

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.

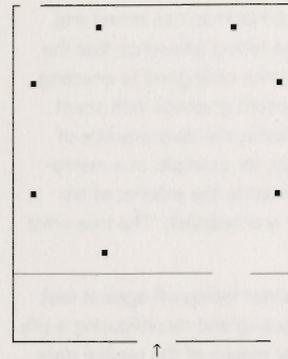
The ear is prey to that which surrounds it; it cannot block out or refocus as readily as the eye. Sound always places the listener inevitably in the middle of a situation. Opening up to "infinite" hearing can change the soul and not just understanding, John Cage asserted in his idealistic approach to aural experience. Acting as if sound were a purely formal phenomenon, as if it were not social, as if it did not partake in semiotics, he advocated the use of random procedures as structuring and compositional methodologies to expand and enrich consciousness. Via both his writings and his works, Cage proved inspirational to Nauman, as he acknowledges: "It had to do with the attitude involved in transforming normal activity into a formal presentation."³ A quip as comical as it is challenging, the subtitle of his new work reveals him sparring with the older man's legacy. *Fat Chance John Cage* reads as both an affectionate retort and an equivocal tribute,⁴ for all unfurls 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, ungovernable, uncanny, 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.

L.C.

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. The scale of the projected images is approximately life-size at the floor-wall junction which generally splits to 1/2 floor, 1/2 wall." In the event, he modified this model, tailoring it to the actualities of Dia's gallery.
2. Nauman, "Keeping It Apart: A Conversation with Bruce Nauman," by Chris Dercon, *Parkett*, no. 10 (1986), p. 55.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
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.

site map and checklist



Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage), 2001
seven video projections with sound
5 hours 45 minutes
Collection of the artist

Bruce Nauman was born in 1941 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. After studying at the University of Wisconsin from 1964 to 1965, he acquired an MFA from the University of California in Davis in 1966. Following his debut show in 1966 at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles, he has exhibited widely in North America and Europe, including in Documenta IV (1968), V (1972), and VII (1982), and in the Whitney biennials of 1984, 1991, and 1997. During the 1980s, several major large-scale exhibitions toured, principally in Europe. In 1994–95, a retrospective was organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. In 1999, he was awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale. Nauman lives and works in New Mexico, where he moved in 1979, developing a professional interest in horse breeding and training.

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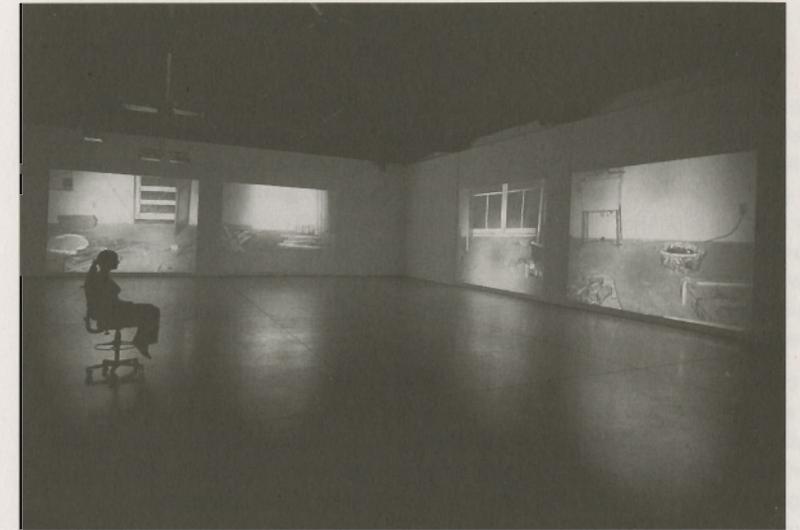
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Bruce Nauman

Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)

January 10–July 27, 2002



cover photo: Stuart Tyson

Dia center for the arts
545 west 22nd street new york

Bruce Nauman Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)

Art is a means of acquiring an investigative attitude.

