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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FACULTY OF FINE ART

SCULPTURE DEPARTMENT

'THE POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE'

BY

MAEVE CONNOLLY

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art & Design &
Complimentary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of
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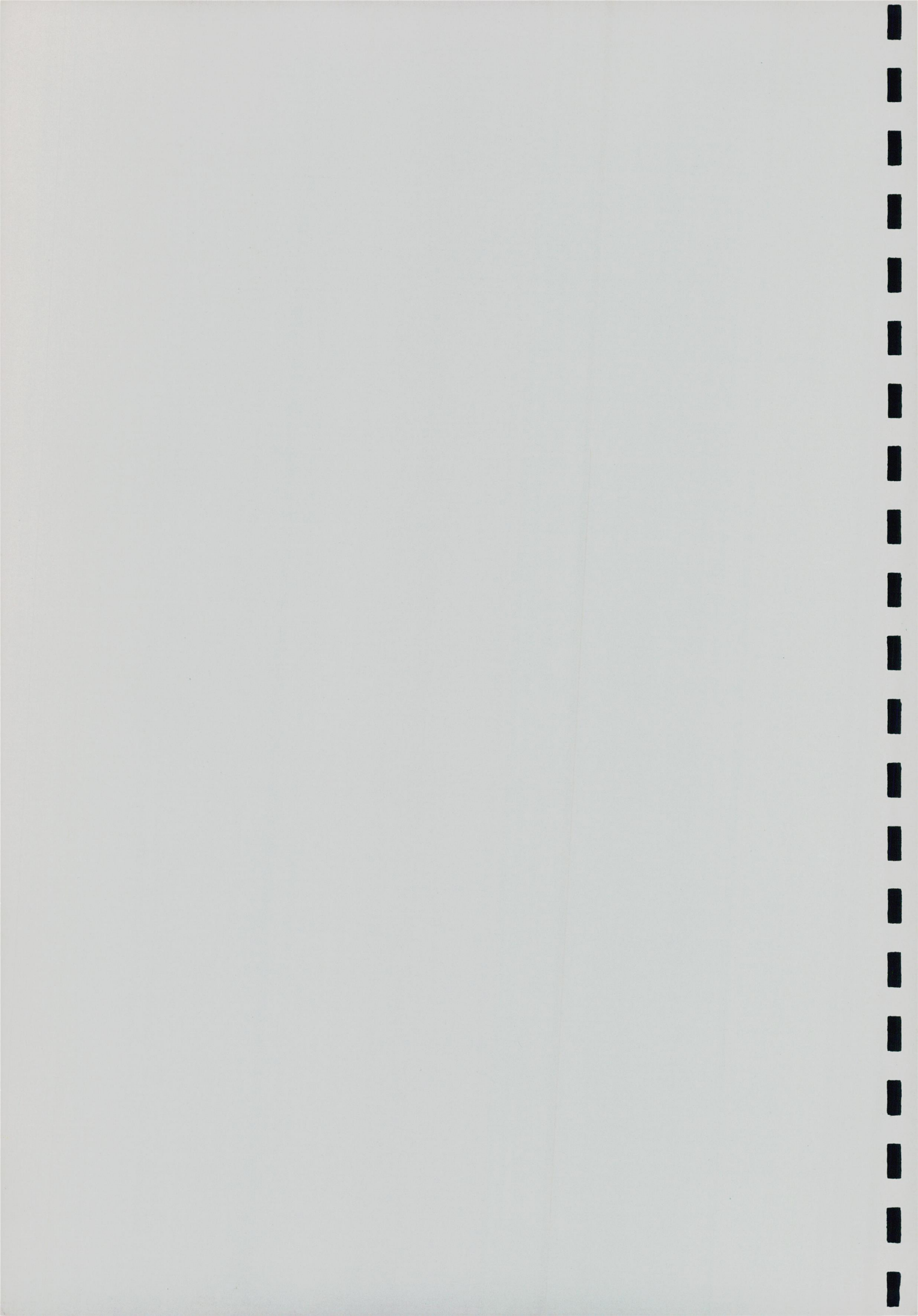
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INTRODUCTION

Performance Art exists within a given space for a given time. In discussing a performance one can never hope to discover its inherent 'meaning', especially if one has not witnessed the performance itself. One can only approach the meaning through the study of documentation which is inevitably biased.

The work of Carolee Schneemann is particularly difficult to view objectively because the main source of information is her book More Than Meat Joy (1979). It is compiled primarily from Schneemann's own writings and it is a highly subjective account.

I believe that performance, perhaps more than any other work, must be viewed within a context. I hope to provide such a context for Schneemann's work. I intend to discuss the ideologies and sources which influence her work (in Chapter I) and also developments and contradictions in feminism during the 1970's (in Chapter II). It is necessary for me to provide an account of the theoretical perspectives which inform my own critical judgements, therefore I will include a summary of contemporary Feminist Film Theory (also in Chapter I). Finally, I will directly address the problem of documentation itself (in Chapter III). I will provide descriptions of all major performances, these will mostly be taken from More Than Meat Joy but, I will include reviews of individual performances in the text where possible.

My aim is to assess the relevance of Carolee Schneemann's work (and by extension the medium of performance itself) to a contemporary feminist audience.



Plate 1 Carolee Schneemann, 'Meat Joy' (1964)

CHAPTER 1 'SOURCES'

MORE THAN MEAT JOY

More Than Meat Joy is not simply a document of Carolee Schneemann's performances from 1962-1978, it is also a very personal and subjective account of the Avant-garde art 'scene' during that period.

Schneemann's book places her at the centre of a large group of friends and collaborators, which includes Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Stan Brakhage, Charlotte Moorman, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Yoko Ono and many more.

Documentation of the performances is interspersed with notebook extracts. (photo-collages, private writings, letters, etc.)

In More Than Meat Joy Schneemann makes numerous reference to her source material, and also to artists and writers who have influenced her work with regard to Meat Joy (1964). She cites the importance of Wilhelm Reich, Antonin Artaud, John Cage and others.

In this chapter I wish to concentrate on Schneemann's early group performances 'Eye Body' (1963), 'Meat Joy' (1964), 'Snows' (1966) and 'Roundhouse' (1967), in relation to her early working methods, the theorists of the sexual revolution and the shamanistic performances of other European and American performance artists.

