Corridors, Tunnels, and Mazes: Bruce Nauman and the Spaces of Behavioral Control
Bruce Nauman is a keen observer of human behavior. Consider, for instance, his amazement at how a woman, taking a seat in a restaurant, established a personal territory: “She sat down in a chair, sprawled out in it, dropped a cigarette lighter at one spot on the table, threw her handbag down in another—in herself, and with all her belongings she took up a huge amount of space.”

Or his memory of a man whose sense of orientation was skewed due to a physiological disability: “I knew this guy in California, an anthropologist, who had a hearing problem in one ear, and so his balance was off. Once he helped one of his sons put a roof on his house, but [the father’s shingles] were not only laid in a zigzag, but also the nails were bent and shingles split. When his son got upset about the mess his father had made, the anthropologist replied: ‘Well, it’s just evidence of human activity.’” Thus the anthropologist teaches his son a lesson in the relativism of body techniques: what seems abnormal to one, seems natural to another.

Nauman appears to have taken this anthropological lesson to heart. As a young artist, he emptied the studio of its conventional tools, presenting himself with the question how to occupy or inhabit this space anew. Rather than acting according to the established protocols of the painter or sculptor, Nauman converted the studio into an experimental site for behavioral learning. For instance, in his four “studio films,” Nauman gave himself unfamiliar tasks to perform as indicated by their titles: *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*, *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk around the Studio*, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, and *Bouncing Two Balls Between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms* (all 1967–1968). Whether subjecting his body to a mechanical set of movements, following the rigid beat of a metronome, or attempting to master a musical instrument he had never played before, Nauman could not be expected to fully acquire this new set of skills within the course of a ten-minute film (that is, the length of one 16mm film reel). *Bouncing Two Balls Between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms,* for instance, shows Nauman throwing a ball against the floor in an attempt to let it bounce off the ceiling, while trying to catch another ball that is rebounding back. The film is less concerned with the artist’s show of dexterity than with his inability to remain in control of the situation. The balls tend to skid off in unexpected directions and constantly break the rhythm of Nauman’s gestures. At a certain moment, frustration gets the better of him and he furiously throws a ball away. As I have proposed elsewhere, we can consider these films as exercises in the (re-)appropriation of the studio space, that is to say, as attempts in the phenomenological sense of the word, to inhabit an environment by means of one’s bodily gestures. However, I also pointed out that this attempt is set up to fail. Nauman’s exercises work against the grain of a phenomenological model of spatial incorporation. Not only were the tasks he set himself exhausting, pushing his body to its threshold of endurance, but neither body nor space were fully placed under the artist’s control. His self-disciplinary endeavor fell short, which, of course, was only to be expected.

Although this phenomenological model has become deeply ensconced in the writing on (post-)minimalism, I would like to introduce another discursive model of human conduct, which was more dominant in the United States after the Second World War, namely, that of behavioral studies. There are reasons of a...
both formal and critical kind to propose such a different perspective to the work. In the first place, behavioral studies provide a helpful set of terms with which to address Nauman’s practice (without, naturally, reducing it to such concepts). For instance, Nauman’s corridor installations, which will form the main topic of this essay, can be said to investigate psychophysical processes of learning and adaption: the prime objects of study in behavioral science. They explore, that is to say, how one copes (or is unable to cope) with disruptions of one’s customary inhabitation of space. With its incessant manipulation of the body and its speech acts, Nauman’s practice operates, therefore, somewhere between the “anthro” and the “socio,” that is to say, close to the bedrock of our forms of life, as Ludwig Wittgenstein once conjectured, postulating an anthropological substratum of the human species that lies beyond all cultural and linguistic differences. But perhaps, as we will see, it is even better to speak of an anthropogenic zone where the species being of the human animal acquires concrete social form as homo faber, homo politicus, or in its most recent manifestation, homo economicus. And this is precisely where, as I will show as well, the apparatus of behavioral studies is located.

