

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: BRUCE NAUMAN

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ROOM**

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[CREW DISCUSSION to 0:01:25]

KH: I'm Kathy Halbreich, Associate Director of The Museum of Modern Art. It's January 9, 2012. I'm here in the Mayer Screening Room at The Museum of Modern Art with Bruce Nauman. And I guess, Bruce, you have to give us a few salient facts.

BN: [Laughs] I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana; grew up mostly in the Midwest, in Wisconsin. Went to the University of Wisconsin and then to California to a couple of years of graduate school at the University of California at Davis, and worked and lived in San Francisco, and then Los Angeles, and now New Mexico for the last, since 1979.

KH: When you moved from the Midwest to the west coast, which was in 1966, I think. Was there any temptation to go east rather than west?

BN: Yes. People I knew, unless you had a job in the Midwest, you were leaving, going either to the east coast or the west coast. Most of the people I knew had gone to New York and to the east coast. There was a man that was teaching ceramics and painting at the University of Wisconsin, had just come from California, had been in Wisconsin a couple of years, and he thought I ought to go to the west coast, because he knew a number of artists, [Wayne Thiebaud](#) and [Bob Arneson](#). So I did, just, maybe, I don't know, to go in a different direction. And I had been in San Francisco once before, with my parents, on a vacation. I didn't really know much about it, but. So anyway, I drove out there. [0:03:28]

KH: And in fact, Arneson and Thiebaud and Wiley were your teachers, and you were the assistant for Thiebaud for a while.

BN: Yes. Wayne was never a teacher of mine. He only taught beginning students. He didn't want to talk to graduate students. He thought nobody was doing a good job with beginning students, really teaching drawing and how to look at stuff. But I learned a lot from being his assistant. He was a really good teacher.

KH: Was it unusual to be the assistant of a painter, when you knew you were going to

BN: They just passed us around. I mean, we didn't have any real role in the classroom.

KH: What did an assistant do?

BN: I can't remember. [KH laughs] I watched him teach. [laughing] But he was so direct and straightforward. He was a really good teacher.

KH: And Wiley, you ended up actually making some work with, right? Video.

BN: We made some sort of sculpture things. Bill Allen was who I did some film with.

KH: Okay.

BN: He was another local artist, a friend of Bill's. But Wiley was, very much liked to teach and really work with the students, mostly graduate students. And he was the kind of person that just basically gave you permission to do whatever you were going to do, or wanted to do.

KH: Did it feel like the east coast was more ideological, in a sense? That there was

BN: Well, I didn't know much about it. I didn't spend time in New York until I was finished with graduate school, basically.

KH: Which was in?

BN: '66.

KH: So this piece [[Untitled, MoMA # 516.1978](#)], actually, which is the first piece, earliest piece of sculpture we have in the collection – it doesn't have a title but it's made out of fiberglass, polyester resin, and light, was made while you were still a student.

BN: Yes.

KH: And it's the last, I guess, work in a series of fiberglass pieces.

BN: I think so.

KH: What did fiberglass make possible at that time?

BN: [pause] It was a quick and easy way to make volumetric shapes and irregular ones. This isn't particularly irregular, but I was, the first ones were made out of clay, and then I made a plaster mold, and then used that to, at first, because there was a good casting, foundry, at the University of California, at Davis, poured them in aluminum. And then, but, you had to wait in line and sign up, and so this way, you could just do it yourself and be finished with it.

KH: So, was there a wood structure first?

BN: This was cardboard and wood.

KH: And then the fiberglass, was it poured, or was it a sheet?

BN: It was a sheet, brushed into place. The resin is brushed into place with color in it, and then the pieces of fiberglass are put in place, and then more resin is brushed on.

KH: And then the wood comes out?

BN: Yes, I varnished everything and waxed it so that it would all come out. But you could still find pieces of plywood in there.

KH: You can also find glitter.

BN: There's some glitter in there.

KH: What were you thinking about, glitter and?

BN: [laughing] Well, the first pieces were much more monochromatic and not transparent or translucent. And as they progressed, I was sort of just trying out all of the different kind of things you could do to it. Because it does have that transparency, which the light helps you see.

KH: Yes, there's a light bulb inside, which

BN: I did one other one that was a long, worm-shaped kind of thing with a neon tube in it. They were the two that had lights in them.

KH: And were the lights there to – I mean, it's almost jokey.

BN: Yes.

KH: And it almost becomes a piece of furnishing, as opposed to sculpture.

BN: Right. That was all part of sort of testing to see where you could go and what you could do. And it's also sort of not knowing what it's going to be like when you're finished. You try it out, and then you see what you've got, and then you decide if that's what you want to do or not. So this was the last of that group of things, and it kind of got a little farther than I thought I wanted to go. [laughing]

KH: In what direction?

BN: It just became too decorative and too thing-like. It belonged to [pause]. Our friend, the dealer from...

KH: Nicholas?

BN: No, from St. Louis, and then New York. Joe Helman. It belonged to Joe and he loaned it to the county museum for some show, and they drove a forklift through it. And so there was a big to-do. They called me up, and I said, "Oh, I can fix it." [laughing]

KH: A little after the fact.

BN: Well, all I had to do was put some patches on it. It sort of looks patchy anyway. Of course, Joe didn't think – well, it wouldn't be the same, of course.

KH: Well, he gave it to MoMA; it's a gift from Joe.

BN: Yes.

KH: So this is '65. In '66, shortly, I think, around the same time as this piece [\[referring to MoMA # 301.1997\]](#) is made, you also have an exhibition that became quite famous, which is called Eccentric Abstraction, curated by Lucy Lippard. And it included Alice Adams, [Louise Bourgeois](#), [Eva Hesse](#), [Gary Kuehn](#), Bruce Nauman, Don Potts, [Keith Sonnier](#), and Frank Lincoln Viner, I guess. He's the only one I don't know in the show. But this has become such a historically important exhibition. Do you remember anything about it?

BN: I didn't see the show. The only person I knew was Keith. I had met Keith before that. And I do remember Lucy, and she was married to Bob Ryman at that time, and the two of them came to my studio in San Francisco. So that's kind of really all I remember about it.

KH: Were you surprised to be selected for a show like this?

BN: Yes. [laughing]

KH: It was unusual, right?

BN: Very unusual; yes.

KH: Do you remember what you showed?

BN: No. Except that her son – she ended up with one of the pieces, and her son drove his bicycle over it and cracked it. [laughing]

KH: I guess that's the problem of sculpture. It occupies the same space we do.

BN: Nothing was worth anything, and she just had stuff around her loft.

KH: Were people selling work at that time?

BN: Well, I sold some things, but the prices were so low that it didn't amount to anything.

KH: Let's look at [Collection of Various Flexible Materials Separated by Layers of Grease, with Holes the Size of my Waist and Wrists](#) [\[MoMA # 301.1997\]](#), from 1966. The first thing I want to ask you is, really, were these the size of your waist and wrists?

BN: Pretty close.

KH: Oh, they were.

BN: Yes.

KH: Okay, so it was true, what the title said.

BN: Yes.

- KH: What about the layers. Why was a piece like this made with so many layers? And I actually can tell you what's in it: aluminum foil, plastic sheet, foam rubber, felt, and grease.
- BN: I don't remember how I chose the materials, particularly, except that they were all flexible. Sometime before this, Kasper König had come through, and I think he got my name from Nick Wilder in Los Angeles. And Kasper was traveling around. He was, I think, trying to put together a book of pictures of art, sculpture, things that he was really interested in, and poetry; I don't know – because his brother's a publisher book seller or publisher, but I don't know if it ever got made. But he was a very interesting guy. He knew a lot of stuff. And he told me about the German sculptor, artist,
- KH: [Beuys](#)?
- BN: [Joseph Beuys](#). So he told me about Joseph Beuys, and I had never heard of him. I didn't know anything about him. But he told me about a few of the pieces he did. And I think his idea of his uses of materials probably had something to do with my thinking about different kinds of
- KH: The felt and the grease
- BN: Yes. He used a lot of animal fat and felt
- KH: Exactly. Was there also any relationship, maybe unconscious, maybe conscious, to [Man Ray](#)'s Wrapped Sewing Machine? Some people have suggested that.
- BN: I'm trying to remember. Yeah; Man Ray had a large show at the Los Angeles County Museum. And I know a friend of mine and I went down there to see the show. But I think – I don't know the dates on that show. It might have been after this. I'm pretty sure it was after this. But seeing that show did help me quite a bit, let me kind of not worry about having a way of going about making work; because he just did whatever he did, and he did all kinds of stuff.
- KH: Was there a lot of pressure then to have a signature?
- BN: Well, [pause] I don't think I thought about it. [pause] I was still trying to figure out what kind of work I wanted to do, how I wanted to go about, you know, making work or being an artist. So I didn't really concern myself too much with it.
- KH: Wiley actually said something great about you, at some point, which was, he described your approach as an attempt to under-impress. [Laughter] I kind of know what he's talking about. I mean, the work wasn't heroic, in a traditional sense.
- BN: Yes, I sort of had the idea that it would be interesting to make things that people could just walk by and not notice. And I remember thinking, when I first finally started to have, to show in New York, and I thought, "Well, this is really a different kind of deal than on the west coast, where people are all-accepting and, you know, everything you do is fine. You're just doing the best you can." And in New York, people were making serious value judgments, and so I thought, "Well, I just need to make stuff that's so tough, they won't even know it's there." [Laughter]

KH: Which is almost an oxymoron, right? So tough, that they almost won't know it's there. I mean, what is interesting to me about this piece is that the material is both kind of luscious and beautiful in some way. The foil, certainly in its aging, has turned into this probably more precious than it really was.