FROM PAINT TO PERFORMANCE

Schneemann's art school training was as a painter. She incorporated moving parts and collaged photographs into her painted constructions. Her student research into forgotten women artists, goddess mythology and ancient artefacts was discouraged by her tutors and it wasn't until she moved to New York that her attempts to rediscover a feminist history were reinforced by contact with other women artists.



Plate 2 Carolee Schneemann, 'Eye Body' (1963)

Schneemann still calls herself a painter;

'What I was trying to find was a way to - in effect - paint with words, with video, with film, with the body, with extended structures in space.'(24 P68).

She was eventually drawn to performance art, because she had to 'extend the principles of painting and construction into real time out of a pressure of imagery and didactic information that could only be vitalized in that way' (24 P.72).

Schneemann's first performance, 'Eye Body' (1963) took place in an environment she had created in her New York loft apartment. Out of broken mirrors, glass, lights, photographs and motorized umbrellas.

When she had created this environment Schneemann was motivated to enter the space: "In a kind of shamanistic ritual. I incorporated my own naked body into the constructions putting paint, grease, chalk on myself" (24 P.68).

Extensive photo-documentation of this piece shows Schneemann lying naked with live snakes crawling on her stomach and breasts. The importance of the snake as a mythic 'goddess' symbol was only discovered in later research by Schneemann.

Repeatedly Schneemann has stated that her work deals with the 'sacred and the erotic' (24 P.72). While her interest in the 'sacred' refers to her use of Goddess imagery, her work cannot be categorized simply as part of the feminist project, since it predates the feminist movement. Her exploration of the 'erotic' is highly personal and has caused her work to be viewed with suspicion by many contemporary feminist critics.

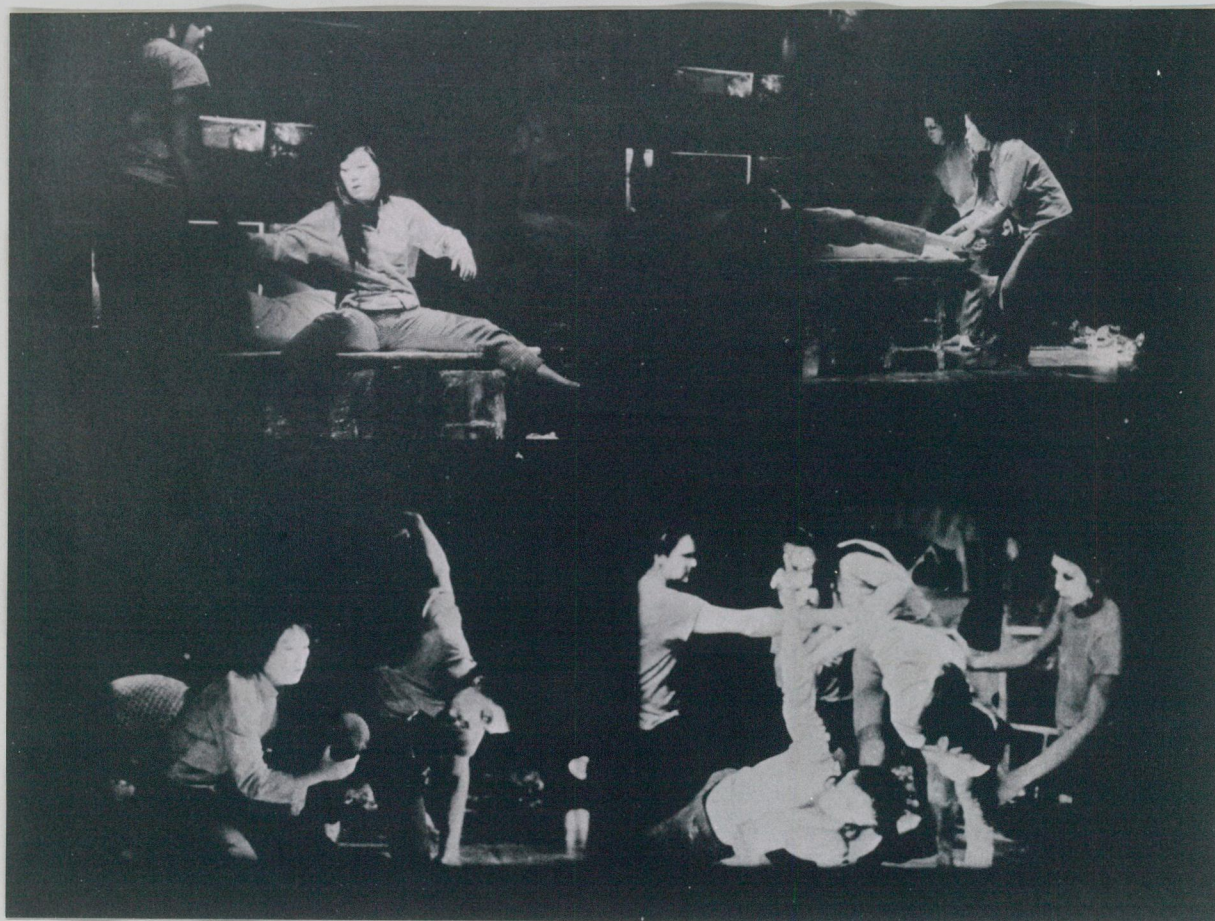


Plate 3 Carolee Schneemann, 'Snows' (1966)

THE EARLY PERFORMANCES

'Eye Body', 'Meat Joy' and the erotic film 'Fuses' (1965) all deal with sexuality. These performances, together with 'Snows' and 'Roundhouse', were carefully planned, choreographed and rehearsed. Schneemann performed certain of them with members of the 'Judson Dance Theatre', other involved untrained performers. In nearly every case movements, as well as technical cues, were precisely coordinated. Different sequences would take place simultaneously. For example, during 'Meat Joy':

Serving maid functions throughout as a stage-manager-in-the-open wandering in and out of performance area to care for practical details. The matter-of-fact actions are deceptive, since cues and co-ordination of materials and sequences often depend on her. (16 P.67)

Actions which appear to be spontaneous or 'ad-libbed' are usually rehearsed. The overall impression may have been chaotic but it was actually carefully choreographed. Documentation of 'Meat Joy' and 'Snows' in particular includes extensive lists of props, technical equipment and unusual materials used to create the environments. These materials include; tinfoil, plastic, foam, rope, fur, feathers, etc. For 'Snows', Schneemann designed a special water-light machine and a colour organ which were used, together with projected films and slides as well as multiple sound-tapes. The use of so many different media in addition to the unfamiliar environment was designed to disorientate and overwhelm the audience. This simulated chaos and the overwhelming sensual stimuli are important elements in Schneemann's early work. The performance 'Meat Joy' and 'Snows' deal ostensibly with difference subjects, 'Eroticism' and 'The Vietnam War'. However, in both performances disparate materials and media are collaged together.

