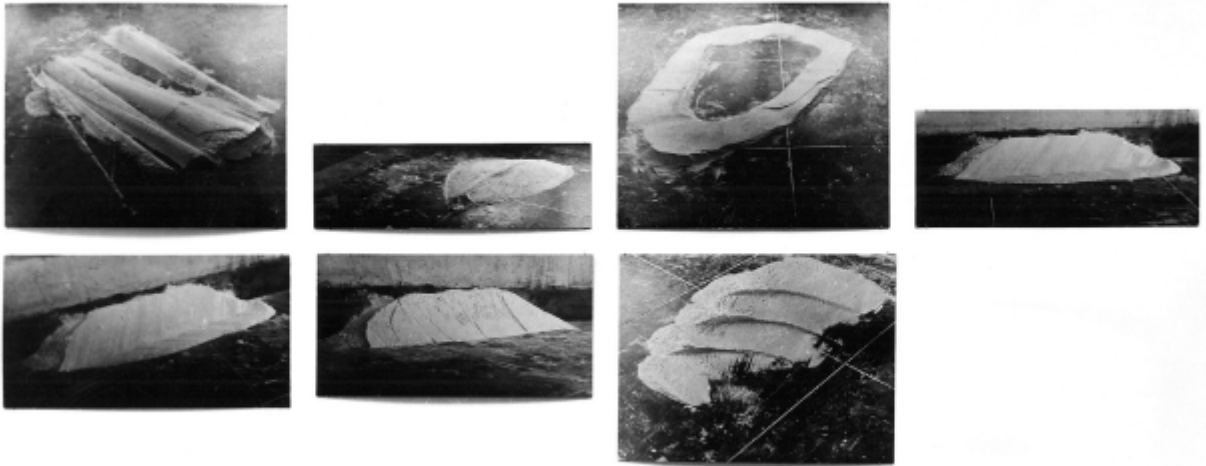


fig. 1.5
Flour Arrangements, 1966. Seven
 color photographs, various sizes.
 Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery,
 New York.

the phrase flour arrangements, generating an a priori framework in which to execute an activity.¹⁶ Clearing everything out of his studio except for a mound of flour heaped upon the floor, every day, over a period of a month, Nauman rearranged the loose pile, photographing each new configuration. The resulting work represents an early example of process, or post-minimal sculpture, in that it is temporary and resists the conventional dictates of production, form, and building.¹⁷ Moreover, in destroying the manipulated object at the end of the procedures, what remains is merely the residual documentation—thirty or so photographic images recording each permutation of the pile—thus displacing the work’s meaning from a centered object into a spatially and temporally dispersed field. In both its conception and final form, however, *Flour Arrangements* engenders other concerns. For one, only seven images were used; thus the resulting work constitutes not a straightforward document of a linear process but a series of individual edited moments, presented as a group of photographs,

arranged at skewed angles and mounted on the wall. More significantly, however, the “sculpture”—that is, the heaped pile of flour—may represent an ever-changing index of Nauman’s daily movements, but the entire process is generated from a linguistic statement: an *instruction*, so to speak. In short, *Flour Arrangements* does not exclusively represent a postminimal reflection upon the nature of sculptural materiality and processes but instead investigates the *performativity* of language.¹⁸

In recent criticism, the term *performative* has become ubiquitous if not fashionable, most often used in the vernacular sense as a descriptive of performance, which is implicitly understood as *bodily* acts.¹⁹ In the context of linguistic philosophy, however, *performativity* has a specific reference: namely, the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin. In a series of lectures, compiled and published posthumously as *How to Do Things with Words* (1962),²⁰ Austin develops the notion of the “performative utterance,” which concerns the relationship between speech (or language) and action. Unlike “constative utterances” which, Austin contends, merely describe something, “performative utterances” perform the action referred to in the uttered statement. A common example is the declaration “I promise,” which, by its very articulation, creates a promise: in this case, the act is simultaneous with or internal to the linguistic statement. Austin classifies these examples as “illocutionary” performatives. In “perlocutionary” performatives, however, something occurs as a consequence of speech: carrying out an order or following an instruction, such as Nauman, in his studio, arranging piles of baking flour.²¹

Through Austin’s concept of the performative, language is understood as a form of human action, as opposed to an instrument of communication or a passive vehicle for the transmission of mental states. Language is not simply something we use but itself constitutes a form of behavior. Through language, acts are achieved, but also, language itself *acts*. It is both material and social. Austin’s theory thus explores the potentiality for words not

merely to signify, but to do: to be operative and dynamic, bearing material consequences.

Beyond the context of linguistic theory, in defining language as action, the performative constitutes a significant challenge to central tenets in metaphysical philosophy: in particular the seemingly immutable (and persistent) antinomies of thought and experience, mind and body, and, as Kant claimed, the theoretical and the practical worlds. These divisions form the foundations of the Western philosophical tradition, exemplified by its designation of an entirely separate realm of enquiry for “acts” or “action,” namely, the field of ethics.²² For our purposes here, what is notable is that these very binaries—which, I am arguing, the performative and, more generally, the speech-act breaches—unwittingly underlie a categorical (and theoretical) division in the discourse of sixties art history, namely, the separation of models of *performance* and *language*, which are viewed as distinct or even mutually exclusive.²³ Nauman’s *Eleven Color Photographs* and *Flour Arrangements* demonstrate, however, that if a more differentiated concept of language is taken into account—where it entails not just the *sign* but the *utterance*, and not just *meaning* but *performance*—the exclusivity of this framework is called into question.

SINCE THEY FIRST appeared in the late sixties, the Studio Films, a series of filmed performance pieces Nauman made in 1967–68, have since attained the status of signature works. In these films, which include *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square*; *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* (fig. 1.6); *Bouncing Two Balls Between Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms*; and *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio*, the familiar image of the artist, clad casually in a T-shirt, dark jeans, and in some cases wearing only socks, appears. Alone in the confines of his studio, which is notably empty, except for a scattering of objects and detritus lying haphazardly on the dusty floor, Nauman performs a series of actions that are limited in

scope and simple in nature. In one, we see him swaggering his hips back and forth as he ambulates around the outline of a white square, mapped in tape on the floor. In another, the same template is used to structure and regulate his movements as he swings each leg outward in rapid succession, leaping to the next side of the square and repeating the movements. He bounces two balls, trying to maintain a steady tempo in the third variation; and in the last, he circulates around the studio, emitting a screeching noise from a violin.

With Nauman's restrained bodily carriage and the mundane nature of the performed tasks, the Studio Films demonstrate the artist's indebtedness to experimental dance of the early-to-mid sixties, in which the basic materials and meaning of dance were scrutinized. For instance, in the "new" dance of Yvonne Rainer and other dancers and choreographers associated with the Judson Dance Theater (and their precedent in the

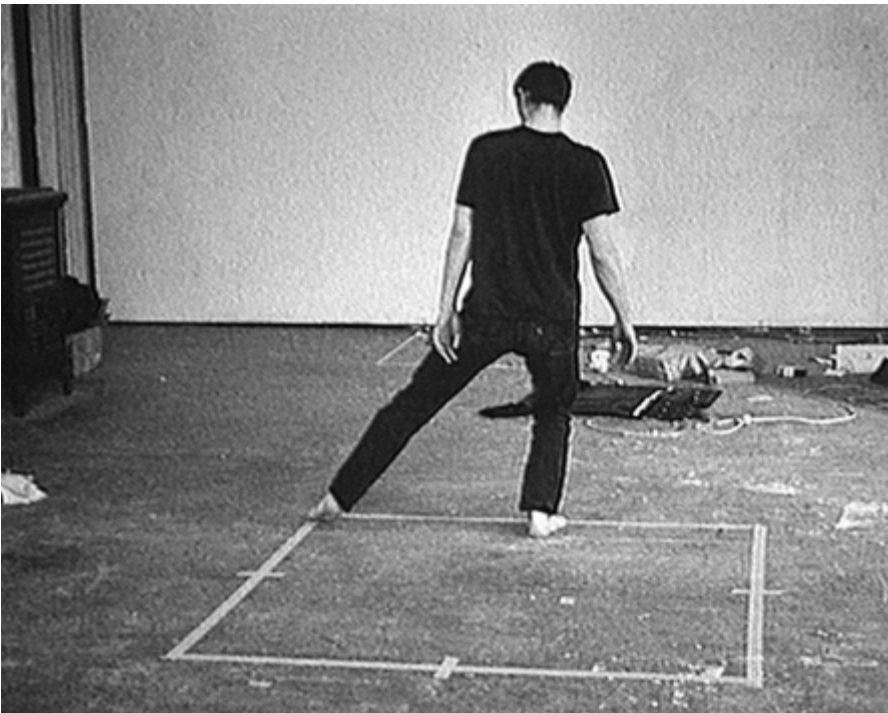


fig. 1.6

Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square, 1967–68. 16 mm film, black and white, sound, approx. 10 mins. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

workshops of Ann Halprin and Merce Cunningham), theatrical and balletic movement were renounced in favor of ordinary, workaday gestures (i.e., walking, lifting objects, gesturing). Robert Morris, among other visual artists, participated in Judson performances, and a link between this reductive, antiexpressive dance aesthetic and the “new” sculpture (namely minimalism) of the sixties was perceived—as Rainer herself argued in a now famous essay.²⁴

Beyond important associations with contemporaneous sculpture, however, experimental dance of the sixties realizes a very different idea of performance itself. In addition to a dispassionate approach to the performing body, in new dance, elements conventionally thought to function outside of the “event” proper—that is, scores, choreography, and documentation—were introduced within performance, displayed or executed during the live event itself.²⁵ For example, in the first performance given under the aegis of the Judson Dance Theater, “Concert of Dance [#1],” a number of dances explicitly reflected upon choreographic notations and scores, moving them from the silent background to become the subject matter of dance. In one of these dances, Elaine Summers’s “Instant Chance,” a series of Styrofoam blocks were employed, each one representing a part of the score: shape determined the type of movement; color the speed; and number the rhythm. During the performance, the dancers threw the blocks in the air, following whatever instructions appeared with this “throw of the dice,” simultaneously creating and performing the dance.²⁶ Likewise, in Nauman’s films, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square* and *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*, the choreographic template—the taped, white square—is rendered visible, his body calling attention to its presence by tracing the square’s outlines during the performance, thus mapping and executing the performance at the same moment. Indeed all of Nauman’s Studio Films, with their focused execution of the tasks outlined in their titles, essentially constitute the display of a set of instructions. In other words,

they depict not simply the body but the choreographic score as well: what might be understood as the language of movement.²⁷

While the performative notation (i.e., the score) remains hidden in the Studio Films, it is explicitly visualized in a group of proposal pieces Nauman begins to create shortly afterward. In these works, rather than being alluded to or confined to the titles, the instruction is isolated, presented as the art object itself now realized in textual form. Mostly produced in 1968–69, these pieces consist simply of written (or dictated) texts that outline a set of conditions for another to follow, in some cases leading to fabricated objects or executed performances. For example, *Untitled* (1969), Nauman's submission to the exhibition "Art By Telephone," states the following:

Hire a dancer and have him phone me from the museum. (Female dancer is satisfactory).

The dancer is to carry out or perform the following instructions: the dancer should stand with his arms held straight like a T, with his legs crossed. He should hold the telephone between his legs. He should then jump up and down following the cadence I give him, for as long as he can until becoming too tired.

For the exhibition, the tape is to be played back on a fairly large screen monitor placed in about the same location as the conversation takes place.

(Probably an office or a phone booth.)

During the exhibition, Nauman dictated the instructions via telephone to a museum staff member, who then carried out the performance, which was recorded and subsequently replayed on a video monitor for the remainder of the show. The final "work" thus exists in two parts: simultaneously as realized performance and the textual directions—which may be repeated, it is inferred, in other contexts and at other points in time. Such an iterative

structure is, in fact, inherent in the performative, which, instead of being a singular occurrence or unique expression of mind, represents a public and *ritualized* act. What makes the creation of a promise possible, for example, Austin maintains, is the preexistence of a conventional procedure that can be *repeated*. Each single instance of a promise thus constitutes a reiteration. Jacques Derrida describes this condition as “a general citationality—or rather a general iterability—without which,” he notes, “there would not even be a ‘successful’ performative.”²⁸ Accordingly, by figuring performance in the mode of an instruction, Nauman suggests that its meaning is not exhausted at the moment of a single execution, such as the performance for the “Art by Telephone” exhibition. In contrast, it ensures and anticipates *many* potential moments—what Judith Butler describes as the performative’s “condensed historicity”—that collectively determine the work.²⁹

While the *Untitled* proposal actually yielded an executed performance, others made by Nauman at the same time are far more ambiguous, some even flouting the feasibility of any physical elaboration due to the extreme or outright impossible conditions outlined within. For example, one *Untitled* piece from 1969 begins “A person enters and lives in a room for a long time—a period of years or a lifetime. . . .”³⁰ Similarly absurd is the mandate to “Drill a hole about a mile into the earth and drop a microphone to within a few feet of the bottom. . . .”³¹ In another example, entitled *French Piece*, the implicit ambivalence is clearly recognized by the artist, who rather than leaving it up to interpretation, instructs that the works (in this case, a pair of sculptures) “may be made.”³²

The instruction or proposal artwork is, of course, not unique to Nauman, as its existence preceded him and, as the sixties progressed, it becomes a key strategy for a range of artists. The questions and theoretical dilemmas Nauman’s proposals present were inaugurated by others; thus many influences and precedents could profitably be explored, as Liz Kotz has recently demonstrated in an important essay on the “event score” in

fluxus art and other practices.³³ But here I do not want to trace the origin of the proposal work or its multiple manifestations, or Nauman's reception of like-minded precedents. My interests are instead with a more circumscribed, critical issue, one that nonetheless transcends the limited purview of Nauman's art. Often in discussions of proposal artworks of the sixties, the key interpretive question hinges upon whether or not the instructions generate *tangible* forms (such as built objects or executed actions), as in the examples of Nauman's proposals cited above, some of which clearly cannot be made. Materiality is seen to be contingent upon their existence as *other* than textual; otherwise, as language, they are relegated to the realm of disembodied ideas or linguistic self-reference. In fact, in the historical reception, the textual proposal is often offered as an example of the reductivist tendencies of orthodox conceptual art, demonstrating its desire to completely displace the sensible aspects of the artwork by language alone—thereby implying that a complete isolation of the linguistic is possible.

If we consider these instructions through the logic of the performative utterance, however, the very legitimacy of these questions—and their value as a means of distinguishing and categorizing objects—is put into doubt. In the domain of speech-act theory, an utterance does not necessarily have to result in a visibly executed task but may assume more subtle manifestations such as a change of heart or mind. Bakhtin describes this as “a silent responsive understanding.” Furthermore, such responses do not necessarily have to occur simultaneously with the utterance but may manifest themselves at any time.³⁴ “Sooner or later,” he writes, “what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the *subsequent speech or behavior* of the listener.”³⁵ In this case, the constructive nature of the response (for Austin, the “force” of the performative) constitutes “actively responsive understanding with delayed action.” In other words, in the interpretive context of the speech-act, whether an utterance prompts visible acts (a thing being built, a performance performed) or the more

ambiguous outcome of “silent responsive understanding,” the *causal* nature of language is nonetheless present.³⁶ In either case, language is understood as a process of engagement or intersubjective negotiation, not removed from but fully involved with the material world.³⁷

ALTHOUGH THE PRECEDING discussion offers a methodological reorientation for understanding the engagement of Nauman’s art with the problematic of language, the conceit of this essay is that such an approach maintains a historical basis, grounded in the shifting fortunes of language (and communication) in the heady years of the late sixties. In a period marked by political upheaval and social unrest, the need to identify the relationship between the realm of human action and larger institutional forces (including language) became more acute, gaining a sense of historical urgency and social responsibility. In addition, with the quickening pace of the “information society,” the very purview of language expanded, viewed as a potential model not just of representation or signification but of *social life* itself.³⁸ Theoretical formations once confined to the context of academic debate gained alternative imperatives, capable of expressing broader social realities. Within this scenario, the limitations of structuralism were more acutely felt. While structuralism had made crucial contributions in the philosophical questioning of “the subject” and consciousness, as the decade progressed, a growing chorus of dissent objected to its perceived *elimination*, rather than simple *critique*, of the subject. “Structural linguistics deliberately set up roadblocks barring access to the subject,” writes François Dosse, in an intellectual history of the movement. “This was the price for the split from psychologism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, for everyone who embraced the structural paradigm.”³⁹ Saussurean semiotics is a prime example, as it contains no place for the subject who *uses* language. Moreover, the referent—or the material reality to which signs refer—is excluded in favor of endless and, some would argue, indulgent self-reference of signifiers. Saussure’s theory, in fact,

actively dismisses the role of the referent, maintaining that the whole of signification is located within the sign—that is, the relationship between the signified and the signifier—and as such, in the absence of the referent. As a result, there is limited exploration of the connection between signs and material reality or the immanence of reality itself, as Wittgenstein demonstrates in his notion of the “language-game,” where the meaning of words is contingent upon the subject’s association of them with broader cultural knowledge and experience.⁴⁰ How, Wittgenstein questions, can an entire set of criteria or elements be properly distinguished as wholly *external* to language, as “context,” when they are immanent to its functioning?

The relevance of these developments to Nauman’s art may not necessarily be obvious, but they begin to take on greater significance if one considers telling signs in his work of a preoccupation with what structuralism largely ignores and what speech-act or enunciation theory attempts to understand, namely, the *subjectivity* of language. Nauman’s interest in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*—leading to his appropriation of the philosopher’s language-game, “a rose has no teeth,” for a sculpture of the same name—is but one explicit example. But there are others, revealing a more systemic engagement with the problematic of the subject and language in Nauman’s practice.

Consider the following four works: the first is the 1968 proposal *Performance Slightly Crouched*, which begins, “You must hire a dancer to perform the following exercises each day. . . .”⁴¹ The second is the sculptural work *First Poem Piece* (fig. 1.7), also from 1968, consisting of a steel plate engraved with a grid, over which are inscribed variations of the phrase “You, May, Not, Want, To, Be, Here (Hear).” Third are two related, text-based drawings from 1972–73 titled *Sugar Ragus* (fig. 1.8), a palindromic phrase that possesses no obvious meaning. Last is the video work from 1985 *Good Boy Bad Boy* (see fig. 2.5), in which side-by-side monitors play two videotapes, one depicting a man and the other a woman, both chanting the same succession of interrelated phrases, although not

fig. 1.7

First Poem Piece, 1968. Steel,
approx. $\frac{1}{2} \times 60 \times 60$ in. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.



in unison: “I was a good boy. You were a good boy. We were good boys.
I was a good girl. You were a good girl. We were good girls. . . .”
and so on.

Differences—of medium, technique, and even the nature of the writing—are clearly in evidence. But less obvious are their similarities, namely, that they all contain directive or imperative verbs, calling out to the viewer/reader/listener: “You.”⁴² In other examples, across the spectrum of media, such a grammatical structure recurs, from the drawing *Please/Pay/Attention/Please* (fig. 1.9) to the neon sign *One Hundred Live and Die* (fig. 1.10), the latter with its string of messages, “Live and Die. Die and Die.



Shit and Die. . . .” In both cases, the linguistic urgency of the proverbial pointing finger, calling out to “YOU,” is realized through the use of directive verbs indicating “you pay attention”; “you piss and die.” In fact, throughout Nauman’s practice, statements of address, assertions, demands, and commands abound, a verbal play so ubiquitous that it cannot be merely coincidental. We are plaintively inveighed, as in the 1973 drawing to “Placate My Art”, or simply ordered as in the lithograph of the same year to “Pay Attention Motherfuckers.”

In these examples, the statements are not just language but specifically pieces of *communication*: relay points between subjects who speak,

fig. 1.8

Sugar Ragus, 1972. Pencil on paper, 18 × 24 in. Courtesy Bruce Nauman.

PLEASE

PAY

ATTENTION

PLEASE

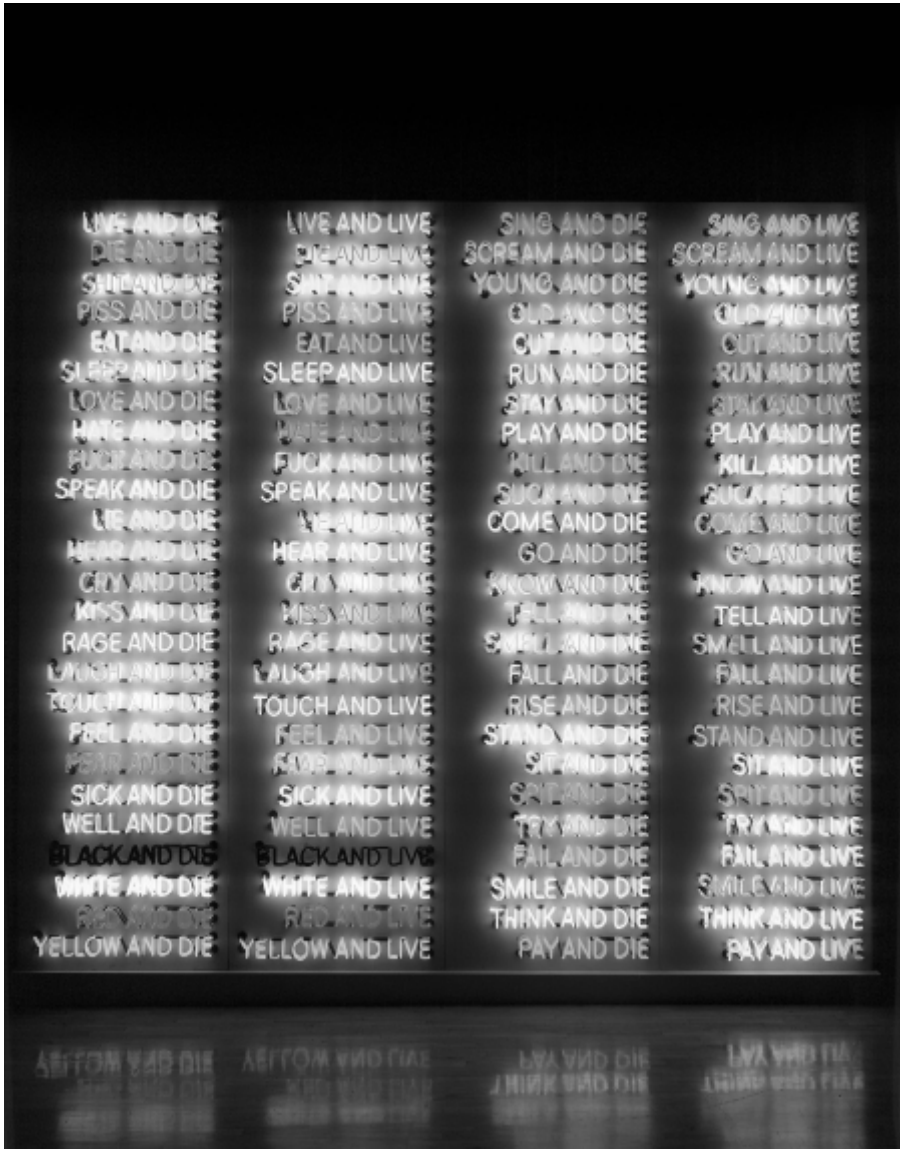


fig. 1.9
Please/Pay/Attention/Please, 1973.
 Collage and Letraset, 27½ × 27½ in.

fig. 1.10
One Hundred Live and Die, 1984.
 Neon tubing with clear glass tubing on
 metal monolith, 118 × 132½ × 21 in.
 Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery,
 New York.

listen, understand, do not understand, and respond. In *Sugar Ragus*, in fact, the structure of linguistic call-and-response figures quite literally. At first glance, the nonsensical phrase seems to reference nothing, but as Nauman explains, it “comes from an old college football cheer.” He continues,

Some guy used to get up in the stands and yell, “Give me an ‘R’”—and everybody would give him an ‘R.’ After spelling out the rest of the letters “R-A-G-U-S” in the same manner, he would say, “What’s that spell? What’s that spell?” and the crowd yelled back, “Ragus!” Then he’d say, “What’s that spell backwards?” and everybody would yell, “Sugar!” I don’t know how the cheer started, but that’s where I got it from.⁴³

Following the speakers’ directives, the respondents echo the requested messages, performing the ritual of the cheer, which essentially constitutes a social pact between participants.⁴⁴ Through this back-and-forth relay, the cheer is produced, its existence contingent upon the mutual participation of onlookers and cheer “leaders.” But in addition to the imperative verb and dialogical structure, the four examples described above reveal something else—namely, an extensive use of the personal pronoun. This is most explicitly evident in *Good Boy Bad Boy* (and in *World Peace Projected*, to draw upon an earlier example), where the two actors recite a dialogue composed of a series of related phrases in conjunction with the linguistic shifters “I,” “You,” and “We”: “I’m alive. You’re alive. We’re alive. This is our life. I live the good life. You live the good life. We live the good life. This is the good life. I have work. You have work. . . .”

For philosopher Emile Benveniste, the personal pronoun is more than a grammatical feature, representing what he calls *deixis*, linguistic elements that define a relationship to a subject.⁴⁵ “The personal pronouns provide the first step in this bringing out of subjectivity in language,” he writes.

Other classes of pronouns that share the same status depend in their turn upon these pronouns. These other classes are the indica-

tors of deixis, the demonstratives, adverbs, and adjectives, which organize the spatial and temporal relationships around the “subject” taken as referent: “this, here, now,” and their numerous correlatives, “that, yesterday, last year, tomorrow,” etc. They have in common the feature of being defined only with respect to the instances of discourse in which they occur, that is, in dependence upon the I which is proclaimed in the discourse.⁴⁶

In deictic speech, language is implicitly involved with the subject: both a narrator who performs words and the listener/reader who receives and responds to them. Even seemingly impersonal adverbs, such as “here” and “now” betray a connection to a subject by virtue of expressing a relation to a specific time or circumstance. Similarly, in Nauman’s *First Poem Piece*, with its invocation of “you” and the fluctuation between the homonymic coupling of “hear” and “here,” the audible grasp of the utterance is merged with a spatiotemporal marker: “you may not want to be here (hear).”

Collectively, the personal pronouns and the present verb tense belong to what Benveniste calls “discourse”—the subjective, lived time of language—as opposed to “history,” which isolates it from the subject and from the ongoing rhythms of time. “We shall define historical narration as the mode of utterance that excludes every ‘autobiographical’ linguistic form,” Benveniste writes. “The historian will never say *je* or *tu* or *maintenant*, because he will never make use of the formal apparatus of discourse, which resides primarily in the relationship of the persons *je: tu*.”⁴⁷

Accordingly, the dialogue spoken in *Good Boy Bad Boy* is based upon the intersubjective relationship of the linguistic “I” and “you.” Furthermore, the speakers, each occupying a separate monitor, direct their messages outward, not just to each other but implicitly to the viewer, who also assumes the place of the subject “you” in the exchange. Each subsequent viewer, therefore, represents another potential “you,” produced at the time

of encounter. Similarly, in *First Poem Piece*, the word “here” suggests not a *fixed* place and time, but the *situation* in which the beholder encounters it. Every new interaction with “now,” for example, results in another present and with “we” another group of subjects. Such moments are infinitely repeatable. As in the performative—which, to recall Derrida’s observation, operates within a structure of “general iterability”—in Benveniste’s “dis-course,” presence is eternal.

In *First Poem Piece*, as in Nauman’s *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room*, I, as the viewer, may partake in a singular experience that is crucial to the meaning of the piece but it is not necessarily a unique experience. There are many “heres,” there are infinite “nows.” Likewise, in Nauman’s first large-scale, sculptural installation, *Performance Corridor* (fig. 1.11), there are many “performances.”

Consisting of a simple structure, crafted from two parallel pieces of wallboard supported by a crude wooden frame, Nauman’s *Performance Corridor*, following large-scale minimalist sculpture, depends upon the beholder’s direct participation for its completion. Encountering the sculpture, the viewer must physically enter its tight space in order to “see” it, taking the place of the artist as the performer. The resulting performance, however, is one that has been made before, as the structure was originally erected as a prop for a videotaped performance entitled *Walk With Contrapposto* (fig. 1.12), which Nauman executed in the privacy of his studio. In the video, due to the angle of the recording camera, only the interior of the corridor and a blurry image of the back of the artist ambulating down its length can be seen. What the video reveals, however, is that the dimensions of the *Corridor*’s width were originally determined by the spatial arc of Nauman’s swaying hips, which are barely contained within the narrow opening: a claustrophobic effect reinforced by the tightness of the camera shot. In the subsequent exhibition of the prop as a sculpture, the artist’s performance is essentially repeated by the viewer—his/her actions physically limited by the confines of the space.⁴⁸ In other words,

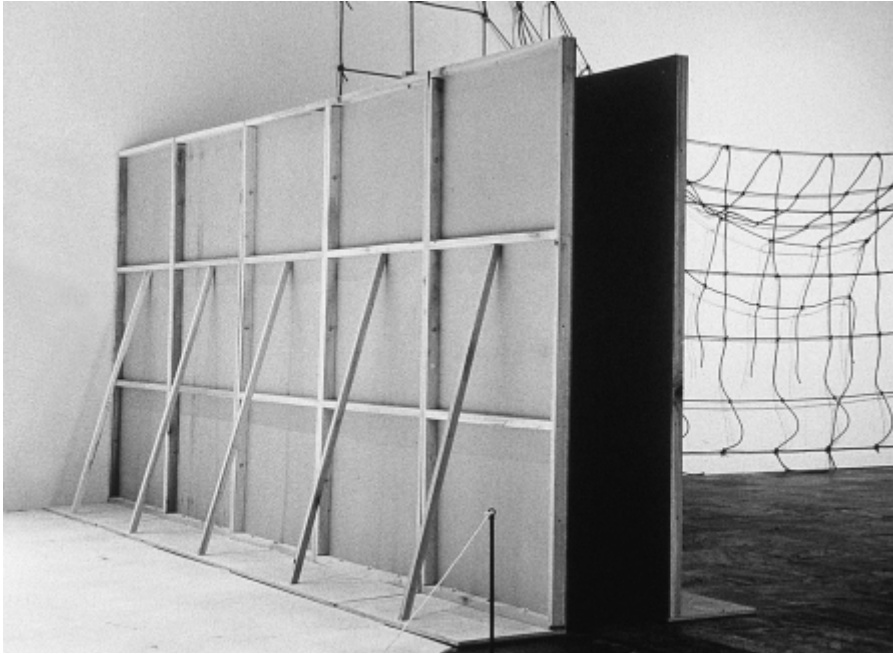


fig. 1.11

Performance Corridor, 1969.
Wallboard, wood, 96 × 240 × 20 in.
Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.



fig. 1.12

Walk with Contrapposto, 1968.
Videotape, black and white, sound,
60 mins. to be repeated continuously.
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix,
New York.

the *Corridor's* meaning issues not from an individual act of bodily intervention, performed by the viewer in the presence of the artwork, but from a compression of many moments: the past traces of Nauman's "original" performance; their repetition in video; and their present and future reiterations by the audience.

What results is a complex, circular temporality that moves across and through space and time, a notion of time distinct from that predicated upon bodily presence but characteristic of "the linguistic organization" of time discussed in Benveniste's theory of subjective language. In other words, the sculpture is a performance not in the singular (*the* event, *the* act, *the* performance) but in the plural (performative, repetitious, and ritualistic) in which any one enactment contains and anticipates traces of others.⁴⁹ "It was just a white corridor and all you could really do was just walk in and walk out and it really limited the kinds of things that you could do," Nauman remarks.

It was hard to do. Because I don't like the idea of free manipulation. Like you put a bunch of stuff out there and let people do what they want with it. I really had some more specific kinds of experiences in mind and, *without having to write out a list* of what they should do, I wanted to make kind of play experiences unavailable, just by the preciseness of the area.⁵⁰

In Nauman's comment, the *physical constraints* of the object are viewed as functioning like "a list"—that is, textual "instruction"—without the necessity of incorporating actual elements of language. As such, underlying the linguistic object and performance installation is a shared operational logic: that of performativity. While this connection is highly subtle in the case of the *Performance Corridor*, it figures more explicitly in a series of architectural sculptures Nauman creates in the early seventies, in which sculptural elements are appended by extensive pieces of writing.

In these installations, which include *Left or Standing/Standing or Left Standing* (1971), *Floating Room* (1972), and *Body Pressure* (1974), texts are introduced within the actual space of the installation (framed and mounted as posters or drawings) and sometimes printed as handouts or exhibition announcements to be distributed to the audience. *Left or Standing*, for example, is composed of two parts: an environmental installation and an accompanying text, originally printed in the form of a brochure. In the installation an empty room, illuminated with intense, yellow fluorescent lights that run down the ceiling, is accessed by two narrow corridors, lit with incandescent light, which abut the central room. The accompanying text is as follows:

LEFT OR STANDING

His precision and accuracy
suggesting clean cuts, leaving
a vacancy, a slight physical
depression as though I had been
in a vaguely uncomfortable place
for a not long but undeterminable
period; not waiting.

STANDING OR LEFT STANDING

His preciseness and acuity left
small cuts on the tips of my
fingers or across the backs of
my hands without any need to
sit or otherwise withdraw.

Less straightforward or didactic than the artist's earlier proposal pieces, *Left or Standing*, as with other installation writings, betrays literary qualities in the crafting of language as well as in the use of the prose form. Visually, the writings are also more complex; linguistic signs are presented in specific formal arrangements and careful consideration is given to

paragraph or sentence spacing, typeface, graphic style, and, in some instances, the color of the paper on which they are printed. Despite these details of design and rhetorical style, however, Nauman nonetheless imagines the writings to function as “instructions”—some abstractly, some more emphatically—suggesting activities for the viewer to execute or certain physical and physiological responses to experience. For example, the text *Body Pressure*, which is mounted on the wall of its installation, begins:

Press as much of the front surface of
your body (palms in or out, left or right cheek)
against the wall as possible.

Press very hard and concentrate.

Form an image of yourself (suppose you
had just stepped forward) on the
opposite side of the wall pressing
back against the wall very hard.

The writing continues in this fashion, suggesting that the viewer concentrate upon “tension in the muscles,” “fleshy deformations that occur under pressure,” “body odors,” and so on, concluding “This may become a very erotic exercise.” In describing these writings, Nauman once remarked upon their seemingly paradoxical combination of directness and obliqueness: “What has been happening lately is that I have been allowing for the fact that the instructions seem to be becoming very specific.” Nauman states,

but the information about the piece is becoming more loose, more vague and open. I think it has to do with the written instructions. Does that make sense? I think it is almost like reading Robbe-Grillet: you come to a point where he has repeated what he said earlier, but it means something altogether different, because even though

he has changed only two words, they have changed the whole meaning about what he is talking about.⁵¹

With a telling reference to Alain Robbe-Grillet, the proponent of the “new novel,” which, with its excessive descriptions of the minutiae of the physical world and experiences, often yields a dizzying sense of estrangement from them, Nauman describes the relationship of his texts to the experiential effects of the physical installations accompanying them. Yet because of their extraordinary phenomenological energy—such as the nausea-inducing, glaring yellow in *Left or Standing*—the critical literature often fails to comment on the writings at all, focusing instead upon first-hand accounts of the physical and physiological unmooring the environments yield. In a recent recreation of *Left or Standing* (fig. 1.13), however, the equivalent role of the writing and physical structure was rendered explicit, as the text was transferred from the page to two video monitors placed directly outside the yellow room, functioning as an introduction (or instruction) for the beholder. Regarding another text-installation, *The Consummate Mask of Rock*, comprising an arrangement of limestone cubes and a lengthy prose piece, Nauman himself once observed, “The poem and the stones carry equal weight. I worked on the poem first, then the idea of the stone. At some point they came to mean the same thing to me. There was an analog.”⁵²

In addition to the blurring of perceptual tasks—of reading, seeing, experiencing, and feeling—Nauman’s text-installations seem to say something about the function of language itself. In a sense, language is *spatialized*: literally, by realizing “writing” as a visual object and an element within a physical environment, but also figuratively, as language emerges from the linguistic system into the space of lived experience, becoming a means of address and interaction. From the beginning, Nauman’s art insists upon the meaningfulness of this process. If *Get Out* does so most economically—where speech, through sound, seemingly “shapes” otherwise empty space, while aggressively confronting the viewer—*World Peace (Projected)*



fig. 1.13

Left or Standing, Standing or Left Standing, 1971/1999. Wallboard, yellow fluorescent lights, 2 monitors, 1 videodisc player, 1 videodisc, text.

Dimensions variable. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

does so most thoroughly. Not only is the viewer placed at the center of a chorus of voices, and thus physically within “dialogical” space, but the speech-act is also explicitly thematized. First there is the content of the spoken phrases based upon the coupling of “talk” and “listen,” perfectly condensing the nature of the utterance as language that speaks and responds. But additionally, within the various scenes, instances of performed language are depicted: from lecturing, to speaking in front of a set of microphones, to signing. Language here is not only public but social, raising the question of the “other,” or of who receives it. In short, the possibility of world peace is tied not simply to the meaning of words but to their delivery, an ongoing linguistic negotiation between subjects.

NAUMAN ONCE REMARKED that what interested him were the “functional edges of language,” where, he elaborates, it ceases to be a “useful tool for communication.”⁵³ In a similar vein, Bakhtin writes, “The desire to make one’s speech understood is only an abstract aspect of the speaker’s concrete and total speech plan.”⁵⁴ Communicative transparency is forsaken for the indeterminacy of the response. To be *understood* does not necessarily take precedent. This is perhaps why, throughout Nauman’s art, the potential for linguistic *miscommunication*, even outright failures or lies, is preserved and encouraged. “I was interested in the idea of lying, or not telling the truth,” he notes, speaking of the little miscues that populate the lengthy titles of some of his early sculptures.⁵⁵ *Wax Impressions of the Knees of Five Famous Artists* (fig. 1.14), for example, is neither made of wax nor does it represent the marks of the knees of “five famous artists.” To revisit the underlying theme of this essay, the question becomes, What is the significance of such an accounting of language in which language is viewed not as a rational means of transmission but as an uncontainable field of utterances? “Language is a very powerful tool,” Nauman once remarked, adding, “It is considered more significant now than at any other time in history and it is given more importance than any of our faculties.”⁵⁶

As this essay has emphasized, the issue of language gained prominence during the sixties due to a number of historical and social reasons. One of them, mentioned only in passing, was the rise of media culture, resulting in a widespread interest in theories of communication, linguistic coding, cybernetics, and so on. In this new technocratic society, the very circulation and control of knowledge and information become central: language, in this regard, is not neutral but represents a potentially contestatory activity as well as a source of power. The speech-act, which approaches language as a social agent—as opposed to the semiotic sign, where language represents a formal system—provides a particularly productive model with which to account for the “game” that communication has become.⁵⁷ The investigation of the speech-act by Nauman’s art may thus be viewed as a subtle form of sociocultural commentary based specifically within the conditions of historical experience.

This is a topic, however, that moves beyond the purview of the current essay.⁵⁸ Instead, I want to conclude with a different possibility, one that touches upon the immediate concerns and underlying themes of this book. Perhaps if language is understood through the terms of the speech-act, we can apprehend why Nauman chooses so often *not* to speak. If the function of the artist’s interview, as a genre, is to clarify and illuminate—to communicate via words what visual representation itself leaves to ambiguity—to do so may betray the very ethos of Nauman’s art in which the complex and messy nature of the utterance is left to play. Nauman’s screaming rant of “get out of my mind” may be a not so subtle clue and, in the long run, not so dissimilar from his “silence”: to find meaning, look not to his words but to the space in which they are encountered and the responses they engender.



fig. 1.14

Wax Impressions of the Knees of Five Famous Artists, 1966. Fiberglass, polyester resin, 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 85 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 2 $\frac{3}{4}$.

Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

NOTES

I want to thank Stefano Basilico, Judith Rodenbeck, and Frazer Ward for their useful comments and suggestions in preparation of this essay.

1. Recent scholarship has significantly challenged the simplicity of this formulation. See, in particular, Elizabeth W. Kotz, "Words On Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Read as Art: Postwar Media Poetics From Cage to Warhol," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2002). It should also be emphasized that equally overlooked is the heterogeneity of language formations *within* conceptual art itself—an issue explored at length in Benjamin Buchloh's important essay, "Conceptual Art: From an Aesthetics of Administration to a Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Summer, 1991): 105–143. For further discussion of the plurality of conceptual art, see also Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

2. *Semiology*, a general science of signs, and *structuralism*, a method of analyzing cultural and social phenomena based on linguistics, are not only closely related but, some would argue, interchangeable. Jonathan Culler writes, "It would not be wrong to suggest that structuralism and semiology are identical. The existence of the two terms is in part due to historical accident, as if each discipline had first drawn certain concepts and methods from structural linguistics, thereby becoming a mode of structural analysis, and only then had realized that it had become or was fast becoming a branch of that semiology which Saussure had envisaged." Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 6.

3. In the essay, "The Problem of Speech Genres," written in 1952–53 (the basis of an unrealized book-length study, *The Genres of Speech*), Bakhtin most thoroughly examines

language as speech. As the editors write in the introduction to the volume in which an English translation appears, Bakhtin's essay emphasizes "the difference between Saussurean linguistics and language conceived as living dialogue." See M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). See also *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). For an excellent overview of Bakhtin's writings and the many concepts and neologisms he developed, see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). The following discussion is indebted to the authors' insightful analysis and explanation of the complexities of Bakhtin's thought.

4. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 69.

5. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger, trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1972).

6. *Ibid.*, 14 (emphasis added).

7. *Ibid.*, 15. In Saussurean semiology, linguistic signs are defined in terms of a series of differences, and communication is subject to a formal model, realized in maps and diagrams. For Bakhtin, however, such an approach is fundamentally flawed. He writes, "Courses in general linguistics (even serious ones like Saussure's) frequently present graphic-schematic depictions of the two partners in speech communication—the speaker and the listener (who perceives speech)—and provide diagrams of the active speech processes of the speaker and the corresponding passive processes of the listener's perception and understanding of the speech. One cannot say that these diagrams are false or that they do not correspond to certain aspects of reality. But when they are put forth as the actual whole of speech communication, they become a science fiction." Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 68.

8. To explain further, whereas in Saussure's system, signification arises from the fabric of words as signs, in Bakhtin's dialogism, meaning is a result of these signs being put into use—in the *singular* instance in which the utterance occurs. Importantly, however, while Bakhtin stresses the significance of the individual utterance, it is neither a personal nor psychological concept; dialogical language is explicitly *extrapersonal* in that, as subjects, we enter into a preexisting "language collective," and thus are formed within discourse.

9. For an excellent detailed analysis of the shifting status of structuralism in the sixties—including the growing influence of speech-act philosophy and pragmatics—see François Dosse, *History of Structuralism: Volume 2, The Sign Sets, 1967–Present*, trans. Deborah Glassman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

10. In 1968, the first English translation of one of Bakhtin's books, *Rabelais and His World*, was published. In addition, during the same year, Bakhtin's "The Role of Games in Rabelais," an essay from the book, was included (in English translation) in a special issue of *Yale*

French Studies on the theme of "Game, Play, Literature" (no. 41, September, 1968, 124–132).

11. A notable exception is Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which, as Jane Livingston remarks, the artist read in its entirety, appropriating one of the philosopher's "language games" as the basis for the sculpture *A Rose Has No Teeth*. See Jane Livingston, "Bruce Nauman," in *Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965–1972*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1972): 13. For a discussion of Nauman's art and Wittgenstein's thought, see Jean Christophe Ammann, "Wittgenstein and Nauman," in the exhibition catalogue, *Bruce Nauman* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1986). See also Robert Storr, "Beyond Words," (WCR, 47–66) for a discussion of the relationship between verbal forms of language in Nauman's art and the linguistic play of Samuel Beckett, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Wittgenstein.

12. This is not to say that a convincing argument for a semiotic investigation in Nauman's art could not be made. Rather, my contention is that speech-act theory provides a valuable model with which to approach the specific functions of language in Nauman's practice. As will be explored in more detail below, language in Nauman's art is more often than not linked explicitly to a subject who uses (and receives) it—an aspect given little consideration in the structuralist or semiotic theory.

13. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 14 (emphasis added).

14. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics*, 133.

15. Referring to a series of prints from 1973, comprising the words "Perfect Door," "Perfect Odor," "Perfect Rodo," Nauman queries, "What is a 'perfect door' or a 'perfect odor?' Objects can be thought of as perfect in some way, so you might have a 'perfect door' in a specific situation. But a 'perfect odor' is something you just don't think about because that's not the right way to classify odors." See Christopher Cordes, "Talking with Bruce Nauman," p. 361 of this volume.

16. A similar process is employed in another group of sculptures, including *From Hand to Mouth* and *Henry Moore Bound to Fail*, that Nauman produces at the same time. In these works, idiomatic expressions (or "language-games") serve as the basis of generating material forms; however, in contrast to *Flour Arrangements*, these employ the outmoded vocabulary of figurative sculpture. In the following exchange from the *Arts* interview with Willoughby Sharp (reprinted in this volume on p. 118), Nauman comments on the relationship of these sculptures to language, in typically droll manner:

W. S.: What were you thinking about when you made *From Hand to Mouth*?

B. N.: Well, things like language games and making objects and how I could put those together. . . . I was very involved with making objects. But also at about that time I did *Flour Arrangements*. I did those to see what would happen in an unfamiliar situation. I took everything out of my studio so that *Flour Arrangements* became an activity which

I could do every day, and it was all I would allow myself to do for about a month. Sometimes it got pretty hard to think of different things to do every day.

17. For example, in an essay on Richard Serra, Benjamin Buchloh identifies Nauman's *Flour Arrangements* as one of "the first true process sculptures," along with Serra's *Scatter Piece* (1967) and *Splashing* (1968). See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in Richard Serra's Work," reprinted in his *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955–1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 414.

18. In this respect, while Nauman's extensive use of word play has precedent in dadaism, futurism, and early twentieth-century avant-garde poetry (as well as their respective revivals in postwar practices), an observation made repeatedly in the critical literature, it possesses a specific resonance in the context of linguistic debates of the sixties—a point discussed in more detail below.

19. The notion of the performative has also been employed to describe the reception of the Duchampian readymade as a nominational act or a declarative statement of artistic intentions. In particular, see Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). This performative interpretation of the readymade is the subject of debate between Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, and Thierry de Duve in the roundtable discussion, "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," (*October* 70, Fall, 1994; see especially pp. 134–136). Importantly, however, the potential for the performative to be understood in such terms—as an intentional, constituting consciousness—has itself been the subject of philosophical debate and critique. In separate writings, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler issue a convincing corrective, demonstrating that, far from a single act of will or an intentional declarative, the performative is a conventional procedure—that is, a *public* act, not a private expression of mind. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 307–330; Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988); and Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997). This point is emphasized further in the discussion below.

20. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962, 1975).

21. To explain further, the illocutionary performative suggests, as Austin writes, that "by saying something we do something" (*How to Do Things With Words*, 91, author's emphasis). The very delivery of the speech is the action (such as "I now pronounce you husband and wife"). In perlocutionary performatives, however, words are instrumentalized in order to produce some result. The utterance itself is not the same as the act—for example, acts of persuasion, in which through speech someone is convinced to perform an action.

22. This theoretical division is challenged by Michel Foucault in his various writings on criminality and punishment, insanity, and, particularly, his later work on sexuality. As John Rajch-

man insightfully observes, "The relationship between thought and modes of being was already at the center of [Foucault's] study of the anthropological theme in Kant's critical philosophy. This was also the question which led him to try to analyze the penal system on the basis of new techniques of the 'governance' of individuals—techniques which made criminality *as much an object of knowledge [savoir] as a way of being*" (emphasis added). Rajchman, "Foucault: the Ethic and the Work," in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 218.

23. In the art historical discourse, the period of the late sixties is often framed in terms of the development of two competing artistic paradigms: *performance* (concerned with the body, action, and enactment) and *conceptual art* (investigating discourse, ideas, and language). In recent scholarship, however, important challenges to the legitimacy of these categories have been raised. In particular, see Frazer Ward, "Some Relations Between Conceptual and Performance Art," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter, 1997): 36–40. See also note 33.

24. Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," in *Yvonne Rainer: Work 1961–1973*, The Nova Scotia Series: Source Materials of the Contemporary Arts, series ed. Kasper Koenig (Halifax: the Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), 63–69.

25. For example, Carrie Lambert makes a convincing argument for the complex and integral role of photography in Rainer's dances, thereby rethinking Rainer's later turn toward film as a logical extension of concerns first addressed in her dance activities. See her "Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*," *October* 89 (Summer, 1999): 87–112.

26. For further description of the dances in "Concert of Dance [#1]," as well as a valuable historical overview of the period of Judson experimental dance, see Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962–1964* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993).

27. The understanding of Nauman's performance films and videos as a visualization of the score is further reinforced in a number of related drawings. For example, in *Untitled (Beckett Walk Diagram II)* (1968–69), the paths, sequences, and directions of movement Nauman follows in the video *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)* (1968), are diagrammatically mapped with lines and arrows, accompanied by choreographic notations (such as "Right leg swings and steps"). In short, bodily actions are translated into linguistic (and other notational) signs.

28. Derrida, "Signature, Event Context," 325.

29. The complete relevant citation is as follows: "As utterances, [performatives] work to the extent that they are given in the form of a ritual, that is, repeated in time, and, hence, maintain a sphere of operation that is not restricted to the moment of the utterance itself. The illocutionary speech act performs its deed *at the moment* of the utterance, and yet to the

extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment. The 'moment' in ritual is a condensed historicity; it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance." Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 3 (author's emphasis).

30. See *Part I: Writings*, p. 55 in this volume, for the complete text.

31. See *Part I: Writings*, p. 50.

32. See Nauman's, "Notes and Projects," pp. 56–60, reprinted in this volume. Judith Rodenbeck suggested to me that Nauman's remark may be an implicit comment on, and thus "response" to, Lawrence Weiner's "statement," which has served as the framework for his work since 1969:

1. The artist may construct the piece.
2. The piece may be fabricated.
3. The piece need not be built.

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receivership upon the occasion of receivership.

The relationship of Nauman's proposal to Weiner's declaration is an interesting possibility, but it also raises questions about origins, influences, and the circulation of ideas (which seem to be endemic to any history of the period and, in particular, conceptual art) in that Weiner's statement, according to Benjamin Buchloh, was first published in the fall of 1968 in *Art News*, and then was republished in the catalogue for Seth Siegelaub's exhibition, "January 5–31, 1969." [See Anne Rorimer's entry on Lawrence Weiner for further information about Weiner's statement and the reference to Buchloh's time-frame, in the exhibition catalogue, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994), 222]. Nauman's *French Piece*, however, was also conceived in 1968, although it was not published until 1970, as part of the aforementioned "Notes and Projects" article which appeared in *Artforum*. Through the terms of Bakhtin's utterance—which is always responsive and thus always a posteriori—the question of origins may not, however, be as significant as the structure of exchange that is implied.

33. In an extensive analysis of the phenomenon of the instruction work, Liz Kotz argues that the "event score," as it was frequently called, represents an important legacy of John Cage's experimental music and notational systems, providing a model later elaborated on by numerous artists in the sixties. In addition to providing a valuable, detailed history of the form's appearance, Kotz situates the origin of the artwork as instruction within the context of "an expanded concept of music," complicating the relationship of language formations and performance structures. Additionally, Kotz discusses the significance of the event scores' ambivalent status ("[as] musical scores, visual art, poetic texts, performance instructions, or proposals for some kind of action or procedure"), as well as their reiterative structure. Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," *October* 95 (Winter, 2001): 55–90.

34. Furthermore, to recall Judith Butler's observation, even in the case of the illocutionary performative (in which the utterance and act are coterminous), given that the "moment is ritualized" (thus itself containing prior moments), there is, she writes, "a failure to achieve a totalized form in any of [the performative's] given instances." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 3.

35. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 69 (emphasis added).

36. Moreover, to recall the discussion above regarding the relationship of Nauman's *French Piece* proposal to Lawrence Weiner's "statement," also to be considered are other possible responses the proposal may effect, ones that do not necessarily entail carrying out the instruction's described actions. Instead, as "work utterances," as Bakhtin writes, the "active responsive understanding . . . can assume various forms: educational influence on the readers, persuasion of them, critical responses, influence on followers and successors, and so on. . . . The work is a link in the chain of speech communion. Like the rejoinder in dialogue, it is related to other work-utterances, both those to which it responds and those that respond to it" Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 75–76.

37. To cite Morson and Emerson, in reference to Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, "for any individual or social entity, we cannot properly separate existence from the ongoing process of communication." In other words, "being" and communication, experience and language are inseparable; or, as the authors note, citing Bakhtin, "*To be means to communicate.*" Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics*, 50.

38. This development was anticipated in the early sixties; for example, philosopher Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere—structured linguistically, as intersubjective, communicative exchange—was first published in 1962. Of course, Habermas's formulation, although incorporating the critical turn to language, largely appropriates the latter for a continuation of Enlightenment terms, in that linguistic exchange is viewed as a rational act. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Bürger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

39. Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, 47

40. According to Wittgenstein, "context" is not outside of but internal to the functioning system of signs, as his language-games underscore. For example, in the language-game "A rose has no teeth," the sense (or non-sense) of the phrase is dependent upon the subject's associations of the words with experience: namely, the fact that flowers never have teeth.

41. See "Notes and Projects," p.59 of this volume for the complete text.

42. Nauman describes *Good Boy Bad Boy* in such terms. He states: "*Good Boy Bad Boy* is addressed to you. Also the idea the television, the image being almost life-size, with only the head, makes a much more immediate, direct connection. And the idea that the words were spoken information was important. . . . It says 'I, we, you. . . .' It involves you by talking to you. 'I was a good boy—you were a good boy.' It is not a conversation, you are not allowed to talk,

but you are involved because someone uses that form of address." Cited from the interview with Chris Dercon, reprinted in this book, p. 306.

43. Cordes, "Talking with Bruce Nauman," p. 359.

44. Moreover, a cheer itself represents a vernacular form of language that (as Bakhtin might emphasize) constitutes a speech genre given scant critical attention in traditional linguistics, which focuses instead upon only certain, "elevated" types of linguistic expression, such as literature.

45. Writing in the late sixties against the tide of structuralism, Benveniste reintroduces the subject as a central problematic of language. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971). I want to thank Leah Dickerman who first suggested I consider Benveniste's theories in relation to my earlier work on Nauman's art and linguistic subjectivity.

46. *Ibid.*, 226.

47. *Ibid.*, 206–207.

48. While the viewer does not literally repeat Nauman's every move—that is, his exaggerated, slow gait—he or she nonetheless follows the same action: walking in and out of the corridor. The relevant distinction would be in comparison to minimalist sculpture, such as Robert Morris's large-scale structures or Carl Andre's floor pieces, in which the viewer chooses his or her own path of interaction. Nauman frequently disdains such "free participation," emphasizing the need to create forms of control that limit interaction.

49. In contrast, in the critical literature, what is often claimed to distinguish performance—or to define its "ontology," as scholar Peggy Phelan has argued—is its relationship to a temporality of ephemeral presence. In this modality of time, the present is not only irretrievable, but unique. Phelan, "The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction," in her *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146–166. As such, photographic documentation is always relegated as properly outside performance, its illegitimate offshoot incapable of capturing *the* performance. Nauman's *Performance Corridor*, however, undermines such a structure, in that the "original" performance itself is *reproduction*, that is, a videotape.

50. Lorraine Sciarra, "Bruce Nauman," reprinted in this book, p. 167 (emphasis added).

51. Jan Butterfield, "Bruce Nauman: The Center of Yourself," p. 181 of this volume.

52. See WCR no. 238.

53. He notes, "I think the point where language starts to break down as a useful tool for communication is the same edge where poetry or art occurs. . . ." Christopher Cordes, "Talking with Bruce Nauman," p. 354, this volume.

54. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 69.

55. Michele de Angelus, "Bruce Nauman," reprinted in this volume, p. 250.

56. Cordes, "Talking with Bruce Nauman," p. 353.

57. See Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-modern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). In the Introduction to the latter, Fredric Jameson writes: "In a more general way, the linguistic dimensions of what used to be called French structuralism and the seemingly more static possibilities of a dominant semiotics have in recent years been corrected and augmented by a return to pragmatics, to the analysis of language situations and games, and of language itself as an *unstable exchange between its speakers*, whose utterances are now seen less as a process of the transmission of information or messages, or in terms of some network of signs or even signifying systems, than as . . . the 'taking of tricks,' the trumping of a communicational adversary, an essentially *conflictual relationship between tricksters*—and not as a well-regulated and noise-free 'passing of tokens from hand to hand'" (pp. x–xi, emphases added).

58. For an investigation of Nauman's art in relation to the emergence of technocratic society in the sixties, see Janet Kraynak, "Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman's Environments," *Grey Room* 10 (Winter, 2003) 22–45.

PART I: WRITINGS

1. **CODIFICATION, 1966**

1. Personal appearance and skin
2. Gestures
3. Ordinary actions such as those concerned with eating and drinking
4. Traces of activity such as footprints and material objects
5. Simple sounds—spoken and written words
Metacommunication messages

Feedback

Analogic and digital codification

Written in 1966, the original text for *Codification* no longer exists; a transcription was reproduced in Marcia Tucker's essay, "Bruce Nauman," in the exhibition catalogue, *Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965 to 1972*. Jane Livingston and Marcia Tucker, eds., (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1972), 41.

2. AMPLIFIED TREE PIECE, 1970 AND UNTITLED, 1969

Sept. 69

Drill a hole about a mile into the earth and drop a microphone to within a few feet of the bottom. Mount the amplifier and speaker in a very large empty room and adjust the volume to make audible any sounds that may come from the cavity.

March 2, 70

Drill a hole into the heart of a large tree and insert a microphone. Seal the hole with cement. Mount the amplifier and speaker in an empty room and adjust the volume to make audible any sounds that might come from the tree.

BN

These two proposal pieces were Nauman's contribution to the exhibition, "Art in the Mind" at the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College (April 17–May 12, 1970). The exhibition, organized by Athena Spear, consisted only of the catalogue, which includes photocopied proposals, instructions, diagrams, and charts from the fifty invited artists. Unbound pages were also mounted "on walls of a well frequented corridor of the art building," as Spear writes in the catalogue; some of the works, she adds, "were executed by students of the Oberlin College Art Department" (n.p.).

3. *UNTITLED*, 1969

Hire a dancer and have him phone me from the museum. (Female dancer is satisfactory).

The dancer is to carry out or perform the following instructions: the dancer should stand with his arms held straight like a T, with his legs crossed. He should hold the telephone between his legs. He should then jump up and down following the cadence I give him, for as long as he can until becoming too tired.

For the exhibition, the tape is to be played back on a fairly large screen monitor placed in about the same location as the conversation takes place.

(Probably an office or a phone booth.)

Nauman's contribution to the exhibition "Art by Telephone" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (November 1–December 14, 1969) was this audio instruction piece. Nauman relayed the instructions via telephone to a museum staff member, who then carried them out. The catalogue of the exhibition consists of an LP recording of the participating artists describing or performing their works.

4. *UNTITLED*, 1969

Leave the Land Alone.

Nauman wrote this humorously terse proposal piece for an “earth art” exhibition (there is no record of specifically which one) in 1969. Nauman's instructions, which he recalls may have been telegraphed or otherwise mailed to the exhibition's organizers (the original text has been lost), were to be executed in skywriting. The piece, however, was never realized—perhaps for lack of funds or because it was not taken seriously.

5. *UNTITLED*, 1969

Part One

Hire a dancer to perform for 30 minutes each day of the exhibition the following exercise: At about the same time each day the guards will clear a large room allowing people to observe through the doors. The dancer, eyes front, avoiding audience contact, hands clasped behind his neck, elbows forward, walks about the room in a slight crouch—as though he were in a room 12 inches lower than his normal height—placing one foot directly in front of the other—heel touching toe—very slowly and deliberately: my rate is about 1 step each 2 seconds.

After 30 minutes the guards allow the people into room and the dancer leaves. The dancer must be a person of some professional presence capable of maintaining a large degree of anonymity.

I add this extra note of caution: I have worked on the exercise and it is difficult.

Do not make the mistake of hiring someone not physically and mentally equipped to undertake this problem.

My five pages of the book will be publicity photographs of the dancer hired to do my piece with his name affixed.

No schedule of the performance times should be posted.

This performance instruction piece was included in the exhibition, "Konzeption-conception: Dokumentation einer heutigen Kunstrichtung /documentation of a to-day's art tendency," at the Städtisches Museum, Leverkusen, West Germany (October 24–November 23, 1969). The exercise is similar to the earlier *Performance (Slightly Crouched)* (1968), included in Nauman's "Notes and Projects," where it is titled "Dance Piece," reprinted in this volume.

Part Two

During the period of the exhibition the piece may be bought by paying the dancer for the number of days not yet worked: he will then cease to perform.

The buyer must also pay me \$50 per day for each performance that wasn't held. He will then own the rights to the number of days not performed at the exhibition and may present them at his own expense and over any period of time he chooses but at the additional cost of \$50 each performance day paid to me.

At the time of purchase a signed witnessed agreement to the above must be sent to me.

6. *UNTITLED*, 1969

A person enters and lives in a room for a long time—a period of years or a lifetime.

One wall of the room mirrors the room but from the opposite side: that is, the image room has the same left-right orientation as the real room.

Standing facing the image, one sees oneself from the back in the room, standing facing a wall.

There should be no progression of images: that can be controlled by adjusting the kind of information the sensor would use and the kind the mirror wall would put out.

After a period of time, the time in the mirror room begins to fall behind the real time—until after a number of years, the person would no longer recognize his relationship to his mirrored image. (He would no longer relate to his mirrored image or a delay of his own time.)

In an essay on Nauman's work, Marcia Tucker writes that Nauman remarked that this impossible performance "is related to a dream which he had a long time ago, and could only be done eventually with the aid of a vast computer network." (See Marcia Tucker, "Phe-NAUMANology," *Artforum* 9, no. 3 (November, 1970): 43. See also WCR no. 166.)

7. NOTES AND PROJECTS, 1970

It has been shown that at least part of the information received by the optical nerves is routed through and affected by the memory before it reaches the part of the brain that deals with visual impulses (input). Now René Dubos discusses the distortion of stimuli: we tend to symbolize stimuli and then react to the symbol rather than directly to the stimuli. Assume this to be true of other senses as well . . .

FRENCH PIECE (August, 1968)

1. *Piece of steel plate or bar four inches by four inches by seven feet, to be gold plated, and stamped or engraved with the word "guilt" in a simple type face about one or two centimeters high. The weight will be about three hundred eighty pounds.*
2. *If the bar cannot be plated, the plain steel bar should be stamped or engraved "guilt bar," the letters running parallel to and close to a long edge.*
3. *Both pieces may be made.*

lighted steel channel twice
leen lech Dante'l delight light leen snatches
light leen lech Dante'l delight leen snatches
leen leche'l delight Dantes light leen snatch
light leen snatch'l delight Dantes leen leech
light leen leech'l delight Dantes leen snatch
snatch leen leen leeche'l delight light Dante

This collection of notes, instructions, and observations was published as an article in *Artforum* (vol. 9, no. 4, December, 1970, 44–45). Included in it are the instructions for a number of proposals for performances and sculptures that were conceived (and sometimes exhibited) as individual works—*French Piece* (1968); *Performance (Slightly Crouched)* (1968), which in the article is identified as "Dance Piece"; and *Untitled* (1969), incorporating "Body as Cylinder" and "Body as Sphere." The article also includes a description of Nauman's film installation, *Spinning Spheres* (1970).

When I want to make a painting of something covered with dust or in fog should I paint the whole surface first with dust or fog and then pick out those parts of objects which can be seen or first paint in all the objects and then paint over them the dust or fog?

Hire a dancer or dancers or other performers of some presence to perform the following exercises for one hour a day for about ten days or two weeks. The minimum will require one dancer to work on one exercise for ten to fourteen days. If more money is available two dancers may perform, one dancer performing each exercise at the same time and for the same period as the other. The whole may be repeated on ten or fourteen day intervals as often as desired.

(A) Body as a Cylinder

Lie along the wall/floor junction of the room, face into the corner and hands at sides. Concentrate on straightening and lengthening the body along a line which passes through the center of the body parallel to the corner of the room in which you lie. At the same time attempt to draw the body in around the line. Then attempt to push that line into the corner of the room.

(B) Body as a Sphere

Curl your body into the corner of a room. Imagine a point at the center of your curled body and concentrate on pulling your body in around that point. Then attempt to press that point down into the corner of the room. It should be clear that these are not intended as static positions which are to be held for an hour a day, but mental and physical activities or processes to be carried out. At the start, the performer may need to repeat the exercise several times in order to fill the hour, but at the end of ten days or so, he should be able to extend the execution to a full hour. The number of days required for an uninterrupted hour performance of course depends on the receptivity and training of the performer.