BN: Well, because the grease is on everything now. And it's just stuff from the car parts places grease. And I had the piece in my studio, and [Ed Kienholz](#) came by. He had just gotten married, and he was on his way to Idaho with his Lynn. And they came by. And so, Ed, Mr. Bargainer, said, "Well, you want to make a trade?" [laughing] So he picked out two pieces; he picked out this piece and one of the earliest plastic pieces.

KH: What did you pick out?

BN: When he got back from his honeymoon in Idaho, and he was back in Los Angeles, I had to go down there and go pick something out. So that was the deal. So when he came back through, we went down to the thrift shop and bought a suitcase, and he rolled it up. He says, "Is it okay if I roll it up?" [laughing] So he rolled it up, which is one way how we started distributing the grease. He stuck it in the suitcase and carried it back to L.A. So I flew down there with my wife and my son who was about a year old, and stayed at the house with he and Lynn. And what he wanted to do was foist off on me one of those washing machines filled with concrete that he was making. [Laughter]

KH: Something easy to move around, right? [Laughter]

BN: And what I ended up with was this beautiful little monument. It's like a tombstone that he made out of wood and soldered tin. And the letters on it say, "Born of a hard hot dog, died of a limp wienie." And it was a tribute to the Ferus Gallery.

KH: Which was opening or closing?

BN: It was gone. He had made it a while ago, when it closed. So Irving had had that, Irving Blum had had it.

KH: Do you still have it?

BN: Yes. Irving was at lunch the other day, and he had never seen it before. It knocked him out. It put little tears into his eyes.

KH: Were artists, like, in and out of each other's studios?

BN: When I lived in San Francisco, it was considered normal. If you went to somebody's house, you always fed them or had coffee or a drink or something, and went in the studio to see what everybody was doing. It was very normal. It was later when I found out that that was unusual.

KH: Yeah. It's too bad, in a way, because it's what makes a community.

BN: Yeah; yeah.

KH: Is the grease here, to me, it's the ultimate human thing. It's, in a way, the embodiment of skin, its grease. Was that, were you thinking about things like that? The sort of, these metaphors, I guess?

BN: I don't think so. But a lot of the pieces around that time had to do with body parts and measurement and the cross sections, you know, the classical seven parts.

KH: Da Vinci?

BN: The head.

KH: I had wondered if the layers had something to do with this theme that goes all the way through your work, which is what's visible and what's invisible. You know, in a way, what's covered up, which comes through in so many ways. But it's also some kind of a very clear way to the epidermis and the way the body is made. Also I read something about Morris and felt. Was there – his felt pieces, I think, came out shortly after this.

BN: I had made some rubber pieces that- some hung on the wall and some were kind of thrown in the corner. And, yeah.

KH: Did it matter who came first?

BN: Well, I was, you know, I was a little disturbed, and then I talked to Dick Bellamy about it and he said, "Just forget it. You're just going to drive yourself nuts." [laughing] It was very good advice.

KH: It was good advice.

BN: Because, you know, there are artists that really do worry about that, and it does drive them nuts.

KH: Absolutely. But what does it prove? I mean, maybe it proves that there's a zeitgeist.

BN: You could always find somebody that did it sooner, but, whatever it is.

KH: And maybe the intention

BN: Because [Richard Serra](#) had those rubber pieces [inaudible].

KH: Absolutely.

BN: That I think he showed in Italy for the first time. I didn't know about those, but I found out about them. And I'm not sure the date on those, but they must have been

KH: They were around that time, yes. And he also showed, I think it was about the same time he was showing animals with the sculpture.

BN: Yes. So it was an interesting time, because there were a lot of people, Keith and Richard and a lot of people doing stuff that was not unrelated, for different reasons, in different places.

KH: What do you think some of the reasons were? Was it the political tumult that sort of made anything heroic suspicious? Was it just a reaction to the fetish finish of minimalism?

BN: Well, the minimalism really didn't have a fetish finish. I mean, [Donald Judd](#), but his early works are really funky. I mean, even some of the plastic and metal

ones. He didn't, he wasn't – [Bob Morris](#) really knew how to put stuff together, how things should join, and a sense of scale. And I think Donald, in his early work, really struggled with that. And he got really good at it. But he had to teach himself a bunch of stuff. It was like, he didn't really know how to make stuff.

KH: They were more ideas, weren't they?

BN: Yes. And a lot of it was fabricated at sheet metal shops and stuff.

KH: Well that's what I meant by the finish, you know. There was definitely, in minimalism, this turn away from the hand.

BN: Yes.

KH: And in your work, there's a turn towards the hand.

BN: Well, in those early, the earliest fiberglass pieces, which I made originally in clay and then made molds and cast them; but I left fingerprints in them and stuff. That was part of the deal, so that they'd have a sense of human scale. That was important to me.

KH: But did this work, which is, I guess we'd say, a photograph, [Composite Photo of Two Messes on the Studio Floor \[MoMA #505.1984\]](#), from 1967. What was your studio like at this time?

BN: [laughing] Well, you know it had a wooden floor, and I had been making stuff out of plaster, so there was plaster and torn paper, whatever is in the picture. That's the results of a couple of different projects, the litter of a couple of different projects.

KH: Did you make the photographs all at once?

BN: Yes.

KH: And you took the photos?

BN: Yes. I think it was from those earliest moon shots, which were all composite photographs.

KH: That was in your mind?

BN: Yes; instead of getting one big photograph.

KH: I was going to ask you. So it wasn't one big photograph, which; what can this convey that one big photograph can't? For example, what was compelling about this, it's not really an assemblage.

BN: I suppose it's because the paste-up of the different parts that don't quite match, gives it a completely different texture than a single large photograph would have. And then there's a sort of, here was this mess and here was that mess, and here's this little thing that connects them.

KH: It almost looks like a blueprint for a house, actually. [BN laughs] But it in fact is a model for nothing, right? But the idea of model is behind here, somehow?

BN: Well, or documenting. Or pretend documenting. It appears to have a purpose but it doesn't, really.

KH: And it's also, again, it's got this very sly humor in it, which is very you, which is to document messes as opposed to the moon. [Laughter] It's a kind of big leap, you know, but it's, one of the reasons I really love this work is, it also suggests for me, in a way, the difficulties of being in a studio.

BN: Yes.

KH: A lot of your work at this time is just figuring out how to inhabit a studio. So we get very quickly to works of art such as the videos, [Violin Film Number One](#), [Playing the Violin as Fast as I Can \[MoMA #583.2008\]](#), '67-68. And do I remember correctly, that Leo [Castelli] gave you the first?

BN: These were made in San Francisco. I was actually out in Mill Valley at the time. Bill Wiley was traveling, and that was his studio. Anyway, these were films, because in San Francisco, there were a lot of underground filmmakers, above ground. [Laughter] There were a lot of filmmakers. So there was equipment. You could borrow from somebody or rent them for five dollars a day or whatever, and sources of cheap film, outdated film. People used it all the time; it worked just fine. So the camera I was always using ran ten minutes, so, everything was ten minutes long.

KH: No editing.

BN: No editing. [laughing] So it was later when I was on the east coast for a while and didn't have access to that equipment, and those big Sony reel to reel Porta-packs -- so Leo bought that. It belonged to the gallery, and I used it for six months or whatever. And then Richard Serra had it. It moved around.

KH: And did you have a preference for film over video?

BN: The video is just a lot easier. I didn't have to do processing and stuff. But, and I liked the idea that I could record an hour at a time with it.

KH: By the way, did you play the violin?

BN: Like that. [laughing]

KH: In other words, had you ever taken a lesson?

BN: I was a bass player. Stand-up bass player.

KH: Was there a natural movement between bass and violin?

BN: I knew how to hold it. [laughing]

KH: I was wondering, what's true, and what's sort of true? Like the holes, that it's sort of true that it's your waist and your wrist. It's sort of true that you play the violin.

BN: What I chose to play was to just leave it at a regular tuning, and then play it as fast as I could. I didn't do any fingering. I was just playing. I was just sawing away. In the other piece I did, I re-tuned it to D-E-A-D and played that. So I think it really, from John Cage's first book, which was Silence, right? And reading

about [Merce Cunningham](#), because I, at that point, I had seen John when I was still in school at the University of Wisconsin; he was here and did some performance. But I don't think at that point I had ever seen Merce. I just knew about him from reading and pictures. But finding an activity, would not be- which I could do, and the tension is in the repetition, and getting tired and making mistakes. And so, you're trying to do it the best you can, but it's. So trying to pick an activity that somehow can contain some kind of interest for somebody watching it.

KH: Is ten minutes long enough to make a mistake?

BN: You get pretty tired, if you're really doing it as fast as you can, and trying not to slow down, and keep the tempo.

KH: How did you get the idea of making performances?

BN: Well, I had done one or two things in public, and I really didn't like it. So, because the, and then again, this idea of documenting something, giving it a sense of importance, even though it's not really about anything. You know, you're selecting the camera angles – a lot of them were shot upside down, or with my head cut off. So there was editing that was going on.

KH: Did it seem potentially that there was a greater range of experimental possibility with these films than maybe with conventional sculptural materials?

BN: [pause] Well, I continued to use all of it. Over the years when I've gotten very involved in video or film or something, I get frustrated with the technical stuff, and eventually I want to go back to just – the reason I became an artist, I assume, is because I like to make stuff. So I always go back, at some point, to drawing or making something.

KH: As I remember, in your studio, when you're making things as opposed to working with many people to make video, you're working alone mostly, right?

BN: Yes.

KH: Still.

BN: Yes. The only time I'm not is if I end up going to a foundry or needing something at a quarry. But there were a few projects where I thought I needed a professional, a professional cameraman, or a professional something. I wasn't able to do myself what I thought needed to be done to carry through on the project. When I would get [Woody](#) and [Steina Vasulka](#) to help me with videoing things. Or, getting Rinde Eckert. And I had trouble with some of that stuff.

KH: And Eckert was an actor, really, wasn't he?

