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Oral history interview with Bruce Nauman,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Bruce Nauman on May 27 and 30, 1980. The interview took place at the artist's home in Pecos, New Mexico, and was conducted by Michele De Angelus for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the California Oral History Project

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Tell me what your parents were doing there and how they got there. Did your grandparents and parents grow up there?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, both my parents are from Chicago. My father worked for General Electric.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: I didn't know General Electric had a plant there. I grew up in Schenectady, which is another big GE town.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did he sell turbines?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 --

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And then you moved to Schenectady?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were your grandparents alive during this time?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you have any memory of him?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I remember him a little bit, not a lot.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What did he do?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He did?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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."

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I have two younger brothers.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What are their names?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You were saying that your grandmothers were alive as you were growing up. Where do they live?

BRUCE NAUMAN: They both still lived in Mill Park, and stayed there.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did they have any kind of input in your life? Did you spend time with them?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But you always grew up in suburban situations?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you remember where you lived?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, but there were fields. So it was probably new housing built after the war.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Is your family German?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you grow up in a fairly religious household?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What church did you go to?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 --

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did your parents speak German with your grandparents?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No. I don't think German was ever spoken in the house at all.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So as your father got older he became more religious and imposed that on all of you.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were there a lot of people always coming through your house, were your parents social that way, or more in a business sense?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What about your mother?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were you a tight family, were you really close?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And you, did you ever have a sense of place in the same way?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: They were supportive of what you did, or did they try and direct your activities?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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."

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: As you were growing up did you have to have jobs and make your own money, did they encourage that kind of independence?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was your dad's name?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Calvin.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And your mom's name and maiden name?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Genevieve Bott.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were either of them interested in art? Did you grow up with that in your background?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you help him and learn about tools -- ?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, I think that there was that.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you read a lot as a kid?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did they encourage that, were they bookish people at all?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: They didn't read to you a lot when you were a child?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Adverse conditions.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you remember books that you specifically liked or that were important to you, or the kinds of books that you read?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Not -- you mean, beyond children's books?

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: No, within children's books.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Which is kind of surprising because you're so tall now.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were you slow in terms of reading and that kind of thing?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, but I think that socially more, maybe partly because I was small, and partly just because socially I -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were you shy?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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-Americana 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You seem to me now like a person who is very private and cultivates a very rich private life.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you study music when you were younger? Guitar?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was this something that you decided that you wanted to do?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes. Neither of them played instruments, so that required some action on my part.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did they make you go out and buy the instrument yourself, or did they give it to you?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, well, they bought the piano, I remember it was a secondhand 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What did they think of your music? Did they think you'd stick with it, or didn't they care?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How old were you when you were interested in Bartok?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were you interested generally in classical music, and what I sort of call contemporary classical, even in high school? That's pretty extraordinary.

BRUCE NAUMAN: But also folk music.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What kind of music did you study, I mean, what were the directions of the teachers that you chose?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Cognition.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was it like when you were younger?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 that was what you wanted to do when, say, you were a teenager.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Where was this?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Without any kind of study or background before then?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Right.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: That is surprising.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were there art classes in your high school that you remember being interested in?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, but I never took any of them.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You didn't?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Then you went to the University of Wisconsin, when was that, what years were you there?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 1960-64.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Why did you go to school there?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Where had your father gone to school to become an engineer?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was he interested in any Bauhaus ideas when he actually was practicing?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I don't think so.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I lived in the dormitories first and then in various apartments, and that kind of stuff.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Had you ever been away from home before?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No -- well, just summer camps and stuff like that.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was that hard?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I don't remember it as being really hard. A lot of people I knew from high school were there.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 --?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did you come to take art classes?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you have to take art as a requirement? No. And you thought in high school that it was all kind of easy. Did you make the decision before you took art classes?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You did!