During the Cold War period, behavioral studies in the USA became a flashpoint of political debate. On the one hand, behavioral studies posited the vulnerability of human conduct, its conformist and manipulable nature, which assumed a traumatic dimension during the brainwashing scare of the 1950s. Yet on the other hand behavioral psychology advanced a pliable conception of the human subject, who is not only prone to captivation by some alien ideology, but who is also susceptible to psychophysical techniques of optimization. The regime of so-called Cold War rationality, in other words, sought to control and predict human behavior in accordance with the program set out by John B. Watson, one of the pioneers of behaviorism in the United States. The premise of Cold War rationality stated that the impulsive character of real-world, human affairs can be harnessed by a more optimal and formalized system of learning and decision-making. Therefore, behavioral studies, like the related fields of game theory, decision theory, operations research and cybernetics, sought to reduce the complexity of social phenomena to a “sequenced protocol of rules” that are algorithmic in nature, “can be executed without discretion or judgment.”

Behaviorism had already overturned the introspective methods of psychology at the outset of the twentieth century, proposing instead that the human subject be treated as a kind of black box: only external, observable behavior is to be measured in terms of environmental stimuli and bodily reflexes. Likewise, mid-century social scientists, although not necessarily embracing behaviorism’s radical rejection of the mental categories of volition and intention, approached the analysis of human activity, such as a group decision process, by reducing it to a series of simple sequential steps. In fact, the content of a specific task—whether strategizing a conflict, planning a party, or playing a game—was less important than its generalization as an instance of rational human conduct.

The ideal of behavioral studies to establish a unified theory of human conduct was never to be realized. Yet the field would, nevertheless, have a major impact on the later twentieth century through its specific apparatus of research: the techniques of manipulation and modification it developed in relation to the

7 John B. Watson, Behavior. An Introduction to Comparative Psychology, New York: Henry Holt, 1914, p. 1. Behaviorism is a subset within behavioral studies, but there is no need here to dwell on the methodological distinctions within the field.
Behavioral studies developed a new set of laboratory “situations,” as they were called, such as “special rooms” rigged with recording devices and secret adjoining observational facilities where scenarios could be played out under close study. These experimental situations not only allowed variables in the environment to be carefully modulated, but enabled researchers to exert a total control over their test subjects.

The corridor installations that Nauman starts constructing in the 1970s, which subject the viewer to various kinds of environmental conditioning, might likewise be called situations. And it is only to the extent that the test subjects of behavioral scientists willingly participated in the experimental situations that one might call the installations of Nauman participatory in character. As many critics have pointed out, Nauman dismissed what he called mere “game playing” in art which released in his opinion the participant of all moral responsibility. Although one may question Nauman’s move to lump all participatory practices together as one, what is important here is that he did not want to relinquish control over the participant in his work. Nevertheless, what Nauman understood by control was not what a behavioral researcher would propose: “With a game you just follow the rules. But art is like cheating—it involves inverting the rules or taking the game apart and changing it.” Nauman still participated in a game, even if he preferred to follow a strategy of foul play. And the rules of this game were established not only within the domain of postwar art, but within the apparatus of behavioral science.

I have noted how behavioral studies forms but one component of the total regime of Cold War reason. But as a disciplinary technique of psychophysical control, behavioral studies are also part of the biopolitical regime of modernity as defined by Michel Foucault. In particular, as an applied science, behavioral studies would develop specific educational and therapeutic methods which are part and parcel of the so-called technologies of the self, which permit individuals, as Foucault states, “to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being.” That is to say, individuals were not only trained, as in the psycho-physical tests of the earlier twentieth century, to acquire certain corporal skills. It was not only the factory or office worker who was subjected to disciplinary techniques of surveillance, but the individuals in general who are trained to acquire certain attitudes, that is, to optimize their inner potential and, as a result, alter their habitual form of life. Life in its entirety, not just the realm of industrial labor, becomes the object of the technologies of self, and its procedures of self-manipulation and self-actualization were to become the special playing field of American psychotherapy during the 1950s and 1960s.
Nauman has acknowledged that he was fascinated by one such powerful outgrowth of behavioral studies: Frederick Perls’s Gestalt therapy, which became sufficiently popular during the 1960s to allow the psychologist to demonstrate his methods on broadcast television. Nauman read the often-reprinted handbook, *Gestalt Therapy. Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (1951), which Perls co-authored with Ralph Hefferline and Paul Goodman. *Gestalt Therapy* is the prototypical self-help manual of the kind that, starting in the 1970s, would crowd the New Age sections of bookstores. It provides exercises in bodily awareness that readers can perform on themselves, permitting them to “orient the self,” “feel the actual,” “sense opposed forces,” “sharpen the body-sense,” and “change anxiety into excitement,” as various chapters titles of *Gestalt Therapy* promise. What is important not only to the argument of this essay, but also to the practice of Nauman, is the manner in which the authors seek to surmount the mind/body split by offering a field theory of human experience. Perls preaches a theory of radical emancipation, refusing to make any distinction between biological, physical, and social factors of existence. Gestalt therapy is essentially a “science and [a] technique,” which is based on a topological notion of the entanglement between organism and environment along a contact-boundary, which consists of the skin surface and other sensory-motor organs of response. The organism and the environment, therefore, cannot be considered as independent elements, but interact at a primary level of awareness: “it is the contact that is the simplest and first reality” [my emphasis]. For instance, the authors consider, “if you are aware of throwing a ball, the distance comes close and your motor impulse has, so to speak, rushed to the surface to meet it.” And if this surface of awareness is properly calibrated with the organism/environment field, motor behavior will demonstrate “graceful energetic movement that has rhythm, follow through, etc.”; unlike, that is, the faltering movements in Nauman’s studio films.