Goedel's Proof

1931: "On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems." 1) *If a system is consistent then it is incomplete.* 2) *(Goedel's incompleteness theorem [sic]) implies impossibility of construction of calculating machine equivalent to a human brain.*

Film Set A: Spinning Sphere

A steel ball placed on a glass plate in a white cube of space. The ball is set to spinning and filmed so that the image reflected on the surface of the ball has one wall of the cube centered. The ball is center frame and fills most of the frame. The camera is hidden as much as possible so that its reflection will be negligible. Four prints are necessary. The prints are projected onto the walls of a room (front or rear projection; should cover the walls edge to edge). The image reflected in the spinning sphere should not be that of the real room but of a more idealized room, of course empty, and not reflecting the image projected on the other room walls. There will be no scale references in the films.

Film Set B: Rotating Glass Walls

Film a piece of glass as follows: glass plate is pivoted on a horizontal center line and rotated slowly. Film is framed with the center line exactly at the top of the frame so that as the glass rotates one edge will go off the top of the frame as the other edge comes on the top edge of the frame. The sides of the glass will not be in the frame of the film. Want two prints of the glass rotating bottom coming toward the camera and two prints of bottom of plate going away from camera. The plate and pivot are set up in a white cube as in Set A, camera hidden as well as possible to destroy any scale indications in the projected films. Projection: image is projected from edge to edge of all four walls of a room. If the image on one wall shows the bottom of the plate moving toward the camera, the opposite wall will show the image moving away from the camera.

DANCE PIECE

You must hire a dancer to perform the following exercise each day of the exhibition for 20 minutes or 40 minutes at about the same time each day. The dancer, dressed in simple street or exercise clothes, will enter a large room of the gallery. The guards will clear the room, only allowing people to observe through the doors. Dancer, eyes front, avoiding audience contact, hands clasped behind his neck, elbows forward, walks about the room in a slight crouch, as though the ceiling were 6 inches or a foot lower than his normal height, placing one foot in front of the other, heel touching toe, very slowly and deliberately.

It is necessary to have a dancer or person of some professional anonymous presence.

At the end of the time period, the dancer leaves and the guards again allow people into the room.

If it is not possible to finance a dancer for the whole of the exhibition period a week will be satisfactory, but no less.

My five pages of the book will be publicity photographs of the dancer hired to do my piece, with his name affixed.

Manipulation of information that has to do with how we perceive rather than what.

Manipulation of functional (functioning) mechanism of an (organism) (system) person.

Lack of information input (sensory deprivation) = breakdown of responsive systems. Do you hallucinate under these circumstances? If so, is it an attempt to complete a drive (or instinct) (or mechanism)?

Pieces of information which are in "skew" rather than clearly contradictory, i.e., kinds of information which come from and go to unrelated response mechanism. Skew lines can be very close or far apart. (Skew lines never meet and are never parallel. How close seems of more interest than how far apart. How far apart = Surrealism?

Withdrawal as an Art Form

activities
phenomena

Sensory Manipulation

amplification
deprivation

Sensory Overload (Fatigue)

Denial or confusion of a Gestalt invocation of physiological defense mechanism (voluntary or involuntary). Examination of physical and psychological response to simple or even oversimplified situations which can yield clearly experienceable phenomena (phenomena and experience are the same or undifferentiable).

Recording Phenomena

Presentation of recordings of phenomena as opposed to stimulation of phenomena.

Manipulation or observation of self in extreme or controlled situations.

- Observation of manipulations.
- Manipulation of observations.
- Information gathering.
- Information dispersal (or display).

8. MICROPHONE/TREE PIECE, 1971

Select a large solid tree away from loud noises.

Wrap the microphone in a layer of 1/4 or 1/8 inch foam rubber and seal it in a plastic sack.

Drill a hole of large enough diameter to accept the encased microphone to the center of the tree at a [convenient] height, and slip the microphone to within an inch of the end of the hole.

Plug the hole with cement or other waterproof sealant.

Extend the microphone wire inside to the pre-amp, amp, and speaker system.

Expanding upon the earlier *Amplified Tree Piece* (1969, reproduced in this book on page 50), this instruction for a sculptural installation, according to the catalogue raisonné entry, was acquired and built by the Grinstein family in Los Angeles; however, the tree in which it was installed died soon after (see WCR no. 201).

9. *LEFT OR STANDING, STANDING OR LEFT STANDING, 1971*

Left or Standing

His precision and accuracy
suggesting clean cuts, leaving
a vacancy, a slight physical
depression as though I had been
in a vaguely uncomfortable place
for a not long but undeterminable
period; not waiting.

This text, originally published as a large poster with two columns of text, is part of Nauman's sculptural installation, *Left or Standing, Standing or Left Standing* (originally titled *Installation with Yellow Lights*). The installation consists of a trapezoidal room (the walls of which do not fully extend to the ceiling) lit with bright, yellow fluorescent lights. Access to the room is from two narrow corridors, which abut either side of the central room and are illuminated with incandescent light. When the viewer looks to the gap between the walls and ceiling, the two different light sources blend, producing a purple afterimage. The entire work was recreated for the 1999 exhibition, "House of Sculpture," curated by Michael Auping, at the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. In this new installation, the text was transferred to two television monitors, placed outside the entryway (see fig. 1.13).

Standing or Left Standing

His preciseness and acuity left small cuts on the tips of my fingers or across the backs of my hands without any need to sit or otherwise withdraw.



fig. 2.1

*Left or Standing, Standing or Left
Standing*, 1971/1999. Wallboard,
yellow fluorescent lights, 2 monitors,
1 videodisc player, 1 videodisc, text.

Dimensions variable. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

10. *FLOATING ROOM, 1972*

Floating Room

We are trying to get to the center of some place: that is, exactly halfway between each pair of parts.

We want to move our center (some measurable center) to coincide with such a point.

We want to superimpose our center of gravity on this point.

Save enough energy and concentration to reverse.

(The center of most places is above eyelevel)

This text was written for the architectural sculpture *Floating Room: Lit From Inside*, first exhibited at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1973. The installation consists of a constructed room, with four walls and an open doorway on one end, that is suspended several inches off the floor. The interior of the room is illuminated from the inside with an intense, fluorescent light that fills the interior space, while a glowing sliver of light seeps out from its bottom edge. The room is situated in the center of an unlit gallery, yielding a sharp contrast between the bright interior and the dark exterior.

11. *DOUBLE DOORS—PROJECTION AND DISPLACEMENT, 1973*

(Image Projection and Displacement) (No Promises)

Stand in the Wedge that will allow you to see through the doors and into the further room.

Become aware of the volume displaced by your body. Imagine it filled with water or some gas (helium).

Concentrate fully on this volume as other considerations dissipate (heat, cold, gravity).

It's not necessary to remain rigid or fixed in position. Form an image of yourself in the further room standing facing away.

Suppose you had just walked through the doors into that room. Concentrate and try to feel the volume displaced by the image.

Walk through to the other and step into that volume—precisely that displaced image.

Pay attention to the placement of your extremities and those parts you cannot see: your fingers—the back of your neck—the small of your back.

Make your body fit your image.

As in the later *Body Pressure* (reproduced in this volume pp.83–85), this text explicitly addresses the viewer, functioning as an instruction for negotiating the accompanying installation. In contrast to the relative sparseness of the sculptural installation—which consists of two parallel walls, set four feet apart, each with its own door of different sizes—the text imagines a richly sensate, phenomenal experience, urging the beholder to generate specific physical and mental responses.

12. *FLAYED EARTH/FLAYED SELF (SKIN/SINK)*, 1973

Peeling skin peeling earth - peeled earth
raw earth, peeled skin
The problem is to divide your
skin into six equal parts
lines starting at your feet and
ending at your head (five lines to make six
equal surface areas) to twist and spiral
into the ground, your skin peeling off
stretching and expanding to cover the surface
of the earth indicated by the spiraling
waves generated by the spiraling twisting
screwing descent and investiture (investment
or investing) of the earth by your swelling body.

This lengthy prose piece is part of the installation work of the same name, consisting of a radiating spiral of masking tape affixed to the floor, which was first shown at Nicholas Wilder Gallery (1973–1974). The text appeared as both a typewritten collage, mounted on the wall in the installation space, and a brochure that was distributed to visitors. (As the catalogue raisonné entry notes, the work is sometimes dated 1974, as that is the date of the text's copyright; see WCR no. 226.)

Spiraling twisting ascent descent screwing in
screwing out screwing driving diving
invest invert convert relent relax control
release, give in, given. Twisting driving down.
Spiraling up screwing up screwed up screwed
Twisted mind, twist and turn, twist and shout.
Squirm into my mind so I can get into
your mind your body our body
arcing ache, circling warily then
pressed together, pressing together,
forced.

Surface reflection, transmission, refraction-

surface tension absorption, adsorption

Standing above and to one side of your-

self- schizoid - not a dislocation, but a

bend or brake (as at the surface of water or a

clear liquid - quartz or a transparent crystal)

(transparent crying)

I HAVE QUICK HANDS MY MIND IS ALERT

I HOLD MY BODY READY FOR INSPIRATION

ANTICIPATION ANY SIGN RESPIRATION

ANY SIGH I THINK NEITHER AHEAD NOR

BEHIND READY BUT NOT WAITING NOT

ON GUARD NOT PREPARED.

Rushing:

I AM AN IMPLODING LIGHT BULB

(imagine a more perfect abstract sphere)

Draw in energy rushing toward you -

toward your center.

(Fools rush in - Russian fools)

Try to get it down on paper - try to

get it in writing (try to get it written down -

try to write it down): Some evidence of a

state - a mark to prove you were there: Kilroy

(make a mark to prove you are here)

Suspension of belief, suspension of an object

object of suspension - to hang.

Talking of a particular space - the space a few inches above and below the floor and within the area bounded by and described by the taped lines.

NOW INFORMATION RUSHING AWAY FROM THE CENTER TOWARD THE PERIMETER A FEW INCHES ABOVE THE FLOOR.

A kind of vertical compression of space or do you see it as a lightening or expanding opening in space - just enough to barely let you in - not so you could just step into it but so that you might be able to crawl into it to lie in it to bask in it to bathe in it.

Can it crush you - very heavy space - (gravity is very important here) (or for important read strong)

Imagine a heavy gas sinking to the floor: If you
walk or otherwise disturb it, it will disperse
so you must use a great deal of care - go slow
(as though you were to enter water making neither
waves nor sounds. It's not so easy)
Be thin.

Now this is difficult and very frightening -
the space is not spherical here - not a closed
figure, but an unbounded parabola or hyperbola
(hyperbolae) and suppose it is expanding or
contracting (shrinking) in time—fixed only at
this apex.

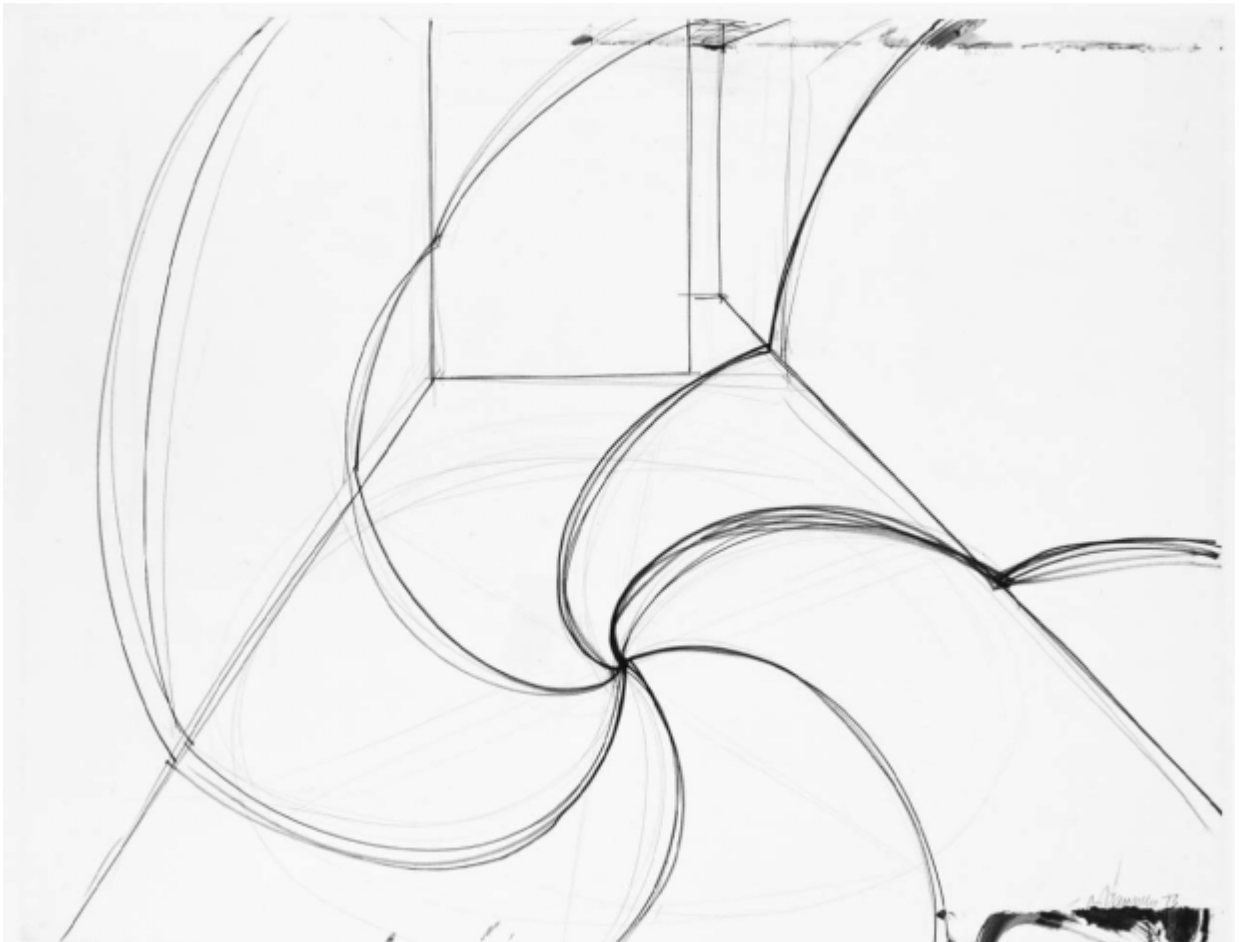
The problem is how do you enter? Can it be
something so simple as turning around, rolling
over, entering a room, going around the corner?

Each is an enormous change - facing north to facing
south - things lined up a certain way rapidly
reversed or left behind (put behind)

You want to turn at an ordinary rate, as though
you want to speak to someone there, behind you
but you want not to speak, but to address your-
self to a situation. (everything will feel the
same and it will not have a new meaning THIS
DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING ANYWAY) but now there
is either a greater density or less density
and if you turn back (when you turn back)
the change will be all around you. Now you
cannot leave or walk away. Has to do with your
ability to give up your control over space. This
is difficult because nothing will happen - and
later you will be no better or worse off for it.
This is more than one should require of another
person. THIS IS FAR TOO PRIVATE AND DANGEROUS
BECAUSE THERE IS NO ELATION NO PAIN NO KNOWLEDGE
AN INCREDIBLE RISK WITH (BECAUSE) NOTHING IS
LOST OR GAINED NOTHING TO CATCH OUT OF THE
CORNER OF YOUR EYE - YOU MAY THINK YOU FELT SOME-
THING BUT THAT'S NOT IT THAT'S NOT ANYTHING
YOU'RE ONLY HERE IN THE ROOM:
MY SECRET IS THAT I STAYED THE SAME FOR A SHORT TIME.

fig. 2.2

Untitled (Drawing for Flayed Earth/Flayed Self (Skin/Sink)), 1973.
Pencil, felt pen, and ink. 22¼ × 40½ in.
Courtesy Bruce Nauman.



13. INSTRUCTIONS FOR A MENTAL EXERCISE, 1974

I N S T R U C T I O N S

- A. LIE DOWN ON THE FLOOR NEAR THE CENTER OF THE SPACE, FACE DOWN, AND SLOWLY ALLOW YOURSELF TO SINK DOWN INTO THE FLOOR. EYES OPEN.

- B. LIE ON YOUR BACK ON THE FLOOR NEAR THE CENTER OF THE SPACE AND SLOWLY ALLOW THE FLOOR TO RISE UP AROUND YOU. EYES OPEN.

This is a mental exercise.

Practice each day for one hour

1/2 hour for A, then a sufficient break to clear the mind and body, then 1/2 hour practice B.

At first, as concentration and continuity are broken or allowed to stray every few seconds or minutes, simply start over and continue to repeat the exercise until the 1/2 hour is used.

The problem is to try to make the exercise continuous and uninterrupted for the full 1/2 hour. That is, to take the full 1/2 hour to A. Sink under the floor, or B. to allow the floor to rise completely over you.

In exercise A it helps to become aware of peripheral vision - use it to emphasise the space at the edges of the room and begin to sink below the edges and finally under the floor.

In B. begin to deemphasise peripheral vision - become aware of tunneling of vision - so that the edges of the space begin to fall away and the center rises up around you.

In each case use caution in releasing yourself at the end of the period of exercise

BRUCE NAUMAN

Originally written in 1969 (as *Untitled [Project for Leverkusen]*) and performed in Germany at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery, Cologne, and the Städtisches Museum, Leverkusen, this proposal was subsequently published under the title "Instructions for a Mental Exercise" in the German journal *Interfunktionen* (no. 11, 1974, 122–124). The article also included schematic drawings of the piece by Nauman as well as commentary by the two performers, Isa Genzken and Jochen Chruschwitz. Similar instructions were used in the two 1973 videotapes *Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise Up Over Her, Face Up* and *Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face Up and Face Down*.

14. CONES COJONES, 1974

Cones

Floater: Rising time/count-up sequence.

A finite number of concentric circles not equally spaced: starting at the outside and measuring inward, the distances between circumferences is a geometric progression (expanding or contracting).

Concentric circles becoming progressively closer either from their center or measured from the outer circumference, describing the intersection of the plane through your center parallel to the floor and a very large but finite series of concentric cones whose common center is located through the center of the earth at a distant place in the universe.

The point of the universe which is the apex of a countable number of concentric cones whose intersection with the plane parallel to the floor passing through your center describing an equal number of concentric circles, appear to radiate, inward or not, that point, moving with the universe, expanding, and so changing, the shape, of the cones, and circles, at this rate.

Earth Moves

The massive center moves about tides.

Black hole functions: contraction, concentration, compression, collapse, contour inversion, contour immersion, inverse/diverse/divest.

Thinking of feeling.

Sinking, feeling.

Expansion Ethics

Release the gas and the container is contained.

Free thinking free thinker; free thinker thinking free.
Floater flauting flauter floating.

Fit into an enormous space where a great deal of time is available as the continually rapidly expanding distances are enormous. Stay inside the cone; avoid the walls; compact yourself; avoid compression. Now time is short.

(You can't get there from here but you can get here from there if you don't mind the t left over.)

What I mean is everything is finite, every thing is closed, nothing touches.

It doesn't mean anything to say there are no spaces in between.

It is meaningless to say there are spaces between.

As though the water had recently been removed.

As though water had emptied.

Cojones

I want to get the whole. I'm trying to get everything, accurate.

I want to get the whole,
Here is every.
Here is the whole, everything, accurate, precise:

Imagine accidentally coming upon a line and adjusting yourself so that the center of your body lies on that line. When you accomplish this there is no next step.

Take my meaning not my intention.

You will just have to do something else.

Here is every.

Here is my precision.
Here is everything.
Apparently this is my hole.
Apparently this is my meaning.

(I have precise but mean intentions.)

Ere he is very.

1. Let's talk about control.
2. We were talking about control.
3. We are talking about control.

There is no preparation for this occurrence.

There is no excuse for this occurrence, there is no reason, no need, no urgency, no . . .

Apparently this is what I mean, although it's not what I intended.

This *accuracy* is not my intention.

Oh, my shrinking, crawling skin

and the need within me to stretch myself to a point.

This accuracy is my intention. *Placate my art.*

This prose piece was conceived as part of the installation *Cones Cojones*, first exhibited at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1975. It exists in two forms: as two collaged drawings (see DCR nos. 296 and 297) as well as a printed handout, which is reproduced here. According to the catalogue raisonné, Nauman recalls that the collaged drawings were mounted in the exhibition and a stack of brochures was placed outside the door to be taken by visitors (see WCR no. 237).



fig. 2.3

Cones Cojones, 1973–1975.
Installation (masking tape) and text
(typewriting and tape on paper). Leo
Castelli Gallery, New York.
Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.

15. **BODY PRESSURE, 1974**

Körperdruck
Body Pressure

Presse soviel der vorderen Oberfläche deines Körpers
(Handflächen nach innen oder außen, rechte oder linke Wange)
so fest wie möglich gegen die Wand.

Press as much of the front surface of
your body (palms in or out, left or right cheek)
against the wall as possible.

Drücke sehr fest und konzentriere dich.

Press very hard and concentrate.

Bilde eine Vorstellung von dir selbst,
(nimm an du seist gerade vorwärts getreten)
wie du auf der anderen Seite der Wand sehr feste
gegen die Wand zurückdrückst.

Form an image of yourself (suppose you
had just stepped forward) on the
opposite side of the wall pressing
back against the wall very hard.

This text comprises one component of the spare sculptural installation, *Body Pressure*, that Nauman made for his exhibition "Yellow Body" (which also included two other works, the architectural sculpture, *Yellow Room [Triangular]* and the installation, *Compression and Disappearance or Exit*) at Konrad Fischer Galerie in 1974. For *Body Pressure*, Nauman built a false wall, similar in shape and dimensions to an existing gallery wall, and hung the text—which was produced as a large, bright pink poster with a single column of text running down the center—on an adjacent wall. According to Dorothee Fischer, a large number of these posters were printed; thus they were most likely also distributed to gallery visitors. The text is reproduced here according to the original, in which both German and English translations appear in alternating stanzas.

Presse sehr feste und konzentriere dich auf das vorgestellte Bild, das sehr feste drückt.

Press very hard and concentrate on the image pressing very hard.

Auf die Vorstellung des sehr festen Drückens
(the image of pressing very hard)

Drücke deine vordere Oberfläche und deine rückwärtige Oberfläche gegeneinander und beginne die Dicke der Wand zu ignorieren oder geistig auszulöschen. (Entferne die Wand).

Press your front surface and back surface toward each other and begin to ignore or block the thickness of the wall. (remove the wall)

Bedenke, wie verschiedene Teile deines Körpers gegen die Wand drücken; welche Teile sie berühren und welche nicht.

Think how various parts of your body press against the wall; which parts touch and which do not.

Betrachte die Teile deines Körpers, die gegen die Wand drücken; drücke feste und fühle, wie sich die Vorderseite und die Rückseite deines Körpers aneinanderpressen.

Consider the parts of your back which press against the wall; press hard and feel how the front and back of your body press together.

Konzentriere dich auf die Spannung in den Muskeln,
den Schmerz, wo Knochen sich treffen, die Verformung des
Fleisches, das unter Druck gerät; bedenke das Körperhaar,
die Transpiration, den Geruch (Duft).

Concentrate on tension in the muscles,
pain where bones meet, fleshy deformations
that occur under pressure; consider
body hair, perspiration, odors (smells).

Dies wird wohl eine sehr erotische Übung werden.

This may be become a very erotic exercise.

16. *THE CONSUMMATE MASK OF ROCK, 1975*

1

1. mask
2. fidelity
3. truth
4. life
5. cover
6. pain
7. desire
8. need
9. human companionship
10. nothing
11. COVER REVOKED
12. infidelity
13. painless
14. musk/skum
15. people
16. die
17. exposure

This prose piece forms one part of the installation *The Consummate Mask of Rock*, a series of sixteen limestone cubes, arranged in paired configurations on the floor of a gallery. The work was first exhibited at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York in 1975. As detailed in the catalogue raisonné, a typewritten collage of the text was framed and mounted at the entrance to the installation and was also printed as a brochure. (See WCR no. 238 for further description and details of the piece.) The original brochure, from which the above is reproduced, is in large format, with two columns of text placed side by side on a single page: column "A" consisting of sections 1–3; and column "B," sections 4–7.

1. This is my mask of fidelity to truth and life.
2. This is to cover the mask of pain and desire.
3. This is to mask the cover of need for human companionship.
4. This is to mask the cover.
5. This is to cover the mask.
6. This is the need of cover.
7. This is the need of the mask.
8. This is the mask of cover of need.
Nothing and no
9. No thing and no mask can cover the lack, alas.
10. Lack after nothing before cover revoked.
11. Lack before cover
paper covers rock
rock breaks mask
alas, alack.
12. Nothing to cover
13. This is the
13. This is the mask to cover my infidelity to truth.
- 14.
13. This is the mask to cover my infidelity to truth.
(This is my cover.)
14. This is the need for pain that contorts my mask conveying the message of truth and fidelity to life.
15. This is the truth that distorts my need for human companionship.
16. This is the distortion of truth masked by my painful need.
17. This is the mask of my painful need distressed by truth and human companionship.
18. This is my painless mask that fails to touch my face but floats before the surface of my skin my eyes my teeth my tongue.
19. Desire is my mask.
(Musk of desire)
20. Rescind desire
cover revoked
desire revoked
cover rescinded.
21. PEOPLE DIE OF EXPOSURE.

CONSUMATION/CONSUMNATION/TASK

(passive)

paper covers rock

(active—threatening)

scissors cuts paper

(active—violent)

rock breaks scissors

1. mask

4. desire

2. cover

5. need for human companionship

3. diminish

6. lack

desire covers mask

need for human companionship masks desire

mask diminishes need for human companionship

need for human companionship diminishes cover

desire consumes human companionship

cover lacks desire

THIS IS THE COVER THAT DESIRES THE MASK OF LACK THAT CONSUMES THE NEED FOR HUMAN COMPANIONSHIP.

THIS IS THE COVER THAT DESPISES THE TASK OF THE NEED OF HUMAN COMP.

THIS IS THE TASK OF CONSUMING HUMAN COMP.

1. some kind of fact
2. some kind of fiction
3. the way we behaved in the past
4. what we believe to be the case now
5. the consuming task of human companionship
6. the consummate mask of rock

(1.) Fiction erodes fact.

(2.) Fact becomes the way we have behaved in the past.

(3.) The way we have behaved in the past congeals into the consummate mask of rock.

(4.) The way we have behaved in the past contributes to the consuming task of human companionship.

(5.)The consuming task of human comp. erodes the consummate mask of rock.

However (2.) Fact becomes the way we have behaved in the past may be substituted into (3.) and (4.) so that

(6.)Fact congeals into the consummate mask of rock.

But (5.) the consuming task of human comp. erodes the consummate mask of rock or the consuming task of human comp. erodes fact, then from (1.) it follows that

THE CONSUMING TASK OF HUMAN COMPANIONSHIP IS FALSE.



fig. 2.4

Consummate Mask of Rock, 1975.
Limestone sculpture (eight 15 in. cubes, eight 14 in. cubes; approx. 360 × 360 in. overall) and text (typewriting, graphite, paper and tape on paper; 39½ in. × 19½ in.). Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

17. FALSE SILENCES, 1975/2000

I DON'T SWEAT

I HAVE NO ODOR

I INHALE, DON'T EXHALE

NO URINE

I DON'T DEFECATE: NO EXCRETIONS OF ANY KIND

I CONSUME ONLY

OXYGEN, ALL FOODS, ANY FORM

I SEE, HEAR

I DON'T SPEAK, MAKE NO OTHER SOUNDS, YOU CAN'T HEAR MY HEART, MY FOOTSTEPS

NO EXPRESSIONS, NO COMMUNICATION OF ANY KIND

AN OBSERVER, A CONSUMER, A USER ONLY

MY BODY ABSORBS ALL COMMUNICATIONS, EMOTIONS, SUCKS UP HEAT AND COLD

SUPER REPTILIAN SOAKING UP ALL KNOWLEDGE, COMPACTOR OF ALL INFORMATION

NOT GROWING

I FEEL DON'T TOUCH

I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THE KINDS AND QUALITIES OF THOUGHTS

I COLLECT. I CAN'T PROCESS

I CAN'T REACT TO OR ACT ON SENSATION

NO EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO SITUATIONS

THERE IS NO REACTION OF INSTINCT TO PHYSICAL OR MENTAL THREATS

YOU CAN'T REACH ME. YOU CAN'T HURT ME

I CAN SUCK YOU DRY

YOU CAN'T HURT ME

YOU CAN'T HELP ME

SHUFFLE THE PAGES

FIND ME A LINE

ARAPAHOE, ARAPAHOE

WHERE DID YOU GO

I BLINK MY EYES

TO KEEP THE TIME

This writing has gone through several manifestations in its history. It was originally made as an audio recording for an installation sculpture (which, at the time, was not realized), to be played from speakers placed in two triangular rooms, abutting either side of a narrow corridor. The text was also published in the journal *Vision* (no. 1, September, 1975) in written form. The original audio recording was not of high quality, so in January, 2000, Nauman re-recorded the text with the voice of Joan La Barbara for the exhibition *Samuel Beckett/ Bruce Nauman* (Vienna, Kunsthalle Wien, February 4–April 30, 2000), in which the entire installation—sound and architecture—was installed for the first time. The text reproduced here is based upon the original publication, in which it appears on a single page.

18. *GOOD BOY BAD BOY*, 1985

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----|------------------------|
| 1 | I was a good boy | 27 | We are evil men |
| 2 | You were a good boy | 28 | This is evil |
| 3 | We were good boys | 29 | I am an evil woman |
| 4 | That was good | 30 | You are an evil woman |
| 5 | I was a good girl | 31 | We are evil women |
| 6 | You were a good girl | 32 | This is evil |
| 7 | We were good girls | 33 | I'm alive |
| 8 | That was good | 34 | You're alive |
| 9 | I was a bad boy | 35 | We're alive |
| 10 | You were a bad boy | 36 | This is our life |
| 11 | We were bad boys | 37 | I live the good life |
| 12 | That was bad | 38 | You live the good life |
| 13 | I was a bad girl | 39 | We live the good life |
| 14 | You were a bad girl | 40 | This is the good life |
| 15 | We were bad girls | 41 | I have work |
| 16 | That was bad | 42 | You have work |
| 17 | I am a virtuous man | 43 | We have work |
| 18 | You are a virtuous man | 44 | This is work |
| 19 | We are virtuous men | 45 | I play |
| 20 | This is virtue | 46 | You play |
| 21 | I am a virtuous woman | 47 | We play |
| 22 | You are a virtuous woman | 48 | This is play |
| 23 | We are virtuous women | 49 | I'm having fun |
| 24 | This is virtue | 50 | You're having fun |
| 25 | I am an evil man | 51 | We're having fun |
| 26 | You are an evil man | 52 | This is fun |

This is a transcription of the dialogue spoken by the two actors in Nauman's audio-video work *Good Boy Bad Boy* (1985). The same one hundred lines were also used in the large, neon-text piece, of the same name, that Nauman made in 1986–87. The transcription was originally published in the interview with Chris Dercon (*Parkett* 10, September, 1986, 58–59) reprinted in this volume, in English with a German translation.

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| 53 | I'm bored | 77 | I like to drink |
| 54 | You're bored | 78 | You like to drink |
| 55 | We're bored | 79 | We like to drink |
| 56 | Life is boring | 80 | This is drinking |
| 57 | I'm boring | 81 | I (like to) shit |
| 58 | You're boring | 82 | You (like to) shit |
| 59 | We're boring | 83 | We (like to) shit |
| 60 | This is boring | 84 | This is shit(ing) |
| 61 | I have sex | 85 | I piss |
| 62 | You have sex | 86 | You piss |
| 63 | We have sex | 87 | We piss |
| 64 | This is sex | 88 | This is piss |
| 65 | I love | 89 | I like to sleep |
| 66 | You love | 90 | You like to sleep |
| 67 | We love | 91 | We like to sleep |
| 68 | This is our love | 92 | Sleep well |
| 69 | I hate | 93 | I pay |
| 70 | You hate | 94 | You pay |
| 71 | We hate | 95 | We pay |
| 72 | This is hating | 96 | This is payment |
| 73 | I like to eat | 97 | I don't want to die |
| 74 | You like to eat | 98 | You don't want to die |
| 75 | We like to eat | 99 | We don't want to die |
| 76 | This is eating | 100 | This is fear of death |



fig. 2.5
Good Boy Bad Boy, 1985. Two video monitors, two videotape players, two videotapes (color, sound). Dimensions variable. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

19. *VIOLENT INCIDENT, 1986*

The scene includes a table set for two with chairs in place and cocktails on the side.

The scene is shot in one take starting with a tightly framed low angle shot that will spiral up and away and clockwise until the finish of the action with the camera at a fairly high angle (looking down on the scene from above head-level) and having made one revolution of the scene.

Both part one and part two are shot with the same directions. I would see the action taking place on the left side of the table. Shot in accurate color.

I

1. The man holds a chair for the woman as she starts to sit down. The man pulls the chair out from under her and she falls to the floor. Man is amused but woman is angry.
2. Man turns and bends over to retrieve the chair and as she gets up she gooses him.
3. Man stands up and turns and faces her now very angry also and calls her a name (shit-asshole-bitch-slut-whatever).
4. The woman reaches back to the table and takes a cocktail and throws it in the man's face.
5. Man slaps woman in the face.

Described here are the situations and actions that form the basis of Nauman's multiple channel video work *Violent Incident*. The installation consists of twelve video monitors, stacked in a grid formation, playing four videotapes. Each tape contains variations on a similar scene, which are carried out by two actors—a man and a woman. In one of the tapes, an off-camera director can be heard, calling out the simple actions (such as to pull out the chair, slap a face, etc.). In this text, Nauman assumes a directorial voice, setting up the scenario and then relaying instructions for actors to follow. The instructions were originally published in *Parkett* 10 (September, 1986) 50. (See also WCR nos. 360 and 361 for a more complete description of the piece.)

6. Woman knees or kicks man in the groin.
7. Man is hurt and bends over, takes knife from table, they struggle and she stabs.
8. He is stabbed.

II

All instructions are the same except the roles are reversed. Woman holds chair for man, pulls it away, man falls, gooses woman; she calls him a name, he throws a drink, she slaps, he kicks, she stabs and he stabs her.



fig. 2.6
Violent Incident, 1986. Twelve video monitors, four videotape players, four videotapes (color, sound). 102 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 105 × 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

PART II: INTERVIEWS

CALIFORNIA GROCERY

DRINK
Coca-Cola

WINE

CANDY

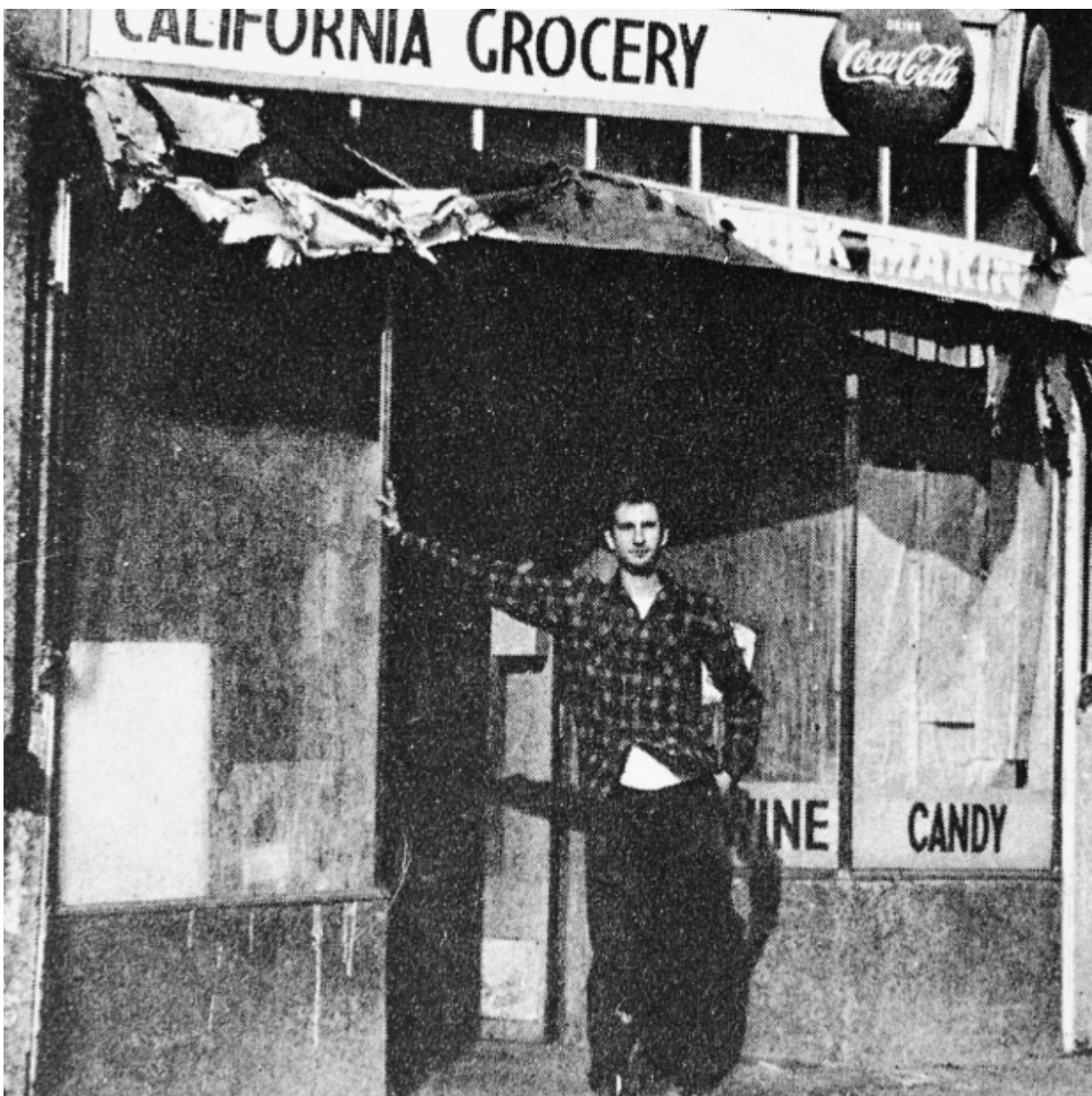


fig. 3.1

Bruce Nauman in front of his
San Francisco studio, circa 1966.
Courtesy Bruce Nauman.

1. THE WAY-OUT WEST: INTERVIEWS WITH FOUR SAN FRANCISCO ARTISTS, 1967 (FALL, 1966)

JOE RAFFAELE AND ELIZABETH BAKER

*The earliest known interview with Nauman took place in the fall of 1966 but was not published until the summer of 1967. At the time, Nauman was living and working in a converted grocery store in San Francisco, having recently graduated from the University of California, Davis with a Masters of Fine Arts degree. Although he was still young and relatively unknown, Nauman had already experienced some success and recognition, including a solo exhibition at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles (May 10–June 2, 1966), and an invitation to participate in Lucy Lippard's "Eccentric Abstraction" show—one of the first to register the shifting aesthetic terrain into postminimal art—at the Fishbach Gallery in New York (September 20–October 8, 1966). This interview with Nauman was one of four that artist Joe Raffaele conducted with artists in the Bay Area. The others included William Wiley (one of Nauman's former teachers at Davis); William Geis; and Bill Allan (also a teacher of Nauman, with whom he made the film *Fishing for Asian Carp*, discussed below)—all of which appeared in the original article, which was a collaboration between Raffaele and Elizabeth Baker. Here are reprinted the article's introductory text and the interview with Nauman.*

IT IS A CURRENT cliché that art forms are increasingly the same everywhere, transmitted in a flash by a kind of inevitable osmosis. Yet art does not happen everywhere, and where it does happen, the course it takes is not predictable. If New York is a generating point, its impulses and ideas may flourish, out of context, in other centers, comparatively isolated in different surroundings, to produce a very different kind of work.

Such is the case in San Francisco, which again seems to be a lively city for art. After the ferment produced by the postwar visitations of New York School painters (Still, Rothko, Reinhardt) tapered off in the early '50s,

the situation relapsed into provincialism, as far as the visual arts were concerned. Recently, however, something new has come into being. The work does not look like New York, or Los Angeles (though in certain respects it resembles the young Tokyo avant-garde). This prolific growth has been inconspicuous because San Francisco has no public art scene: galleries are neither plentiful nor adventurous; museums have not been interested; collectors buy elsewhere.

Only now has the work of some of the younger and more radical artists begun to emerge. This was celebrated locally in the so-called “Funk Art” show at the University of California, Berkeley (which also included artists from New York, Los Angeles, etc.); some San Franciscans are represented in “American Sculpture of the '60s” in Los Angeles; a few have shown in New York. But even in San Francisco their work remains largely unknown, except in the local artist community—their reputations are mainly underground. Most of these younger artists are connected with university art departments or art schools, which are able to sustain a diverse group, independent of any public support.

In the fall of 1966, Joe Raffaele, young painter and total New Yorker, went to San Francisco. Living there, and teaching at the University of California at Davis, he met many of these artists. Among them were William Wiley, William Geis, Bruce Nauman and Bill Allan, all of whom live and work in the area. (Like New York, San Francisco is a transient city—none of these artists was born there, though all are Westerners.) Their ideas, perceptions, feelings about art, reasons for making it—even their way of life—impressed Raffaele as completely unlike New York. The result of his association with them is a series of taped interviews, which *ARTnews* presents in somewhat condensed form. Raffaele’s account also contributed to this discussion of their work, and about San Francisco’s new art in general.

These four artists do not form a school, nor is their work alike, but there is a kind of community of ideas; they share certain qualities which seem to

stem from the San Francisco ambiance. The fact that with practically no art public, their art does not have to be salable or even particularly exhibitable, has encouraged a vigorous experimental atmosphere. There is little pressure to produce consistently, compete very much, or in general “make it.” And obviously a situation in which there is nothing much to look at but your own work can have its advantages, especially in a direction of intensifying and particularizing.

Their work is informal, idiosyncratic, often deliberately weird. Use of materials is generally casual, the results often perishable. The effort to turn idea into art as directly as possible makes “finish” undesirable. Emphasis is on process, on idea—but not in the sense of “ideal”; there is distrust of too much logic or thought. Reliance is on intuition, accident, even the obvious which just happens to be at hand. Trying to live in the moment, these artists are involved with the flow of making, as much as the conclusion. Their subject matter is closely tied to everyday life. It is often randomly autobiographical, with objects left untransformed, retaining multiple layers of meaning. It is as inclusive as possible. There is a willingness to be unpretentious, unsolemn, jokey. They seem to aim at being deliberately not impressive (in a way that has nothing to do with Pop’s formalizing and monumentalizing of the trivial).

Also characteristic of these four artists, as well as others in the Bay Area, is a propensity to work in any medium, in any direction—they are not confined to a single purpose or style. (Many make films; these tend toward autobiography, too.)

Their point is content, but in spite of professed disregard for form, a special kind of style has resulted. The works tend to be 3-dimensional—objects are what they are (the ambiguities and intellectualizations of painting are circumvented). Imagery tends to be freely organic, with biological illusions (Geis); or fragmentarily figurative as with casts of parts of the body (Nauman); objects may be chosen for their suggestive connotations

and used in conjunction with words (Wiley); subjects that are secret, abstruse or absurd may have elaborate developments (Allan). Surfaces may or may not be painted, are frequently irregular, messy, rough, etc.

Distant attachments to Dada and Surrealism exist, through the specifically anti-art polemic of Dada is absent, as is traditional Surrealist imagery. Rather, there is a kind of Surrealism of everyday life—a nostalgia for the most insignificant things and events, a haphazard documentation, an automatist access to ideas, referential titles. In their commitment to art as inseparable from life, they are of course aware of [Robert] Rauschenberg's and [John] Cage's attitudes; but they are less intellectual about it. There is also a debt to [Jasper] Johns, and of course to [Edward] Kienholz. (As with the last, there is hint of social protest, though lower keyed, much less definite.) In their transformed re-assertion of various New York-originated ideas of the late '50s, the offshoot has really become a new plant.

By taking such an isolated stance, there is an element of deliberate perversity, since of course all are obsessively well-informed about New York. In fact, much of what they do is about *not* going along with New York, about *not* being overwhelmed by it. The work itself seems to suggest a crotchety, stand-offish individualism. This has opened up something else; to them, even time is different—every part of life has equal value, to themselves and potentially to their work. (A life-style that is classic Western in its nonchalance is part of this—un-urban, relaxed, with big drinking, slow talk, cowboy boots, blue jeans, whiskers, etc.)

Physically, the Bay Area produces a spell—the shifting sea climate reiterates change as a constant of life. Psychologically, a phenomenon which is still largely foreign to New York, the “psychedelic mentality,” pervades the thinking of these artists—a kind of looser idea of the self, a lack of boundary lines, etc. All this is related to, but by no means dependent on, actual involvement with drugs. In fact, San Francisco's mood may just as well have given sustenance to the drug scene as vice versa. Not that the artists

of San Francisco spend their lives in an enormous fog-soaked high—rather, it is their own somewhat withdrawn existence which really predominates in their work—a certain stability, against the background of which their art is based on unsureness, experiment, risk, change.

It is not likely that the present situation in San Francisco will last. Numerous factors, including greatly increased museum activity, may soon give the city its own art world, with the attendant stimulations, pressure and potential corrupting factors. If this turns out to be the case, these artists will then find themselves in a different relationship to the mainstream. Thus these interviews reflect a moment which may be unique.

Joe Raffaele: How did you start doing films?

Bruce Nauman: Films are about seeing. I wanted to find out what I would look at in a strange situation, and I decided that with a film and camera I could do that. In one film I did, the title was straight and everything else tipped on its side, partly because you could get more in the picture that way and partly as a concession to art—so it looked as if I did something to it, changed it. The films I did with Bill Allan are the closest to just making a film, without considering art. We made a film called *Fishing for Asian Carp*. Bill Allan got into his boots and we went to the creek. We ran the film until Allan caught the fish.

JR: Was it a put-on?

BN: No, it's that you want to make a film, you don't know how long it'll take, and so you pick something to make it about that will determine how long it will be. When he caught the fish, it ended.

JR: What is it that films give you that your other work doesn't?

BN: I guess the film becomes a record of what went on. Maybe also

because you tend to believe that what is shown or, a film is really true—you believe a film, or a photograph, more than a painting.

JR: What is this piece called?

BN: *A Wax Mold of the Knees of Five Famous Artists [Wax Impressions of the Knees of Five Famous Artists (see fig. 1.14)].* Although it's made out of fiberglass, and they are my knees. I couldn't decide who to get for artists, so I used my own knees. Making the impressions of the knees in a wax block was a way of having a large rectangular solid with marks in it. I didn't want just to make marks in it, so I had to follow another kind of reasoning. It also had to do with trying to make the thing itself less important to look at. That is, you had to know what it is about, too. To go and look at it was to try and think whether you liked to look at it, or just how involved you were in looking at art in general; that was not quite enough though, you had to know these other things, too.

JR: One has to approach your work in terms of itself, because it seems completely unlike anything else. What do you relate yourself to in past art?

BN: A little bit of everything. I suppose my work must have to do with some of the things the Dadaists and Surrealists did. I like to give the pieces elaborate titles like they did, although I've only been titling them recently.

JR: How important is the making of a thing, as opposed to your conceiving of it? In this knee piece, is the actual doing of it—the molds and the fiberglass and the pouring, etc.—the important thing, or is it the final image?

BN: A little of each—although it should be O.K. if someone else made it. The problem is, you can't get someone else to make it right. I've had that problem. I think I make the plans as well as they can be made, and then I bring them to somebody and they make the piece wrong, or they can make it stronger and do it another way.

JR: What determines what medium you'll use for a particular piece?

BN: The reason for making a piece is what it will look like. For instance, at one point I thought about making outdoor sculpture. I thought that outdoor sculpture was usually big, and durable, but that seemed very dumb, because it's already nice outside with trees and fields, and I didn't want to put something there and change it all. So I thought maybe I'd make something which fell apart after awhile—which would return to nature. Like dirt, or paper, that would disintegrate. Then I made this piece which is a plaque which you put on a tree (fig. 3.2). After a few years, the tree would grow over it, and finally cover it up, and it would be gone.

JR: That's beautiful.

BN: Then I made plastic copies and I thought maybe I could send them to people I knew all over the world.

JR: It reads, "A rose has no teeth." What does that mean?

BN: I got it from Wittgenstein. He's talking about language, and he says to think about the difference between "A rose has no teeth" and "A baby has no teeth." With the first one, you don't know what it means, because you've made an assumption outside the sentence. So when I thought of what to put on this plaque I thought of these words, because they have as much to do with nature as anything I could think of.

JR: Do you think of what you do as art?

BN: It's important that someone should see the work.

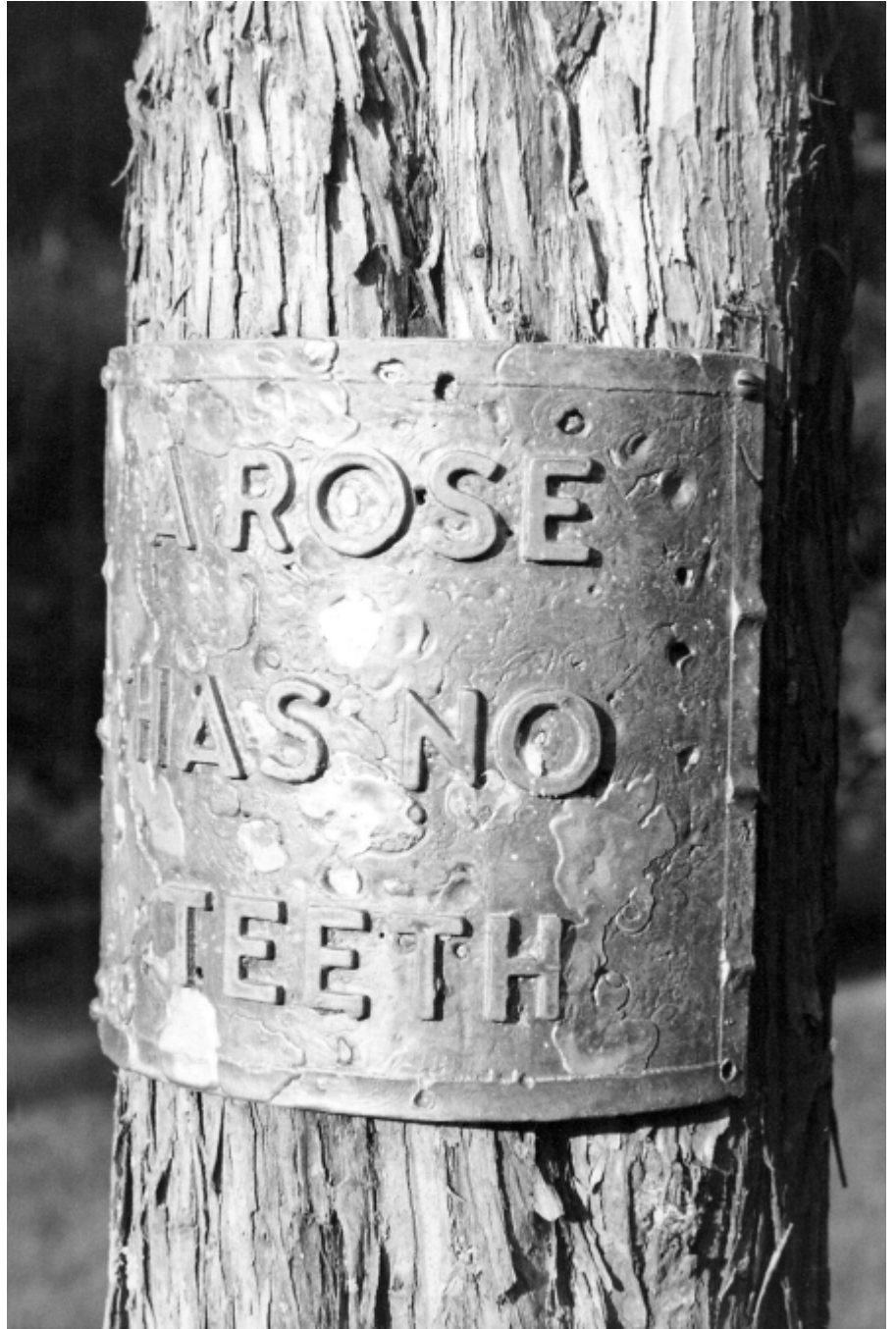
JR: Yet the tree plaque is not about someone seeing it, it just exists somewhere.

BN: It could be in a gallery.

JR: Then somehow it would be a plan or a scheme—like a new ship at the

fig. 3.2

A Rose Has No Teeth, 1966. Lead,
7½ × 8 × 2¼ in. Courtesy Sperone
Westwater Gallery, New York.



dock being inspected before its maiden voyage. I mean, the liner is for sailing and not for inspecting.

BN: I'm not sure how I feel about doing these pieces and then not having anyone ever hear about them. It is really funny about my wanting to make things for people to see, and at the same time making them as hard as possible for people to see. I like to take the reference or contact points away, and those things which people are used to looking at—but that isn't true either.

JR: I see you're making a neon sign with words on it. What does it say?

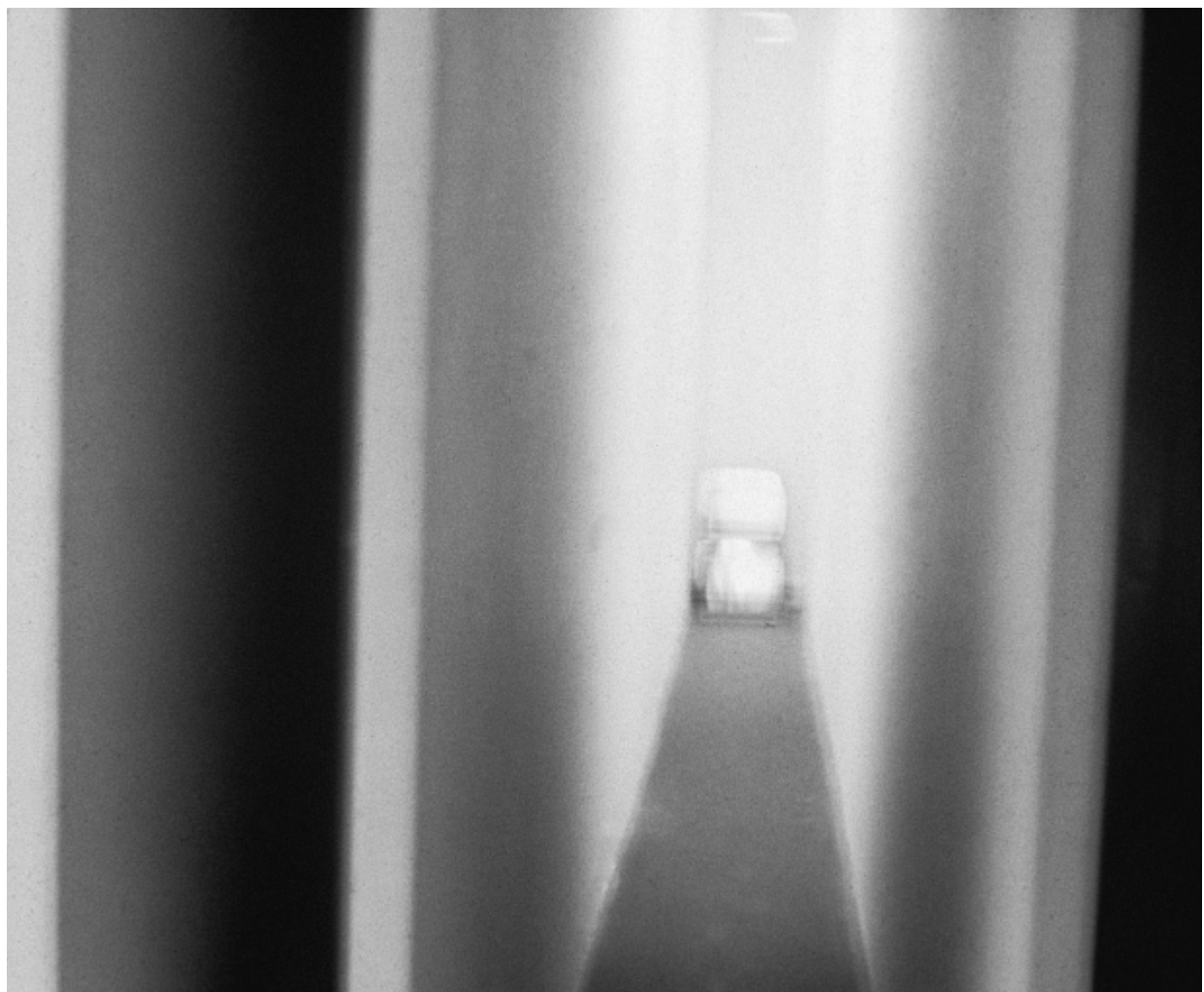
BN: "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths."

JR: And do you believe that?

BN: I don't know; I think we should leave that open.

NOTE

First published in *ARTnews* 66 (Summer 1967): 39–40; 75–76. Reprinted with permission, Joseph Raffael [Mr. Raffaele later changed the spelling of his name] and Elizabeth Baker.



2. NAUMAN INTERVIEW, 1970

WILLOUGHBY SHARP

The following is the first of two important, early interviews conducted by Willoughby Sharp (the second follows). Here, Sharp discusses the range of Nauman's recent work, focusing in particular upon the intersection of sculptural concerns and an investigation of the body. In the beginning of the interview, Nauman discusses his installation sculpture Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation), 1970 (fig. 3.3), which he was then in the process of conceiving.

WITHIN THE LAST five years, Bruce Nauman has produced a highly complex body of work which retains strong affinities with the new sculpture, but is quite independent from its dominant modes of expression. He began making sculpture in 1965 as a graduate student at the University of California—narrow fiberglass strips cast in a sketchy manner from plywood molds so that each work has a rough and ragged look resembling what is now referred to as Poor Art. Later that year, he did a series of latex molds backed with cloth, which hung from the wall or were heaped on the floor; but by the time of his first one-man show at Nicholas Wilder's Los Angeles gallery early in 1966, Nauman had outgrown these kinds of sculptural concerns and began to explore a wider range of media. He started filming physical activities like bouncing balls and pacing around the studio so that these everyday events were also incorporated into his oeuvre. That year he made about twenty pieces of sculpture using unusual materials like aluminum foil, foam rubber, felt, grease, galvanized iron, cardboard, lead and vinyl in which lengthy explicit titles play a crucial role in the conception and understanding of the artistic enterprise. A work such as *Collection of*

fig. 3.3

Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation), 1970. Wallboard, three video cameras, scanner and mount, five video monitors, videotape player, videotape (black and white, silent), dimensions variable. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

Various Flexible Materials Separated by Layers of Grease with Holes the Size of My Waist and Wrists would be unintelligible without reference to its mildly ironic title. Aside from an isolated outdoor work, *Lead Tree Plaque*, bearing the inscription “A Rose Has No Teeth,” (see fig. 3.2) most of the sculptural objects from late 1966 are concerned with seeing the human body in new ways. The subject and scale of these works is often a direct ratio of unusual measurements taken from sections of the body. To realize the punning piece, *From Hand to Mouth* (1967), Nauman cast that part of his own body in plaster and pea green wax, an introspective and detached statement of a self-mocking sensibility. After moving to New York for his one-man exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery in January 1968, he started producing videotapes, one of which shows him saying “lip sync” as it gradually goes out of sync.

The presentation of the body in straightforward physical movements is a recurring theme of Nauman’s recent work, as seen in several of his latest one-man exhibitions. He showed *Six Sound Problems*—“walking and bouncing balls,” “violin sounds in the gallery”—in July 1968 at Konrad Fischer’s Düsseldorf gallery; the *Making Faces* holograms (fig. 3.4) at Ileana Sonnabend’s Paris gallery in December 1969; and a video performance piece at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery this month [March, 1970].

Willoughby Sharp: What are you doing for your one-man show at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery this month?

Bruce Nauman: The piece I want to do will have a set of walls running the whole length of the forty-foot-long gallery. The distance between the walls will vary from about three feet to about two or three inches, forming corridors, some of which can be entered and some of which can’t. Within the wider corridors, some television cameras will be set up with monitors so that you can see yourself. Body parts of me or someone else going in and out of those corridors will also be shown on videotape. Sometimes you’ll see yourself and sometimes you’ll see a videotape of someone else. The



fig. 3.4

First Hologram Series (Making Faces)
F, 1968. Holographic image on glass,
8 × 10 in. Courtesy Sperone
Westwater Gallery, New York.

cameras will be set upside down or at some distance from the monitor so that you will only be able to see your back. I have tried to make the situation sufficiently limiting, so that spectators can't display themselves very easily.

WS: Isn't that rather perverse?

BN: Well, it has more to do with my not allowing people to make their own performance out of my art. Another problem that I worked out was using a single wall, say twenty feet long, that you can walk around. If you put a television camera at one end and the monitor around the corner, when you walk down the wall you can see yourself just as you turn the corner, but only then. You can make a square with the same function—as you turn each corner, you can just see your back going around the corner. It's another way of limiting the situation so that someone else can be a performer, but he can do only what I want him to do. I mistrust audience participation. That's why I try to make these works as limiting as possible.

WS: This work seems like an extension of your *Performance Corridor* [1969] (see fig. 1.11).

BN: Yes, that work consisted of two parallel walls twenty inches apart. Originally, it was just a prop for a videotape I was making in my Southampton studio of me walking up and down the corridor [*Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968 (see fig. 1.12)].

WS: I don't think many people realized they were supposed to enter it.

BN: Well, that was difficult. I didn't want to write it down, or have an arrow, so it was left open. That piece is important because it gave me the idea that you could make a participation piece without the participants being able to alter your work.

WS: Was it only possible to get in from one end?

BN: Yes, it ran directly into the wall, like a channel. It was much rougher in the studio, because you could only see down the corridor on the videotape. I walked very slowly toward and away from the camera, one step at a time. My hands were clasped behind my neck, and I used a very exaggerated contrapposto motion.

WS: How did the videotape read?

BN: The way you saw it, the camera was placed so that the walls came in at either side of the screen. You couldn't see the rest of the studio, and my head was cut off most of the time. The light was shining down the length of the corridor and made shadows on the walls at each side of me.

WS: It is significant that your head couldn't be seen?

BN: In most of the pieces I made last year, you could see only the back of my head, pictures from the back or from the top. A lot of people asked why I did that.

WS: There is a similar attitude in some of your objects, like *Henry Moore Bound to Fail (Back View)*.

BN: Someone said that it made the pieces more about using a body than autobiographical.

WS: Do you ever let others carry out your works?

BN: I always prefer to do them myself, although I've given instructions to someone else from time to time. It's a bit more difficult than doing it myself; I have to make the instructions really explicit, because I trust myself as a performer more than I do others. What I try to do is to make the situation sufficiently specific, so that the dancer can't interpret his position too much.

WS: Could you say something about your relation to the California scene, because the contribution of West Coast artists is often overlooked.

BN: The artists that I knew in San Francisco were a little older than I am and had lived there a long time. They were connected to a hiding-out tradition. I think that had something to do with the confusion about my work. When people first saw it, they thought it was Funk Art. In my mind it had nothing to do with that, it just wasn't in my background at Wisconsin. It looked like it in a way, but really I was just trying to present things in a straightforward way without bothering to shine them and clean them up.

WS: What works were you doing then?

BN: Plastic pieces and rubber pieces, the 1965 fiberglass things on the floor (fig. 3.5). I was still in school then, and I don't know that they're particularly strong works. I still like some of the rubber pieces and a couple of the fiberglass ones.

WS: In what ways are you critical of them now?



fig. 3.5

Untitled, 1965. Fiberglass, polyester resin, 24 × 132 × 5 in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

BN: I don't think they were really clear. A little later, in 1966, I started to feel that they were like doing things with sculpture, and that I wasn't doing work based on my thinking. I didn't know what to do with those thoughts. So I stopped making that kind of work and then I did the first pieces with neon and with wax.

WS: How were the early pieces unclear?

BN: It is difficult to think about them. They involved simple things like making a mold, taking the two halves and putting them together to make a hollow shape and turning it inside out. I tried to create a confusion between the inside and outside of a piece. One side is smooth so that it looks like the outside, and the other is rough because that's the way the fiberglass is cast, but you can see it as well.

WS: So there were formal considerations and technical problems.

BN: But I wanted to get beyond those problems. So when I made the rubber pieces, I used the same kinds of molds but of soft materials. Then I made the neon piece of my name exaggerated fourteen times.

WS: The latex rubber floor piece which you did in 1965–66 seems to be a prototype of your late work. How was that made?

BN: Well, that work consists of four or five pieces of latex rubber which were all cast in the same shape, fastened together, painted slightly different colors and just dropped on the floor. There were others. I think the one Walter Hopps has is one of the best, it is about seven or eight feet long and ten inches wide, with slits cut down the length of it. It's hung by one strip so that it drops open.

WS: What led you to start cutting into materials?

