Imagine the following scene: it is the summer of 1966 and we are standing before a somewhat derelict storefront in San Francisco (fig. 1). Above the ripped awning a sign reads “California Grocery” and adjacent to it a “Drink Coca-Cola” advertisement is still in place. The former storeowner has clearly vacated the premises and whereas the space appears to have a new tenant, its current function is not apparent. Therefore, let us step inside, uninvited, in order to investigate. There are not many intelligible signs of activity that strike our eye upon entry. The room is furnished in a sparse manner with a single table and chair. In the far corner an untidy group of various objects—cans, bags, bottles, and cups—are randomly dispersed along the wall or perch precariously upon a few wooden shelves. The walls are devoid of decoration, the floor unswept. The messy interior is occupied by a solitary figure, not as a dwelling apparently, but as a place of work. Yet in the absence of any recognizable tools, in so far as we can detect, it becomes difficult to ascertain his trade. And if we stay long enough, his conduct provides no obvious clues to his profession, either, as he is not so much indolent, as engaged in highly repetitive, seemingly mundane forms of activity. His customary behavior appears to consist of sitting in the chair while sipping coffee or, alternatively, pacing back and forth across the floor. There is little work being done of any recognizable fashion.

This strange little tableau provides a fictional glimpse into the artist’s studio of Bruce Nauman. Although the scene is meant to convey a kind of phenomenological “limit-experience” of the studio space, which, as I shall argue, Nauman explored in the later sixties, my description of the young artist’s studio space is not purely fictional. It has been compiled from such diverse sources as contemporary photographs that Nauman took to record his earliest works—many of which were ephemeral in nature and subsequently destroyed—and from the various interviews the artist gave in these years (fig. 2). Taken together, these photographic and verbal testimonies provide a remarkable insight into Nauman’s working methods or what I shall call, in a very precise meaning of the word, his studio habits.

No doubt, the tableau I have drawn of Nauman’s studio is a piece-meal one, assembled from fragmentary and disparate sources. The artist did adopt a former grocery store in San Francisco as his first studio upon graduation from art school, but my description also draws upon certain recurrent features of a series of studios that Nauman temporarily occupied during the sixties and beyond. What is key in the above description is the impression of emptiness; that is to say, the lack of customary, artistic tools, such as brushes, paint tubes,
canvasses and picture easels; but also the disorderly distribution of objects and, finally, the spasmodic, restless behavior of its occupant. The studio inhabitant seems to exist in a homeless state, ill at ease in a space that, according to traditional accounts of the modern studio, should be the most intimate and authentic domain of the artist's existence. This domain may be designated, in a very precise sense of the word, as the artist's *habitus*. In doing so, I am making a deliberate reference to the currency of this term within phenomenological thought and, in particular, within the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Yet my reasons for doing so are both critical and historical in nature. Whereas it shall become clear how the notion of the habitus provides a heuristic tool of investigation in the present context, it may be consi"
practice; a practice that unfolds in the interface between body and media. For instance, the spectators of Nauman’s early video installations are submitted to highly disorientating forms of mediated experience. To explain his procedure of dis-habituation, Nauman draws a comparison to climbing a staircase in the dark:

[…] when you think there is one more step and you take the step, but you are already at the top […] It seems that you always have that jolt and it really throws you off. I think that when these pieces work they do that too. Something happens that you didn’t expect and it happens every time. You know why, and what’s going on but you just keep doing the same thing.

It is not Nauman’s video installations, however, that will constitute my primary topic here, but his studio practice of the late 1960s, which is infiltrated first of all by the mechanical apparatus of film. I shall explore how the bodily technics of inhabitation, which are historically rooted in the studio, but transplanted to the gallery environment by minimalism, become profoundly questioned in a set of four 16 mm films which Nauman shot in 1966-67 and are collectively known as the Studio Films. They consist of Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square, Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms, Playing a Note on the Violin while I Walk around the Studio, and Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square. In each film, the artist engages in a repetitious, bodily task, a kind of learning exercise. Yet this disciplinary task is never fully mastered or brought to completion. Furthermore, these iterative performances take place in the denuded environment of a studio, which was not even his own. The Studio Films, namely, were shot in the workspace of the painter William T. Wiley, which Nauman temporarily occupied himself.