This collage approach is closely related to Schneemann's work as a painter.



Plate 4 Hermann Nitsch, '3.Aktion' (1963)

Plate 5 Carolee Schneemann, 'Meat Joy' (1964)

SHAMANISM

These performances ('Meat Joy', 'Snows', 'Roundhouse') have often been linked with work by the Vienna Group artists and Fluxus, such as Hermann Nitsch, Gunter Brus and Otto Muhl. There are certain similarities. Both Schneemann and the European Artists refer to their work as 'shamanistic'. As artists they embrace the function of the ancient Shamen to 'heal' and to release 'sacred' forces.

They see their work as therapeutic and cathartic for themselves and for their audiences. Through the ritual of performance, access is gained to the deepest levels of instinct and primitive urges are released.

The notion of shamanism is problematic for many reasons. The artists of the Vienna Group carried out large scale 'aktionen' in which violent and destructive events often took place; against objects, animals or people. While the majority of artists were male (with Valie Export as a notable exception), many of their 'victims' were female.

In his article "Art in the Dark" (Art Forum 1983), Thomas MacEvelley not only compares 'Meat Joy' to the work of Hermann Nitsch, he also finds their sources to be closely linked.

'Like Nitsch's work, Schneemann's is based on depth psychology and on the appropriation of contents from the neolithic stratum of religious history, especially the religious genre of the fertility rite'. (26 P.65). Schneemann herself challenged this categorisation (see Chapter II).

Thomas MacEvelley overlooks many important differences between Schneemann's performances and those of the Vienna Group.



131 48. Aktion, Paris 1975

Plate 6 Hermann Nitsch, '48.Aktion' (1975)

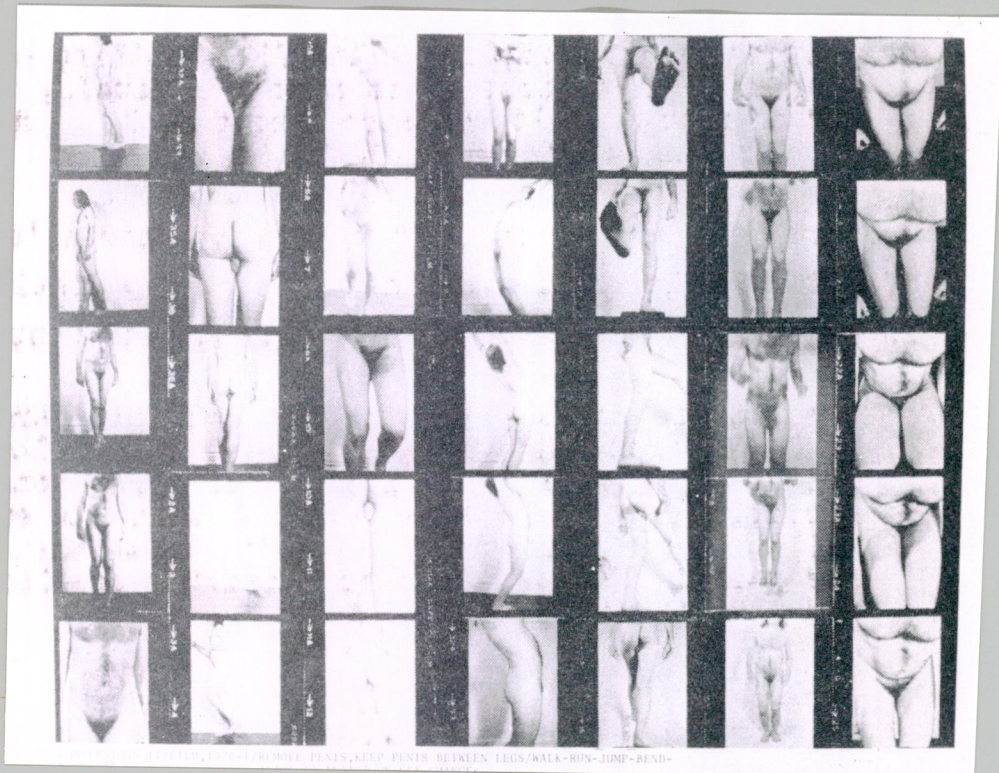


Plate 7 Vito Acconci, 'Conversions' (1970-1)

He makes a distinction between the work of Chris Burden (and presumably Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim also) and that of the Vienna Group on the grounds that -

Burden's work has functioned as a personal initiation or catharsis as well as an investigation of the limits of ones will [while] others (including Nitsch) are convinced that their performances are cathartic for the audience as well and in that sense serve a social and therapeutic purpose. (26 P.70)

It seems that MacEvelley chooses to associate Schneemann's group performances with those of Nitsch, etc. because they are ritualistic in structure and, most importantly, because there are large numbers of participants (on stage as well as in the audience).

I would argue that Schneemann's group performances combine the personal exploration of, say, Burdens with the group catharsis of Nitsch's. However, Schneemann does not set herself apart from her performers. She does not take a dominant position with performances. Her role as Author/Director is established in rehearsals and not manifested on stage.

'In my work in performance and film, nothing happens that I haven't first tried myself - usually with a lot of fear and risk because I need risk. I need to push my own boundaries' (24 P.69).

The actions, movements involved in Schneemann's work (in addition to the Multi-Media aspect) clearly distinguish her intentions from those of Hermann Nitsch and Gunter Brus.

The body is not injured or even terribly stressed, it is not concerned with deformation and violence or denial of pleasure, the body is enacting something ecstatic for me. Some artists want to explore guilt, shame, repression, I don't choose that role. And this is used against me - Critics complain "On you make it too easy" (24 P.22).



WILHELM REICH AND THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

One of Carolee Schneemann's major early influences was the psychologist Wilhelm Reich. His texts were widely read during the 1960's.