Gestalt therapy maintains that experience acquires its “unified structure” at the contact-boundary between organism and environment. At least when the organism functions in a normal and creative manner and is not inhibited by stultified habits or repressed needs. The good form of Gestalt psychology is thus transposed into the good contact of Gestalt therapy and forms a “figure of interest” against a ground within the organism/environment field. If such a figure of good contact is established, causing the needs of the organism and the possibilities of the environment to coincide, reality will appear as a vivid, meaningful whole. If not, a weak gestalt is formed that is “dull, confused, graceless, lacking in energy,” which is symptomatic of the circumstance that the organism/environment field cannot “lend its urgency and resources to the completion of the figure.” The environment will appear to be blocked and the person is said to be not all there. That is to say, this person suffers from boredom or exhaustion and undergoes a process of mental and physical withdrawal that is not uncommon in the context of Nauman’s work.

Nauman’s work mimics the exercises of Gestalt therapy, although not in a faithful manner, brushing Perls’s theory of the contact-boundary against the grain. Take, for instance, Body

---

15 See, for instance, the program “Three Approaches to Psychotherapy” (1965) in which Perls conducted one of the therapy sessions with the same patient; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgiX0OLnpYM (12/8/2017).
17 Ibidem, p. 250.
19 Ibidem.
20 Ibidem, p. 231.
21 Ibidem.
22 Ibidem.
23 Ibidem, p. 323.
24 See Nauman’s text “Withdrawal as an Art Form,” which includes an idea for the “[d]enial or confusion of a Gestalt invocation of physiological defense mechanism,” in: Kraynak 2003 (as in note 12), p. 60.
Pressure (1974). This piece invites the spectators to press their body against a wall and to imagine that it's their own body pressing back, causing the inner and outer surface of the body to connect in a paradoxical fashion:

"... Form an image of yourself (suppose you / had just stepped forward) on the / opposite side of the wall pressing / back against the wall very hard ... begin to ignore or / block the thickness of the wall. (remove / the wall) ... Concentrate on tension in the muscles, / pain where bones meet, fleshy deformations / that occur under pressure; consider / body hair; perspiration, odors (smells). ..."  

And as if these instructions were not suggestive enough, Nauman adds "This may become a very erotic exercise." Body Pressure's imagining of a series of viewers hugging the wall, violates the antiseptic spaces of modernist art. In a perverse act of creative destruction, the pristine white cube of exhibition is converted into a site of autoerotic display. It is doubtful, to say the least, that this is the kind of excitement that Perls had in mind in composing his book.

If the skin surface presents a topological zone of integration between organism and environment for Perls, more often than not, it operates in a contrary fashion in Nauman's installations. For instance, the room installation Flayed Earth / Flayed Self (Skin Sink) (1973), which consists of a radiating spiral of masking tape affixed to the floor, is accompanied by a text that begins with the following command:

"Peeling skin peeling earth—peeled earth / raw earth, peeled skin / The problem is to divide your / skin into six equal parts ... stretching and expanding to cover the surface / of the earth. ..."  

Here we are offered the image of an elastic human skin, which like a kind of rubber sheet, is pulled and stretched in order to conform to the spherical surface of the globe: a thought experiment in isomorphic transformation that is typical of topological mathematics.