Before looking at these films in more detail, let me first return to the opening scene – the semi-fictional account of Nauman’s studio, which will figure here as a kind of primal scene. By this, I do not mean the position of this scene within a chronological sequence – the “first” studio of the artist – nor do I wish to imply that such a tableau provides direct access to the inner motivations or exact methods of the artist. I am not about to repeat the familiar scenario of the studio visit that opens a window onto the inner world of the creative process. Like its Freudian prototype, our primal scene works with all kinds of historical delay and it refuses to nestle comfortably within any conventional discourses of the studio. What it achieves, instead, is to complicate, if not completely annul, the dialectics of showing and hiding that organized the standard discourse of the modern studio during the major part of the twentieth century.

It is symptomatic, for example, that Nauman’s studio in San Francisco openly retained the traces of its former commercial function. His studio constitutes a make-shift situation where, so it appears, the artist struggled to impose his own material imprint, producing precarious stacks of body casts that now only exist in the spectral form of grainy snapshots. Or, in a more deliberate response to the camera, Nauman submitted himself to an absurdly futile act of “transcending” the studio environment. Failing to Levitate in the Studio is a black-and-white photograph of 1966 that shows a ghostly, de-materialized image of his rigid body, arms pressed against the thighs, supported only at its extremities by two folding chairs. Artlessly superimposed on this first image by means of double-exposure is a second image of the sagging body of the artist with his legs spread-eagled across the floor. Only the most fleeting glance would be taken in by such a glaring subterfuge. Here photography served Nauman not only as a means of documentary evidence, recording the transient products of his daily studio activity, but it yields a more fabulatory aspect, invoking the early cinematic tricks of George Méliès as well as the pranks of later slapstick comedy.

It is a well-known fact that Nauman’s studio photography deliberately confuses the status of the documentary and the staged image, allowing Jeff Wall, for instance, to make an insightful play on the double meaning of studio photography as both documentary and commercial practice in the margins of his important essay on conceptual photography. This mingling of fact and fiction in Nauman’s studio photography, which is linked to his punning use of titles, is quite pertinent to my argument, which will not attempt to reconstruct the artist’s studio in any, strictly empirical sense of the word. If the following
presents a kind of archaeology of the studio, then its purpose is not to excavate a particular physical site where a specific set of artistic skills and discipline were exercised, maintained and developed. Rather, its aim will be to analyze the studio as a place where a certain "truth" of artistic activity is produced, even if the advertised knowledge amounts to no more than a deliberate cliché, as the neon "shop sign" that Nauman fashioned in 1967 self-consciously declares: "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths." Nor, for that matter, does our arche-scene point towards the silence of the studio, a visibility or "mystic truth" prior to all language.

Following Michel Foucault, we need "to substitute the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, [by] the regular formation of objects that only emerge in discourse." I understand the studio, in the first place, as the locus of a series of performative or discursive events. An approach that prompts the following questions: what are the particular rules, practices, and functions that constitute the "local knowledge" of the studio? What expressions of truth become possible (or obsolete) in this place during a given period of time? In short, how to define the studio as dispositif: a system of heterogeneous discourses and practices governed by immanent rules of enunciation.

What I have called the local knowledge of the studio becomes embodied in the various myths of the studio that circulate in art historical discourse. I shall discuss, in particular, two alternative fictions of the studio that demonstrate how the rules of the game underwent a rapid mutation in the late 1960s. In fact, my description of Nauman's studio already juxtaposed two different myths of the studio, which I shall provisionally designate as that of the cluttered and the empty studio. I shall develop the first model of the studio by drawing on the phenomenological notion of the habitus, whereas the latter model counters the former. These twin myths of the studio are not, in fact, mirror images of each other: each myth is indexed to different historical dispositifs of the studio. Thus the topos of the cluttered studio has its roots in the nineteenth century and is even associated in phenomenological theory with the pre-industrial workplace, which precedes the Fordist rationalization of labor. The cluttered studio must therefore be understood as the complementary image of the disciplinary institutions of industrial society; it forms, as it were, the after-image, of the factory.