BN: It was a specific formal problem. I was making those pieces when I was still at graduate school at Davis in California. The first real change came after that when I had a studio. I was working very little, teaching a

class one night a week, and I didn't know what to do with all that time. I think that's when I did the first casts of my body and the name parts and things like that. There was nothing in the studio because I didn't have much money for materials. So I was forced to examine myself, and what I was doing there. I was drinking a lot of coffee, that's what I was doing.

WS: Have your feelings about using your own body in your work changed since then?

BN: No, not really. It's getting a little clearer to me now. At that time it took the form of acting out puns, like in *From Hand to Mouth*. Now I can make dance pieces and I can go back to something like *Performance Corridor* for a very simple problem.

WS: Doesn't *From Hand to Mouth*, which is a wax impression of a part of your body, have different concerns from a performance or a videotape?¹

BN: Well, it does. But the only things that I could think of doing at that time were presenting these objects as extensions of what I was thinking about in the studio.

WS: What were you thinking about when you made *From Hand to Mouth*?

BN: Well, things like language games and making objects and how I could put those together.

WS: You almost had to make an object. That's what an artist did, so you did that. But a pun became a way of going beyond just making an object.

BN: That's more or less it. I was very involved with making objects. But also at about that time I did *Flour Arrangements*. I did those to see what would happen in an unfamiliar situation. I took everything out of my studio so that *Flour Arrangements* became an activity which I could do every day, and it was all I would allow myself to do for about a month. Sometimes it got pretty hard to think of different things to do every day.

WS: You forced yourself to do flour arranging rather than make something?

BN: Yes, and a lot of the work after that deals with the same problem, like the films of bouncing two balls in the studio and pacing in the studio. Playing the violin was a more arbitrary situation, because I didn't know how to play the violin. Some were very logical, like pacing, because that's just what I was doing around the studio. My activities were reasonably straightforward.²

WS: There seems to be a great diversity in your work, from *Flour Arrangements* to the films.

BN: I've always had overlapping ways of going about my work. I've never been able to stick to one thing.

WS: Would you say that *Flour Arrangements* was a test of your strength?

BN: Yes, I suppose it was a way of testing yourself to find out if you are really a professional artist. That's something I was thinking about at the time.

WS: Is that still a problem?

BN: No. Last year I was reading *Dark is the Grave, Wherein My Friend is Laid*, Malcolm Lowry's last book . . . it's a complicated situation. The main character, an alcoholic writer, has problems finishing his books and with his publishers. He is sure that other writers know when their books are finished and how to deal with publishers and with their own lives. I suppose it's the normal artist's paranoia and that was more or less the way I felt at the time, kind of cut off, just not knowing how to proceed at being an artist.

WS: You often use words in your work, but you mistrust them a lot, don't you.

BN: My work relies on words less and less. It has become really difficult to explain the pieces. Although it's easier to describe them now, it's almost impossible to explain what they do when you're there. Take *Performance Corridor* which I've already talked about. It's very easy to describe how the piece looks, but the experience of walking inside it is something else altogether which can't be described. And the pieces increasingly have to do with physical or physiological responses.

WS: Could you describe some of the word pieces?

BN: Well, a couple of years ago I made a piece called *Dark*. It's just a steel plate with the word "Dark" written on the bottom. I don't know how good it is but it seemed to be a germinal piece to me.

WS: In what way?

BN: The feeling of the weight of the piece. I thought I made a good job of getting the word with the piece, having the word "Dark" underneath so that you can't see it.

WS: Could you have used other words?

BN: I did think of the word "Silent," but that was the only other word I really considered.

WS: Is it absolutely necessary to have the word there?

BN: If I did the piece now I probably wouldn't put the word there. But it seems that having the word there helps you think about that bottom side and what it might be like under there.

WS: What is your attitude to making outdoor works now?

BN: Well, last fall I designed a couple of other pieces for outdoors. One is simply to drill a hole into the heart of a large tree and put a microphone in it. The amplifier and speaker are put in an empty room so that you can hear whatever sound might come out of the center of the tree.³ Another one

had to do with placing odd-shaped steel plates and mirrors over a large shrub garden—that was the only work in which I tried to put objects outside, and even in that case it's not really a natural situation because it was supposed to be in a garden rather than out in nature. But neither of them has been done.

WS: One of your most striking works is *Portrait of the Artist as a Fountain* [*Self-Portrait as Fountain* (see fig. 1.4)]. Is that one of your first photographic works?

BN: Yes.

WS: How did you come to do that?

BN: I don't know.

WS: Did you take several photographs of that piece?

BN: Yes. There was also a black and white photograph taken in a garden.

WS: To present a photograph as a work in 1966 was pretty advanced. There weren't very many sculptors, I can't think of any, who were presenting photographs as the work at that time. Can you say anything about what made you decide to do it?

BN: Well, I've always been interested in graphics, prints, drawings and paintings and I was a painter before I started making sculpture. I guess I first started using photographs to record *Flour Arrangements*. Then I started thinking about the *Fountain* and similar things. I didn't know how to present them. I suppose I might have made them as paintings if I had been able to make paintings at that time. In fact, I think I did get some canvas and paint but I had no idea of how to go about making a painting anymore. I didn't know what to do. Perhaps if I had been a good enough painter I could have made realistic paintings. I don't know, it just seemed easier to make the works as photographs.

WS: In *Flour Arrangements*, the photographs documented a work, whereas in *Portrait of the Artist as a Fountain* the photo documented you as a work. Does that mean that you see yourself as an object in the context of the piece?

BN: I use the figure as an object. More recently that's roughly the way I've been thinking, but I didn't always. And when I did those works, I don't think such differences or similarities were clear to me. It's still confusing. As I said before, the problems involving figures are about the figure as an object, or at least the figure as a person and the things that happen to a person in various situations—to most people rather than just to me or one particular person.

WS: What kind of performance pieces did you do in 1965?

BN: I did a piece at Davis (fig. 3.6) which involved standing with my back to the wall for about forty-five seconds or a minute, leaning out from the wall, then bending at the waist, squatting, sitting and finally lying down.⁴ There were seven different positions in relation to the wall and floor. Then I did the whole sequence again standing away from the wall, facing the wall, then facing left and facing right. There were twenty-eight positions and the whole presentation lasted for about half an hour.

WS: Did it relate to sculptural problems that you were thinking about then?

BN: Yes, that was when I was doing the fiberglass pieces that were inside and outside, in which two parts of the same mold were put together.

WS: Did you identify your body with those fiberglass pieces?

BN: Yes. In a way I was using my body as a piece of material and manipulating it.

WS: Then there is a body-matter exchange which plays a very strong part in your thinking?

BN: Yes. I had another performance piece in 1965; I manipulated an eight-foot fluorescent light fixture.⁵ I was using my body as one element and the light as another, treating them as equivalent and just making shapes.

WS: I see that there is a close correlation between the performances and the sculptural objects such as the fiberglass works.

BN: I think of it as going into the studio and being involved in some activity. Sometimes it works out that the activity involves making something, and sometimes that the activity is the piece.

WS: Could you talk more specifically about a performance piece and a sculptural object that are based on similar ideas?

BN: Well, take the twenty-eight positions piece and the fiberglass pieces. I vaguely remember making lists of things you could do to a straight bar:



fig. 3.6

Wall-Floor Positions, 1969. Videotape, black and white, sound, 60 mins. to be repeated continuously. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

bend it, fold it, twist it; and I think that's how the performance piece finally came about, because it was just that progression of actions, standing, leaning, etc. which I carried out. I don't know whether it was that clear.

WS: How did you come to use videotape in the first place?

BN: When I was living in San Francisco, I had several performance pieces which no museum or gallery was interested in presenting. I could have rented a hall, but I didn't want to do it that way. So I made films of the pieces, the bouncing balls and others. Then we moved to New York, and it was harder to get film equipment. So I got the videotape equipment which is a lot more straightforward to work with.

WS: How did the change from film to videotape affect the pieces?

BN: Mainly they got longer. My idea was to run the films as loops, because they have to do with ongoing activities. The first film I made, *Fishing for Asian Carp* [1966] began when a given process started and continued until it was over. Then that became too much like making movies, which I wanted to avoid, so I decided to record an ongoing process and make a loop that could continue all day or all week. The videotapes can run for an hour—long enough to know what's going on.

WS: Are you working only with videotapes at the moment?

BN: No, I've been working with film again. The reason they are films again is because they're in super-slow motion; I've been able to rent a special industrial camera. You really can't do it with the available videotape equipment for amateurs. I'm getting about four thousand frames per second. I've made four films so far. One is called *Bouncing Balls*, only this time it's testicles instead of rubber balls. Another one is called *Black Balls*. It's putting black make-up on testicles. The others are *Making a Face*,⁶ and in the last one I start out with about five or six yards of gauze in my mouth, which I then pull out and let fall to the floor [*Gauze*, see fig. 3.9]. These are all shot extremely close up.

WS: You could call that body sculpture.

BN: Yes, I suppose.

WS: Are there any precedents for this in your early work?

BN: The works of this kind that I did were all holograms, *Making Faces* (1968), which came up in a very formal way when I was thinking about arrangements.

WS: What kind of facial arrangements did you do?

BN: They were usually contortions, stretching or pulling my face. I guess I was interested in doing a really extreme thing. It's almost as though if I'd decided to do a smile, I wouldn't have had to take a picture of it. I could just have written down that I'd done it or made a list of things that one could do. There was also the problem with the holograms, of making the subject-matter sufficiently strong so that you wouldn't think about the technical side much.

WS: Mitigating the media is a real concern then?

BN: It was particularly difficult with the holograms, because of their novelty.

WS: Are you still working with holograms?

BN: There is one more set that I want to do, using double exposures. That piece would involve my body in a much more passive way than the others.

WS: It seems that one could almost divide your work into two categories: the pieces that are directly related to your body, and the ones that aren't.

BN: Well, in the works I've tried to describe to you, the one with the television cameras and the walls, and others I have in the studio using acoustic materials, I have tried to break down this division in some way, by using spectator response. These pieces act as a sort of bridge.

WS: Like the work with a tape recorder, *Steel Channel* that you showed in “9 at Castelli.”⁷ What sound did you use?

BN: It was a loud whisper. Let’s see, how did it go . . . “Steel channel, lean snatch, lean channel, steel snatch.” “Lean snatch” is a cheating anagram of “Steel channel.” It’s not one of my favorite pieces.

WS: What other audio works have you done?

BN: There are two different groups of tapes: one was in “Theodoron Foundation: Nine Young Artists” at the Guggenheim in August 1969, of rubbing the violin on the studio floor, the violin tuned D.E.A.D., and one other. Then I did a piece at Ileana Sonnabend in December [*Sound Breaking Wall*, 1969]. It was a large L-shaped wall covering two walls of her Paris gallery. It was flush with the wall with very thin speakers in it. For that, there were two different tapes: one was of exhaling sounds, and the other of pounding and laughing alternately. You couldn’t locate the sound. That was quite a threatening piece, especially the exhaling sounds.

WS: What are the sources of the punning in your work?

BN: I don’t know. I just do it.

WS: Duchamp?

BN: Yes, I can’t argue with that, but I don’t think he’s a very important influence. He leads to everybody and nobody.

WS: Well, one source that you have mentioned is Dada and Surrealism.

BN: I would like to back out of that too. Those questions were brought up by other people rather than by me. I really don’t give these things that much thought.

WS: Is there an affinity in some of your work with Duchamp’s body casts?

BN: Yes, there's no question about that. On the other hand, when I made a lot of that work, it had more to do with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* which I was reading at that time. That work had a lot to do with the word-game thing.

WS: What particularly impressed you in *Philosophical Investigations*?

BN: Just the way Wittgenstein proceeds in thinking about things, his awareness of how to think about things. I don't think you can point to any specific piece that's the result of reading Wittgenstein, but it has to do with some sort of process of how to go about thinking about things.

WS: In 1966 you exhibited *Shelf Sinking* (fig. 3.7) at Nicholas Wilder Gallery. It seemed to me to be the most complicated piece you had done up to that point.

BN: It was one of my first pieces with a complicated title, a sort of functional title. I like the piece quite a bit, I took a mold and made plaster casts of the spaces underneath the shelf. I suppose the elaborate title enables you to show a mold with its casts without presenting the work as such.

WS: How important is the title to a work like *Henry Moore Bound to Fail (Back View)* (see fig. 3.15)?

BN: I don't know. There's a certain amount of perverseness involved, because the piece could probably just have been left the way it was. I mean, it could have just stood without any kind of descriptive title. It could have been just "bound to fail." When I made the piece a lot of young English sculptors who were getting publicity were putting down Henry Moore, and I thought they shouldn't be so hard on him, because they're going to need him. That's about all the explanation I can give about adding Moore to the title.

WS: How did you make that work?



fig. 3.7

*Shelf Sinking into the Wall with
Copper-Painted Plaster Casts of the
Spaces Underneath*, 1966. Wood,
plaster, paint, 70 × 84 × 6 in.
Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.

BN: Well, a photograph of my back was taken, then I modeled it in wax. It's not a cast of anyone.

WS: That's one of the very few figures or parts of a figure that you've actually modeled.

BN: Yes.

WS: This perverseness is of course something that a lot of people have mentioned. Do you think you are deliberately perverse?

BN: It's an attitude I adopt sometimes to find things out—like turning things inside out to see what they look like. It had to do with doing things that you don't particularly want to do, with putting yourself in unfamiliar situations, following resistances to find out why you're resisting, like therapy.

WS: So you try to go against your own nature, and to go against what people expect: exhibiting things from the back or that you can't see.

BN: Yes. But I tend to look at those things in a positive way and I've often been surprised when people take them in the opposite way and think I'm being perverse. It's like the John Coltrane mirror piece. To talk about perversion because you're hiding the mirror. . . . That wasn't what I had intended at all. To me it seemed that hiding the mirror was a positive thing, because it made for an entirely different kind of experience—the mirror reflecting and yet not being able to reflect the floor.

WS: That piece is so private . . .

BN: Yes. I remember talking to someone about public art and private art. My art tends to fall in the private category.

WS: Would you say that the works are more about you than they are about art itself?

BN: Well, I wouldn't say it, no.

NOTES

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1. Interestingly, Nauman here does not correct the misconception regarding *From Hand to Mouth*, which is not a cast of Nauman's body, as is often assumed, but of his first wife, Judy Nauman. In a later interview with Lorraine Sciarra, reprinted in this volume, he is less circumspect, remarking "It's pretty difficult to make a cast of yourself," (p. 163).

2. Nauman here is referring to the four "Studio Films," 1967–68, including *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* (fig. 1.6), *Bouncing Two Balls Between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing*

Rhythms (see fig. 3.10) and *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk around the Studio* (see fig. 3.12).

3. Nauman refers here to *Amplified Tree Piece*, conceived originally for the exhibition "Art in the Mind" (Oberlin College, 1970), reprinted in this volume p. 50.

4. *Wall-Floor Positions* was a performance from 1965 that Nauman recreated in a video of the same name in 1968, illustrated here.

5. Titled *Manipulating a Fluorescent Tube*, the performance was originally done at U. C. Davis in 1965; in 1969, Nauman recreated the actions for a videotape of the same name.

6. The film was subsequently renamed *Pulling Mouth*.

7. *Steel Channel Piece* was exhibited in "9 at Castelli," an exhibition organized by artist Robert Morris at Leo Castelli Gallery's 108th Street warehouse space in New York (December 4–28, 1968). The show is now often known as "9 in a Warehouse," after the review written by Max Kozloff, "9 in a Warehouse: An Attack on the Status of the Object" (*Artforum* 7 (February 1969): 38–42).



fig. 3.8

Corridor Installation with Mirror—San Jose Installation (Double Wedge Corridor with Mirror), 1970–1974. Wallboard and mirror. Ceiling height 336 × 60 in. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection, 1991. Courtesy The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

3. INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE NAUMAN, 1971 (MAY 1970)

WILLOUGHBY SHARP

*The second of two interviews with Willoughby Sharp, reprinted in this volume, appeared in the second issue of *Avalanche*, a journal founded by Sharp and Liza Bear in 1970. With its unusual format and monthly focus upon an individual artist—whose portrait appeared on the cover, accompanied by an interview—*Avalanche* quickly became an important forum for discussions of contemporary art. The selection of Nauman for this issue was prompted by the artist's exhibition at San Jose State College, California, for which he created a new installation sculpture (fig. 3.8). In the interview, Sharp principally directs his inquiries to the subject of Nauman's experiments with film and video and his hybrid installation works; thus it presents one of the most extensive records of the artist's thinking about these issues. The original article was accompanied by a series of photographs, taken by photographer Gianfranco Gorgoni, depicting Nauman making and installing the actual sculpture (unfortunately, the photographs were not available for reproduction here). At the end of the text, a selection of stills from the artist's first series of videos, made in 1968–69, were reproduced.*

DURING THE FIRST week of May 1970, Nauman made a V-shaped corridor piece at San Jose State College, California. The photographs document the execution of this work, and the following discussion was videotaped in the College's studio on May 7 and later edited in collaboration with the artist.

Willoughby Sharp: How did you arrive at the San Jose piece, did it grow out of your *Performance Corridor*?

Bruce Nauman: Yes, because the first pieces that were at all like it were just corridors that ended at a wall and then made into a V. Then I put in another V and finally I put in the mirror.

WS: Why did you decide to use it that way?

BN: The mirror?

WS: No, the change in the interior, the second V.

BN: When the corridors had to do with sound damping, the wall relied on soundproofing material which altered the sound in the corridor and also caused pressure on your ears, which is what I was really interested in: pressure changes that occurred while you were passing by the material. And then one thing to do was to make a V. When you are at the open end of the V there's not too much effect, but as you walk into the V the pressure increases quite a bit, it's very claustrophobic. . . .

WS: Pressure is also felt on the spectator's own body. Does that come from your ears?

BN: It has a lot to do with just your ears.

WS: So space is *felt* with one's ears?

BN: Yeah, that's right.

WS: The light inside had a particularly soft quality which really got to my body. How did you control the light that way?

BN: Because the piece goes to the ceiling, all of the light is reflected into the two entrances, so it's very indirect light.

WS: Well, I noticed that the exterior wall started just the other side of one of the light fixtures recessed in the ceiling. Was the piece carefully planned to block off that light?

BN: No. I built it so that there wouldn't be any lights in the space. The light in there is more or less accidental.

WS: When I walked inside, the mirror cut off my head and the shock of seeing myself headless was a strong part of the piece. But if a shorter

person is standing close to the mirror, he can see his face. Are these differences important?

BN: Yes. When I put the mirror in the first time, it was six feet tall, which was half as high as the ceiling. That was too high—you couldn't feel the space behind the mirror at the apex of the V. So I cut it off to a little less than five and a half feet, which is just below my eye level.

WS: Then you adjusted the piece after experiencing it. Do you also make that kind of adjustment while you're constructing the piece?

BN: Yeah, I first made that piece in my studio.

WS: So you knew what you were dealing with in terms of space.

BN: Yes, but it was much more crude in the studio.

WS: It's really hard to know what I felt in there, but somehow it brought me closer to myself. From your own experience of being in there, how would you say it affects you?

BN: Well, the corridors that you walk down are two feet wide at the beginning and they narrow down to about sixteen inches. So going into it is easy, because there is enough space around you for you not to be aware of the walls too much until you start to walk down the corridor. Then the walls are closer and force you to be aware of your body. It can be a very self-conscious kind of experience.

WS: So you find yourself in a situation where you are really put up against yourself.

BN: Yes, and still the interest—since you are looking into the mirror and seeing out of the other corridor—the visual interest is pretty strong and it's centered somewhere else; it's either in the mirror or looking beyond the mirror into the end of the V.

WS: Some people don't see over the top of the mirror into the end of the V.

BN: Well, if you are shorter than I am and you see your whole self in the mirror, then you probably wouldn't look over the mirror, so that's really difficult to. . . . If the mirror is too short, it doesn't work either because you look over the mirror; you just see your feet in the mirror, and the bottom of the corridor. So the piece is effectively limited to people who are built somewhat like I am.

WS: Then the size of the spectator plays a role in the success of the piece.

BN: A big person couldn't go in at all.

WS: Right. I didn't get a chance to see your last Wilder show. How does the San Jose corridor piece compare with the ones at [Nicholas] Wilder [Gallery]?¹

BN: Well, there were parts of the Wilder piece that you could experience immediately, but the thing was so large and complicated that I think it took much longer to grasp.

WS: Do you think this piece is more successful?

BN: No, just more immediate.

WS: What relation do these corridor pieces have to your recent videotape works like *Come*?²

BN: It's really like the corridor pieces only without the corridors. I tried to do something similar, but using television cameras and monitors, and masking parts of the lenses on the cameras. . . . If one camera is at one end of the room and the monitor is at the other, then the camera lens can be masked so that an image appears maybe on a third or a quarter of the screen. The camera is sometimes turned on its side, sometimes upside

down, and that creates a corridor between the camera and the monitor. You can walk in it and see yourself from the back, but it's hard to stay in the picture because you can't line anything up, especially if the camera is not pointing at the monitor. Then you have to watch the monitor to stay in the picture and at the same time stay in the line of the camera.

WS: How did you decide on the title, *Come*?

BN: I don't remember.

WS: Have you finished those slow motion films of gauze in your mouth (fig. 3.9) and painting your body?³

BN: Yeah.

WS: Could you talk about some of them?

fig. 3.9

Gauze, 1969. 16 mm film, black and white, silent, 8 mins. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.



BN: There were four films in which the frame speed varied between a thousand frames a second and four thousand frames a second, depending on how large an area I was trying to photograph and what light I could get. In one I was making a face, in another I had about four or five yards of gauze in my mouth which I pulled out very slowly. There were two others, one of which was called *Black Balls*. I put black makeup on my testicles. The other was called *Bouncing Balls* and it was just bouncing testicles.

WS: How long are they?

BN: Four hundred feet of film, that runs for about ten minutes. They take from six to twelve seconds to shoot, depending on the frame speed. The action is really slowed down a lot. Sometimes it is so slow that you don't really see any motion but you sort of notice the thing is different from time to time.

WS: Do they have color in the system?

BN: You can shoot color, but the film speed is not so fast. I suppose you could push it. I just shot black and white.

WS: And there is a fourth one?

BN: That's four.

WS: Do these films stimulate you to work further in that direction with the same equipment?

BN: Not yet. It was pretty much something I wanted to do and just did.

WS: I know it often happens that you do certain things in one medium, then you do something similar in another medium. How does that come about? Is it because you cannot take a project further at a particular moment?

BN: Originally a lot of the things that turned into videotapes and films were performances. At the time no one was really interested in presenting

them, so I made them into films. No one was interested in that either, so the film is really a record of the performance. After I had made a few films I changed to videotape, just because it was easier for me to get at the time. The camera work became a bit more important, although the camera was stationary in the first ones . . .

WS: Were these the films of bouncing balls (fig. 3.10)?

BN: Yeah. The videotapes I did after those films were related, but the camera was often turned on its side or upside down or a wide angle lens was used for distortion. . . . As I became more aware of what happens in the recording medium I would make little alterations. Then I went back and did the performance, and after that . . .⁴

WS: Which performance?

BN: The one at the Whitney during the "Anti-Illusion" show in '69. I had already made a videotape of it, bouncing in the corner for an hour (fig. 3.11). At the Whitney the performance was by three people, instead of just myself, and after that I tried to make pieces where other people could be involved in the performance situation, individuals.

WS: Why did you find that desirable?

BN: It makes it possible for me to make a more . . . it's difficult for me to perform, and it takes a long time for me to need to perform. And doing it once is enough. I wouldn't want to do it the next day or for a week, or even do the same performance again. So if I can make a situation where someone else has to do what I would do, that is satisfactory. Quite a lot of these pieces have to do with creating a very strict kind of environment or situation so that even if the performer doesn't know anything about me or the work that goes into the piece, he will still be able to do something similar to what I would do.



fig. 3.10

*Bouncing Two Balls between the
Floor and Ceiling with Changing
Rhythms*, 1967–1968, 16 mm film,
black and white, sound, approx. 10
mins. Courtesy Electronic Arts
Intermix, New York.

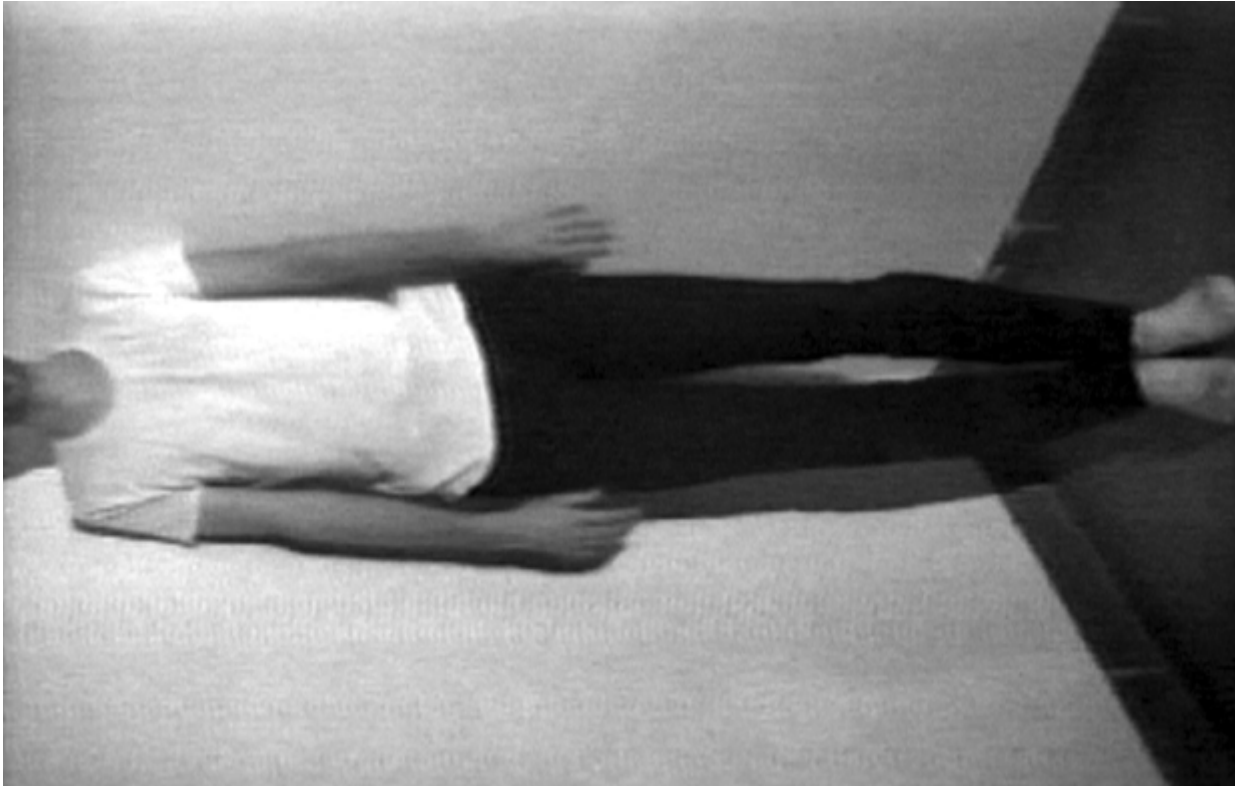


fig. 3.11

Bouncing in the Corner, No. 1, 1968.
Videotape, black and white, sound,
approx. 60 mins. to be repeated
continuously. Courtesy Electronic Arts
Intermix, New York.

WS: Some of the works must be stimulated by a desire to experience particular kinds of situations. Just to see how they feel. Are you doing the work basically for yourself?

BN: Yes. It is going into the studio and doing whatever I'm interested in doing, and then trying to find a way to present it so that other people could do it too without having too much explanation.

WS: The concern for the body seems stronger now than when we did the *Arts Magazine* interview.

BN: Well, the first time I really talked to anybody about body awareness was in the summer of 1968. Meredith Monk was in San Francisco. She had thought about or seen some of my work and recognized it. An awareness of yourself comes from a certain amount of activity and you can't get it from just thinking about yourself. You do exercises, you have certain kinds of awarenesses that you don't have if you read books. So the films and some of the pieces that I did after that for videotapes were specifically about doing exercises in balance. I thought of them as dance problems without being a dancer, being interested in the kinds of tension that arise when you try to balance and can't. Or do something for a long time and get tired. In one of those first films, the violin film (fig. 3.12), I played the violin as long as I could. I don't know how to play the violin, so it was hard, playing on all four strings as fast as I could for as long as I could. I had ten minutes of film and ran about seven minutes of it before I got tired and had to stop and rest a little bit and then finish it.

WS: But you could have gone on longer than the ten minutes?

BN: I would have had to stop and rest more often. My fingers got very tired and I couldn't hold the violin any more.

WS: What you are saying in effect is that in 1968 the idea of working with calisthenics and body movements seemed far removed from sculp-



fig. 3.12

Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk around the Studio, 1967–1968.

16 mm film, black and white, sound, approx. 10 mins. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

tural concerns. Would you say that those boundaries and the distance between them has dissolved to a certain extent?

BN: Yes, it seems to have gotten a lot smaller.

WS: What you have done has widened the possibilities for sculpture to the point where you can't isolate video works and say, they aren't sculpture.

BN: It is only in the last year that I have been able to bring them together.

WS: How do you mean?

BN: Well, even last year it seemed pretty clear that some of the things I did were either performance or recorded performance activities, and others were sculptural—and it is only recently that I have been able to make the two cross or meet in some way.

WS: In which works have they met?



fig. 3.13

Stamping in the Studio, 1968.

Videotape, black and white, sound,
60 mins. to be repeated continuously.

Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix,
New York.

BN: The ones we have been talking about. The first one was really the corridor, the piece with two walls that was originally a prop in my studio for a videotape in which I walked up and down the corridor in a stylized way for an hour.⁵ At the Whitney “Anti-Illusion” show I presented the prop as a piece, called *Performance Corridor* (see fig. 1.11). It was twenty inches wide and twenty feet long, so a lot of strange things happened to anybody who walked into it . . . just like walking in a very narrow hallway.

WS: You had been doing a lot of walking around in the studio. When did you start thinking about using corridors?

BN: Well, I don’t really remember the choice that led me to . . . I had made a tape of walking, of pacing, and another tape called *Rhythmic Stamping in the Studio [Stamping in the Studio]* (fig. 3.13) which was basically a sound problem, but videotaped. . . . I was just walking around the studio stamping in various rhythms.

WS: Did you want the sound to be in sync?

BN: The sound was in sync on that one. In the first violin film the sound is out of sync, but you really don’t know it until the end of the film. I don’t remember whether the sound or the picture stops first.

WS: I think you stop playing the violin but the sound goes on.

BN: The sound is fast and distorted and loud, and you can’t tell until all at once . . . it is a strange kind of feeling.

WS: Is the film of the two bouncing balls in the square out of sync? Did you play with [*sic*] the sync on that?

BN: No. I started out in sync but there again, it is a wild track, so as the tape stretches and tightens it goes in and out of sync. I more or less wanted it to be in sync but I just didn’t have the equipment and the patience to do it.

WS: What did you think of it?

BN: It was alright. There's one thing that I can't remember—I think I cut it out of some of the prints and left it in others. At a certain point I had two balls going and I was running around all the time trying to catch them. Sometimes they would hit something on the floor or the ceiling and go off into the corner and hit together. Finally I lost track of them both. I picked up one of the balls and just threw it against the wall. I was really mad.

WS: Why?

BN: Because I was losing control of the game. I was trying to keep the rhythm going, to have the balls bounce once on the floor and once on the ceiling and then catch them, or twice on the floor and once on the ceiling. There was a rhythm going and when I lost it that ended the film. My idea at the time was that the film should have no beginning or end: one should be able to come in at any time and nothing would change. All the films were supposed to be like that, because they all dealt with ongoing activities. So I did almost all of the videotapes, only they were longer, they went on for an hour or so. There is much more a feeling of being able to come in or leave at any time.

WS: So you didn't want the film to come to an end.

BN: I would prefer that it went on forever.

WS: What kind of practice did you have for those films? Did you play the violin to see what sound you were going to get?

BN: I probably had the violin around for a month or two before I made the film.

WS: Did you get it because you were going to use it, or did it just come into your life?

BN: I think I bought it for about fifteen dollars. It just seemed like a thing to

have. I play other instruments, but I never played the violin and during the period of time that I had it before the film I started diddling around with it.

WS: When did you decide that it might be nice to use it?

BN: Well, I started to think about it once I had the violin and I tried one or two things. One thing I was interested in was playing. . . . I wanted to set up a problem where it wouldn't matter whether I knew how to play the violin or not. What I did was to play as fast as I could on all four strings with the violin tuned D.E.A.D (fig. 3.14). I thought it would just be a lot of noise, but it turned out to be musically very interesting. It is a very tense piece. The other idea I had was to play two notes very close together so that you could hear the beats in the harmonics. I did some tapes of that but I never filmed it. Or maybe I did film it while I was walking around the



fig. 3.14

Violin Tuned D.E.A.D, 1969.

Videotape, black and white, sound,
60 mins. to be repeated continuously.
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix,
New York.

studio playing. The film was called *Walking around the Studio Playing a Note on the Violin* [*Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio*]. The camera was set up near the center of the studio facing one wall, but I walked all around the studio, so often there was no one in the picture, just the studio wall and the sound of the footsteps and the violin.

WS: I saw most of these four films about a week ago at the School of Visual Arts—I liked them even better the second time I saw them. You made a simple, repetitive activity seem very important.

BN: I guess we talked about this before, about being an amateur and being able to do anything. If you really believe in what you're doing and do it as well as you can, then there will be a certain amount of tension—if you are honestly getting tired, or if you are honestly trying to balance on one foot for a long time, there has to be a certain sympathetic response in someone who is watching you. It is a kind of body response, they feel that foot and that tension. But many things that you could do would be really boring, so it depends a lot on what you choose, how you set up the problem in the first place. Somehow you have to program it to be interesting.

WS: So you reject many ideas on aesthetic grounds.

BN: Besides you make mistakes, so it doesn't all come out.

WS: Do you ever see one of your films and then decide that you don't want to show it to anyone?

BN: Oh yeah. I have thrown a lot of things away.

WS: What percentage do you destroy?

BN: Gee, I don't know.

WS: Does it happen frequently?

BN: Oh, pretty often. Maybe half the time.

WS: On what grounds? Could you explain a piece that you finally rejected?

BN: I couldn't remember. I can't remember any of the other film problems.

WS: You did mention that you threw one film away, or you weren't sure. Which one was that?

BN: I think we mentioned one, but it wasn't necessarily a film. For the videotapes it is harder to say, because I had the equipment in the studio. With the films I would work over an idea until there was something that I wanted to do, then I would rent the equipment for a day or two. So I was more likely to have a specific idea of what I wanted to do. With the videotapes I had the equipment in the studio for almost a year; I could make test tapes and look at them, watch myself on the monitor or have somebody else there to help. Lots of times I would do a whole performance or tape a whole hour and then change it.

WS: Edit?

BN: I don't think I would ever edit but I would redo the whole thing if I didn't like it. Often I would do the same performance but change the camera placement and so on.⁶

WS: In the film of the bouncing balls, it looks as if the camera was just placed there. How carefully did you set up the camera in that film?

BN: It was set up to show an area of the studio.

WS: With a certain definite cut off point.

BN: Yeah. It had a lot to do with the lenses I had—I was limited to the three standard lenses. I was using the widest angle lens on the camera.

WS: But take the film in which you do a dance step around two squares of masking tape on the floor [*Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*]. The near side of the outermost square is cut off.

Now that was obviously deliberate. You knew you weren't getting the nearest line on the film and that your feet wouldn't be seen when you came along that line. Do you remember why you made that decision?

BN: No, I don't remember. It was just better that way.

WS: Did you try it out so that both squares were completely visible?

BN: I don't remember. It's been a long time.

WS: How much time did you spend setting up the camera?

BN: I don't know. Sometimes it really takes a long time, and other times it's just obvious how it must be done.

WS: Did you consider using a video system in the San Jose piece?

BN: Well, in this piece the mirror takes the place of any video element. In most of the pieces with closed circuit video, the closed circuit functions as a kind of electronic mirror.

WS: So you are really throwing the spectator back on himself. That's interesting. I hadn't realized the similarity between the mirror and the video image before. Is there a natural extension into video from a certain situation, such as this piece? Or didn't you even consider that?

BN: I didn't consider it. The mirror allows you to see some place that you didn't think you could see. In other words you are seeing around the corner. Some of the video pieces have to do with seeing yourself go around a corner, or seeing a room that you know you can't get into like one where the television camera is set on an oscillating mount in a sealed room.

WS: That was at the Wilder show, wasn't it?

BN: Yes. The camera looks at the whole room; you can see the monitor picture of it, but you can't go into the room and there is a strange kind of

removal. You are denied access to that room—you can see exactly what is going on and when you are there but you can never get to that place.

WS: People felt they were being deprived of something.

BN: It is very strange to explain what that is. It becomes easier to make a picture of the pieces or to describe what the elements are, but it becomes much more difficult to explain what happens when you experience them. I was trying to explain that to somebody the other night. It had to do with going up the stairs in the dark, when you think there is one more step and you take the step, but you are already at the top and have the funny . . . or going down the stairs and expecting there to be another step, but you are already at the bottom. It seems that you always have that jolt and it really throws you off. I think that when these pieces work they do that too. Something happens that you didn't expect and it happens every time. You know why, and what's going on but you just keep doing the same thing. It is very curious.

WS: The Wilder piece was quite complicated.

BN: It is hard to understand. The easiest part of the piece to get into was a corridor thirty-four feet long and twenty-five inches wide. There was a television camera at the outside entrance, and the picture was at the other end. There was another picture inside too but that's irrelevant to this part of it. When you walked into the corridor, you had to go in about ten feet before you appeared on the television screen that was still twenty feet away from you. I used a wide angle lens, which disturbed the distance even more. The camera was ten feet up, so that when you did see yourself on the screen, it was from the back, from above and behind, which was quite different from the way you normally saw yourself or the way you experienced the corridor around yourself. When you realized that you were on the screen, being in the corridor was like stepping off a cliff or down into a hole. It was like the bottom step thing—it was really a very strong experience. You knew what had happened because you could see

all of the equipment and what was going on, yet you had the same experience every time you walked in. There was no way to avoid having it.

WS: Would you like to do something for network TV?

BN: I'd like CBS to give me an hour on my terms. I'd like to do color work which I haven't done yet because of the expense involved. I haven't been strongly motivated to either. I suppose if I really wanted to I could hustle it somehow. But if it became available to me I would like to use color. Some people in Europe have been able to use it. I forget who. A Dutch artist did something called the *Television as a Fireplace*. Apparently a fire was broadcast on the screen for fifteen minutes or so. All you saw was the fire.

WS: Right. Jan Dibbets did that last New Year's Eve.

BN: In Holland all the stations are government-owned. The European television setup is much lower-keyed than the American, so time is not as valuable as it is here. It is a little easier to do things like that, but it's still difficult.

WS: Do you see that as a goal? It seems to me that one of the reasons for working with videotape is that the work can get out to far more people so that obviously CBS . . .

BN: I would . . . I'm not interested in making compromises in order to do that, although I still want to do it. I would like to have an hour or half an hour to present some boring material.

WS: Do you feel that you could subvert television, change it?

BN: I'm not really interested in actively spending my time trying to get those people to let me use their time. If time was offered to me I would use it, and I would want to do things my way. But to take the trouble to do whatever one has to do . . .

WS: What I meant specifically was that if the new art is going to be signifi-

cant for a larger segment of the culture, working with videotape gives you the means to help bring that about.

BN: Oh, I think it is not . . . although there would be a wider audience. But I would still want to have my time available and have only four people watching the piece, just because of what I could do with equipment that I wouldn't have access to otherwise.

WS: So there really isn't a strong desire to change the existing level of communication.

BN: No.

WS: Then we come back to where we ended the last time: who is your art for?

BN: To keep me busy.

NOTES

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1. Sharp is here referring to the multipart sculptural installation, subsequently entitled *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)*, which Nauman produced for an exhibition at Nicholas Wilder Gallery in 1970 (see fig. 3.3). The work consists of six corridors, some which are lighted, of different widths (three of the corridors can be entered into by the viewer) as well as a room, which can be seen but not accessed. The room contains a video camera placed on an oscillating mount, from which a live feed is seen on a monitor placed in one of the corridors. In another corridor, two video monitors are stacked on top of each other: one presenting a prerecorded image of the empty corridor, the other which plays the live images from a camera mounted in its interior (a similar structure is replicated in Nauman's *Live Taped Video Corridor*, 1970). Other corridors contain various configurations of cameras and monitors. For a detailed description of this complicated installation, see WCR no. 172.

2. The videotape to which Sharp refers here was subsequently retitled *Video Corridor for San Francisco (Come Piece)* and was made in 1969. As the artist remarks, in this spare installation, he attempted to replicate the often unsettling phenomenal effects of the corridor installations without employing wall structures. Similarly, the catalogue entry for the piece describes how "the work produced a further sense of kinesthetic disorientation because the images on the monitor upset normal perceptual expectations; not only might

one see oneself moving on the horizontal plane instead of the vertical, but one's image also diminished in size—seeming to recede—as one moved towards the monitor and away from the camera." See WCR no. 168.

3. In 1969, Nauman rented a high-speed industrial camera, which he used to make four films—*Black Balls*, *Bouncing Balls*, *Pulling Mouth*, and *Gauze*—discussed here. The four films would come to be known as the "slo-mos." See also Sharp, "Nauman Interview," reprinted in this volume, for further discussion of these works.

4. The actions Nauman performs in the *Bouncing in the Corner* videotape formed the basis of a live performance he did at the Whitney Museum, mentioned below, which was performed by himself, the dancer Meredith Monk, and his first wife, Judy Nauman.

5. Nauman is here referring to the videotape, *Walk With Contrapposto* (1968; see fig. 1.12).

6. For example, in *Bouncing in the Corner No. 2: Upside Down*, the same actions seen in *Bouncing in the Corner No. 1*—continuously falling and slapping his hands against the wall—are repeated in a second video, this time with the camera inverted.

4. BRUCE NAUMAN, JANUARY, 1972

LORRAINE SCIARRA

In 1972, Lorraine Sciarra, an undergraduate at Pomona College in Claremont, California, made the unusual decision to write her senior thesis on a topic in contemporary art, a relatively rare (and rarely permitted) occurrence in the field of art history at the time. The subject of Sciarra's thesis was the "new" conceptual art proliferating in New York and California in the early seventies, focusing upon the work of Nauman, John Baldessari, Sol LeWitt, and Lawrence Weiner. Lacking ample research materials on these young artists, Sciarra simply phoned them "out of the blue," as she recalls, requesting studio visits and interviews, which she taped and transcribed herself. Following is the interview she conducted with Nauman, which has never been published in English.¹

Lorraine Sciarra: Were you once doing traditional painting?

Bruce Nauman: Yes, I started in high school and then went to a traditional art school, and in an art school you learn how to draw.

LS: Where did you go to school?

BN: University of Wisconsin.

LS: Were you painting there?

BN: Sure, we all did abstract expressionist paintings and then we did hard edge paintings—whatever was going on, everybody did that. And then well that was about the time of Pop Art; Lichtenstein and Oldenburg. They were sort of the avant-garde, nobody we really paid attention to in Wisconsin. Well, people didn't even know how to deal with de Kooning for instance, and it was ridiculous because we should have had to. That was really advanced, trying to deal with de Kooning. And so there was no way

to even talk about Lichtenstein or somebody like that, or even Jasper Johns.

LS: That's interesting because people are always making comparisons between your work and Johns's.

BN: At that time it was very difficult for people to even think about those people in that part of the country. Then I moved to California and it was all taken for granted.

LS: What made you switch from painting to sculpture? The earliest pieces of yours that I have seen in magazines were those rubbery-type sculptures on the floor and the wall.

BN: They were just shapes that came out of paintings. Those were the kinds of shapes that were in my paintings. The paintings were kind of like West Coast free landscape paintings. The shapes were there and then I started to make the shapes stick out of the paintings. Then I used fiberglass and pulled the painting over them and then I stopped making the painting altogether, just made the shapes.

LS: Was it a natural or dialectical development—or was it because people around you were influencing you?

BN: Well, it was just something that occurred. I went to school at the University of California at Davis, the Graduate School, and I think the thing that helped the most was that it was a new school, and they didn't know what to do with graduate students. They gave you a studio and said fill it up, and you didn't have to do anything else. You were suppose to sign up with courses with various people, but if you didn't go, most of the [teachers] didn't come to see you. A couple of the people like Bill Wiley who were there were very open, and the influence really had to do with permissiveness. They'd say, "Well, you can do that"; or you'd do something that was hard to do just in your own head and they wouldn't say it was good or bad, or you could have made it better if you had done that. They'd just say

“Well, that’s okay to do that,” for you to take that thing off the wall and put it over here and not make a painting. Not that it wasn’t critical. If there was work that they didn’t like, they’d say it was a pile of shit. But there was just sort of an open feeling, and it was hard for a lot of people being left alone that much, but it worked out really well for me. It was just what I needed. It was a good period of school. There were quite a few people who came out of it and were just in that couple of years . . .

LS: Did you ever study any old masters of painting?

BN: No.

LS: Well, what about the influence of Dada and Duchamp? Were they big influences or have critics played that up?

BN: Well, I think that’s been played up. I think that what happened is that—well two kinds of things. [Jasper] Johns and maybe [Jim] Dine and a few other people used Duchamp, and I think what happened was that information was just sort of in the air. I don’t think it comes from paying a lot of attention to Duchamp, because things that have been written about my work where they get really specific. . . .

LS: Like the *Green Box*?

BN: Yes, those were things that I didn’t know about at all. There was no way to go see the work, and at that time there were books about Duchamp, but since then, not many more have been published. [. . .] But somehow the kind of questions that Duchamp was interested in were being looked at again and were being circulated. A large number of people were looking at that information and thinking about it, and I think maybe . . . well . . . so anyway he is an influence in that sense. And then in the Bay Area up around San Francisco, where I lived for a couple of years, there is a really big nostalgic feeling about Dada, but not so much Duchamp. It really has to do with [Kurt] Schwitters and . . .

LS: [Jean] Arp?

BN: No, not so much. But it still had to do more with making things than with Dada. It has probably changed since I've left. But at that time there were still strong feelings about that period, and they had a lot of respect for the Dada artists, which I suppose didn't interest me so much, but because it was all around me, it must have had some influence.

LS: What made you start taking photographs of your body like the squirting fountain piece [*Self-Portrait as Fountain*; see fig. 1.4] and the early word pieces?

BN: A lot of it had to do with getting out of school. I think an interesting thing that happens in school is that people are there together, and you can do really kind of the best work. A lot of people do it. Then you go away from the school and you leave that group, and I was really very much alone. I knew a few people in the Bay Area, but they didn't live near enough for me to visit them. So I didn't see people very often. I taught at the Art Institute in San Francisco, but I only taught once or twice a week and then I didn't see anybody but the students from there, and beginning students haven't thought very much about their work. They weren't people that I could talk to about my work very much.

LS: Do you have a strong desire to talk to people about your work?

BN: Not too often. But when you're in a school situation you do see people more often—every day or every other day, or at least often enough to see their work, and they, yours. So you get a lot of kind of advanced work. What happens then is you go away from the school situation and it is very difficult to continue that, because you are not reinforced. I had to start over altogether. [With some people I know,] they have probably done no work that was as advanced as what they did when they were in school, where there was that great encouragement. Then they go away and withdraw and become more conservative, doing landscape paintings and

such, and sometimes that leads to something else and sometimes it doesn't. But . . .

LS: Did you ever return to painting?

BN: Well, I think that when I made the photographs, I had been trying to think about how to get those images out, and I thought about making paintings but it had been such a long time since I did any painting that there was no way. I had no style of painting, so if I would have made paintings, they would have been just very realistic, and I don't know if I even could have done that at that point, but I would have retrained myself to draw or paint. And so it was just easier to use the photographs.

LS: Where did your interest in words come from? Why the verbal puns? You seem to be more concerned with the idea than a visual image.

BN: That was something that people whom I was around enjoyed doing. Bill Wiley, the person I was closest to at that time, enjoyed that sort of thing—making puns. And also I think it comes more out of literature. I was reading Wittgenstein and his interest in language—not necessarily puns, but in looking at language and the sort of word games that occur. And I think I was reading Nabokov at the time. He uses all kinds of word games a lot. And they probably reinforced what I found interesting in them.

LS: Then do you take a very limited audience into consideration when you are doing your works? In a piece like *Henry Moore Bound to Fail (back view)* (fig. 3.15) you seem to assume that your audience has a certain amount or kind of knowledge or information. Isn't that kind of limiting?

BN: Well I said before that . . . well, that piece comes out two ways. It comes out “Henry Moore Bound to Fail,” and just “bound to fail,” which is more general. But there were several pieces that dealt with [the sculptor] Henry Moore about that time, and they had to do with the emergence of the new English sculptors, Anthony Caro and Tucker and several other people. There was a lot written about them and they [. . .] Some of them



fig. 3.15

Henry Moore Bound to Fail (back view), 1967. Wax over plaster, 26 × 24 × 3½ in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.



fig. 3.16
Device to Stand In, 1966. Steel, blue
lacquer, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 17\frac{1}{4} \times 27\frac{1}{4}$ in. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

sort of bad-mouthed Henry Moore—that the way Moore made work was old-fashioned and oppressive and all the people were really held down by his importance. He kept other people from being able to do work that anyone would pay attention to. So he was being put down, shoved aside, and the idea I had at the time was that while it was probably true to a certain extent, they should really hang on to Henry Moore, because he really did some good work and they might need him again sometime.

LS: Another anchor?

BN: Right, and that's what I was thinking about.

LS: You seem to have been involved in body art from quite early on.

What made you start making photographs of things happening to your body—like the [film] where you are pulling gauze out of your mouth [*Gauze*, 1969]?

BN: Well the first pieces, the first films were . . . Well even before the films there were some objects that were made to step in or stand on (fig. 3.16)—sort of a really arbitrary way to locate a person.² The box had a hole in the top and you were supposed to put your foot in there. It was a little bit awkward because the box was about that wide, and you had to put your foot in the center and stand there. They were just ridiculous things to make people do. People would just stand there trying to figure out what they were doing there. Things like that. Then there were other pieces that had to do with objects you looked at through a hole, which was sort of difficult to do since people's eye-levels are different. Then the earliest performance things had to do with manipulating objects in some formal way—like standing up, lying down, bending over, and the first performances without any objects had to do with using those same kinds of things, but just with the body [see fig. 3.6]. Start off standing against the wall, then away from the wall, then bend over, and then you could bend over and touch the floor, and then lie down, roll over, and stand up in sort of a mechanical way.

LS: Body as object?

BN: Yeah, except that what occurs . . . I don't think you can avoid it. Sometimes it functions as that, but other times there seems to be much more . . . oh, what's the word I want. Some of the connotations with some positions of the body that you can't avoid. Some you'd expect, and some are surprising, so that's all of interest. It's sort of like if you take some number of elements and manipulate them in a number of arbitrary ways, you get a bunch of boring things as well as a bunch of interesting ones. But when you take a thing like the figure, it's really hard to keep it anonymous and not . . .

LS: In other words, people directly relate to it as far as personal experience.

BN: Yeah, right, and I think that's what's interesting about it. You just make these rules which are arbitrary and follow them and get the effect of an emotional impact.

LS: Were you trying to make the body anonymous?

BN: It has more to do with just following those rules and finding out what would occur—if there would be an emotional impact.

LS: Well, then did you watch people viewing your pieces?

BN: No, because most of the time I was performing them and it would be pretty difficult. I would then talk to some people about them, and find out what happened.

LS: Was this feedback very important?

BN: Yeah, I guess so, at that time. But then later I had a bunch of things that I wanted to do and I wanted to do them in public; I went to some museums and nobody wanted to do them. So I filmed them.

LS: When was this?

BN: Early 1968 or '67. And after they were filmed in the studio I never felt it very important to get the films out. Somehow having made a recording of them it wasn't so important to display them.

LS: Then was it necessary to use a recording device?

BN: Yeah, it wasn't just enough to do it in the studio.

LS: How come?

BN: I don't know. It must have still had to do with making a performance and the possibility that other people would see it.

LS: And that possibility is necessary?

BN: It was then, yeah.

LS: Was anyone else using film at the time?

BN: Well sure, and I knew some filmmakers, but I didn't know anybody who was doing these kinds of things.

LS: Using the camera as purely a recording device?

BN: Yeah, It was just in order to record. I would just set the camera up. All the people using film that I knew in the Bay Area were making movies, stories, and abstract works. I was just doing straightforward recording of an activity. And then later I began to manipulate the camera because you do, depending upon the kind of camera or lens, have a point of view—and where you point the camera.

LS: Can the camera ever function as just a recording device?

BN: Sometimes it appears to be so more than others, but then I began to manipulate, especially with a videotape, because the camera is light and it was easier to manipulate. There are so many things you can do—put it sideways or upside down or hang it from the ceiling or whatever.

LS: So you consciously got into using the camera as a new medium.

BN: Right.

LS: These later tapes of your body—did they evolve out of a similar interest that you were concerned with in the earlier sculpture works, like the mold of your arm (fig. 3.17) and knees (fig. 3.18)? Your work always seems to somehow have been involved with your own body.

BN: No, that's the thing which upset my wife when she read that article. People always assumed that these were of me but actually they were of her. It's pretty difficult to make a cast of yourself.

fig. 3.17

From Hand to Mouth, 1967. Wax over cloth, 28 × 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.





fig. 3.18

Six Inches of My Knee Extended to Six Feet, 1967. Fiberglass and polyester resin , 68½ × 5¾ × 3⅞ in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

LS: Well, there goes the whole narcissistic theory of your work.

BN: I guess so. She really did get upset. She wrote *Artforum* a letter the first time, but it didn't have to do with explaining, but with her wanting recognition, she said anyway.

LS: Speaking about articles, people or critics seem to imply that you are greatly concerned with the theories of [philosopher Maurice] Merleau-Ponty. Have you ever read him?

BN: No I never have. I read a book called *Gestalt Therapy* that was important because it has to do with awareness of your body and a way of thinking about it. [. . .] I think what happens is you get sort of interested in something and then something else, someone, or some book comes along that makes what you are doing more clear to you, and you can proceed more easily. And so I read that book and it helped a lot, and I think that's where it became more than just . . . Let's see, the earliest performance things that were filmed were things like you sit in the studio and what do you do? Well, it turned out that I was pacing around the studio a lot, so that was an activity that I did so I filmed that, just this pacing. So, I was doing really simple things like that. Being interested in the sound of pacing and just the activity of pacing around the studio. Then that book made me more aware that you can do these physical—you can do these exercises or any kind of simple activity, and then I met Meredith Monk, who was a dancer up in San Francisco. She had seen some of the work on the East Coast and we talked a little bit and that was really good to talk to someone about it. Because I guess I thought of what I was doing sort of as dance because I was familiar with some of the things that Cunningham had done and some other dancers, where you can take any simple movement and make it into a dance, just by presenting it as a dance. I wasn't a dancer, but I sort of thought if I took things that I didn't know how to do, but I was serious enough about them, then they would be taken seriously, which sort of works if you pick the right things. You do have to pick the

right things. But anyway, talking to Meredith helped, because she is a dancer and thought about things in that way. Then she helped in a performance.

LS: What made you make the change to your later pieces, the environments that a person himself experiences—the switch from you as subject-object to the viewer taking on this role?

BN: Well, I began to think about how you relate to a particular place, which I was doing by pacing around. That was an activity which took place in the studio, and then I began thinking about how to present this without making a performance, so that somebody else would have the same experience, instead of just having to watch me have that experience.

LS: Once removed?

BN: Or even two or three times by the time that it is on tape. The experience is really completely changed around and so the earliest pieces were really just narrow corridors, and the first one that I used was a prop for a piece that was taped and then was presented as just a prop for a performance; it was called that, without any description of what the performance was [*Performance Corridor*, 1969, see fig. 1.11]. It was just a very narrow white corridor and all you could really do was just walk in and walk out, and it really limited the kinds of things that you could do. It was hard to do. Because I don't like the idea of free manipulation. Like you put a bunch of stuff out there and let people do what they want with it. I really had some more specific kinds of experiences in mind and, without having to write out a list of what they should do, I wanted to make kind of play experiences unavailable, just by the preciseness of the area. Because an interesting thing was happening. A lot of people had taken a lot of trouble educating the public to participate—if I put this stuff out here, you were suppose to participate. And certain kinds of clues were taken that certain sculptures were participatory. You walk in or you rearrange things. Bob [Robert] Morris had a show in a large space with a large number of pieces

of felt lying there, and a lot of angled things, but he had them all made up: some sort of C-shaped things and rectangular plates cut in strange shapes.³ Anyway, there was just a large number of things—about one hundred elements arranged all over the floor in this space. He had taken a good deal of trouble to arrange them in a particular way. Then people would come in and start rearranging them and he got very upset, they weren't supposed to do that. But at the same time, a year before, he had written all this crap about if you put these things out there, it doesn't matter how you arrange them.⁴ It's the same thing. So people can arrange them anyway.

LS: But he got upset?

BN: Yes, because this was true about the old pieces but not the new ones, because he took a lot of trouble to arrange them. And I could go in or you could go in, an artist or a person who is paying attention, and see that somebody had taken a lot of trouble and that it was really arranged. It wasn't just dumped in a pile. And it probably wasn't arranged by somebody who just came in off of the street. Although it could have been but probably wasn't. And these were the clues. You were supposed to look at it. But somebody who had [. . .] So anyway those kind of confusions occur, and I wanted to avoid that kind of thing.

LS: Do you think that many people have a hard time relating to your work? Or that one needs previous information?

BN: Sometimes they are hard and sometimes they aren't. Some of the pieces have really very little information and demand an awful lot of the people that are there, and, in those cases, maybe it's difficult. Very few people get anything out of it. Other pieces tend to kind of manipulate, you're stuck with it. You can ignore it, but it's a little more—it's very difficult to sometimes. But whether you choose to take it as an interesting experience, that's something else again.

LS: Do you think that your pieces are more successful or less successful depending upon the amount of information you give out in them?

BN: I don't know, it's really hard to say. You see, working alone in the studio the pieces are really just made, in your own particular case, they're made for one other person at a time, sort of. And you should have a lot of time. So they tend to work out reasonably well in galleries, except at openings and on weekends where there are a lot of people around—where you don't have much traffic through. But if they get stuck in a museum, which doesn't happen very often anyway, it's a real problem where you have a lot of traffic and it's just ridiculous to have guards sending in one person at a time, regulating time. I hate that a lot. I'd rather have a piece fail in the majority of cases because there are too many people than to have a guard out there, because that's kind of a test thing. With all those people waiting it's really difficult to do it.

LS: A large number of people dismiss your work and similar type pieces as not being “art” since it doesn't follow or make use of traditional media. Does this concern you at all?

BN: No. It doesn't seem to worry me. But sometimes if you make work that's just too private, nobody else can understand it, just because of that.

LS: Your past work has sort of been divided into two areas. Some critics feel that your environments are very logical and almost scientific, while your tapes such as bouncing balls are incredibly personal. Do you think there's such a great difference between what are you doing or concentrating on now?

BN: That's sort of a false dichotomy. Literature is kind of, well . . . I enjoy reading and having that information about psychology. People respond to specific situations, there have been so many laboratory tests that you have real specific information with physiological things that occur, and why we react in various situations in various ways. So you can set those problems

up so that they appear intellectually to be experiments. Except I don't think that any of the pieces really function that way. And mostly they're much more intuitive than that. It has more to do with working on something and finding out "wow, that's far out" or interesting, and then thinking about it, trying to figure out why it interested you. It doesn't work from knowing some kind of result and then making the piece with that result. It somehow has to do with intuitively finding something or some phenomena and then later kind of relating it to art and information and maybe even concluding a piece from that. But the approach always seems to be backwards. I never seem to get there from knowing some result or previously done experiment.

LS: Are you interested in making people aware of new ways of perceiving, and to have them think about this? Or is it just sort of a momentary sensation you want to impinge upon them?

BN: If it succeeds as a work and not just as a kind of phenomena experiment or whatever, where you just get some curious information to take away. It still can do that, but at the same time it should succeed as an art work, in which case then people should be forced to think about it in the way that they think about any other art work that has any meaning for them.

LS: How do people think about art then?

BN: I don't know.

LS: Then why do you think that you do art—or consider your work as art?

BN: A lot of it has to do with a person just being trained as an artist. I continue to function sort of within the recognized art world, so whatever I am doing is art.

NOTES

Unpublished manuscript, Pomona College, Claremont, California, 1972. Printed with permission, Lorraine Sciarra.

1. The interview has been lightly edited for this publication, and unreadable sections of the original, hand annotated manuscript are indicated by ellipses enclosed in brackets [. . .]. A German translation of the Sciarra interview appears in Christine Hoffman, ed., *Bruce Nauman: Interviews 1967–1988* (Amsterdam: Verlag der Kunst, 1996).

2. In this passage, Nauman is describing a series of “device” sculptures he produced in 1965–1966, such as *Device to Stand In*, *Device to Stand In (Brass Floor Piece with Foot Slot)*, and *Device to Hold a Box at a Slight Angle*. These relatively small, minimalist-inflected, geometric structures sit on the floor, the first two having an opening in which to insert one’s foot, inviting the viewer to “participate” with the object, albeit in a highly circumscribed way.

3. Nauman is possibly referring to Robert Morris’s sculptural installation *Untitled (Threadwaste)* (1968), which is made up of a lateral spread of multicolored, industrial thread interspersed with various objects such as scraps of felt and lengths of copper wire. Within the sculptural mass are a series of upright mirrors that reflect the materials. The work was exhibited in Morris’s studio space at the end of 1968 and at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1969, according to the catalogue entry in the Morris retrospective exhibition catalogue. As this was the the same time that Nauman was living in New York, it is conceivable that he could have seen one or two of these exhibitions. For a complete description and an illustration of the work, see Kim Paice, “Threadwaste, 1968” in *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 226–229.

4. In the mid-to-late sixties, Morris wrote a series of influential articles (most of which appeared in *Artforum*) in which he theorized minimalist, and later postminimalist or process, sculpture. Nauman is probably referencing one (or both) of Morris’s essays on the notion of “antiform” or antiobjects. For example, Morris writes: “Considerations of ordering are necessarily casual and imprecise and unemphasized. Random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied, as replacing will result in another configuration. Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and order for things is a positive assertion” (“Anti-Form,” *Artforum* [April 1968]; reprinted in the anthology, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993], 46). Similarly, in “Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects” (1969), Morris writes, “Implications of constant change are in such work [with a marked lateral spread]. . . . In the work in question indeterminacy of arrangement of parts is a literal aspect of the physical existence of the thing” (*Continuous Projects*, 61).



fig. 3.19

Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face Up and Face Down, 1973. Videotape, color, sound, 60 mins. to be repeated continuously. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

5. BRUCE NAUMAN: THE CENTER OF YOURSELF, 1975

JAN BUTTERFIELD

In this interview, Nauman discusses his recent videotapes, including Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face Up and Face Down, as well as interactive sculptural environments.

Jan Butterfield: When did you first begin working with video?

Bruce Nauman: In 1968. I had made some films with Bill Allan when I was living in San Francisco, but in New York I was able to get videotape equipment through Leo Castelli—which worked a lot better than film. It is really hard to get good film processing on the East Coast.

JB: How early were you making videotapes in relation to others working in the medium?

BN: Early. I told Leo that I would like to get some equipment, and he put up the money for it (about \$1200). I had the equipment in the studio for a year to work with. When I left there, I gave it back to Leo—and it was at that point that others began to use it, like Keith Sonnier. Then he loaned it to a lot of other people, such as Richard Serra. Now most of the people in New York—like Robert Morris, Richard Serra, [John] Chamberlain, and [Lynda] Benglis—have done tapes.

JB: I just saw your sixty-minute tape, *Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face Up and Face Down* (fig. 3.19) and I am not altogether sure of my response to it. I found it problematical, both in terms of duration and in terms of structure: the absence of beginning and end.

BN: Let me give you some history: When I was living in San Francisco I made films which were only ten minutes long, because that was the size of the reel that I was renting from a guy at the Art Institute.¹ I had the idea at that time that they should be loops, that they should be continuous. In fact, the “Art Make-Up” films (fig. 3.20) were originally made to be loops. There were four of them—one would be on one wall of a square room and the other three would be on the three remaining walls. They were all made for the San Francisco Museum of Art. Then Gerry Nordland found out that they were films and not sculpture (they were made for a “sculpture” show) and he wouldn’t allow them in the exhibition. So, they have never really been shown as loops.

JB: What date was that?

BN: 1968. After that, videotape was really nice because it was a full hour, and that seemed to still imply you could get this same effect without having to make a loop. At this point I met Steve Reich in Denver, and then got to know him better in New York. Then I met Phil Glass. I also heard other music that Terry Riley and La Monte Young were doing. That was really important for me. I was able to use their idea about time as a really supportive idea. There was never anything you could really take from them, but their attitude about time and the things going on were very supportive.

