which ensures that the objects represented are a little larger than life, as if seen
close-up, intimately, and by their alignment close to the gallery floor which allows
illusory space to extend almost seamlessly into depth beyond the actual space of
the room. Moreover, since the speakers are located on the perimeter of the room,
recorded sound merges almost imperceptibly with local ambient noise. Sound from
different projections, from different moments of past time, overlaps, blending and
melding indistinguishably with occasional passing events. Eventually, the illusory
and actual prove inseparable, almost indistinguishable.

The ear is prey to that which surrounds it; it cannot block out or refocus as readily
as the eye. Sound always places the listener inevitably in the middle of a situation.
Opening up to “infinite” hearing can change the soul and not just understanding,
sparring with the older man’s legacy. Fat Chance John Cage reads as both an affec-
tionately retort and an equivocal tribute, for all unfort at night, in the darkest reaches of
the mind/studio, in a world neither visible to sight nor to rational, investigative
study. Invaded by stealthy creatures who run amok, feral and savvy, impervious to the
domesticated feline, this murky milieu takes on noirish overtones, presaging events
at once unpredictable, unanswerable, frightening, and unknowable—events whose sole
witness will be the surveillance camera. Invested with humor that is as black as it
is bleak, as absurd as it is droll, Mapping the Studio I insinuates an unexpectedly
disturbing register in what is proving to be the abiding thematic in Nauman’s art.

Notes
1. In his notes on Mapping the Studio I, Nauman states: “The presentation should be in a room
about twenty-five by fifty feet with a twelve-foot ceiling and necessary entrance and exit. The
projected images are about eight feet high by ten feet six inches wide and ordered as they
were in the studio, three images on each of the long walls and one image on one short wall.

2. Nauman, “Keeping It Apart: A Conversation with Bruce Nauman,” by Chris Dercon, Parkett,

3. Ibid., p. 87.

4. This subtitle was initially conceived as a work by Nauman for an exhibition planned by the
Anthony d’Offay Gallery in London in memory of John Cage. When asked for a contribution to this
never-realized exhibition, Nauman faxed this in reply.
Bruce Nauman: Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)

Art is a means of acquiring an investigative attitude.
—Bruce Nauman

Bruce Nauman's studio two summers ago. In response, he bought an inexpensive video camera and an infrared lamp to track their nocturnal activity. In late August, he began recording, having established seven camera positions that mapped junctions of wall and floor around the perimeter of the studio, a prefabricated building on his ranch near Galisteo, New Mexico. Continuing to shoot intermittently over the next three months, he amassed some forty-five hours of footage. During the following year, he edited this material, compressing it onto DVDs whose duration, five hours forty-five minutes, happens fortuitously to equal that of the daily opening hours of Dia, where the work has its debut. Consequently, a full "screening" takes place every day, no looping is involved.

For this presentation of Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage), 2001, Nauman has overlaid his studio onto the gallery. Using the distance between pilasters on the building's east and west walls as a fixed dimension for the seven projections, he arranges them around the room to mimic the original camera placement. The murky tonalities are integral to infrared tape. The jittery uncoiling is caused by technical limitations; large quantities of information cannot be seamlessly assimilated and can only be incrementally absorbed, stored, and then released. Each projection is accompanied by its own stereo soundtrack, which consists mostly of ambient noise: trees rustling in a gale, a heavy rainstorm, the occasional barking of a dog, a train passing in the distance, a cat's plaintive meow. Pinned to the entrance wall of the gallery, a log charts the key visual and aural events within each projection, serving as a temporal and spatial map within. Standard office stools that roll and swivel offer long-term viewers the opportunity to rest as they wait and watch for who knows what.