The empty studio, on the other hand, presents a kind of threshold condition, a limit-experience", where the institutional stratifications of a disciplinary society, its divisions between public and private, begin to collapse. Yet the empty studio does not figure as a functionalist retooling of the private studio as public laboratory. Rather the empty studio points beyond a disciplinary dispositif in which both the modern studio and the factory hold a share. Which brings me to the second component of my argument, which is of a genealogical rather an archaeological nature. As Foucault famously stated, the dispositif is not only "linked to certain limits of knowledge that arise from it and, to an equal degree, condition it, but the nature of the apparatus is essentially strategic ... [it] is always inscribed into a play of power." That is to say, the local knowledge of the studio is always intertwined with specific, subjectifying forms of power, whether as site of resistance or affirmation. The studio is a site where subjectivity is produced. Think in this regard of the disciplinary apparatus of formalist aesthetics, which invested the spectator of modernist painting with the status of a transcendental subject who mirrored himself in the self-enclosed, autonomous object of art. The empty studio, on the other hand, does not act as a theater of identification, but stages the interminable tracings of individuation that lack an absolute object of self-reflection. As a result, Nauman's studio practice shifts the terms of cultural debate, displacing our attention from a formalist ontology of the medium to a political ontology of subjectivation. To be sure, I do not claim that Nauman is alone in having done so, nor do I suggest that the full implications of this shift were visible at the time. The full genealogy of the empty studio remains to be written.

A few words on the phenomenological model of the studio as habitus are required, before we look more closely at the role of the empty studio in Nauman's Studio Films. To this purpose, I shall briefly turn to another, earlier description of the artist's studio, namely Paul Valéry's "Degas Dance Drawing." This fragmentary text compiles memories of several visits to the painter's studio, presumably during the early part of the twentieth century. Significantly, Valéry wrote the text at a much later date, during the early 1930s, and he reflects upon the past in a wistful manner, casting the painter's studio as the allegory of a form of life nearing extinction in the present.
Valéry’s personifies the familiar figure of the intruder, breaching the private domain of the modern artist:

When I rang his door... He would open mistrustfully and then recognize me... He would take me into a long attic room, with a wide bay window (not very clean) where light and dust mingled gaily. The room was pell-mell... [a shelf piled with] all the nameless odds and ends that might come in handy one day.¹³

Perhaps Valéry expected to receive some kind of illumination upon entering the inner sanctum of the artist. Instead he appears baffled by the disorder of the scene he encounters, overwhelmed by the confusion of the place. Yet the pivot on which his narrative turns is the conceit that Degas possesses a subliminal means of mobilizing the chaotic environment:

It sometimes seems to me that the labor of the artist is of a very old-fashioned kind; the artist himself a survival, a craftsman or artisan of a disappearing species, working in his own room, following his own homemade empirical methods, living in untidy intimacy with his tools, his eye intent on what is in his mind, blind to his surroundings; using broken pots, kitchenware, any castoffs that come to hand...¹⁶

Degas is blind to his surroundings, yet the inchoate accumulation of stuff coheres as an organized whole around the artist's body. The artist inhabits his studio like a spider its web, even if the intruder cannot detect the delicate tracery of the intentional patterns he spins.

What will be of use to us is the embryonic, phenomenological theory of objects that Valéry's text unfolds, a theory that is binary in character. On the one hand, we have those things that stand out from a formless background of nameless odds and ends: objects that are designated, for instance, as "broken pots" - discarded utensils of no further use. And on the other hand we have those objects that possess a pre-ordained place within an equipmental network of intentional activity. That is to say, the "broken pot" acquires a new purpose as an artist's tool. The two object-types may therefore be nominally the same, but they are situated within different fields of signification.¹⁷

Valéry is blind to this second aspect of the object and he knows it. Degas' blindness, however, is of a different kind. The artist is not only blind to those who intrude upon his private space (Valéry is shocked, for instance, that the painter undresses in his presence), but he dwells within the cluttered studio like a person who without fault can traverse a familiar room in the dark. But let me take these thoughts a step further. Valéry's musings may easily be related to similar reflections on the dual identity of the object in Heidegger's Being and Time, a text that preceded Valéry's by almost a decade.