JB: Were you into music also at that time?

BN: Yes, because I was a musician. I played guitar and bass. So, although I wasn’t really making music at that time, their ideas were supportive of my attitude. The way I used the videotape was to incorporate their ideas about the way time should be. I think also that Warhol’s films were useful. . . . I think it was like knowing about John Cage without ever having heard his music. You could read him and still get lots of useful information. In fact, in some ways it was more useful than hearing him. All those people were around—Phil Glass was doing this thing with Richard Serra, and all of these things were kind of cross-feeding into each other.

JB: In an article that came out a while back you stated that time was a very important factor to you—that you wanted the participant to be able to come in at any point and know where he was. Certainly your pacing piece and this recent tape have that quality. How much of the tension is built up by actual rather than implied duration?

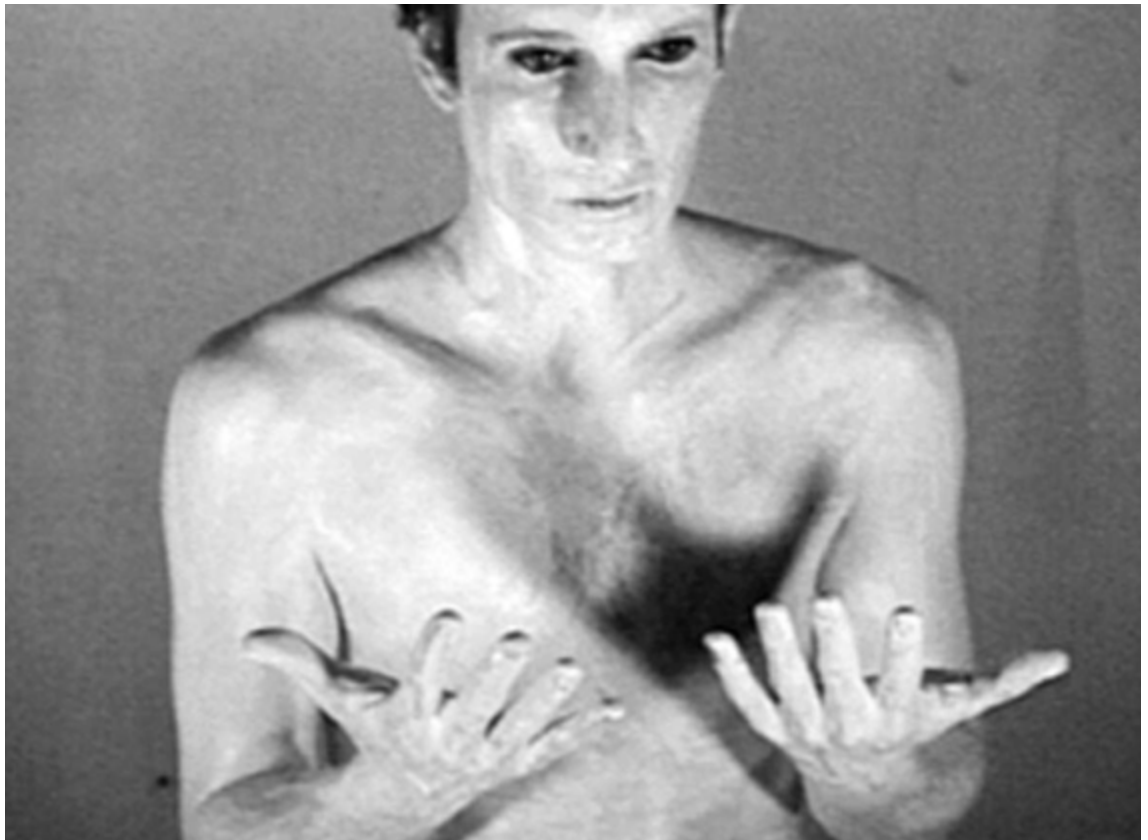
BN: Which one did you see?

JB: The one with the male body, *Tony Sinking into the Floor*.

BN: I asked because there are two tapes, each with a different problem. In the first, the problem was to attempt to sink into the floor, and the second was to allow the floor to rise up over you [*Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise*

fig. 3.20

Art Make-Up, No. 2: Pink, 1967–1968.
One of four 16 mm films, color, silent,
10 mins. each. Courtesy Electronic
Arts Intermix, New York.



Up over Her, Face Up, 1973]. So there are two very different tapes. Initially, it was my idea that people could come in at any point, because you sort of have the information. But, on the other hand, in tapes I have made where the exercise is very difficult to perform (if you watch them very closely), there is a whole different set of tensions: whether it is just watching mistakes, or getting tired when those kinds of things start to happen.

JB: So they are equally important to you for different reasons?

BN: I felt really good about the floor tape.

JB: I sense that you do, but I am not sure it is possible to really understand what is happening in that piece.

BN: There is a great danger there and I will explain why. I was working on the exercise in the studio for a while and wanted to make a tape of it, a record, to see if you could see what was happening. When I did the things, they made me tired and I felt good when I finished, but they were not relaxing; they took a lot of energy and a lot of concentration and paying attention. I was in New York, and had the opportunity to do the color tape, and I thought it would be nice if somebody else could do it other than myself. I talked to the two people pretty much individually; we talked about what I wanted done, and what I meant by it, so that they could function and take it seriously. They practiced it a little bit at home, and felt what they thought about when they were doing it. Then, somehow, when they got into the studio, it was pretty much what I had experienced myself. The problem was to make the exercise take up a full hour—which I had never been able to do. (I was able to concentrate for maybe fifteen to twenty minutes at the most; then you simply find out that you are not thinking about it, or you become distracted.) In the television studio the situation was very good. There was no one there except a TV technician who was bored with the whole thing and went back to read a book, and one other guy that both people knew, so it was easy. The studio had a concrete floor

and that seemed to be important, as opposed to working in their apartments which had wooden loft floors.

JB: Important negatively? Important in what sense?

BN: It made the whole exercise what it turned out to be. It became extremely tense: the guy who was trying to sink into the floor started to choke, and almost got the dry heaves. I got pretty scared, and didn't know what to do. I didn't know if I should "wake him up" or what, or if he was kind of sleepwalking. I didn't know if he was physically ill, or if he was really gasping and choking. He finally sat up and kind of controlled himself, and we talked about it. The tape was running, but unfortunately the microphone did not pick it up, but I wish it had because it was really beautiful—he was really scared. He said, "I just tried to do it too fast, and I was afraid I couldn't get out." What had happened was that as his chest began to sink through the floor, it was filled up and he just couldn't breathe any more, so he started to . . . to choke. We started to kind of talk it out. We had been watching his hand and it turned out that we were watching the wrong hand. He was thinking about the right one and we were watching the left one, but he said, "I was afraid to move my hand, because I thought if I moved it some of the molecules would stay there and I would lose it—it would come all apart and I couldn't get it out." Interestingly, the night before, the same thing had happened to the girl in the other tape. She broke out into an incredible sweat, and she couldn't breathe. It was pretty scary. It was, first of all, amazing that someone else could do this exercise, that they could even get into it. It was such an intense experience that it was really frightening for both of them to do. As nearly as I can tell, the tapes don't show any of that, which I thought was also interesting.

JB: Are you still doing tapes?

BN: No, there were just some tapes, and then other things such as the environments. I have been involved lately with special installations, with a set of written instructions to be followed. One of the recent pieces is a

fig. 3.21

Green Light Corridor, 1970.

Wallboard, green fluorescent light fixtures, dimensions variable. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.



“centering piece.” It is a room with a high ceiling. You are to go into the room and locate its center, which is somewhere above eye level. Then you attempt to locate the center of yourself, and then try to move your own center until it coincides with the center of the room. There is a set of instructions for people to follow (for how you might find your own center) which is intended to be a *physical* center. The instructions say to find what seems to be the center of your left side and what seems to be the center of your right side, and imagine a line coming from those two points. At that point you find the center of your front, then the center of your back, and imagine a line connecting those two points. Then you concentrate on trying to make those two lines cross.

JB: I react very strongly to *Green Light Corridor* (fig. 3.21), but I think it is a very frightening piece. The manner in which it was structured made it necessary for participants to participate in it your way—and that is frightening.

BN: Yes, but I also find it a very calm piece, standing in the middle, for those who go that far. Did you see the floating room [*Floating Room: Lit From Inside*, 1972] I did at [Leo] Castelli [Gallery]? With that, people seemed to either have pretty much the same experience I did, or none at all. I suspect that they either had *no* experience or they were blocking it out, because it was, in a way, a pretty frightening thing, too. I think it has to do with fear, but it also has to do with the way we normally control space, or fill up space.

JB: Can you build some of those unrealized pieces in your head? Without needing to finish them?

BN: Well, they almost always need to be built or mocked up or whatever, because they always change quite a bit.

JB: Have you been mocking up the rooms in your studio?

BN: Usually it is the only way I can get a feel of the scale and the size.

JB: I am interested in examining some of your attitudes about “art.” There has to be some common ground, some societal overlap for pieces to be “visible” to others besides yourself. How little of that can we have and still have an “art form,” rather than individual exercise on your part? I am interested in determining whether or not you are conscious of where the boundaries are.

BN: Not consciously. I don’t necessarily think consciously aware. I am sure that I think about that, and would really like to be working at the edge of that. What I am really concerned about is what art is supposed to be—and can become. It seems to me that painting is not going to get us anywhere, and most sculpture is not going to, either, and art has to go somewhere. What I see now is interesting. I think that the overlap (the societal overlap you were talking about) is the part we see now. It may seem familiar, and at some point we may be able to look back and say, “Well at some point we saw an overlap, and that was wrong—the important part was way out there somewhere.” Do you see what I mean? This thing about obscurity? Everybody is going about looking for what is going to be “next” in terms of art, and it will probably turn out that it is something that has been going on all of the time. It’s just that we have tunnel vision. We are looking at the wrong part of it, or too small a part of it, and we are missing all of that stuff going on out there—at the edges.

JB: There must be times, though, when you get jerked up short, when you say to yourself: “Is this even remotely interesting or comprehensible to anyone besides myself?”

BN: Well, I don’t think that it bothers me that the pieces are not for many people, because the way I work, it seems that I am doing them in the studio for me or for the small number of people who come to the studio, so it is really very one-to-one. I don’t think of them in terms of a lot of people at a time, or even for lots of people over a period of time. However, most of the people that came to the studio are sympathetic anyway (you can really

feel that quickly); you can tell if you want to talk to people, to communicate, or not at all. Sometimes certain kinds of people come in, and I just don't tell them anything, or show them what I've got.

JB: That comes back to this idea of yours of not wanting the participant to flop around. You obviously want the experience to be a very specific response. Do you ever query people afterwards to see if they have had the same response you have? Does that interest you?

BN: A little bit. It is usually more spontaneous than that. People will tell me that they tried it and it didn't do what I said it would for them; or that they read a great deal about a given piece, but didn't have the response that they were "supposed to"; or, conversely, that they did not seem to relate at all to what I had written on the instructions. For example, I will say at some point that the exercise will become very sensual, or very sexual, and people will tell me that it didn't for them.

JB: Do some get something else altogether from a piece than what you intended?

BN: Yes.

JB: And does that make it unsuccessful as far as you are concerned?

BN: What has been happening lately is that I have been allowing for the fact that the instructions seem to be becoming very specific, but the information about the piece is becoming more loose, more vague and open. I think it has to do with the written instructions. Does that make sense? I think it is almost like reading [Alain] Robbe-Grillet: you come to a point where he has repeated what he said earlier, but it means something altogether different, because even though he has changed only two words, they have changed the whole meaning about what he is talking about.

JB: It is a very complicated thing. I am not sure any two people can experience a phenomenon the same way.

BN: Right, so that's . . .

JB: . . . the thing about the control factor. I think the control factor is a very interesting aspect of your work.

BN: I think that if you can control the situation physically, then you can have a certain amount of similarity. People are sufficiently similar so that you can have at least a similar kind of experience. But, certainly, the private thing can change the experience a great deal in some ways, and I don't expect to be able to control that. But, on the other hand, I don't like to leave things open so that people feel they are in a situation they can play games with.

JB: Why not?

BN: Why do I not like to do that? Well, I think I am not really interested in game playing. Partly it has to do with control, I guess.

JB: That obviously is a key factor in your work: you are not simply setting up an "it is" situation.

BN: Well, some of the pieces have to do with setting up a situation and then not completing it; or in taking away a little of the information so that somebody can only go so far, and then can't go any farther. It attempts to set up a kind of tension situation. I think it has to do with a personal fear of exposing myself. I can only give so much. If I go further, it would take away something, or do something, that would throw me off the track. We all go so far that we have the fear of exposing ourselves. We really want to expose the information, but, on the other hand, we are afraid to let people in.

NOTES

First published in *Arts Magazine* 49 (February 1975): 53–55. Reprinted with permission, Bruce Nauman.

1. The "Studio Films," 1967–68, were made with 16 mm film in ten-minute reels.



fig. 3.22

Untitled (Trench, Shafts, Pit, Tunnel, and Chamber), 1978. Cor-ten steel, 66 × 108 × 204 in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

6. BRUCE NAUMAN INTERVIEWED, 1979 (OCTOBER 1978)

IAN WALLACE AND RUSSELL KEZIERE

The following interview was prompted by an installation of Nauman's new sculptural works that were intended to function as "studies" or models for (real or imagined) monumental outdoor sculptures, some of which were to be buried underground with ramps or passage-ways providing entry points for the beholder. The interview was conducted by Canadian artist Ian Wallace and Russell Keziere, the editor of Vanguard, a now out-of-print journal of contemporary art, published by the Vancouver Art Gallery Association.

BRUCE NAUMAN'S MOST recent sculptural installation at Ace Gallery, Vancouver, during October and November 1978, was indicative of the artist's longstanding concern with maintaining a sense of double entendre. He feels that the tension generated between two separate orders of information, both of which would occasion divergent experiences in the viewer, provides the real interest in this work. The objects are on one hand, to be taken at a prima facie level as material sculpture and, on the other hand, referencing as scale models to fictional and monumental realities. Vancouver artist and teacher Ian Wallace and Russell Keziere discussed the problems intrinsic to his use of equivocal orders of intentionality with Bruce Nauman on October 9, 1978 in Vancouver.

Ian Wallace: Your show at Ace in 1973 had a set of instructions telling us to stand next to the wall. That piece required no materials at all; was it generated from the studio? It seemed to me that there was a lot of psychology going into it. What other kinds of input did you see going into it?

Bruce Nauman: There was a period once when I did a number of performance pieces with videotape; they required what I guess you could call sets. They were used to control the content, and became important. If you give somebody a set of instructions, then they are obligated to give some kind of interpretation. If I can limit the kinds of things which can be performed then I can control part of the experience. That's where all that came from.

IW: What bothers me about the pieces here is the whole question of scale; the pieces are said to be $\frac{1}{40}$ th of actual size. In terms of a spectator's use of the piece, this allows him an incredible leeway to take off on his own.

BN: One of the things that I liked about this series of works is that the models exist without any of that information and function in the room as object sculpture which can be dealt with very directly. But when you add on the information that it is really a model for a huge outdoor work, you get to the point of giving out information and taking it away at the same time.

IW: That is what I find contradictory about them.

BN: Yeah.

Russell Keziere: I talked to a lot of people who have come to this exhibition and there has been a certain amount of delight with the spatial flexibility of the pieces, especially the eye level perimeters. But there has also been the reaction which Ian mentioned: what does he think he is doing telling us it is only 1:40 scale—is he actually going to build this thing or not? I found, however, that this additional order of information worked rather like some of the titles in your earlier pieces which were like tangential orders of information. Those puns and titles were in fact far more tautological than phenomenological. The result was not a univocal statement, but something highly equivocal and not to be taken at face value. I find that the reference to scale in this piece acts in very much the same way.

BN: The information about scale gives you two kinds of information: visual and physical information as well as the intellectual information which indicates that the sculpture is only a model. Immediately you begin to imagine what it would be like and how you would respond to it at the proper scale. You have to deal with two orders of information at once, that's what makes it interesting.

IW: Where do the shapes come from?

BN: The first pieces in this series had to do with shafts that were to go down into the ground about forty feet. You would go down the stairs, circle around the perimeter, the clear sky left visible only through the tops of the shafts. This related to the series of which the simplest turned out to be just a 60-foot square, the top edge of which would be just above eye level. My intention was to deal with the relationship of public space to private space. When you are alone, you accept the space by filling it with your presence; as soon as someone else comes into view, you withdraw and protect yourself. The other poses a threat, you don't want to deal with it. The best example of this is when someone steps out of a crowded street and into a phone booth. On the one hand you go in there to get acoustic privacy and on the other hand you make yourself a public figure. It is a conflicting kind of situation. What I want to do is use the investigative polarity that exists in the tension between the public and private space and use it to create an edge.

RK: This notion of a polarity between private and public space seems to tie in with the distinction between the studio and the street.

BN: Whenever I give a public presentation of something I did in the studio, I go through an incredible amount of self-exposure which can also function, paradoxically, as a defense. I will tell you about myself by giving a show, but I will only tell you so much. Again, it's like using two orders of information: the tension is intentional.

RK: You once said that you mistrusted audience participation, and yet in much of your recent sculpture, even this work which would seem to be much more “stable” than anything you have done, the notion of enterability (at least in potency) and in involvement has been of paramount importance. Of course when you made that statement audience participation was very much in the vogue and you were attempting to vouchsafe a certain amount of privacy.

BN: I think at that time there was also a prevalent description of art as game-playing and role-playing, and I really didn't like that. I thought art was too serious to be called game-playing. It is said that art is a matter of life and death; this may be melodramatic but it is also true. If you allow art to become a real political activity, then it does go beyond game-playing or role-playing.

RK: Which political matrix do you see yourself as addressing?

BN: Art is a means to acquiring an investigative activity. I don't know if you can necessarily change things in a broad sense. You can make yourself aware of the possibilities; it is important to do that. I don't know how, in that sense, it relates to the art community. But my attitude comes from being an artist and not a scientist, which is another way of investigating. When I was in school I started out as a mathematician. I didn't become one, but I think there was a certain thinking process which was very similar and which carried over into art. This investigative activity is necessary. I think that we trust too much in accepting traditional validations. When you go to a museum or gallery of Greek vases, nobody questions their validation. And now you really don't doubt that this thing is important simply because it was made by Mr. de Kooning. We need to know that the object was made by an artist before it is given its validity. An investigation of this is the activity and the traditional validation is the matrix.

IW: What essentially interests me in this work, aside from these extra-aesthetic considerations, is the fabrication. I was wondering, for example,



if you were interested in the construction industry? You use plaster, wood, steel, and all the basic components necessary for construction. Does this enter into it at all, or am I looking at something which really doesn't count?

BN: These are all things which are available to me and I know about them.

IW: But you mean for the plaster pieces to be sunk into the ground; the fabrication won't actually be seen.

fig. 3.23

Ramp, 1977. Wood, plaster, iron, approx. $43\frac{5}{16} \times 165\frac{3}{8} \times 13\frac{3}{4}$. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

BN: Yeah.

IW: When the plaster pieces are out of the ground you can read them quite well as negative shapes. But if they are sunk into the ground, what good is this feeling for the materials?

BN: It's an entirely different feel. They become things that you walk into rather than walk around. If these plaster works were built full-scale and you walked down into the space, you would be inside looking out rather than outside looking in.

IW: I was really resisting this reference to scale. What happens is that this additional information actually turns into possible fictions. The piece becomes a platform for a set of possible activities: how far are you willing to carry this through? May one consider one's own fiction as part of your primary intention?

BN: At one point all those things which were not impossible but exceedingly unlikely, interested me. I allowed myself to follow through with them, constructing them in a smaller scale.

IW: These proposed monumental pieces relate, on another level, to other works you have done such as the peripheral vision and perspective piece that was shown last year at Ace. Everytime I got a peg on the unifying structure of that work it began slipping around several points of view. It worked like the performance corridors; when you're inside you are at the one point where you can't see the periphery. When you are down in the sink piece, also, everything else is peripheral.

BN: In those instances you were being forced to rely almost entirely on your physical and emotional responses to the situation, rather than standing away from it and having an intellectual experience of it.

IW: I saw some drawings in *Interfunktionen* for a video piece of yours which really interested me. It was called *Tony Sinking* and it involved lying on the floor and concentrating on the peripheral vision.

BN: I did two: *Tony Sinking [into the Floor, Face Up and Face Down, 1973, see fig. 3.19]* and *Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise Up Over Her [Face Up, 1973]*. I think they both did it face down and face up. We used two cameras and changed locations from time to time, slowly faded from one image back to another for a period of an hour. That was the extent of the main visual texture of it apart from the performances of the individual people. We had discussed the project together, practiced it, and they were aware of my intentions. They took the whole thing very seriously, which was important. Then Tony came on the first day and we taped him; on this occasion he was lying on his back and after about fifteen minutes he started choking and coughing. He sat up and said: "I did it too fast and I scared myself." He didn't want to do it again, but did it anyway. At another time we were watching his hand through the cameras and it was behaving very strangely. We asked him about it later and he said that he was afraid to move his hand because he thought he might lose molecules. The same thing happened to Elke, who had not talked to Tony about it at all. She had a really physical and violent reaction. This was amazing because when we had practiced it, none of us had that kind of response. The only thing they could figure out was that when they had done it in my studio on the wooden floor, they weren't as threatened as they were by the density of the concrete floor in the television studio. I don't know what it is like to see those tapes because it was an incredibly emotional and intense experience for all of us; I doubt if that intensity comes across on the tape. They were really important things for me to do but I have no idea how I feel about them as works.

IW: Is work of this nature an ongoing concern for you?

BN: No. I am not doing anything that particular. But I do not see what I am doing now as any radical departure from it. What I was investigating at that time was how to examine a purely mental activity as opposed to a purely physical situation which might incur some mental activity.

IW: It seems to have a lot to do with how self-images are constructed in space. A lot of your earlier work was easily reproduced in the sense that it was related to photographic images; are you working against that now? Do you share, like other artists who are concerned with space, such as Michael Asher or Robert Irwin, a negative attitude to photographic documentation?

BN: I think it is important to be aware that the photograph is a photograph.

IW: Which has more importance for you: the whole general notion, with all the different levels of information, or the visual, tactile level, e.g., the plaster dribbling over the edges of these plaster pieces here.

BN: I think all those things are important. Dimension is important and how they are made is important.

RK: Has the contemporary integration of photography into sculpture been of significance to you? Previously you were known by your photographs and now you are doing something primarily sculptural.

BN: I am no longer pursuing those particular ideas. Sometimes those ideas were already worked out in photography, and sometimes they were almost the same intellectual ideas worked out in sculpture. In most cases, however, I find still photography limiting for my interests. I don't know how to get everything I want into a photograph. I am a little more comfortable with film. In general and recently, I have been frustrated in my attempts to do something in two-dimensional media; I can get a certain amount of what I want into it, and then I feel blocked.

RK: Would you have preferred an actual performance situation for something like the *Studies for Holograms* [*First Hologram Series (Making Faces)*, 1968, see fig. 3.4] or do the photographs suffice?

BN: I think they worked best as holograms. I don't think I ever had any need to or any intention of doing a performance of them.

RK: Would you ever want to dramatize the private/public space tensions that are operative in the sculptural objects?

BN: Not particularly.

RK: How does humor operate in your work? Many of your titles have involved jokes and puns, and sometimes the conflicting orders of information have a significant and humorous irony.

BN: I think humor is used a lot of the time to keep people from getting too close. Humor side-steps and shifts the meaning.

IW: Do you relate at all to other artists in the L.A. area like Asher, Irwin, Burden or Norman? And in the past your work has been characterized by a California context; is that still there?

BN: I know most of the artists in the area, but not well. I used to see Irwin fairly often, but he travels so much that I see him more often abroad than at home. I don't think there is a "school" in California, there is a different focus now. I would feel closest to Irwin as someone who has done art for a long time and has made some fairly major changes in his way of working; he has continued to do interesting work. That personal quality is more important to me right now than specific works.

IW: Do you do any work in Europe and how do you relate to it?

BN: I do some work there, but I haven't seen too much art there that has interested me.

RK: How do you presently perceive your role in an expanding art world?

BN: When I left school and got a job at the Art Institute in San Francisco, I rented some studio space. I didn't know many people there, and being a beginning instructor I taught the early morning classes and consequently saw very little of my colleagues. I had no support structure for my art then; there was no contact or opportunity to tell people what I was doing every

day; there was no chance to talk about my work. And a lot of things I was doing didn't make sense so I quit doing them. That left me alone in the studio; this in turn raised the fundamental question of what an artist does when left alone in the studio. My conclusion was that I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever it was I was doing in the studio must be art. And what I was in fact doing was drinking coffee and pacing the floor. It became a question then of how to structure those activities into being art, or some kind of cohesive unit that could be made available to people. At this point art became more of an activity and less of a product. The product is not important for your own self-awareness. I saw it in terms of what I was going to do each day, and how I was to get from one to another, and beyond that I was concerned with maintaining my interest level over a longer period of time, e.g., a part of a lifetime. It is easier to consider the possibility of not being an artist. The world doesn't end when *you* dry up. What you are to do with the everyday is an art problem. And it is broader than just deciding whether to be a sculptor or a painter. It is a problem that everybody has at one time or another. An artist is put in the position of questioning one's lifestyle more than most people. The artist's freedom to do whatever he or she wants includes the necessity of making these fundamental decisions.

RK: These speculations on your role and behavior are not aesthetic but moral.

BN: Yeah, right.

RK: During this period in your development, when you didn't have a support community, this form of speculation would have been necessary to find any kind of level of expression.

BN: But the support community can function both ways: it is a support community but it is also a limiting community. All they can support is what they know. When you do something other than that, you are automatically

deprived of support. This is not meant as a criticism, it's a fact. Your activity does become moral and political in the sense that whenever an artist or a philosopher chooses to do original work he threatens the stability of what is known about the discipline, and *that* is a political situation. Sometimes the innovation is so obscure that nothing is threatened, at other times it is so far gone that it can't threaten anything. When it is right at the edge, however, where it is poking holes at what is known and thought to be art, then it becomes dangerous.

RK: Will that evolution always occur within a dialectic, must there be tension?

BN: There has to be some conflict between what is already known and the innovation; if there is no relationship or connection, then very little will happen. It won't even be seen.

IW: You lacked a support system when you were alone in the studio. But now public interest in your art is pretty fine; have you left the studio and relate instead to the media and art criticism?

BN: Not too much. Where I am living now I don't have too much immediate feedback to my art.

IW: Where are you living now?

BN: Pasadena. Los Angeles, in general, doesn't offer much in the way of immediate response or a community which can provide that function. The critics in L.A. are not very interesting, and when I show in New York or Europe, the media response comes back very slowly. Most of my feedback is from friends who come to the studio to see my work.

IW: You must have a fair number of commissions. Has this solved your problem of what to do next?

BN: There are no commissions. The work for this show, for example, was produced out of that same problem of what to do in the studio. The only

difference being that these pieces were done as scale models; I couldn't really make the entire thing in the studio. I haven't really had to work much in response to demand or commissions.

RK: Would you ever move back to New York, where you were in the late sixties?

BN: One of the things that New York can do is to force you to clean yourself up and define your work. Since so many people do so much work, you're going to overlap no matter what you do; the pressure is to clean it up and find your own area. But this same pressure can also force you to be narrow and in some ways can inhibit real change. I was on an NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] advisory committee recently, for example, and had to look at an awful lot of art. I think the saddest thing was that all the artists were trying to look like they had just come out of an art magazine. It was almost as if they were thinking that if we make it look this way it will be acceptable. The edges had been taken off, there was a total lack of experimentation. No one was willing to make a mistake. I preferred the people who were occasionally completely bad because they had some energy. And that is what is important.

NOTE

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7. INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE NAUMAN, MAY 27 AND 30, 1980

MICHELE DE ANGELUS

The following conversation with Michele de Angelus represents one of the most extensive interviews Nauman has ever given—although it has never previously been published.¹ The discussion is unusual in a number of respects: for one, the typically private Nauman speaks at length about biographical details of his life and his educational background: from his childhood, his experiences as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin, his years in graduate school, to the start of his artistic career. Additionally, he touches upon such subjects as artistic precedents for his work, and those artists (visual, performing, and literary) who have been important to the development of his thinking.

The rhetorical style of the text reflects the natural give-and-take of an informal conversation, as it was never edited for publication. To preserve this voice, the original transcript is being reprinted here with minimal intervention; grammatical mistakes and interrupted or fragmentary sentences remain. The only modifications include minor editing and correction of factual errors, as well as the addition of notes to clarify references made by the conversants.

Michele de Angelus: I read somewhere that you were born in Fort Wayne, Indiana. When was that?

Bruce Nauman: 1941, December 6, the day before Pearl Harbor. That helps you remember your birthday.

MD: Tell me what your parents were doing there and how they got there. Did your grandparents and parents grow up there?

BN: No, both my parents are from Chicago. My father worked for General Electric.

MD: I didn't know General Electric had a plant there. I grew up in Schenectady, which is another big GE town.

BN: Yes, we lived there for a while, too. My father was a—I don't know what he was doing at that time; he did drafting for them for a while. He was an engineer but he was a salesman, a sales engineer.

MD: Did he sell turbines?

BN: At one time he did—I don't know what he sold then, I know he did sell turbines. I don't know what he did when we lived in Schenectady. When we lived in northern Wisconsin he sold mining equipment.

MD: And then you moved to Schenectady?

BN: For a couple of years, and then to Milwaukee, and that was about until I was in the third grade. And then we moved up to Appleton, Wisconsin for three more years and back to Wauwatosa, which is a suburb of Milwaukee. I finished high school there—I guess I was there all the way through high school. Then I went to the University of Wisconsin.

MD: Were your grandparents alive during this time?

BN: Yes, both my grandmothers were alive. My mother's father died fairly early, when I was five or six. My father's father died when I was about twelve.

MD: Do you have any memory of him?

BN: I remember him a little bit, not a lot.

MD: What did he do?

BN: He worked for American Excelsior or something, I don't remember in particular. I remember one time going to his plant; I remember machinery, lots of it. It was the old machinery that ran on a lot of big leather belts on overhead power. And he used to do magic tricks.

MD: He did?

BN: Yes, he'd send us in the kitchen and say, "Get some apples and bananas from your grandmother," and he'd make them disappear. But my mother's father died when I was young enough that I don't remember. I believe he was sick at home and when we would visit we would have to be quiet: "Grandpa's sick."

MD: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BN: I have two younger brothers.

MD: What are their names?

BN: Craig and Larry. Craig is the next youngest, we're four years apart. Larry's the youngest, he's eight years younger than I am.

MD: You were saying that your grandmothers were alive as you were growing up. Where did they live?

BN: They both still lived in Mill Park, and stayed there.

MD: Did they have any kind of input in your life? Did you spend time with them?

BN: My mother had a very large family, four sisters and a brother, and when we lived in Indiana and in Wisconsin we were close enough to go there at Christmas and Thanksgiving. And there were some other relatives. I think my mother's aunt or something had a farm in Michigan. I used to go there in the summer sometimes.

MD: But you always grew up in suburban situations?

BN: Pretty much, yes. Small towns, or suburban neighborhoods. I remember, living in Schenectady, we lived right on the edge of town by the farmers' fields.

MD: Do you remember where you lived?

BN: No, but there were fields. So it was probably new housing built after the war.

MD: Is your family German?

BN: Yes, my father's family. Well, my great-grandfather on my father's side came from Germany when he was fairly young; he was a cabinetmaker. Then there's English, I think; my grandmother was English and Scotch. My mother's side is mostly English and Scotch-Irish or something like that. But some of the people came a long time ago, so were pretty Americanized by the time I knew them.

MD: Did you grow up in a fairly religious household?

BN: No. Well, it's interesting, the difference between myself and my brothers. We're four years apart, each, and my father—working for the same company all that time, starting out with probably not a lot of money and working up to—I don't know how much, but quite comfortable now, I'm sure. But he remained, or it appeared to me, he got more conservative as he got older, and started going to church more. I don't remember particularly when I was real young, but I remember somehow the first Christmas when we had to go to church—it was a shock.

MD: What church did you go to?

BN: It was the Episcopal church; my mother's family were mostly Episcopal. Some of her sisters were Catholic, but her mother was Episcopal. My father, I think they didn't particularly go to church except I think they went to a Lutheran church sometimes. German Lutheran. In fact, my grandfather used to say things in German sometimes which—the first time I ever went to Germany I had these phrases and I used them and they turned out to be nothing, or at least they were old, old colloquialisms that nobody—

MD: Did your parents speak German with your grandparents?

BN: No. I don't think German was ever spoken in the house at all.

MD: So as your father got older he became more religious and imposed that on all of you.

BN: Well, I guess the impression that I've always had, I don't know if it's true, is my mother's more religious than my father. The thing I remember about going to church with my father was that he's a salesman, and he could just talk to anybody. Before we got to church he talked to everybody, when he got out of church he talked—I remember waiting for my father to finish talking to everybody. Then he was always on the vestry, on the board or something. So it was always very social for him, too.

MD: Were there a lot of people always coming through your house, were your parents social that way, or more in a business sense?

BN: Most of my father's friends were either neighbors or people that he knew at work, some other salesmen that came through, or people at work.

MD: What about your mother?

BN: Well, I think that part of—and certainly there were neighbors and things like that, but a lot of their social contacts were business. That was corporation life, even though my father wasn't an executive of a corporation where you would be forced into corporation life. I think a lot of the people they knew were through work.

MD: Were you a tight family, were you really close?

BN: I don't know how to—not in the sense that I see it in other kinds of families. I've thought a lot about it because of all the moving, and Craig, my next younger brother, lives in Madison, Wisconsin, which is—he kind of didn't move as much as I did. The moves would get longer and longer, we'd stay in one place longer as my father would go up in the company. So Craig spent a lot of formative years in Wisconsin, and in Madison, in particular. He was still living at home the last time they moved, which was to Southern California, and he eventually moved back to Wisconsin—he

really felt that was where he wanted to be, where he was from, and it was a sense of place. Although he still knew people there, it wasn't so much that; most of the people he knew while he grew up there had left, but there was that sense of place that he felt strongly about.

MD: And you, did you ever have a sense of place in the same way?

BN: I don't think so. I wouldn't particularly want to go back to that part of the country. I've lived in the West long enough that I'm really comfortable with the kind of space that exists here. It would be very hard for me to leave. I think one thing that I got from the family was that sense of security and personal confidence.

MD: They were supportive of what you did, or did they try and direct your activities?

BN: No, it wasn't particularly directed. I mean, certainly they had opinions about things, but there was support but not in any really outrageous way—the best whatever, a guitarist, whatever you want to try in the world, you should do that, do pretty much what you wanted, although my father was more concerned with how you were going to make a living. I finally decided I wanted to be an artist, which wasn't until my second year of college. He wanted me to be a mathematician or in business administration. His concern was that you can't make a living at it, but you could teach math and make paintings at night or something. It was a strong enough opinion that I had to argue with him, or at least say “no.”

MD: As you were growing up did you have to have jobs and make your own money, did they encourage that kind of independence?

BN: Yes. But I think they also adjusted—I always did yard work when I was younger and a paper route, then when I was in high school and college I had some jobs, but four years later, by the time Craig had come along, it was tough and there weren't summer jobs any more. I think that my father always wanted him to do that, but finally he realized that those kinds of

jobs were gone, the economic situation was a little tougher. He accepted that; it wasn't necessary for him to work for the family to get by—the circumstances were changing.

MD: What was your dad's name?

BN: Calvin.

MD: And your mom's name and maiden name?

BN: Genevieve Bott.

MD: Were either of them interested in art? Did you grow up with that in your background?

BN: Well, the two pieces would be from my great-grandfather, who was a cabinetmaker, and when my father was younger, when I was growing up, he used to build a lot of stuff, he made furniture . . . so there was that interest in making things.

MD: Did you help him and learn about tools?

BN: Yes, I think that there was that.

MD: Did you read a lot as a kid?

BN: Yes.

MD: Did they encourage that, were they bookish people at all?

MD: Well, my father didn't until lately; now he reads more. But I don't think he ever read much unless it was connected with work; he would read a lot of office management things. I don't remember them reading a lot. They subscribed to *Life*, and *Reader's Digest*, and things like that. And I know my mother read more. I can remember her reading in the mornings after she was finished with most of her work.

MD: They didn't read to you a lot when you were a child?

BN: No—yes, they did, and it’s one of my mother’s complaints that I don’t remember what she used to read to me as a child. But I do remember some of the Remus stories and things like that.

MD: What were the books and things you liked most, the things that you liked to do most when you were a child? Were you outdoorsy or—

BN: Yes, yes, I was a Boy Scout. We used to camp a lot—for our vacation, because we didn’t do much of anything else at that time, and that lasted, oh, I’m not sure how many years in a row until finally my mother said, “Enough of this,” when it had rained for ten days or something like that—and it was supposed to be a fishing trip, right? In those days my mother did everything. Because she did it at home, and then when we went camping she still had to cook everything and wash the dishes, but she had to do it under less than wonderful circumstances.

MD: Adverse conditions.

BN: And somebody complained about the food in the rain one day and that was that. We packed up and we never went camping any more. But I really enjoyed all that.

MD: Do you remember books that you specifically liked or that were important to you, or the kinds of books that you read?

BN: Not—you mean, beyond children’s books?

MD: No, within children’s books.

BN: The Uncle Remus I remember. I think it was my father who read that, he used to do all the different voices. That’s probably why I remember it a little better than the others. I don’t know, I have a strange—I developed very slowly when I was growing up. I was small for my age.

MD: Which is kind of surprising because you’re so tall now.

BN: Yes, but I didn’t start to grow until I was about a senior in high school.

And then I continued to grow until I was in college. I weighed 150 pounds when I was a senior in high school and five more pounds when I got out of college.

MD: Were you slow in terms of reading and that kind of thing?

BN: No, but I think that socially more, maybe partly because I was small, and partly just because socially I . . .

MD: Were you shy?

BN: Yes, I think that—the other thing I was going to say, I think that out of that family there was love and security and the feeling that you could get by or succeed or find satisfaction in your life and a sense of being responsible, kind of all those regular middle-American upper middle class values, there. The thing that the moving did, I think, was make it hard to make friends. What I did, and now what my kids do, is they're very reserved when they come into a situation and they watch it carefully to see how they can fit in. They're not going to thrust themselves in. They go and they watch and then try and fit in.

MD: You seem to me now like a person who is very private and cultivates a very rich private life.

BN: Well, I think it's from all that, which I did when I was growing up. I was a musician and I made model airplanes, and all those things were private things.

MD: Did you study music when you were younger? Guitar?

BN: I started playing the piano when I was in the third grade or something like that, and did that off and on, and finally started playing the guitar, and classical guitar. Then played the bass.

MD: Was this something that you decided that you wanted to do?

BN: Yes. Neither of them played instruments, so that required some action on my part.

MD: Did they make you go out and buy the instrument yourself, or did they give it to you?

BN: No, well, they bought the piano. I remember it was a second-hand piano, and I never practiced enough, which is probably why I never stayed a musician because I'd never had that discipline. But the guitar playing—it seems to me that maybe they bought my guitar and I bought the—I don't remember. Then I was working, on whatever those jobs were, newspaper routes and things, so it was possible to afford those things.

MD: What did they think of your music? Did they think you'd stick with it, or didn't they care?

BN: I don't think that it was—it wasn't discouraged, but it wasn't greatly encouraged either. I don't think that they thought in terms of the possibility of being a concert guitarist or a composer or any of those kinds of things. I don't think that those were things that were particularly in their experience. They didn't have a lot of records around. I remember getting into arguments with my father because I'd play Bartok on the record player and he thought that was awful screeching and wanted me to play Beethoven not that awful Bartok again.

MD: How old were you when you were interested in Bartok?

BN: In high school. Well, I played in the orchestra in high school so I think that was important, I played the bass there. So I got a lot of encouragement there from school.

MD: Were you interested generally in classical music, and what I sort of call contemporary classical, even in high school? That's pretty extraordinary.

BN: But also folk music.

MD: What kind of music did you study? I mean, what were the directions of the teachers that you chose?

BN: Well, the most serious studying that I did was when I was being a guitarist. I had a good teacher and—I guess what happened, when I finally left and I went off to college—well, I had played the bass in a polka band in high school, because, you know, in that part of the country—and we'd play at weddings and stuff like that. So I started playing with a dance band in college, and eventually started playing with jazz groups, which was much more interesting, and kind of made a lot of money through college with that. Somehow the thing that's the most interesting about my career or whatever is all that time having thought that maybe I was going to be an engineer or something. And finally I think the tendency was always toward something more pure than a practicing engineer, was to be a mathematician or a physicist. I don't know why or where that comes from. And certainly wanting to be an engineer is in some ways because my father was an engineer, but also the vocational stuff then, that was okay, I could do math. But I feel it even in my work now—I don't know what you call it, abstract, or tendency towards abstraction, or intellectual—

MD: Cognition.

BN: Something like that, that made me want to be a mathematician, not an engineer. More interested in the structure of mathematics than solving problems in math, which I suppose is a little bit more philosophical than the practical in that sense.

MD: What's interesting to me is I see your art as being very involved in, as you say, intellectual, cognitive, philosophical processes and explorations, and yet to see you here in your home, where you're involved with building and making a place out of a tough landscape. It seems like New Mexico is a tough place to live.

BN: It is.

MD: And that seems like it's a very different kind of thing than the intellectual aspect of your art; it's a real contrast.

BN: Well, I often have that double—at some point there's always a really strong need to make something, and there's a great deal of satisfaction in it, either art, or cabinetwork or whatever, and I lose patience with it after a while, too. I'm not good at finish work. I'd never really say that, I get impatient with finish work, probably I'm not very good either but I'd hate to say it. Because I think also, with the art as well as with the house or anything else, once the idea is clear, I mean it's made it far enough so that it's clear what's going on, I'm finished with it, emotionally and mentally I'm finished with it. I don't care to fuss with it.

MD: Do you set it up so you have assistants or helpers who do that, both in your art and—

BN: Very seldom.

MD: You end up pushing yourself to do it to the finish?

BN: Well, when it's finished far enough so that I apprehend, so that the point is clear, with a work of art, for instance, then it doesn't need any more finish work. It needs to be made well enough to communicate. I very seldom can work with anyone else, because when it gets to that point where I can say, "Now I know what's going on, you can finish it," it doesn't need any more finishing. The house is a little different, because it has to have trim painted and things like that.

MD: Did you have any conceptions when you were growing up of what an artist was, or any contact with art—did you go to museums or—

BN: I remember we used to go to the museums in Chicago. I don't know how young I ever went to these places. We used to go to the Field Museum of Natural History and to the Museum of Science and Industry, which was what I liked the best at that time. I went back to Chicago last

year to put a piece up at the Art Institute. I took my son, who was at the time I guess fourteen, and we went to the various places. He liked the Field Museum, and my brother came down from Madison and brought his daughter and we all went to the Museum of Science and Industry thinking we'd have this wonderful reminiscence of the past, and it was just awful—the place, I don't know if it's gone downhill or not, but it was so commercial and everything was coming apart.

MD: What was it like when you were younger?

BN: Probably not much different. But I remember going into the coal mine, the submarine and all that stuff, which is still there—that's all okay, it's still the best part, but the other exhibits are in terrible shape. And in fact I did read some stuff in the paper, it's been controversial because there are so many commercial exhibits now, all the companies have exhibits. That was all okay, but now that's all been called into question, it's a little bit too much advertising and expense.

MD: But you didn't have any kind of holistic, I mean, you had no contact with artists, and you had no conception of what that was, or never an ambition that was what you wanted to do when, say, you were a teenager.

BN: I had a very close friend that always took all the art classes, and would do all of that stuff, and I think one year in high school we both went to an art school and took a class together.

MD: Where was this?

BN: In Milwaukee. I don't remember what it was called or what became of it. I never, even since I've been an artist, never have been able to work or just draw anything in particular. I really enjoy drawing, but I must have something to draw, and I can't just go in and make drawings of anything in particular, just draw. In fact I try it and I just frustrate myself and get angry.

MD: It's so strange, when you're growing up, the idea of the artist (as it was presented to me) always had to do with facility and those things, you know.

BN: Well, I think one of the things, when I finally started to do it seriously, I switched my major in college. I could do it all, I mean I could draw real well, I could do it well enough to get a lot of encouragement to continue to do it.

MD: Without any kind of study or background before then?

BN: Right.

MD: That is surprising.

BN: But I'd always had all those hobbies where you did a lot of physical work and dexterity was important, and in being a musician, so I think that there was enough training to that.

MD: Were there art classes in your high school that you remember being interested in?

BN: Yes, but I never took any of them.

MD: You didn't?

BN: I was going to say that I had a friend who took them all through high school. He ended up being an engineer. I think that I always thought that art classes were dumb and too easy. I think that was the general high school attitude.

MD: You couldn't see any purpose to it, was that it, or just that was what the kids did who couldn't deal with the academic subjects?

BN: Well, I think there was both of that, those were the easy classes and they probably weren't—I mean high school classes that I knew anything

about probably didn't have much to do with art, at least with my understanding of what art should be about.

MD: Then you went to the University of Wisconsin. When was that, what years were you there?

BN: 1960 to '64.

MD: Why did you go to school there?

BN: I don't think there was a lot of choice. I could have stayed home and gone to a school in town or I could go there, because the tuition was low. We still had to get the money together, we weren't with a lot of money to be sent off to an out-of-state school where it took a great deal of money. I'd done well enough in high school, and I got into the honors program there, so probably if I had known or thought about it or had any encouragement from somebody I could have gotten scholarships somewhere in the East, but I don't think that was considered a great concern. My parents weren't in need of money then, it wasn't a real need situation at that time, but there also wasn't a surplus to send me off to college.

MD: Where had your father gone to school to become an engineer?

BN: He went to school at Armour Institute, which is now the Illinois Institute of Technology. It must have been a pretty interesting school, although I'm not sure when he was there, but that's where Mies van der Rohe went, most of those Bauhaus people went there from Germany. Mies must have been there at that time, I'm sure, although my father lived at home and commuted two hours a day on the train to get to school. I'm sure he had no time to figure out who Mies van der Rohe was.

MD: Was he interested in any Bauhaus ideas when he actually was practicing?

BN: I don't think so.

MD: So you went off to the University of Wisconsin thinking you were going to be a mathematician. What was it like? You lived on campus?

BN: I lived in the dormitories first and then in various apartments, and that kind of stuff.

MD: Was it a really rich place then? When I was there—I spent a summer there—and was just overawed by how many—there were just so many resources there, whatever you were interested in you could pursue. Was it like that when you were there?

BN: Yes. It was a big school. It was as big as Berkeley and there were a lot of people around the campus. I think that you don't, as a freshman or sophomore even, I don't think that you're prepared to take advantage of a lot of things that are going on, it's just there. I joined up with the music society and then finally started playing music a lot more and when I lived there I was on the swimming team. I had swum all through high school, but I wasn't really all that good so I quit after two years of it.

MD: Had you ever been away from home before?

BN: No—well, just summer camps and stuff like that.

MD: Was that hard?

BN: I don't remember it as being really hard. A lot of people I knew from high school were there.

MD: Did you have a pretty well-developed sense of yourself when you—that was one of my big problems when I first went to school—How did you come to understand that you weren't going to be this mathematician that you . . . ?

BN: I stuck with the math pretty long, in fact during part of the time when I had switched into an art major I continued to do math. I think most of the friends I had were engineers or were going to be engineers, or physicists,

or chemists, or something like that. I had one close friend who had gotten through most of the undergraduate courses in college while he was still in high school—he did very poorly in everything else because he didn't care about it mostly, but in organic chemistry he had just incredible facility. He knew the answers to problems before he knew how to write all the steps down—it would take him three days to write all the steps down, it took everybody else three days to go through everything to get the answer, but he could read the answer, which was really interesting. So he'd published papers by the time he got to college. He was doing graduate work when he was a freshman, and all that kind of stuff. So I was around a few people like that, and I saw that those kinds of people had a certain kind of intuitive understanding about their field, you know, that I didn't have. I think that I maybe knew a little bit about mathematics, I had a really good feeling about—not practical mathematics, but about understanding the structure of mathematics, a lot of interest in it, so I continued to do that. It had to do with the way it was taught, I think. I had a very small class for a couple of years and a particularly good instructor who was an algebraic topologist and presented things very well; I liked him a lot. But the physics end of it—I was in some physics classes—was not interesting to me.

MD: How did you come to take art classes?

BN: Well, I've never been able to figure out that particular decision. I decided over one summer, or maybe I'd even decided the spring before and somehow tried to justify the decision, I suppose, but I've never really . . .

MD: Did you have to take art as a requirement?

BN: No.

MD: And you thought in high school that it was all kind of easy. Did you make the decision before you took art classes?

BN: Yes.

MD: You did!

BN: And of course I was still playing a lot of music at that time, so I also took some music theory courses, thinking maybe I wanted to be a musician and I needed to know more about that.

MD: Did you know people who were artists?

BN: No.

MD: So it was a decision that just sort of happened in the abstract?

BN: Yes. I mean, I wasn't totally unacquainted with the fact that art went on, or anything like that. I think I knew that, I think I knew that I had some facility. And it also doesn't take very long to find out that having facility doesn't make you an artist. You look around and see all kinds of people that have facility but it's not doing anything. I may—I really don't know about having been to the Art Institute before that time. I know I spent a lot of time there afterward.

MD: Had you read artists' biographies or . . .

BN: No.

MD: There wasn't, like, people's work that you were familiar with?

BN: No, I really entered the whole thing with a lot of ignorance about art, especially about contemporary art, because there was next to no information about that around, and even in the school that wasn't discussed. It was a very conservative school, very, very little art training.

MD: Did you have any feeling as to what prompted you to this? It's so curious, isn't it?

BN: I think about it a lot, because it's hard to—I don't know what went through my brain at the time.

MD: But you went home and sort of meditated on this decision over the summer. Did you present it to your parents, was that an obstruction?

BN: Yes. Actually, the only thing that was an obstruction—well, I think what my father said was, “How are you going to make a living, make some money, as an artist?” I do remember one time going, I think, with my mother; there was a woman who was a painter who had been written up in the paper as a successful artist, and we went to visit her, called her, and asked her what it was like to be an artist. And I remember she recommended, “If you have to go ahead, then do it.” I believe she just painted watercolors, landscapes and flowers and things.

MD: When was this?

BN: I think it was that summer.

MD: So it was after your sophomore year? How did you feel about talking to this woman who told you couldn't make a living at it?

BN: I didn't want to see her. I felt embarrassed about going to somebody's house and I didn't know what questions to ask, I mean you don't, you know. It was just a very intuitive, arbitrary kind of—I think somehow it wasn't an uninformed decision, in a lot of ways it was, but I think I must have been around something that made it a possibility that I'd consider.

MD: So after you went back to school after you'd made this decision, then you enrolled in art classes.

BN: Yes, I know that I did some stuff. I know my mother has some drawings I'd made maybe when I was in high school or a little later, but they're probably the only ones I made, about three of them, and they're not particularly good but—I don't think they show anything at all except what anybody adept could do. So I must have had some interest in that, but it was certainly an undiscussed, unspoken interest.

MD: Whose classes did you take, and what kind of classes?

BN: It was a very traditional art school, so you did drawing and design first, and then they let you make paintings and then after that they let you make sculptures. And you drew with north light from the cast, and in the drawings you did regular stuff. I guess there were two kinds of people at the school who were useful to me. I don't think I knew anybody, any of the teachers, particularly well.

MD: Were the classes big?

BN: Yes, they were university size. And a lot of them—there was the art education department, art and art education, so there were a lot of people who were never going to be artists who weren't interested in art in particular—they were going to be teachers, and all the elementary school teachers had to take art classes and design classes. So that I think the level was pretty—I mean, maybe there'd be twenty art education majors and ten artists, or something like that—and even those weren't going to teach art; like in any university, they were just regular students—not like a professional art school where everyone was intent on a career.

MD: Were there any of those people there, though, who were intent on a career?

BN: Yes; you know, I run across them once in a while from classes I had. There were quite a few people I wondered what happened to. There were a couple of graduate students that stick in my mind more than some of the teachers. I can't even remember their—somehow the intensity was more there than in the teachers. Most of the teachers, the permanent staff, which was pretty big, were older W. P. A. [Works Progress Administration] guys, socialists. They used to talk about Yasuo Kuniyoshi and play poker in the socialist clubs in Milwaukee, because that's a big socialist part of the country.

MD: Who were some of these people, do you remember any of their names?

BN: Santos Zingale comes to mind, he's a painter, probably an interesting guy, but he taught most of the beginning painting classes . . .

MD: Really?

BN: Oh, there was a lot of that, I mean, if he saw you holding a pencil, or if he saw you sharpening a pencil—we spent a lot of time on preparing your paper and how to prepare a canvas and all that stuff.

MD: Was that generally the tenor of the place? Practical, how-to-be-an-artist stuff rather than esthetics and position?

BN: Yes, absolutely. And then there were a few teachers who rebelled against all this, and you kind of remember them even though they may not have been good or interesting artists, but they stick out just because they were younger people who had to be hired because people retired and died off—

MD: Who were they?

BN: Well, Stephen French, he was a printmaker, he lives around San Jose now. He encouraged anybody who did anything out of the ordinary—nobody else would do that. And then the other guy that's still around was Italo Scanga.

MD: He's in La Jolla now. Was he as much of a character then?

BN: Oh, yes, absolutely. He got fired.

MD: Did you make friends with any of these people who were really intent on this professionalism, any of your fellow students?

BN: Well, I had one pretty close friend; I don't know what happened to him.

MD: Who was he?

BN: I can't remember his name. But I remember, you know, he'd go to

New York and come back and start painting in the New York Abstract Expressionist style. Nobody else in the school did—you didn't know it existed. And I remember going to the Art Institute one year for the big American show, every other year, and there was some de Kooning and some Hans Hoffman, but there were also some [Roy] Lichtensteins, the first comic book paintings with the war stuff, the planes flying, and so it was the first time I'd ever seen that and the first time I ever saw an actual Barnett Newman, and I think the first time I ever saw—maybe it was a different show and I'm getting it confused—a bunch of [Jackson] Pollock pieces, the *Blue Poles* and some other pieces. But anyway, we'd get back to Wisconsin and no one would mention that stuff. It was intensely confusing, because we were making still lifes and figures, drawings of figures, and not having anybody willing to deal with the work as far as . . .

MD: Your teachers were basically doing representational work?

BN: Yes, or at the best, sort of late Stuart Davis abstraction. But that was it.

MD: Well, you saw these works when you went back there; did you in any way try to confront them or incorporate them into your work? How did you assimilate this stuff?

BN: I think it just sat there, you know, it's back there. You don't know what to do with it, it's so far from—all you can do is make an incredibly radical change, stop everything you're doing and try and do the other stuff. I think the hard part about that was that I really enjoyed making paintings, and I think at that time I was making kind of what I thought were West Coast landscape, figurative, sort of [Richard] Diebenkorn—anybody else . . .

MD: You knew their work then?

BN: Yes, I think that they were in the art magazines, which is what we'd go by—pictures. I got out of that in kind of two ways, three or four ways. One was through seeing some of Lester Johnson's work, which was really

important because it was much more vigorous work than what I read out of the pictures of West Coast landscape painting. Of course you didn't see any David Park or somebody who was around and in power. And then after that I saw an Al Held painting called, what could it be called?

MD: Was it the big geometric shapes?

BN: There was a big huge geometric shape on one part and another shape on another part; the big one was black.

MD: Where did you see it?

BN: At the Art Institute in Chicago. And you could see that it had been worked on a lot, but it was made with acrylic paint and it was more or less hard edge, but it was hand-drawn hard edge, and so it was kind of a way to work and still work on a painting, which was how you made those other kinds of paintings, how you built up the surface and texture and all that stuff that seemed to be important.

MD: Those canvases that you describe as West Coast landscape things, were they in oil?

BN: Yes.

MD: Was there anybody there who was working in acrylics at that point? Was it a technology or a medium that wasn't . . .

BN: It was mainly oil paint. I think it was available. I think maybe the watercolorists would use it or something, but it wasn't used in a serious painting way at that time, if I remember. Maybe somebody was I didn't know about.

So that was what I was doing when I finished school, the last things, in fact, even after I'd finished school. I stayed there for most the summer, with a guy named Wayne Taylor from Sacramento, who was a ceramicist and a friend of Wayne Thiebaud's and also a friend of [Bob] Arneson, and

he'd left that area and come to Wisconsin. I guess he probably came there that winter but I didn't know him. He was working on some sort of project that summer that I helped him with, I don't remember. So he was pretty outrageous for a ceramicist, because there were excellent potters but they made pots and huge bowls. I do remember Voulkos had come through there at some point—when I was there I didn't know about it—and made a teapot; it still sat on the shelf of things that visiting artists made, but he'd even made a parody of a Voulkos teapot, thrown, but then it had a handle that was a slab about as huge—stuck on, it couldn't possibly work, the handle didn't fit, and the lid didn't fit, and the spout was in the wrong place, but it was all, it was very—I mean, nobody did anything like that, even as a joke or anything. So there were still people who could throw those huge bowls and stoneware, and beautiful work, but really quite boring, and so Wayne Taylor arrived and was making coiled pots and built things and—making sculpture with ceramics, he was doing—he came from that part of California.

MD: And you liked him?

BN: Yes. So when I left Wisconsin, people either went East or West, and I went West, I think maybe thinking that the East was a little too frightening—I didn't know anything about it because I'd never been that way either, so I'm not sure why it seemed more frightening than going West, but I went to the Bay Area, and drove out there and went to, I guess I stopped at Davis. Wayne had said, "If you want to go to school, go to Davis," because he knew Wayne and he knew Bob Arneson.

MD: Wayne Thiebaud was there then? Oh, I didn't know that. I knew Arneson was there.

BN: Yeah, Thiebaud got there at the beginning. Anyway, I stopped by there and then I went into San Francisco, looked at the Art institute and looked at Berkeley, I think, and you couldn't get into those schools without an application that had to be mailed in a long time before. In fact, I think I

tried to get a scholarship to Indiana, to study with I can't remember his name—he was a painter that was painting then that I was interested in. At any rate, I went back to Davis and they were signing—it was a fairly new graduate program and they were signing up anybody that arrived. In fact, the secretary said to me, "I'm sure they'll want you." "Don't you want to see some work?" "No, I'm sure they'll just—." So that was extremely good for me, because it was a new graduate program and it had very little structure. Arneson was there, and interesting, and I did ceramics with him for a while and paintings and stuff and strolled around. Bill Wiley was there—probably the most important person for me, I think. They gave us a studio to work in there and the instructors and we had a seminar once a week, and that was about it.

MD: So each student had their own studio?

BN: Yes. They had some old World War II barracks and they gave you, like, a bedroom in the barracks or something, and somebody else painted in the kitchen. They were big rooms, and it was really nice. So you were really in an intermediate place. It wasn't at all like a more organized school. Sometimes a teacher would come around, sometimes they wouldn't, sometimes you'd go and find somebody to talk to and they'd comment. So you did have the encouragement of being in school. There were your friends and you could go have coffee or you could not see anyone. One requirement was being in the seminar once a week, which mostly was Wiley ran it. I guess it was a holdover from his [San Francisco] Art Institute days. He went in and people brought work and everybody would talk about it, would talk about whatever the case was that day.

MD: How did he talk about the work?

BN: He tried not to. He tried to make everybody else talk about it. In fact, if he came in, he would very seldom start a discussion of any kind. Sometimes nobody would say anything for an hour, and everybody would just

go—which was pretty heavy duty. Other times there would be discussion. I don't remember any particular . . .

MD: He didn't present a program.

BN: No. Everybody was just supposed to be working, and then you brought in your work and it got discussed or didn't.

MD: When you felt like it, you brought work. It wasn't like you had your appointed day by which you had to bring something.

BN: I think that if enough work wasn't coming in people would decide you'd have to volunteer. I don't think that was ever much of a problem. The next week four people would volunteer to bring work in just to make sure there was going to be work.

MD: Was this a good situation for you?

BN: Oh, absolutely. I mean, that kind of combination. There was this minimal amount of structure with the freedom to do pretty much as you pleased, or not do anything. People would criticize—there were enough serious people, if you weren't doing enough work there would be some criticism.

MD: Was there a prevalent idea of what it was to be an artist going around at that place then?

BN: I don't know. When I went there the freedom to do almost any kind of thing was so amazing to me. You could make *any* kind of painting or you could stick something on it or make—you could just do anything. It probably seemed conservative to other people, but coming from Wisconsin with really even spoken conservatism, not even with just what people actually did, I think I was able to deal with it real well. I think it was hard for some people to come and not be told what they were supposed to do.

MD: What did you end up doing?

BN: I made paintings. I guess I did some kind of plastic things. I was very confused about what to do, it was hard. I made paintings again, made abstract paintings or landscape paintings. Then I made landscape paintings, went back to oil paint and made landscape paintings and finally they had these strange shapes, and then the shapes—I finally made the shapes out of welded steel and stuck them on the paintings and painted the shapes, which is—I'd seen—Keith Long was the guy's name at the University of Wisconsin who was a graduate student.

MD: He was your friend who went to New York?

BN: I didn't know him. I knew him just as somebody there, probably a fairly strong personality. I don't think he taught or anything, as an assistant, but I'd go in the graduate studios and see his work, which was very strange and very strong. He was a good painter.

MD: What was his work like?

BN: Well, they were kind of very large, flat landscapes, but he'd stick things on them, not so much real three-dimensional, but there would be some surface stuff. The paintings that stick in my mind the most, I think, were in the graduate program there in Wisconsin. You had to do figurative work in this department, and so he'd made one of these big—they were kind of abstract but kind of landscape paintings, and they were quite large, and so he'd made this big thing and then some strange shape came down and then turned into a portrait. He made a couple of those. They were beautiful paintings in my remembrance, and totally radical and weird. Very strange.

MD: Did he serve as a good example to you in that he was someone who didn't get reinforced—I mean, did his art get reinforced by people there?

BN: He must have gotten some.

MD: Because he was still there.

BN: Yes. The other guy I remember from there who was a graduate student—I don't know what he's doing either or if he ever continued to be an artist. His name was Johnson, I don't know his first name, and he worked during the day; he drew maps for some company in town, I guess. And at night and on the weekends he would come in and put on a worksuit, overalls, and he carried a dimestore hammer and a dimestore saw and made these structures out of lath strips all nailed together, and sometimes they had wheels on them, sometimes painted on and stuck together. Sometimes they had drawers in them and stuff. Everybody—the instructors—really disliked him: he took up a lot of room, and they didn't feel he was serious because he used all these toy tools. People would pin notes on them and he'd paint the notes into it.

MD: This was at Wisconsin? That must have been really hard for them to deal with.

BN: And I think for his graduate show he showed some of those structures. They were really rickety and they'd fall apart when he'd get them over to the place where he had to show them. And then he took what I assume were a lot of his old paintings and turned them face to the wall—then he took a lot of boxes from when you buy oil paint—there's like a box for four or six tubes, and each tube is in a cardboard toilet paper roll tube. He glued all that stuff on the back and made little designs, x's and o's and stuff. I don't remember whether he painted them, or he painted some, I guess. And I believe they failed him. I don't think that they gave him his degree. But I left after that and I don't know if he tried again, or if he left, or if he ever intended to get a degree or what.

MD: Did you perceive any of his activities at the time as performance art? I know that wasn't an area of interest.

BN: I think that there was a feeling of that. You know, his costume. I've no idea what I thought about it or how much I thought about it. The stuff was just there, and I remember it, so it certainly made an impression.

MD: That sounds interesting. I wonder what he's doing now?

BN: I have no idea.

MD: Well, at Davis you mentioned doing some paintings that you stuck things on.

BN: Yes, I made welded shapes and put them on. And what finally happened is the painting stopped and then I made shapes. Those first plastic sculptures, I made them out of fiberglass (fig. 3.24), and finally started welding steel.



fig. 3.24

Untitled, 1965. Fiberglass, polyester resin, 55 × 95 × 14 in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

MD: How did you get access to that technology? Were there people there who were doing it?

BN: No, there wasn't anybody there at the time—I don't think they were even doing welded steel at this time. In the sculpture department it was either work with clay or casting.

MD: Bronze, you mean.

BN: Yes. But at Wisconsin people had used fiberglass, but they used it to make metal—they made clay figures (most of it was figurative), and would make a plaster cast of it and then cast the fiberglass into the plaster, but use a lot of bronze powder in it—you could patina it. They never looked like plastic, that was not the point, but it was a cheap way of making a “bronze” casting.

MD: Well, when you came to it, was it for the same reason, or did you like the . . .

BN: No, I put color in the plastic and made them green and pink.

MD: What years were you at Davis?

BN: That would be 1964 [to] 1966.

MD: So those pieces I've seen, the resin pieces from around 1965, those you did there. A lot of those have to do with positions in relation to rooms, it seemed to me. What were you thinking of in doing those?