BN: He was trained as an opera singer and he's a stand-up guy, and he tells stories, and he plays music, and he's had bands, and done all kinds of performance things and plays.

KH: So he was used to being in front of the camera.

BN: Yes, and a tremendous presence. And so he sang for me. He sang my words but he had to invent the [the whole thing?] And some of those things, and Walter

the Clown, those are the people that made the piece. I sort of give them all instruction, and they carry it out.

KH: So they were permitted a great deal of interpretation.

BN: Yes.

KH: Did you throw away any of these that you made, any of the ten-minute films? Or did you keep everything?

BN: There's one or two that are missing. Real early ones; nobody knows where they are. They're just gone. And there are some of the earlier videotapes that I never stored correctly, and they just, the stuff fell off, and it's in the bottom of the box . [laughing]

KH: One of the things that's also interesting, even about the range of work that we own, is that sometimes the work or an idea takes different forms in different media. So, for example, we also have this print called [Violins Violence \[MoMA #395.1987\]](#), made in '85, you know, twenty-some years, almost twenty years later. What is it about violins and violence?

BN: I was asked – I was going to do a commission for [pause] – I can't remember the campus. This was for a university in southern California. It was a state college. They had a new auditorium, music performance space, and so they asked me to do some sort of commission for it. And the entrance was a big glass wall, and then the lobby was there, and then you walked into the auditorium. And so I was working with neon at that point, and so I designed a big neon piece that said *Violins, Violence, Silence*. It was a triangular piece. And so I thought, because then you'd see it, read it one way from the inside and the other way from the outside, the reverse. Anyway, they didn't like it.

KH: But the piece was made, right?

BN: The piece was made, but not for them. So, I knew [Claes Oldenburg](#) at that time, so I asked Claes how he did his contracts; because I never got paid anything and I'd done a bunch of work. Well, the piece eventually got made, and so I did get paid when it was sold. But he said, "Well, first you make a contract for a proposal. Then at each step, then you make a maquette, and then you -- at each step, either side can say, 'No more.' But you get paid at each step." And he said, "And one thing is, if they don't accept your first proposal, don't make another one, because it just means you're going to waste everybody's time. And the other thing is, no matter what they tell you, what they really want is a medium-sized [Henry Moore](#) on a pedestal." [Laughter] "They don't know it."

KH: I was going to ask you, actually, about the public commissions, because there are some drawings that relate to that, and the particular difficulties of them. It's a very different process than working in your studio, isn't it?

BN: Yes.

KH: Is there any pleasure in it?

BN: Well, you get to build something that I wouldn't normally have had any way to make, or maybe any interest in making. And some of them are interesting. And

some of the people you deal with are very good. The problem is, of course, you're always dealing with committees. And most of the ones that got put through, there was somebody that really cared about it that pushed it through.

KH: Yes, I think public works require enormous faith and stubbornness on somebody's part.

BN: On somebody's part.

KH: So is the real relationship in *Violins and Violence* to sound and violence? Because later, we also come up to color being attached to certain violent stereotypes, so I'm just wondering if all of the senses are in play here.

BN: Well this violin piece, it's a pretty aggressive piece. I don't know if you'd call it music, but it's a pretty aggressive [laughing] sound piece. [referring to [Violin Film #1, *Playing the Violin as Fast as I Can*, MoMA #582.2008](#)]

KH: And tell me about aggressiveness and your public. I mean, a lot of the works have this core of distress, or core of calling out, you know, some deep anxious feeling. And some have said that this has made it very, very difficult for your audience. Does that ring true, or is it of concern, or?

BN: [pause] Well, I think there was an awareness on my part of the things that were aggressive or difficult to pay attention to. But I think a lot of people were doing various kinds of testing. The people I knew, Steve Reich and Phil Glass and Lamont Young – well, I didn't know Lamont, but that kind of stretching the music, a new way of paying attention and listening. And [Andy's \[Warhol\]](#) long films, and Cage and, you know.

KH: I mean, people left Cage's concerts in droves.

BN: Yes. Probably his biggest influence is his writing. [laughing]

KH: Okay, let's talk about, this is [Art Makeup Number One White, Number Two Pink, Number Three Green, Number Four Black](#) [MoMA # 1182.2007]. And again, like the layers in the earlier piece, many of your works, to me, sort of have a mask-like urgency. I mean, this drawing, [Face Mask](#) [MoMA #190.1982], from '81, just another example of masks coming up. We see them in *Clowns*¹, later. Talk a little bit about Art Makeup and where it came from. Was it about painting?

BN: Well, the first version of this was a film, and it was black and white. And I only used black and white makeup. And it was also in the '60s, and so there was a lot of, the racial tensions that existed around the civil rights and stuff was really important. So it was a comment on that, in a sense, because I put on one color and then, or, the black and the white, and it just comes out grey. So it was, my thinking at the time, it was kind of connected to that. So when I got the color video – this was a video, right?

KH: No, it was 16 millimeter film transferred to video.

¹ Clown Torture, 1987, The Art Institute of Chicago

BN: Okay, so I did have some color film. Then it becomes a comment on the comment, because it's several different colors.

KH: A comment on which comment?

BN: And again, the coming out grey; because it comes out grey again. And

KH: Is that about a lack of certainty in the world?

BN: [pause] I don't think I was that clear in my own mind about how, what that. It was more about, well, if you can do two colors, you can do four colors. [laughing] And see what happens. So.

KH: But did you see your body as a canvas?

BN: Yes, using your body as an instrument. And so, it's not about me personally, it's about just using the body.

KH: So you were a convenience.

BN: Yes. Just another tool or medium.

KH: I mean, it's interesting because you'll see this question of color comes up, well, often, but in another work. So the question here wasn't about covering up.

BN: I don't think so.

KH: Okay. Anything to say about this drawing, which is later? [Face Mask \[MoMA #190.1982\]](#)?

BN: Well, I think it probably has to do with the use of clowns and hiding behind an image. I know what I was thinking, that one thing that was interesting to me in making works of art was what you reveal and what you conceal, and that tension between the two. And [pause] so you're not just telling everything about yourself. It's not a memoir. It's you're trying to make a piece of art, and the interest is in that tension, not in the information itself, particularly. And so, it doesn't matter how much you tell or don't tell, it's how you use it.

KH: I mean, the viewer very rarely knows who you are.

BN: Right.

KH: So that restraint is really something you impose upon yourself, not necessarily with the viewer in mind, but as a way to stimulate yourself, right?

BN: Yes. Well it was that gestalt therapy and theory, you know, where you look for your resistances and try and go into them. Like, you do the hard thing rather than the easy thing. I remember I had a painting teacher when I was still in school that said, "You're always trying to save the part that's beautiful, and it's ruining your painting." [laughing]

KH: Because you get too attached to it?

BN: Yes; you can't see the whole thing because you're trying to save this.

KH: And the Gestalt therapy was to go where the pain is.

BN: To find the resistances and go there.

KH: And you read quite a bit about that.

BN: Yes.

KH: Yes; I remember that.

BN: There was a lot of popular press about it.

KH: So it was in the press at this time. I mean, what other things were coming at you in the popular press at this time? I mean, yes, not in '81 particularly, but civil rights, Viet Nam, people were demonstrating in the streets.

BN: Well, [pause] a lot of the early demonstration, I was still in school at the University of Wisconsin. But I was so naïve [laughing] I kind of didn't even know what was going on.

KH: Because it was a hotbed, wasn't it?

BN: My brother is four years younger than I am and he was out there getting beat up. He was much more aware than I was. But I just sort of zoomed past it, somehow.

KH: It's the mathematician. [Laughter] So, I mean, we're still in the '60s, I'm sorry to say, but this is [Slow Angle Walk, Beckett Walk \[MoMA #1177.2008\]](#). What's a Beckett walk?

BN: I can't remember which novel it comes from. But there were two things. One is, this person is on the beach. Maybe he's not on the beach. One of them is on the beach, this one, but he's walking, and his limbs don't work right. And so he has to, this is supposed to be an imitation of, or a copy of what's described in the book. He has to, his knees aren't bending. He picks up one leg, but then he has to turn ninety degrees and puts it down. Then he picks up the other leg and he turns this way, and puts it down. So it's like, every three steps, he gets to take one step forward.

KH: Hmm, it's very Beckett. [Laughter]

BN: Exactly.

KH: Is that how artists work?

BN: That sounded good to me. The other one is where he has the stones.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

BN: It's either that trio. It's Watt. I forget the other two names².

[CREW DISCUSSION]

² Molloy, 1955; Malone Dies, 1956; The Unnamable, 1958

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KH: I was going to ask you about [\[Merce\] Cunningham](#) and [Meredith \[Monk\]](#).

BN: I met Meredith. I was living in California and she was working out there. I met her at a party or something. But she was aware of my work, and I sort of knew a little bit about her.

KH: I remember this. I mean, what's so interesting is, just that all of the media kind of were living together. It wasn't so unusual.

BN: Yes. Everybody knew everybody; it was all smaller.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

KH: I'm so conscious in work like Beckett Walk of all of the media; film, dance, sculpture, painting, music, literature. They all sort of lived in the same house. You know, we make such a big deal of it today, but it was natural, when you talked about seeing Cage and working with Meredith Monk, and reading Beckett, being in Thiebaud's class. Talk a little bit about that flavor of that period.

BN: Well, we didn't think about it. I mean, I had met these other people and it was all very casual, and a lot of the musicians were performing in art galleries because the musician musicians didn't want them around.

KH: The same for film, right?

BN: Yes.

KH: The so-called avant-garde film was seen mostly in galleries, right?

BN: Yes, and universities. I mean a lot of the people I knew in San Francisco that were filmmakers, there was like a circuit. [Laughs] You could get on the circuit and travel through the Midwest and show your films and get some tiny little amount of money, go home, and make another one. Everybody just used everybody as you needed them and knew them.