The studio reveals evidence of daily activity as well, accumulated residues of past work. Storage crates, molds for cast pieces, tools, and sundry off-cuts cohabit with a pair of Nauman's signature heads, a partially obscured reclining figure, plus drawings and sketches for various projects; some finished, others abandoned. Perusing only one day during the day, this paraphernalia shifts around or even disappears: the ladder, for example, is removed midway through the cycle; the bolt mat is propped upright against a wall; and the screen door shuts, preparing the camera for the weather's demands. Washes of video cassette, and several monitors create a kind of axis near the center of the room—"the site for reviewing the previous nights' footage." Occasionally, a blurred figure can be glimpsed crossing the camera's skyline, as the artist exits the room after having inserted a new cassette into the camera. Odd motifs and other insects interrupt the static mise-en-scène; their brief trajectories inning eerie staccato gestures. But the real stars are Toons—the tailless, hairless mice bred from the standard Strassburger strain in which certain mutations had been induced. They scamper, scurry, and roam, sometimes freezing momentarily, their eyes glowing incandescent as they glance unfurlingly into the camera before resuming their self-appointed tasks.

Mapping the Studio I reprises key themes and preoccupations Nauman has mined and honed over a career spanning more than thirty years—with the telling difference that the results, paradoxically, will tend to be disarmingly nonchalant, deceptively rough-edged, is part of the pleasure of resolving a sculptural conundrum or realizing an insight. Nauman continually refines his aesthetic by skeptically and rigorously scrutinizing his own practice, its precepts and premises. In a gesture as wryly self-mocking as it is deeply imperious praxis approached more closely the activities of a protagonist in a Samuel Beckett play than it did the standard Life magazine profile of a great artist driven by passion and instinct, be it Picasso or Pollock. The struggle to conceive a work of art, these typically low-key, low-budget endeavors implied, is more likely to involve hours of tedious repetitive activity or bleak periods of seemingly fruitless inactivity than macho manipulations of recyclable material, virtuosic displays of craftmanship, or transcendent insights. But in respect of whatever enters the artist's field of vision, he remains self-determined, the discipline of limited means in his case stimulates, concentration, and flair. That the results, paradoxically, will tend to be disarmingly nonchalant, deceptively rough-edged, is part of the pleasure of resolving a sculptural conundrum or realizing an insight. Nauman continually refines his aesthetic by skeptically and rigorously scrutinizing his own practice, its precepts and premises. In a gesture as wryly self-mocking as it is deeply imperious praxis approached more closely the activities of a protagonist in a Samuel Beckett play than it did the standard Life magazine profile of a great artist driven by passion and instinct, be it Picasso or Pollock. The struggle to conceive a work of art, these typically low-key, low-budget endeavors implied, is more likely to involve hours of tedious repetitive activity or bleak periods of seemingly fruitless inactivity than macho manipulations of recyclable material, virtuosic displays of craftmanship, or transcendent insights. But in respect of whatever enters the artist's field of vision, he remains self-determined, the discipline of limited means in his case stimulates, concentration, and flair. That the results, paradoxically, will tend to be disarmingly nonchalant, deceptively rough-edged, is part of the pleasure of resolving a sculptural conundrum or realizing an insight. Nauman continually refines his aesthetic by skeptically and rigorously scrutinizing his own practice, its precepts and premises. In a gesture as wryly self-mocking as it is deeply imperious praxis approached more closely the activities of a protagonist in a Samuel Beckett play than it did the standard Life magazine profile of a great artist driven by passion and instinct, be it Picasso or Pollock. The struggle to conceive a work of art, these typically low-key, low-budget endeavors implied, is more likely to involve hours of tedious repetitive activity or bleak periods of seemingly fruitless inactivity than macho manipulations of recyclable material, virtuosic displays of craftmanship, or transcendent insights. But in respect of whatever enters the artist's field of vision, he remains self-determined, the discipline of limited means in his case stimulates, concentration, and flair. That the results, paradoxically, will tend to be disarmingly nonchalant, deceptively rough-edged, is part of the pleasure of resolving a sculptural conundrum or realizing an insight.

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