Reich began his career as a Freudian, dedicating his career to the study of neuroses. He spent much of his early career elaborating on Freuds' study of Libido. But Reich was also a Marxist, who believed that the political revolution was doomed to failure, unless it was accompanied by the abolition of repressive morality. He maintained that a repressive ideology is internalised in the character structure of the individual through family life and that repression exists in order to create the specific character structure necessary for the preservation of authoritarian social regimes. In contrast with Freud, he believed that the 'Oedipus Complex' occurred only in patriarchal, capitalist societies. Reich thus advocated matriarchy as the most 'natural' form of social organisation.

In Psychoanalysis and Feminism, Juliet Mitchell provides a thorough critique of Reich's position. He based his view of matriarchy on anthropological studies which Mitchell finds questionable. (10 P.174)

Reich presents his matriarchy as a society where there is no repression - only the expression of healthy and normal sexuality. He then came to the conclusion that 'The Oedipus Complex which Freud discovered, is not so much a cause as it is a result of the sexual restrictions imposed on the child by society' (10 P.181).

For Reich the Libido (which he later termed 'Orgone Energy') was a profoundly biological urge and he believed that 'genitality was the only true sexuality' (10 P.155).



Plate 8 Carolee Schneemann, 'Meat Joy' (1964)

For Reich the Libido (which he later termed 'Orgone Energy') was a profoundly biological urge and he believed that 'genitality was the only true sexuality' (10 P.155).

Reich attributed all neuroses to a frustration of the sexual urge, in addition, aggression was caused by a re-channelling of the Libido.

Therefore the task of the Reichian therapist was to free the genitality which anxiety and aggression masked, '(If one achieved orgasmic powers), the super-structure of the psychoneuroses would automatically fall down. Cure the body and mind will follow suit'. (10 P.169).

This Reichian belief in the importance of sexual release appears to have influenced Schneemann's early work, most notably. 'Meat Joy' (1964). This piece was intended to be a celebration of sexual energy - sensually overwhelming both for audience and performers. Schneemann's has said in reference to this early work: 'There was a Reichian spirit: once people experienced sexual freedom, their creative, spontaneous perceptions about themselves and the world would be constructive and propulsive. That didn't quite happen.' (29 P.19).

PORNOGRAPHY

In "Towards a Feminist Erotica" Kathy Myers writes 'The sexual radicals, Reich and Marcuse, played a central role in the development of the Libertarian tradition'. She points out that Reich (and Marcuse) proposed that sexuality was subject to social censorship when it threatened to disrupt the social order. This invested sexual practices with a potentially revolutionary power (12 P.287). Juliet Mitchell attributes Reich's faith in a revolutionary sexuality to his Marxist beliefs: 'Revolutionaries must encourage all that is hostile to the bourgeois order, for instance the adolescent tendency to rebel for sexual



freedom' (10 P.208). Reich's faith in the power of sexual freedom is based on his view of the sexual urge as biological and 'healthy'. He also advocates 'Communal living' and the 'abolition of marriage' (10 P.208) because these would undermine the patriarchal family, which Reich believed to be the cause of repression and thus, neuroses.

Myers maintains that 'Libertarianism falsely assumes that everything which is socially unacceptable is inherently subversive and liberating' (12 P.288).

She believes that the Reichian concept of sexual 'freedom' has inadvertently contributed to the acceptance, if not the actual growth of pornography. Furthermore, she argues that pornography does not challenge the patriarchal family: 'It implicitly acknowledges and supports social privileging of the family reproduction and hetero-sexual union' (12 P.287).



Plate 9 Vito Acconci, 'Conversions' (1970-1)

CHAPTER II 'FEMINISM'

TRADITIONS OF (MIS)REPRESENTATION

Many of Carolee Schneemann's early performances were developed in contrast with the work of male performers, discussed earlier. These performers; Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Yves Klein, Hermann Nitsch, were all criticised for their treatment of women in performances during the 1960's and 1970's. In her important article on "European and American Women Body Art", Lucy Lippard states 'Acconci has tied up and otherwise manipulated women, psychologically and physically. Chris Burden has thrown burning matches on his wife's nude body in performance' (8 P.134).

Lucy Lippard claims that this 'Acute gynaephobia' arises from a 'neurotic dissatisfaction with the self'. This dissatisfaction is also found in the female performer but dealt with in a totally different way, through transformation processes and self-exploration instead of by violence and self-destruction as in the male (8 P133).

She cites certain male artists who have attempted to transform themselves Vito Acconci 'burning hair from his chest, making it supple, flexible' in an attempt to 'develop a female breast', then he tucked his penis between his legs to extend the 'sex change' (8 P.127).

Lippard attributes performance of this type to 'birth envy'. She quotes Lea Vergure who claims that 'male artists envy the uterus as capacity for creative power'.¹ At the close of her article Lippard asks why more women performance artists have not introduced major images of pregnancy and childbirth into their work. She appears to locate some potential power in this subject-matter. This 'power' is ill-defined, as is the term 'birth envy': This line of argument is problematic - because it locates divisions between the works of male and female artists purely in relation to their biological differences.

¹ See Vergine, Lea Il Corpo come Linguaggio Milan, Praverio 1974.



Plate 10 Carolee Schneemann, 'Meat Joy' (1964)