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you know people who were artists?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So it was a decision that just sort of happened in the abstract?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Had you read artists' biographies or --

BRUCE NAUMAN: No.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: There wasn't, like, people's work that you were familiar with?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you have any feeling as to what prompted you to this? It's so curious, isn't it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I think about it a lot, because it's hard to -- I don't know what went through my brain at the time.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: When was this?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I think it was that summer.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So it was after your sophomore year? How did you feel about talking to this woman who told you you couldn't make a living at it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So after you went back to school after you'd made this decision, then you enrolled in art classes.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Whose classes did you take, and what kind of classes?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were the classes big?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were there any of those people there, though, who were intent on a career?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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. 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Who were some of these people, do you remember any of their names?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Santos Zingale comes to mind, he's a painter, probably an interesting guy, but he taught most of the beginning painting classes

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Really?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was that generally the tenor of the place? Practical, how to-be-an-artist stuff rather than esthetics and position?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 that had to be hired because people retired and died off -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Who were they?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He's in La Jolla now. Was he as much of a character then?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, yes, absolutely. He got fired.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you make friends with any of these people who were really intent on this professionalism, any of your fellow students?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, I had one pretty close friend; I don't know what happened to him.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Who was he?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Hofmann, but there were also some Lichtenstein, the first coming 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 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Your teachers were basically doing representational work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, or at the best, sort of late Stuart Davis abstraction. But that was it.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Diebenkorn -- anybody else -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You knew their work then?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 A1 Held painting called, what could it be called?

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was it the big geometric shapes?

BRUCE NAUMAN: There was a big huge geometric shape on one part and another shape on another part; the big one was black.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Where did you see it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Those canvases that you describe as West Coast landscape things, were they in oil?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was there anybody there who was working in acrylics at that point? Was it a technology or a medium that wasn't

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And you liked him?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Wayne Thiebaud was there then, oh, I didn't know that. I knew Arneson was there.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So each student had their own studio?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did he talk about the work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 --

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He didn't present a program.

BRUCE NAUMAN: No. Everybody was just supposed to be working, and then you brought in your work and it got discussed or didn't.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: When you felt like it you brought work. It wasn't like you had your appointed day by which you had to bring something.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was this a good situation for you?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was there a prevalent idea of what it was to be an artist going around at that place then?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What did you end up doing?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 painting: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He was your friend who went to New York?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was his work like?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: He must have gotten some.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Because he was still there.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 work suit, overalls, and he carried a dime store hammer and a dime store 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: This was at Wisconsin? That must have been really hard for them to deal with.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you perceive any of his activities at the time as performance art? I know that that wasn't an area of interest -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: That sounds interesting. I wonder what he's doing now?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I have no idea.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Well, at Davis you mentioned doing some paintings that you stuck things on.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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, and finally started welding steel.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did you get access to that technology, were there people there who were doing it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Bronze, you mean.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Well, when you came to it was it for the same reason, or did you like the -

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, I put color in the plastic and made them green and pink.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What years were you at Davis?

BRUCE NAUMAN: That would be 1964 and 1966.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: This is in the sixties? In San Francisco?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The whole funk thing up in San Francisco -- was that really a prevalent esthetic at Davis then?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

[Break in tape.]

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: We were talking basically about the esthetic that was happening at Davis, and you were saying Manuel Neri and Joan Brown -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Well, what did you see of Wiley's work and Arneson's work while you were there, and what -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was he doing when you knew him?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How about Bob Arneson's work now, was he doing portraits of himself?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You knew about those kinds of historical things?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Johns's things than anything else. It was an a-literate society, culture, or it was at that time.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So you knew his attitude, was that it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did you use that?

BRUCE NAUMAN: People didn't use it in an intellectual way at all, they used somehow the material as a means to make more art.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You knew Jasper Johns' work then?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Where?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 re-assessing, 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were you in anyway 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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."

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: That set of 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The punning pieces, like Drill Team and those sorts of things, talk about those.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He's American; you know, Duchamp comes out of the Cartesian system of thought that is very French.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Of course, Man Ray really tried to identify himself with that.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But he didn't have the basis for it.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 at the -- for the Arensbergs for all those years.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: After he came to New York.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, before that he collected for them in Europe.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Oh, did he? I didn't know that, that's interesting.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Maybe that's wrong. But I think that he was doing that while -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He was in contact with him before he came out, so that may be so-, because they were all prepped for it when he arrived.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: It's pretty puerile humor, it seems to me.