Another installation of Nauman's that deliberately distorts the methods of Gestalt therapy is provided by Double Doors—Projection and Displacement (1973). It is a slightly more complex installation, consisting of two parallel walls built four feet apart in the center of a room. Each wall contains a doorway opening onto the back of the room. The aperture that is closest to the spectator is slightly larger so that separation between the two walls becomes apparent. An instructional text imparts the following commands to the viewer:

27 Bruce Nauman studied algebraic topology at the University of Wisconsin. For more on the topological character of his work, see Eric C. H. de Bruyn, "Topological Pathways of Post-Minimalism," in: Grey Room, No. 25, Fall 2006, pp. 32–63.
"Stand in the wedge that will allow you to see through the doors and into a further room. / Become aware of the volume displaced by your body. Imagine it filled with water or some gas (helium.) … Form an image of yourself in the further room standing facing away. / Suppose you had just walked through the doors into that room. / Concentrate and try to feel the volume displaced by the image. / Walk through to the other [sic] and step into that volume … / Make your body fit your image." 28 [my emphasis]

Nauman's directions read as a parody of the conceptualist strategy of de-materialization. One can think, for instance, of Robert Barry's Inert Gas Series / Helium, Neon, Argon, Krypton, Xenon / From a Measured Volume to Indefinite Expansion (1969). Yet it's also apparent that projective exercise of Double Doors—Projection and Displacement plays havoc with Perl's process of creative adjustment. Nauman's exhortation to make your body fit your image is exactly what Gestalt Therapy vehemently warns against: "Most persons, lacking adequate proprioception of parts of their body, substitute in place of this visualization or theory. For instance, they know where their legs are and so picture them there. This is not feeling them there!" 29 Flouting this rule, Nauman asks us literally to visualize ourselves as an abstract image. We are to step into a virtual volume that coincides with our own body and, as a result, transform ourselves into a sculptural object as in Nauman's Self Portrait as a Fountain (1966–1967/1970) or, alternatively, allow ourselves to disperse from a "measured volume" into an "indefinite expansion" as in Barry's Inert Gas Series / Helium, Neon, Argon, Krypton, Xenon / From a Measured Volume to Indefinite Expansion.

What these projective exercises of Nauman accomplish, therefore, is an exacerbation of the basic proposition of Gestalt therapy, namely, that the contact-boundary is constituent of reality. Yet that only begs a further set of questions. Is there an inside and an outside to this epidermal surface? If the self operates as a system of contact, then how can it simultaneously form and be formed by this contact-surface? Gestalt therapy, therefore, appears to be based on an inner paradox, demanding that we engage in a process of self-individuation (which nevertheless is subjected to the directives of the therapist). And it is this contradiction that Nauman's work, consciously or unconsciously, draws out. The point is not, of course, to critique the methods of Gestalt therapy as such. It only functions here as a radical instance of modern technologies of the self. I have indicated, thus far, how Nauman's works act as a kind of counter-technique, disrupting the behavioral processes of creative adaptation. What remains to be considered, however, are the political ramifications of such a strategy. To this end, I shall now turn to Nauman's so-called corridor and tunnel pieces of the 1970s.

Placate / My Art … Clap Ate / My Rat

Much has been written about how the video corridors of Nauman tend to elicit experiences of a disconcerting, frustrating, or even frightening nature. The most discussed work in this context is probably the Live-Taped Video Corridor (1970), which causes viewers to recede ever farther away from their own self-image as they walk down the narrow passage-way towards the video monitor installed at its (dead-)end. Likewise, in Going Around the Corner Piece (1970) spectators catch only a momentary glimpse of their own back, just before it slips around the corner. Our own body image is, as it were, constantly eluding our projective grasp, disappearing like a specter into the grainy texture of the video.

---


29 Perls / Hefferline / Goodman 1951 (as in note 16), p. 86.
screen or falling sideways out of its frame. Indeed, we are submitted to an uncanny experience, which is not dissimilar to that portrayed in horror films in which the protagonist runs through endless corridors in hot pursuit of a mysterious other, who always disappears around a corner just before the latter can be identified. Until, of course, in the final encounter, the pursued turns out to be no one but the pursuer. In other words, Live-Taped Video Corridor and Going Around the Corner Piece could be called schizogenic exercises whereby the psychological and perceptual relationship between figure (self) and ground (body) is severed.