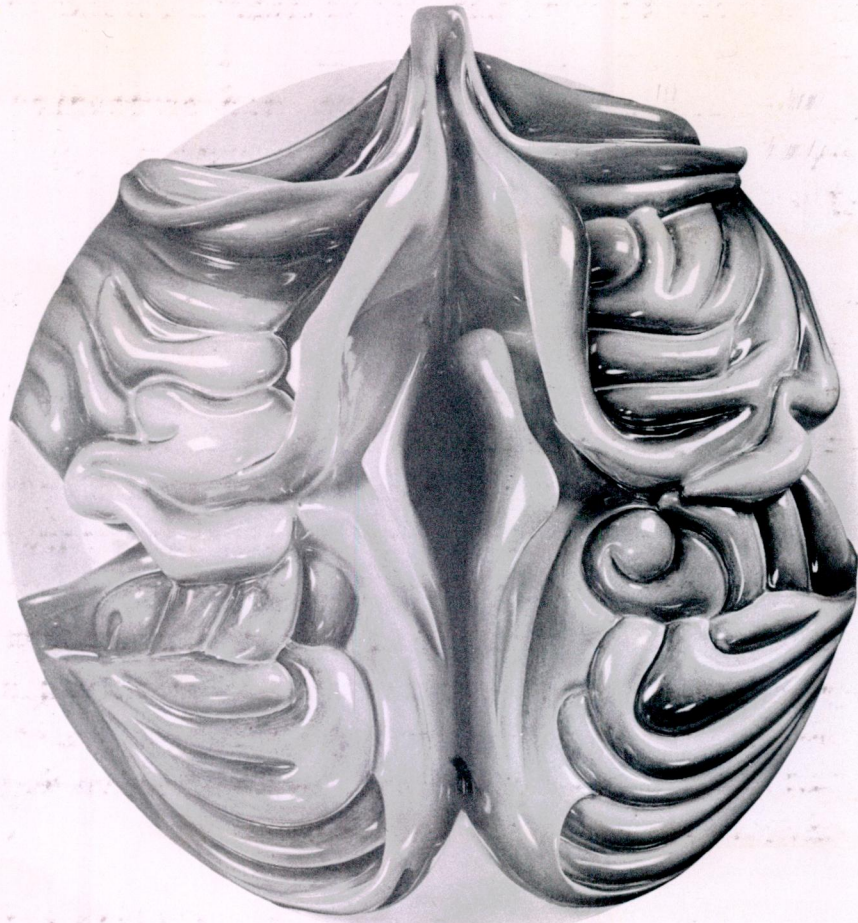
In her writings Carolee Schneemann frequently makes references to 'woman as creative power' etc., in the same manner as Lippard (both subscribed to a similar belief in mother-goddess mythologies). However, Schneemann seems to have consciously resisted the use of actual childbirth or pregnancy images. Her performance 'Meat Joy' (1964) is a celebration of Flesh. Performers writhed semi-naked on plastic sheets, covered in fish, chicken, sausages, blood and eggs. The audience were seated close to the performers and extensive use was made of lighting and sound (popular sixties songs mixed with street sounds).

Sexuality is explored through sensual experimentation, the textures and smells of the meat, the interplay of lights on the performers bodies, the collaged sounds. In the article "Art in the Dark", Thomas McEvelley attempted to categorise 'Meat Joy' as a fertility rite. Schneemann, in a letter to the Editor of Visible Female, challenged this categorisation. She stated that 'Meat Joy' works against a 'male birth fetishisation'².

Instead she described the performance as an 'erotic celebration' thus denying its connection with procreativity.

² See Schneemann, Carolee "Letter to the Editor" in Robinson H. (Ed.) Visibly Female London, Camden Press, 1987.

both politically and socially if women were to become



Georgia O'Keefe

Plate 11 Judy Chicago, 'The Dinner Party : Georgia O'Keefe'
(1973-8)

COUNTER STEREOTYPES

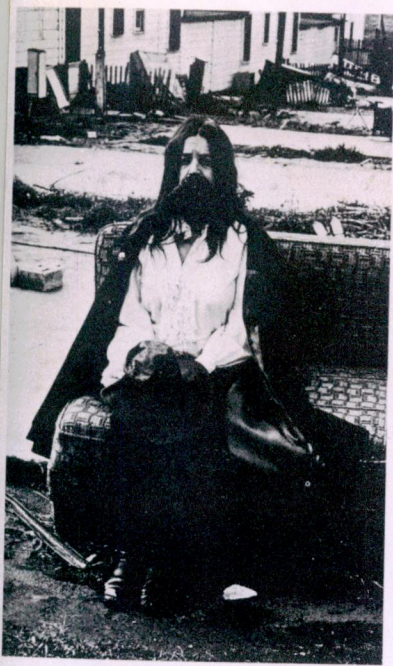
Many approaches were used by feminists during the 1970's in their struggle to create more accurate and positive representations of women. Two main strategies which have emerged are relevant to my discussion of Schneemanns performances.

One could say that these strategies were employed by feminists on the east and on the west coasts of America. In California, artists like Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago were developing a new iconography for women. Chicago's use of Labian imagery is well known. Many other artists extended this project by researching 'forgotten women artists and developing goddess mythology.'³ These efforts were designed to give women a stronger cultural identity. They relied on the celebration of bodily functions and processes. (birth and menstruation) and also of natural symbolism and the 'creative power' of which women were the controllers.

These positive images of women were totally reliant on the valorisation of authentic womanhood or 'essential' femininity.

In her article "Woman's Stake : Filming the Female Body", Mary Ann Doane explains that a critique of essentialism 'leads to the exposure of the inevitable alliance between "Feminine Essence" and the natural, the given or precisely what is outside the range of political change' (3 P.219). This approach leads nowhere. It encourages women to be content with celebrating what they already have, (namely, their bodies) and with creating 'pure' representation. This ignores the possibility that processes of representations may themselves be corrupt.

³ For more information see Orenstein, Gloria F. "The Re-emergence of the Archetype" in Robinson, H. (Ed.) Visibly Female, Candel Press London 1987).



Eleanor Antin as *The King*, 1973. Photo: Phil Steinmetz.