In Being and Time, Heidegger defines two ontologies of the object, namely the zuhanden - that which is "available" - and the vorhanden - that which is "occurrent."¹⁸ Availability designates those objects that are embedded within a network of possible assignments as a piece of equipment that is fitted for specific tasks. We do not perceive the available object as a figure that stands out in isolation amongst the accumulated "stuff" of the world. We do not consciously name, that is, the available object a "broken pot." As long as we remain absorbed within the daily realm of availability or purposeful behavior, objects emerge only in so far as they correspond to our intentions, just like the tools of a craftsman that lie about the workshop, but are always "available" or zuhanden.

Availableness refers, therefore, to a manner of incorporating space; that is, a corporeal fashion of extending ourselves into the world by means of a habitual set of skills, techniques and instruments. It is this dilation of our body into the world that Merleau-Ponty, for instance, refers to as the habitus. But there is another point that needs stressing: availableness namely also refers to the worldliness of everyday existence; that is, to the subject's implication within a nexus of practices and significations that is public, not private. Availableness relates to a shared form of life, whereas one might mistake habitual behavior as belonging to an exclusively personal "style of life." Such confusion will be the result, for instance, of conflating the notion of the studio-as-habitus with a modernist conception of the artist's studio as a figure of pure inwardsness. A phenomenologist would most likely argue, however, that the latter, modernist model of the autonomous...
studio is an idealist construct and all artistic activity is “enmeshed in a single, identical network of Being.” Which is why, according to Merleau-Ponty, “the very first painting in some sense went to the farthest reach of the future.” But it is not to such a habitual continuum of the body that Nauman subscribes.

Heidegger offers us a slightly more historicized version of the habitus. His example of availableness is that of the pre-industrial workshop, a communal space of labor unlike, for sure, Degas’s studio (although modernism produced its own versions of the public studio). In the workshop, instruments remain ready at hand, waiting in their assigned place until needed, at which point the worker quickly reaches for the correct tool without needing to actively look for it. By way of contrast, Heidegger provides a number of scenarios where the object becomes estranged from the subject’s realm of intentionality. A tool, for instance, might become misplaced or malfunction. The tool is then disclosed as a distinct object as it has fallen out of the active rhythms of the work process. Transformed into a passive object of contemplation, the occurrent object assumes the stubborn presence of a natural thing. But the object might also be disclosed as occurrent to the stranger who enters the workshop, but does not participate in the same horizon of intentionality shared by the artisans.

And so we return to the previous scene of Valéry’s intrusion upon the artist’s studio. Valéry is excluded from Degas’ habitus: it can only show itself as occurrent to the writer. Yet, for that matter, Valéry’s gaze is not exactly neutral. It spreads its own opaqueness around itself. Valéry, in other words, is the carrier of a transcendent gaze that invades the habitus and is capable, as phenomenology would theorize, of estranging the subject from his own projects. The effect of such an objectifying gaze, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, is to open a drain-hole in the middle of the world through which being is perpetually flowing off. This transcendent gaze reappears in the Studio Films, where it becomes internalized by the artist, rather than blindly deflected as in the case of Degas. Transported into the studio by the mechanical eye of the film camera, Nauman’s solitary gestures in the empty studio are exteriorized by the camera’s fixed stare. The Studio Films show a sequence of mundane activities repeated over and over again until the film reel runs out (fig. 3). Nauman shot the films alone, placing the stationary camera at, or slightly above, eye-level, in order to show a section of empty wall and floor. The frame of the camera is mirrored by the outline of a square fastened to the floor with masking tape. In relation to this geometric boundary, Nauman performs the particular task described by the title of each film. For instance, in Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms, Nauman alternately throws a ball against the floor in an attempt to let it bounce off the ceiling, and tries to catch another ball that is already bouncing back. It is not a mastery of this game, however, that Nauman displays, but the opposite. The balls skids off in an unexpected directions and he is unable to sustain a constant rhythm. At a certain moment he vents his frustration by throwing the ball away. This film reveals a flaw on another, mechanical level as well: the sound track goes out of sync. These faults, however, are not purely accidental, but quite elemental to the significance of these films. They are, that is to say, not merely deficient documents of a failed performance.