BRUCE NAUMAN: It's witty, if anything, but not humorous.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you know about Duchamp's punning pieces and the way he used titles in relation to his work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I didn't understand any of that.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You found out about that later? Like the Mona Lisa, L.H.O.O.Q.

BRUCE NAUMAN: I think that we all saw all those letters written there but I don't think anybody ever explained it and I never asked.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So tell me about the process of making that set of color photos. What was the time period over which they were made?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 situation 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: There are pieces that are really interesting like that, the shelf sinking into the wall, and then you made casts of the spaces underneath. Can you talk about those a little bit?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: That piece at eye level with the curve at the bottom.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Conceptual process --

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did these come out of your San Francisco studio, those pieces, too?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And you were saying that you worked alone, basically, you had a lot of time alone. You taught one day a week.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was this kind of isolation almost really good for you, do you need that in order to work generally?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 (sp?) -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 and they had a 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 modeling

budget for the sculpture department and so we used to hire him to come and model. Nobody worked from the figure at 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did they know your work? Did they know what you were doing at that point?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was there an exchange about --

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Geist and a few other people. Nobody really close.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you know them socially?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And you, did you read books?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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!"

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So it was like an anti-intellectual stance.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, yes, very strongly, yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, very few people saw it.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was it just that you didn't have that need, or were you a little hesitant?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Were there any people you could think of who you thought really understood your work and were reinforcing about it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You worked with Bill Allan for a while, on making films. Talk about that, how did that come about?

BRUCE NAUMAN: That was the slant step period, which was what looked like a stool except that the part where you 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 and Bill finally decided we would --

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You knew him from Davis?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Slantstep. We had the original and we built all this stuff -- it was like a shop film. It was a parody of a shop film.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The film was done in San Francisco?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 could call it finger gaffing." And Bob says, "Finer gaffing!" and then he started to laugh, and he's got the most wonderful laugh, and the laugh goes on after the -- "Ho - ho - ho - ho." It's a wonderful laugh.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 just -- the film and all this -- was input from your friends and just whatever was -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 ever 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Cohesiveness really is in the ideas and in your behavior, and you just plug in to whatever medium it takes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 while you were still in graduate school in Davis. How did that come about?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You'd already moved up there?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And what they saw were those resin pieces.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Resin pieces and bunches of rubber pieces.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Those were colored and propped against the wall.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was that extraordinary for you at that time? You were still in graduate school.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, yes, absolutely. Because I hadn't had any particular encouragement outside of the school. Nobody had even seen the work. It was strange.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was it like to see the pieces in a gallery, in a space other than your studio?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, I don't remember what I thought about that.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did it seem an important part of the process of art making, to finally externalize it that way?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did anything sell out of that show?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No. I think the first film pieces were shortly after that. 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 -- was a filmmaker -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Who was it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And what was that piece like, or about?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Manipulating a fluorescent tube.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was that your first interest in light as a part of the work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: About the set of photographs, what was the edition? Was it an edition?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, I think so, but I don't remember the edition. Eleven or fifteen, I think.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: A small edition.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Or maybe it was only seven, I don't remember.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you begin working with performance and your art coming out of your activities in the studio- your movements? In San Francisco?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did you come to video, had you worked with it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was your relationship to New York and New York artists at the time you were in

Southampton?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, I had a number of friends that I had known before. That year -- let's see, I first showed with Leo in 1968 before I moved there. So then after I moved out there I had that relationship, and then Richard and Keith 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 that 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was there anybody whose work you were seeing at that time that was important to you?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did you meet them? You said you knew them before you went to New York?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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. 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you know Terry Riley?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, I don't know him, but I knew his music also, because I'd seen him perform once or twice.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was important to you about what these people were doing, or about their work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What about Phil Glass?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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, time wise, 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Talk a little bit about how the spectator -- how you wanted the spectator to deal with these pieces.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 -