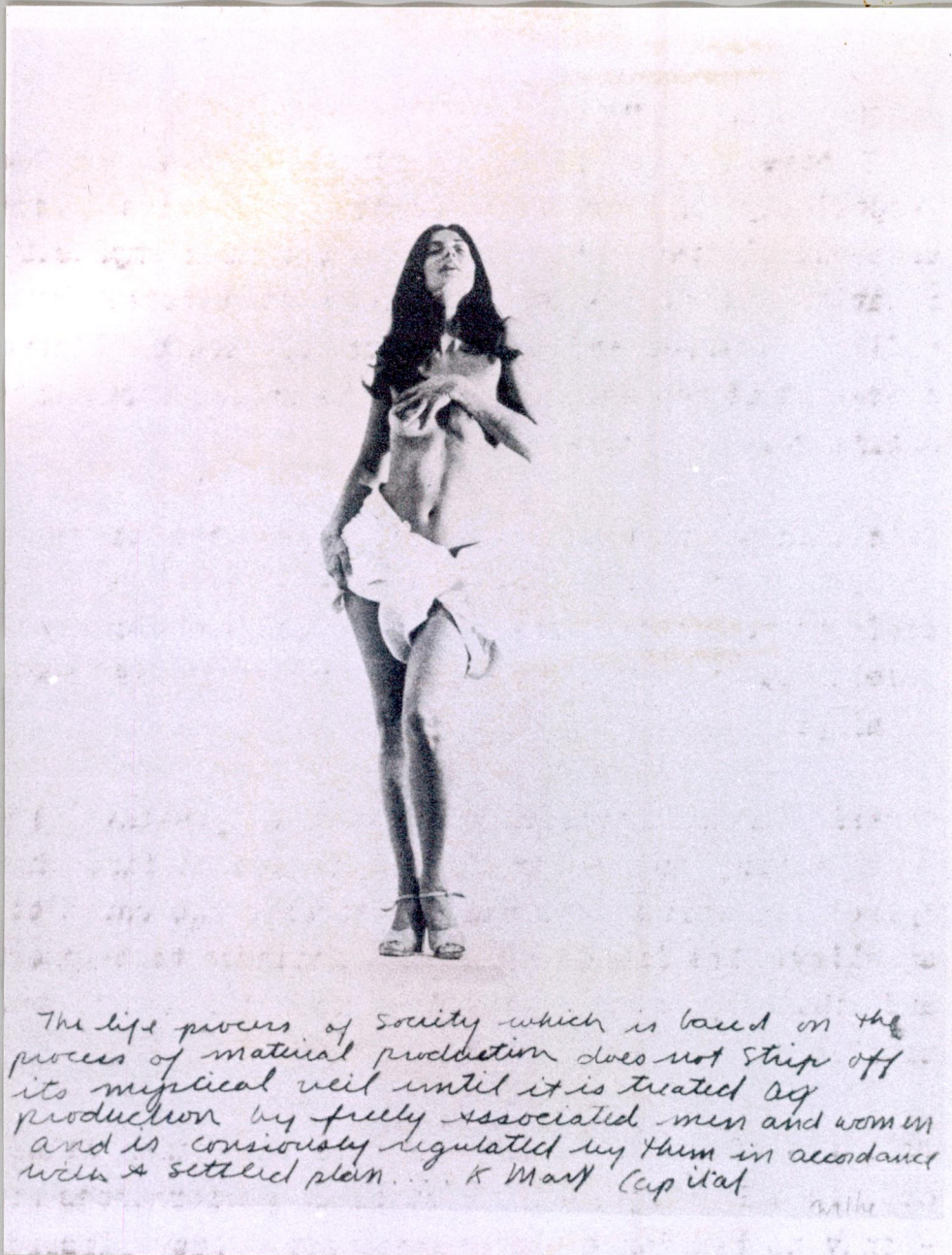
Adrian Piper, *Catalysis III*, 1970. Photo: Rosemary Mayer.

Plate 12 Eleanor Antin, (1973) and Adrian Piper, (1970)

This issue is explored by Judith Barry and Sandy Flittermann in "Textual Strategies". 'Art that relies on women biological functions may simply reinforce unproblematic images of women that do not take into account the social contradictions implied in "Being-a-Woman" '. (1 P.315). The work of East Coast artists like Adrian Piper, Hannah Wilke and Eleanor Antin deals with these contradictions.⁴ Using parody, role-play, make-up and dressing up these women explore the construction of female identities.

Schneemann explored these issues in both 'Naked Action Lecture' (1968) and 'Up to and Including their Limits' (1973-76.)

⁴ For more information on Transformations and Processes, see Tickner, Lisa, "Body Politic" in Parker.R . and Pollock.G. (Ed.) Framing Feminism Pandora, London 1987 (PP.270-272).



The life process of society which is based on the process of material production does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men and women and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan... K Marx Capital

Plate 13 Hannah Wilke. 'Super-T-Art' (1974)

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

As I have indicated, the early strategies of Feminists (especially on the West Coast of America) were soon somewhat discredited. There was too much emphasis on the relationship of the woman's body to nature, myth (i.e. bodily processes and cycles) and not enough awareness of processes of representation and the social structures which define roles for women.

Film Theory is relevant to any discussion of performance art in which a woman uses her naked body as a means to confront patriarchal stereotypes. Quite obviously the body itself is not free of connotations it is coded with meanings.

Certain feminist artists who produced 'positive' images of women during the 1970's were horrified to find that their 'pure' representations did not advance the cause of sexual equality. The images which were intended to be provocative and challenging were merely exploited as a source of titillation.

This was often the case with work by Hannah Wilke whose, occasionally misguided, flirtatious performances backfired - only to reinforce old stereotypes. Lucy Lippard writes 'It is a subtle abyss that separates mans use of women for sexual titillation from women use of women to expose that insult' (8 P.125).

A case in point is the infamous book of photographs by Susan Santoro - of vaginas. Shortly after this book was released - amid great controversy - stills of female genitalia began to appear in pornographic magazines. ⁵

⁵ For further information on Susan Santoro (Towards a New Expressionism Rome, Revolt Feminite, 1974) See Pollock, Griselda "Whats wrong with Images of Women"? Framing Feminism Pandora London 1987 (P.135).



As a reaction against this overt association of female sexuality with the biological, feminist theorists argued for a redefinition of sexuality based on psychoanalysis. Doane writes; 'Psychoanalysis assumes a necessary gap between the body and the psyche so that sexuality is not irreducible to the physical'. (3 P.219).

Writers such as Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Constance Penley, Jacqueline Rose, as well as the aforementioned Mary Ann Doane, are influenced to varying degrees by Jacques Lacans re-reading of Freud.

Lacan maintained that no image has meaning in itself, given directly through vision, but only acquires it.

Within a particular cultural order Lacan also believed that the phallus of Freudian psychology is not the penis - possessed by neither male or female, it belongs to the symbolic order and not nature.

Mary Ann Doane provided a definition of sexuality which clearly removes it from notions of essentialism; 'Sexuality is constructed within social and symbolic relations, it is most unnatural and is achieved only after an arduous struggle - one is not born with a sexual identity' (3 P.219).

However, Doane, Kristeva and Irigaray's theories have all been met with charges of essentialism. Irigaray and Kristeva see female sexuality as polymorphous and multiple. The former bases her theories on the nature of the female genitals among other things, while Kristeva stresses the importance of the pre-oedipal stage in the female before her negative entry into the symbolic order.



Mary Ann Doane calls on the above theories in support of her own proposition, that of 'anaclysis' in which bodily functions are a prop for sexuality.

Doane therefore defends the notion of 'feminine specificity' rather than essence. Constance Penley, as paraphrased by R. Lapsley and M. Westlake, criticises this position, aligning it with essentialism where: 'Identity and difference are established before they can be adequately questioned'. (7 P.103).