What is common to the Studio Films is the deliberate execution of a
repetitive task that is situated somewhere between a habitual performance and a disciplinary exercise. Nauman's tasks have one constant function, however: they enact, or seem to enact, a corporeal mode of appropriating the studio space. It is not insignificant in this respect that the studio in which the films were made was not his and that it appears to have been exceedingly empty, aside from some scattered debris in the background. Nauman's fascination with our daily acts of incorporating space is highlighted by the following anecdote:

It's like a woman I saw once in a restaurant. She sat down in a chair, sprawled out in it, dropped a cigarette lighter at one spot on the table, and threw her handbag down in another—in herself, and with all her belongings she took up a huge amount of space.

What the woman's behavior illustrates is nothing else than the phenomenological operation of inhabitation: the dilation of our being-in-the-world through the habitual performances of our body. According to Merleau-Ponty, one can in fact differentiate three, sequential levels of inhabitation: a biological, a choreographical and a cultural.

On the most primary level, the habitus will simply concern those actions necessary for the preservation of life. Thus the woman who distributes various objects—the handbag, the lighter—around her is not setting up territorial boundaries, but expanding her bodily sphere of awareness. The woman pays these objects no conscious heed, but they express to her "potentialities of volume, the demand for a certain amount of free space." Following Merleau-Ponty's general scenario, the woman may now elaborate on these primary gestures of extension, providing them with a figurative meaning. As a result, her milieu becomes suffused with "a core of new significance." More than establishing an elemental radius of action, she has invented a primitive kind of dance.

The woman's scattering of her possessions establishes an expressive space around her. Her basic habits become the medium of expressive movement; they allow things to begin to exist under her hands and eyes. When Nauman observed the woman, therefore, he was looking at her as a choreographer might. And here a question of learning or the acquisition of new habits becomes crucial. To learn a dance it is not enough, so Merleau-Ponty maintains, to conceive its ideal formula in an analytic fashion. Rather, one must reconstruct the new movement on the basis of previously acquired movements, such as walking and running. There is a catch, however, because working backwards in this manner, from dance to habit, inverts the true order of cause and effect. The formula of a new dance can only incorporate elements of general motility because it already has "the stamp of movement" set upon it, as Merleau-Ponty declares. It is the body that comprehends movement, not the intellect. Therefore, our intention—"what we aim at"—and our performance—"what is given"—must be experienced as existing in simultaneous harmony.

If we now consider Nauman's Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square, we might appreciate how Nauman counters the logic of Merleau-Ponty. In Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square Nauman starts in one corner of the square, gingerly stepping along the taped line. At times his body is turned towards the center of the square and at other moments it faces the wall, providing the camera with only an intermittent glance of his face. Again, as in the former film, Nauman's movements are not dictated by any internal rhythm. He regulates his step by the beat of a metronome. This film shows Nauman, therefore, acquiring the patterned gestures of a dance, but it is the awkwardness of the "exercise" that counts and not the ideal formula of the "dance."

Does Nauman truly approach the body and its techniques as a choreographer would? This film is often cited as a demonstration of Nauman's interest in the work of the choreographer Merce Cunningham. Cunningham is known to mix choreographed moves with everyday gestures, but also to combine professional and non-professional performers. Thus Cunningham downplayed the need for acquired technique in dance, calling it too constrictive, and suggesting that movement in itself is expressive "regardless of intentions of expressivity." Cunningham, in other words, desired to return to the "biological" realm of untutored, if habitual movement. Yet, something is different in Nauman's performance: it is executed in a contradictory fashion. His gestures are both too controlled and regulated as well as too unrehearsed and awkward. What strikes me about the Studio Films
in general is that Nauman's conscious effort stands at odds with his performance: his movements become schematic, almost mechanical at times, subject to an external or imposed force of discipline, rather than habitual learning process of dance. Furthermore, they also succumb to the entropic energy of the body, repeatedly failing at their task. Nauman becomes, in the end, fatigued.