KH: And did you and Meredith do a dance together, Meredith Monk?

BN: She did one of my performances with me, and I was in one of hers in Santa Barbara one year. Richard was there.

KH: Richard Serra?

BN: Yes. It was one of her very large orchestrated pieces using half the student body.

KH: Right. [Laughter] And then what was yours?

BN: I was falling off the stage. Oh, for Meredith, yeah, that's what I was doing.

KH: Literally?

BN: Yes. [laughing]

KH: Was there a mattress below, or?

BN: No, but it wasn't- there was only a four or five foot drop. [laughing]

KH: And what was she doing?

BN: I don't remember. She and Richard were doing something on the stage. I think the one she did with me was at the Whitney, it was *Bouncing in the Corner*.

KH: Right, which was your piece that she executed.

BN: Well, we did it together; and there were three of us.

KH: In three separate corners?

[00:04:39]

BN: Yes.

KH: Who was the third?

BN: My wife. Justine. And Meredith was quite surprised how hard it was. Because she was probably in better shape than any of us, but.

KH: And this was when you'd sort of decided you didn't want to be in front of an audience.

BN: Yes; yes.

KH: And how did it change, the experience, for you, of being in an audience or being in your studio alone?

BN: [pause] Some of the first props that I did for some videos that I'd performed I'd recorded. And then they became the sculpture or the piece, and the audience became the participant if they chose to enter into a space. So that was a shift.

KH: So it controlled the audience's movement.

BN: Yes. I made a corridor and I called it [Walk With Contrapposto \[MoMA #1178.2008\]](#), I think, and videoed that. And Marcia Tucker came out to visit. I was living on Long Island, out in Southampton. And she came out to visit, and she was putting together her show at the Whitney. I don't know when the show went up. She came out in 1969. Anyway, she saw that. She said, "Well, that's a sculpture." [laughing]

KH: Show it as is.

BN: Yes.

KH: Okay, so, from Beckett, it's not a big leap to ask you about language, which is really one of the materials that's almost constant in the work. And I suppose this

1972 piece, [Perfect Door, Perfect Odor, Perfect Rodo](#) [MoMA # 191.1996.a-c] is a good place to begin. What was most interesting to you about language?

BN: [pause] At one point I was interested in poetry, but that didn't last too long.

KH: And you actually wrote poems?

BN: And there is some writing, some text in- and then Wittgenstein's interest in language and the structure of language and how it has to do with how we think about things, and how we ask questions, and making the right question. And there was a point when I first got out of school, and I guess this has to do with having a style, I realized that there were a lot of things that I was interested in that was not getting into the work. And so I was trying to find a way to get more things into the work than just painting, drawing, sculpture, whatever. Letting it [sighs]

KH: And in a funny way, I think we're also trained somehow to think that language has an absolute meaning, is less malleable than the visual world. But in fact, over and over again, you show us that it's as malleable as a piece of rubber. I mean, for example, what's sort of great here is just the three mediums you're working with. I mean, one is a drawing for this piece [MoMA #805.1996], the neon [MoMA # 191.1996.a-c], and then the print[s]³. What's a rodo, by the way?

BN: Nothing. [laughing] That's what I liked about it. Because, what's a perfect door, and what's a perfect odor? And then, rodo is nothing, anyway.

KH: Well, the real question is this idea of perfection, right?

BN: Yes.

KH: Which is more than elusive.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: And the rodo tells you that. But also, what about the color?

BN: I don't remember how I picked the colors. I think they're all different whites. I think that's what the original thought was. But over the years, if things have gotten broken and rebuilt, a lot of the colors have changed. You can't get a lot of the colors any more, yeah.

KH: And when you're working in neon, drawing, prints, in a funny way, the print seems to me the most adamant. Is that something you like about printmaking? Or, why do you make prints?

BN: I like the change that happens when it's printed. Whatever you draw, first of all, it's reversed. But things happen in there that you can't control, and I like that; see what happens. [pause] I had a very good teacher when I was at the University of Wisconsin, because you had to take all of these classes, and I took a printmaking class. And he was Alfred Sessler, and he was a great -- I really liked him and he was a good teacher.

³ Print series: MoMA #555.1976; #556.1976; #557.1976

KH: Somehow magic happens in the printing.

BN: Yes. So I did a lot of woodcuts and lithography.

KH: You know, it's interesting to think about perfect, and things you can't control

BN: Well, you know, we were talking about *Excavation*.

KH: The [de Kooning](#) painting.

BN: Yes, which is just perfect. But he could have changed a lot of things and it would still be perfect. [laughing]

KH: Well, what's interesting about that painting, which I went up and looked at again today in the last day of the de Kooning show, is, and I was trying to think about it with you in the back of my mind knowing it was an important painting to you, is again, it's these layers and layers and layers and layers, it's about the invisible as much as it's about the visible. It's what was, as much as what is. And of course, it also has this very erotic sense of color poking, peeking through. But, what is it about that painting that is so important to you?

BN: Both of my parents are from Chicago and we had a lot of relatives in Chicago, so we spent a lot of holidays and vacations in Chicago. And we would always go to the Field Museum, to the planetarium, to the aquarium, and to the Art Institute. It was this thing; we'd have lunch in one of the cafeterias. But, so, as I got older, and would travel down there by myself and became interested in being an artist, all of that stuff stayed in the same place, for years.

And I remembered that I had seen that painting before. But I remember, one day, being there by myself, and there was always a bench there. And a [Clyfford Still](#) was back over there. [laughing] But I saw the painting for the first time, I mean, I really understood what was going on, or thought I did. So it was the first time I really had a really deep art experience.

KH: Not just with that painting, but in general.

BN: In general; I think. Maybe with music, before, but with that painting, it just opened a lot of stuff up.

KH: Was it the fight in it, too? The fact that it wasn't so easy?

BN: Maybe; yeah.

KH: I mean, that's so moving in his work.

BN: Yeah. When I got to California and working with Wayne, you know, being around him, and always changing it, fixing it up. Get it right. Fix it up. Don't be afraid to erase it and patch it up. Fix it, get it right. Get it the way you want it.

KH: And getting it right meant not leaving it alone, in a way, right? [Laughter]

BN: Yeah.

KH: It's funny because you look at [Thiebaud](#), and he's almost, for me, the opposite of de Kooning. I mean, there's such a grace in his work. You don't feel the anxiety. Was it there?

BN: Maybe in all of the preparation. I don't know how much he changed once he started a work, I mean; I was never around [then]. But when he would demonstrate in class, he'd just have a big sheet of newsprint and charcoal and leather eraser, and put up a still life or whatever. And he would just show, here's what you do. You make this mark. Fix it until it's, get it in the right place. Just keep- don't try and save everything. Keep working. And [pause] anyway, that really impressed me. So it's the getting there, not the being there.

KH: Well, that's the only way to have a life in art, right? Is to be really interested in the getting there, as opposed to what's finished.

BN: Yes.

KH: So this is a piece called [Cones Cojones \[MoMA #2909.2008.a-c\]](#), which, in Spanish, we know, means "balls" as in testicles. 1973-75. And you did write a very lengthy text.

BN: Yes, it has a text.

KH: I think it's a two-part text that hangs on the wall. I was reading it today. How much of it is scientifically accurate? For instance, like, [reading] "The point of the universe which is the apex of a countable number of concentric cones, whose intersection with the plane parallel to the floor." I couldn't make sense of it.

BN: [laughing] Well, you're supposed to imagine all of this, that's all. You make this picture in your mind, and then, if you make that picture in your mind, this is what shows up on the floor.

KH: Did you do that?

BN: Yes.

KH: So, this actually is what you imagined

BN: Yes, to get that.

KH: Because I actually, I found them hard to read. They're very dense. You were a math student in college. Were you reading science at this time? I know later,

BN: Not so much anymore; no.

KH: I mean, here you have the slightest bit of material. You have a bit of masking tape on the floor, albeit, it has to be arranged somewhat precisely.

BN: There's rules. [laughing]

KH: Yeah, there are real rules, and then two texts. When I read this, what I find is a man swimming in space.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: You know, what I find is this question about, in a way, like [Beckett Walk \[Slow Angle Walk \(Beckett Walk\), MoMA #1177.2008\]](#), where is stability? That feeling which you actually talk about at the very end, where you say, “The massive center moves about tides. Black hole functions. Contraction, concentration, compression, collapse, contour, inversion, contra-immersion, inverse, diverse, divest. Thinking feeling, sinking feeling.” To me what’s truly great about your work is when it’s neither thinking nor feeling but some convergence of the two, the overlapping. Or maybe they’re not even distinct.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: What were you thinking about in terms of “thinking feeling”?

BN: I don’t know any more. [laughing] I do remember though, that if you stand in the center, the way the rings are, it does warp the floor. So there is a physical, visual-physical sensation that occurs there.

KH: A perceptual trick.

BN: Yes. Yes. And I was interested in that as part of the

KH: And how did you know that would happen?

BN: Try it. [laughing]

KH: So, did you have the idea, first, of doing that? Or did something tell you that it was possible to make that perceptual trick?

BN: I was working with those kinds of ideas.

KH: And why was the text necessary?

BN: It was a very long text to start with, and it got reduced and reduced to this. [pause] But I made a number of pieces where you had to imagine yourself in some place or some spot in your interior, some point in your interior.

KH: So you were turning – you were making quite literal the process of looking.

BN: Yes.

KH: For the participant, now. I mean, to think of somebody as a viewer, they’re having to be someplace to see this, to make it work.

BN: Yes.

KH: So they’re becoming the performer, too.