BN: Well, by that time there was, I think, I don't know exactly, but a certain amount of that had to do with my response to the Bob Morris and Don Judd stuff that was in the magazines. Also, I think a really important piece for me, that I'd forgotten about for years and remembered not too long ago, was a show of some kind—I don't remember what the point of the show was—in San Francisco. There were two pieces of Richard Tuttle's, early pieces.

MD: This is in the sixties? In San Francisco?

BN: Yes. And one was—I don't know if I can get it right—one was—I think they were both made out of wood. They were kind of wiggly, and one kind of was like a golf club shape and was brown and the other was silver. I don't know what it did, except it was more vertical. They were of a bigger scale than he mostly works in now, they were five or six feet long. I remember thinking about those a lot. I had already been making the other things but they really reinforced, I think, some stuff I was doing. And I think there was almost nobody there that could really give me much. Wiley was giving encouragement, but Arneson by that time had lost the point and wanted to be more dynamic and not dead weight. Roy De Forest was teaching at that point, and would come in and say, "Here's what you want to do . . ." and he made a little drawing with feet at each end, which is what Roy De Forest would do.

MD: The whole funk thing up in San Francisco—was that really a prevalent aesthetic at Davis then?

BN: It was finished by then, I think. The really good stuff had been made before that point and there was nobody really doing it. I don't think it was a point at Davis.

MD: We were talking basically about the aesthetic that was happening at Davis, and you were saying Manuel Neri and Joan Brown . . .

BN: No, what I was saying was that later, when I saw work from Davis that was done before I got to that part of the country, that was what seemed to me the strongest funk sensibility. Certainly there were people still engaged in that, but I think it was before I was there, and I don't think I have a real understanding of what was going on. By the time people were doing funk shows and things, it was past.

MD: Well, what did you see of Wiley's work and Arneson's work while you were there, and what . . .

BN: Arneson's work was around because he had a studio in the school. Wiley's work I didn't know much about until he had a show somewhere. A lot of people imitated him, even at that point—students and other artists—he was the leader, he was a very charismatic person. He'd been sort of a known artist in the area for a long time. He was the first one out of the Art Institute to show on the East Coast, at least to get any popularity. He changed his work more radically after that.

MD: What was he doing when you knew him?

BN: He was making these kind of assemblage sculpture things, and making paintings that had lots of stuff in the pyramids. It was the beginning of what we're more familiar with as his work now. It didn't have as much writing in it. He was really interesting and important for me, I think, because I liked him a lot, we could talk to each other, but it changed from a student even finally to a relationship. But he works entirely differently than I ever have. He goes to the studio every day and he makes a lot of work and doodles and scribbles and scratches, and I've never been able to do that, never even really tried. I go in the studio often, but I just don't have that kind of work process. He's interesting to me because I think there is not really any one piece of his that I can think of and say I liked that painting or object or anything, but as a body of work, to see a lot of it together, it's . . . that's what I like and maybe that's because the way he works—things just kind of come one after the other, in groups, or however they come.

MD: How about Bob Arneson's work now, was he doing portraits of himself?

BN: Not so much at that time. I think he was starting to. The objects were more of that surrealist ilk—I don't know exactly what you call it, because it's not Surrealism, but the fingernails instead of the typewriter keys and

things like that. I think he was starting to make bricks. A heavy influence in that area more than anything was a certain part of Dada and Surrealism. Not the attitude so much as, like, the urge to collage isn't as important as a take-off, for instance.

MD: You knew about those kinds of historical things?

BN: Not a lot. I think that people used that. It was around. I think there was just that information kind of available in the same way that Duchamp was available at that time, because a lot of the Duchamp books hadn't been published at that point. I think people knew about him, but they used a certain kind of information from Duchamp. They weren't so much interested in his actual attitude about art, how it can be done, or what—and maybe even knew more about Duchamp through [Jasper] Johns's things than anything else. It was an *a-literate* society, culture, or it was at that time.

MD: So you and your friend hadn't read about Duchamp, you didn't know his work specifically but you were aware that he had created an attitude toward art?

BN: We knew about certain things from art school—I mean art history classes. We knew about the *Nude Descending a Staircase* and a few pieces after that, but not very much, it wasn't . . .

MD: So you knew his attitude, was that it?

BN: There was just a—no, I don't think I really did. I think you just sort of had that information: here's the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, here's the urinal, and here's maybe three or four other things and then he stopped making work, which turned out to be not true anyway.

MD: How did you use that?

BN: People didn't use it in an intellectual way at all. They used somehow the material as a means to make more art.

MD: You knew Jasper Johns's work then?

BN: Yes, but not a lot of that work came to the West Coast. I think I may have seen some stuff, but I don't remember that much. Mostly it was from art magazines, and I still hadn't even gotten information because I hadn't been in the East at all until 1968.

MD: Can you talk about the way—what your working process was then? You were saying that now your process is dissimilar from Wiley's, where he just goes and works every day. What was your process like then?

BN: When I got out of school I got a part-time job at the Art Institute, so I moved to San Francisco and rented a space for a studio.

MD: Where?

BN: Out in the Mission District, not downtown Mission, but out . . . I don't remember the name of the street. I could probably take you there. It was a small space, but—other than Wiley, who lived out in Mill Valley, I didn't know anybody in town. I taught early morning classes and very few teachers, much less students, came to school that early—I taught freshman painting or sculpture, or something. And I think when you're in school you get a lot of encouragement, just from peers and instructors. When you're out on your own, no matter how you deal with it, you have to reexamine why you're doing that work. And especially because I knew so few people, I spent a lot of time at the studio kind of reassessing, or assessing, why, why are you an artist and what do you do, and finally that's what the work came out of—that question, why is anyone an artist and what do artists do. And so some of that early work after I got out of school had to do with how I spent my time. I paced around a lot, so I tried to figure out a way of making that function as the work. I drank a lot of coffee, so those photographs of coffee thrown away . . . of hot coffee spilled . . . [*Eleven Color Photographs*, 1966–67/70, see fig. 1.4].

MD: Were you in any way taking on the idea that this wasn't what artists had been doing as art up to that point, did that in any way—that wasn't a problem?

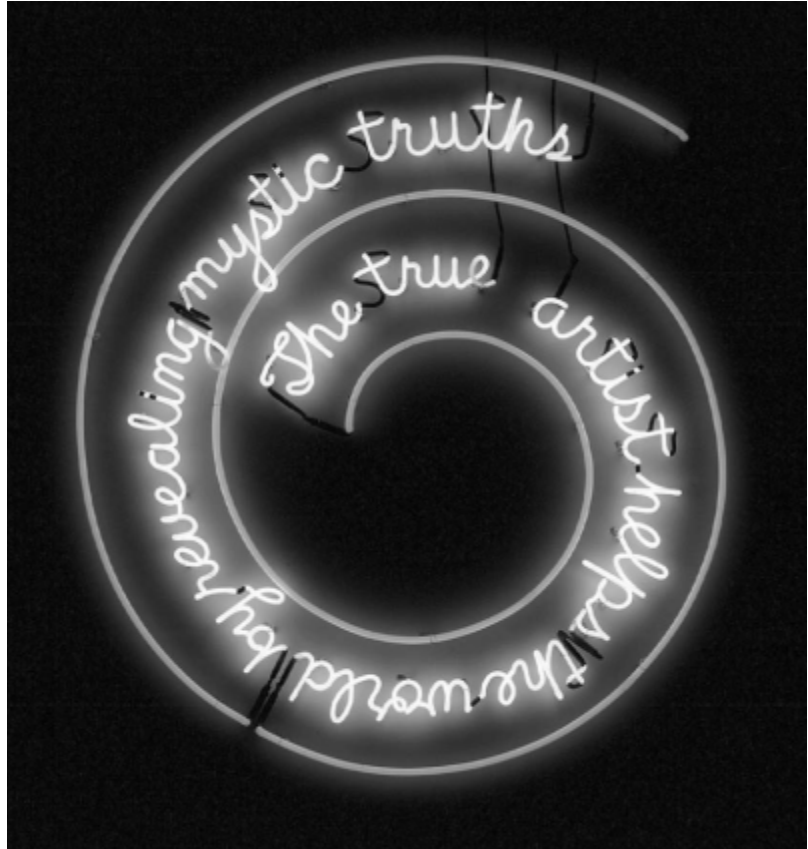
BN: No. Well, I think there's always, when you feel you aren't getting a lot of attention anyway, or there's a very small audience that you have, then I think that a certain amount of testing can . . . I think that you do things to find out if you believe in it in the first place, just like often you'll say things in conversation, just to test, and so you do that. I think a lot of work is done that way, which doesn't make a fake or anything, it's the only way you find out is to do it. So there was a lot of that. I made that neon sign which said, "The True Artist Is an Amazing Luminous Fountain," and "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths" (fig. 3.25).

MD: That set of photographs [*Eleven Color Photographs*] is really interesting to me. That's the first—when I was first finding out about your work that was the first I saw, then I learned about the earlier sculptures, and to me that seems to be about what an artist is in this society. Were you consciously taking on those things?

BN: Well, that was the examination, what is the function of an artist? Why am I an artist is the same question. And a lot of the reading that I was doing at that time. I think that I finally realized that the sculpture I had made in college revolved around that reinforcement—a lot of people doing work that was art about art. I needed to work out of a broader social context, and I needed to get more of what I thought and what I knew about it into the work—I was reading—I think a lot of word/visual puns and other pieces come from reading Nabokov. I was reading Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which I think doesn't provide you with anything except a way to question things. You can have an argument and follow it until you find out that it makes sense or doesn't make sense, but it was still useful to me to find out that it did go to anywhere or it was wrong.

fig. 3.25

The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign), 1967. Neon tubing with clear glass tubing suspension frame, 59 × 55 × 2 in. Edition A/P. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.



MD: The punning pieces, like *Drill Team* and those sorts of things, talk about those.

BN: Probably, as much as anything I did them after I saw the Man Ray show I went to in Los Angeles. I forget when that was that the museum had a Man Ray show. I think I did those around that time, and probably after that. He's an interesting person, but he lacks the cohesiveness and the direct intellectual trail of Duchamp, but in another way he did all of that different stuff and made no apologies for any of it, too.

MD: He's American; you know, Duchamp comes out of the Cartesian system of thought that is very French.

BN: Of course, Man Ray really tried to identify himself with that.

MD: But he didn't have the basis for it.

BN: Also, somehow, it's a more working class—if that's—I don't know what his background is, but he also worked as a photographer. Duchamp comes out of a more leisure attitude. There was family money, and then he worked for the Arensbergs for all those years.

MD: After he came to New York.

BN: Well, before that he collected for them in Europe.

MD: Oh, did he? I didn't know that, that's interesting.

BN: Maybe that's wrong. But I think that he was doing that while—

MD: He was in contact with him before he came out, so that may be so, because they were all propped for it when he arrived.

BN: Certainly there was a lack of humor; the humor is entirely different from Man Ray, but in fact I suspect there's no humor at all in some of those things.

MD: It's pretty puerile humor, it seems to me.

BN: It's witty, if anything, but not humorous.

MD: Did you know about Duchamp's punning pieces and the way he used titles in relation to his work?

BN: I didn't understand any of that.

MD: You found out about that later? Like the Mona Lisa, *L.H.O.O.Q.* . . .

BN: I think that we all saw all those letters written there but I don't think anybody ever explained it and I never asked.

MD: So tell me about the process of making that set of color photos. What was the time period over which they were made?

BN: Maybe a summer or something, I don't remember. The main thing about them I remember is I was taking pictures and I met this guy, Jack Fulton, who was a photographer in the area and was taking pictures of everybody's work. He started out doing it because he was interested in taking pictures of art, and then started doing it to make pictures of work. He did it as a business, and he had never done any color printing at that time, so we made an arrangement, and I paid for the materials and the prints and that's how they got done the first time. He's an interesting guy. He probably knows more about art of that area and that period than anybody else, because he got involved independently and eventually got to know most of the people in the area.

MD: It's interesting to me that if you see those photos in isolation, I didn't connect them at first with your—I don't know what you want to call it—phenomenological pieces in some of the videotapes and films and the situations that you would set up in galleries later. I don't know what category to call those things, but they come out of the same processes when you talk about the process that made them. That's interesting. There's a real cohesion there in the development of your work.

BN: It feels like it to me. I know it's not always easy, because a lot of connecting steps get left out—things that don't get made, or things that don't need to be made, so the evidence isn't always there.

MD: There are pieces that are really interesting like that, the shelf sinking into the wall, and then you made casts of the spaces underneath [*Shelf Sinking into the Wall with Copper Painted Plaster Casts of the Spaces Underneath*, 1966, see fig. 3.7]. Can you talk about those a little bit?

BN: They were from looking at Futurist pictures that interested me. But it was also, by the time I got to the shelf sinking into the wall, I think there was a feeling that I wanted to make—and there were a number of other pieces that were sort of abstract fragments of shelves and things—

MD: That piece at eye level with the curve at the bottom (fig. 3.26).

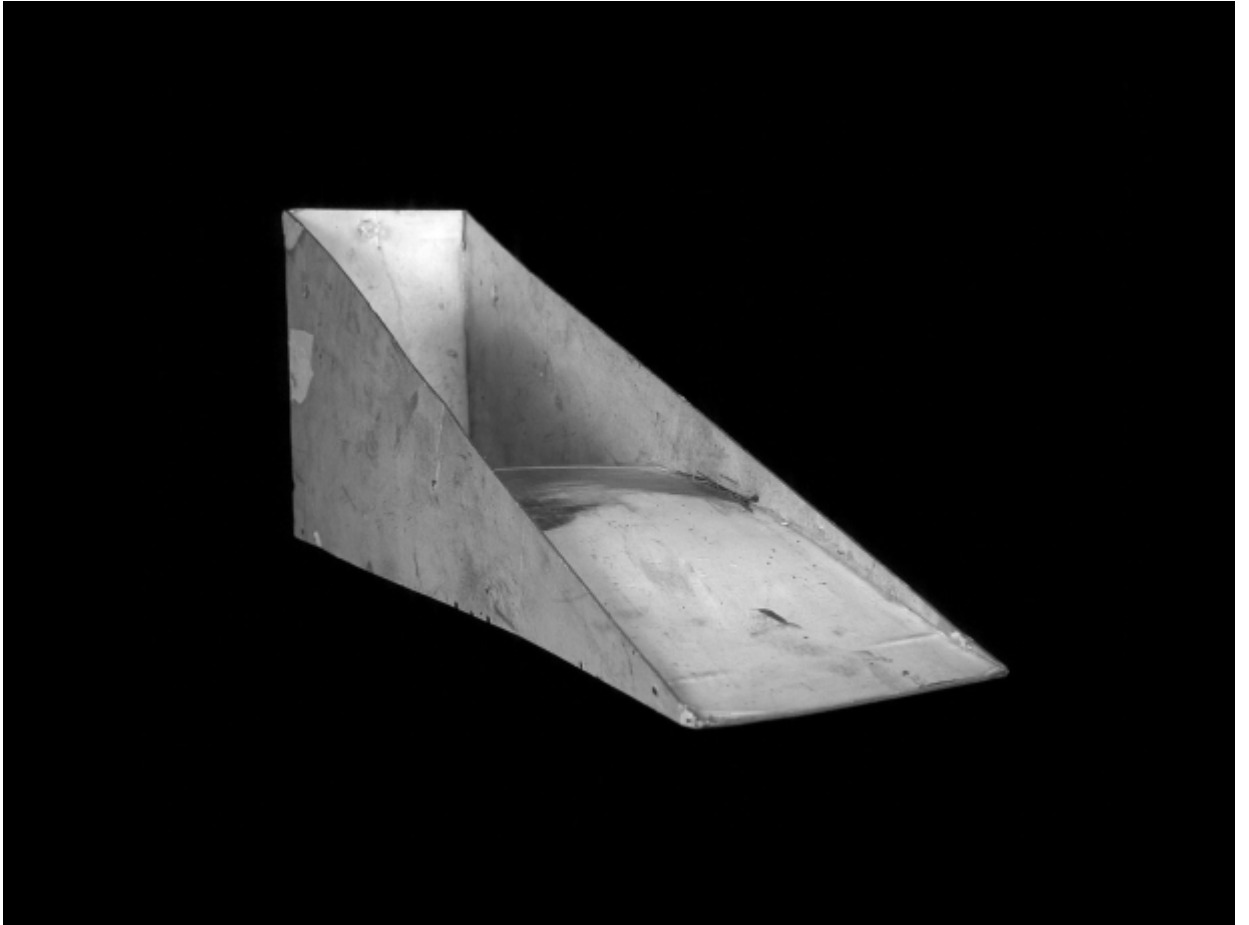


fig. 3.26
Untitled (Eye-Level Piece), 1966.
Cardboard, paint, $7 \times 4\frac{1}{4} \times 19\frac{7}{8}$ in.
Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.

BN: Yes. I guess it was an excuse to make an object, and I'm not clear exactly . . . if you don't have the courage to go ahead and just make it, an abstract object, and just stick it on the wall, but somehow to give it a reason or meaning by alluding to some—

MD: Conceptual process . . .

BN: Yes. Well, it was necessary at that time for me to do that in order to make work. I was just sort of tied in a knot and couldn't get anything out, and so now there was a reason or excuse so that things could be made. Certainly they needed to be physically, sculpturally interesting to me. I felt that was important, but at the same time, to append a title made me more comfortable.

MD: Did these come out of your San Francisco studio, those pieces, too?

BN: Yes.

MD: And you were saying that you worked alone, basically, you had a lot of time alone. You taught one day a week.

BN: I might have gone in there two mornings a week or so. It was just one class, probably went in a couple of days a week.

MD: Was this kind of isolation almost really good for you, do you need that in order to work generally?

BN: Well, I've always—yes, pretty much so. But there were other strange things that used to go on at the school. I remember there was a guy who was a poet, Bill Withram—he was a socialist and a poet. Part of the time he worked as a stevedore or something like that, I think, but he was a friend of a lot of the artists. They had a modeling budget for the sculpture department and so we used to hire him to come and model. Nobody worked from the figure at that school, and mostly nobody came to school, so he and I would sit and have coffee. But then he would think up things like, "Today I'll be hard to find," and would go—the class would come in or

whatever and he'd be hiding up in the corner of a window, or sitting there, nude, holding very still, and he'd do that until somebody would notice him. Just try and amuse himself, and a lot of curious stuff like that. And then a lot of the models they used were from the topless bars and stuff like that, so that would be weird, too, that kind of stuff. Strange things at that school. But the thing about the school was, I think it was probably as conservative in a lot of ways as any school is—art school—but there was a very strong moral atmosphere about being an artist. It was very important to be an artist, it was very important to do a lot of work, and to work at night and you'd work all day and having a studio—it went a little too far, because it had to do with the kind of work you could make. There were certain attitudes left over from, I don't know what they were left over from, for me they never worked too long. Wiley would tell stories about going into Frank Lobdell's studio or something, and Frank would have paintings he'd been working on for twenty years and they were so thick and crusty and he'd pull them out and show people and stuff would fall off and he would stick it back on. And everybody made paintings that were warped, you know, all that kind of stuff, which is very romantic, but . . . It had a lot to do with being frustrated and angry, too, and being ignored, never having a show in New York. Which is eventually why I left the area. That frustration and energy used on hating New York and Los Angeles was phenomenal. It was an incredible paranoia among most of the people I knew.

MD: Did they know your work? Did they know what you were doing at that point?

BN: Yes.

MD: Was there an exchange about—

BN: Well, not a lot. There weren't a lot of people who saw it. I knew Bill Wiley and Bob Hudson a little bit, and Bill Geis and a few other people. Nobody really close.

MD: Did you know them socially?

BN: Yes, a little bit. The only person I finally met who—but there was an incredible narrowness. Nobody read books, it was against the rules to read books.

MD: And you, did you read books?

BN: I did, yes, until I actually was ready to leave the area. And Jim Melchert was wonderful, he was somebody you could talk to about something you'd read and could take seriously a lot of ideas, and he didn't have to say, "What the fuck is this boring shit!"

MD: So it was like an anti-intellectual stance.

BN: Oh, yes, very strongly, yes.

MD: So it wasn't necessary to be an artist and be accepted as a professional; people didn't need to see your work, they just needed to know you were working.

BN: People only saw work in somebody's studio; nobody showed work, that was very rare. It was against the rules to go to New York. If you went you were an outcast and couldn't come back; you'd better go and make it because you'd sold out.

MD: But in relation to your work, and what you were doing and what you had in your studio, were there many people that saw it, was that a need that you had?

BN: No, very few people saw it.

MD: Was it just that you didn't have that need, or were you a little hesitant?

BN: I think there were both those things. I think there's always a need to some extent and I think—but that was what was expected; that was the attitude. People didn't expect a lot of approval or—I mean, I think some

peer group, people came to your studio and you showed them what you were working on. There wasn't a lot of paranoia about that, I don't think.

MD: Were there any people you could think of who you thought really understood your work and were reinforcing about it?

BN: Well, I think Wiley did, on some level or other. But then he left for a year of travel in Europe. I think it was at the end of that really strong isolationist period for a lot of those people. Wiley was finally making some exhibitions and having enough money to—because everybody was very poor, and after I left more and more of those people showed more and sold work after a while—Bob Hudson—and got a lot of recognition. It took a lot of the bitterness out of things. And relaxed them, and they made more work, and the work got better, too.

MD: You worked with Bill Allan for a while, on making films. Talk about that, how did that come about?

BN: That was the “slant step” period. The slant step looked like a stool except that the part where you are supposed to step on it had too much of a slope to do anything with. I don't know why, I was really amused by it, and it was in a used shop in Mill Valley. Those guys knew about it; they'd seen it, and finally when I went down to visit Bill Allan one time he took me to see it. And I went back, and I guess they bought it for me, and they brought it up to Davis. I was still in school. I made some drawings of it and a copy of it (fig. 3.27) and Bill finally decided we would—

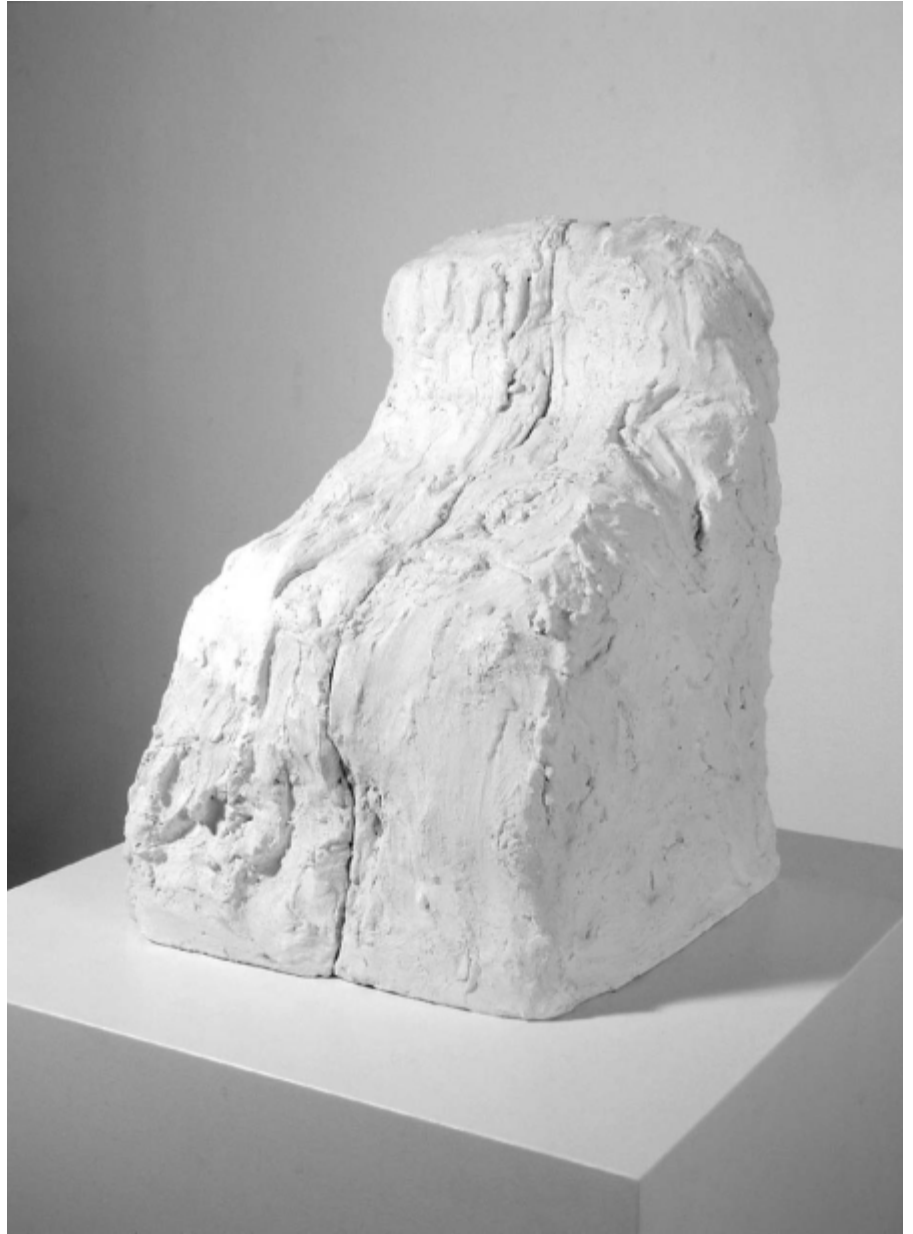
MD: You knew him from Davis?

BN: Yes, Allan wasn't teaching at Davis, but he was a friend of mine, and he must have come up or something like that. So we decided we would make a film called *Building the Slant Step*. We had the original and we built all this stuff—it was like a shop film. It was a parody of a shop film.

MD: The film was done in San Francisco?

fig. 3.27

Mold for Modernized Slant Step,
1966. Plaster, 22 × 17 × 12 in.
Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.



BN: No, it was done in Davis. Even before that we made *Fishing for Asian Carp*. Because Bill's a real good fisherman; that's how we made this film, like a travelogue. I went out and filmed him—the point of the film was to go out and film Bill fishing until he caught a fish, which he did. And then Bob Nelson, who was a filmmaker in San Francisco, narrated the thing, I guess partly because he could edit it and make the sound recording. So we did this travelogue, and he was the narrator, and Allan as the fisherman had to talk—“Well, Bill, here we are out—I see you're putting on your waders.” “Yes, we call those waders.” The film would have been really dumb and boring except that when we got to the end of it and Bill catches a fish and he picked it up with his finger in the gills and Bob says, “Well, Bill, I see you've caught your fish now and you're picking it up. What do you call that when you're picking it up with your finger like that?” And he said, “Well, when you don't have a gaff or a net, I guess you call it finger gaffing.” And Bob says, “*Finger gaffing!*” and then he started to laugh, and he's got the most wonderful laugh, and the laugh goes on.

MD: It seems like you've come to all these different media really naturally. Your work clearly isn't about working in a particular medium, and all of this is just—the film and all this—was input from your friends and just whatever was—

BN: Yes. Well, some of it took more research. When I did those holograms, that took a lot of—I did them first as still photographs with Jack Fulton, who took the pictures actually, and then I did it as film, and none of it seemed quite satisfactory, and finally I found out about holography and figured out—wrote a lot of letters. It took me a year or two to find out somebody who could do what I wanted to do. I got that done.

MD: Cohesiveness really is in the ideas and in the behavior, and you just plug in to whatever the medium it takes.

MD: Okay, Bruce, last time we were talking about your time in San Francisco. But I want to go back a little bit to the show that you had in Nick Wilder's [gallery] while you were still in graduate school in Davis. How did that come about?

BN: Tony De Lap had come up to Davis to teach for one semester, I think, and he had traded some work with me and then he moved. He was living in San Francisco at the time and then he moved to Southern California to teach at Irvine and Nick Wilder saw a piece at Tony's house; it was a low, plastic piece. So he said he had nightmares about it for about two months, so he decided he wanted to see more work. He and Joe Goode were coming up to deliver something to San Francisco, and they came by and—

MD: You'd already moved up there?

BN: No, I was still living in Davis at that time, it must have been. I remember it was very hot, so it must have been well past the winter. So he came to the studio and saw a lot of work there. I don't think they stayed two minutes, and they left.

MD: And what they saw were those resin pieces.

BN: Resin pieces and bunches of rubber pieces.

MD: Those were colored and propped against the wall.

BN: Leaning on the wall. So then he called—I don't remember the dates of all this stuff—but then he called and we arranged the show. I think I had the show in June.²

MD: Was that extraordinary for you at that time? You were still in graduate school.

BN: Oh, yes, absolutely. Because I hadn't had any particular encouragement outside of the school. Nobody had even seen the work. It was strange.

MD: What was it like to see the pieces in a gallery, in a space other than your studio?

BN: Well, I don't remember what I thought about that.

MD: Did it seem an important part of the process of art making, to finally externalize it that way?

BN: I don't think I had that feeling so much, because when you're at school, people see the work a lot. I think that later, when I was spending more time alone in the studio and not as many people were seeing the work, it was more important for the work to get out and to see it outside the studio.

MD: Did anything sell out of that show?

BN: I think he did sell some stuff, yes. Maybe not immediately, but not too long after. He bought some things himself, and Katie Bishop, who was—she functioned as a secretary, but she also did almost everything in the gallery—and she bought something out of that show. Eventually, all of the work—no, not all of it, but most of the work in the show sold within a year or two, at quite low prices, but fine prices for those days.

MD: Well, after you were in San Francisco, you began pretty quickly, it seemed to me, to start working in ways that were other than object-oriented. Did you do film or video pieces before that portfolio of photographs [*Eleven Color Photographs*]?

BN: No. I think the first film pieces were shortly after that.³ They were pieces that I had kind of intended as performances, but I didn't know exactly how to go about setting them up as performances. I had access to a guy at the Art Institute that I knew that had—[he]was a filmmaker—

MD: Who was it?

BN: I don't remember his name. He worked in the gallery. He was a nice

guy, but I don't remember his name. I did do one performance piece before that was part of my graduate show at Davis.

MD: And what was that piece like, or about?

BN: Manipulating a fluorescent tube.⁴

MD: Was that your first interest in light as a part of the work?

BN: No, I had made some neon work before then. I think I just threw it all away, destroyed it all before I left school and never showed any of that work to anybody outside of the people I knew. But anyway, there was an interest in the use of light.

MD: About the set of photographs, what was the edition? Was it an edition?

BN: Oh, I think so, but I don't remember the edition. Eleven or fifteen, I think.⁵

MD: A small edition.

BN: Or maybe it was only seven, I don't remember.

MD: Did you begin working with performance and your art coming out of your activities in the studio—your movements—in San Francisco?

BN: Yes, right. But it wasn't—they were sort of documentations first, the photographs, and then when I moved out to Mill Valley, I moved into Bill Wiley's house for a year while he was traveling, and then I did the films there. Probably more photographs, and then more neon. I was doing neon work both in San Francisco and Mill Valley. Then I got an NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grant in 1968 and I moved to Southampton, New York, to a house that Paul Waldman and Roy Lichtenstein owned. Paul had been teaching at the school at Davis when I was there for a short time. I had never studied with him but I'd go in and talk to him. So he offered the house—it was their summer house, and they didn't use it very

much anyway—it was too complicated: everybody with separate families and the house just wasn't big enough. And they built a studio and then neither of them would use the studio because they couldn't use it together—one of those deals. So anyway, I used the studio and the house and made the videotapes there, because I didn't really have access to film equipment any more.

MD: How did you come to video, had you worked with it?

BN: No, I hadn't. I think my only real familiarity with it was seeing it in store windows—you know, a camera on the sidewalk and you see pictures in the store window. Leo [Castelli] bought the equipment and I used it for about a year and then gave it back to the gallery and then Keith Sonnier used it, Richard Serra used it, everybody got to use it.

MD: What was your relationship to New York and New York artists at the time you were in Southhampton?

BN: Well, I had a number of friends that I had known before. That year—let's see, I first showed with Leo [Castelli] in 1968 before I moved there. So then after I moved out there I had that relationship, and then Richard [Serra] and Keith [Sonnier] started showing with Leo, and I knew them, and we were in a lot of group shows together. I knew them, I knew Walter De Maria and Sol LeWitt, other people from traveling mostly. Different shows. Frank Owen and Steve Kaltenbach were people that I'd known on the West Coast who were both living in New York. So I saw quite a few people. I used to take the train in two or three days a week and I'd hang out with those people.

MD: Was there anybody whose work you were seeing at that time that was important to you?

BN: No. I think that what was important more than the work and other artists was the number of musicians I knew that I'd known before, but most of them were living on the East Coast—Phil Glass, and Steve Reich,

and I knew La Monte Young's music although I'd never known him, but I used to spend time with him at the studio.

MD: How did you meet them? You said you knew them before you went to New York?

BN: La Monte Young and Steve Reich are from the West Coast. Steve was a friend of Bill Wiley's and I met him through Bill. I think they had done some projects together. Also I'd met Meredith Monk on the West Coast—I've forgotten why she was out there. I met her at a party and talked to her for a little bit, and then when I got to the East Coast I was still doing some performance. One time I did a performance at the Whitney and I got nervous and decided I needed some professional in the group and asked her to work with me.⁶ After that I worked with her once or twice at different places. But I think those were really important, because you do, you call yourself an artist or a painter or sculptor or whatever and then you do performance things or make things or music, but you can get away with a lot by not putting it into the field of music and calling it a dance. And I think it's important that you—there's a lot of naiveté which lets you do things, but at the same time maybe they're things that have been done or done better or could stand a little more competence even.

MD: Did you know Terry Riley?

BN: No, I don't know him, but I knew his music also, because I'd seen him perform once or twice.

MD: What was important to you about what these people were doing, or about their work?

BN: Well, I think the sense of structure and time, things that continue. La Monte's idea that the music always went on and it was a performance, that it was always available, that it was continuous. There was no beginning and no end.

MD: What about Phil Glass?

BN: Well, a lot of that same feeling was there; a lot of it also went back to two other—when I was in school as an undergraduate in Wisconsin and still playing music like jazz, I think Coltrane was the person I listened to as much as anybody, and a lot of the music was modal rather than more traditional jazz. That also has that sense that there's no progression, it just goes on and on until you choose to stop. And so I really liked that idea of performance or videotape that went on longer than film, or film that went on in loops and things like that—you could walk in at any point. I think I like—there's a kind of a tension set up when you . . . A lot of the films were about dance or exercise problems or repeated movements, as were the performances. You have the repeated action, and at the same time, over a long period of time you have mistakes or at least a chance, changes, and you get tired and all kinds of things happen, so there's a certain tension that you can exploit once you begin to understand how those things function. And a lot of the videotapes were about that.

MD: This posits a kind of attitude toward the audience or the spectator, a kind of—well, what you were saying about this kind of performance or event that goes on and it doesn't . . . timewise, it's ever-present. There's no beginning and no end, in a sense. That means that the relationship of the spectator is really different than with something that has a beginning, middle, and end. Were you aware of that, were you thinking of that?

BN: Oh, yes.

MD: Talk a little bit about how the spectator—how you wanted the spectator to deal with these pieces.

BN: Well, I wasn't interested in a boring situation and I think what was important was that there was no—of course, there always was a beginning and an end, but it seemed to me that if it went on long enough, if somebody could come in and watch it you could give them an hour or a half hour or two hours or whatever, but what I always wanted to be careful about was to have the structure include enough tensions in either random

error or getting tired and making a mistake—whatever—that there always was some structure programmed into the event. And I really was interested in tensions, not in the tension of sitting there for a long time and having nothing change. And I think the pieces that were successful were successful for those reasons, and the pieces that weren't successful failed to be because they didn't have enough structure built into them.

MD: This business of making art out of drinking coffee in your studio or, like, pacing in your studio—these are commonplace human activities, you know. They're not, it's not like, let's say, the technique of painting or something where that is something that is an art activity as opposed to drinking coffee, which is also a life activity shared by your spectators.

BN: But, see, that's where—well, what I might say is I think that those early Warhol films and what I'd known and seen of Merce Cunningham's dance were important considerations. Because his dance is built up of very normal activities. But again, it's how you structure the experience in order to communicate it. I think that's really important. You can't just make a documentation and present it, because people do it all the time and some of it is boring and some of it will be interesting, and I think that's where the art comes in, is the ability to communicate not just a bunch of information but to make an experience that's more general.

MD: Is this analogy accurate, that, essentially—think about Duchamp's readymades, okay, his whole premise was these were art because he took them out of a real-life situation and put them into a context that was other than a real-life situation, and that act gave you insight or made an interesting situation that evoked things or provoked ideas. Is this the same kind of process, to, say, take this act of walking on this square in your studio or drinking coffee in your studio, and to put it into an art context with a title. . . .

BN: I think that's real risky. I'm not sure that I—

MD: This isn't what you're doing, you're saying.

BN: No. I think that it was important for me not to do that—certainly I deal with it in an art context all the time, and the work goes to museums and it doesn't go just out on the street or in a department store or whatever. It does give people a clue as to where to start. But I really mistrust art that's just about art. Which I'm not sure—I have no way of classifying Duchamp's work, but certainly there's a lot of work that I would call "hothouse" work or whatever, without the context of this—

MD: . . . of art you don't understand it. It doesn't exist.

BN: Maybe even in the context of a certain kind of art, a certain period of time. And I would hope that I could go beyond that to appeal to people without that importance of the particular social, cultural—it's too narrow a cultural apprehension of the work. I don't know. I have no idea, how well that works . . .

MD: The neon pieces that come out of your body, the templates from your body (fig. 3.28)—so much of your art does come out of your physical presence and size. How do you think the audience can relate to that? Does it involve an imaginative process of evoking the artist and his presence?

BN: No, I think those things were really quite impersonal. I think I used myself as an object; maybe impersonal is the wrong word. I think the attempt is to go from the specific to the general. Maybe it's the same kind of way of making a self-portrait, as Rembrandt made a self-portrait, and a lot of other people, making a self-portrait where you're not interested so much—you're making a painting, but you're also making an examination of yourself and also making a generalization beyond yourself.

MD: Why did you use neon for that?

BN: I did it lots of ways; I did it with wax and with neon, with metal and just all kinds of—⁷

MD: One of your pieces that I really love is the one called *Five Famous*

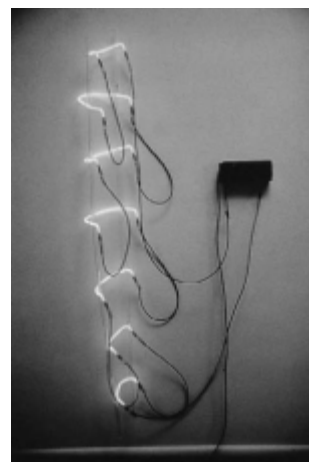


fig. 3.28

Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten-Inch Intervals, 1966. Neon tubing on clear glass tubing suspension frame, 70 × 9 × 6 in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

Artists' Knees [*Wax Impressions of the Knees of Five Famous Artists*, 1966, see fig. 1.14] only it was all your knee. Why?

BN: I was interested in the idea of lying, or not telling the truth. The full title is *Cast in Wax*, or *Molded in Wax*, or something like that—but it's a fiberglass piece, too, a large yellow-colored—

MD: That's great. I like that piece a lot; it really works. By 1970 you had an amazing number of shows for a young artist. You'd showed at Fischbach [Gallery, New York], you'd shown at Ileana Sonnabend, you really had a lot of shows in the few years after you got out of graduate school. Was that good for you, was it troublesome?

BN: It was pretty good. I don't know. I have no way of knowing what it would have been like not to have had any, or to have had a smaller number.

MD: How did these people find out about your work? Was it through [Leo] Castelli?

BN: Well, no. Nick [Nicholas Wilder] had the first show, and let's see, who came around? David Whitney was working for Leo at that time and had come to the West Coast, and was a friend of Nick's and came up and saw the work. I don't remember the order of all those things. Dick Bellamy⁸ was on the West Coast and came up and saw the work, also through Nick.

MD: He's great. He's a nice person.

BN: And I showed some work in a summer show with Dick, and he immediately passed me on to Leo. He arranged the business with Leo, but also it had to do with David Whitney. Between David and Nick and Dick Bellamy it kind of got arranged to show with Leo. At the same time Lucy Lippard had come through and seen the work and included me in the show she did with Fischbach.⁹ Kasper Koenig, who was German and had come to this country to publish—he was going to publish poetry and pho-

tographs of a few artists' work he was interested in. I've forgotten who all—I know he was interested in [Joseph] Cornell and [H. C.] Westermann, I don't remember who else. In fact, he told me some things about Joseph Beuys at that time, who was totally unknown—I'd never heard of him, he was unknown in this country pretty much altogether—which was very influential. I never saw any of the work until about three or four years later when I was finally in Germany, but, anyway, he was acting as a representative for Konrad Fischer, who had just started his gallery. In fact, I showed there before I showed with Leo . . . or perhaps not.¹⁰ It was about the same time, it was 1968. I think he'd had the gallery for a year or two at that time. So I showed there and then I showed with Ileana [Sonnabend] in Paris because of the connection with Leo, and also with [Gian Enzo] Sperone and Bruno [Bischofberger]. That was all through Leo and the gallery. The Konrad Fischer connection was separate.

MD: Did this put pressure on you to create more work?

BN: No, I didn't feel that at all. The only time I felt that pressure was the year I was in New York, and I was in a lot of group shows. I had the show with Leo, but mostly—and that was at the end of that year, the spring of 1969, I guess it was then. I'm not sure if those dates are right. At any rate, I was in a lot of group shows, mostly with Richard Serra and Keith [Sonnier] and a whole bunch of other people there, very popular type of group shows. I think I used more work, I mean I sort of—all the things I'd thought of, I used them all up that year. And I felt very drained by the time I left New York.

MD: What was it like to see your work in the context of a group show? Did it matter? Did it give you more information, about what you were doing?

BN: Well, I'm not sure. I think maybe the main thing I remember is that it was extremely clear to me, or extremely important to be clear about what I was doing. I think I maybe let out one or two pieces that I felt that I

shouldn't have because . . . people would call. It's very hard to turn people down, to say you don't have something.

MD: Did Keith and Richard get your work—did they—

BN: Oh, I think so, yes. I'd met Richard before I moved to New York. He'd come out to the West Coast to visit because he's from there.

MD: Was that important to you to have people who understood your work, who you were showing with?

BN: Yes. Oh, I think those kinds of things probably give you as much encouragement as anything. And Walter was on the West Coast a long time before he moved to New York. De Maria came out to visit; we went to the track and stuff. But I think that recognition by your peers is really more important than anything else. It was to me at that time and still is.

MD: Let's talk about your use of light and neon. Was it interesting technically to you at all, or did you have someone else do all of that?

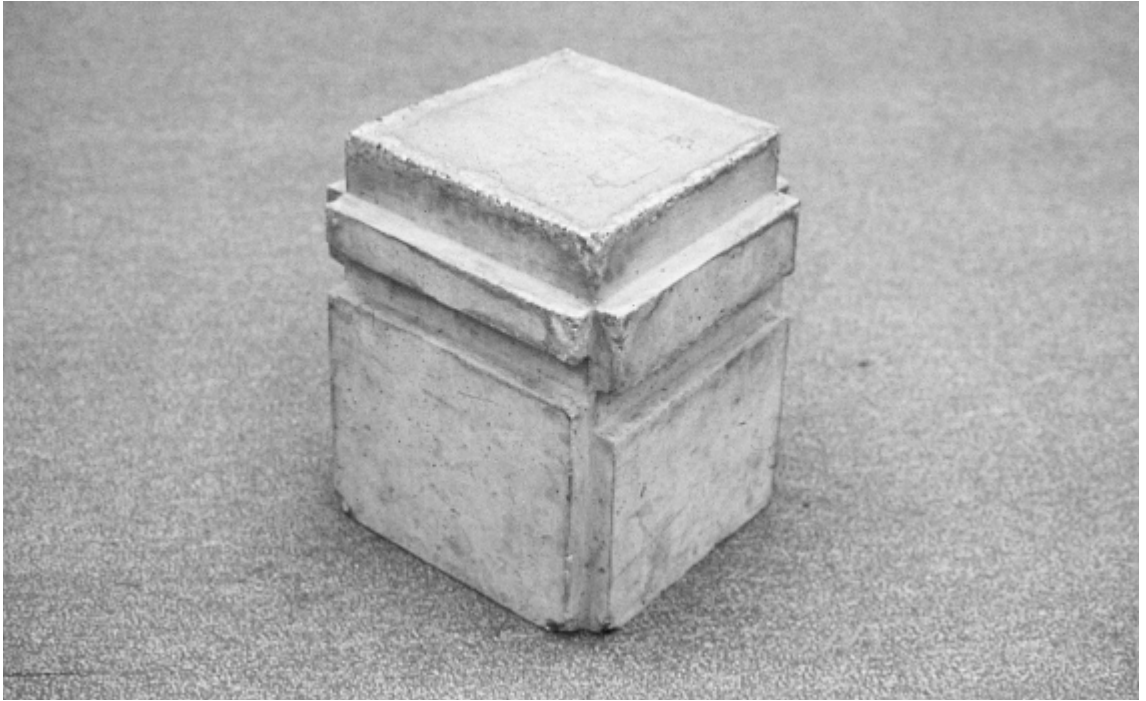
BN: No, I always had somebody else do it. I think the first use of it that was of any interest was the spiral neon sign [*The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967], and that was made that way—I made another one that was never as good but it was a window-shape wall sign [*The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain (Window or Wall Shade)*, 1966].

MD: That had words on it also?

BN: Yes. That one said, "The true artist is an amazing luminous fountain." It was the idea that they would be signs just like any other sign, like a beer sign or a—

MD: Coors or Budweiser—

BN: Yes, something like that. . . I think a store sign, anything, it could hang in a window or on a wall or whatever. We were talking the other day



about having things that related or were based on ordinary objects, shelves or chairs or whatever. One of the pieces I did the first time I was in Germany was a piece called *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair* (fig. 3.29). It was the chair I had in the apartment I was staying in. I was doing some work for Konrad Fischer. It was a chair that was made after the war, it was all made out of steel, very square, just straight sides and braces underneath. And when we made the cast of the space underneath, it had this very strange—a little concrete castle, kind of—it was very strange to have this title, which was a description of what the thing was in relation to visual, the object, which took on sort of a character of its own. It didn't read as the space under a chair, but it was this little toy castle. So those kinds of thoughts were very interesting.

MD: The space under, below, or around something when made positive could have its own identity.

fig. 3.29

A Cast of the Space Under My Chair, 1965–1968. Concrete, $17\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{3}{8} \times 14\frac{1}{8}$ in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

BN: Which I think—I'm not sure if it had come directly out of the de Kooning statement that I read someplace that when you paint a chair, you don't paint the chair, you just paint the spaces between the rungs.

MD: That's what was happening in that shelf that was sinking into the wall [*Shelf Sinking into the Wall With Copper Painted Plaster Casts of the Spaces Underneath*, 1966] and—

BN: Yes. Well, that and then it comes out of . . . is the same idea of the Futurist things—speeding through space.

MD: Like Boccioni. He made those objects colliding with each other, integrating—I've always liked those. What about those light photographs, like *Light Traps for Henry Moore*, is that what they were called? That was you moving a light—

BN: A flashlight in the background.

MD: That's a use of light, but the whole title, the whole “trap” implies a spatial existence. Tell me about those.

BN: And I tried to make the drawing three-dimensional. What am I supposed to tell you?

MD: You're supposed to just tell me what you were thinking of when they came into being. Those are really eerie to me, probably because of the title, and something that is—in a way that's a Futurist because it's like movement in time that isn't substantial, creating this vision in the photograph of substance, of a light trap. Why Henry Moore? You've done a couple or three things . . .

BN: I did quite a few drawings and several pieces that related to Henry or had him in the titles.

MD: *Henry Moore Bound to Fail* (see fig. 3.15)—

BN: It seems to me that was a period when a number of English sculptors were gaining some prominence. The names I can't think of. Tucker and . . .

MD: The younger people.

BN: Yes. There were quite a few, at the time, and some painters, too. Not just sculptors. The first time in a long time. And a lot of them didn't care for Henry's work, which I was not particularly fond of myself, anyway. So that's how that whole thing—

MD: Did you see it as these people being bound by his success and the way he is succeeding?

BN: Well, I think—no, I don't know that I had that particular view, but there certainly was that. If you didn't do Henry—if you worked like that it was very hard to get any acceptance, I'm sure.

MD: Those photographs, *Light Traps for Henry Moore*. Why light traps?

BN: Because they were made with light. I don't really remember all my feelings about those.

MD: In the image were you trapped in the light, was that it?

BN: No.

MD: I like those a lot. There's one piece about Henry Moore that's reproduced in color in this catalogue [I've seen], and it's like a case.

BN: It's a drawing. It's a storage capsule.

MD: Yes, *Seated Storage Capsule for Henry Moore*. It's so Egyptian.

BN: Yes, oh, I remember now. Well, I was also trying to make the drawing somewhat like Henry's subway—underground—drawings.

MD: The figures.

BN: And I also had the idea that they would need Henry sooner or later,

because he wasn't bad. He was a good enough artist and they should keep him around. They shouldn't just dump him just because a bunch of other stuff is going on. And so I sort of invented a whole mythology about all that, I suppose you'd call it. I remember it well enough to—

MD: So these are kind of fantasy drawings? You've made other capsules, like real life capsules, storage capsules. A storage capsule for the neon templates of your body. When did your use of holograms begin, when did you get involved with them?

BN: That was 1968 or so.

MD: How did that happen, was it an extension of the photographs?

BN: Well, yes, it came out of the performance things, and the idea of making faces was the first group, and we did the photographs making faces. And the idea of being just sort of—you can manipulate your body as a dancer would or even you can manipulate yourself making faces, or social attitudes, things like that. So they were made as photographs first and that wasn't quite satisfactory and then I did some as short films, film loops, and eventually—I don't remember where I came across the idea for one—*Scientific American* or someplace—and found a company to do the work. I did two sets—

MD: How did that change the quality of the images?

BN: Well, they became three-dimensional images. They existed in space rather than—they were much more sculptural.

MD: But they were still static.

BN: They were static, yes.

MD: Did you see those as being self-portraits, essentially, or more about human gesture?

BN: Yes, more about human gestures, although I don't know. I've always

worked pretty much alone, even in this case where somebody else was making—doing the work. I used myself as the subject matter. I'm not sure if I could or would have at the time used someone else or let somebody else do that much, so I'm not clear about that.

MD: Why do you think you don't want a model, why do you always work with you?

BN: Well, I have used other people. Some of those cast—some of the photographs and some cast plaster or wax things are from other people. *[From] Hand to Mouth* (see fig. 3.17) and the folded arms with the broken off—

MD: *Hand to Mouth*, isn't that you?

BN: No. And then a number of the performance pieces were done by other people.

MD: Would you say that you work predominantly with your own body, though?

BN: Yes.

MD: Why?

BN: It's just what was available. And I think because when you're trying to find something out, it's much easier to do, using yourself and I mean I still—we were talking the other day about having somebody else do work for you. You have to make a whole different set of instructions, you have to think about the work: whether it's a performance or having a piece made or something; you have to be able to think about it in a different way. If I have an object fabricated out of steel or something then I have to know, maybe even more, because you have to tell somebody else everything, more than maybe you have to tell yourself. It's really a lot harder in a certain way.

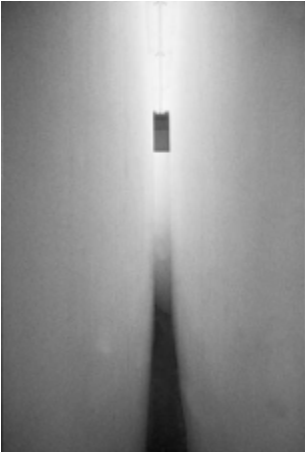


fig. 3.30

Corridor with Mirror and White Lights
(*Corridor with Reflected Image*),
1971. Wallboard, fluorescent lights,
mirror, dimensions variable. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

MD: Your involvement with all these different media, your work has a lot of different aspects that are other than art: psychology, behavior, phenomenology—do you read extensively in other fields than art?

BN: Not extensively, I don't think. I read a lot of stuff, but not programmatically at all. I think the interest in reading comes after the work more, rather than the work coming out of the reading.

MD: Are you interested in these processes, these technological aspects, or is it just an end?

BN: Oh, sometimes, not necessarily, I mean glass blowing is interesting as a skill, but I wouldn't particularly want to learn it.

MD: Tell me what the '69 *Performance Corridor* (see fig. 1.11) was.

BN: It was a piece—that's when I lived in Southhampton—I was doing videotapes in the studio, that's about all I was doing at the time, and I built it as a prop for a particular performance which was taped [*Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968, see fig. 1.12]. When Marcia Tucker had the show ["Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials"] at the [Whitney] Museum the piece was still in the studio, and I'd had it there for a long time. I'd used it a while and then taken it down, and I'd gotten very used to it and I liked it. But I had never displayed anything like that or showed it. Initially I'd never thought of it as a sculpture or an art object at all, it was a prop.

MD: What was it exactly?

BN: It was just two parallel walls that stuck straight out from the studio wall about twenty feet and about twenty inches apart. I remember it wasn't very big—I can remember some bigger ones. I finally just decided it was fine the way it was, it didn't need the performance. I think it was very hard for me to present it without any particular instructions, because I felt I didn't want people to make their own performance. I wanted to control the situation, and I felt that by giving something as simple and uninflected as that corridor, that I was allowing people a lot more latitude than I was used to.

MD: And you were uncomfortable with that.

BN: Yes, I was very uncomfortable. At the same time, the idea of the dead-end corridor, which I hadn't thought of when I built the piece but I found out about it when it was there—it really appealed to me.

MD: You used that in other pieces. Can you talk about what they were like?

BN: Well, there were a number of corridors that were designed after that. You see, that was the first one. Some of them were to look into, most of them were made to enter—some were a little wider and some were a lot narrower, some had—one piece that Tate [Gallery, London] (fig. 3.30) owns has a mirror at the end at a slight angle which does two things. It makes it look like it's going around a corner, and, because the mirror ends before the top of the wall, it makes the end look like it's twisted. It's very strange, almost an optical illusion.

MD: Sounds great. Is it narrow?

BN: It's only about seven or eight inches wide, so you can go in it, but it's not intended necessarily that you enter. And there was the *Green Light Corridor* [1970], which was open at both ends; you could pass all the way through.

MD: I've never seen any of the light corridors. I've read about *Blue Light Corridor*, *Yellow Light Corridor*.¹¹ Were those like emotional mood–state situations?

BN: Well, yes, I never had any specific feeling about how they ought to work. The *Green* was a very strong piece, but I had some people go in and find it very relaxing and other people find it very tense. I found it fairly tense myself. And then the yellow rooms (fig. 3.31) that I made—I could never stay in them.

fig. 3.31

Yellow Room (Triangular), 1973.
Wallboard, plywood, yellow fluorescent
lights, dimensions variable. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.



MD: Is this all experimental, or had you done any reading about the psychology of colors or that sort of thing?

BN: Well, no, I suppose nothing very specific. I suppose I had some rudimentary information from whatever reading here and there. But it put light in a very physical sense. It was almost more like being in a liquid at first, so that there was a very strong psychological and physiological response involved.

MD: Did it change your sense of temperature as well?

BN: I think the yellow one does. I think yellow, especially American yellow fluorescent, which is different than the European yellow fluorescent—

MD: Really, how different?

BN: Well, I don't know. They must use different coatings . . .

MD: But I mean, like, qualify the color difference if you can.

BN: I can't. It's more of an emotional response to it, it's slightly different. Also, American fluorescent, because of our sixty-cycle current—

MD: It's a product of electricity.

BN: Right. A lot of people really are bothered by fluorescent light. They're aware of the flicker, and the buzz is always there. Then because European is fifty cycles—it's different, stronger actually—and they tend to use not as bright a light there—and there's a lot more electricity here . . .

MD: What happens with your videotapes? Isn't the videotape image a product of the electric current essentially—the number of rasters?

BN: You can't transfer from American to European systems, unless they've developed something since I've last been in Europe.

MD: What happens when you use their monitors and their electricity to show your tapes?

BN: Most of the time, when Americans send stuff to Europe they would simply have to use a transformer to change to 220 volt, and then also a—I forget what it's called—anyway, you can change from sixty-cycle to fifty-cycle, but it requires a machine. I've forgotten what it's called.

MD: That difference between film—which to my eye is crisp, obviously, a resolved image, and there's a great deal of depth in it—as compared to video, which is often really grainy and the space is really . . . it seems to me that there's not very much depth. It's like an intimate image, and then it's right up against the screen. How did that change the nature of your work, or did it?

BN: Well, I think it did. And you also have to deal with the fact of the equipment, the monitor, and the television set in the space.

MD: Did you have a video camera just set up and going, or did you have it connected with a monitor, so you could, on the spot—

BN: Generally I had it with the monitor, but most of the time I could also—but usually I could see what was going on. You had to be able to, I didn't have anybody else there to keep track, because usually the camera was fixed. I needed to be able to see where I was in the picture and what was going on.

MD: Isn't that a weird kind of schizophrenia, though, because you were performing for yourself?

BN: Well, I used that in one of the corridor pieces. One of the more successful ones was the long corridor that had a live image and a taped image of the empty corridor (fig. 3.32).

MD: That piece was at the Whitney once and it was one of the most physically affecting sculptures, if you want to call it that, that I've ever experienced.



fig. 3.32

Live-Taped Video Corridor, 1970.
Wallboard, video camera, two video
monitors, videotape player, videotape,
dimensions variable. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

BN: Well, the other thing that made it work was that I used a wide-angle lens and it was above and behind you as you walked into the corridors, so you were removed from yourself, sort of doubly removed—your image of yourself was from above and behind, and as you walked, because the wide-angle lens changes the rate that you're going away from the camera, so as you took a step, you took a double step with your own image. It's a strange feeling.

MD: It really made you doubt your physical presence. Cameras don't lie. Here I am, I know I'm here but I'm not there. The camera says I'm not here.

BN: The feeling that I had about a lot of that work was of going up the stairs in the dark and either having an extra stair that you didn't expect or not having one that you thought was going to be there—that kind of mis-step that surprises you every time it happens. Even when you knew how those pieces were working, as the camera was always out in front of you—but they seemed to work every time anyway. You couldn't avoid the sensation, which was very curious to me.

MD: At that point, though, you were making work that was essentially the place where it operated—maybe this is true of all of your work—was not physically, because it was the sum of all that in the spectator.

BN: Well, I think what you have very obviously in that situation is two kinds of information. You have the information that you've given yourself walking down this space, and then the other information through the camera visually. You have a piece of visual information and a piece of kinetic, or kinaesthetic, information and they don't line up—this idea that you're passing in the dark—and I think that the tension is set up by those two kinds of information that you can't ever quite put together. They won't quite fit. That's what the piece is, is that stuff that's not coming together.

MD: And the energy, you just put energy trying to make them together, put them together, but they don't jell. I liked that piece a lot.

BN: So I think, in a sense, a lot of the titles of what we were talking about, the cast of space under the chair and the visual image of very strongly something else was the information, so that a lot of the earlier pieces where there were titles like *Shelves Sinking into the Wall*, and all that, were sort of trying to give two pieces of information—was a justification on the one hand. And probably what I found out from that is that you can give two pieces of information and the piece is finally about that. It's about the tension of not being able to put them together.

MD: The effort of resolution.

BN: Yes.

MD: What was *Art Make-Up* (see fig. 3.20) about?

BN: I put on—I think I did a tape of it and I did a film of it, or there were four separate films, about ten-minute films—I put them all together—putting on, I've forgotten the sequence of the colors. In the film there were four different colors, there was white, I put on white make-up, then green, and then purple, and then black. From the waist up, I think, is what the film showed. And I think in the tape it was just two colors, black and white, because it was black and white tape. And I suppose it had whatever social connections it had with skin color and things like that. Also the play on the words, “making up art.”

MD: You do all the pieces where you'll do this kind of visual/linguistic punning, like *Draw More*, or things where you change them around. There was a funny one that I read, something about—let's see if I can find it in here—there are also these sort of—

BN: Well, there were also the flour arrangements, which actually came from Bill Wiley—either that or he commented on it afterwards. He was going to send a Japanese friend over so he could have a Japanese flower arrangement.

MD: This is a great one: *Run From Fear, Fun From Rear*.

BN: Yes. That one came from—I was living in Pasadena, in fact I think it was just before we were doing that show, and I saw it written on a bridge—in color, someone had written in spray paint, “Run from Fear.”

MD: And then you—

BN: —transposed it.

MD: Are you good at those things where they give you words that are all mixed up?

BN: Not particularly good at it. I'm not sure why. I don't know, my brain does those things, makes those slips that may come out, but I'm not really very good at anagrams and whatever those things are called. When we were working on this show, Jane Livingston was extremely good at inverting things, but letter for letter. It was just amazing how she could do it. An interesting story—when I was in—I guess it was the first time I was in Düsseldorf—and I was interested in all those kinds of things and Konrad [Fischer] knew it and we went to a restaurant that—I can't think of his name. He was a French artist who visited and drew everything down on the table after—

MD: Spoerri?

BN: Yes, Daniel Spoerri had this restaurant there, and a friend of his had made a whole bunch of—what do you call them, palindromes, where a whole sentence reverses and makes a mirror image of itself—“Madam, I'm Adam” is an example. Anyway, he'd done a whole bunch of them and they were all in German. It had been done in blue and black enamel like the street signs, all over the walls and outside and everything, and so he tried to explain a bunch of them to me, of course they didn't make any sense in English. Anyway, we went to Konrad's mother's house for tea or something a couple of days later. He was telling her that—and she does all these crossword puzzles, and she said, “Oh, of course anyone can do that,” and immediately did several. And the next day, a few days later, she

sent Konrad a letter and the whole letter was done that way—and the next time I went back a couple of years later, she had written and had published a mystery novel and the whole novel was written that way.

MD: That's incredible. It takes a certain kind of brain power. The piece that you did—there are a couple of them that I've seen in neon—one is your name as if written on the surface of the moon [*My Name As Though It Were Written on the Surface of the Moon*, 1968], and the other is—I forget the exact title, but where the letters of your name are elongated—

BN: Exaggerated fourteen times [*My Last Name Exaggerated Fourteen Times Vertically*, 1967]. Well, in the one written on the moon there are several of each letter stretched horizontally. There were a number of things that I did. I also did two drawings of my knee extended.¹² Stretched.

MD: Yes, I was going to mention that. Extending one finite thing and changing the look of it by extension. Why did that interest you? Is it the same kind of involvement as the space under the chair?

BN: Yes, I suppose, just a distortion, again, of a starting point. Starting with something.

MD: It's like a given image, your name or your knee, something that already exists?

BN: Some place to start. You have to make a mark somewhere and then you can deal with it.

MD: I've always thought that part of the reason that [Jasper] Johns did that was because he didn't want the responsibility for creating an imagery.

BN: Yes, well, I think there is that. In fact, I was thinking after talking the other day about the first photographs, the visual puns, the wax and stuff like that, that I had an idea to do some of those things—I think it was after I saw the Man Ray show and went back home and thought, how will I do these, I can't just make paintings of them because I haven't painted in a

long time and I hadn't even made any drawings, at least drawings of things in the world, and I didn't have any style. I would have to learn how to paint all over again and I wasn't very interested in that, so I came up with these photographs. Somehow I think, I may be mistaken, I had the idea that I could just take a picture, and I wouldn't have to think about how to draw it or something. Of course, when you take a picture, you have to think how to take the picture but in another sense I knew enough about painting to know that it would be a whole lot of work and I didn't know enough about photography to get involved in trying to make a really interesting or original photograph. I would have done a painting, I suppose. I think that was my problem.

MD: It seems that the execution, the physical embodiment of your work is always cool, a cool thing. There's a detachment or an objectivity. It seems you don't want to establish, as you were saying, a physical style. Do you understand what I'm getting at?

BN: Yes, but—

MD: Is that a conscious thing, do you think? Or do you think it's true?

BN: I think it's true in the sense that I think that I, at different times, found myself trapped into using a particular medium, or not trapped so much as, you use it a lot and finally find out it's wrong, it's getting in the way. I didn't want to get stuck in something like that because it was very hard for me to stop painting, when I did stop painting, because I really enjoyed painting, moving around and mixing paint, and just all the sensual things involved in making paintings. I think that I got away from making things myself for a long time. And then I finally did start in the last several years making things out of plaster, the models, and making them out of wood and whatnot. I really enjoy it, I like to do it, and I missed it a lot by not letting myself do it for a long time.

MD: But you have established your style ideologically. I mean, there's a style of cognition in your work.

BN: But even where there is a continuity of media, in drawings, for instance, in pencil or charcoal, there is a fairly recognizable style.