BRUCE NAUMAN: I think that's real risky. I'm not sure that I --

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: This isn't what you're doing, you're saying.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: -- of art you don't understand it. It doesn't exist.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The neon pieces that come out of your body, the templates from your body -- 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Why did you use neon for that?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I did it lots of ways; I did it with wax and with neon, with metal and just all kinds of -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: One of your pieces that I really love is the one called Five Famous Artists' Knees, only it was all your knee. Why?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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, 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did these people find out about your work? Was it through Castelli?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, no, Nick 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 Bellamy was on the West Coast and came up and saw the work, also through Nick.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He's great. He's a nice person.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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. Kaspar Koenig, who was German and had come to this country to publish -- he was going to publish poetry and photographs of a few artists' work he was interested in. I've forgotten who all -- I know he was interested in Cornell and 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 Conrad Fischer, who had just started his gallery. In fact, I showed there before I showed with Leo ...or perhaps not. 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 Spornoni and Bruno [Bischofsberger]. That was all through Leo and the gallery. The Conrad Fischer connection was separate.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did this put pressure on you to create more work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 one or two pieces out 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did Keith and Richard get you work -- did they -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was that important to you to have people who understood your work, who you were showing with?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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, and that was made that way -- I made another one that was never as good but it was a window-shape wall sign.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: That had words on it also?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Coors or Budweiser --

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Cast of the Space Under My Chair. It was the chair I had in the apartment I was staying in. I was doing some work for Conrad 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The space under, below, or around something when made positive could have its own identity.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: That's what was happening in that shelf that was sinking into the wall and -

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes. Well, that and then it comes out of ...is the same idea of the Futurist things -- speeding through space.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Like Boccioni. He made those objects colliding with each other, integrating -- I've always liked those. What about those light photographs, like Traps for Henry Moore, is that what they were called? That was you moving a light -

BRUCE NAUMAN: -- a flashlight in the background.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: That's a use of light, but the whole title, the whole "trap" implies a spacial existence. Tell me about those.

BRUCE NAUMAN: And I tried to make the drawing three-dimensional. What am I supposed to tell you?

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 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

BRUCE NAUMAN: I did quite a few drawings and several pieces that related to Henry or had him in the titles.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Henry Moore Bound to Fail --

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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....

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The younger people.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you see it as these people being bound by his success and the way he was succeeding?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Those photographs, Light Traps for Henry Moore. Why light traps?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Because they were made with light. I don't really remember all my feelings about those.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: In the image were you trapped in the light, was that it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: I like those a lot. There's one piece about Henry Moore that's reproduced in color in this catalogue, and it's like a case.

BRUCE NAUMAN: It's a drawing. It's a storage capsule.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Yes, Seated Storage Capsule for Henry Moore. It's so Egyptian.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, oh, I remember now. Well, I was also trying to make the drawing somewhat like Henry's Subway -- Underground -- drawings.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The figures.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: That was 1968 or so.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did that happen, was it an extension of the photographs?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did that change the quality of the images?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, they became three-dimensional images. They existed in space rather than -- they were much more sculptural.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But they were still static.

BRUCE NAUMAN: They were static, yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you see those as being self-portraits, essentially, or more about human gesture?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Why do you think you don't want a model, why do you always work with you?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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. Hand to Mouth, and the folded arms with the broken off -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Hand to Mouth, isn't that you?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No. And then a number of the performance pieces were done by other people.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Would you say that you work predominantly with your own body, though?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Why?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Are you interested in these processes, these technological aspects, or is it just an end?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, sometimes, not necessarily, I mean glass blowing is interesting as a skill, but I wouldn't particularly want to learn it.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Tell me what the '69 Performance Corner was.

BRUCE NAUMAN: It was a piece -- that's when I lived in Southampton -- 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. When Marcia Tucker had the show at the New 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was it exactly?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 with 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And you were uncomfortable with that.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You used that in other pieces. Can you talk about what they were like?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 has, 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Sounds great. Is it narrow?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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, which was open at both ends; you could pass all the way through.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: I've never seen any of the light corridors. I've read about Blue Light Corridor, Yellow Light Corridor. Were those like emotional mood - state situations?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 that I made -- I could never stay in them.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Is this all experimental, or had you done any reading about the psychology of colors or that sort of thing?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did it change your sense of temperature as well?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I think the yellow one does. I think yellow, especially American yellow fluorescent, which is different than the European yellow fluorescent

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Really, how different?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, I don't know. They must use different coatings

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But I mean, like, qualify the color difference if you can.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: It's a product of electricity.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What happens with your videotapes? Isn't the videotape image a product of the electric current essentially -- the number of rasters...?