BN: Right. I mean, I did a few pieces where I had other performers perform things, sinking into the floor,

KH: Elka, which I think we have, actually. Okay. Speaking of language and color, we have [Human Need Desire \[MoMA # 228.1991.a-g\]](#). Clearly, I think there’s a real slippage of language here, as the neons go on and off. It’s sort of almost like a heartbeat. But this is a return to neon, after a period of almost ten years, I think, or something like that?

BN: Quite a while, yes.

KH: What made you, do you remember what made you say, 'Oh, gee, I can go back to this; I haven't used it all up.' [pause] Neon is this commercial material. I think the first neons you made were based on a shop sign.

BN: Yes.

KH: So it was actually something you saw in the world,

BN: A beer sign. My first studio in San Francisco was an old grocery store, where I was painting, like a bodega. So the apartment was in the back, and the storefront was – and the beer sign was still in the window. Or a beer sign was still in the window. And so I was around it. I didn't take it down. But then, you realize, I'm inside and it's backwards. So that was interesting to me, that it becomes abstract, then. So that was what was interesting to me. And that, it came out in that neon for the *Violins Violence Silence*, because it was going to hang in the window.

KH: It's a two-sided piece, really.

BN: Yes. So I liked that about it.

KH: I mean, one could say that your work is figurative, and curiously narrative. I mean, always broken. And then you say, "I liked it because it was abstract." Was there – I'm trying to think if you've made anything that was obdurately abstract.

BN: [Laughs]

KH: For me, by the way, the west coast gave permission to make figurative work, narrative work, storytelling; that it had a kind of primacy that on the east coast, I think, was gone.

BN: Mm-hm. And again, seeing the [Man Ray](#) show, everything was possible.

KH: Yeah. And by that, you mean using imagery, even if it's not a one-to-one.

BN: And you could just be really stupid. [laughing]

KH: Yes. [laughing] Contrarian.

BN: Because you know, [Duchamp](#) actually didn't know a lot about Duchamp, but he was always real smart about everything, and [Man Ray](#) wasn't. He was just, sometimes he was and sometimes he wasn't. Sometimes the paintings were just awful. But he made them. He didn't worry about it. I don't know; I thought about it. Maybe it's because he made his living being a photographer, and had a real job. [laughing]

KH: It was a more secret life, what he was making for himself, which could be more foolish.

BN: Yes. So, I don't know.

KH: What interests me about these neons is, here you are dealing with, you know, our deepest human concerns: desire, dream, need; and you're using a commercial tool to broadcast this. Was that on your mind in terms of using neon? It kind of had to be, didn't it?

BN: I made these and they were shown in Los Angeles, so, they were made in Los Angeles. And I found this guy who said he would do them. He made all the Walk, Don't Walk signs for years. [laughing] But he was a Seventh Day Adventist, and when he saw the text of what he was going to do, he didn't want to do it, because he said it was blasphemy and various things. So I had to go talk to him and say, have a big discussion, and he finally agreed that no, it wasn't terrible stuff for him to do.

KH: And what do you think you said to him that made a difference? [laughing]

BN: I can't remember, but, you know, maybe half an hour, talked to the man, went through everything.

KH: I think when people look at art, they take it quite literally. If it says this, it means this. But actually, your work often has a question mark.

BN: Yes. Maybe that's one of the things he wasn't – because it was so open ended, it was hard for him to decide what it did mean, and if it was an affront.

KH: What about color here? Any reason for choosing certain colors?

BN: Not always. When I did the piece in San Diego, we thought there might be color that might be appropriate for the [Vices and Virtues](#) [MoMA #750.2005.a-g]. And some of them, like, Envy should be green. But actually, we couldn't find any real – we had some graduate students doing research.

KH: Any reason for the colors, you mean?

BN: Right. We couldn't really find any place that assigned it anywhere in any of the texts or anywhere. In fact, it's really hard to find what the vices and virtues are, because sometimes there's more and sometimes there's less; depends on where you look.

KH: How often does that kind of research come into your work?

BN: Almost never. [Laughing]

KH: I mean, okay; talking about color, here we have a piece from a year later, 1984, [White Anger, Red Danger, Yellow Peril, Black Death](#) [MoMA #111.1990.a-f]. Now we're dealing with a whole different idea of color, aren't we?

BN: [laughing] Yes. [pause] Well, they're pretty, except for Yellow Peril, I suppose, they're sayings that people use. But somewhere in the Bible, there is a yellow peril. I got it from [Walter DeMaria](#), because he did some pieces about, "beware of the yellow people." Everybody thought he was talking about the Chinese; but he got it out of the bible, whatever it is.

KH: Well, I take these to be stereotypes, in a way. So you're dealing with color as stereotypical phrases.

BN: Yes, and then there's a little twist, because these are basically abstract things, white anger, and then black death refers, of course, to the plague. So it's the only one that has a specific

KH: Closure?

BN: Yeah, but the twist to the whole

KH: I'm not sure that I understand, so, tell me that again.

BN: Well, because it refers to a specific peril, the plague, and these don't.

KH: I see, so, in other words, this is historically

BN: Something that happened.

KH: And these are just phrases.

BN: Yes.

KH: That actually suggest fear.

BN: Yes.

KH: As well as anger. And what I was thinking about this morning was, you've got three or four chairs, four chairs. One is seat-less, one is backless, and one is legless, which are like these amputated figures.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: And I was thinking that maybe the language is also about some kind of amputation of subtlety, like, a stereotype is an amputation, too. The chairs are yellow, black, red, and white, what was the relationship between the chairs and the phrases, the color and the form?

BN: This series started with the triangle, but it had to do with torture, and the chair represents the human figure in this case, and many, a lot of people use it that way. So, I think it carries into this piece.

KH: You did a piece about Jacobo Timerman, right?

BN: More or less. It was after reading some of his things and V. S. Naipaul's stories from South America.

KH: He was, disappeared but he returned.

BN: Yes. He was; yes. So he came back and wrote

KH: About his experience of torture. And what about this, why does this piece hang?

[pause]

BN: I know I wanted them to be able to move. They don't spin, but they can rock.

KH: And was that, again, a way to engage the viewer as a participant?

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: I mean, there is a slight danger to being around this piece.

BN: Yeah; also hanging it, they hang it roughly on average eye level, so that you kind of can't see them; can't see the shape of them, particularly.

KH: Again, visible, invisible.

BN: Yeah.

KH: But for me, it's also that the hanging and the wobble of them makes me a part of them.

BN: Yeah.

KH: And so I can't really step outside of the world of stereotype, torture.

BN: Yeah.

KH: I'm implicated, I guess.

BN: Mm-hm.

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[Crew Discussion]

KH: So I thought we might use [Model for Triangular Depression \[MoMA #192.1996.a-c\]](#) from 1977 as a way to briefly talk about architecture, and then even public works. But tell us a little bit about *Model for Triangular Depression* which is such a, as I know all of these plaster pieces are quite fragile. So here you are making something kind of chunky.

BN: Well, they're not that fragile.

KH: Well, do you care if they chip and

BN: Every time they ship them there are always a few chips left in the bottom of the crate. [laughing]

KH: So you knew that would happen.

BN: Yes. But I really liked working with plaster, so, a certain amount of that just happens.

KH: And was it that it was a liquid that turned to a solid? Or what was pleasurable about it? It also feels good.

BN: It feels good, and I liked the way it worked with light, the light on the surface.

KH: Light is an important material that I haven't really thought of outside of the neons. What's interesting also about the neons is that they are more than themselves in that there's a spill of light that goes beyond, say, the language.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: So plaster grabs light. I mean, it absorbs it, making something more physical?

BN: I don't know, but it has that kind of, well, it can have a hard shiny surface, but mostly it has kind of a dead surface that does suck up light. I had a show at the, Whitechapel, when Nick [Serota] was there. And the one room has all those skylights. And all of the plaster pieces were in there. It was so beautiful, that skylight light and the, yeah.

KH: Was this – this piece leads to the tunnel pieces, right?

BN: Yeah.

KH: So were you thinking about, I mean, depression appears in a couple of your works, actually.

BN: [laughing]

KH: Both as something underground, but also as a mental state.

BN: Yes.

KH: Is there an equivalence between underground and the mental state? Or did you just really mean depressed?

BN: I think that's all I meant. The scale was intended, if you built it, that if you would walk down into it, you would be just, not, it would be a horizon.

KH: Which would be the horizon?

BN: The edges would be, if you stood down in about the middle.

KH: So if you built this piece, one would be at the point at the top, where all the angles converge.

BN: At the bottom.

KH: I'm sorry; at the bottom. So in fact, the underneath is

BN: That's underground.

KH: Yeah.

BN: So, when I did this one, and then I did the trenches and things, that's why I hung them. And again, [Claes](#) – I said this. So I was trying to think of how it would show that they were underground. And he said, "Well, I'd just rub dirt on them." [Laughter]

KH: [laughing] Did you?

BN: No. That was [Claes's](#) idea. [laughing]

KH: I mean, it's kind of wonderful to imagine you having those kinds of conversations, which are very, they're problem-solving conversations.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: Is that how artists talk to each other?

BN: I don't know.

KH: It's what you, when you're talking to an artist about work, do you start there?

BN: I don't know, but when [Coosje](#) was writing and doing the drawing show and stuff, so I spent time with them, and going into [Claes's](#) studio and seeing all of those little models that he had made for, and it was just so funky because it was like, whatever he had around, he'd put it all together somehow.

KH: Were these models for the public projects?

BN: Yes. It would be like, there'd be an old grinding wheel for the round part, and some stuff and some pencils stuck in that. You know, it was just amazing; so beautiful.

KH: They became so refined.

BN: I know.

KH: Actually, through the process of making them. So, were you really wanting to keep the funkiness alive in these?

BN: Well, yes, the making, and the making of it shows the texture, the scale that's there; and the density and the weight. This was in three parts, and there was single mold, plywood mold, upside down. And, so, I used the same mold for each of them.

KH: And the mold, again, has a grease, or, how do you get them out?