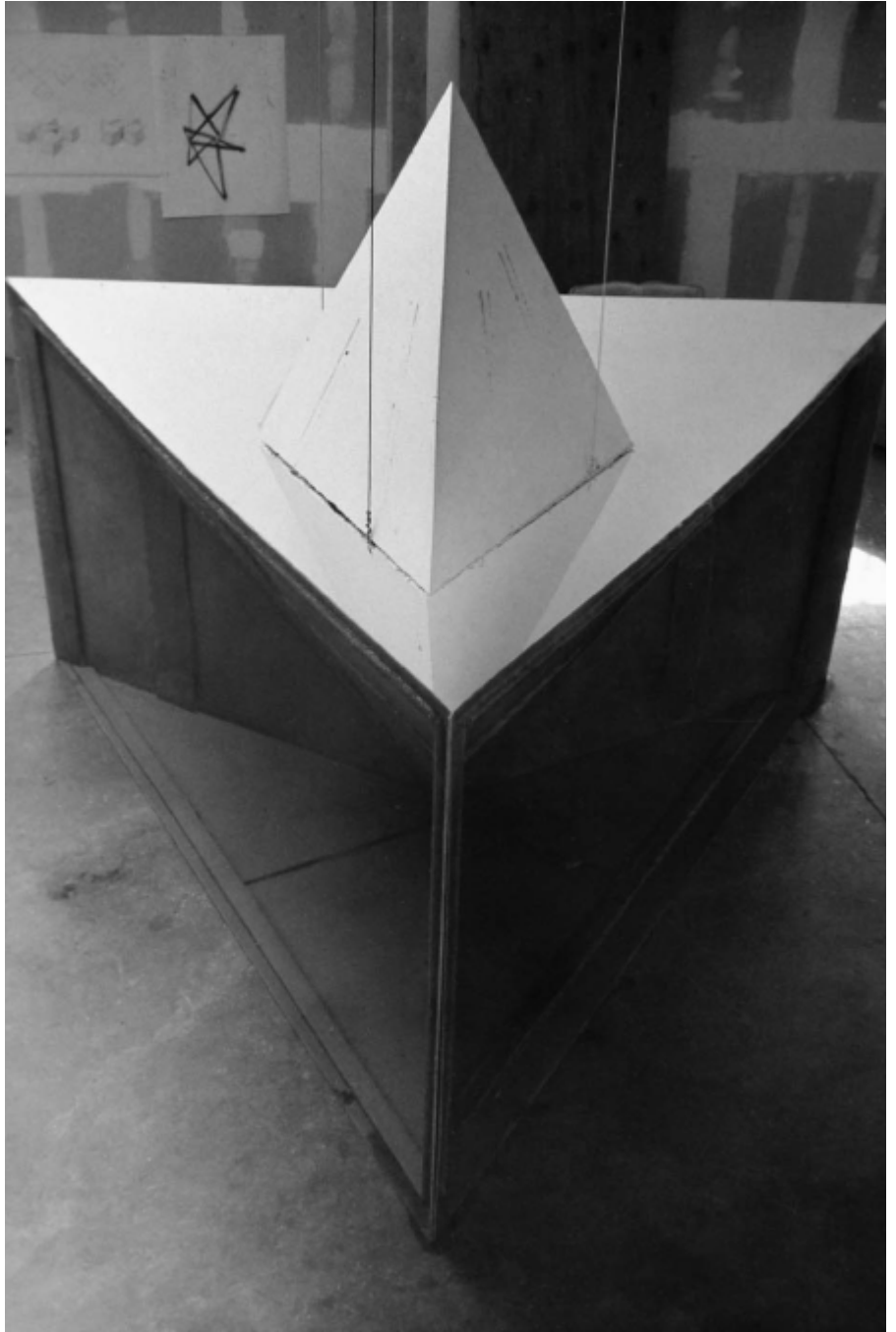
MD: I'm curious about the way your work manipulates the spectator. Do you feel any kind of responsibility about that? It's clearly an aim in a lot of the work.

BN: Well, maybe at the simplest level, but when I do something that's of interest to me, or the experience of the work is interesting—I don't know, that's confusing—well, then I just have to assume that some number of people will, if I've done a good job and made some interesting statement, be interested in that, too. And so I don't in that sense feel that it's a manipulation. I think that—but of course it's real complicated because I'm involved in the whole discovery of the piece, and what's left is the piece which I made. I seldom have a lot of interest in it once it's finished; I've done what I set out to do or gotten some place and found something out about it. In the end all you can do is trust that my needs and the situation are general enough that other people can become involved in it. And I know they're quite often quite demanding, but I think that's all right, too. I think one of the most important things in the last—well, quite a long time—in the work . . . I'm not clear how it's manifested.

I was talking to Peter Schjeldahl, he's a poet and critic, and we were talking about where the work came from and that we both felt that our work came a lot out of frustration and anger. So a lot of the work is about that, frustration and anger in the, with the social situation, not so much out of specific personal incidents but out of the world or mores or any cultural dissatisfaction, or disjointedness or something, and it doesn't always appear that way in the work, I think. Somehow it generates work; it generates energy from the work. But a lot of the work—the tunnels—has maybe been closer to that, more directly involves things that can't be made, and things you could never get into and dead ends and uncomfortable spaces. I made a print for a portfolio for Jasper's [Johns] foundation that was

fig. 3.33

Model for a Pit and Suspended Chamber, 1979. Fiberglass and plaster, 60 × 120 × 24. Courtesy Bruce Nauman.



called *Human Companionship*, *Human Drain*, and somebody came in and saw it and said to Harriet (Lindenberg, Bruce's companion), "Aren't you terribly offended by that?" Because it clearly—I mean, it wasn't directed at anyone or at Harriet at all, it was a much more general kind of frustration with people unable to get along with people. . . . I'm kind of lost as to where we started out and where we're going.

MD: You were talking about the frustration that your work comes out of, that frustration. More in a social, political sense than, say, in terms of the art world or that sort of thing. There is a piece I saw just before I came out here to New Mexico. Richard Armstrong put together a sculpture show, and it was a sort of semipyramid with walls (fig. 3.33)—do you know the one I'm talking about?¹³

BN: Yes, I know the piece.

MD: Tell me about that. I found it really ominous. This is a piece that's up now at the San Diego Museum of Art, and it's walls, with a diamond-shaped—

BN: —a triangular depression or an upside-down pyramid, whatever, and then the diamond that hangs in the middle.

MD: It was set in the middle, it wasn't hanging. Do you remember it hanging?

BN: It's supposed to hang.

MD: Above it?

BN: No, it hangs right down so that the bottom point touches the bottom of the pit. Well, it comes from a bunch of other work I'd done that were models for underground pieces, and I had those parts around because I was making something else, so obviously it can't be an underground piece any more—they couldn't be chambers and tunnels and things because they're hanging. So it just becomes an object, although I think I still called

it *Pendant Suspended*, something like that. It did have a strange quality, it was very unexpected to me.

MD: What was the material? There was this weird fleshy kind of color—

BN: Fiberglass. It was white on the inside, but the outside was the open side of the mold in which it was made, so it had these pinks and greens.

MD: Yes, strange. Are those objects the focal points for a kind of imaginary entry?

BN: Yes, well . . . how do you mean?

MD: Where you can't enter that work physically, you know, you're excluded from it, so what I was doing was standing on tiptoe and peering . . .

BN: It's about five feet high, so most people can manage to see over the top, or almost over the top. I really liked that not being able to quite deal with the physical . . .

MD: It's a big object in your space.

BN: Yes, or even things that don't quite fit in the room because you can't ever get distance on them. A lot of the work deals with that situation, partial blocking of the vision and things like that.

MD: Frustrating the spectator, in short.

BN: Yes. Well, I think a lot of the work is about that—not about frustrating, more about the tension of giving and taking away, of giving a certain amount of information and setting some kind of expectations and then not allowing them to be fulfilled, at least not in the sense that you expect, which is another way of giving two kinds of information that don't line up. Because you set up certain expectations, then go someplace else, or don't follow them at all, or stop people from getting wherever you might be going. I think those are real interesting kinds of . . .

MD: Joseph Beuys's work deals, it seems to me, with a lot of aspects of societal frustration. Do you find that important in his work? Or what do you find important in his work?

BN: I've never read much of the stuff that's been written or that he's written. I've never listened to him talk. I've seen quite a lot of the work from 1968, and when he had some work at Documenta, in Kassel—he had a huge room full of stuff, quite an amazing bunch of stuff to see all together. The last time I saw his work was at the Guggenheim. Not as nice a kind of installation, things were separated. To see all of it just together in a room is much nicer. You can differentiate between objects and stuff. So I don't know if he has all kinds of mythologies and some German stuff—and some . . .

MD: But what did you like about the work, what was important to you?

BN: It has an incredible physical presence, which is what I think most of the Americans took from him, the physical manipulation of materials. But they cleaned it up a lot. His work has an altogether different kind of presence from that . . . a certain . . . I really don't know how to characterize it. It's not work that's easy to take a picture of. I mean, you can take certain . . . maybe like a Pollock. What can you do, there's a Pollock painting and all you can do is make an imitation of a Pollock.

MD: Yes, he takes over an area so completely that—

BN: —there's nothing left to show you a way to make art.

MD: There's no direction out of that that doesn't look like it.

BN: You know, it's real interesting. Pollock and de Kooning are the two major American painters for a long time. Everybody can learn—so many people took stuff from de Kooning and a whole school of things that revolves around the way he worked—and other people—that revolves around that way of making paintings, that didn't exist for Pollock because

it was more about a way of being an artist or something, I'm not sure. And I still have a very unsettled feeling about Pollock's paintings. I'm not sure why.

MD: Do you look at a lot of work, historical things?

BN: No, not a lot. I look at things, but not very often.

MD: Is there anybody—any historical artist's work that's important to you, or whom you admire, or have learned things from?

BN: Well, certainly Picasso. I think Picasso as much as anybody. And then de Kooning. I learned a lot at different points from looking at de Kooning.

MD: Did you know de Kooning in New York?

BN: No, I haven't met him. I think that the only—I don't know, you learn things in all kinds of ways. I remember once seeing a George Tooker show at the Whitney . . . those things he made. It was really nice to see that. I took a lot of good things away from that. I was in London a long time ago and saw the da Vinci cartoon for a painting that they have in a darkroom, I've forgotten the painting it's for. But anyway, its quite a large drawing. I think that was the first time that I ever was around a piece of art that I really felt that the person was so removed from anything that I have ever had experience with, and I think that all the other times de Kooning, or somebody, even though you sense the mastery—I want to call it "work"—with the da Vinci drawing I didn't have that feeling at all. I just had really a feeling of a very special person there, and I could never hope to—I had no idea how to go about imitating or being inspired by or anything. Just there was somebody who was really in another realm of intelligence, you know. Not so much of just drawing, because there are probably a lot of people who could draw like that—maybe I thought that I could learn to draw that well, but that wasn't the point.

MD: Do you think it was a cultural separation as well?

BN: Well, probably. Probably some of that. It's hard to say. And I've also never gone back to look at it again to see if I still had the same kind of feeling, because a lot of times those things just happen once—the next time you don't know exactly what.

MD: Are there artists now that you're close to and whose work you follow with interest?

BN: Well, yes and no. (Robert) Irwin and I talk—we don't get to see each other very often, but we talk a lot, and he's someone whose career I've always been interested in, but as much for—not all his particular works, again, but the way he's continued to work over, and changed, not worked and worked again, and all those different things. I was very—I really liked seeing Jasper's retrospective for that reason, for seeing the early work and then some pretty uninteresting work and then some strong work again. And maybe at a certain point in your career you begin to feel that, and it seems important to see a number of people just disappear or slide or get to a point and just stay there, and it seems important to consider how to continue to be an artist over a long period of time—to keep the work interesting to yourself. You know, you have no interest in doing the same work over and over again. . . . And in this culture, at least for a while, people appeared and disappeared and that was sort of—and, I mean, you make two good paintings and you know you're in art history, and you can disappear or be forgotten or whatever, and that was a pretty poor view of someone's life, not just how to be an artist but—

MD: Was Irwin ever your teacher?

BN: No.

MD: You just met him when you were in California?

BN: Actually I met him in Holland. We never saw each other much in California.

MD: He's one of the great influences in this—in the latter part of this century, clearly, for all kinds of reasons besides just his work.

BN: You think so?

MD: Well, I personally find him really influential on my life and on me, even with minimum contact. And so many different people—they don't say what you've said, but they, you know, there's some other aspect of him that really is important to them, and his name pops up all over the place.

BN: Of course, he goes all over the place, too. He can talk to everybody or anybody.

MD: He's incredibly accessible.

BN: —and do work anywhere. Yes, well, I think he's really interesting.

MD: Can you talk about the recent pieces? You mentioned that you were doing plaster pieces, like the one you're showing at Hill's (Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico) now.

BN: Well, again, they're models for underground tunnels (for example, see fig. 3.34).

MD: The scale on which you've made these pieces, is that how you project them underground? Or are these reduced models?

BN: I think I tended to keep the scale around one to twelve. On some of them the scale would be thirty to one or something like that.

MD: When did you start doing these underground pieces?

BN: Quite a long time ago there were some shafts that went down into the ground, with stairs to enter and a curve or something, and you couldn't see out of the top. A lot of them are just tunnels underground. Some of them had surface pits or trenches and shafts that went down. They are all, almost all of them function, and as models they function as large sculp-

tures or objects in a given space anyway, and one of the things that's of interest to me in the whole project, or in all the projects, is how they need to function as sculptures without the other information of knowing that they're models for tunnels.

MD: You've built some of them underground actually?

BN: No, none of them have ever gotten built. A couple of them are almost built; insofar as I know, they haven't been completed.

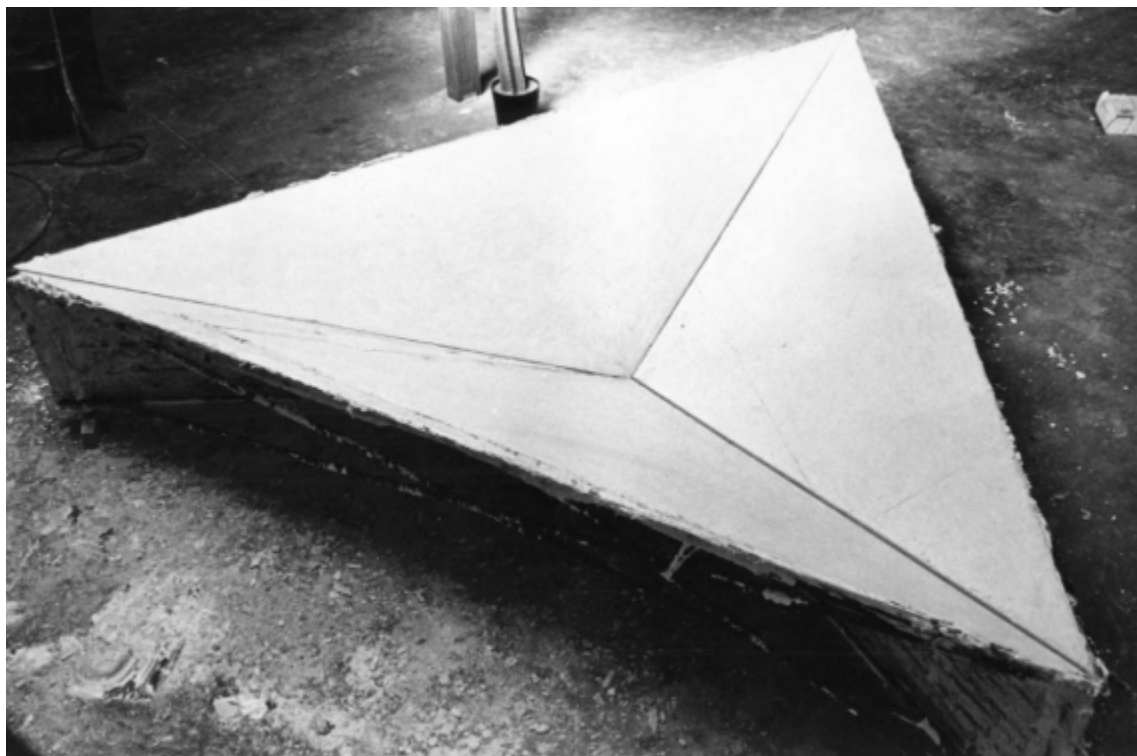
MD: But underground you can only know them sculpturally through your imagination.

BN: But they would all be spaces you could enter.

MD: So you'd know the interior.

fig. 3.34

Model for Triangular Depression, 1977.
Plaster, burlap, and steel, 21 × 120½ ×
120½ in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.



BN: Right, so what you'd have is the outside when you look at it . . .

MD: –in the gallery.

BN: Yes, and you'd have this other information that if it were built the spaces would be ten feet high so that you could enter. They're all extensions of the different corridor pieces. They have to do with circular structures or a lot of corners where—I guess one of the more important parts of a lot of the work had to do with the difference between private space and public space, and how it's psychologically different to be in a room with a bunch of people by yourself and to find that—for instance, if you're in a space and then other people enter, then your apprehension of the space changes, or the way you function in the space and how you locate yourself in the space, where you don't know the people, all that kind of stuff. So that one of the main things that I had thought about was to deal with trying to find the edge, to enforce the tension between that sort of transformation, between your space and having to share it, socially or whatever.

MD: How does that actually work in the piece? How can you do that without people?

BN: Well, some of the pieces that were rooms or corridors dealt with it because then the people were involved, and they had to deal with going around corners or curved spaces where part of the time you would be alone, but at the same time the corridor goes out in front and behind you and you don't know when someone else will appear. I guess the analogy that I made in the beginning, the early pieces were where you are in a phone booth and you are in a phone booth for acoustic privacy; at the same time it's on a street corner, for instance, or in a gas station or something. You remove yourself from the crowd and become an object and people notice you. You've removed yourself and placed yourself in a vulnerable position, and one of the first pieces I built that dealt with that was the piece called *Floating Room*.¹⁴ It was just a room that was suspended so that the walls left a gap of about four or five inches all the way

around, and when you were inside, if you walked too close to the edge then you were visible from the outside of the room by anybody who happened to be there.

MD: How did you get access to this room?

BN: There was a door. It was very interesting, because the longer you stayed in there the harder it was to leave. Because . . . I think it's a very real psychological drama or whatever. It's like when you're a kid and you're lying in bed and you're okay but if your arm would go over the side there can be something under the bed. See, the area of the space you can't control, and I think people do, one way or another, try and control the space—I mean, you whistle or make noise, or just visually are more comfortable with the space. So a lot of the situations have to do with that. Some of them have to do with going down a corridor into a dead-end space, which is both frustrating and kind of frightening—you can't get out. People are coming in and you kind of have to deal with the people.

MD: What interests you about these situations? It's clearly, the end point is not to create X emotional situation.

BN: No, the important thing is the tension, of how to deal with the situation.

MD: And how people resolve it or don't?

BN: Well, my intention would be to set it up so that it is hard to resolve, so that you're always on the edge of one kind of way of relating to the space or another, and you're never quite allowed to do either. Now, for instance, one piece that I made for Castelli a couple of years ago, there were five rings that were all—one at the top was a trench that was supposed to be at ground level but it was actually around eye level, and three others that were all tunnels underground but they twisted and did various things in relation to each other. It was large enough (it was about thirty feet or so) so that when you entered the gallery space you were never able to get

away from it. Your view of the whole piece was always blocked by another part of the piece, so that you had, instead of the frustration or tension of being inside it, and of the public/private business being set up, or even because it's a circle and you walk around a circle, you never will really see very far behind you—you are unable to even get outside the piece, because it was an object in the room which you couldn't get away from to see it. So I still, as I said before, I enjoy those kinds of tensions. Again, two kinds of information.

MD: The inside views of the piece, though, or the inside kinesthetic experience of these pieces, is at this point fairly imaginary.

BN: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

MD: Because you don't know how they really function underground or on the scale that you intend them.

BN: Right. I have to try and imagine that. I have set up partial constructions in the studio, and things like that, to try and get some idea of what I think the scale ought to be, but I suppose there's no way of knowing how accurate that is until something's built.

MD: Is there any possibility of these being built?

BN: Oh, I don't know, some of them may be. We've had places that had the money and then we couldn't find the right locations—right locations with no money, and things like that.

MD: Have you ever seen any of Alice Aycock's works?

BN: Just in photographs. No, that's not true, I think one piece. There was one that I saw in New Jersey at Far Hills. . . . It was tunnels underground. That was pretty interesting. But you could kind of tell from the drawings how it would feel. Only the fear when you were in it was real instead of just imagined. It was interesting.

MD: Tell me about the move here from South Pasadena.

BN: Pasadena.

MD: And you decided to come out here. Why, and what kind of decisions were involved?

BN: Oh, I think that I was finished with Los Angeles. I don't know that I was getting much out of the city. And this is very arbitrary, coming out here, because there was no place in particular I wanted to go. I didn't have any place in particular I needed to go. I think my feeling was I would not go to another city, except maybe to New York. There was no point in going to Seattle, or Houston, or Dallas, or something like that. And so we decided we would come here or at least move to the country somewhere, and then also because Harriet had friends and her brother . . . and I didn't really want to leave the West, because I feel very comfortable with the kind of space. I suppose also I did, I know Larry [Bell]—although we don't see each other very much, we're pretty far apart—I think knowing that somebody else that I knew was somewhere around.

MD: What are the differences in working here as opposed to working in the city?

BN: Oh, I miss my lunches. You know, when I was bored in the studio there was always somebody I could call and go and have lunch. Go get a burrito or whatever, just to get out of the studio. And it's not so easy now because I don't know anybody that's close enough to do that.

MD: You've been out here for about a year now.

BN: The only people I know to have lunch with that are available are in Santa Fe, so I have to arrange to go to Santa Fe, and that's more than just going out for an hour or forty-five minutes just to see somebody for a short time to kind of wash your brain out or whatever.

MD: As for actually working in your studio, has being in Pecos influenced those processes?

BN: Not particularly, no. No, I always spent my time in the studio, a lot of reading and some drawings and working. I still do that.

MD: What about input from other artists, or going to galleries and that sort of thing?

BN: No, I never did that very much anyway. I don't think that's a very important part of it. I mean, I get out and do get away from here often enough. This year and a half I've been away three or four times.

MD: The winters here, though, can be pretty severe. Were you at all isolated here or snowed in?

BN: No, we never were snowed in; we had a fairly mild winter this year.

MD: Being physically in this situation, does that influence your ideas about yourself or your behavior?

BN: No, I don't think so.

MD: You seem to have taken to this place pretty easily.

BN: Yes, well, I grew up mostly in fairly small towns and spent a lot of time out . . . I think that both intellectually and emotionally I feel comfortable with that distance on the art world. I've always had that in a certain sense. The only time I ever showed work was with Nick Wilder, living in the same town where I lived during the time I lived in Los Angeles, and Nick never sold much and the work very seldom got reviewed, so there wasn't a lot of feedback anyway. And then all the other places I showed, New York or Düsseldorf, even if I went to install the show, I usually left right afterwards, so I didn't get a lot of direct feedback. In the early days I couldn't afford to travel anyway; a lot of times the work was shipped and put up and I wasn't even there. So I always had a kind of a distance. It took two years before I found out what people thought about things anyway.

MD: So that's not a big difference here. That's pretty interesting to me because—and it's really heartening—because you aren't somebody who

goes out, I think, and tries to create a persona in the art scene, you know, and yet your work has had a real success and really been widely seen, pretty quickly after you made it.

BN: Although, and I'm not sure what I would have done to be more accessible, if I would have made more work, if there would have been more demand for work, if the prices for the work would have been a bit higher. I don't know how any of that stuff would have worked. As it is, the work sells very slowly, and the work from four years ago sells before the new work sells, and all that kind of stuff, so you don't have any immediate pressure to make any particular kind of work because by the time something sells I'm already making different stuff anyway. So most of the pressures, I think, are pressures I put on myself when I do any of that in the studio. It's for whatever reason, in the studio. I remember when Paul Waldman was at Davis, and he'd say, "God, it's terrible," because he only did a third as much work as he did when he was in New York, because there was no pressure, there were no people there and no demand, nobody was doing work around him. So I said, "Why are you doing all the work if you're just doing it because other people around you are working?" It seemed that the work needs to come from the artist needing to do the work. Well, in a certain sense that was a naive attitude. At that time I was doing tons of work because that's what students do. But that is a combination of pressures you put on yourself and needs that you have and then pressures that other people put on you. I know that when there's a demand for work I often do a lot more work. It's not worse or anything, I like it. But I think it's also not just the demand, it's the recognition from people, saying they like the work and they want it, and you feel good and you go do a lot of work.

MD: Do you trust that?

BN: Oh, it depends on where it comes from.

MD: Are you able to live from the sale of your work?

BN: Yes, I have mostly. Sometimes I teach.

MD: Talk a little bit about where you've taught after San Francisco.

BN: After San Francisco I taught at U.C.L.A. a little bit, and at [University of California] Irvine for a while. Irvine first, and then U.C.L.A., and then I taught at Cal Arts. And I've done a lot of sort of one week here, one week there kinds of things.

MD: What did you teach while you were at Irvine?

BN: Let's see, I taught sculpture and I taught some kind of—I don't remember what it was called at U.C.L.A.— people did anything they wanted to.

MD: Was teaching a useful process for you?

BN: Not particularly. I think sometimes it has been interesting, and sometimes pretty . . .

MD: Are students aware of what your work is when they take your courses?

BN: Not always. It depends on, like if I go and talk or lecture or spend several weeks someplace with graduate students they tend to know something. But there's not a lot of information anyway. A lot of the work goes to Europe; it never gets introduced here or anything, so, no, in that sense. And if they're younger students they tend to not know anything about it.

MD: What do you try to give to them; how do you teach? I always wondered how you teach art.

BN: Well, it depends on what it is. Mostly what I've done is talked to or spent time with graduate students—or upper division—in which case I look at individual work, one at a time, and have seminars. I can deal with small groups of people in seminar situations, and then we can talk about most anything: art or books or whatever. I suppose I'm more interested in why anybody does art, so those are the kinds of things that get discussed.

MD: Why do you think you do art now, in an ongoing way? Is it that you

come to this idea that you're an artist and therefore you make art, or is it an exploration?

BN: Well, I don't know. I told you before that my work comes out of frustration, and I feel that. But I don't think I was aware of it so much before but . . . that provided some sort of motivation. In that sense I think it's almost a philosophical response to the environment at large, to the culture or whatever.

MD: But this art doesn't affect the culture in a larger sense. It's not like social work or something.

BN: Oh, no. I think that people make a mistake about that. Art can never—I don't think I know any good art, very, very little good art that has any direct political or social impact on culture. But I would think that art is what's used in history; it's what's kind of left and that's how we view history, as through art and writing—art in the broad sense: music and writing and all that, and it's not ever—you know, art is political in the sense that it pokes at the edges of what's accepted or what's acceptable, or because it does investigate why people do art or why people do anything, or how the culture can and should function. I think art's about those things, and art is a very indirect way of pursuing those kinds of thoughts. So the impact has to be indirect, but at the same time I think it can be real. I think it's almost impossible to predict or say what it is, but it certainly doesn't apply to the political situation today or tomorrow, except in an abstract and more general way.

MD: [Robert] Irwin has an image that he uses that I've always liked. He talks about a culture being an egg and artists as pushing and expanding the boundaries of what's inside the egg.

BN: I think that with art or philosophy or any kind of—at the edges of any discipline, if you think of art as a discipline, the people that are interesting are the people that are exploring the structure of the discipline. In that

sense they're breaking the discipline down, too, as they're expanding it. They tend to break down what's there. Certainly there are artists who function entirely within the discipline. I would find those people uninteresting. Not that they're not talented or skilled or all those things, but it's not of interest to me. In that sense there's a great deal of confusion, because it doesn't require being able to draw or being able to paint well or know colors, it doesn't require any of those specific things that are in the discipline to be interesting. On the other hand, if you don't have any skill at all, then you can't communicate either, so it's an interesting edge between—that edge is interesting for those reasons.

MD: Is it important that your art communicate these things within your lifetime?

BN: I don't know. I think if you don't see any response, or wrong responses always—it depends on who is doing the responding. Some people like the work and you understand why they like it and that feels good, and you know why, they understand what you're doing. And other people are irritated by it, and that's important, too, because you understand why they're irritated by it. Those tend to be signs of respect. Other people could like it or be irritated or anything but it would mean nothing because you don't think they have any understanding of what's going on at all. So I suppose you select your audience when you need to get some positive response; in a much broader sense than that, it's hard to expect much more.

MD: Does Harriet understand your work?

BN: I think so.

MD: Does she comment on it?

BN: Yes, and she had just about no experience in art when I met her a couple of years ago. I think she's comfortable with the work and with my being an artist and all those things. The things that are hardest for her are

being around a lot of art world stuff—that's the social part of it, which goes on.

MD: Annalee Newman told me—I was asking her about the input she had into Barnett Newman's work, and she said she never told him when she liked or disliked a piece, because he assumed that she was so one with him that wasn't an issue at all. Does Harriet ever criticize or express a preference about certain things?

BN: Oh, yes.

MD: She's a sociologist, right? Or has that interest . . . Does she see your work as functioning in that way?

BN: Well, yes. In a more direct sense, she deals with the world in a very emotional, day-to-day level, immediate contact with people every day, and her political interests have always been very active. She's worked with the farmworkers doing this and that, and for the Friends Service Committee and all that sort of stuff. She's always been very direct, and I suppose in a sense my own political reactions are much more sublimated to indirect—they seldom deal with specific issues. A kind of broad, general response to the world. It's such a very different way of functioning in reference to those things.

MD: How does your personal relationship, say, with Harriet and with your children, influence your work, or does it?

BN: It's very hard to say, because I know that I've worked through times when I'm comfortable, or happy or whatever, and other times when I've been under a lot of emotional strain or even money strain, and all those kinds of things, but I still can do the work. Other times when I haven't been able to work don't seem to be related to any particular thing that happened. I think an important part of doing art is being able to take risks in the work, and I think if you're, if the rest of your life is terribly insecure all the time, it gets harder and harder to take the risks in your art. So I think I

needed or have needed—and probably if I had been unhappy or insecure over a long period of time, maybe it would have affected the work, but I think these things never extended themselves long enough to where I was unable to function in my work.

MD: You have two children, a boy and a girl. Did that change your way of working when you began to have a family?

BN: Not particularly. I don't think so. Maybe I used to work more at night or something.

MD: Do they like your work, or do they understand it? Do your children—how does your identity as an artist jibe with your identity as a father?

BN: I don't know. They understand I'm an artist, and that's my job. I probably have more free time than most fathers, but I don't know if they're aware of that yet, that kind of difference. Because even when they're here, I want my time to go to the studio. I tell them when I'm in the studio you can come in if you need something but you can't come in and mess around, or make any noise, or anything. Even if I'm just sitting here reading a book—it's all work. And they respect all that. Eric is older and he can formulate questions about it. He's sort of been around enough with other kids and has had enough exposure to what art's supposed to be in school to be able to come to the studio and say, "Dad, why is this supposed to be art?"

MD: You said something that interested me the other day. You were talking about seeing your son interact in social situations and learning things about yourself, or imagining that that was how you were. Do you learn behavioral things from them?

BN: Oh, I don't know, not anything particular. You learn whatever you need to learn to take care of the kids. You learn to pay attention to them. I don't know.

MD: I was thinking in terms of learning about humanity in a larger sense.

BN: I don't think so. I don't have any—I don't know.

MD: Living here in Pecos is a pretty hard life in comparison to, say, city life. Physically, there's the cold and getting your house into shape, taking care of the animals and keeping up that road and all of that. How has that changed your relationship to your work?

BN: Well, all the other things take time, and it depends on where you live to what extent you want to engage in it. We're out far enough so that there are some real problems of getting around. On the other hand, I grew up in the Midwest and we had plenty of snow and rain.

MD: Did you ever live in a situation like this, though, where it took this much of your energy to prepare and maintain the environment for yourself?

BN: No. A lot of them have been taken on, like the chickens and that stuff, you take on. You don't have to have chickens.

MD: Did you know that this is what you would get into when you decided on this place?

BN: Oh, not exactly. I don't think you ever know exactly what's going to happen. But we knew when we bought this particular place that the house wasn't finished, it was barely a house. I think one thing I thought I was going to do, or I told myself I was going to do before we got here, was that I was going to have a studio in Santa Fe, and that I would drive to the studio. But that's just too far, it's too much work. It would cost too much now, too, to make the drive every day. I think the energy would be too much to put out, so that I'd rather spend the money and the time getting the studio big enough to work in here.

MD: It's nice having a studio you can walk to.

BN: But it's close and I can close the door or I can be in it. I really liked the studio I had in Pasadena; it was huge and the art part and living quarters

were separate. You could close the door and you didn't have to go in the studio.

MD: Was it a loft?

BN: Yes. It was huge. It was very nice. It was a loft, on the second floor, but it had an enormous freight elevator so you really couldn't ask for much more, in that situation.

MD: This studio is much smaller.

BN: Yes, it's too small. I'll eventually get it bigger.

MD: What about large-scale pieces like the one that's at Hill's now, how do you manage?

BN: I was able to make it, and once I make it I don't do anything else until I get it out of there, so what I did last winter is, I have lots of stuff stacked outside covered up with plastic. But what I was used to in the last few places I've worked is, I had enough room to do several pieces and have them up and be able to look at them and deal with them over a long period of time. Even though I don't change them, I'd get to look at them and see what I think about them, because they'd change after they were finished.

MD: You can't do that in this studio.

BN: No, not here.

MD: Do you miss that?

BN: Oh, yes. So the first thing I want to do is to make a flat spot outside.

MD: Also, I would think the physical confines of the space would influence your performance work.

BN: Yes. Well, it does influence—the size and amount of the space. . . . So eventually I'll have a much more . . .

MD: Do you find that—is it an asset that you're at the end of a dirt road? You know, people who come here are people you know are going to come here, because otherwise they haven't the faintest idea which dirt road to go down, so that conditions people's access to you and your access to people. Also, I would think it would give you a lot of time alone.

BN: But I always liked that anyway. So that's not different. But it remains to be worked out how it will be over some number of years.

MD: You see this as a long-term investment?

BN: Well, I can't afford to do anything else. A lot of people assumed I was here part-time from Los Angeles, there winters and here summers. I've just never been in a position to do that.

MD: I don't see how people, even when they can afford to do it, can maintain it. One thing that's becoming clear to me in seeing the environment out here is that it takes an amazing amount of maintenance to keep these buildings up, to keep them handsome and tight.

BN: But people that grew up and expected to own a house—I mean the climate really is superior, compared to living in Montana or Idaho, or Wisconsin, anyplace—you just don't get that much snow. It's cold longer, but the cold isn't as severe for as long, and you can get by on a lot less of a house.

MD: Do you find yourself spending your time, your art-related time, differently here in any way?

BN: Well, I don't know. There's just a lot of things that you do differently. When I was in town if I was frustrated in the middle of the afternoon I could go to a movie, about two hours worth, and then go back to the studio. I can't do that here because even if I wanted to drive to Santa Fe they don't have movies all day every day; they're all at night. I used to do that, I

used to go to Westwood and go to three movies. So you just sort of deal with what's there.

MD: I'm curious about your relationship to the community. This is an interesting place in terms of cultural mix: Anglo, Indian, and Spanish, and that creates a kind of highly charged situation where all those cultures meet. You're an artist living in this situation.

BN: Well, people right around here, around Santa Fe, accept that because there are a lot of artists around Santa Fe. Of course, my work doesn't have much to do with those landscape and Indian painters and all that stuff. It's just a totally different way of thinking about being an artist, near as I can tell. So there are not many people who are sympathetic with me in that sense. At any rate, when I tell people I'm an artist, people don't think that's weird any more than they did in Los Angeles. And you get the same kind of response: "Do you paint in oils?" or something like that.

MD: Is that true of the people in Pecos also, that they're accustomed to artists?

BN: Oh, yes, they think there are a number of special people that just live here in the summer—artists. The guy up the road, Brownie Hall, who's in his sixties—he makes paintings, he's an artist. He's been doing it for about two years, but—they're primitive things, things he knows, horses and stuff.

MD: And they just see that he's an artist and you're an artist.

BN: So we're all just artists. I think that people around here work very hard to get by—nobody's making a lot of money. There are people who live on the Pecos, but mostly farther up the river, who are summer people, mostly, a retired lawyer from New York. And they come out and they live here part of the time or all of the time and they've got some money and when they need firewood they buy it, which we do too, actually, most people do, but they buy a lot, they buy fifteen cords instead of four cords, and when they want the road work done they call Santa Fe and the gravel truck comes

out and there's gravel. People around here call Tony Lopez because he's got his own gravel, and it's cheaper; it's not as good but that's what they can afford. People do an enormous amount of stuff themselves here, they just can't afford and would never think of having someone else do it. You do it yourself, and your kids, and your neighbors and your cousins, because everybody has cousins, come over and get the job done. So I think that you can be accepted, but not if you flaunt your differences. It helps a lot that Harriet speaks very good Spanish. And can talk to people.

MD: You were saying, though, that there is a lot of violence in Pecos.

BN: Yes, it has a reputation for it.

MD: Have you encountered any?

BN: No, we haven't witnessed any of it. I think there is a lot of violence, but I don't think there's any more here than there was in Los Angeles. Los Angeles was one of the worst in the country, it turns out. I didn't know that. Or New York—or any big city is full of violence. Here, the violence is different because there's more passionate violence. There's cousins and people fighting over somebody's sister, and things like that are in a sense more reasonable. It's not just random. You can understand why it happened.

MD: You seem kind of taken with the myth, or legends or mythos of Pecos.

BN: Well, I think I didn't know any of that stuff when I moved out here. I had no idea that Pecos was what it had been in the past. It's not much now, it was just a farming, ranching, laborer town, just a small country community, and yes, it's sort of neat to run into all that history. I enjoy it, but it doesn't go beyond it. I guess it's interesting to see an area that was part of that social development. And it's still kind of going on, the cultural mix is changing here. The Indians are gone, but the white folks are moving in.

MD: It's an interesting place.

BN: And I do like it because of its pretty much straightforward function, its character as opposed to a lot of small towns that are commuter towns. People work more in Santa Fe.

NOTES

Unpublished manuscript from the California Oral History Project (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art, 1980). Printed with permission, Bruce Nauman.

1. Never published in complete form. Excerpts from this interview appear in the exhibition catalogue *Bruce Nauman: Image-Text 1966–1996*, ed. Christine van Assche (Paris: Centres Georges Pompidou, 1997).
2. Nauman's exhibition at Nicholas Wilder Gallery—his first solo show—was held from May 10–June 2, 1966.
3. The Studio Films, 1967–1968.
4. Nauman later recreated this performance for the 1969 video, *Manipulating a Fluorescent Tube*. He also based another later video, *Wall Floor Positions* (1968), upon the actions executed in a second performance done at Davis in 1965.
5. The photographs that make up the portfolio *Eleven Color Photographs—Bound to Fail, Coffee Thrown Away Because it Was Too Cold, Drill Team, Eating My Words, Feet of Clay, Finger Trick with Mirror* [retitled *Finger Touch No. 1*], *Finger Trick with Two Mirrors* [retitled *Finger Touch with Mirrors*], *Self-Portrait as a Fountain, Spilling Coffee Because the Cup Was Too Hot* [retitled *Coffee Spilled Because the Cup Was Too Hot*], *Untitled (Potholder)*, and *Waxing Hot*—were all originally made in 1966–67 as unique prints, but were frequently exhibited together. As the Walker catalogue raisonné explains, after several of the images were damaged in 1970, Nauman decided to reprint them, and Leo Castelli suggested that he publish the photographs together as a portfolio which is how they are now catalogued. The edition number of the *Eleven Color Photographs* is eight.
6. The performance Nauman refers to here was part of a series, titled "Extended Time Pieces," organized as part of the Whitney Museum's exhibition, "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials," in 1969. In addition to dancer Meredith Monk, Nauman's first wife, Judy Nauman, also participated in his performance.
7. In addition to the *Neon Templates*, Nauman made another version, mentioned here, titled *Wax Templates of the Left Half of My Body Separated by Cans of Grease* (1967). The sculpture consists of a free-standing column, made up of a series of flat, U-shaped plates, stacked alternately with gallon-size cans of grease. The piece was subsequently destroyed by the artist, but a photograph of it, seen in Nauman's San Francisco studio, survives [see Coosje van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 243]. Additionally, Nauman concurrently made a series of "template" drawings, in which the same modular unit is

stacked and otherwise arranged in sometimes playful combinations. See DCR nos. 35–41, 43–45.

8. Richard Bellamy was founder and director of the influential Green Gallery in New York.

9. Lippard's exhibition, "Eccentric Abstraction" at Fischbach Gallery (September 20–October 8, 1966), was one of the first to identify in the work of a group of younger artists—including Nauman, Eva Hesse, Keith Sonnier, among others—a new sculptural aesthetic, which, she maintained, countered the perceived sterility of minimalism. Lippard's catalogue essay, "Eccentric Abstraction," is reprinted in *The New Sculpture: Between Geometry and Gesture*, Richard Armstrong and Richard Marshall, eds. (New York: Whitney Museum, 1990), 54–58.

10. Nauman's first solo exhibition ("6 Day Week: 6 Sound Problems") with Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf, was held between July 10–August 8, 1968.

11. The correct titles are *Blue Light Room* (1972) and *Installation with Yellow Lights* (1971), the latter which was subsequently renamed *Left or Standing, Standing or Left Standing* (see fig. 1.13), after its accompanying text.

12. Nauman is referring to the two drawings, *Six Inches of My Knee Extended to Six Feet*, from 1967, which were used as the basis for a fiberglass and polyester resin sculpture of the same name and year (see fig. 3.18).

13. "Sculpture in California: 1975–1980," San Diego Museum of Art (May 18–July 6, 1980). Nauman's sculpture, being discussed here, is titled *Model for a Pit and a Suspended Chamber* (1979). (There is no entry for the work in the catalogue raisonné.)

14. Nauman made two versions, *Floating Room (Light Outside, Dark Inside)* and *Floating Room: Lit From Inside*, in 1972. Both installations were based on the same idea of a suspended room; but in the former, the room is unlit and the exterior gallery space is illuminated, and in the latter, it is the inverse. For further description of the latter sculpture and its accompanying text, see p. 65 of this volume. (See also WCR nos. 213, 214, and DCR 240–248.)

8. BRUCE NAUMAN INTERVIEW, 1982

BOB SMITH

In this interview, Nauman discusses the series of underground tunnel pieces, including models and drawings, he began to create in the mid-to-late seventies, as well as the more recent "triangle" and "square" sculptures. In the exchange, what emerges is that these later works—with their explicit political content—represent a recognition of the "implied violence," as Nauman says, of the physical and psychological attributes of his earlier environmental sculptures.

Bob Smith: When we were working on the corridor piece at LAICA [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art] in 1975, you were primarily interested in extending the consciousness of the viewer. It seems to me that even without physically experiencing the work, just looking at drawings or models, you are requiring viewers to contemplate an implied experience that has the potential of altering consciousness or perception. Do you make any distinction between the *actual* physical experience and the implied projection of the viewer created in drawings and models?

Bruce Nauman: Not that it was always a verbal analogy I could explain, but I think the point of the piece can be conveyed through the drawings as a more or less intellectual exercise. It could provide a back door to the point of the piece. Physically entering the piece gives another kind of information—provides emotional, physical, psychological—whatever. You have two kinds of information. For instance, the pieces are called models but function as very large sculpture. I'm using two kinds of information simultaneously to build another kind of response or using two kinds of information to contradict each other and create a tension about knowing

about the piece, about the experience, using the tension as a focal point of the work rather than using the information or the object.

BS: I am particularly curious about the untitled circle drawings. They look like drawings for models that could be amplified to varying scales. Those drawings seem to be exceptions to most of your work which have specific titles.

BN: Well, those were in fact models for tunnels. I don't know how the drawings were titled, but it's clear that they are models because it shows how the entrances exist at ground level. By the time the drawings had gone from Pasadena to Europe, been in a couple different shows and been in three different catalogs, they finally developed "untitled" titles.

BS: So that's a product of museum bureaucracy.

BN: The other thing I should say about it is that with the earliest pieces, which were trenches and shallow depressions, the earliest models of the tunnel were fairly simple, circular things and would clearly not be impossible to build even if they could be large scale. But then they became complicated. They became formal problems, or changed enough so I could just deal with them in forms in the studio and also they were really about a certain type of frustration and anger—creating uncomfortable spaces and shapes even on a very large scale for lots and lots of people. Standing on one end they become impossible to enter.

BS: Is there any implication that museum patrons might be in serious jeopardy?

BN: If they were made in full scale they'd be huge. There would be a 10-foot cross-section to walk through and 100 or 300 feet in diameter. They all had those kind of scales so they'd be large for the public and wouldn't have to do with museums.

BS: Just be for the public . . .

BN: I think that kind of implied violence and anger is what the newest work, the triangle and squares, is trying to show and for the first time it's really much more obvious. There is a Beckett book called *The Lost Ones* which describes a large number of people in a strange, very accurately and clearly described space . . . but they're stuck in it. A greenish yellow light, circular space with no top to it, just black and then greenish light and walking around and around in a circle. When I read this, a very powerful connection to a lot of the work I had done before encouraged me in the direction of the tunnels and the kind of oblique comment they make on society.

Reading "The Return of Eva Peron" and "The Killings in Trinidad" left me with a much more direct anger about political horribleness and the appalling information through the whole last number of years.

BS: Your work creates rather oblique metaphors for attitudes about society. When did this direction first appear?

BN: I think the earliest piece which was really overt was the cage piece (fig. 3.35). I didn't do anything like that for a long time after because I was scared to really focus on these loaded subjects.



fig. 3.35

Double Steel Cage Piece, 1974. Steel, 84 × 162 × 198 in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

BS: The new works seem to continue the combination of physical and psychological elements. Particularly with the way the pieces are installed, the way they are planned to kind of hover in an unearthly state. Does that make any sense?

BN: Well, the first piece was the *South America Triangle* (fig. 3.36). I made that piece . . . and after I finished it, it stopped my work for a long time because the image was really strong and so far from earlier work. So direct. It took a long time before it occurred to me that the other two, the *Circle* and the *Square*, were intended to function differently.

BS: There is a kind of image and power in a couple of the drawings—*Buried Ring* and *Floating Ring*. It implies a kind of magnetism or metaphysical energy that powers and drives the piece. I sense that in the other work too.

BN: My idea about *The Tunnel* is that some would be buried in the earth, others would float in the air, defying gravity.

BS: Are the *Buried Ring*, *Floating Ring* works related to the chair pieces?

BN: Well, I think that it is a logical connection but not an emotional one.

BS: A lot of the drawings show arrows and the suspended shapes (square, circle, diamond, etc.) in some kind of rotation.

BN: Well, the thing occurred to me at some point while I was working on the group . . . that circular space station in the fifties, like flying saucers.

BS: I was thinking they might obey physical laws that we know nothing about. That there is that possibility that the more we find out about how those things behave in space, the less confident everyone is about the way things work. The tuning of the legs . . .

BN: *South America* and *Africa Diamond* (fig. 3.37) . . .

BS: They're tuned "D," "E," "A," "D."

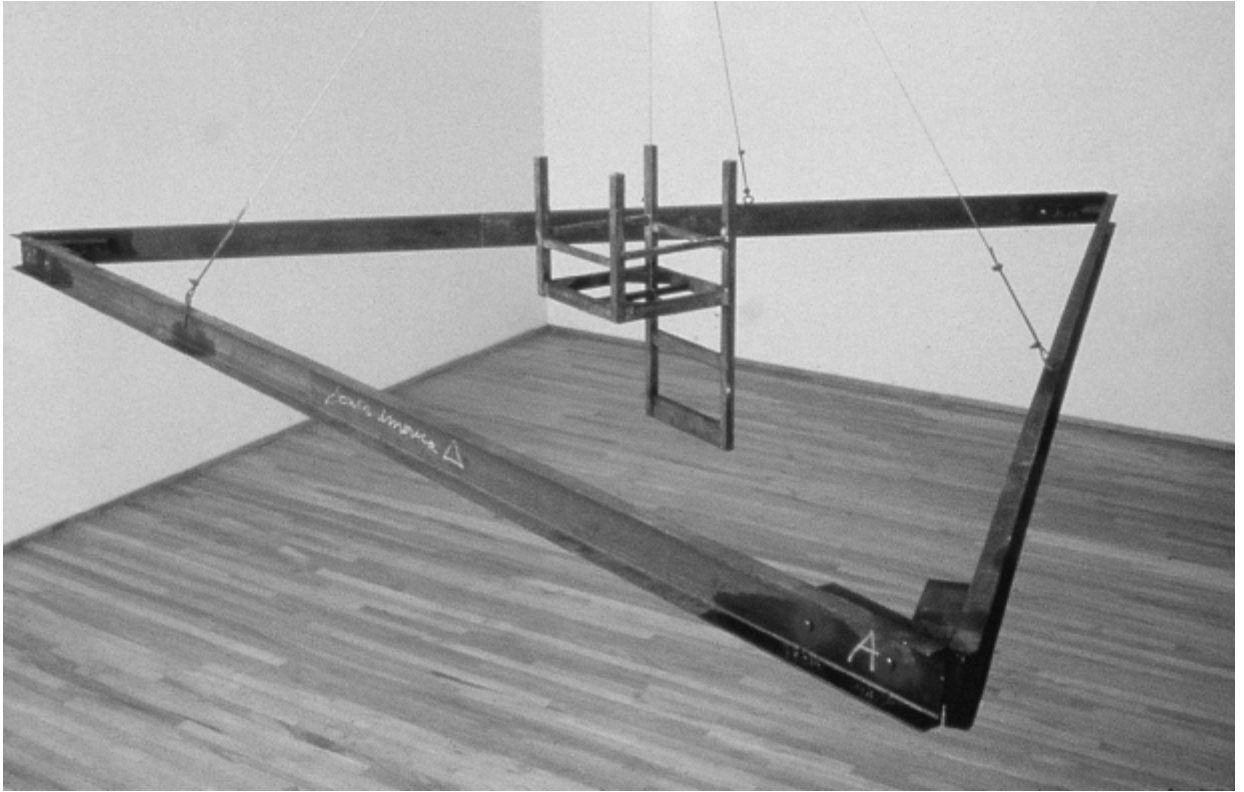


fig. 3.36

South America Triangle, 1981. Steel,
cast iron, wire, 39 × 169 × 169 in.
Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery,
New York.



fig. 3.37

*Diamond Africa with Chair Tuned
D.E.A.D.*, 1981. Steel, cast iron, wire,
285 × 138¼ in., suspended 60 in. off
floor. Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.

BN: It's really "D," "E," "A," "D Flat."

BS: I pinged on them with a dime, but I don't have a very good ear. Maybe I didn't hit them in the right order.

BN: I think they're labeled.

BS: Ah, on the ends of the legs?

BN: Somewhere . . . I tuned the whole chair on the back and legs. The whole chair has a really good ring. If you take a hammer in there and give it a good whack, it's almost like steel. A lot better than cast iron, which almost shatters. I worked for two weeks with a tuning fork trying to find out what all the different notes were. If you wanted to tune it accurately, you'd have to have all the parts separated by rubber grommets or something, but all welded up into a solid mass like that—you get the overtones—extra vibrations which are not clear.

BS: There seems to me to be an interesting contradiction between the ominous quality of the work and the tune—the kind of music which seems very lifelike and optimistic.

BN: After I did the first three, which were a related group, I found that somehow the added complexity of music and sound took it to such a different level of information. I liked this complexity which was not directly clear—the *Triangle*, *Circle*, and the *Square* alone.

BS: Would you say there's a relationship between the sound in the chair and the tapes in the corridor piece?

BN: Oh . . . I hadn't thought about that at all. In a certain way there is—I don't know—not a very direct relationship. I think what happens is that you find it makes noise; you might as well have control over that too.

BS: The key drawing for all the works seems to be the one titled *Foucault Pendulum* [*Musical Chair Suspended as Foucault Pendulum*, 1981].

BN: Not really. It came later. The other drawings were made earlier, before any of the pieces were constructed.

BS: Because *Foucault Pendulum* has the most information, I'd like to use it as an illustration, but not deal with it verbally. Thus forcing the reader to discover additional clues. The drawing is so clear; why spell everything out?

BN: OK.

BS: Using Africa and South America as themes, is that a comment on Third World cultures?

BN: *South America* was originally about the Eva Peron book. But I think . . . *Africa/South America* deal with the specific violence and cultural present there.

BS: One last question. How many chickens would you have to have if you wanted to eat two a week and also have eggs?

BN: (Laughing) . . . How many eggs do you want?

NOTE

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9. KEEP TAKING IT APART: A CONVERSATION WITH BRUCE NAUMAN, 1986

CHRIS DERCON

This discussion with Chris Dercon concentrates on Nauman's video installations and tapes made during the eighties, and their precedent in his earlier experimentation with film and video.

THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW is an excerpt from a one-hour conversation recorded by René Pulfer on July 12th at the Videowochen im Wenkenpark in Riehen near Basel, where Bruce Nauman's video installation *Good Boy Bad Boy* (1986) was shown.

Chris Dercon: I have the impression that *Violent Incident* (see fig. 2.6) is much like the Punch and Judy pieces. There is also that kind of distant look, like in the neon-sculptures.

Bruce Nauman: In *Good Boy Bad Boy* (see fig. 2.5) the two people are looking directly at you, so you have contact. It is much more personal. In *Violent Incident*, the image, the activity is something you're looking at from a distance, it's been recorded, the camera is moving, it's further away.

CD: What does it mean for you "looking at a distance"?

BN: The space, the psychological and physical distance between the activity going on and the eye of the viewer. In *Good Boy Bad Boy* the eye-contact is always there, we're looking straight. They are looking straight in the camera, or straight out of the television. So when you pay attention, you have this very immediate contact.

CD: It strikes me that in *Good Boy Bad Boy* the frontal look is completely different from the contact in the neon pieces and *Violent Incident*.

BN: *Violent Incident* is observing, so that the distance is like an activity where you're a voyeur somehow, only connected because you happened to pass it. *Good Boy Bad Boy* is addressed to you. Also the idea the television, the image being almost life-size, with only the head, makes a much more immediate, direct connection. And the idea that the words were spoken information was important.

CD: Is it direct speech? Does it say "you"?

BN: Well it does sometimes. It says "I, we, you. . . ." It involves you by talking to you. "I was a good boy—you were a good boy." It is not a conversation, you are not allowed to talk but you are involved because someone uses that form of address. In all of these neon pieces and in *Violent Incident* as well, you're not asked to participate, you're involved only through the intensity of the light or the sound or whatever . . .

CD: It is "he, she, and it"?

BN: Right, it's the third person.

CD: Were you thinking about the video monitor as a piece of furniture?

BN: In a sense, yes, as something that was just there. From the earliest tapes that I did, coming in a certain sense from some of Andy Warhol's films. They just go on and on and on, you can watch them or you can not watch them. Maybe one's showing already and you come in and watch for a while and you can leave and come back and eight hours later it's still going on. I liked that idea very much, it also comes from some of the music that I was interested in at that time. The early Phil Glass pieces and La Monte Young, whose idea was that music was something that was there. I liked that very much, that kind of way of structuring time. So part of it is not just an interest in the content, the image, but the way of filling a space and taking up time.

CD: Something I was wondering about in *Good Boy Bad Boy* was that the black man takes only about 15 minutes, while the white woman takes 16 minutes, and then the image of the man turns to black, while she talks one more minute.

BN: They go through the sequence five times, and the first time is supposed to be completely flat, a neutral delivery. Then it's supposed to become more animated and by the fifth recitation, they were very angry and very intense, so it took her a little bit longer to do it than it took him. If you let the tapes play, they become out of sequence, which I like; they're together but not really. After a while she's at the end and he's at the beginning or vice versa. It goes through these different possibilities of how they can relate to each other, which I like.

CD: The words they are using—are they found words?

BN: I made a list and there are more things that could have been added. But I just picked a hundred phrases. It's an arbitrary number. Stop with a hundred and start over.

CD: Why are you making lists? Can you make a narrative based upon information?

BN: Yeah, I mean “can.” It's making lists, I do it a lot, a lot of artists do, for example Carl Andre. A lot of poems are really lists, lists of possibilities.

CD: The British filmmaker Peter Greenaway stated in *Artforum* (November, 1983), “Why shouldn't you make a narrative based upon information.” This also struck me in your work. The narrative in *Good Boy Bad Boy* and in *Violent Incident* actually comes out of information. But it's also a kind of breaking up: a sabotage of the hegemony of information.

BN: Yes. When I first did performances a long time ago, they were about a list of the possibilities of making some kind of movements: standing, leaning, sitting, lying . . . and making a list of what appeared to be discrete

movements. When I did the performances, I found that certain positions seemed to have powerful emotional connections and others were just changes and didn't make any sense. So it was interesting to me to take these lists and then see which ones seemed to have some resonance and which didn't. The lists start out being arbitrary and then they begin to organize themselves or I can organize them into what then really becomes a narrative structure. But it was initially a way of finding a beginning and an ending to an activity, to a film, a tape, a performance.

CD: I would say even the neon pieces work that way, the flashing-up, flashing-out also seems like a list.

BN: Yes, of possibilities. It becomes a way of covering all the possibilities without really having to make a list. For instance, it would be really complicated in the case of a neon piece like *Welcome (Shaking Hands)* (1985) because it takes 10 or 15 minutes to run through the whole thing. The programming would be very complicated if I said "I want to see all the possibilities of these two figures." But by making this very simple program of one being slightly faster than the other, there is a randomness that covers all the possibilities.

CD: In the winter of 1968–1969, your biography in the catalogue of the Kunstmuseum Basel says: "Bruce Nauman is very busy making videotapes."

BN: Yes, I made about twelve tapes, I think.

CD: But before that—you made films?

BN: The films were basically the same as the tapes. It has also to do with the availability of equipment. When I was living in San Francisco, there were a lot of filmmakers. When I moved to the east coast, I didn't know any filmmakers. It was hard to get equipment. Then Sony video equipment started to be fairly inexpensive. I was living outside of New York City, so it

was very easy to work on the videotapes. I didn't have to rely on film labs getting equipment and giving it back, things like that.

CD: Didn't you have any problems with the "milky image" of the black and white portapak [early portable video camera]?

BN: Well, it seemed okay for the work I was doing. You just have to think in terms of the image you're going to get. I didn't need a highly resolved image. At that time, I was interested in the ambiguous quality of the image. The work isn't autobiographical. It isn't really about me. When I was doing it, it was mostly with images of myself but almost every image is either upside down or the head doesn't show at all or it's only the back. So it was only important to have an image of a human figure, even if I was using myself at the time. A little bit later, when I started using other people, it was easier if there was a face, because it was an actor, an actor being someone who is not anyone.

CD: Vito Acconci said: "Film is like landscape and silence—while video is close-up and sound." Did you also find that it was something completely different?

BN: Video is a much more "private" kind of communication. Generally, it's what one person does. You sit and have contact with a television set, as opposed to a film, where generally a lot of people go and the image is very large; it's more of a common experience.

CD: You were working a lot with the scale of the video image in your corridor pieces.

BN: Yes, and at that time, I was thinking a lot about the connection between public and private experiences. I think it came from working in the studio. You work alone in the studio, and then the work goes out into a public situation. How do people deal with that? It's different when someone comes to my studio and sees my work. I mean you have those experiences by yourself as opposed to coming to a museum, where there

are going to be a lot of other people around. So you tend to try an experience with art, but protect yourself in some way. You have to learn to shut yourself away from the rest of the public. So in those corridor pieces which were about the connection between public and private experience, the video helps the private part even though it's a public situation. The way you watch television is a private kind of experience. But it's beginning to break down in those sports events where you now have a large screen.

CD: Back to the earlier period, because I think it had a bearing on *Violent Incident*, what was your idea about sound?

BN: It is just the sound that comes from the activity of making the tape, such as a scraping of the feet. Some of the tapes did have a voice sound, things that were spoken to the camera.

CD: Did you speak to the camera or to the monitor? You were working with a closed-circuit installation.

BN: I remember in some cases I spoke to or looked at the camera. In the [videos] *The Beckett Walk* [*Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)*, 1968] or *Stamping In the Studio* [1968; see fig. 3.13], I was interested in the location of the camera in one situation. Part of the activity takes place within the range of the camera, and part of it out of the range of the camera. You can see that the room is larger and the only contact you have is the sound of the activity, and then finally the figure comes back into the range of the camera. I like that idea too, the activity goes on the camera, in the sense of observing but you can't see everything, so it misses parts.

CD: About 1968—you were very interested in the works and writings of Merce Cunningham. Was the dance-world, for example what happened in the Judson Church important for you?

BN: Yes. I didn't know much about it, because I was on the west coast and that is very far away. But I knew about Merce Cunningham and about the writings of John Cage and I had heard some of his works. It had to do

with the attitude involved in transforming normal activity into a formal presentation, which Merce was doing with dance and John Cage was doing with music. So knowing about it was even more important than seeing it. One thing came up over and over again in the interview with Coosje van Bruggen.¹ I would tell her about something that had been very important to me, in terms of how to structure a performance or some art activity and she would say: "Oh, but it wasn't like that." I said: "It's the way I remember it." So she calls what I did "a creative misreading or a creative misunderstanding."

CD: You were saying that you didn't have the video equipment yourself. Leo Castelli gave the equipment and then you used it and Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier used it. So it was passed from one artist to another?

BN: Yes.

CD: Did Castelli commission video works?

BN: No, I was asked to do videotapes and so I asked Leo: "Can we buy this equipment or rent it?" I didn't have any money at that time, so he said: "Sure." The gallery owned the equipment and we all used it.

CD: Why was everybody so interested?

BN: Richard Serra had made some films and he liked the directness of video. He'd been working with a filmmaker to have somebody that understood the technical stuff. Some was just novelty, but video made it very easy to get an idea down quickly.

CD: You never wanted to work with color, when once the black and white got off?

BN: Not for a long time, it was very difficult. The equipment was much more expensive. By that time I had made a first group of videotapes, then I didn't make any tapes for a long time. By the time I made the next tapes, I did use color, it was much easier. I made a couple of tapes, called *Sinking*

into The Floor [Tony Sinking into the Floor, Face Up and Face Down, 1973; see fig. 3.19] and *Trying To Rise Above The Floor* [Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise Up over Her, Face Up, 1973]. I used some actors for that, not myself. And it was done in a professional studio with somebody else operating the cameras, so I became the director. Before that, I did a few here, in Europe, two or three, in Holland at the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven.

CD: One of your earliest environmental pieces or sculpture pieces involving video is the piece at the Wide White Space gallery in Antwerp. There you used a video camera which was relaying the underground [sic] of the garden to the gallery space. Was that the first time you used a closed-circuit installation?

BN: No, the first one was an installation in Los Angeles, in Nicholas Wilder's gallery (1970) [*Corridor Installation, Nick Wilder Installation*; see fig. 3.3]. It was actually a combination of five or six different corridors. The one piece that's still around a lot is the one called the *Videocorridor* [*Live Taped Video Corridor*, 1970; see fig. 3.32]. In that case, there are two television monitors at the end of a corridor that you can enter. One of the monitors shows constantly a videotape of the empty corridor. Then a camera is installed high above the entrance to the corridor with a connection to the monitor at the closed end of the corridor. There is a wide-angle lens on the camera. So as you walk down the corridor, the camera is above you and behind you. As you walk towards the monitor, towards your own image, your image is yourself from the back. So as you're walking towards your image, you're getting further from the camera. So on the monitor, you're walking away from yourself, and the closer you try to get, the further you get from the camera, the further you're from yourself. It's a very strange kind of situation. That was the first closed circuit. In that same installation, one part of the gallery was completely closed off. There was a camera mounted high in a corner and it kept going back and forth, and

then that monitor was out in the gallery so you could see the empty space just panning back and forth across the empty space.

CD: The video corridor and especially the piece in the Wide White Space gallery also had something to do with a negation of volume. The inside is going to be the outside and the outside is going to be the inside which you already hinted at in your early sculptures.

BN: A lot of sculptures did have to do with an intentional question or confusion about which is the inside and which is the outside.

CD: Hadn't you any problems with the opaqueness of the video image?

BN: It's only giving you information, you can't participate, but it is the nature of how television works. It is opaque, it only gives you, you can't give back. You can't participate. I like that. To every rule, I also try to find the opposite, to reverse it. There's the real space and there's the picture of the real space which is something else—in a sense, there are two kinds of information, the real information that you have being near walls, in a space, in an enclosure, and other bits of information which are a more intellectual way of dealing with the world. What interested me was the experience of putting those two pieces of information together: physical information and visual or intellectual information. The experience lies in the tension between the two, of not being able to put them together.

CD: Did you do any other video installations or sculptures involving video after 1970?

BN: I had a couple of proposals for public situations, but they were never accepted, so they weren't made.

CD: What kind of proposals?

BN: For train stations or subway stations. Pictures of inside from the outside, or showing people at another stop, it could have been the same place but they weren't quite the same people. Some of the installations

involved going around the corner, so that you could see what was happening there. You would see maybe somebody else leaving the space, but you could never see yourself leaving or entering it.