BRUCE NAUMAN: You can't transfer from American to European systems, unless they've developed something since I've last been in Europe

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What happens when you use their monitors and their electricity to show your tapes?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Isn't that a weird kind of schizophrenia, though, because you were performing for yourself?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 misstep 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 kinesthetic, 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The effort of resolution.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was Art Makeup about?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 makeup, 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."

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 -

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, there were also the flower 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: This is a great one: Run from Fear, Fun from Rear.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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."

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And then you --

BRUCE NAUMAN: -- transposed it.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Are you good at those things where they give you words that are all mixed up?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Dusseldorf -- and I was interested in all those kinds of things and Conrad [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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Spoerri?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Conrad'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 after, she sent Conrad 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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, and the other is -- I forget the exact title, but where the letters of your name are elongated -

BRUCE NAUMAN: Exaggerated fourteen times. 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. Stretched.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, I suppose, just a distortion, again, of a starting point. And I suppose it's the same way Jasper used targets and maps. Starting with something.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: It's like a given image, your name or your knee, something that already exists?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Some place to start. You have to make a mark somewhere and then you can deal with it.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: I've always thought that part of the reason that Johns did that was because he didn't want the responsibility for creating an imagery.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, but --

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Is that a conscious thing, do you think? Or do you think it's true?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But you have established your style ideologically. I mean, there's a style of cognition in your work.

BRUCE NAUMAN: But even where there is a continuity of media, in drawings, for instance, in pencil or charcoal, there is a fairly recognizable style.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 someplace 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 (sp), 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 foundation that was called, Human Companionship, Human Drain, and somebody came in and saw it and said to Harriet,* "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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 semi-pyramid with walls -- do you know the one I'm talking about?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, I know the piece.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 -

BRUCE NAUMAN: -- a triangular depression or an upside-down pyramid, whatever, and then the diamond that hangs in the middle.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: It was set in the middle, it wasn't hanging. Do you remember it hanging?

BRUCE NAUMAN: It's supposed to hang.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Above it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What was the material? There was this weird fleshy kind of color -

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Yes, strange. Are those objects the focal points for a kind of imaginary entry?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, well ...how do you mean?

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: It's a big object in your space.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Frustrating the spectator, in short.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 up 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But what did you like about the work, what was important to you?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 (?) 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Yes, he takes over an area so completely that --

BRUCE NAUMAN: -- there's nothing left to show you a way to make art.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: There's no direction out of that that doesn't look like it.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you look at a lot of work, historical things?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, not a lot. I look at things, but not very often.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Is there anybody -- any historical artist's work that's important to you, or whom you admire, or have learned things from?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you know de Kooning in New York?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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, it's 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you think that was a cultural separation as well?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Are there artists now that you're close to and whose work you follow with interest?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 -

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was Irwin ever your teacher?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You just met him when you were in California?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Actually I met him in Holland. We never saw each other much in California.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: You think so?

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Of course, he goes all over the place, too. He can talk to everybody or anybody.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: He's incredibly accessible.

BRUCE NAUMAN: -- and do work anywhere. Yes, well, I think he's really interesting.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Can you talk about the recent pieces? You mentioned that you were doing plaster pieces, like the one you're showing at Hill's* now.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Well, again, they're models for underground tunnels.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The scale on which you've made these pieces, is that how you project them underground? Or are these reduced models?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: When did you start doing these underground pieces?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 sculptures 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You've built some of them underground actually?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, none of them have ever gotten built. A couple of them are almost built; insofar as I know, they haven't been completed.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But underground you can only know them sculpturally through your imagination.

BRUCE NAUMAN: But they would all be spaces you could enter.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: So you'd know the interior.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Right, so what you'd have is the outside when you look at it --

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: -- in the gallery.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How does that actually work in the piece? How can you do that without people?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 the Floating Room. 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How did you get access to this room?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What interests you about these situations? It's clearly, the end point is not to create an emotional situation.