Furthermore 'any attempt to derive gendered sexuality from the body endangers the uncompromising insistence of psychoanalysis that sexuality is an arbitrary identity imposed by convection'.

Clearly this psychoanalytic approach to sexuality is at odds with the theoretical perspectives which informed much of Schneemann's early work. But her performance is viewed, and judged, within the context of contemporary feminist theory.

STRUCTURES OF PERFORMANCE

The conception of the audience is very important in Carolee Schneemann's work. The early works (during the 1960's) were perceived initially as part of the tradition of the 'Happening' - a fashionable social event part of the avant-garde scene.

Later, performances were associated with consciousness-raising and political demonstrations. Schneemann created works for Angry Arts week (e.g. Snows 1967) in support of the Vietnamese people. She also staged the work 'Roundhouse' in 1967 for the 'Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation, in London. These performances were structured by the need to awaken and to liberate the audience. A further change occurred in the 1970's - when her work became categorised as 'feminist'.



Plate 14 Carolee Schneemann, 'Meat Joy' (1964)

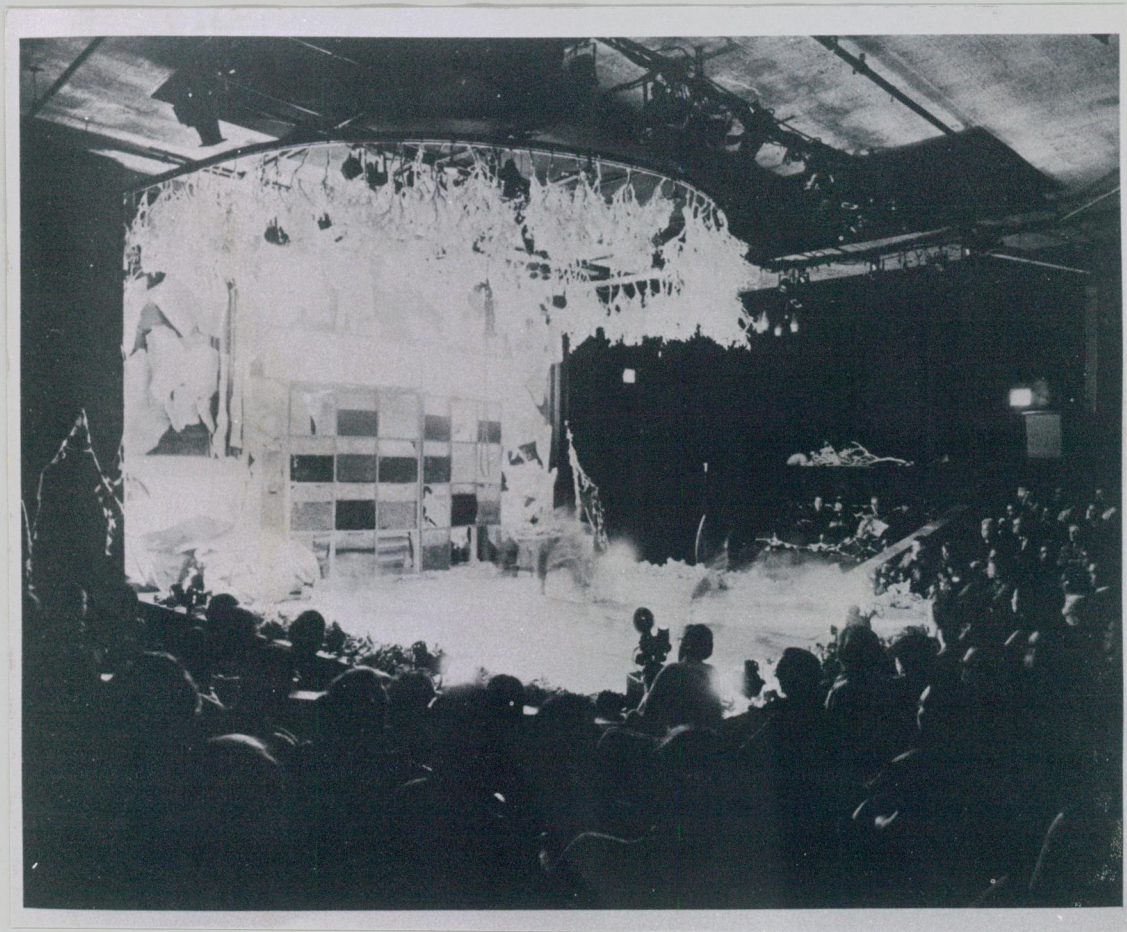


Plate 15 Carolee Schneemann, 'Snows' (1966)

'Up to and including their Limits' (1973, Interior Scroll' (1975) and 'Homerunmuse' (1978) were all directed at specifically feminist audiences. The performances were no longer perceived as entertainment.

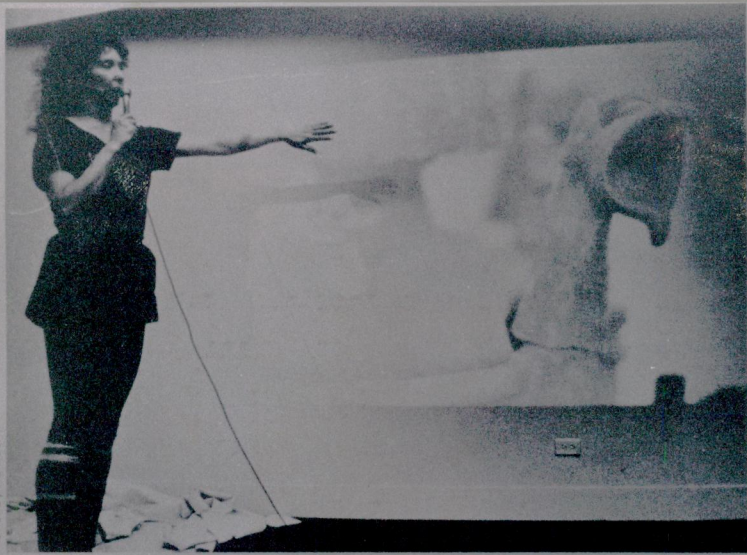
In the early works audiences are bombarded with light, sound and movement. These pieces usually took place in a theatrical setting, e.g. The Martinique Theatre or The Judson Dance Theatre.