Again, it should come as no surprise that such dissociative techniques belong as well to the arsenal of Frederick Perls. “We have split you as a person into two warring camps,” we read in Gestalt Therapy, challenging us to “let loose the schizophrenic possibilities of your imagination,” by asking patients to imagine everyday life situations as the opposite of what they habitually take them to be and to reverse the normal function of things (for example, eat from a chair, sit on a table, turn pictures upside down, or even invert the order of letters in a word). Why not, the authors write, “imagine the motions around you as if they occurred the other way around, as in a reverse-motion moving-picture film.” Yet the most common schizogenic technique they recommend is to focus on the spaces between things, rather than on the things themselves, or to concentrate on the grammatical structure of language, rather than on its meaning: “Eventually you will understand that, as in art, although the content of what is said is important, it is much more the structure, the syntax, the style, that reveals character and underlying motivation.”

The first type of perceptual exercise, which pushes the background into the forefront of one’s awareness, is absurdly realized by Nauman in such works as A Cast of the Space under My Chair (1965–1968) or Platform Made Up of the Space between Two Rectilinear Boxes on the Floor (1966). Likewise, Nauman often manipulates the syntactic structure of language, engaging in semiotic games of substitution, variation, and combination, as in Love Me Tender, Move To Lender (1966), Placate / My Art / Plac / Ate / Art / Clap Ate / My Rat / My Rat / Ate Clap (1973), First Poem Piece (1968), Consummate Mask of Rock (1975), or the script to Good Boy Bad Boy (1985). However, what is relevant here is that such relational procedures, which disrupt the good form of Gestalt psychology, create a sense of dissociation in the reader/viewer: “Standing above and to one side of your- / self-schizoid - not a dislocation, but a / bend or brake (as at the surface of water ...).” And this schizoid self who is beside itself is not offered any respite from the situation, unlike Perls’s patient.

---

30 Ibidem, p. 45.
31 Ibidem, p. 47.
32 Ibidem.
33 Ibidem, p. 216.
34 Nauman 1973 (as in note 26), p. 260/267. The “problem” that this text presents the spectator is to “divide your / skin into six equal parts,” peeling it off, “stretching and expanding to cover the surface / of the earth indicated by the spiraling / waves ...” (Ibidem).
is presumed able “to stand between [opposing habits]—or, rather above, them—at the zero-point, interested in both sides of the opposition but not siding with either.”

Such a zero-point which neutralizes the distinction between inside and outside is precisely what Nauman’s most successful installations, such as Live-Taped Video Corridor and Going Around the Corner Piece, refuse. In Nauman’s various light corridors, curved corridors, and parallax corridors, the spectator is subjected to a series of psychophysiological manipulations, undergoing a constant modulation of the organism / environment field, which is more unsettling than exciting in Perls’s sense of the word. The general effect of Nauman’s corridor installations is to disturb the spectator’s sense of figure and ground, creating an experience of disorientation by means of the cramped, awkwardly shaped spaces, the creation of acoustic and visual illusions (by means of mirrors, for instance), or the use of intense, colored illumination. The corridors confuse our senses, direct our movements, and, on occasion, even block our access to other spaces. We are like rats caught in a maze. What is a maze, after all, but a system of corridors?

That I’m not simply making a play on words is shown by Nauman’s installation Learned Helplessness in Rats (Rock and Roll Drummer) (1988), which incorporated an actual rat maze. Since the early twentieth century, the rat maze formed a standard piece of equipment in the behaviorist laboratory. Its ubiquity was secured by the behaviorist principle that, as John B. Watson claimed, there is “no dividing line between man and brute.” Behaviorism, that is, tended to reduce all human conduct to a biological level of existence, whereby the formation of habits is thought to be determined by a direct correlation between input (stimulus) and output (reflex). This reflex response theory, therefore, makes no distinction between human or animal modes of behavior: the rat running the maze provided behaviorism with a general model of human conduct. Yet this very model of behavior is enabled by the laboratory situation: the rat maze removes the ambiguity of real-life situations, breaking every decision down into simple binary choice—right / left, yes / no—so that this device would even serve as a model of the cybernetic brain during the 1950s.