CD: Why, after almost 15 years, did you suddenly want to make another tape (*Good Boy Bad Boy*)?

BN: I think it's because I had this information that I was writing. I didn't want to make a neon sign. I didn't know what to do with it, really. I could write it and publish it, print it or whatever. . . . It took a long time to decide to do it, but I finally did it as a video. I had thought about doing it as a performance in some way, but I have never felt comfortable with performance. And video seemed to finally be one way to do it. It was very interesting for me when we made the tapes. I used professional actors. The man had done mostly live, stage acting, so he was much more generous and more open in his acting. She had done a lot of television acting, mostly daytime, like commercials and some soap-opera acting. So a lot of her acting is from her face. She didn't use her hands much and I liked that difference. What interests me is the line between others. Because they are actors, it's not autobiographical, it's not real anger, but pretending to be angry and they are pretty good at it, but maybe not really convincing. I like all these different levels, knowing and not knowing quite how to take the situation, how to relate to it.

CD: That's also what happens in the neon sculptures in a way.

BN: Yes.

CD: The idea of "contour" is interesting in this context, too. There is much more fiction in "contour" than in actual action. This also applies to the *Neon Templates* [*of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten-Inch Intervals*, 1966, see fig. 3.28].

BN: Yes, it's a completely artificial idea. I'm taking something apart in a very arbitrary way.

CD: Why is there a shift in the sequence of the images in *Violent Incident*? You see for example, action 2/action 1 and then action 2 again twice.

BN: It makes it more formal. Again to go through the possibilities. First of all reversing the roles of the man and the woman. That gives you a lot of different possibilities at the same time. Then the slow-motion, changing the colors. There is one whole part on the tape that's just rehearsals. The man that was actually helping do the direction is talking to the woman carrying the camera. So they're walking through it and he's saying: "Now the chair!" He's breaking the action apart even more: "chair—goose!—yell!—throw the cocktail!—slap!—take the knife!—stab!—fall down!—finish!" It takes eighteen seconds to do the activity correctly and then 45 seconds to do it when you take it apart and talk about it. I liked all this, keep taking it apart, taking it apart.

CD: Do you have any other video projects?

BN: I'm not sure but I think I'd like to do something similar to this last tape, only using people dressed as clowns.

CD: Why clowns?

BN: It just struck me hearing these people that are actors that you could add another level of unreality. Putting someone in a clown-suit is changing the context. It's like the clowns in a circus who are not always funny. Having people that are supposed to be amusing or humorous act in a violent way can add to the violence. I hadn't thought through this very much. Maybe it's like Japanese theatre. There is a mask, and having a figure behind the mask is more threatening than an angry person. Because there's something you don't know and you're never going to find out.

NOTES

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1. Coosje van Bruggen held a series of conversations with Nauman in 1985–1986, in preparation for her monograph, *Bruce Nauman* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988). The interviews were not recorded or transcribed, however, and exist only in the form of the author's notes.

**10. BREAKING THE SILENCE: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE
NAUMAN, 1988 (JANUARY, 1987)**

JOAN SIMON

Appropriately titled "Breaking the Silence," Joan Simon's interview with Nauman—one of two reprinted in this volume—was the first published discussion in many years to cover an overarching perspective on the artist's work and career. It took place on the occasion of a 1987 retrospective of Nauman's art at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. Simon, who has written extensively on Nauman's art, is also the general editor of the invaluable catalogue raisonné in the Walker Art Center Nauman retrospective catalog.

LAST YEAR, TWO major retrospective exhibitions in Europe of the work of Bruce Nauman made it possible to see, comprehensively and for the first time, the tremendous diversity and at the same time the consistency of vision that characterize his work. Inevitably, these exhibitions recalled the fact that Nauman's only other retrospective (aside from a survey of the neons at the Baltimore Museum in 1982) was over 15 years ago—when the artist had just turned 31. That 1972 retrospective, organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum, included many of Nauman's now classic early works: fiberglass casts, neon pieces, photographs, films, videos, drawings and environments (including several corridor installations). The heterogeneity of Nauman's early work not only challenged the purity of Minimal or Late-Formalist sculpture, but it also demonstrated Nauman's characteristic attitude toward art-making, which often treats linguistic fragments and material issues as interchangeable.

Nauman was raised in the Midwest. He was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1941, and while he was still young his family moved to Milwaukee.

There Nauman attended the University of Wisconsin, studying mathematics and art. Following graduation from Wisconsin in 1964, Nauman went to the University of California at Davis to continue his art studies. Though initially a painter, Nauman soon began producing quirky sculptures, performances and films under the influence of his instructors, William Wiley and Robert Arneson.

During 1965–66 Nauman produced his first fiberglass pieces and performances based on simple procedures and body movements. In 1966, Nauman finished his M. F. A. at Davis and moved to San Francisco, where he had a studio in an old storefront. There his work began to reflect more directly his relationship to his own body and to the space where he worked. These themes were explored in neon (*Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten Inch Intervals*, 1966), wax casts (*From Hand to Mouth*, 1967), holograms (*Making Faces*, 1968), film (*Art Make-Up*, 1967–68) and fiberglass sculpture (*Six Inches of My Knee Extended to Six Feet*, 1967). In 1968, Nauman had his first solo show at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York.

In the 1970s, Nauman's work shifted from the body and elements in the studio to quasi-architectural installations, (including many corridor pieces) which often incorporated sound or video. Nauman himself was no longer the ostensible subject; instead, the cameras were often turned on the viewer. A recurrent motif was his exhortation of the viewer to pay attention. In the claustrophobic corridor pieces, Nauman confronted the viewer with seemingly playful or gamelike situations, but these were often quite terrifying to experience. The viewer's self-image was at stake, as video cameras recorded him or her in the corridor from behind or upside down. This use of emotionally charged architectural space sometimes comprised whole rooms—like *Double Steel Cage Piece*, 1974, a doubled prison cell within a cell—which served as moral statements or political metaphors. During the '70s Nauman almost entirely abandoned photography, film and

video, although he continued to use video and audio technology in his installations.

Nauman's 1980s work focuses increasing attention on social and political subject matter. His large-scale steel sculptures, such as *Diamond Africa with Chair Tuned D.E.A.D*, 1981, and *South America Triangle*, 1981, use abstract elements (like a steel chair or a huge hanging steel triangle) to suggest the threat of political torture or the cold surface of alienation. The abstracted chairs in these works also reintroduce a surrogate figurative presence. This figuration is reiterated in Nauman's recent neons and videos. In both forms, Nauman's work frequently starts with a banal situation or an innocent joke—as in pulling a chair out from under someone in *Violent Incident*, 1986. In a series of videos made since 1987, featuring actors dressed as clowns, Nauman has continued to investigate the darker side of humor.

Bruce Nauman: There is a tendency to clutter things up, to try to make sure people know something is art, when all that's necessary is to present it, to leave it alone. I think the hardest thing to do is to present an idea in the most straightforward way.

What I tend to do is see something, then re-make it and re-make it and re-make it and try every possible way of re-making it. If I'm persistent enough, I get back to where I started. I think it was Jasper Johns who said, "Sometimes it's necessary to state the obvious."

Still, how to proceed is always the mystery. I remember at one point thinking that some day I would figure out how you do this, how you do art—like, "What's the procedure here, folks?"—and then it wouldn't be such a struggle anymore. Later, I realized it was never going to be like that, it was always going to be a struggle. I realized I would never have a specific process; I would have to re-invent it, over and over again. That was really depressing.

After all, it was hard work; it was a painful struggle and tough. I didn't want to have to go through all that every time. But of course you do have to continually re-discover and re-decide, and it's awful. It's just an awful thing to have to do.

On the other hand, that's what's interesting about making art, and why it's worth doing: it's never going to be the same, there is no method. If I stop and try to look at how I got the last piece done, it doesn't help me with the next one.

Joan Simon: What do you think about when you're working on a piece?

BN: I think about Lenny Tristano a lot. Do you know who he was? Lenny Tristano was a blind pianist, one of the original—or maybe second generation—bebop guys. He's on a lot of the best early bebop records. When Lenny played well, he hit you hard and he kept going until he finished. Then he just quit. You didn't get any introduction, you didn't get any tail—you just got full intensity for 2 minutes or 20 minutes or whatever. It would be like taking the middle out of [John] Coltrane—just the hardest, toughest part of it. That was all you got.

From the beginning I was trying to see if I could make art that did that. Art that was just there all at once. Like getting hit in the face with a baseball bat. Or better, like getting hit in the back of the neck. You never see it coming; it just knocks you down. I like that idea very much: the kind of intensity that doesn't give you any trace of whether you're going to like it or not.

JS: In trying to capture that sort of intensity over the past 20 or so years you've worked in just about every medium: film, video, sound, neon, installation, performance, photography, holography, sculpture, drawing—but not painting. You gave that up very early on. Why?

BN: When I was in school I was a painter. And I went back and forth a couple of times. But basically I couldn't function as a painter. Painting is one of those things I never quite made sense of. I just couldn't see how to

proceed as a painter. It seemed that if I didn't think of myself as a painter, then it would be possible to continue.

It still puzzles me how I made decisions in those days about what was possible and what wasn't. I ended up drawing on music and dance and literature, using thoughts and ideas from other fields to help me continue to work. In that sense, the early work, which seems to have all kinds of materials and ideas in it, seemed very simple to make because it wasn't coming from looking at sculpture or painting.

JS: That doesn't sound simple.

BN: No, I don't mean that it was simple to do the work. But it was simple in that in the '60s you didn't have to pick just one medium. There didn't seem to be any problem with using different kinds of materials—shifting from photographs to dance to performance to videotapes. It seemed very straightforward to use all those different ways of expressing ideas or presenting material. You could make neon signs, you could make written pieces, you could make jokes about parts of the body or casting things, or whatever.

JS: Do you see your work as part of a continuum with other art or other artists?

BN: Sure there are connections, though not in any direct way. It's not that there is someone in particular you emulate. But you do see other artists asking the same kinds of questions and responding with some kind of integrity.

There's a kind of restraint and morality in Johns. It isn't specific, I don't know how to describe it, but it's there, I feel it's there. It's less there, but still important, in Duchamp. Or in Man Ray, who also interests me. Maybe the morality I sense in Man Ray has to do with the fact that while he made his living as a fashion photographer, his art works tended to be jokes—stupid jokes. The whole idea of Dada was that you didn't have to make

your living with your art; so that generation could be more provocative with less risk. Then there is the particularly American idea about morality that has to do with the artist as workman. Many artists used to feel all right about making a living with their art because they identified with the working class. Some still do. I mean, I do, and I think Richard Serra does.

JS: No matter how jokey or stylistically diverse or visually dazzling your works are, they always have an ethical side, a moral force.

BN: I do see art that way. Art ought to have a moral value, a moral stance, a position. I'm not sure where that belief comes from. In part it just comes from growing up where I grew up and from my parents and family. And from the time I spent in San Francisco going to the Art Institute, and before that in Wisconsin. From my days at the University of Wisconsin, the teachers I remember were older guys—they wouldn't let women into teaching easily—and they were all WPA [Works Progress Administration] guys. They were socialists and they had points to make that were not only moral and political but also ethical. Wisconsin was one of the last socialist states, and in the '50s, when I lived there and went to high school there, Milwaukee still had a socialist mayor. So there were a lot of people who thought art had a function beyond being beautiful—that it had a social reason to exist.

EARLY WORK

JS: What David Whitney wrote about your *Composite Photo of Two Messes on the Studio Floor* (1967)—that “it is a direct statement on how the artist lives, works and thinks”—could apply in general to the variety of works you made in your San Francisco studio from 1966–68.

BN: I did some pieces that started out just being visual puns. Since these needed body parts in them, I cast parts of a body and assembled them or presented them with a title. There was also the idea that if I was in the

studio, whatever I was doing was art. Pacing around, for example. How do you organize that to present it as art? Well, first I filmed it. Then I video-taped it. Then I complicated it by turning the camera upside down or sideways, or organizing my pacing to various sounds.

In a lot of the early work I was concerned with ideas about inside and outside and front and back—how to turn them around and confuse them. Take the *Window or Wall Sign* (see fig. 3.25)—you know, the neon piece that says, “The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths.” That idea occurred to me because of the studio I had in San Francisco at the time. It had been a grocery store, and in the window there was still a beer sign which you read from the outside. From the inside, of course, it was backwards. So when I did the earliest neon pieces, they were intended to be seen through the window one way and from the inside another way, confusing the message by reversing the image.

JS: Isn't your interest in inverting ideas, in showing what's “not there,” and in solving—or at least revealing—“impossible” problems related in part to your training as a mathematician?

BN: I was interested in the logic and structure of math and especially how you could turn that logic inside out. I was fascinated by mathematical problems, particularly the one called “squaring the circle.” You know, for hundreds of years mathematicians tried to find a geometrical way of finding a square equal in area to a circle—a formula where you could construct one from the other. At some point in the 19th century, a mathematician—I can't remember his name—proved it can't be done. His approach was to step outside the problem. Rather than struggling inside the problem, by stepping outside of it, he showed that it was not possible to do it at all.

Standing outside and looking at how something gets done, or doesn't get done, is really fascinating and curious. If I can manage to get outside of a problem a little bit and watch myself having a hard time, then I can see what I'm going to do—it makes it possible. It works.

JS: A number of early pieces specifically capture what's "not there." I'm thinking about the casts of "invisible spaces": the space between two crates on the floor, for example, or the "negative" space under a chair (see fig. 3.29).

BN: Casting the space under a chair was the sculptural version of de Kooning's statement: "When you paint a chair, you should paint the space between the rungs, not the chair itself." I was thinking like that: about left-overs and negative spaces.

JS: But your idea of negative space is very different from the sculptor's traditional problem of locating an object in space or introducing space into a solid form.

BN: Negative space for me is thinking about the underside and the back-side of things. In casting, I always like the parting lines and the seams—things that help to locate the structure of an object, but in the finished sculpture usually get removed. These things help to determine the scale of the work and the weight of the material. Both what's inside and what's outside determine our physical, physiological and psychological responses—how we look at an object.

JS: The whole idea of the visual puns, works like *Henry Moore Bound to Fail* (see fig. 3.15) and *From Hand to Mouth* (see fig. 3.17) complicates this notion of how we look at an object. They are similar to readymades. On the one hand, they translate words or phrases into concrete form—in a sense literalizing them. On the other hand, they are essentially linguistic plays, which means abstracting them. I'm curious about the thought process that went into conceiving those works. For instance, how did *From Hand to Mouth* come about?

BN: In that case, the cast was of someone else, not of myself as has generally been assumed—but that doesn't really matter. It was just supposed to be a visual pun or a picture of a visual pun.

I first made *From Hand to Mouth* as a drawing—actually there were two or three different drawings—just the idea of drawing “from hand to mouth.” But I couldn’t figure out exactly how to make the drawing. My first idea was to have a hand in the mouth with some kind of connection—a bar, or some kind of mechanical connection. I finally realized that the most straightforward way to present the idea would be to cast that entire section of the body. Since I couldn’t cast myself, I used my wife as the model.

I worked with the most accurate casting material I could find, something called moulage. I found the stuff at some police shop. You know, they used it to cast tire prints and things like that. It’s actually a very delicate casting process; you could pick up fingerprints in the dust with it. The moulage is a kind of gel you heat up. Because it’s warm when you apply it to a body, it opens up all the pores—it picks up all that, even the hairs. But it sets like five-day-old Jell-O. You have to put plaster or something over the back of it to make it hold its shape. Then I made the wax cast, which became very super-realistic—hyper-realistic. You could see things you don’t normally see—or think about—on people’s skin.

JS: All your work seems to depend not only on this kind of tactile precision, but also on a kind of incompleteness—a fragmentariness, a sense of becoming. As a result, your pieces accrue all sorts of meaning over time. With *From Hand to Mouth*—completed over 20 years ago—what other meanings have occurred to you?

BN: Well, it’s funny you should ask that, because not long ago I read this book in which a character goes to funeral homes or morgues, and puts this moulage stuff on people and makes plaster casts—death masks—for their families. I had no idea that this was a profession. But it turns out that this moulage is a very old, traditional kind of material and was often used this way. But it just connects up in a strange sort of way with my more recent work, since over the past several years I have been involved with both the idea of death and dying and the idea of masking the figure.

MASKS AND GAMES

JS: An early example of masking the figure—your figure, to be precise—was your 1969 film *Art Make-Up* (see fig. 3.20).

BN: That film—which was also later a videotape—has a rather simple story behind it. About 20 years ago—this was in '66 and '67—I was living in San Francisco, and I had access to a lot of film equipment. There were a lot of underground filmmakers there at that time and I knew a bunch of those guys. And since everybody was broke, I could rent pretty good 16mm equipment for \$5 or \$6 a day—essentially the cost of gas to bring it over. So I set up this *Art Make-Up* film.

Of course, you put on makeup before you film in the movies. In my case, putting on the makeup became the activity. I started with four colors. I just put one on over the other, so that by the time the last one went on it was almost black. I started with white. Then red on the white, which came out pink; then green on top of that, which came out gray; then something very black on top of that.

One thing which hadn't occurred to me when I was making the film was that when you take a solid color of makeup—no matter what color—it flattens the image of the face on film. The flatness itself was another kind of mask.

JS: The whole idea of the mask, of abstracting a personality, of simultaneously presenting and denying a self, is a recurring concern in your work.

BN: I think there is a need to present yourself. To present yourself through your work is obviously part of being an artist. If you don't want people to see that self, you put on makeup. But artists are always interested in some level of communication. Some artists need lots, some don't. You spend all of this time in the studio and then when you do present the work, there is a kind of self-exposure that is threatening. It's a dangerous situation and I think that what I was doing, and what I am going to do and what most of

us probably do, is to use the tension between what you tell and what you don't tell as part of the work. What is given *and* what is withheld become the work. You could say that if you make a statement it eliminates the options; on the other hand if you're a logician, the opposite immediately becomes a possibility. I try to make work that leaves options, or is open-ended in some way.

JS: The tenor of that withholding—actually controlling the content or subject—changed significantly when you stopped performing and began to allow the viewer to participate in some of your works. I'm thinking of the architectural installations, in particular the very narrow corridor pieces. In one of them, the viewer who could deal with walking down such a long claustrophobic passage would approach a video monitor on which were seen disconcerting and usually “invisible” glimpses of his or her own back.

BN: The first corridor pieces were about having someone else do the performance. But the problem for me was to find a way to restrict the situation so that the performance turned out to be the one I had in mind. In a way, it was about control. I didn't want somebody else's idea of what could be done.

There was a period in American art, in the '60s, when artists presented parts of works, so that people could arrange them. Bob Morris did some pieces like that, and Oyvind Fahlstrom did those political-coloring-book-like things with magnets that could be rearranged. But it was very hard for me to give up that much control. The problem with that approach is that it turns art into game playing. In fact, at that time, a number of artists were talking about art as though it were some kind of game you could play. I think I mistrusted that idea.

Of course, there is a kind of logic and structure in art-making that you can see as game playing. But game-playing doesn't involve any responsibility—any moral responsibility—and I think that being an artist does involve moral responsibility. With a game you just follow the rules. But art is like

cheating—it involves inverting the rules or taking the game apart and changing it. In games like football or baseball cheating is allowed to a certain extent. In hockey breaking the rules turns into fighting—you can't do that in a bar and get away with it. But the rules change. It can only go so far and then real life steps in. This year warrants were issued to arrest hockey players; two minutes in the penalty box wasn't enough. It's been taken out of the game situation.

JS: Nevertheless, many of your works take as their starting point very specific children's games.

BN: When I take the game, I take it out of context and apply it to moral or political situations. Or I load it emotionally in a way that it is not supposed to be loaded. For instance, the *Hanged Man* neon piece (1985) derives from the children's spelling game. If you spell the word, you win; if you can't spell the word in a certain number of tries, then the stick figure of the hanged man is drawn line by line with each wrong guess. You finally lose the game if you complete the figure—if you hang the man.

With my version of the hanged man, first of all, I took away the part about being allowed to participate. In my piece you're not allowed to participate—the parts of the figure are put into place without you. The neon "lines" flash on and off in a programmed sequence. And then the game doesn't end. Once the figure is complete, the whole picture starts to be recreated again. Then I added the bit about having an erection or ejaculation when you're hanged. I really don't know if it's a myth or not.

I've also used the children's game "musical chairs" a number of times. The simplest version was *Musical Chairs (Studio Piece)* in 1983 (for a related work see fig. 3.38),¹ which has a chair hanging at the outside edge of a circumference of suspended steel Xs. So, when the Xs swing or the chair swings, they bang into each other and actually make noise—make music. But of course it was more than that because musical chairs is also a cruel game. Somebody is always left out. The first one to be excluded always



fig. 3.38
Musical Chair, 1983. Steel, wire,
34 × 192 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 200 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Courtesy
Sperone Westwater Gallery,
New York.

feels terrible. That kid doesn't get to play anymore, has nothing to do, has to stand in the corner or whatever.

LARGE-SCALE SCULPTURE

JS: There seems to be something particularly ominous about your use of chairs—both in this and other works. Why a chair? What does it mean to you?

BN: The chair becomes a symbol for a figure—a stand-in for the figure. A chair is used, it is functional; but it is also symbolic. Think of the electric chair, or that chair they put you in when the police shine the lights on you. Because your imagination is left to deal with that isolation, the image becomes more powerful, in the same way that the murder offstage can be more powerful than if it took place right in front of you. The symbol is more powerful.

I first began to work with the idea of a chair with that cast of the space underneath a chair—that was in the '60s. And I remember, when I think back to that time, a chair [Joseph] Beuys did with a wedge of suet on the seat. I think he may have hung it on the wall. I'm not sure. In any case, it was a chair that was, pretending it was a chair—it didn't work. You couldn't sit in it because of that wedge of grease or fat or whatever it was—it filled up the space you would sit in. Also, I'm particularly interested in the idea of hanging a chair on the wall. It was a Shaker idea, you know. They had peg boards that ran around the wall; so they could pick up all the furniture and keep the floors clean. The chairs didn't have to be on the floor to function.

In 1981, when I was making *South America Triangle* (see fig. 3.36) I had been thinking about having something hanging for quite a long time. The *Last Studio Piece*, which was made in the late '70s when I was still living in Pasadena, was made from parts of two other pieces—plaster semi-

circles that look like a cloverleaf and a large square—and I finally just stuck them together. I just put one on top of the other and a metal plate in between and hung it all from the ceiling. That was the first time I used a hanging element. I was working at the same time on the “underground tunnel pieces.” These models for tunnels I imagined floating underground in the dirt. The same ideas and procedures, the same kind of image, whether something was suspended in water, in earth, in air.

JS: *South America Triangle* in a certain sense continues these ideas of game-playing, suspension, inside and outside, and the chair as a stand-in for the figure. In this case though, we’re talking about a big steel sculpture hanging from the ceiling, with the chair isolated and suspended upside-down in the middle of the steel barrier. This seems considerably more aggressive than the earlier work, though the content is still covert, an extremely private meditation. But the title hints at its subject matter and begins to explicate its intense emotional and political presence. I’m wondering what your thoughts were when you were making this piece?

BN: When I moved to New Mexico and was in Pecos in '79, I was thinking about a piece that had to do with political torture. I was reading V. S. Naipaul's stories about South America and Central America, including “The Return of Eva Peron” and especially “The Killings in Trinidad”—that’s the one that made the biggest impression on me. Reading the Naipaul clarified things for me and helped me continue. It helped me to name names, to name things. But it didn’t help me to make the piece. It didn’t help me to figure out how the bolts went on. It just gave me encouragement.

At first, I thought of using a chair that would somehow become the figure: torturing a chair and hanging it up or strapping it down, something like that. And then torture has to take place in a room, or at least I was thinking in terms of it taking place in a room, but I couldn’t figure out how to build a room and how to put the chair in it. Well, I’d made a number of works that

had to do with triangles, like rooms in different shapes. I find triangles really uncomfortable, disconcerting kinds of spaces. There is no comfortable place to stay inside them or outside them. It's not like a circle or square that give you security.

So, in the end, for *South America Triangle*, I decided that I would just suspend the chair and then hang a triangle around it. My original idea was that the chair would swing and bang into the sides of the triangle and make lots of noise. But then when I built it so that the chair hung low enough to swing into the triangle, it was too low. It didn't look right, so I ended up raising it. The triangle became a barrier to approaching the chair from the outside.

Again, it becomes something you can't get to. There is a lot of anger generated when there are things you can't get to. That's part of the content of the work—and also the genesis of the piece. Anger and frustration are two very strong feelings of motivation for me. They get me into the studio, get me to do the work.

JS: That sense of frustration and anger also becomes the viewer's problem in approaching and making sense of your work, especially a piece as disturbing as *South America Triangle*. One critic, Robert Storr, said recently, "Unlike settling into the reassuring 'armchair' of Matisse's painting, to take one's seat in Nauman's art is to risk falling on one's head . . ."

BN: I know there are artists who function in relation to beauty—who try to make beautiful things. They are moved by beautiful things and they see that as their role: to provide or make beautiful things for other people. I don't work that way. Part of it has to do with an idea of beauty. Sunsets, flowers, landscapes; these kinds of things don't move me to do anything. I just want to leave them alone. My work comes out of being frustrated about the human condition. And about how people refuse to understand other people. And about how people can be cruel to each other. It's not

that I think I can change that, but it's just such a frustrating part of human history.

RECENT VIDEOS

JS: Recently, you've returned to video for the first time since the late '60s. In *Violent Incident* (1986; see fig. 2.6), you not only moved from "silents" to "talkies," but you also used actors for the first time. Nevertheless, the video seems to pick right up on issues you've explored from the beginning. The chair is a central element in the action and the whole tape centers on a cruel joke. Again there is this persistent tension between humor and cruelty.

BN: *Violent Incident* begins with what is supposed to be a joke—but it's a mean joke. A chair is pulled out from under someone who is starting to sit down. It intentionally embarrasses someone and triggers the action. But let me describe how it got into its present form. I started with a scenario, a sequence of events which was this: Two people come to a table that's set for dinner with plates, cocktails, flowers. The man holds the woman's chair for her as she sits down. But as she sits down, he pulls the chair out from under her and she falls on the floor. He turns around to pick up the chair, and as he bends over, she's standing up, and she gooses him. He turns around and yells at her—calls her names. She grabs the cocktail glass and throws the drink in his face. He slaps her, she knees him in the groin and, as he's doubling over, he grabs a knife from the table. They struggle and both of them end up on the floor.

Now this action takes all of about 18 seconds. But then it's repeated three more times: the man and woman exchange roles, then the scene is played by two men and then by two women. The images are aggressive, the characters are physically aggressive, the language is abusive. The scripting, having the characters act out these roles and the repetition all build on that aggressive tension.

JS: Sound is a medium you've explored since your earliest studio performances, films and audiotapes. The hostile overlaying of angry noises contributes enormously to the tension of *Violent Incident*.

BN: It's similar with the neon pieces that have transformers, buzzing and clicking and whatnot; in some places I've installed them, people are disturbed by these sounds. They want them to be completely quiet. There is an immediacy and an intrusiveness about sound that you can't avoid.

So with *Violent Incident*, which is shown on 12 monitors at the same time, the sound works differently for each installation. At one museum, when it was in the middle of the show, you heard the sound before you actually got to the piece. And the sound followed you around after you left it. It's kind of funny the way *Violent Incident* was installed at the Whitechapel [Art Gallery, London]. Because it was in a separate room, the sound was baffled [*sic*]; you only got the higher tones. So the main thing you heard throughout the museum was "Asshole!"

JS: That's sort of the subliminal version of a very aggressive sound piece you used to install invisibly in empty rooms, isn't it?

BN: You mean the piece that said, "Get out of the room, get out of my mind"?² That piece is still amazingly powerful to me. It's really stuck in my mind. And it's really a frightening piece. I haven't heard it for a few years, but the last time I did I was impressed with how strong it was. And I think that it is one of those pieces that I can go back to. I don't know where it came from or how I managed to do it because it's so simple and straightforward.

JS: How did that come about?

BN: Well, I had made a tape of sounds in the studio. And the tape says over and over again, "Get out of the room, get out of my mind." I said it a lot of different ways: I changed my voice and distorted it, I yelled it and

growled it and grunted it. Then, the piece was installed with the speakers built into the walls, so that when you went into this small room—10 feet square or something—you could hear the sound, but there was no one there. You couldn't see where the sound was coming from. Other times, we just stuck the speakers in the corners of the room and played the tape—like when the walls were too hard to build into. But it seemed to work about as well either way. Either way it was a very powerful piece. It's like a print I did that says, "Pay attention motherfuckers" (1973). You know, it's so angry it scares people.

JS: Your most recent videotapes feature clowns. I can see a connection to the *Art Make-Up* film we talked about, but why did you use such theatrical clowns?

BN: I got interested in the idea of the clown first of all because there is a mask, and it becomes an abstracted idea of a person. It's not anyone in particular, see, it's just an idea of a person. And for this reason, because clowns are abstract in some sense, they become very disconcerting. You, I, one, we can't make contact with them. It's hard to make any contact with an idea or an abstraction. Also, when you think about vaudeville clowns or circus clowns, there is a lot of cruelty and meanness. You couldn't get away with that without makeup. People wouldn't put up with it, it's too mean. But in the circus it's okay, it's still funny. Then, there's the history of the unhappy clown: they're anonymous, they lead secret lives. There is a fairly high suicide rate among clowns. Did you know that?

JS: No, I didn't. But it seems that rather than alluding to this melancholic or tragic side of the clown persona the video emphasizes the different types of masks, the historically specific genres of clowns or clown costumes.

BN: With the clown videotape, there are four different clown costumes; one of them is the Emmett Kelly dumb clown; one is the old French

fig. 3.39

Clown Torture (Dark and Stormy Night with Laughter), 1987. Two color video monitors, two videotape players, two videotapes (color, sound), dimensions variable. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.



Baroque clown (I guess it's French); one is a sort of traditional polka-dot, red-haired, oversize-shoed clown; and one is a jester. The jester and the Baroque type are the oldest, but they are pretty recognizable types. They were picked because they have a historical reference, but they are still anonymous. They become masks, they don't become individuals. They don't become anyone you know, they become clowns.

JS: In your tape *Clown Torture* (fig. 3.39),³ the clowns don't act like clowns. For one thing, they're not mute. You have the clowns tell stories. Or, I should say, each of the clowns repeats the same story.

BN: Each clown has to tell a story while supporting himself on one leg with the other leg crossed, in such a way that it looks like he is imitating sitting down. So there is the physical tension of watching someone balance while trying to do something else—in this case, tell a story. The takes vary because at some point the clown gets tired and falls over. Then I would stop the tape. Each of the four clowns starts from the beginning, tells the story about 15 times or so, falls over and then the next clown starts.

This circular kind of story, for me, goes back to Warhol films that really have no beginning or end. You could walk in at any time, leave, come back again and the figure was still asleep, or whatever. The circularity is also a lot like La Monte Young's idea about music. The music is always going on. You just happen to come in at the part he's playing that day. It's a way of structuring something so that you don't have to make a story.

JS: What's the story the clowns tell?

BN: "It was a dark and stormy night. Three men were sitting around a campfire. One of the men said, 'Tell us a story, Jack.' And Jack said, 'It was a dark and stormy night. Three men were sitting around a campfire. One of the men said, 'Tell us a story. Jack.' And Jack said, "It was a dark and stormy night"

NOTES

First published in *Art in America* 76 (September 1988): 140–149, 203. The interview is excerpted from the film *Four Artists: Robert Ryman, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, Susan Rothenberg* (Michael Blackwood Productions, 1988). Reprinted with permission, Joan Simon.

1. Over a period of years, Nauman made numerous sculptural works with suspended chairs and steel frames; in several of these, the chair produces sound when struck, or when it comes into contact with the metal supports (see, for example, fig. 3.37). Among this group are three versions that are specifically based upon the children's game musical chairs, all made in 1983: *Musical Chair* (fig. 3.38), *Musical Chairs*, and *Musical Chairs: Studio Version* (discussed in the interview). The "musical" chair refers both to the game, in which the turning-off of the music prompts the participants to scramble onto the chairs, as well as the use of the chair as a musical element within the sculpture. (See WCR nos. 313, 314, 315.)

2. In the installation, the recording says "Get out of my mind, get out of this room."

3. There are three "clown torture" video installations, all from 1987: *Clown Torture*; *Clown Torture: I'm Sorry and No, No, No, No*; and *Clown Torture: Dark and Stormy Night with Laughter*.

**11. TALKING WITH BRUCE NAUMAN: AN INTERVIEW, 1989
(EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS: JULY, 1977; SEPTEMBER, 1980;
MAY, 1982; AND JULY, 1989)**

CHRISTOPHER CORDES

Over a period of twelve years, Christopher Cordes conducted four interviews with Nauman. For the catalogue raisonné of Nauman's prints, which was assembled by Cordes, the transcripts were edited and compiled into one interview "to follow the chronological development of Bruce Nauman's printmaking," as he explains in the introduction. In the interview, the conversants touch upon a range of topics, including the extensive use and investigation of language in Nauman's printmaking and related pieces. The discussion also reveals the degree to which Nauman works in series, realizing the same ideas in different material forms.

A large number of specific prints are mentioned, many more than it was possible to reproduce here. For illustrations, the reader is encouraged to consult the print catalogue raisonné (PCR); entry numbers are provided in brackets.

PART I: AN OVERVIEW

Christopher Cordes: What do you like about making prints?

Bruce Nauman: There is a directness to making marks—lithography, in particular, involves a very wonderful surface to draw on. You don't get that quality of working with the stone or the plate when you just make a drawing. It seems like every time I've worked on a group of lithographs, the first ones have a lot to do with making marks on the stone and drawing with a crayon, making washes, and things like that. As I work at it for a period of time, a lot of that disappears or I get that out of the way. There is a finish I can get, a kind of tightness and clarity I really like.

In printmaking there is a sense of stepping back more. This is almost a contradiction because there is a directness in drawing, but in printmaking there is an added element of allowing the technique to be a buffer between me and the image. I like that, too—the mechanicalness of it. Sometimes, just because the image is reversed, there is a sense of removal, like I was left-handed. There is also a sense of ritualizing the image.

CC: Do you get that feeling because you are working on a lithographic stone or an intaglio plate, which are both three-dimensional surfaces?

BN: No, I think the “objectness” of the stone is very important, but it has more to do with the printing process. Somehow you hook yourself into a process like hooking onto a machine: you give it some information, it does something with it, and a result comes out. If you understand how the machine works, then you understand what the output is going to be. But there will still be some extra work not done by you, and that just fascinates me.

CC: How does the printmaking process affect your approach to drawing?

BN: Most of the drawings I make are to help me figure out the problems of a particular piece I’m working on. The first time I did lithographs, I was making lots of drawings in the studio and I thought I could just go into the shop and continue to make those drawings as prints. But it never worked out that way; it always ends up that I don’t want the prints to be drawings, I want them to be part of the process of making prints—just making a drawing doesn’t feel sufficient. A clearer or more independent statement is there in the prints.

Since I tend to make them in groups with long lapses in between, there is a struggle each time to rediscover what I think printmaking can be. An important aspect of this is how comfortable I feel in a particular workshop. All these things influence the work that comes out. I go in with some

fixed ideas, and then in the process of trying to get those ideas out, they change a lot. I've often felt best about either the very first work I do when I go in, or the last work; sometimes the stuff in the middle tends to be real muddled. Perhaps it is because with the first work, I'm still clear about my conception of what I want and I just get it down; by the last work, I'm much clearer about the kinds of processes I'm comfortable with. But there is some confusion in the work done in the middle.

CC: In the catalogue *Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965 to 1972*,¹ Jane Livingston emphasized your concern to find “non-artistic” mediums to work in. If that is the case, how do you feel about printmaking, which is full of “art” implications?

BN: That quote comes from a much earlier period of my work, and I don't even have a response to it now. I did try to make the block-letter word prints in a nonprintlike way—just printing the image—but I don't think I was particularly concerned with nonart mediums.

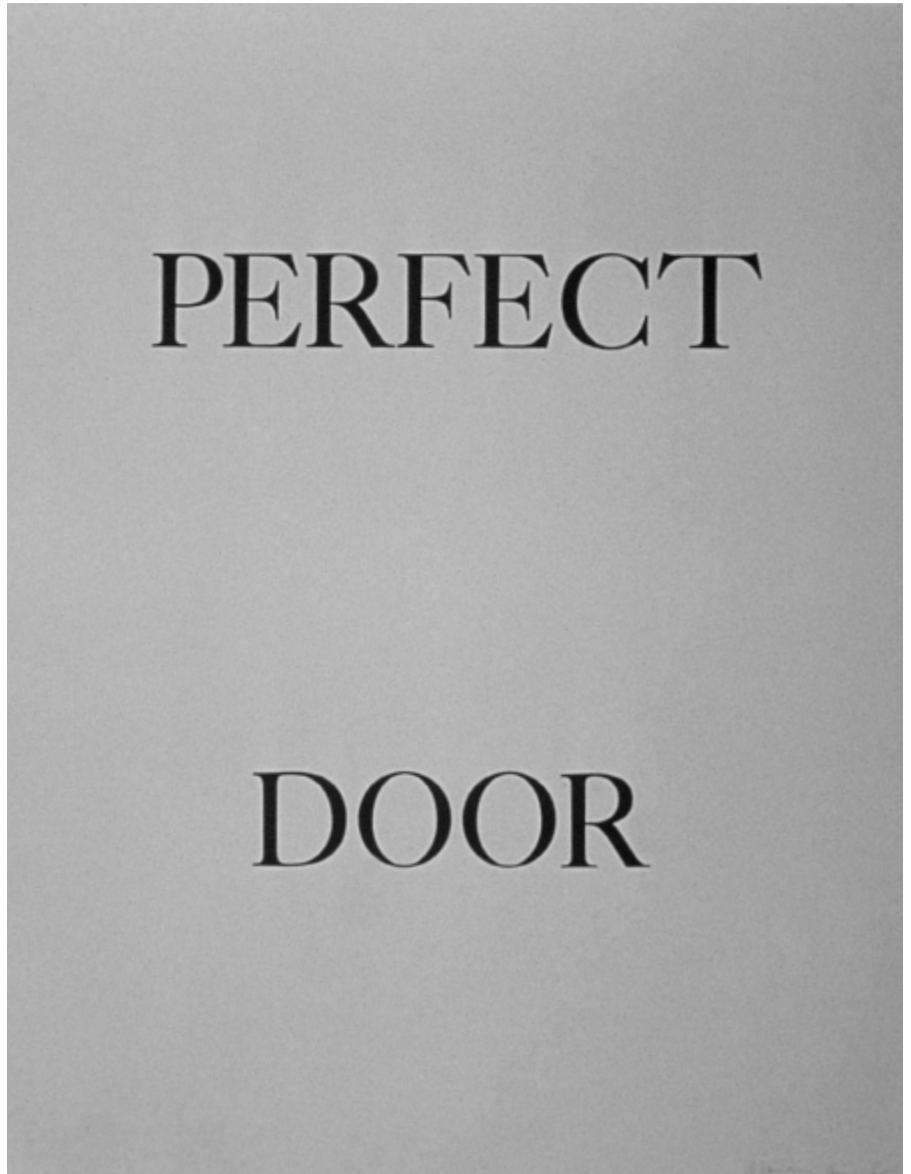
CC: How do you decide which printing process is best suited for the image you have in mind?

BN: I think my first impression is to draw it. When I need to work out something while I am making the drawing, it seems to be easier to make a lithograph. And when I am working on a lithograph, I prefer to work on a stone rather than a plate because plates don't allow me enough latitude for making changes. Most of the lithographs on stone end up having a lot of scraping, over-drawing, and wiping off—all kinds of changes made during the work.

The times that I have made drypoints, I wanted to make that particular kind of line; I really like the quality of that line and the quality of the ink. I think I have only used a screen when just using typeface for a printed word message—it's more mechanical. I don't have a real strong feeling for the way the ink sits on the paper with a screen. I like how the ink seems to be more a part of the paper in the other processes.

fig. 3.40

Perfect Door, 1973. Lithograph on paper, 32 × 26 in., edition of 50. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.





PERFECT

ODOR

fig. 3.41

Perfect Odor, 1973. Lithograph on paper, 32 × 26 in., edition of 50. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

In almost all cases where I can't get the image clean or clear enough, I'll go to some other process: perhaps cutting the image as a stencil and shooting it photographically on a litho plate, like in the *Perfect* prints (figs. 3.40, 3.41), or maybe cutting the stencils for a silkscreen instead. *Silver Grotto/Yellow Grotto* [PCR no. 36] was done as a screenprint because it was too large to do on a plate.

CC: Are the decisions to incorporate lithography with screenprinting made for reasons of economy? For example, both *Sugar/Ragus* [PCR no. 14] and *Clear Vision* (fig. 3.42) have a screenprinted flat (an unvaried application of ink over a block area) similar to the hand-printed flat in *Tone Mirror* (fig. 3.43).

BN: Sometimes the decision was made because I wanted to get a certain quality to the ink on the flat that was hard to achieve with the lithographic ink, but you could get it by using a screen. There is a yellow-and-green in *Sugar/Ragus* that was run as a screen; I did it that way because the printer was able to mix the color and draw it more easily than I could on stone. It was economy, but it was also just easier to print.

CC: How do you respond to color? For instance, what is the relationship between the implications of a word-image and its color?

BN: It is very hard for me to use color. It's real powerful and has been a problem for me in printmaking—probably because I don't do enough printmaking to be comfortable with it.

If I'm working on a stone, I generally get the whole image with the first drawing. Extra stones tend to be ways to make changes I can no longer make on the first one. You run another stone when you can't fix the first stone anymore, if you can't open the stone up because you might lose some grays, or if you've lost the grays and have to add some. Sometimes there is also a nice quality when you run two different kinds of blacks. Often the image is already fairly complete and functioning in black-and-



fig. 3.42

Clear Vision, 1972. Lithograph on paper, 36 × 48¾ in., edition of 50. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.



fig. 3.43

Tone Mirror, 1974. Lithograph on paper, 30¼ × 40 in., edition of 100. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

white, so even if there are two or three stones, I'm still dealing pretty much with a black-and-white problem.

Occasionally I have tried to add color, but that's kind of silly to do just because I feel I want some color. In the prints where I started out knowing that I wanted to do color, I have been able to break it down and be more successful; it requires being clear about the final image before I start working, so I tend to work the whole thing out ahead of time. I don't think that you would say these are not color problems in a painterly sense, but I don't come in thinking in terms of making a lithograph and having it read as a color statement. If there is color in it, it's a necessary part of the print but probably not the main energy of the print.

CC: Although your prints are not overtly colorful, one senses a lot of color in them; on some you have to look carefully to see the multiple color printings.

BN: I don't think you have to be able to see the number of runs. It's there in the richness of the print, and you understand that when you see it. My brother always used to put too much salt on everything because he thought when you salted food, you should be able to taste salt and not the flavor. I have a hard time with color and it seems to work best for me when it's used in a clear but sparing way. If I try to get too many colors into it, it breaks down. In many of the prints where there is a tone, the tone will often have a lot of color in it: greens get used a lot, so black doesn't always read as black. When I was a student, I was a painter and I tended to try to make colors that looked like mud. I was interested in getting them as close as possible to mud but still have them function as color.

CC: Considering the sculptural concerns of your work, why have the majority of your prints been word-images as opposed to sculpturally related drawing?

BN: Most of the word pieces were produced during a period when I was

doing a lot of writing; the print medium seemed the most reasonable way to get them out. I've also made neon signs out of them, but I started to feel uncomfortable with that; it was like encumbering the information—the poetry—with this technology that didn't seem very important. It was as if I was doing them as neons just because that's the way I did them, and that didn't seem like reason enough. But when I began to see the information as poetry, doing them as prints made sense, and then in a way, making prints became about just being really careful with the typography and the layout.

The presence of the words on paper and the way they were printed were very important to me. The first time I wanted to use large, clean letters was with *Suck Cuts* (fig. 3.44), so I picked a typeface and we sent it off to the typesetters. When the type came back, all they had done was blow up the largest size they had. It looked terrible because it was very crude; when it was small you didn't see that. Large printed signs like billboards generally aren't very clean images, but it's not that important because the message is there and you get it. I wanted the typography to be really precise and sharp so that my visual statement would coincide with what the words said in just one vision. I ended up drawing it myself, which required a lot more work than I expected—it's not easy to draw that stuff and get it real clean.

CC: All of your prints relating to sculptural ideas are either intaglio dry points, etchings, or lithographic line engravings. Why do you want that fine, linear quality when you make sculpturally related prints?

BN: When I draw in the studio, I draw mainly with a pencil; things are worked out in terms of line. At a much later stage of working on an idea, I can visualize it so that I can use brush strokes or the flat side of a piece of chalk to indicate the volumes. But my first impulse is to use a pencil.

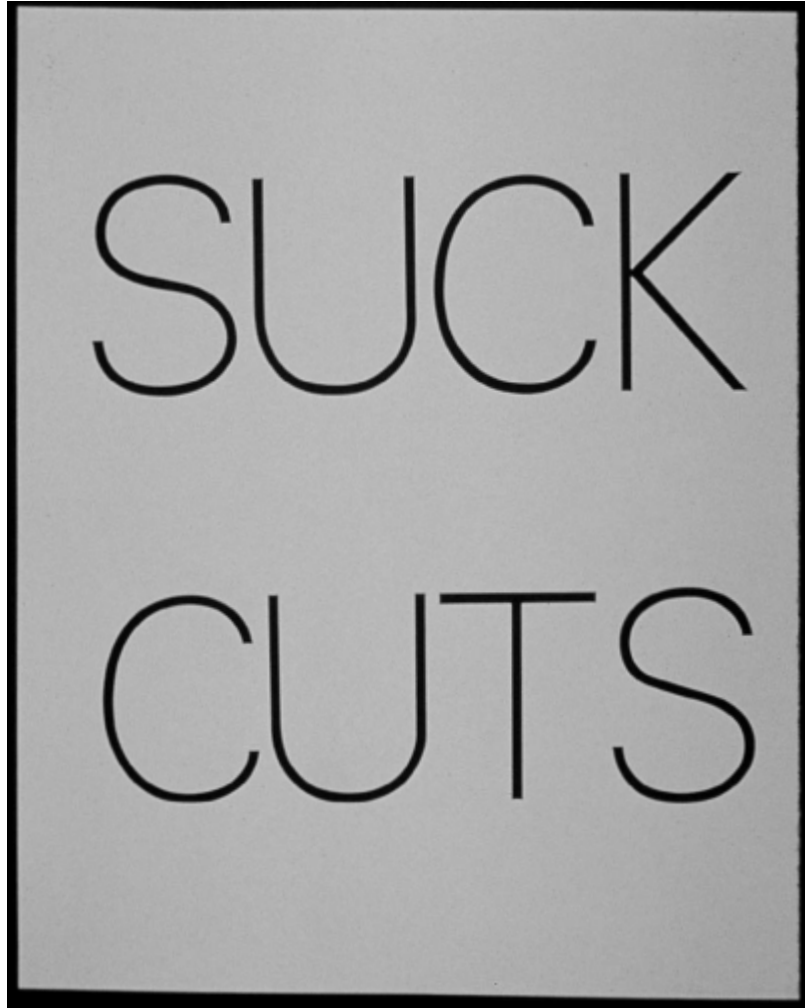
The lithographs involve large areas of dark and light. They are almost always worked out directly with a big brush or a fat crayon, and generally

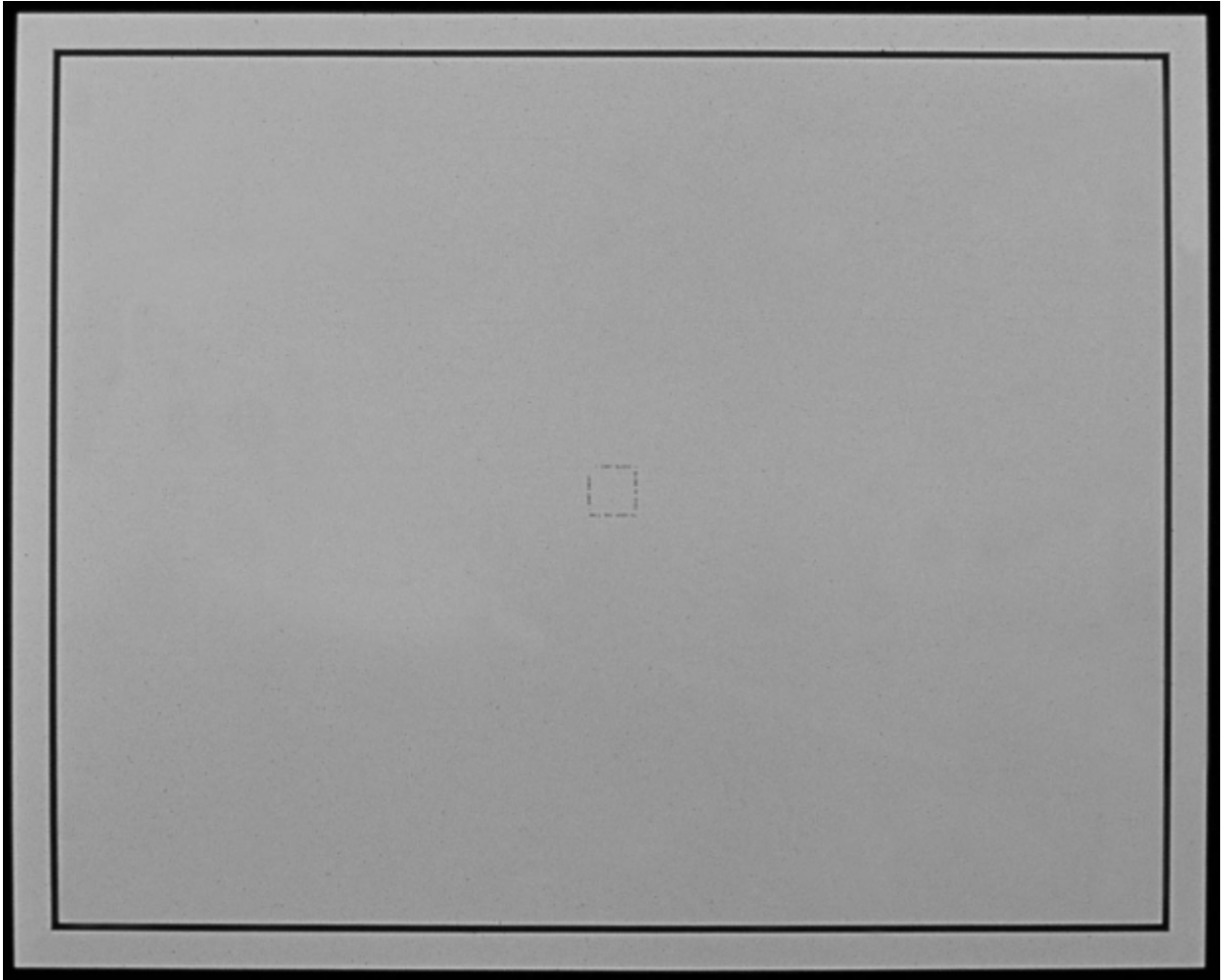
fig. 3.44

Suck Cuts, 1972. Lithograph on paper, 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 31 $\frac{5}{16}$ in. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

fig. 3.45

No Sweat, 1975. Silkscreen on paper, 40 × 32 in., edition of 25. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.





involve a very shallow space of some kind. In my favorites, *Clear Vision* and *M. Ampere* [PCR nos. 15 and 21], I thought of it in terms of stone-chiseling and shallow relief—an inch or less deep—so the surfaces appear flat.

CC: Ludwig Wittgenstein has referred to language as a “mirror image” of the world; what prompted your concern with front/back ideas and image reversal in prints?

BN: I don’t know, but I was doing it for a long time. I first became aware of front/back interplay when I was making my early fiberglass sculptures. They were made in molds and each mold was interesting in itself—I would look at the back of it the whole time I was making the piece. In a similar way, most printmaking reverses the image during the process. I forget that it will be a mirror image, so the decision to do it frontward or backward happens then.

I like the way front/back interplay confuses the information. Not knowing what you’re supposed to look at keeps you at a distance from the art while the art keeps you at a distance from me; the combination produces a whole set of tensions one can learn to exploit. I think that’s a very strong part of my work—giving you some information about myself by giving you a piece of art, but also not letting you get any closer to me. It’s like trying to get close yet not being allowed to get too close. Those kinds of tensions are very interesting; communication in general interests me. An artist is in a peculiar position—you know you’re not talking to your best friend, but you have to assume you’re speaking to people who are interested in what you are doing. It is difficult to address yourself to an anonymous public.

CC: Some of your prints, such as *Vision* [PCR no. 18] and *No Sweat* (fig. 3.45), require a physical closeness to be perceived, while others, because of their bold word content—some as warnings, some as pleas—imply distancing. Are there any general concerns that you take into consideration regarding the viewer?

BN: I think pretty much in terms of how I respond to my work, and assume that other people will have at least a similar response.

CC: How do you deal with the workshop environment when you are making prints? Do the energies there interfere with your vision?

BN: My relationship to the printers in the workshop is very important. It's a special kind of relationship, different than always being by myself in the studio where the work has nothing to do with other people or places. In a sense, the prints can be isolated into groups, and my response to each group has a lot to do with the place where they were done. When I am doing the prints, I experience a kind of distillation of my personal state of mind with the workshop. When I'm finished with that experience, the prints are finished—it doesn't have as much to do with how the prints are made.

I don't do anything consistently; I don't make drawings or sculpture consistently. If I haven't drawn for months and I have something that I think I need to draw, I might have to do it over several times to remember how to make that particular kind of drawing. I ask myself, "What do I need to learn in order to get this idea on paper?" The same thing happens in making sculpture, and every time I make prints it seems I have to relearn how to make them.

When I go into a printshop and I haven't made drawings for awhile, I try to make them in what I remember as being the way I made drawings the last time I worked on prints. Often that doesn't carry over, because the idea has changed. It is always a struggle the first few days trying to draw the image on the stone or plate, but if you enjoy working with the medium, you get seduced by the nice things about it.

CC: Most printmakers are seduced by the appearance of a technique and they let that be the reason for its being.

BN: I am very impatient and mistrustful of that. I remember a painting teacher I had who would stand by the student painting racks so all he

could see were the edges of the paintings, which all looked fantastic. If you pulled one out of the racks, the middle looked awful because that was the part the student was working on. The edges were kind of the leftover parts they hadn't even thought about, but this teacher would say, "Oh, the edges look great. How could you care about the middle? It looks terrible!"

In printmaking, I think there is a lot of accidental stuff that gets to be too important. This is probably the reason why washes and other techniques are very hard for me to deal with; I would rather not have any there at all. They look so wonderful I don't know what to do with them. Maybe it also has to do with the struggle I have with color. I am always seduced by that rich layering of transparencies but I don't know how to use them. They are not really a part of my statement, so trying to stick them in is often a mistake. When it's time for them to be there, they will just be there; to try to do it because it looks good somewhere else is rarely successful.

CC: That is another one of the traps many printmakers fall into.

BN: I have often been surprised when there have been eleven or sometimes even twenty-three runs in a print by Jasper [Johns] but it doesn't look like that many runs—it looks like it might have been done in just three. Maybe when you look close you see it couldn't have been done in three, and perhaps it's twenty-three because he changed his mind after four runs and he needed to make corrections. I have no idea how it occurs, but the image doesn't look thick and turgid; it looks clean and clear. The fact that there were twenty-three runs just doesn't matter—it's only important to people who care about counting.

When I first learned about printmaking in the Midwest, all of those high-powered people—Hayter, Peterdi, and Lasansky—set the example that everyone had to imitate. You had to do a minimum number of processes to the stone or plate or piece of wood; it just involved a lot of density. I remember when David Hockney's *A Rake's Progress* (a suite of sixteen prints dated 1961–63) came out. These very simple etchings were heavily

attacked by that whole Midwestern contingent. They thought the work had nothing to do with printmaking; that is a narrow point of view.

CC: Print works by artists who are not formal printmakers tend to evolve out of other urgencies.

BN: There are all kinds of art you can do that fulfill the need for busy work when you don't have many ideas. Professional photographers generally don't have anywhere near as much equipment as amateur photographers do—they couldn't carry it all around with them because they have work to do. They require only what it takes to meet the needs of the photograph. But amateurs don't have a specific job to get done, so their equipment seems just like a lot of fun toys and tools for taking up their time in the darkroom.

CC: And forget about image-making.

BN: Yes, I think the manipulations you can do are imitation creativity. It's more obvious in printmaking because printmakers have more tools and techniques to play with, but it happens to painters as well. When there is really no vision, painting has to do with the manipulation of materials.

CC: You have assembled a curious group of words and phrases in the course of making art—many of which are quite startling when viewed within the context of everyday language. When discussing your prints in relation to philosophy, linguistics, and language, one must also consider the parallel importance of your use of nonwords to connote feelings that are experienced but indescribable. How does your work reflect your views on the use of language today?

BN: I am really interested in the different ways that language functions. That is something I think a lot about, which also raises questions about how the brain and the mind work. Language is a very powerful tool. It is considered more significant now than at any other time in history and it is given more importance than any of our faculties.

It's difficult to see what the functioning edges of language are. The place where it communicates best and most easily is also the place where language is the least interesting and emotionally involving—such as the functional way we understand the word “sing” or the sentence “Pick up the pencil.” When these functional edges are explored, however, other areas of your mind make you aware of language potential. I think the point where language starts to break down as a useful tool for communication is the same edge where poetry or art occurs.

Roland Barthes has written about the pleasure that is derived from reading when what is known rubs up against what is unknown, or when correct grammar rubs up against nongrammar. In other words, if one context is different from the context that was given to you by the writer, two different kinds of things you understand rub against each other. When language begins to break down a little bit, it becomes exciting and communicates in nearly the simplest way that it can function: you are forced to be aware of the sounds and the poetic parts of words. If you deal only with what is known, you'll have redundancy; on the other hand, if you deal only with the unknown, you cannot communicate at all. There is always some combination of the two, and it is how they touch each other that makes communication interesting. Too much of one or the other is either unintelligible or boring, but the tension of being almost too far in either direction is very interesting to think about.

I think art forms in general are most interesting when they function in the same way. For instance, if de Kooning makes paintings, we give him a lot of credit for it. But if someone else makes a fantastic painting that you think is a de Kooning when you see it, a curious argument arises after you find out that it is not by de Kooning. Why do you feel so cheated? I think it is because you have entered into a “friction” in your understanding of de Kooning, which somehow makes you feel cheated out of the rest of his paintings.

Art is interesting to me when it ceases to function as art—when what we know as painting stops being painting, or when printmaking ceases to be printmaking—whenever art doesn't read the way we are used to. In this manner, a good piece of art continues to function, revealing new meaning and remaining exciting for a long time, even though our vision of what art is supposed to be keeps changing. After a while, however, our point of view as to how art can function changes radically enough that the work of art becomes art history. Eventually, our perspective is altered so much that its functions just aren't available to us anymore and art becomes archaeology.

PART II: QUESTIONS REGARDING SPECIFIC PRINTS

CC: Are the *Studies for Holograms (a–e)*, 1970 (fig. 3.46) exaggerated facial manipulations of the first five letters of the alphabet—“A” through “E”—or are they more generalized facial gestures? How did you decide on those manipulations?

BN: They aren't about the letters “A” to “E” at all—that is simply an identification sequence added later for cataloguing the prints. The idea of making faces had to do with thinking about the body as something you can manipulate. I had done some performance pieces—rigorous works dealing with standing, leaning, bending—and as they were performed, some of them seemed to carry a large emotional impact. I was very interested in that: if you perform a bunch of arbitrary operations, some people will make very strong connections with them and others won't. That's really all the faces were about—just making a bunch of arbitrary faces. We photographed a lot of them and then I tried to pick the ones that seemed the most interesting. Of course, when you make photographs of the manipulations the emotional connections are more confusing than in the performance pieces, but the same idea was behind the images.

CC: What prompted you to do those images as prints?

fig. 3.46

Studies for Holograms (e), 1970.
One of a portfolio of five screenprints
on paper, 26 × 26 in. each, edition of
150. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery,
Chicago.



BN: I did a whole series of them as photographs first, then I tried making films of them. Eventually, I ended up with the holograms as the most satisfactory way of expressing the images. Since they required a lot of equipment, it seemed necessary to have very powerful images in order to make you forget that there was this big pile of paraphernalia around. I had the slides for a long time, and we made prints just because they seemed like nice images.

CC: *Raw-War*, 1971 (fig. 3.47) was your first word-image print—were you thinking about the 1970 neon *Raw War* or the word/language manipulations implied in the *Studies for Holograms*?

BN: I don't remember why it came up again. When I did the holograms, I was practicing making faces while I worked in front of a mirror. Later, in 1968 and '69, I made a series of videotapes in which I used the camera

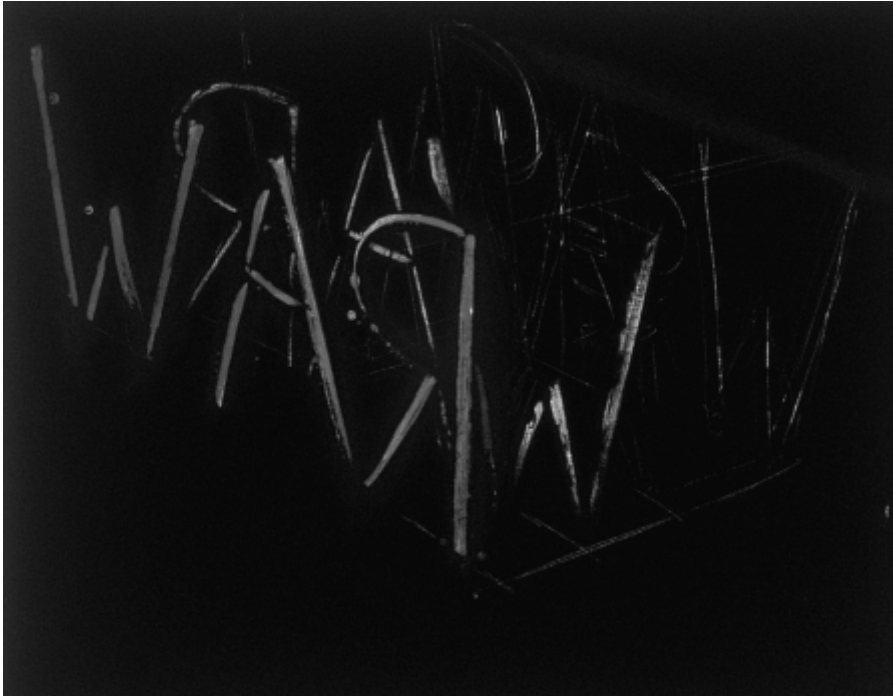


fig. 3.47

Raw-War, 1971. Lithograph on paper, 22¼ × 28¼ in., edition of 100. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

as a mirror by watching myself in the monitor. There was one tape called *Lip Sync* (1969) that had the image upside-down and the sound of the repeated text, “lip sync,” going alternately in and out of synchronization with the lip movement. That particular video seems directly related to *Raw-War*.

CC: Do you think of *Raw-War* as a political statement? “War” is a word loaded with connotations, and your color choices in both the lithograph and the neon sign heighten the political references. Were these works done in response to the Vietnam War?

BN: Well, certainly there are political feelings present in them, but nothing more specific than that.

CC: Are the two untitled drypoints of 1972 [PCR nos. 10 and 11]² based on sculptural drawings?

BN: When I was making those drypoints, they were finished when the visual image read in a clear and strong way; I didn't try to make them explain the sculpture. In fact, that's one difference I feel between making drawings and making prints: I don't try to let the job of explaining the idea of a sculpture interfere with the print image. I want the print to be able to exist without reference to the object outside of itself. But with the drawings I am explaining something to myself about a specific problem in sculpture, so the relationship to the object is very strong and I usually don't try to make a separation.

CC: I find *Suposter*, 1973 [PCR no. 12]³ to be an enigmatic and difficult image.

BN: Yes, I do, too. Making it was a real struggle; I thrashed around a lot with it. That print was done because I had the show at the Los Angeles County Museum ("Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965 to 1972," a retrospective organized in conjunction with the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York). It was sold to benefit the museum; Gemini G.E.L. [Los Angeles print publisher] donated their services to print it so all the proceeds went to the museum.

CC: What does "ters opus" relate to? The words sound like *terse opus*, which means succinct work.

BN: That is what it's supposed to mean. But it also refers to the third way of doing it: "ters" suggests *tres*—the Spanish word for three. All the various imaginations of those words, and then all the different conflicts they presented, mixed together in my mind and it came out in the print. It got very complex and wordy—I let it do all that, but it was really a struggle the whole time.

CC: What does the reference to "short rest" mean?

BN: "Opus" is a work or labor; "rest" is the opposite.