BN: Usually, you can use, just varnish it, or green soap, or whatever.

KH: And then you lift it out of the mold?

BN: Yes. Or if it's too heavy, you take the mold apart and whatever.

KH: So the metal struts go in the mold, too?

BN: Yes. So the metal struts, and I forget what I was using, expanded metal or something in there, and burlap.

KH: And did you ever think this would really get built?

BN: It didn't matter, at that point.

KH: So it's again, it's like, [Cones Cojones](#) [[MoMA # 2909.2008.a-c](#)]; it's like imagining yourself there.

BN: Yes.

KH: Because actually, the first time something like this was built was, was it in Munster?

BN: Well, it took them a long time to build it, but they finally did.

KH: Which was just like what? Five years ago or something?

BN: That's a square one, I think. Yes.

KH: And was that the first that was ever built of these?

BN: Yes.

KH: So that was built in the '90s.

BN: Yes, it was proposed much earlier for a different location, but then, because it was Kasper, he had already spent all of the money [laughing] or had made too many projects. Whatever.

KH: Kasper König was a big part of your life.

BN: Yes.

KH: I mean, what's interesting to me, you mentioned him earlier, was, that there really was this travel between the U.S. and particularly Germany during the time you were.

BN: Yes, it was interesting because, well, Kasper connected me with Konrad Fischer and [Sol \[Le Witt\]](#) and um, [pause; laughing] that guy that puts those metal plates on the floor.

KH: Serra? Oh, [\[Carl\] Andre](#).

BN: Carl and Sol were the first two people that showed with him.

KH: With Konrad.

BN: Yes, with Konrad. But a number of artists, you know, somehow, American artists, had much more recognition in Europe than in this country. Or even if they were known in this country, nobody was selling anything. Konrad had to sell stuff to keep the gallery open, so.

KH: Well, one could say that about you. I mean, that until, really, fairly recently, you were much better known in Europe than here. I mean, let's say, fifteen years, or something like that.

BN: Yes.

KH: Why do you think that was? What was going on in Europe that made your work more understandable, let's say?

BN: I have never quite understood it. I've wondered if there was a European sensibility that came out of the Bauhaus and Constructivism and things, that they were able to see works in a different way than fit in here. And I've often wondered if Europeans really understand the work in the way that we think we understand American artists' work. You know, Ponza bought a lot of stuff and he

really thought about stuff, really tried to understand. But then when he would install them, sometimes he cleaned them up so much, one wondered if he really understood what was going on.

KH: Literally cleaned them up?

BN: Yes.

KH: Hah. Like the mattresses and stuff?

BN: Well, a lot of things where, if they were built there, then he would make them much prettier than I would have made them if I had built them.

KH: But even your sources, when I think about them, some of the literary sources, the philosophical sources, sources you've mentioned today, Beckett. We haven't mentioned Robbe-Grillet today, but I know he's important to you. Wittgenstein. They're European thinkers. So there must be something that maybe the longness of history allows you to believe in ambiguity more than here, where we want clarity. We want certainty. We don't want grey. We want black. We want white. We don't want grey. And I've always thought maybe that was an ingredient that helped the Europeans see your work more clearly.

BN: And then again, calling it a model or a study, but what is it, really, why is it there if that's all there is? Because there isn't anything else.

KH: Right.

BN: So I like that kind of ambiguity, too.

KH: Right. Yes, I was going to ask you about, like, [House Divided \[MoMA # 314.1985\]](#) from '83, which is a drawing. Or it's a print, actually.

BN: That's a print, yes.

KH: It is; I'm sorry. It's a print. The drawing is [Crossed Stadiums \[MoMA # 120.1986\]](#) from '84. What's a diagram? What's a working drawing? What's a model?

BN: [laughing] There are diagrams and working drawings, when you need to know where to put something or how to put something together. Which sometimes can be a drawing that looks just fine as a drawing, and sometimes it's just a diagram.

KH: So are these drawings for the last piece that we acquired, [Days \[MoMA #1635.2009\]](#), are they –what's that? [Untitled 2008 \[MoMA # 330.2010; 331.2010\]](#). Is that a diagram? Is that meant, does that help you conceive of it?

BN: It wouldn't help you actually install it.

KH: It certainly wouldn't.

BN: No. Because there's no dimensions. This is basically a rough sketch of how it was installed in my studio. And then, when we installed it here, the space is quite different.

KH: But would you do this – what would this tell you when you were making it for yourself?

BN: It's a reminder of roughly how I laid it out in the studio.

KH: So it would be better than a photograph because it would come earlier than, or, you couldn't make a photograph of this?

BN: I probably made this after I had already put it up in the studio.

KH: Okay, and then, let's look at this, [Crossed Stadiums](#) [MoMA # 120.1986] from 1984. As far as I know, that never existed.

BN: That never existed. So it's a hypothetical. It's a drawing of an idea, something that possibly could be built, or not.

KH: And it's very related, actually, to [Model for a Triangular Depression](#) [MoMA # 192.1996.a-c]. It seems to me you look at it and you can see the relationship. It's eleven years later. Was this intended to be neon, in your mind?

BN: No, I don't think so. I think maybe it was lighting, but not neon. So this, a version of this piece, did get built, in Washington, the Stadium piece. And in fact, it was the first proposal for the piece that I did in Albuquerque, which they did reject. And contrary to Claes's advice, I made another proposal that they did build.

KH: Right; right. That's the underground

BN: Yes, which they tried to cover up as fast as they could. [Laughter]

KH: It's dangerous.

BN: It's got ivy all over it.

KH: Does it now? [Laughter]

BN: It's kind of pretty

KH: Just what you wanted; a pretty outdoor piece. [Laughter] Okay, so, I mean, in a funny way, you're, this almost goes back to the studio photographs, which are an invented way of looking at your studio.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: And these are also inventions that may or may not happen.

BN: Yes.

KH: Okay. Did you make lots of these? When you start to draw, do you draw

BN: Well, several.

KH: Yeah. At the same time.

BN: Yeah.

KH: And so, why would you make a divided house in a print?

BN: This was, the structure itself is in Illinois, in a sculpture park—Manilow. So that was a commission because Mr. Manilow liked it and wanted it. Of course, it got done because he was in charge. It was his money, his park. Well, it belonged to the school, but, the grounds around the school.

KH: But did you make this print before it was built?

BN: It was after.

KH: And so what were you thinking about in making it after?

BN: I do a lot of that. I do a lot of drawings after things are finished. It helps me understand what I did.

BN: You have to look at what's there and see what actually happened. Because a lot of the times, the things that you intend turn out to be the least important, or a less important part of what was really there. Things come up that you don't think about or don't know are going to happen.

KH: In the making.

BN: In the making.

KH: And in the kind of reality of dealing with materials, and

BN: Yes. Or even the idea that you had when you did it. There's some minor part that turns out to really be the most important part, and that comes out whether you knew it was going to happen or not.

KH: Yes, you kind of begin to wonder how people who don't work in their studios take advantage of that kind of moment.

BN: Yes.

KH: If somebody else is making your work, it's hard to know that, isn't it?

BN: Yes. Well, Carl, you know, never had a studio.

KH: Yes; [Carl Andre](#).

BN: Yes. But he managed to -- an amazing range of ways of doing things. But he did make them himself when he got wherever he was going. So, he was handling materials.

KH: Yes. Okay; we'll kind of probably accelerate a little bit here. [Seven Virtues](#) [Seven Vices \[MoMA # 750.2005.a-g\]](#), 1983-84. The question for me became, can a vice live without a virtue?

BN: [Laughs] One thing I like about the overlap is that the way people's minds work, you try and read it; you try and make something out of it, a single meaning out of each block, and you can't help yourself. You don't necessarily try and translate the two separate words, but

KH: So, read this to me. [Laughter] This is temperance and

BN: I don't remember which they are, let's see- Gluttony.

KH: Okay, Temperance and Gluttony.

BN: And this says, "Flautish."

KH: Is that a real word?

BN: [laughing] No.

KH: I didn't think so. I was reading, and somebody said, "Oh, and then there's this word." And I went, [BN laughs] "There's a flautist." So, this was the genesis also, or the genesis for this was another public work

BN: Yes.

KH: Made for the Stewart Collection.

BN: Right.

KH: Is this [a] question of architecture in the real world? This occupies space in a very strange way.

BN: This does, yes.

KH: I mean, all of the, almost like headstones, are propped against a wall on the floor.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: Do you think of them as having a voice across the space?

BN: They should be talking to each other, yes.

KH: That's what it seemed to me, too. So it kind of becomes like Days.

BN: Mm-hm

KH: You know, again, twenty years later.

BN: Yes; yes. And the original, or the neon one in La Jolla, it was intended for the theater. Because I had the idea, well, often a theater has got, like Shakespeare's [inaudible], so I thought that would be good to put in the theater. But then, the theater's at the edge of the campus, and people said, no-no, they can't put neon up there, because it will. So Mary [Beebe] was great. She went down to all of the neighborhoods and talked to the people and said, "Well, actually, you can't see theater from here," people that were going to complain.

KH: Mary Beebe was a stalwart. I mean, she could get things done.

BN: So we really, you know, went on, for a long time, couldn't get it done.

KH: A couple of years?

BN: Yes. And then, they were building this new earthquake testing lab, and the guy, somehow he knew Mary or something, he said, "Well, I want it on my building." [laughing] So that was great. He spoke up.

KH: I mean, for a theater, Vices and Virtues is almost like comedy and tragedy.

BN: Yes, yes.

KH: Was that sort of operating like that?

BN: Yes; yes.