Dance or disciplinary exercise? This ambivalence is fundamental to the Studio Films. They are symptomatic of a changed, historical condition of the studio: a cultural institution that now seems to both demand and resist conscious appropriation. Indeed there is a third level of the habitus, beyond that of the biological or choreographic, as Merleau-Ponty maintained, namely that of the cultural space: "sometimes, finally, the meaning aimed at cannot be achieved by the body's natural means; it must then build itself an instrument, and it projects thereby around itself a cultural world." The artist has long occupied the habitus of the studio with his equipment in an unquestioned manner. But now the studio has been emptied out and reverted to a blank state. As a result the artist had to resort to other techniques, both corporeal and technological, in order to re-posses the studio space, yet perhaps it is precisely such processes of re-territorialization that have become deeply problematical to Nauman and other artists of his generation. Perhaps that is the drama of the Studio Films?

All that we may surmise is that the empty studio provides us with a liminal figure of the erasure of a particular form of life -- the "natural" performances of the artist that are no longer available in the precise, phenomenological meaning of the word. Any number of statements by Nauman from this period hint at such a state of unsettledness: "That's the thing about going into the studio to experience the quiet. All that's there is you, and you have to deal with that. Sometimes it's pretty hard."

In the absence of a conventional set of instruments, the empty studio has become in a certain sense uninhabitable. The empty studio rebounds upon the subject occupying it.

We know that the actual emptiness of Nauman's studio, that is, its lack of traditional artist's tools, resulted from his decision in 1965 to abandon painting. Starting with a series of fiberglass casts, Nauman attempted to rid himself of the artistic skills he had acquired as an art student. In effect, Nauman sought to dislodge the modernist equation between artistic practice and specific discipline: one is either a painter or a sculptor, but not an artist in general. Challenging this convention, Nauman would justify his work in a strictly performative manner: the work of art is simply the product of someone working professionally as an artist: "Art is what an artist does, just sitting around in the studio. And then the question goes back to what is art? And art is what an artist does, just sitting around in the studio."31

The spiraling logic of Nauman's statement might seem evasive, to say the least. Yet it does address the contradictions of its own historical moment, if leaving them unresolved. Nauman's spasmodic disruptions of the stillness of the studio mimic on one level the habitual iterations of the subject: "If you see yourself as an artist and you function in a studio and you're not a painter, if you don't start out with some canvas, you do all kinds of things - you sit in a chair or pace around."32 Yet by introducing the camera, Nauman has punctured the private shell of the studio. Even though no one is actually present behind the camera, Nauman's gestures are performed to another's gaze. His body is framed from without, caught between the borders of the screen and the taped square on the floor.33 Even his feeble attempts to evade the gaze of the camera by moving off-screen only underscore the continuity of on- and off-screen space, demonstrating that there is no true place to hide.34 The studio has become a spectacle: showing has trumped hiding.

Are we left, then, with a choice -- impossible to decide -- between inhabitation and instrumentalization? Both options present a mode of (re-)territorialization, proving how the modern body is always caught up in a bio-political nexus of power and knowledge; invested by social techniques of discipline and control. Even phenomenology's pre-industrial idyll of the workplace cannot dispel this historical truth.35 What the Studio Films portray, therefore, is not an appropriation, but a de-territorialization of space: "I wanted to find out what I would look at in a strange situation, and I decided that with a film and camera I could do that."36 They document a glitch within the instrumental network of assignments -- or what Foucault would identify as a disciplinary dispositif -- the repercussions of which will only become evident at a later stage.
Perhaps we also need a different set of terms: words such as “puncturing” or “invading” do not accurately describe what happens to the studio space in the case of the Studio Films. These films do not so much present a set of boundaries that are breached, as a topological space that is folded inside out, where the interior is always in touch with the exterior. Here the repetitions of the body no longer operate as a means of mastery, whether habitual or disciplinary in kind, but subvert the function of the studio as a site for the construction of the artist’s self. The Studio Films exhibit a laborious faltering of the body and its techniques. But what historical lesson can be drawn from such a learning behavior without issue? Does this placement of body within a spiraling loop of negative feedback provide an exit from a specific historical dispositif of the studio or does it merely suspend its internal contradictions?