CC: *Sugar/Ragus*, 1973 reminds me of your 1967 drawing *T into B*, which physically transforms two letters of the alphabet into one another by abstracting the verbal signs. How did you arrive at this particular word-image and what does it imply?

BN: That's simple: it comes from an old college football cheer. Some guy used to get up in the stands and yell, "Give me an 'R'"—and everybody would give him an "R." After spelling out the rest of the letters "R-A-G-U-S" in the same manner, he would say, "What's that spell? What's that spell?" and the crowd yelled back, "Ragus!" Then he'd say, "What's that spell backwards?" and everybody would yell, "Sugar!" I don't know how the cheer started, but that's where I got it from.

CC: A horizon line supports the word and the background color changes—did you mean for this print to have any landscape reference?

BN: It didn't start out that way, but it does make those connections.

CC: Why did you choose fluorescent colors for this print?

BN: We had the black image completed and I was drawing on one of the proofs with crayons; I don't remember why I picked that colored crayon.

CC: Does the anagram "ragus" have any meaning other than as an abstracted verbal sign?

BN: It becomes an object when you think about the letters. With a number of the other prints as well—such as *Clear Vision* and *M. Ampere*—I had a strong image of the letters chiseled into the stone while I was drawing, so there is a sense of sculptural relief in those prints.

CC: Were you thinking of them as neon signs, where the space is physically shallow?

BN: No, more like chiseled monuments in low relief. I think I also liked the idea that I was working on stone and the image of something chiseled in

stone, as opposed to drawn on stone. *Malice* [PCR no. 37] was worked out in a similar way, although not as clearly.

CC: Do you view the word prints as objects?

BN: In certain cases, some of the word prints become objects. When that happens, they get very close to being signs you could hang on the wall—just like that exit sign over there. They have the same scale and almost serve the same purpose, but I don't think they ever really quite achieve that.

CC: In this group of prints, when the major portion of the image is worked out in one drawing on stone, the most successful ones are those with the chiseled illusion.

BN: Yes, I tend to fill the whole page in shallow relief—not just the letters, but the overall image is worked on to get shallow space. *Pay Attention*, 1973 [PCR no. 16]⁴ is very much a drawn image on stone; it clearly has hand-drawn letters with no attempt to make anything else. When I work on drawings outside of printmaking they are not so much about themselves—their point is to explain how a piece functions. When the explanation is clear, then I am finished making the drawing. But in the prints, I confront what the drawing is supposed to be more often. It is a more complex investigation somehow, and is probably as close as I get anymore to thinking about how paintings should be made.

CC: Like *Clear Vision*, 1973, the word-images in *Pay Attention* become visual opposites of their meanings. The way the word “attention” is drawn looks almost like you weren't paying attention—it becomes obscured and loses accuracy.

BN: I was drawing with one of those big, fat grease sticks—a rubbing crayon—and it reminded me of when Richard Serra was working at Gemini. He made his prints by drawing over and over on the stone, getting a thick, greasy build-up. Of course, when they printed them, all that sur-

face was gone—there was just flat black. He was getting real frustrated because he was into that surface and it just wouldn't be there. A lot of the same effort is in *Pay Attention*; I drew over and over with the rubbing crayon to get a thick texture but, of course, it's not there in the print.

CC: In comparison with the similar layout of *Doe Fawn*, 1973 [PCR no. 20], *Pay Attention* seems almost to need more space.

BN: That was something else I was trying to achieve: a real aggressive pushing at the edges and at the surface. That is a more accurate statement of what the print is about than the literal meaning of the words “pay attention”—even though that's in there, too. It was really hard to leave that print. At some point, I was just finished with it; it was either good enough to keep or throw away—like the experience I went through while making it. In other words, I was finished with the print whether the print was finished or not.

Doe Fawn is another print that I have a lot of mixed feelings about. I really like it, but again, it was real hard for me to leave it the way it was—to call it finished. I love the uncomfortableness that I have with it; I'm not sure why.

CC: Was the source for your image in *Clear Vision* Wittgenstein's reference to “clear vision” in his *Philosophical Investigations*?

BN: I didn't remember that he had used that term when I made the print, but who knows what one chooses not to remember. I was very interested in the difference between the way you think of the words “vision” and “clear vision”—the implied meanings are really far apart. “Vision” is there twice, but as soon as you say “clear” vision you think about what a “clear vision” means. I was interested in the *Perfect* prints of 1973 (see figs. 3.40, 3.41)—“door” and “odor” in particular—for the same reason. What is a “perfect door” or a “perfect odor?” Objects can be thought of as perfect in some way, so you might have a “perfect door” in a specific situation. But a “perfect odor” is something you just don't think about because that's not the right way to classify odors.

CC: Was there a deliberate distillation of the words in the *Perfect* prints to transpose the letters of “door” to “rodo” and “odor”?

BN: I started out first with the “perfect door” image. It was only going to be one print, but at some point later I realized that I also got “odor” so I did the second image. Finally, I tried to see what other words I could get and I decided to use “rodo”—a nonword you could make, but without any of the logical connections that “door” and “odor” have.

CC: Is there any relationship between the concept of perfection, the visual clarity of the words, and the printing process?

BN: I just wanted a good clean image.

CC: *Doe Fawn* and the *Perfect* prints are reminiscent of the word games children play by reversing the sounds of words, inadvertently adding new dimensions and discovering hidden resources in language. What sort of thought process did you use to arrive at these specific word groups?

BN: I don’t know; they just came out. I do a lot of word transposition in everyday conversation. Sometimes, when they have strong poetic associations and I really feel them, I stick with them and get used to them.

CC: Do you like poetry?

BN: Not particularly. I like to read writers who pay very careful attention to the words, making them work beautifully—mostly as prose. There is very little poetry that I like.

CC: What prompted you to start investigating and evaluating the functions of language?

BN: I have always read a lot; I read in chunks and will read almost anything. I even have a certain kind of taste in awful books, so there are some things I won’t read. There just came a point when I wanted to get what I was interested in into my work.

CC: You have published four books: *Pictures of Sculpture in a Room*, 1965–66; *Clear Sky*, 1967–68; *Burning Small Fires*, 1968; and *L A Air*, 1970. What were you attempting to do in each of these books?

BN: *Pictures of Sculpture in a Room* was done when I was a student. My aim was to make an object of the book to confuse the issue a little bit. It is a total object, but it has pictures—however, it is a book, not a catalogue. *Clear Sky* was a way to have a book that only had colored pages—pictures of the sky. I like the idea that you are looking into an image of the sky, but it is just a page; you are not really looking *into* anything—you are looking at a flat page. *L A Air* was the same idea, but it was also a response to *Clear Sky* using polluted colors instead. Similarly, *Burning Small Fires* was a response to Ed Ruscha's book, *Various Small Fires* (1964).

CC: The prints you made at Cirrus [Editions, a Los Angeles gallery and print publisher] in 1973 [PCR nos. 20–25]⁵ seem calmer, sometimes almost banal, when compared to your earlier Gemini prints [PCR nos. 13–18]⁶; they appear to be more concerned with questioning pragmatic thinking, while the Gemini prints are more introspective and raw.

BN: A lot of that had to do with what was going on in my private life at the time. When I did my first Gemini prints, I was teaching a class at U.C.L.A. two days a week, in addition to working three or four days a week at Gemini. The teaching alone would have been an extra load for me, but having to spend five or six days a week away from my studio was really a strain. There also were too many artists working at the same time at Gemini, so there was a lot of pressure in the workshop. I think everybody felt the printers were not very happy—it was not a comfortable situation. Much of the work was done partly in response to that environment, and partly in response to never being in my studio. I was totally exhausted by the time I finished my semester of teaching, which was just about the same period that I worked on the prints.

CC: *Tone Mirror*, 1974 [PCR no. 26] was done for the portfolio *Mirrors of the Mind*. Obviously, “tone” could refer to lithographic potential, but what were you thinking of in relation to the portfolio theme?

BN: I was thinking in terms of sounds: the word “tone” and a sound or note, plus the idea of reversing a sound. What does it mean to have a “mirror” of a tone? A tone is a system, so it is like reversing time or something. I don’t know if any of this is explicit in the print, but that is what was of interest to me when I did it.

CC: The group of nine prints from 1975 that you call *Sundry Obras Nuevas* [PCR nos. 28–36]⁷ are brutal images. Are they personal pleas and warnings, as opposed to more generalized statements concerning reality?

BN: Once again, I think it had to do with the things going on in my life at that time.

CC: Why the group name—which means “Various New Works”—what was the reason for this thematic presentation?

BN: Gemini wanted something to put on the announcement postcard, and since there was a range in the prints—a couple of them were kind of weird—I just used that title to unify the group.

CC: *Oiled Dead* has a visual elegance that camouflages the haunting message. Was this ambiguity deliberate?

BN: Originally, it started out as two print images: “dead fish” and “oiled meat.” I was not happy with either one, so I started collaging them together and ended up with *Oiled Dead*. I had “dead fish” pinned up on the wall in my studio for about a year before I did anything with it. I don’t remember where it came from, and I never knew what to do with it, so I tried to use it in a print. It’s hard to reconstruct how the other parts came to me.

CC: Does *Proof of Pudding* refer to the adage about proving one's own worth? All eighteen prints in the edition are unique impressions demonstrating a technical virtuosity in inking that must have presented a test for the printer.

BN: I was debating whether to do a print that would say "no two alike" even though they would all be the same, or to do each one as a proof so there would be no edition. My idea was that no matter how good the printer was or how hard he tried to make them exactly alike, they couldn't really be quite the same; there would always be something different.

CC: What is the curious mark in the lower left corner of the image?

BN: That's a brush stroke. I was testing out the brush and it was supposed to be taken off the print, but then we left it on for more color in that area.

CC: *No Sweat* and *Proof of Pudding* are similar in that they both use slang jargon. But the physical configuration of the image in *No Sweat* implies a tightly sealed, personal enclosure that metaphorically locks the viewer inside its confining space. What is the relationship between this physical and mental confinement and the term "no sweat?"

BN: In the poem I wrote in 1974 called *False Silences*,⁸ "no sweat" has to do with a person—myself, or whomever—as a consumer of everything: someone who is always taking information or other people's intelligence, who uses but doesn't give back anything in return. They don't defecate, they don't sweat, they don't talk—nothing. There is that closed feeling because something that just takes from you and never gives anything back feels very suffocating.

I had a friend I used to talk to, and there was an interval in the relationship when we would talk for long periods of time and when I was finishing talking, I would feel sucked dry—just wiped out. It would take days to recover. It was almost like he had somehow taken my personality away from me

without giving me anything back—he would just consume information, things, energy. There are people like that; they need so much—they drain you. I had that image in mind when I did the print, not that person specifically, but a very frightening, powerful image of something that just takes everything from you and doesn't give anything back.

CC: And these same implications seem to be present as well in *Silver Grotto/Yellow Grotto*.

BN: Yes, that's right.

CC: What is the "grotto" reference about?

BN: The visual image I have is of a very beautiful, but somewhat frightening cave—the kind that you could sail a boat into and see reflections. Since "silver" also suggests nonhuman, you can go inside the grotto but you don't really like to make contact with it. That's the image I carry around with me. The space in which the print or the original neon version [1974] hangs is the "Silver Grotto" where this information functions. It communicates a group of separate statements that don't quite line up because they aren't exactly parallel assertions. Each of those words performs differently on you—if you stand over here, this one will affect you, but if you are standing over there, that part works, and so on.

CC: Therefore, the last line in the print—"I can suck you dry"—is not the summation of an equational configuration, but instead just a continuation of the specific ambience?

BN: Right.

CC: I believe *Help Me Hurt Me* is a landmark for printmaking in the 1970s. The drawing gesture, the integration and connotation of the color, and the verbal/mental implications are combined in a monumental presence. How did this image evolve in relation to the over-printing (the word "dead" is printed over the image "help me hurt me")?

BN: I remember trying over-printing on a couple of different ones when we were proofing it, but I don't remember specifically how I arrived at that.

CC: Why do you ask your audience for "help" and "hurt" in this print, while antithetically asking them to "placate" your work in *Doe Fawn*?

BN: All of those messages have to do with making contact. "Help me hurt me" communicates a personal appeal and "placate art"—my art—is a more general appeal to put art outside of yourself, where it becomes something you don't have any control over. Sometimes making art seems like a process that just occurs, rather than something that people do. And it gets out of control sometimes; the art goes on outside of your own volition in some sense or another, and then art and culture, in general, go on. It also has to do with the confusion about being an artist and being a person, and whether there is a difference between the two. Sometimes there appears to be an enormous distinction yet at other times it feels like there is no difference at all. I think all these elements are in there.

I struggle a lot with those issues. It seems as though more of my life is concerned with things I care about that I can't get into my work. It is important to me to be able to get these things into the work so that the art isn't just something I do off in the corner, while going hiking in the mountains remains separate. I want there to be more continuity; going hiking isn't doing art, but I want the feelings that I have there to be available in the other parts of my life. I don't want the art to be too narrow.

There is an outdoor piece I did in 1968 that consists of a steel slab—four feet square and four inches thick—with the word "dark" inscribed on its underside, facing the ground. The feelings I had about that piece and the way it functioned for me were important for a long time. I was able to make a statement in it that let things out of me that I hadn't been able to get out before. There are a few pieces like that every now and then, but it's hard to figure out how to make the art broad enough to absorb more of these concerns. It takes a long time for some kind of change to occur in the work.

CC: Have there ever been times when the artmaking activity has become separate?

BN: Yes, at different times it has. That's one of the reasons why the words started coming into my work in the first place. I began to feel very limited when I was making those early fiberglass pieces; I felt a real lack and I just didn't know how to get the other things I was interested in—like reading and the way words function—into the work. You are supposed to be an artist and you think this is what art is over here, but you are really interested in all these other things that are taking up more and more energy. I just didn't know how to integrate that energy until I was finally able to use it in the most obvious way possible by making a sign—or whatever—and it felt good.

CC: In 1977, you deviated from an almost consistent use of word-imagery and returned to sculpturally related drawing in *False Passage* [PCR no. 39] and the two *Underground Passage* prints [PCR nos. 38 and 40], which were published by Gemini in 1981. Why did you go back to schematic drawing in these prints, and are they conceptually related to the circular image found in the unfitted drypoint of 1972 [PCR no. 11]?

BN: I hadn't done much writing in 1977, so those prints were based on drawings for the sculpture I was making at the time. The sculpture does relate to the earlier drypoint, but I was unaware of the relationship until I got the intaglio plates for the later drypoints and I just started back working on the same ideas.

CC: What do the three drypoints of 1981 explain about the sculpture you were making at the time?

BN: They all refer to the models for large-scale underground pieces. The circles are underground spaces—tunnels and shafts—that you could walk around inside of if they were built to full scale. In the flat, open ones, the top edge is at ground level where you would enter and then walk down a slope toward the center of the piece.

When I was working on those prints, I originally wanted to start out by just making line drawings with the line functioning within the circular images. Then, after doing an edition like that, I planned to go back in and rework the plates to try to get them into large areas of dark and light where the lines wouldn't function so much. I wanted to see what would happen when I tried to make that change.

CC: If that was your original plan, why did you choose the intaglio process for these prints? The transition from linear to tonal would have been easier and more immediate in lithography.

BN: I had the idea that there would be a kind of precision involved in working with the tools on the metal plates. I like the kind of line you get in a drypoint—it functions in the way I want it to; it's different from the kind of line that I get when I work on a litho stone. In some ways I wanted to start out doing etchings instead, but the first plate I worked on was absolutely unsatisfactory. Slipping around on the plate with the ground on it was really uncomfortable. With drypoint, I like the resistance of the plate to the tool making marks.

CC: In the end, you chose not to rework the images from linear to tonal?

BN: Yes. At the time, I thought maybe that was the way of making the image—draw, print it, and then work on it again. But the completion of print-images is less clear to me than it is with drawing; I tend to think that I should work on a print more. Eventually, there just came a point in the project when it seemed finished in my mind.

CC: The title of *False Passage* implies its own impossibility—what were you exploring in this print?

BN: The image is an optical illusion; it's not a thing that can be made. It appears to be a description of something that could be made as a physical object, but it is forced to be only a drawing. Although appearing

to describe something, the print ends up being only itself because it no longer has a reference to sculpture or drawing.

CC: What made you decide to do another word-image print when you did *Malice* [PCR no. 37] in 1980?

BN: I don't know. I already had the idea to do a word-image when I went to work in the printshop at Ohio University. Actually, I had several in mind and they all dealt with the idea of human malice.

CC: How did it feel to switch from intaglio back to lithography? Was there any relearning of the thought and drawing process?

BN: Well, I had not drawn for quite awhile and we did have some trouble—we lost a couple of stones because of the etching procedures and another one broke in the press—but I enjoyed working on a stone again. Although I like the resistance of drypoint. I am more comfortable with stone and with the image I can get. Maybe that's the reason I never went back to rework the three drypoints of 1981.

CC: Why did you make a neon sign of the word “malice” (fig. 3.48) as well as the lithograph?

BN: I guess for the same reason I did the print—I really like the image.

CC: Your other neon works either extracted another word from the main word, like *Eat Death*, 1972, or formed a new word from the reversal of the main word, such as *Raw War*. Some neon pieces, like the *Perfect* group of 1973 and your 1967 *Window or Wall Sign* (see fig. 3.25), are just that—neon signs. Why does the word appear frontward and backward in *Malice*? The reverse of the word doesn't extend information or read as a pure sign, in fact, the information becomes somewhat confused.

BN: That is its intent—the malice of the situation—to make it hard to read, to be contrary. “Malice” is frontward and backward in the print, too, except there the words are on top of one another instead of superimposed.

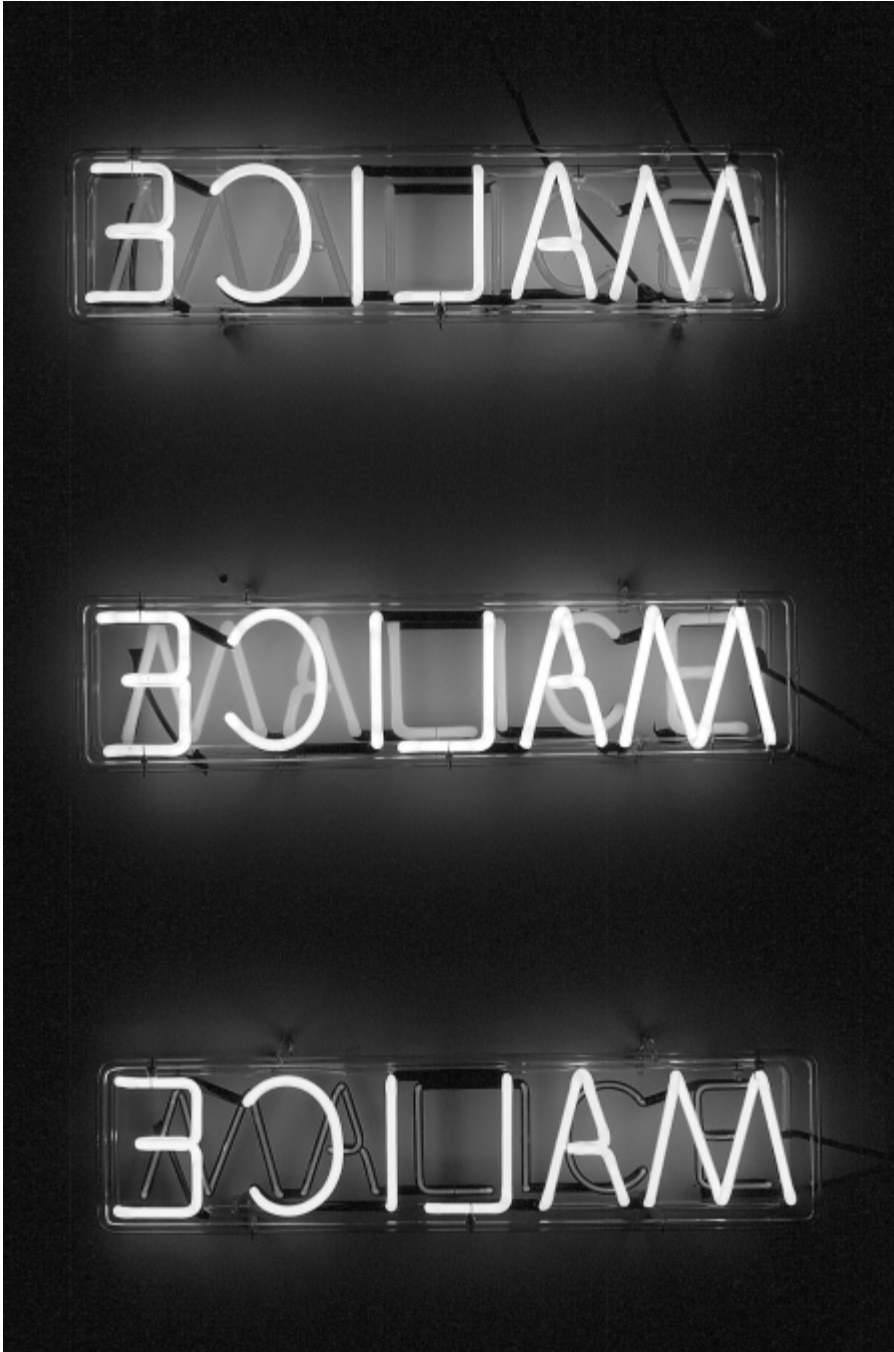


fig. 3.48

Malice, 1980. Neon tubing with clear glass tubing on suspension frame, three versions, edition of 3, 7 × 29 × 3 in. each. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

Actually, the words are different sizes in the neon piece and you have to look through it to see that the letters are not exactly superimposed.

CC: The green light of the neon becomes an intense white because of its saturation by the red neon light. What are your criteria for choosing color in the neon pieces?

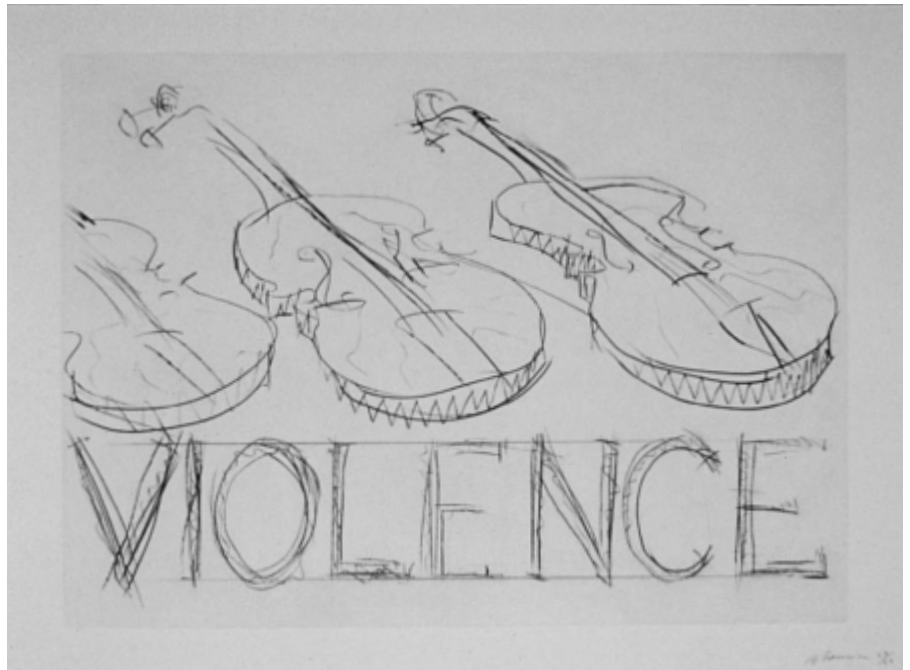
BN: I pick them so the color functions as color, although with the one-color pieces, it may be a symbolic choice. I like the fact that you can have very warm and very cold colors in neon, and I try to use these variables in combinations.

CC: What is the origin of the “mask” reference in the two 1981 lithographs *Life Mask* and *Pearl Masque* [PCR nos. 41 and 42]?

BN: I was thinking about the stone piece I did in Buffalo, New York (*The Consummate Mask of Rock*, 1975, which was first exhibited at the

fig. 3.49

Violins/Violence, 1985. Drypoint on paper, 28 × 39½ in, edition of 23.
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.



Albright-Knox Art Gallery) (see fig. 2.4). How does an artist present himself? What is masked and what is not—that tension between what is given and what is held back.

CC: There is an implied violence in your hanging chair pieces of the early 1980s (see figs. 3.36, 3.37, 3.38) and in some of the neon signs from the same period, like *Violins Violence Silence*, 1981–82 (see fig. 3.54) that is reflected in the 1985 drypoints *Violins/Violence* (fig. 3.49) and *Suspended Chair* [PCR no. 48]. Concurrently, the large, tiered neon word works, like *One Hundred Live and Die*, 1984 (see fig. 1.10), and the 1985 prints *Shit and Die* and *Live or Die* [PCR nos. 51–53], all seem by the nature of their word content to be about aggressive posturing. When your first figure neons were seen in 1985, the blatant violence and sexual combat that are depicted in them came as a real visual jolt—*Sex and Death* (fig. 3.50), for instance, or *Double Poke in the Eye II*. What were your developmental criteria through these shifts in your work?

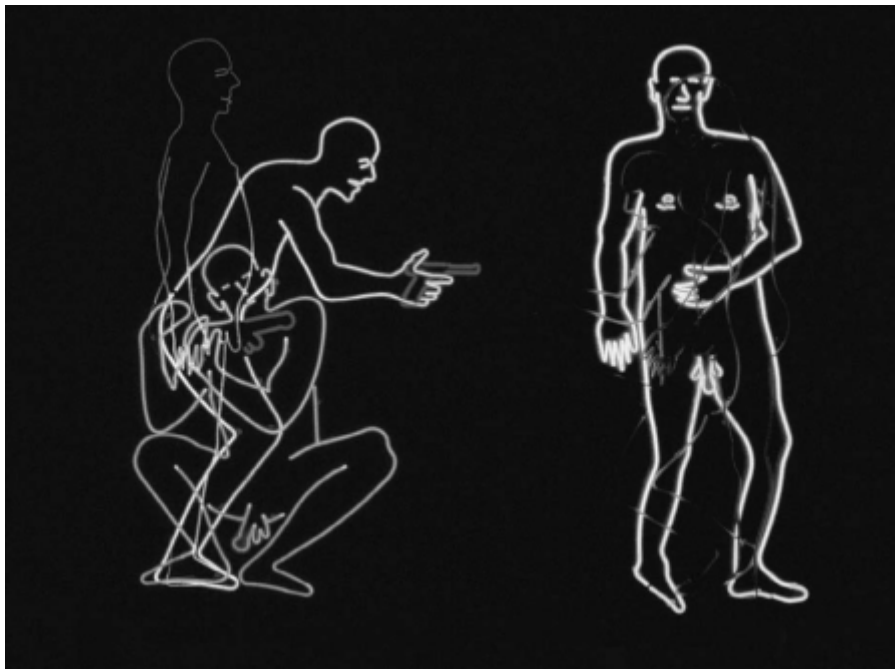


fig. 3.50

Sex and Death, 1985. Neon tubing mounted on aluminum monolith, 72 × 96 × 11½ in. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

BN: From the suspended chair pieces, it was just a natural progression. Instead of organizing a formalized plan with violence as a theme, it seemed more interesting to take the idea and just go with it—seeing what would happen when I moved forward and just made the work. With the figure neons, the timing sequence is very important—it becomes violent. The pace and repetition make it hard to see the figures, and although the figures are literally engaged in violent acts, the colors are pretty—so the confusion and dichotomy of what is going on are important, too.

CC: In 1988, the image of a clown appeared in the two lithographs *TV Clown* and *Clown Taking a Shit* [PCR nos. 55 and 56]. This is the first time that you have used a human figure in your printwork. What does the clown represent, and what are the origins of this image in your work?

BN: I did an earlier clown print at Gemini, but it has never been released. The basic idea came from the clown videotapes I did (*Clown Taking a Shit*, 1987, for example) (see fig. 3.39). Like the reference to a “mask,” the clown is another form of disguise. A similar kind of distancing was also used in my early videotapes when the human figure was shot from above or behind so it was more of an object than a personality. The traditional role of a clown is to be either funny or threatening—their position or function is ambiguous, and I like that.

CC: Your most recent work incorporates animal representation—as seen in *Hanging Carousel (George Skins a Fox)*, 1988 (fig. 3.51). Suspended from your carousel pieces are plastic replicas of skinned animal carcasses that are ordinarily used in taxidermy to facilitate the mounting of hides. Why are you using these manufactured surrogates, which clearly denote a dead presence?

BN: They are beautiful things. They are universally accepted, generic forms used by taxidermists yet they have an abstract quality that I really like.

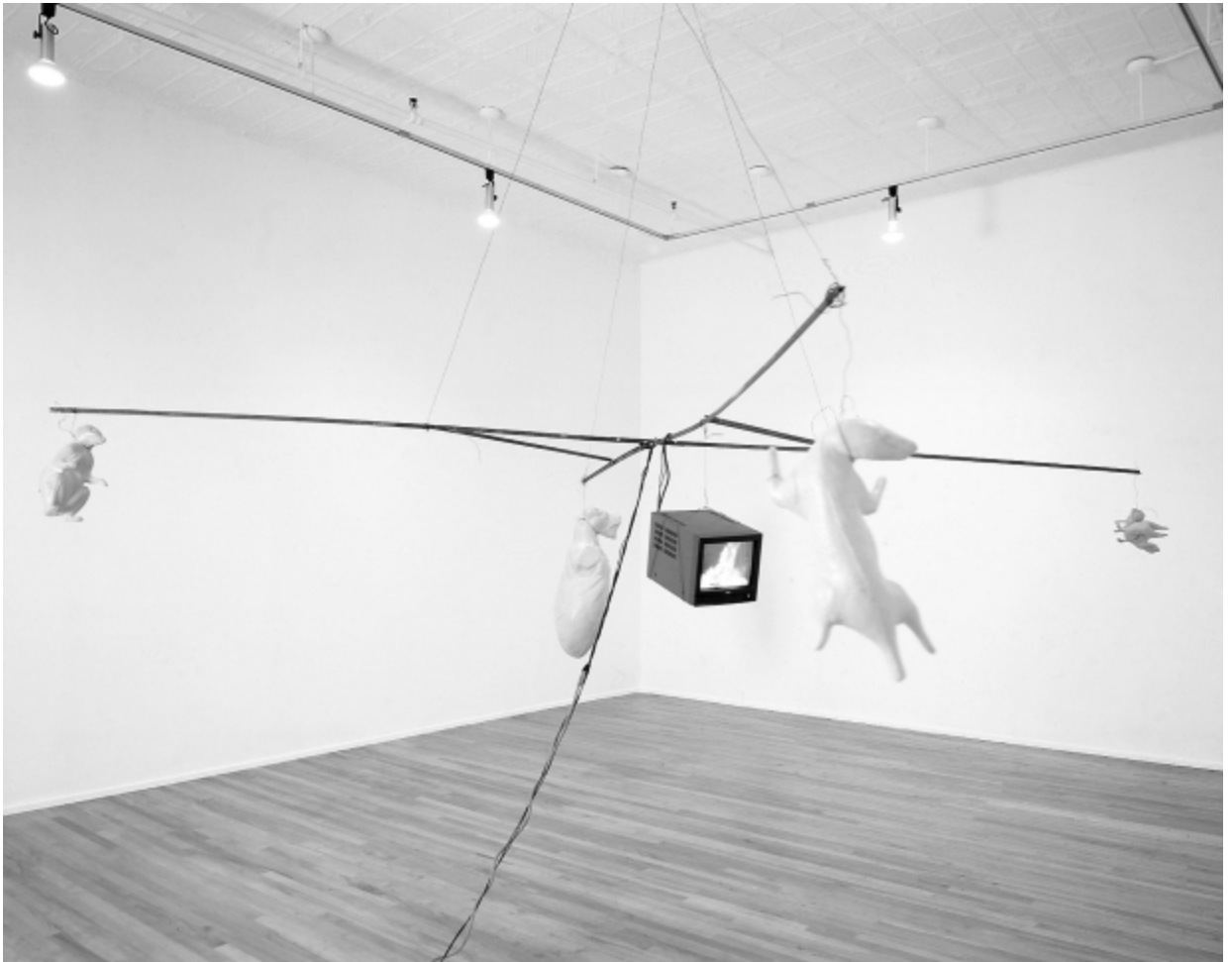


fig. 3.51

Hanging Carousel (George Skins a Fox), 1988. Steel, polyurethane foam, video monitor, videotape, 204 in. diameter, suspended 75 in. off floor. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

CC: Is there anything about the procedure of taxidermy which you relate to your personal methodology for making art?

BN: No, not particularly. The images in the two *Carousel* prints done in 1988 [PCR nos. 57 and 58], were based on standard taxidermy forms—still intact—like the ones used in the sculpture. But with the new prints that I'm working on now,⁹ the forms have been reassembled. I had some forms cast in metal and when they came back from the foundry they were cut in pieces, I guess because it was easier to cast them that way. The casts were around the studio for a while, and then I started putting them back together in different ways—rearranging them into new shapes that became more abstract.

CC: Has your relationship to printmaking changed over the years? Do you have any new concerns or objectives in the most recent works?

BN: I don't think so. I am a little clearer now about what I can do, but that is just because I've made more prints.

CC: Are there any underlying factors or goals encompassed in your total print involvement when seen as a complete group?

BN: I don't think I have ever tried looking at the prints just to see if they have any underlying relationship from one end to the other. When I think about doing art, I think about it as an investigation of the function of an artist, or the function of myself as an artist. Each piece of work is a result of what I do in the studio every day, year by year. I think: "How do you spend your life being an artist?" and I attempt to be honest with myself about that, while having some sort of moral or ethical position and some integrity about being an artist. Individual works point at this from different directions, so when you experience a body of work over a long period of time, you get a little more understanding of what an artist is.

NOTES

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1. Jane Livingston and Marcia Tucker, *Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965–1972* (Los Angeles and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1972).
2. The prints are abstracted renderings of Nauman's underground tunnel studies.
3. The print consists of three words/phrases—"suposter," "ters opus," and "short rest," the latter two written backwards—in a field of dark gray and thick black lines.
4. In the print, the boldly drawn words "Pay Attention Motherfuckers" are written backwards.
5. These include *Doe Fawn*, *M. Ampere*, *Normal Desires*, and the *Perfect* prints.
6. In this group are *Eat Death*, *Sugar Ragus*, *Clear Vision*, *Pay Attention*, *Suck Cuts*, and *Vision* (all 1973).
7. The prints included in this group are: *Help Me Hurt Me*, *Help Me Hurt Me (State)*, *Dead*, *Proof of Pudding*, *Ah Ha*, *Oiled Dead*, *Oiled Dead (State)*, *No Sweat*, and *Silver Grotto/Yellow Grotto* (all 1975).
8. See Part I: Writings (pp. 92–93 of this volume) for the complete text, *False Silences*.
9. The prints are all based upon the figure of the suspended horse, as in the *Carousel* sculpture illustrated here (see PCR nos. 62–68).

12. WAYS OF SEEING: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE NAUMAN, 1995

TONY OURSLER

From 1989 to 1995, virtually no interviews with Nauman appeared in print. This one, conducted by the artist Tony Oursler, took place on the occasion of Nauman's major traveling retrospective, organized by Neil Benezra and Kathy Halbreich at the Walker Art Center, which opened in 1994. The interview—which, according to Oursler, was approximately an hour long—was published in excerpted form. Although this final edited version is brief, it represents one of the few records of Nauman's public comments from the time of this important exhibition.¹

The introduction was written by Carlo McCormick, editor of Paper, the magazine in which the interview was first published.

BRUCE NAUMAN HAS had such a profound effect on a particular sensibility, a way of seeing, examining, and even questioning things, that those who are prone to think and wonder in those ways cannot help but rate him as one of the most significant influences on their lives. It's not Nauman's fault, of course, but much of the work he did, from the late '60s to the present, has really warped a lot of viewers. A visit to the Nauman exhibition, at the Museum of Modern Art, should go far in illustrating not only why this seminal body of conceptual gestures has been so influential, but how and who it has so deeply affected. While so much of what he has addressed, particularly his personal meditations on the body, has become central to the discourse of contemporary art, it is the fluidity with which he moves through such diverse mediums that is so amazing. His extremely experimental efforts in performance art, sculpture, installation, language, video and a variety of representational alternatives, from holograms to

neon, have provided a wealth of potent images and fertile ground for the imaginations of many contemporary artists. Beyond the obvious laudable aspects of bringing this relatively obscure Californian conceptualist into the public eye, there is also the fortuitous timing of a major touring retrospective of Nauman's work over the past 30 years—just when a younger generation of artists, whose vision owes much to Nauman's creative practices, are beginning to receive critical attention. A lot of what we like in artists such as Kiki Smith, Mike Kelley or Matthew Barney has to do with what they liked about Nauman. This certainly holds true for artist Tony Oursler, who was granted a rare interview with Nauman by phone from his New Mexico ranch.

Tony Oursler: Do you ever get artist's block?

Bruce Nauman: Yeah, several times. Somewhere in the early or middle '70s, I had a really serious one—the first one I'd ever really had. It was pretty scary, because you start thinking, "Well, now what am I going to do? I'll have to get a job." It lasted maybe six months. When I started working (again), the work didn't really change much from the work I did before. I still have kind of long ones from time to time.

TO: Did putting together your retrospective make you go back in time and think about all of the stuff that you hadn't really had to think about in a long time?

BN: I guess so. I'm not sure why, because some of the work I couldn't really relate to anymore at all. I couldn't even figure out why I did it or put myself in that kind of situation in any way; and other work was kind of interesting to look at because the thoughts appear in the work continually.

TO: What pieces did you have no connection with?

BN: I think the early fiberglass pieces and the rubber pieces. I could kind of remember why I did them and what I was thinking about, but it's not work

that interests me anymore. In fact, I told them if they're going to put it in the show, then they're totally responsible for figuring it out, because I can't.

TO: What does it feel like to have this huge block of stuff, which is somehow representing you personally, out there moving around?

BN: After a time, you train yourself that once the work is out of the studio, it's up to somebody else how it gets shown and where it gets shown. You can't spend all your time being responsible for how the work goes out in the world, so you do have to let go. What happens is that it starts to become overbearing and I catch myself getting frustrated and angry about the situation. Then I see that it's taken over, and then I can let go.

TO: You mentioned anger. I've been doing a lot of work with various ways that people relate to emotions and trying to put that in the work as a kind of barometer, which is something I've always found interesting in your work. Is a lot of it motivated by emotional states that you get in?

BN: I think so, although I'm always puzzled by this myself—trying to figure out where work comes from, what gets you to go and try and do work, what gets you in the studio. Roy Lichtenstein, when he first started doing comic-book paintings, said he didn't know what else to do. I just have to do something, so I do something and it might be really stupid, but I just can't think of anything else to do. Sometimes it even gets put aside because it's such a stupid idea, but oftentimes when I go back to it, it has a lot of power because it was created totally out of the need to make something.

TO: And then sometimes other works of yours seem very methodical.

BN: Yeah, I think I have to have work that is really justifiable and has reasons. I suppose that's the stuff that appears to be more methodical. Then you get caught up in that too much, then you think, "Gee, this is so self-important and so serious." You need to be able to be stupid and make mistakes, too.

TO: Speaking of being stupid, do you watch television at all?

BN: Not a huge amount. (My wife) Susan [Rothenberg] likes to watch “Seinfeld” because it’s her connection to New York. So that works. But if I watch it too often I get really annoyed with it. I used to like to watch baseball, but we don’t have baseball anymore. But I like to lie on the couch on Saturday or Sunday afternoon and fall asleep in front of some sort of ball game. It doesn’t seem to matter if it was baseball or football or whatever, I could always fall asleep. It was kind of nice.

TO: I was wondering: If you were, say, 25, a woman, and just got out of art school, what kind of work would you be making?

BN: I don’t see why I wouldn’t be doing the work I’m doing now. I remember saying many years ago to a friend that I wish I had spent more time hiking in the mountains when I was younger. Like I said, “When I was 18, I should have been doing that stuff.” He said, “Well, what the fuck are you talking about? Why can’t you do that now?” It’s just a stupid thing—of course I can do that now. So I did. Maybe if you’re not a well-known artist, if you don’t have the opportunity to show work, you might not do certain kinds of work. I’ve always felt that I’ve worked with whatever money’s been available and whatever equipment’s been available. You just do the work. Using those things as an excuse, like “I haven’t got the money or the equipment or the room,” are bad excuses for not doing work.

TO: You’ve always been attracted to using new technologies.

BN: When I did the holograms (see fig. 3.4), that was probably the most advanced I’ve ever gotten in terms of new technology. In general, I think I just use stuff that’s there. Sometimes you push a little bit, but not too much. It gets too expensive or too hard to find, then it’s just not interesting. But I was interested in having an object but not having an object, the 3-D stuff. It’s not gotten any easier for anyone to do that sort of work since that time.

TO: I have a really off question: Do you have any beliefs or experiences with UFOs?

BN: I've never had any experience. But there are people here (in New Mexico) who believe in them and think that they have a landing place where they actually go into the mountain. I've always been kind of curious about how I'd react if confronted with a being of some sort—if I'd be scared shitless or curious. I'm just waiting to see, I guess.

NOTES

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1. During the course of organizing the exhibition, curators Neil Benezra and Kathy Halbreich made several studio visits with Nauman and were in regular communication with the artist, but, according to Benezra, no formal recordings of these exchanges were made.



figs. 3.52, 3.53

Vices and Virtues, 1983–1988.
Neon tubing and clear glass tubing
mounted on aluminum support grid,
height 84 in. The Stuart Collection,
University of California, San Diego.
Courtesy Sperone Westwater
Gallery, New York.

13. BRUCE NAUMAN: VICES AND VIRTUES: INTERVIEW, 2001

JOAN SIMON

The following is the second of two interviews with Joan Simon reprinted in this volume. Here, Nauman discusses the sculpture commission he produced for the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego. The discussion provides insight into Nauman's public art projects and commissions—in particular, the controversies and setbacks that occur, as in the case of a neon text piece entitled Vices and Virtues. At the end of the interview, Nauman speaks about a new project he was beginning to work on—"videotaping various locations in the studio with infrared light and tracking the mice and the cat ... My working title is Fat Chance John Cage." The piece, which is titled Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage), is the subject of the next and final interview in the volume.

Joan Simon: Your project was first proposed to the Stuart Collection in 1983 and was completed in 1988. What happened in between?

Bruce Nauman: It took a long time, but dealing with Mary [Livingston Beebe, the Director of the Stuart Collection] and her staff was very good. The whole thing was well thought out; they made it easy for the artist to work. Dealing with institutions isn't always that straightforward. In my experience these things do take years. That was a long time, but I think it's probably not unusual.

The original proposal was to install the piece on the theater building, and we ran into some problems with that. I think most people thought it was okay, but some people connected with the theater didn't like the idea.

JS: Do you know the reason?

BN: No. Just didn't want it on the building. Then the back of the theater faces off-campus, and people who could see the back of the theater objected to the neon. We did all kinds of stuff—it would be turned off at 10 o'clock or 11, stuff like that—but it didn't fly.

Then a guy who was in charge of the building it's on now, this earthquake testing lab, basically volunteered the building. It was a new building at the time, they were just finishing it. He said, "Why don't you put it on my building, I'd like it." So at that point, given that this thing had been going on for a couple years by then, on and off, we figured that was going to be the best way to do it. That's how the piece got over there. My idea was that it would go around the top of the theater building; it made sense there. It doesn't have a reason to be on the lab building.

JS: The reason for it being on the theater?

BN: It was about human attributes that actors would have to deal with. It had a kind of theatrical function. But it didn't have a reason to be on the lab building, other than the fact that it was the only building where anybody wanted it and it could fit. There were a lot of politics that went on, and the thing about Mary was—at a certain point, in my experience with anybody else, they would have given up. But she just kept going. Once she wants to do something it's hard to stop her.

JS: Once the decision was made, how far along was the lab? Was it being built? Already built?

BN: I think it was just barely finished when I first saw it.

JS: This was the second big neon piece you'd put on the outside of a building, and like the first one, *Violins Violence Silence* (Exterior Version) (fig. 3.54) in Baltimore, it was initially conceived for a different site—but this piece is different, in that while the Baltimore piece is mounted on two solid exterior walls, this one is mounted so that it can be seen from all four sides, and from inside as well as outside the building.



fig. 3.54

Violins Violence Silence [Exterior Version], 1981–1982. Neon tubing with clear glass tubing suspension frame, height 48 in. The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

BN: Right. All around the top of the building is basically a big glass box. What they do in there is build structures and then stress them until they break, to figure out what it is that broke and how to build stronger, more earthquake-proof structures. It has to be a pretty big building so they can build sections of buildings inside it.

JS: The letters are seven feet high and six stories up.

BN: You can see them from the inside because of the glass, but you can also see them from the outside. You can see all the way through the building, so you can see the front side and the back side of the letters.

JS: You can see the words on opposite sides of the building at the same time. You've used the vices and virtues in a number of projects—was this the first?

BN: It was, in fact. We got a graduate student to do research, because when I started thinking about the seven vices and the seven virtues, I thought, it's got to be written down somewhere exactly what they are, probably in the Bible. But it's not, at least not in that form. There are places where you can find a list of vices and virtues, but they're not even called that. They're all kind of different. The earliest written stuff is probably Jewish, at least the ones we could find. So there are lists like that, but they don't necessarily follow the ones that we think of.

JS: How did you finally pick the ones for your project?

BN: Well, we kind of did what seemed to be the more modern amalgamation. Maybe Mary still has some files that show how we finally got a list.

The other thing we tried to find—because I thought, well, green is envy, everybody knows that one—was that maybe someplace, maybe during the Middle Ages, there would have been some kind of codification of the colors with the various vices and virtues. There didn't seem to be any list of those things either, except for a couple; I thought that's got to be there,

that sort of medieval iconography, but it's not. I used associations where I could find them, but otherwise they're kind of arbitrary.

JS: Did you do the initial search for the words because you were looking for a text specifically for the theater building? Or did you have them in mind completely separate from that building, and before it became a potential site.

BN: No, I had the idea of doing some sort of frieze on a building. I looked at the library because it's not uncommon to have authors' names there. And on theaters you'd have playwrights' names. I thought it would be interesting to use these descriptions of human traits, rather than authors.

JS: The vices move in a counterclockwise direction around the building and the virtues—

BN: go clockwise—

JS: and they go slower.

BN: Yeah, they have a different rate, so that the combinations differ. Random pairs appear. And at some point they all go on together.

JS: I don't remember this kind of ribboning before—your neons have advanced with the technology of the industry. The '60s and early '70s works have comparatively simple on-off configurations. Then when you returned to the medium after the Baltimore Museum survey of the neon works in '82, the switching systems became mechanically quite complex, and by the end of the '80s you were using a computer system.

BN: Yeah. Boy.

JS: What kind of system now runs the synchronization, the pattern, the dance of these letters?

BN: It's fairly simple: it's electronic switches. Neon really went out of style for a long time. When I first started to do it again, all that was really

available was mechanical switches, which would always go out of sync and wear out, break, and stuff like that. Then when neon began to get popular again, all that electronic stuff was available. It was so much simpler. You could do very complicated stuff and basically just program it with the chip in there. It didn't get out of sync, it kept time, and you could do all that. It made it a lot simpler, a lot more precise. I was able to use all this stuff without sitting around with a screwdriver adjusting everything all the time.

JS: The Stuart Collection *Vices and Virtues* has the computerized electronics?

BN: Yeah.

JS: Even before the Baltimore neon piece came a proposal to mount a neon sign around a building for your first retrospective, in '72, at the L. A. County Museum of Art. Both the Baltimore project and the L. A. project were rejected along the way.

BN: Which one was the one in L. A.?

JS: *La Brea/Art Tips/Rat Spit/Tar Pits*. The proposal was for a sign that could be seen from the nearby La Brea tar pits. The wordplay uses the name of that site for an anagrammatic art-world commentary, and the words themselves were supposed to encircle the L. A. County Museum building.

BN: And I did a proposal for, which school was it? It was for a new music building, a concert hall.

JS: That concert hall was supposed to be for Long Beach State College, and got canceled after it had been fairly—

BN: We got pretty far along with that before they decided they didn't want to do it. The entrance lobby had glass on the exterior, big glass windows. That proposal (*Violins Violence Silence*) was to hang in the window, and

you would be able to see it from the inside and the outside. It did get built that way.

JS: Only later, at the time of the Baltimore survey of neons.¹ In a way, the relationship of the words to the concert hall in that work, and then the change to the art museum, is something like the relationship of the words to the theater at UCSD, and then the switch to a different building where the words have no context. When you installed the piece in Baltimore, the triangular format had changed, and you put it up—

BN: on a horizontal.

JS: And on two walls. Rather than making the words encircle the building, you superimposed them, as well as executing one set backward (in mirror writing, to be clearer), and the other set “normally”—written forward.

BN: Yeah, reversed. Because the initial conception was that it would be hanging in a window, so you'd see it from both sides and have that confusion of forward and backward.

JS: You gave the Stuart Collection a set of drawings to consider as your proposal. Do you remember those, or what were you trying to indicate in them?

BN: They were scale drawings of the words. In one or two drawings I drew the building and how the words would be placed, on which sides of the building. It was like a plan view of the building and then the words were drawn on each side, or next to each side.

JS: Subsequently you've done variations of *Vices and Virtues*—in stone, in drawings: in English and also in German.

BN: There was a small-scale neon (*Seven Vices and Seven Virtues*, 1983). I think the letters were a foot or ten inches high. That was meant to go around the inside of a room, installed up high, near the ceiling. Then

there was a stone version. Then there was a German stone version. Then the full-scale drawings of that.

JS: In the past two years you have again been working almost exclusively on public, outdoor, commissioned works. These public pieces seem to have a pattern of being rejected before being built—how have the recent ones gone?

BN: Well, the one at Bellingham [Washington, *Stadium Piece*, 1999] actually went quite well. But that one was (originally) for the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, and got rejected (*Stadium*, 1983). It sort of sat around in various guises for a long time and got rethought.

JS: The other public piece you've recently completed is a staircase, but I think it was developed specifically for its site.

BN: The one at [collectors] Steve and Nancy Oliver's [*Stairway*, 2000]. That's pretty different, dealing with an individual or a couple like that. You don't have anyone else to deal with; once you agree to go ahead, it just goes.

JS: You worked in neon and video in the late '60s and early '70s, and after about a ten-year hiatus returned to both. You returned to video again in the '90s, but not neon. Are you thinking about any neon works right now?

BN: No. The last one that almost came up was the piece I did, *Partial Truth*, when Konrad (Fischer) [of Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf] was dying. It was the year that Susan [Rothenberg] and I had sublet a loft in New York. Konrad had heard about that. He called and said, "Bruce, I hear you're moving to New York." I said, "No, well maybe partly. This is partly true." And he said, "This is a piece. We'll make this piece." So I didn't really think about it very much, but I did make a drawing. By the time I'd made a drawing, he'd already made plans to have it made in neon. Then he died before anything got done. I didn't really want to do it in neon; it seemed

appropriate to do it in stone. That was the last tiny thing that almost got done in neon.

JS: Are there other public projects you're thinking about at the moment?

BN: No.

JS: What are you doing?

BN: I've been videotaping various locations in the studio with infrared light and tracking the mice and the cat. I've got about forty hours of tape of them now. My working title is *Fat Chance John Cage*.

JS: I remember where that came from (laughter)—the invitation to participate in a memorial exhibition for John Cage, and your faxed response, which was your participation.²

BN: It's interesting, the mice and the cat. So far I've never gotten a picture of the cat catching a mouse. I have had a picture of the cat in the frame at the same time as there was a mouse in the frame, but they saw each other at the same time and the mouse got away. So, we'll see.

JS: What are you going to do with it?

BN: I don't know. My intention right now would be to get about six hours in six locations and then it would be a continuous, life-size or larger-than-life-size projection of each location for six hours. I guess you could sit there for six hours and watch the cat and the mice come and go, or hear the dogs barking outside and the coyotes once in a while. Or you could come and go, whatever.

JS: What does infrared light make it look like?

BN: Sort of a gray-green color. Not very green, but greenish. Which I might start altering, I don't know. It's kind of a restful color. The other thing it does, the way this camera works, in order to get enough light to have some brightness and clearness to the picture, it's almost like a stop-action.

What it does is it stacks up six, seven images, and then you view it. So you get this strange kind of stop-action deal.

JS: What's the camera?

BN: It's a little digital camera you can buy that's built to pick up infrared.

JS: What would it usually be used for?

BN: I don't know why they put that on there.

JS: Why would somebody be taking infrared pictures if they weren't looking for mice and cats at night?

BN: I don't know. It lets you take pictures in what they call the dark. You don't need any other light. It's got a little infrared light on it, you can't see it, so you can shoot in the dark.

JS: Actually it reminds me of the flashing neons in the dark—the words catching up with each other in *Vices and Virtues*—and also of your early photos in the dark, where you twirled a flashlight and captured the image. You called them light traps.

BN: Yeah.

JS: The cat-and-mouse game sounds great.

BN: It's very amusing, kind of pretty. Every night I shoot an hour and then I view it. I've been taking notes, writing down the times when the mouse appears and disappears. Sometimes there are only two or three events an hour, sometimes there are flurries of activity where there's a mouse in and out of the picture every minute for half an hour. I've got a logbook with all this stuff.

NOTES

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1. The exterior neon work, *Violins Violence Silence*, permanently mounted on the Baltimore Museum of Art, along with the smaller, interior version of the same name, were both originally conceived for a commission at Long Beach State College. The commission was subsequently canceled, and the works were later realized on the occasion of a retrospective of Nauman's neons at the Baltimore Museum in 1982. (See WCR nos. 299, 300.)

2. (Bruce Nauman's response to an invitation to participate in a memorial John Cage exhibition at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, in 1992, was a witty fax that, honoring the master of chance operations, said: "Fat Chance." This typical Nauman wordplay was his contribution to the show, and was not—as one might interpret it if taking the words at face value—a refusal to participate. [JS])



fig. 3.55

Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage), 2001. Seven color DVDs, players, projectors, 5 hours 45 mins. each. Installation view, Dia Center for the Arts, New York (January 10–July 27, 2002). Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

14. BRUCE NAUMAN INTERVIEW, 2001

MICHAEL AUPING

In the following, curator Michael Auping discusses Nauman's new video installation, Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage) (fig. 3.55), exhibited at the Dia Art Center in New York from January 9–June 16, 2002. The two other parts, or related pieces—entitled Mapping the Studio II with color shift, flip, flop, & flip/flop (Fat Chance John Cage) All Action Edit (2001), and Office Edit II with color shift, flip, flop, & flip/flop (Fat Chance John Cage) Mapping the Studio (2001)—were presented in a second exhibition at Sperone Westwater Gallery (June 6–July 27, 2002). Both consist of a series of DVDs, shot with special infrared cameras, screened as large-scale projections on the walls of a room. In the first version, Mapping the Studio I, the tapes are played in numbing real-time (the total length being just under six hours long), so that the beholder, depending upon when he or she enters the room of projections, may or may not see any movement or incident: the appearance of either the mouse or cat—or the occasional moth—thus being a matter of chance. In contrast, the second version, Mapping the Studio II, consists of an “all action edit,” as Nauman indicates in his witty, unwieldy title: the five and three-quarter hours of tape having been edited down into more manageable sequences, ranging from a half hour to just over one hour, in which the filmic “action” occurs. Together, the works explore the effects and experience of time—a subject continually addressed by Nauman over the course of his career.

Michael Auping: So what triggered the making of this piece, and how long did you think about it before you actually began to make it?

Bruce Nauman: Well, I was working on the Oliver [collectors Steve and Nancy Oliver] *Staircase* piece and I had finished up the *Stadium* piece in Washington and I was trying to figure out what the next project would be. I was trying to come up with something out of those ideas, thinking about where those ideas might lead me next, and I really wasn't getting

anywhere. Those pieces had pretty much finished off a line of thought and it didn't make sense to try and extend it. So a year or so ago I found myself going in the studio and just being frustrated that I didn't have any new ideas to work on. What triggered this piece were the mice. We had a big influx of field mice that summer, in the house and in the studio. They were everywhere and impossible to get rid of. They were so plentiful even the cat was getting bored with them. I'd be sitting in the studio at night reading and the cat would be sitting with me and these mice would run along the walls and the cat and I would watch. I know he'd caught a few now and then because I'd find leftover parts on the floor in the morning.

So I was sitting around the studio being frustrated because I didn't have any new ideas and I decided that you just have to work with what you've got. What I had was this cat and the mice and I did have a video camera in the studio that happened to have infrared capability. So I set it up and turned it on at night when I wasn't there, just to see what I'd get. At the time, I remember thinking about Daniel Spoerri's piece for a book. I believe it's called *Anecdotal Photography of Chance* [*An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, 1966]. You know, he would photograph or glue everything down after a meal so that what you had were the remains. For the book, a friend of his did the subtext, writing about the leftovers on the table after Spoerri had preserved them. He wrote about every cigarette butt, piece of foil, utensil, the wine and where it came from, etc. It made me think that I have all this stuff laying around the studio, leftovers from different projects and unfinished projects and notes. And I thought to myself why not make a map of the studio and its leftovers. Then I thought it might be interesting to let the animals, the cat and the mice, make the map of the studio. So I set the camera up in different locations around the studio where the mice tended to travel just to see what they would do amongst the remnants of the work. So that was the genesis. Then as I got more involved I realized I needed seven locations to really get a sense of this map. The camera

was eventually set up in a sequence that I felt pretty much mapped the space.

MA: So the final piece is six hours long? How did you decide on that length, as opposed to eight hours or two hours?

BN: Well, it felt like it needed to be more than an hour or two, and then I thought if it's going to be that long then it should be . . . well, it just felt like it needed to be long so that you wouldn't necessarily sit down and watch the whole thing, but you could come and go, like some of those old Warhol films. I wanted that feeling that the piece was just there, almost like an object, just there, ongoing, being itself. I wanted the piece to have a real-time quality rather than fictional time. I like the idea of knowing it is going on whether you are there or not.

MA: It seems to me this relates to that early *Pacing the Studio* piece [*Pacing Upside Down*, 1969]. Do you see that?

BN: Somewhat. It generally goes back to that idea that when you don't know what to do, then whatever it is you are doing at the time becomes the work.

MA: In that sense, it also relates to your last video *Setting a Good Corner*.

BN: Yeah.

MA: So the fact that you've done two in a row means that you don't have any more ideas.

BN: (laughter) I guess there's nothing left.

MA: Tell me about the subtitle. I think the reference to Cage is fairly clear in terms of the open-ended character of the piece, but why the words "Fat Chance"?

BN: Well, when I chose the seven spots, I picked them because I knew there was mouse activity, assuming that the cat would occasionally show

up too. So the given area that I would shoot over a certain period became a kind of stage. That's how I thought of it. So, when nothing was happening, I wanted it to still be interesting. These areas or stages, if you will, tend to be empty in the middle. So that became the performance area and the performers are the bugs, the mice and the cat. So the performance is just a matter of chance when the performers are going to show up and what is going to happen.

"Fat Chance," which I think is just an interesting saying, refers to a response for an invitation to be involved in an exhibition. Some time ago, Anthony d'Offay was going to do a show of John Cage's scores, which are often very beautiful. He also wanted to show work by artists that were interested in or influenced by Cage. So he asked if I would send him something that related. Cage was an important influence for me, especially his writings. So I sent d'Offay a telegram that said "FAT CHANCE JOHN CAGE." D'offay thought it was a refusal to participate. I thought it was the work, but he didn't get it so—

MA: So along with the debris in the studio, you're reusing an earlier work in the title as well.

BN: Yeah.

MA: Let me ask you about the issue of cutting and editing for this piece. You refer to Cage, which is about indeterminacy and chance, and you do the piece with that kind of inspiration, and then you go in and cut and edit it—

BN: No. I didn't. It's all real time. The only thing that comes into play in regards to what you're saying is that I only had one camera and I could only shoot one hour a night. So it's a compilation. There's forty-two hours altogether. So it's forty-two nights. The shooting went from late August through late November or early December. I didn't shoot every night. Before I went to bed at night I would go out to the studio and turn the

camera on and then in the morning I'd go out and see what had happened. And I'd make a log of what happened each night.

MA: But you have flipped or reversed and then colonized some of the scenes.

BN: Right. There are two versions of the piece. In the first version, nothing has been manipulated, no flips, reverses or color changes. In the second version, there are color changes and flips and reverses. Then there is also a third. I'd show the piece to Susan [Rothenberg] and she'd get really bored with it and say "Why don't you cut out all of the stuff where nothing is happening?" And I'd say, well, that's kind of the point of the piece. And then she said "Well, obviously that's what you should do then," precisely because it is contrary to the piece. So I did do a kind of "all action" edit. So the six hours gets cut down to forty minutes or an hour.

MA: How did you decide what color to use and when to reverse or flip an image? Was it generally a matter of composition or highlighting certain scenes?

BN: Both. In terms of the colors, I wanted to run through the rainbow, but it ended up having a kind of quiet color. It changes from a red to a green to a blue and then back to red over fifteen or twenty minutes. But it changes at a very slow rate. You can't quite see the color changing. In each of the seven images it's changing at different times so you have a lot of different colors at any given moment. It's a quiet rainbow. The flips and the flops are fairly arbitrary at about fifteen minutes apart. It's a way of keeping the eye engaged, to give the whole thing a kind of texture throughout.

MA: In terms of reading this symbolically, were you thinking of the cat as a surrogate for the artist, chasing mouse/muse?

BN: Not really. I was interested in the relationship between the two of them, but more in a psychological way. Their relationship exists as a sort of a paradox between a joke and reality. They've been cartoon characters for

so long that we think of them as light-hearted performers, but there is this obvious predator-prey tension between them. I wanted to create a situation that was slightly unclear as to how you should react. I think there are parts that are humorous and there are parts that are not at all. But those are glimpses that you might or might not catch. The overall effect is ambiguous, maybe a little anxious. Then you can hear the dogs barking once in awhile and the coyotes howling now and again. So there is also an element of what's going on inside and what's going on outside, which I like. There are also two locations on the tape of the different doors in the studio. One door goes into the office and two doors go outside and most of the time during the taping I could keep those doors open because it was still warm. Sometimes you can see the reflections of the cat's eyes outside through the screen door. The mice also go inside and outside because there is a hole in one of the screens and they could come and go. Throughout the piece there is an outside-inside dialogue that deals with being in the studio with all this activity going on, and then being aware of a larger nature going on outside that space.

MA: What kind of emotion do you associate with this piece? If you had to assign it an emotion, what would it be?

BN: I don't know about an emotion. What I've felt in watching it is almost a meditation. Because the projection image is fairly large, if you try and concentrate on or pay attention to a particular spot in the image, you'll miss something. So you really have to not pay attention and not concentrate and allow your peripheral vision to work. You tend to get more if you just scan without seeking. You have to become passive, I think.

MA: There's a kind of forlorn beauty about the piece, almost a pathos. This may sound, well, you just turned 60 so you are now making what curators and art historians call "the late work." Is there any thought here in regards to reviewing yourself?

BN: (laughter) I guess it's late work. I hope it's not too late. Maybe in the sense that there's ten years of stuff around the studio and I'm using the leftovers, but I've always tended to do that anyway. Pieces that don't work out generally get made into something else. This is just another instance of using what's already there.

MA: Well, I was also thinking about the fact that the camera is an extension of your eye. In the primary sense, you are the observer. We are following you watching yourself.

BN: That's true. There are times when I "see myself," as you put it, and times when I don't. There are times when I just see the space, and it's the space of the cat and the mice, not necessarily my space. On the other hand, I've had to re-look at all of this stuff before it finally gets put on the DVDs—and I'd forgotten that I'd done this, but the spaces that I'd shot, because I wasn't shooting every night, every hour the cameras move just a little bit. The image changes a little bit every hour regardless of any action that's taking place. I was working in the studio during the day all that time. I would unconsciously move things around. Maybe organize a few things—what you do in a studio when you're not supposedly making art. So the areas that I was shooting tended to get cleaner or have fewer objects in them over the period of the six hours. I thought that was kind of interesting. It didn't occur to me when I was doing it, but then I went to SITE Santa Fe and saw Ed Ruscha's film *Miracle*. In the garage as he gets more precise, the garage gets cleaner and cleaner and he gets cleaner as the film goes on. The film made me think that I had done the same thing unconsciously.

MA: Since I haven't seen the final cut, I'm curious how the piece ends.

BN: It ends pretty much how it starts. It begins with a title and a few credits, and then basically it just starts and then it ends. No crescendo, no fade, no "The End." It just stops, like a long slice of time, just time in the studio.

NOTE

Edited excerpts of this interview, modified as a series of independent reflections by Nauman, along with a brief introduction by Auping, were published in the article "A Thousand Words: Bruce Nauman Talks About Mapping the Studio," *Artforum* 40 (March 2002): 120–121. Reprinted with permission, Michael Auping.

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