KH: I mean, what's so interesting is, instead of neon, here you've got stone. I mean, this is forever, vices and virtues. [BN laughs] I'm afraid we're stuck with them forever. Here's [Punch and Judy II, Birth and Life and Sex and Death \[MoMA #214.1996\]](#), from 1985; around the same time, slightly later than [Seven Virtues and Seven Vices \[MoMA # 750.2005.a-g\]](#). It's hard to figure out the virtue from the vice, here. [Laughter] But, talk a little bit about clowns, and *Punch and Judy*, and masks, and these again, almost human but particularly violent displays of our humanity.

BN: The first one of these, which was much simpler, somebody wanted, it was for a casino in Atlantic City, and they wanted something for the lobby. Anyway, they didn't like it. [laughing] But that sort of led to all of this, and the clowns, and all the stuff. So.

KH: Talk about Punch and Judy, I mean, as, are we?

BN: I didn't really look at that I mean, there's that long tradition of *Punch and Judy* but I didn't look into it very much. I didn't research it. I knew it was there, but I didn't do anything about it.

KH: I mean, you knew that this was a man and a woman who had an exaggerated relationship based on kind of slamming each other.

BN: Yes.

KH: What's interesting to me is that Judy's pretty much not in this picture.

BN: Right.

KH: It's mostly Punch's.

BN: Yes.

KH: Judy is kind of a goner.

BN: Yes.

KH: But were these all drawings meant for neons? .

BN: I think they all got made into neons. They don't have any guns and knives in the neons. But I think they mostly got made.

KH: They weren't intended as diagrams, or were they?

BN: I don't think so, at this point.

KH: What about sex, death. What's the connection?

BN: I must have just been thinking about the violence that can come, in both. It's clearly not about the little death. [laughing]

KH: Talking about clowns, we have [Dirty Joke \[MoMA #193.1996\]](#) from 1987. [BN laughs] Somebody has nicely transcribed this for us.

BN: Oh yeah.

KH: [reading] Two newlyweds went to their hotel room. They were trying to decide how to get together. They decided to stand in opposite corners of the room, undress, and then madly towards one another. So they did. They undressed and they started running as fast as they could toward one another. In their excitement they missed each other. The woman went out the window. She fell six stories, landed on an awning, pulled herself up to the edge of the awning, looked over and called to the bellboy, "Help! Help!" The bellboy looked up and said, "Hey lady, I'd be happy to help you, but right now we're real busy trying to get some guy on the sixth floor out of a keyhole." Laughter. Is this a dirty joke? [Laughter]

BN: [laughing] Sort of.

KH: [laughing] What's dirty about it?

BN: It depends on what part of him stuck in the keyhole. [laughing]

KH: Do you think that's the point of the joke?

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: Okay, well, here we have, if we look at it, we have. I guess it's a clown.

BN: Yes. She has the clown makeup on, and a clown suit.

KH: And she tells the joke?

BN: She tells the joke, and then she laughs.

KH: And does she tell it upside down?

BN: I think both ways. I think she gets to do it both ways.

KH: Well, I mean, these certainly aren't images of loving couples. [BN laughs] And then we get to [Learned Helplessness and Rats, Rock and Roll Drummer \[MoMA #471.1996\]](#), 1988. This is apparently the title comes from the *Scientific American* in '87, and the title of the article was, "Stressed Out: Learned helplessness in rats sheds light on human depression." [BN laughs] So, there you are reading this article. Between the article, which is '87, and the work, which is '88, what, how does it find this visual form?

BN: [laughing] Well, this is a labyrinth, but it has, so, I took my daughter's pet rat and put him in there and videotaped him, and that's what's in here.

KH: Your daughter had a pet rat?

BN: Mm-hm; very nice.

KH: How did she get this rat?

BN: Pet store. There are plenty of rats out in the woods. [Laughter]. So, the rock and roll drummer there, and he's torturing him with this funky band.

KH: He's torturing the rat?

BN: Yes. Sound, so that's how they – you just overstress them and, I mean, they didn't need a *Scientific American* article to figure this out, any research. So I found this guy, and, Juliet [Myer] found him. I was looking for, like, a punk kind of drummer, angry. And so, he played a little bit and it was just exactly what I needed. And he said, "But, you know, I'm not really angry. I'm just more kind of sullen." [Laughter] But it worked for me. [laughing]

KH: I wondered if somehow he was also being stressed out. if he wasn't some image of – almost like adolescence and how we lose our ability to be...

BN: Yes. He was pretty young,

KH: He's like, he's going to lose this, if he's not careful. He's going to lose this emotional

BN: Yeah, and he might learn how to play the drums better, too. [laughing]

KH: Exactly. Exactly. Was it sort of an equivalent, somehow, between who was getting stressed out? I mean, is it that this drummer would stress us all out?

BN: Yes. Yes.

KH: What kind of music were you listening to? Do you listen to punk at all?

BN: I did. I mean, it was a little past the real stuff, but that's what he was doing.

KH: Yeah. And so why do you have two visions of him?

BN: I can't remember. There was a switcher and sometimes you'd see the rat, and sometimes you'd see him.

KH: I kind of wondered if this was the smaller monitor was just for the rat.

BN: Yes, it's for the rat.

KH: The imagined rat.

BN: Yes; it's for them to watch.

KH: This is for us,

BN: Yes.

KH: So we are the rat, aren't we?

BN: Yes.

KH: Constantly running in a maze. Animals appear often enough in your work. So, in 1989, a year later, we have [Three Part Large Animals \[MoMA #194.1996.a-c\]](#), which is part of a series made out of taxidermy.

BN: Styrofoam taxidermy forms, yes.

KH: What was the first one? Do you remember? Or, where did this series come from?

BN: It was a commission in Des Moines for the park outside the museum.

KH: Now we actually have that photograph of the pyramid [[Model for an Animal Pyramid, MoMA #144.1991](#)].

BN: Pyramid, yes, the *Animal Pyramid*. And that was another commission that went pretty well. So those are bronze, and the animals are all stacked up, the elk at the bottom, or moose – I forget what they are. The big ones at the bottom, the little ones at the top. [laughing] And they sent me a – I lost the picture. They sent me a great picture, because there were a lot of deer in there, and they took, one of the people that worked there took a picture of the deer grazing right next to the, standing around next to the,

KH: But here's the image of *Model for Animal Pyramid* [[Model for an Animal Pyramid, MoMA #144.1991](#)] from 1989. But some of these animals, these models, also were cast. Some of them were also shown with actually a taxidermist, or was it a hunter? I can't remember.

BN: Oh, yeah. My friend George, George Skins-a-Fox.

KH: That's it.

BN: So he's a trapper, a hunter and a trapper. That's how he made his living, for years.

KH: So the skin, of course, is what is missing.

BN: Right.

KH: In these.

BN: Yes, and again, they become kind of, they don't have any ears; they don't have the correct feet.

KH: They're amputated like the chairs.

BN: Yes. There are no eyes. Yes.

KH: Does that make them, what? More abstract? Or, why?

BN: [pause] Yes, it takes away their individual-ness.

KH: I mean, that's interesting, because so much of your work also is about the individual in a larger social system, and so, if they lose their individuality, they become part of that system.

BN: Mm-hm. And then this one, where they're put together in odd ways, it's, after the foundry had them, they'd cut them up to make the molds, and then they'd send me all these parts back. So I have all of these parts lying around the studio, and I just start putting them together.

KH: So this is an imagined animal.

BN: [inaudible] Yes.

KH: Those are not its legs?

BN: Right.

KH: So it becomes kind of Calder-esque.

BN: I suppose, yes.

KH: I were you thinking of mobiles?

BN: Hanging things

KH: Is very much a part of the work, this fragile stability.

BN: Yes.

KH: I always found these works quite terrifying, even though you knew they were fiction.

BN: Yeah, I know, but they're pretty spooky.

KH: They are. So, here we have, not unrelated, *Hanging Heads Number Two*, *Blue Andrew With Plug*, *White Judy Mouth Closed*, [[Hanging Heads Number Two, Blue Andrew With Plug, White Julie Mouth Closed, MoMA #470.1996](#)]. Hanging heads, no bodies. Whose

BN: It's probably supposed to say Julie. Because it was Juliet's.

KH: Aha. So, we need to actually make the correction on that.

BN: And Andrew is somebody she found in a store and asked if he wanted to come out and have a cast of his head made. [laughing]

KH: Did you ever see him again?

BN: Nope. [Laughter]

KH: So, okay, there's a plaster cast made? Well, how does this work?

BN: Yes. We made the mold then, what did we do from there? I don't know if we made waxes first, or plasters first and then a finished mold, and then all of the waxes for the casting.

KH: So this goes through seven iterations.

BN: Yes, quite a few.

KH: Several, than what we see here.

BN: Yes.

KH: Is there a relationship between these two? [pause] Or even, let's go, *White Anger*, [[White Anger, Red Danger, Yellow Peril, Black Death, MoMA #111.1990.a-f](#)] 1984. Those three?

BN: The hanging head [pause] after I met Susan, which was 1988.

KH: Susan Rothenberg, your wife.

BN: Yes. Well, I'd known her, but. But so, when we started seeing each other, her daughter was still in high school, so I would come out here and spend a week or two, and she's come out there, back and forth. And so I got a studio. If I was going to be here for a week, she'd go in the studio and sit on the couch or whatever.

So I got a little studio on White Street. A bunch of artists had lofts in those buildings. It was probably not as big as this but it was fine, had a window I could look out. So I was doing drawings, and I drew this head and stuck it up, and it hung upside down and kind of scared me. But that's where these came from.

KH: There we have [Think \[MoMA # 195.1996.a-d\]](#) from '93, which is you, right?

BN: Yes.

KH: Now, you've also taken the television, the monitor, and turned it upside down,

BN: Turned it over, yes.

KH: Which degrades the image some?

BN: Usually it changes the color on the old televisions, it distorts the color, like running a magnet in front of it. And those, just those cubes, so it's easy to turn them over. Now you have to do something with the flat screens [laughing]. It makes it harder.