Nothing can be decided on the basis of these four films alone. But should this be to conclude on too colorless a note, there is another possibility that comes to mind. A possibility that I raised before, if only in passing, and that ties the deadpan Studio Films in a compelling, if indirect fashion to a cinematic tradition that was much admired by the historical avant-garde, namely slapstick comedy. For Walter Benjamin, among others, the reason for this admiration of the pratfalls of Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton was obvious: just as the jerky gestures of Charlie Chaplin’s body mimicked the flickering, intermittent motion of the projected image, the social function of slapstick comedy was to assist the spectators in their accommodation to modern life, to steel the human sensorium against the shocks and innervations of the expanding industrial society. Yet we cannot simply graft such an avant-gardist pleasure in physical comedy onto the Studio Films, despite their similar fascination with the faulty movements and fumbling gestures of the human body. Rather than anticipating a future in which humanity would establish a new social habitus whereby an equitable organization of productive forces would not cause the alienation of man and machine, the Studio Films may be considered to participate in that long farewell to the Fordist model of social organization that was initiated during the 1960s. Like a prisoner in his own studio, Nauman, in a painfully slow fashion, paced out the perimeter of the square taped onto the floor. But even while he enacted this almost maniacal parody of disciplinary behavior in 1967, quite different modes of modulating subjectivity were already being implemented within the emergent workspaces of a post-Fordist society, where it was not the physical, but the linguistic performances of the human subject that were to become capitalized. Perhaps the violent scenes of communicative breakdown in later video installations such as Clown Torture (1987) may be said to respond to such charged historical conditions, but that is a discussion for a different time.

NOTES


2 Bruce Nauman received his MFA degree in June of 1966 at the University of California, Davis. Upon graduation he moved to San Francisco.

3 Although the two are not completely unrelated, the phenomenological concept of habitus should not be confused with Pierre Bourdieu’s perhaps more famous appropriation of the same term, which was prompted by the latter’s translation of Erwin Panofsky’s Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism (1967).

4 Although I shall not develop my argument in quite these terms, it is possible to describe the studio-as-habitus as a particular, historical dispositif or formation of the various discursive, institutional, socio-economic and equipmental conditions that determine both the possibilities and limits of studio practice during a given historical period.

5 The classic texts are Robert Morris, “Notes On Sculpture, Part I,” Artforum 4/6 (February 1966) 42–44; “Notes on Sculpture, Part II,” Artforum 5/6 (October 1966) 20–23; Annette Michelson, Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969); Rosalind Krauss, Passages In Modern Sculpture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977). With his infamous attack on minimalism, Michael Fried would begin to develop a counter-model of phenomenological critique (See “Art and Objecthood,” Artforum 5/10 (June 1967) 12–23). One may already deduce from this list of publications how the phenomenological model of minimal art has been strongly determined by the work of Robert Morris. Donald Judd proposed another theoretical model of minimal art, which may be loosely referred to as “empirical skepticism.” However, this does not invalidate the phenomenological model I shall adopt in the following.

7 See, for instance, the description of Bruce Nauman’s Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation) of 1970 in Bruce Nauman: Catalogue Raisonné, 241.

8 Sharp 1970, 30. Not even the visibility of the technical apparatus prevented this decentering effect: “When you realized that you were on the screen, being in the corridor was like stepping off a cliff or down into a hole... You knew what had happened because you could see all of the equipment and what was going on, yet you had the same experience every time you walked in. There was no way to avoid having it” (ibid., 30).


9 The films are all shot on black-and-white 16 mm stock and they last the length of one 400-foot reel (that is, circa 10 minutes). They all have sync sound except for Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square.