—Bruce Nauman

Mice invaded 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.¹ Using the distance between pilasters on the building's east and west walls as a fixed dimension for the seven projections, he arranged them around the room to mimic the original camera placement. The murky tonalities are integral to infrared tape. The jittery unfolding 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 rain-storm, 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 corollary to the 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 as 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. Depending on the work carried out during the day, this paraphernalia shifts around or even disappears: the ladder, for example, is removed midway through the cycle; the bobcat mold is propped upright against a wall; and the screen door shuts, presumably as the weather cooled. A couple of chairs, stacks of video cassettes, and several monitors create a kind of oasis 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 sightline, as the artist exits the room after having inserted a new cassette into the camera. Odd moths and other insects interrupt the static *mise-en-scène*, their brief trajectories limning eerie staccato gestures. But the real stars are *Toonsis*—the tailless cat—more bored than excited by the invasion of potential prey, and the effervescent mice that have appropriated the studio as their stage. They scamper, saunter, and roam, sometimes freezing momentarily, their eyes glowing incandescent as they glance unwittingly 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 extended periods now devoted to looking and thinking were once consigned to enacting myriad forms of repetitive activity. In the late sixties when a recent graduate with scant means, Nauman explored a trio of interwoven subjects: the studio, the daily practice of making art, and the role of the artist. He adumbrated the latter, for example, in a memorable neon sign, alongside more commercial counterparts affixed to the exterior of his building. Its cool spiral letters traced the claim, at once ironic *and* heartfelt, "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths" (1967).

Eschewing stock notions of the artist as the heroic action painter facing off against vast expanses of the unsullied canvas, Nauman spent days configuring and reconfiguring a pile of flour on the floor into sculpture, recording each variation by means of the neutral gaze of a fixed lens. Or, he devised a series of meticulously choreographed performative tasks for a single witness, the implacable camera: bouncing balls from the ceiling, walking in an exaggerated fashion, manipulating a fluorescent tube into a series of artfully studied poses, stamping around the studio Later he hired assistants whom he directed to meld physically into the architecture or, alternatively, to levitate, thereby lampooning—albeit ambivalently—routine assertions that mysterious transformations attend the genesis of a mystical masterpiece.

Sometimes perversely banal, sometimes risible, sometimes absurd, this medley of oblique actions astutely pilloried received notions of inspiration and creativity, of the role and image of the artist, and the practice of art-making. On this account alone, Nauman's deeply impersonal 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 recalcitrant material, virtuoso displays of craftsmanship, or transcendent insights. But irrespective of whether externally imposed or, more frequently these days, self-determined, the discipline of limited means in his case stimulates efficiency, concision, 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 generous, he plans to release another version of *Mapping the Studio*. This "all-action" adaptation, whose duration will be about an hour in length, will focus on the highlights of the first: the gliding moths, the glaring mice, the cat's meow, the gliding moths, and more.

Deeply entrenched is the ubiquitous belief that privileged access to artistic inspiration (which perhaps can never actually be witnessed) proves revelatory to the observer. That consuming desire to witness the creative process and, hence, to invade if not the artist's mind then at least its physical surrogate—his studio—has provoked charged ripostes from

Nauman, as exemplified in an audio installation from the series *Studio Aids II* (1968); a looped recording intones, "Get out of my mind, get out of this room." In a similar vein, he built spare, archetypal chambers that can never be entered but can, sometimes, be accessed via a mechanical prosthesis, the closed-circuit camera, which provides evidence and surveillance in one. Such psychologically charged situations, involving vicarious and voyeuristic witnessing that occasionally verge on spying, continue to manifest themselves in his latest work.

Considered at once a private arena for artistic investigation and a site of public exposure, in which the creator plays host to visitors in formal as well as more informal encounters, the studio has a long history as a topos, metaphorical as well as rhetorical. Originating in the late nineteenth century with commissioned studies of Rodin's various ateliers, a venerable historical lexicon that includes celebrated photographs of Brancusi's as well as Giacometti's studios, retrospectively shapes contemporary understanding of those artists' practices. Such documents may however become works in their own right, as in the case of the Romanian's delicate shots of his works, tools, and bases bathed in limpid stillness. Testimonies to work as creative labor and, more particularly, to the process of making sculpture, they too haunt *Mapping the Studio I*. In a series of exceptionally evocative studies, Giacometti's pale plasters loom spectrally from the tenebrous gloom of his cramped quarters; by contrast, Nauman's chaotic milieu bestrewn with barely distinguishable tools, models, and leftovers, seems caught serendipitously or in a state of transition. Far from his forebears' theatrical, almost reverential portrayals of this sanctum, his scrutiny is surreptitious, requiring subterfuge.

Those celebrated black-and-white still images memorialize a time past, now veiled in nostalgia; Nauman's recording unfolds relentlessly in the present. The real time documented in *Mapping the Studio I* is, literally, time past, yet as it plays out obdurately in the present it is experienced by the visitor as lived time. The extended uninflected continuum in Andy Warhol's epic films of everyday events (such as sleeping) and the near-monochromatic compositions of La Monte Young or Philip Glass provided exemplars for Nauman in his youth. Attesting to his fascination with Warhol's films, the young sculptor's comments are a veritable prescription for *Mapping the Studio I*: "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," he concluded, adding, "It also comes from some of the music 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."² In *Mapping the Studio I*, the viewer's immersion in the lived moment is enhanced by the scale of the projections,