Learned Helplessness in Rats (Rock and Roll Drummer) refers to a specific behaviorist concept—a state of apathy that is induced in lab rats by subjecting them to conditions of unavoidable stress. Most likely what attracted Nauman to this disturbing notion is the fact that it inverts the usual logic of behaviorist experimentation: rather than investigating the learning process of animals and humans (in order to establish a bodily economy of prediction and control), learned helplessness concerns a process of unlearning: a disinvestiture and incapacitation of life, reducing the organism to an exceptional state of passivity in the face of even the most extreme forms of torture conceived by imaginative laboratory technicians. There is no need to elaborate how Learned Helplessness in Rats (Rock and Roll Drummer) conflates the behavioral situations of the laboratory and the museum, suggesting how they both train subjects to conduct themselves in a passive manner. Yet, the work takes up the behavioral apparatus in a more representational fashion, whereas the earlier corridor

---

35 Perls / Hefferline / Goodman 1951 (as in note 16), p. 46.
installations enacted this entangled relationship in a more concrete and bodily fashion. In this regard it is interesting to note that a film proposal by Nauman of the early 1970s imagined the construction of a simple closed maze that was to be traversed by blindfolded actors. Pushing the behaviorist logic to its limit, this project exploits the absurdity of reflex theory which renders learning (that is, locating the exit) completely dependent on external, contingent factors: an involuntary trial-and-error process. A scenario that Nauman’s film would have made literal since the “helpless” actors could only clear a path through the labyrinth by randomly bumping into each other and the walls.

One of the first and most complex of the corridor installations is Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation) (1970). One needs little imagination to see how its layout resembles that of a learning maze. It was constructed of six lighted and unlighted corridors of varying widths, three of them being too narrow to enter. The first corridor, which was too narrow to be accessible, opened onto a partially concealed room on the right. The second corridor contained a video feedback system similar to the Live-Taped Video Corridor. The fourth corridor contained a monitor at its end with a live feed from the concealed room. Above this monitor, a closed-circuit camera was mounted but flipped onto its side. As one turned the corner, entering the next corridor, one could glimpse a fleeting image of one’s back on another monitor at the far end of the fifth corridor, producing an effect similar to Going Around the Corner Piece. In the fifth corridor one could also stealthily watch a live feed of other visitors entering the fourth corridor. In this installation, the visitor becomes both the object and subject of surveillance, rat and researcher in one.

But what learning process is this rat-man submitted to, if any at all? The Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation) offers no satisfaction of one’s needs, no reinforcement of correct behavior. In fact, the spectator entering this partitioned and dissociative structure, will, more likely than not, fail to build up a comprehensive overview of the environment. In other words, the installation works against the behaviorist stratagems of the rat maze, which aimed to establish a correspondence between animal and human modes of coping with one’s environment. How, that is, does the decision-making process of the human-animal operate? According to what rule does the test subject determine that it must turn left or right? Whereas the American

psychologist Edward C. Tolman, after a tireless series of rat maze experiments, invented the seminal notion of cognitive mapping in 1948, striking a masterful compromise between behaviorist and Gestalt theories of learning, Nauman’s corridors seem more prone to create an impression of cognitive dissonance. We are, as it were, placed out of sync with the environment.

But where else might one encounter corridors, if not on the miniature scale of the rat maze? As an architectural element, the corridor was invented to enable swift communication between the inside and outside of a fortification. In modern times, the corridor became a common feature of the disciplinary institutions of modernity—schools, hospitals, factories, and prisons—ensuring the smooth circulation of people. The corridor became synonymous with rationalist design; that is, until the 1960s. Rather than a functional device, the corridor became viewed as a space of human degradation: the corridors of power mutated into shock corridors. Environmental psychologists now derided the corridor as a space of alienation. One author, writing in 1967, complained about the “dizzying pattern of reflections” and the glaring light effects in the hallways of a psychiatric hospital.

41 The rat maze is a bit of a misnomer. A true maze has multiple entrances and exits.
coming to the conclusion that such spaces are detrimental to the mental health of the patients.\textsuperscript{43} Whereas the corridor once fitted into the diagram of disciplinary power, it had become corrupted by the time Nauman started working on his corridor installations. Something, clearly, was amiss with the behavioral regime of Cold War reason and the corridor installations of Nauman were not the only contemporary symptom of this disturbance in the social and cultural order.\textsuperscript{44}

And if the remodeling of the gallery into a corridor was not sufficient, Nauman would also imagine them spreading underground as well, initiating a series of models for subterranean passages, tunnels, and shafts-in 1977. These were to be self-contained spaces (and not a maze like a mine or a cave system). None of these models were ever realized and it is hard to imagine how they could have been, considering not only the costs, but the lack of clues as to scale and technical details in Nauman’s models (and related drawings). Was there to be a lighting system? Climate control? How is one to access or exit the space? And, once one is down there, what can one be expected to do? Are we to be plunged into darkness, like his proposal to situate blindfolded actors in a maze? And, if so, for how long? Why would anyone agree to undergo such an ordeal? Nauman shies away from answering such questions (for good reasons) and, consequently, the models have been mostly read in sculptural terms. Yet, if these models are no more than a thought experiment, marking an external limit to Nauman’s topologies of behavioral manipulation, they deserve to be taken as such and not denuded of their political implications. In short, why does Nauman seem to pull back from articulating the full significance of these models?