10 On Nauman’s interest in the slapstick routine and magic tricks, see, for instance, the later work “Falls, Pratfalls & Slight of Hands” of 1993.


12 This work was not only inspired by the neon signs hanging in the shop window of his studio, but its spiral configuration also refers to the rotating discs in Marcel Duchamp’s film Anemic Cinema. The punning phrases inscribed on the discs in Duchamp’s film are mostly sexual in nature and their movement before the spectator’s eyes causes language to turn inwards on itself in an almost physical act of auto-affection.


16 Ibid., 19–20.

17 In an interesting early essay on cinema, Louis Aragon describes his fascination with the camera image as driven by the same procedure of de-familiarization that is used by poets: “Poets without being artists, children sometimes fix their attention on an object to the point where their concentration makes it grow larger, grow so much it completely occupies their visual field, assumes a mysterious aspect and loses all relation to its purpose. Or they repeat a word endlessly, so often it diversifies itself of meaning and becomes a poignant and pointless sound that makes them cry.” Louis Aragon, “On Decor,” in: Paul Hammond (ed.), The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema (London: BFI, 1978), 29.


21 While Coosje van Bruggen remarks that the framing of the image is accentuated by the cropping of the square in Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square, oddly enough she maintains that the use of the square is somewhat arbitrary and only serves to formalize and provide direction to the “exercise.” She therefore continues to view the film as primarily a “straight” documentary of a performance-like activity, while I shall maintain that the Studio Films are medium-specific works. See Coosje van Bruggen, Bruce Nauman (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 228.

22 Speaking of Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms, Nauman remembered that: “[I] started out in sync but there again, it is a wild track, so as the tape stretches and tightens it goes in and out of sync. I more or less wanted it to be in sync but I just didn’t have the equipment and the patience to do it.” Sharp 1971, 28.

23 At least two of Hollis Frampton’s films from this period deal with similar themes, but in a more oblique fashion, namely Process Red (1968) and Maxwell’s Demon (1968), which uses a found instructional film of a man performing Canadian Air Force exercises.


26 Ibid., 143.

27 Here is Bruce Nauman on Cunningham: “I guess I thought of what I was doing as a sort of dance because I was familiar with some of the things Merce Cunningham and others had done, where you take a simple movement and make it into a dance just by presenting it as a dance.” From an unpublished interview with Lorraine Sciarra (Pomona College: January 1972), as quoted by Jane Livingston in Bruce Nauman: Works from 1965 to 1972 (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art), 26.

28 Coosje van Bruggen describes a performance at Brandeis University in 1992 where Cunningham used both professional dancers and students. The second group of performers was asked to execute simple, ordinary gestures, such as washing their hands, filing their nails, combing their hair, and skipping. Cunningham stated that he did not want to separate the human being from the action he does, or the actions which surround him, but... [to] see what it is like to break these actions up in different ways,

29 Ibid., 230.
30 Van Bruggen 1988, 18.
31 Ibid., 14.
32 Bruce Nauman as cited in Van Bruggen 1988, 14.
33 In fact the Studio Films were originally intended as performances, but Nauman had no audience. He was turned down by numerous museums, so he decided to film them instead. He has noted that while he knew many filmmakers in the Bay Area at the time, he felt that these films were unique in the fact that they only recorded an activity. Other filmmakers were involved in making either narrative or abstract films.
34 Already in 1965, Nauman had presented a performance at the University of California, Davis, which shares a similar dialectic of individualization versus objectification: "I did a piece at Davis which involved standing with my back to the wall for about forty-five seconds or a minute, leaning out from the wall, then bending at the waist, squatting, sitting, and finally lying down. There were seven different positions in relation to the wall and floor. Then I did the whole sequence again standing away from the wall, facing the wall, the facing left and facing right. There were twenty-eight positions and the whole presentation lasted for about half an hour... [they were related to] the fibreglass pieces that were inside and outside, in which two parts of the same mold were put together ... I was using my body as a piece of material and manipulating it." Sharp 1971, 26.
36 Van Bruggen 1988, 225.