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, the important thing is the tension, of how to deal with the situation.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And how people resolve it or don't?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The inside views of the piece, though, or the inside kinesthetic experience of these pieces, is at this point fairly imaginary.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Because you don't know how they really function underground or on the scale that you intend them.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Is there any possibility of these being built?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 location; right locations with no money, and things like that.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Have you ever seen any of Alice Aycock's works?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Just in photographs. No, that's not true, I think one piece.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: There was one that I saw in New Jersey at Far Hills. I guess it was the D'Arco that put it in, and 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. Tell me about the move here from South Pasadena.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Pasadena.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And you decided to come out here. Why, and what kind of decisions were involved?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What are the differences in working here as opposed to working in the city?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You've been out here for about a year now.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: As for actually working in your studio, has being in Pecos influenced those processes?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What about input from other artists, or going to galleries and that sort of thing?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: The winters here, though, can be pretty severe. Were you at all isolated here or snowed in?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, we never were snowed in; we had a fairly mild winter this year.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Being physically in this situation, does that influence your ideas about yourself or your behavior?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, I don't think so.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You seem to have taken to this place pretty easily..

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 Dusseldorf, 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you trust that?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, it depends on where it comes from.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Are you able to live from the sale of your work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, I have mostly. Sometimes I teach.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Talk a little bit about where you've taught after San Francisco.

BRUCE NAUMAN: After San Francisco I taught at U.C.L.A. a little bit, and at 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What did you teach while you were at Irvine?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was teaching a useful process for you?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Not particularly. I think sometimes it has been interesting, and sometimes pretty

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Are students aware of what your work is when they take your courses?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What do you try to give to them; how do you teach? I always wondered how you teach art.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: But this art doesn't affect the culture in a larger sense. It's not like social work or something.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: I think that with art or philosophy or any kind of -- at the edges of any discipline, if you think of art as 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Is it important that your art communicate these things within your lifetime?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Does Harriet understand your work?

BRUCE NAUMAN: I think so.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Does she comment on it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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 that wasn't an issue at all. Does Harriet ever criticize or express a preference about certain things?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, yes.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: She's a sociologist, right? Or has that interest. Does she see your work as functioning in that way?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 farm workers 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: How does your personal relationship, say, with Harriet and with your children, influence your work, or does it?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 extend themselves long enough to where I was unable to function in my work.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You have two children, a boy and a girl. Did that change your way of working when you began to have a family?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Not particularly. I don't think so. Maybe I used to work more at night or something.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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?"

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: I was thinking in terms of learning about humanity in a larger sense.

BRUCE NAUMAN: I don't think so. I don't have any -- I don't know.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Did you know that this is what you would get into when you decided on this place?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: It's nice having a studio you can walk to.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Was it a loft?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: This studio is much smaller.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, it's too small. I'll eventually get it bigger.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: What about large-scale pieces like the one that's at Hill's now, how do you manage?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You can't do that in this studio.

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, not here.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you miss that?

BRUCE NAUMAN: Oh, yes. So the first thing I want to do is to make a flat spot outside.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Also, I would think the physical confines of the space would influence your performance work.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes. Well, it does influence -- the size and amount of the space So eventually I'll have a much more

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You see this as a long-term investment?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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, any place -- 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Do you find yourself spending your time, your art-related time differently here in any way?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: 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.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Is that true of the people in Pecos also, that they're accustomed to artists?

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: And they just see that he's an artist and you're an artist.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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 that live on the Pecos, but mostly farther up the river, that 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You were saying, though, that there is a lot of violence in Pecos.

BRUCE NAUMAN: Yes, it has a reputation for it.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: Have you encountered any?

BRUCE NAUMAN: No, we haven't witnessed any of it. I think there is a lot of violence but I don't think there's anymore 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: You seem kind of taken with the myth, or legends or mythos of Pecos.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

MICHELE DE ANGELUS: It's an interesting place.

BRUCE NAUMAN: 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.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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