\textbf{Dépeupler}

Nauman once recalled how, as a boy, he used to visit the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. He coveted his memories of two installations in particular: a full-size replica of a coal mine, Old Ben No. 17, and a German U-505 submarine. These two artificial structures are what environmental psychologists call ICE’s, an acronym for Isolated, Confined, and Extreme environments.


\textsuperscript{44} Consider, for instance, the rise of the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and its influence on Michel Foucault’s critique of the institutions of disciplinary power.
Similar spaces are formed by prisons, intensive care units, hospital isolation wards, and space stations. During the 1970s they would be discovered by psychologists as a natural laboratory to observe the coping strategies of humans under stressful conditions. One researcher, for instance, suggests that isolated research stations on Antarctica “may be one of the last and best places in which to accomplish sorely needed basic behavioral studies.” He ruefully notes, “voluntary, solitary self-isolation of selected individuals is not ... currently permitted by US authorities.” ICE’s, in short, provide the behavioral psychologist with a perfect situation of environmental control, which test subjects, such as the polar researchers, have either voluntarily signed up for or, as in the case of prisoners, have been legally submitted to. Even so, what form of life is being incubated in an ICE?

A possible answer to this question is not to be found in the field of environmental psychology as such, which continues the behavioral project of predicting and controlling human behavior, while evading the biopolitical repercussions of this project. And, indeed, Nauman himself has mentioned a quite different, literary source for his subterranean structures, namely Samuel Beckett’s short story Le dépeupleur (The Lost Ones, 1970). According to Nauman’s (not wholly accurate) account, this text describes “a large number of people in a strange, very accurately and clearly described space ... but they’re stuck in it. A greenish yellow light, circular space with no top to it, just black and then greenish light and walking around and around in a circle.” It was Beckett’s story, he adds, that “encouraged me in the direction of the tunnels and the kind of oblique comment they make on society.”

Beckett’s lost ones are sealed into a prototypical ICE: a closed cylinder which keeps its inhabitants alive, if only barely so, by a concealed system of life support. The throbbing, nauseating, yellowish light permeates the entire space as if it were, Beckett writes, “uniformly luminous down to its least particle of ambient air,” blurring all contours and straining the eyes of the lost...

---

47 In 1971, a test in social conditioning, the Stanford prison experiment, went horribly wrong, prompting the U.S. government to establish ethical guidelines for behavioral research.
ones. Human life, in Beckett’s imagination, has been reduced to a state of near exhaustion; the individuals shuffle around in endless circles and are incapable of making contact with each other besides the occasional sexual encounter. Few, if any words are spoken. In other words, confinement has reduced the lost ones to a minimal, sheer biological state of existence; they have become nearly impervious to external stimuli, exhibiting a sheer comatose state of deprivation. This is what Giorgio Agamben has described as the state of exception, drawing on the classical distinction between bios as a particular “form of life” and zoë as the lawless, biological existence of “bare life.” On the one hand, the state of exception is defined by a suspension of the juridical order, but it is also the anthropogenic zone, as Agamben argues, in which the distinction between animal and man, zoë and bios, is decided. It is not only a proto-juridical, but a proto-linguistic zone, because it is the faculty of speech which allows the human animal to enter a political community, the polis. But this distinction between zoë and bios is not one of strict opposition; the two exist in a mutual state of inclusive exclusion. “There is politics,” Agamben writes, “because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life,” yet, at the same time, this political being “maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion.”50 In other words, the distinction between bare life and the form of life is ultimately irreducible; the anthropogenic event occupies a topological zone of indistinction. Gestalt therapy would attempt to police this very zone, establishing a primary contact-boundary of the skin that allows an individual to assimilate its environment; in short, to territorialize space. This is also why, Perls, as noted above, would make no fundamental distinction between biological and social modes of spatial experience (similar, in fact, to Nauman’s example of the anthropologist-carpenter). The Gestalt therapist, therefore, is nothing else but an antecedent of the life coach who administers to the entrepreneurial subjects of neoliberalism.