KH: But, is the world upside down?

BN: The first ones I did, when I turned them upside down, or sideways, was just to, again, kind of taking it out of context and giving it an odd. So, these two are not synchronized, but I'm jumping up and down, so the head comes and goes in the image. So they come and go and they get out of sync.

KH: And Think. Is it an imperative? Like, "Pay attention motherfuckers"?

BN: It is, in this case. It's the way it's shouted; yes.

KH: Is it that we don't think enough as a species?

BN: I was probably talking to myself. [Laughing] Because the other one I did was Work. So, Think and Work.

KH: Are you always working, or are there long spells between work?

BN: My friend used to say, "Every day is a work day; every day is a holiday." [Laughter] I don't know. But I go to the studio almost every day. I'd say every day, even if it's reading or. A lot of reading.

KH: What are you reading now?

BN: *Day of the Jackal.*

KH: Gee, that's a flashback. [Laughter]

BN: I know.

KH: Did they make a movie of that recently?

BN: Yes, well, no, a long time ago.

KH: Oh, okay.

BN: Twenty years ago or something. [laughing] It was quite a good movie. And I've also got [pause]. Huh; the name just went away.

KH: That happens. Do you read fiction, nonfiction, science, history? Do you have a preference?

BN: Some history, not too much. Fiction. Not much science. A lot of mystery stories. I just finished reading. [cell phone rings]

[CREW DISCUSSION]

KH: So the most recent acquisition was a work called [Days \[MoMA # 1635.2009\]](#), made for the American Pavilion at Venice, though it didn't take place in the American Pavilion. There were two versions, Italian and English. The one MoMA has is English. Before we perhaps dig into this piece which was shown most recently, do you have particular memories of particular days at MoMA that were meaningful to you? Was it a place that you came to when you were in New York? I know I've seen you here at openings over the years we've both kind of been at.

BN: Yes. I often came here, wander through the collection, or maybe a show that was up.

KH: Well, what's interesting really,

BN: But, that it's here.

KH: What's its significance to artists, a place like MoMA, or MoMA?

BN: The Matisse's. [laughing]

KH: Yeah, it's a pretty great room.

BN: Yep.

KH: It was an introduction to art for me. I grew up here, and I remember coming here when I was twelve, having been at the Art Students League, taking drawing lessons, and then coming here with my pad. And I sometimes wonder whether a 12-year-old could still do that, the place is so much bigger now.

BN: Yeah; yeah; it's really changed. But, I don't know, I just, when I did start coming here, I just loved being able to come in and walk through and kind of know what there was. Then you could just come back and see one or two things and go away. I liked that about it, having it.

KH: We have, I think, a really marvelous collection of your work now. But had it not been for Elaine Dannheiser's gift, which wasn't all that long ago, that really was the foundation for Bruce Nauman at MoMA.

BN: Yes, that was a nice group of things that she gave.

KH: I'm not sure that your work would have been seen here so easily prior to that.

BN: Well, a lot of it was going to Europe. She was one of the people here that was interested.

KH: Well, again, I think what was collected here was often New York based. It was minimalism.

[00:45:06]

BN: Well, you know, when you go to the Art Institute, those are the Chicago collectors, and so you have certain real strengths of artists that were there and things that they were interested in. And there are some spots that are pretty thin.

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[CREW DISCUSSION]

KH: It's very hard to know the work of your own time. But Elaine's collection was extraordinary.

BN: Yep. But it's also interesting that museums – strong directors make a big difference in the quality of collections and what gets collected.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

KH: So, [Days \[MoMA #1635.2009\]](#), 2009. We've talked about the enormous range of materials you've used, from grease, to neon, to plaster, to moving images, to sound. And sound was right there at the beginning. We talked about [Playing the Violin as Fast as I Can \[MoMA #583.2008\]](#). And when we get to [Days \[MoMA #1635.2009\]](#), the most recent piece, it's almost all sound.

BN: Mm-hm.

KH: And it relates to me very much like Vices and Virtues [MoMA # 750.2005.a-g], this conversation. How did you begin to make it? You were invited to be in Venice.

BN: The piece was almost finished before that, in fact, it was just about finished. And I called, so, I guess it was finished, because I called Angela. I said, "You know, I've got this piece, but it's not going to work in your gallery, Angela." [laughing] [

KH: Is this Angela Westwater? Yeah.

BN: She said, "Just wait." Because, I didn't know it but the negotiations were underway.

KH: For the new gallery, or for

BN: No, for Venice.

KH: Oh, for Venice.

BN: Yes. So I had it mocked up in the studio from that drawing [[MoMA# 330.2010](#)]. And, but, it came from just thinking about being in the studio, when I wasn't doing any work. And day after day after day. [Laughing] And there you are: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. And starting over. And so I eventually, I didn't know what to do with it, and eventually decided well, it could be an audio piece, but there should be seven people, one set of voices for each day of the week. And starting asking people to record. And so, some of them were recorded in a, like, musician friends that had access to a studio. And some were just done on people's laptops, and all kinds of ways of doing it. Which actually helped quite a bit, because it gave it a variety of sounds. We got one kid, and some women and some men, and older and younger, and cowboys, and no Indians. But, it came out, you know, it was a really nice mix of the voices.

KH: And did you pick people for their voice?

BN: Some I did because they were professional and I knew they would do it, you know, get a good clear. Jennifer has this beautiful, beautiful voice. Texas stuff there. And Alexander, the kid, it just floats over everything; it's so lovely. So the mix and the range. And so I had that all there. So when they were, Carlos came out, Carlos Basualdo came out from Philadelphia to discuss whether I wanted to do this Venice business. I had the piece there and he. So he had these other venues in mind which would fit, that kind of large space. So I said, "Well, we could do an Italian one, too." [Laughter] And so he found another large space, so we did -- we were able to do both. But the difference was, it really was different, because we recorded everything in Italian. I went to Venice and in a couple of days in one studio with the same sound engineer. And so it was flat.

KH: There was a sameness; yeah.

BN: Compared to the English. And so I had to present it differently to make it work.

KH: Why did you decide to do sound, and then these remarkably beautiful speakers which for me stand in as bodies, I mean, hanging in space.

BN: Yep.

KH: But, why not video? Why just sound for this?

BN: I don't think I even considered video. It must not have felt appropriate.

KH: Did it feel like a chorus? Did it really feel like music?

BN: Yes; yes.

KH: I mean, it's so interesting to me because, I guess, like any great artist, there's a kind of consistency in the work that over time reveals itself. And if we think

where we began today with some of the videos, what you did in the studio, almost the everyday anxiety of being there often is the content of the work. Which, of course, really is also something we all experience: even if we're not trying to make art, we are trying to make meaning. So for me, this is where your work, as obstreperous, sometimes, as it is, as violent as it can be, as it accosts us, it also reminds us of the vigilance of being a decent person, somehow. But, what's fascinating to me, and I think would be to the general public, is just that that anxiety in the studio never goes away.

BN: Mm-hm. Or, no, yes it doesn't. [laughing]

KH: Yeah. I mean, but that's what keeps you at it, too, right?

BN: A lot of times it's having the patience to wait and see what's going to happen, because you can't force it, anything, or, I can't. I love to draw, but I can't make a drawing unless I have something to work out. So, And sometimes the projects, I mean, at a certain point, it's just tedious, some part of the job that just has to be done and it's not any fun, but you just have to do it, get through it.

KH: Did this feel to you as it felt to me, that there was something, even though it's directly related to the earliest work, or to works that hang later from the ceiling, did it still – there was something about it in its extraordinary beauty that was a calmer, newer response to the world?

BN: Well, I don't know. I think that there have been other pieces that have that kind of beauty and

KH: Mostly having to do with music though, right? Or not?

BN: Some have to do with music. I thought that the Cat and Mouse: Fat Chance John Cage piece was very quiet and beautiful.

KH: Yes, that's true.

BN: And that was interesting, because when I was shooting that, it was like in the morning to go and look at what happened overnight, and it's kind of a meditation. And at the same time, I was reading Lewis and Clark's journals, so I'd read a little part of the voyage or the day's progress every day. It was just interesting. And I felt like that reading Captain Cook's journals. It's much shorter, but.

KH: This idea of a voyage, a journey.

BN: And you can go and visit a little bit of it every day. It's not something you want to sit down and read straight through. But this little passage, it's kind of nice to do that.

KH: And yet, I'm sure it repeats, but for me, it was never about sameness.

BN: Yes. Well, when I was reading Lewis and Clark's journals, there's a sameness because they always put down why we went this far, and gave all their map coordinates, and all this stuff. But something happened almost every day that was unexpected and unusual. Sometimes it's how bad the mosquitoes were. [laughing]

KH: Mm-hm. That's about being attentive, isn't it?

BN: Yes, yes.

KH: And I do think that's something your work is always suggesting to us, it's important to be aware- not beware but to be aware. But, anything more you want to say about [Days \[MoMA #16354.2009\]](#)?

BN: I liked the way it looked here.

KH: It looked beautiful. What was particularly mesmerizing to you about it?

BN: The windows at both ends. And then, you know, this stairwell adjusted the space to, so it wasn't just a rectangle. It gave a little change.

KH: And what was, what did the windows look out on?

BN: This is looking out over Fifth Avenue, I mean, 53rd Street.

BN: And the other way is looking out over the Garden.

KH: So, for me, I mean, my office looks out on that 53rd Street view, which to me is classical modernist New York.

BN: And then the different structure.

KH: Yeah; these squares.

BN: Those are the new windows over there, and the old windows over here.

KH: And when you look out, it's also, there are all of those aluminum buildings, you know, made out of these squares of material. And then, you know, the man-made nature of that remarkable garden.

BN: It's a great room.

KH: So it was a very meditative experience. For me, it calmed me down. It put me in a world. I think our day is done.

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