The lost ones constitute a lapsarian society, falling back into threshold space of exception or, as the behaviorist might say, learned helplessness. As the French title of Beckett’s story suggests, the political fabric of the bios, or human community, is becoming unraveled. We could, therefore, conclude that Nauman’s practice as a whole functions as a dépeupleur or deanthropogenic machine that counters the behavioral technologies of power. Yet, this would be too formal a statement and does not sufficiently historicize the work. I have situated Nauman’s practice in relation to the behavioral regime of Cold War reason but what became of this regime after the 1960s?

As both Foucault and Agamben have asserted, the exception has become the rule in our current, neo-liberal age. That is to say, the behavioral technologies of the self, which were once confined to certain institutional spaces—family, school, hospital, factory—now permeate all of social life, requiring that we endlessly modulate our life styles. The neoliberal subject is no longer a seller of abstract labor-power, but a bearer of human capital, who is expected to invest in his or her own potential. So, today, we are experiencing a total economization of the subject.51 In a post-welfare state where no one’s future is secure, we must constantly update our personal portfolio in order to survive: homo economicus has placed homo politicus on critical life support.

Although the behavioral apparatus originated in a different socioeconomic order, it fed directly into the neoliberal regime that emerged during the 1970s. In fact, towards the end of the decade, Foucault would suggest that a direct correlation exists between the behaviorism and neoliberalism that connects the writings of B. F. Skinner and Gary Becker. Both systems of human management are based on mechanisms of reinforcement as has become all too obvious in the case of the so-called sharing economy and the controversial policies of a company like Uber. Returning to the roots of behaviorism, we could also state that the economization of human beings is equal to their animalization since individual subsistence, or bare life, becomes the main principle of existence. The rat-man of behaviorism becomes the homo economicus of neoliberalism. But where does that leave the dépeupleur machine of Nauman? Does his work, somehow, register this historical transformation in the behavioral paradigm?

In a more optimistic moment, Agamben has proposed that artistic practice can enable “archaeological idling of the anthropological machine and the works of life, language, economy, and society, in order that the becoming human of the human being will never be achieved once and for all.” Perhaps this smacks of a belated form of avant-gardist thought, yet it does suggest that the anthropogenic event—in the dual sense of the coupling and uncoupling of the human/animal dyad—must be historicized. However, for the main part, Nauman appears to have been content to mimic the perspective of the behavioral psychologist, albeit from a skewed position. The further mutations of the species human being are hardly registered in his practice.

Consider, for instance, a more recent work, Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage) (2001), which continues to cast the studio in the form of a behavioral situation. But what kind of cognitive map is drawn here? And for whom? The video installation presents a lengthy surveillance of the nocturnal conduct of animals, who inhabit the studio in the absence of the artist. According to a classic distinction in environmental biology, Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage) converts the objective space or Umgebung of the studio into the territorial life-world or Umwelt occupied by cats and mice. We cannot enter into this perceptual world; it is a closed unity that contains certain marks that are only of significance to the animal. As a result, Nauman wavers between the anthropogenic poles of humanization and animalization: “I was interested in the relationship between cat and the mice, but more in a psychological way. Their relationship exists somewhere between a joke and reality. They’ve been cartoon characters for so long that we think of them as lighthearted performers, but there is this obvious predator—prey tension between them. I want to create a situation that was slightly unclear as to how you should react.” We have, therefore, a studio-for-the-artist, a studio-for-the-cat, a studio-for-the-mouse, but we also have a studio-for-Disney, a studio-for-Tom-and-Jerry. And mediating between them is the inhuman

---

55 But it could prove productive to consider Nauman’s later video installations, and the language games they play, in relation to Paolo Virno’s essay on “Jokes and Innovative Action,” (as in note 4).
56 See note 53.
eye of the camera that shoots a video which is “just there, ongoing, being itself.” A camera eye that records a video of a deserted studio, almost bereft of human signs of interest. *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)* is the video of a (in)human space lacking in affect where almost nothing stirs. “It ends pretty much how it starts ... It just stops, like a long slice of time, just time in the studio.” As the anthropogenic machine continues to idle in the abandoned studio, the rat-man has long since escaped the maze. His name is *homo economicus*.

---

58 Ibidem, p. 399.
59 Ibidem, p. 403.