Later works were performed in alternative spaces for Artists (like the Arts Meeting Place or the Franklin Furnace.) These pieces were often structured as performance - installations. Instead of being allocated a given space (as in the 'Theatrical' works) audiences of the installation pieces are free to wander through different areas.

Schneemann's work became increasingly concerned with space during the 1970's. For example in 'Homerunmuse' (1978), the notion of the museum figured both conceptually and physically.

This piece was designed to explore the notion of the 'Muse'. 'Its form as museum, physical and aesthetic space, the images of a museum exhibit "Women Artists 1550-1950" and the metaphoric implications of an artist herself performing in a museum' (16 P.118).

The piece includes prerecorded and written texts, live action and speech and four slide units - The slide images were composed of prehistoric artefacts/work from the Women Artist 1550-1950 exhibition/Schneemann's early performances and a photograph of an Equatorial Island Owl Goddess. Schneemann made periodic runs through the museum to break up the action - video cameras in selected corridors relayed the runs on to monitors in front of the audience.



fade-out roof ripping tape/ muse slide floats on mirror/double projection museum, prehistoric artifacts/improvise on text

.....what am I doing? well we'll show some things we've made....yes yes they're afraid I'll pull down my paints.... you know....they suspect I get messages from my cunt & want to exhibit them....which?.....all the things are here..... no they don't know what they mean.....but they might guess something....confused....yes....passive?....yes...spectators.....you know....it's all under glass....many of our things... when? before we were raped murdered banished tricked lied to abducted chased captured locked up starved tortured ...around that time....what?....yes our things what we made what they stole kidnapped hid denied were our yes under glass....what? which? our bowls bones pots weavings masks vulva goddesses our phalli and slippers and coats and mittens in leather and paint made from berries and leaves our holy batons ivory horns calenders in stone our bells arrows shells feathers thongs pebble images of our Mother.....



Plate 16 Carolee Schneeman, 'Homerunmuse' (1978)



dissolve muse slide/ full wall abutting slides of "Women Artists", double projection scored to recorded text/run in place with dumbbells

BIOLOGICAL SPIRITUAL & AESTHETIC UNITY -- PRIMAL UNITY OF CREATIVE ACTS HER IDENTIFICATION WITH MATERIAL IS IMMEDIATE BECAUSE HER BODY'S FUNCTIONS ARE TRANSFORMATIVE PERIODIC & UNDENIABLE. IT IS IN HER BODY THAT EXTREME TRANSFORMATIONS OCCUR CHANGES WHICH PARALLEL THOSE OF NATURE. FROM THE KNOWLEDGE OF HER BODY SHE IS MOVED TO ACTIVATE TO SHAPE & TO CREATE FORMS IN THE WORLD WHICH SURROUNDS HER

THE CIRCLE OF MOONS IS SCRIPT

bells on an kles...begin runs through museum out of sight & reappearing....

OR COURSE SHE IS NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY MEN DID NOT TRIVIALIZE THIS GUIDE IN ORDER TO KEEP HER VALUE THEY MADE HER EXCLUSIVE TO THEMSELVES THE CREATIVE FEMALE SPIRIT WAS CO-OPTED SHE COULD ONLY SERVE MEN SO SUPERIOR WAS SHE TO HER VERY GENDER SOURCE THAT ONLY HE COULD INCORPORATE HER IN EFFECT SUCK HER BACK INTO HIS BODY A REVERSAL ON THE CREATIVE ACT OF HIS ORIGINAL BIOLOGICAL MOTHER THE MUSE HAS SERVED PATRIARCHIAL IMAGINATION AS ACCOMPLICE COLLABORATOR TRAITOR DEFENDING & DEFINING HIS CREATIVE TERRITORY APART FROM FEMALE WILL & IMAGINATION



Plate 17 Carolee Schneemann 'Homerunmuse' (1978)

SELF-REPRESENTATIONS

In a review of 'Up to and Including Her Limits' (Art Forum 1976), Ann-Sargent Wooster comments on Schneemann's relationship with the use of technical processes and structures. There was a wide variety of media involved in this piece; Super-8 film loops, video tapes, sound tapes and printed matter. The installation space consists of several separate areas. In the performance area Schneemann is suspended naked in a harness. The weight of her body causes the harness to spin at intervals - she makes marks on the surrounding walls. The performance area is illuminated by the light of an empty projector. In a separate space the film 'Kitch's Last Meal' is projected while the collaged sound tapes are playing (sounds of domestic life, conversations and feminist polemic). There is also a bank of video monitors showing old and recent performances, updated daily in yet another area Schneemann's notes and other printed matter is displayed for reading.

'Up to and Including Her Limits' toured for three years (1973-1976). In each location, the different media were presented separately.

In her review of this piece, Ann-Sargent Wooster writes that 'Kitch's Last Meal' has 'a definite strength both ideologically and aesthetically (P.74). Its concentration on the banal and mundane elements of life is in support of the feminist position that all aspects of life are equally important as subjects of art.

However, Wooster maintains that there is a contradiction between the 'homemade' quality of the film and the manner in which it is presented, because it is closely synchronised with the collaged sound tapes and therefore has only a 'pseudo-informality' (31 P.74).



Anthony McCall

The Kitchen

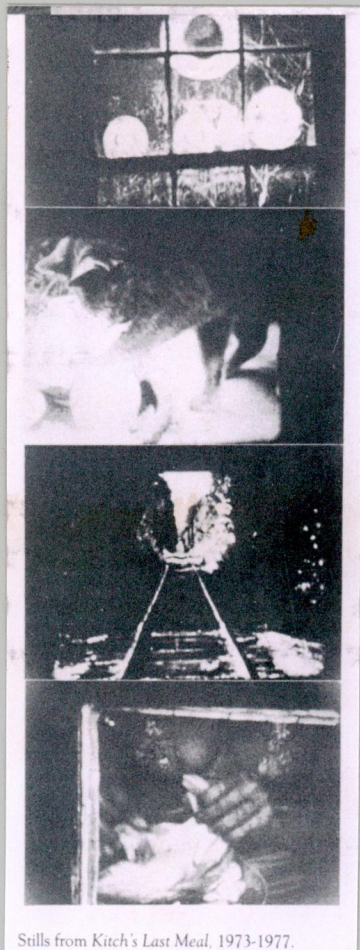
Ritual community of the audience, ritual penetration of the space; communal investigation, organization of the elements. Participation in the death of the cat—funeral rite; integration of the dead cat body (live, active in the video and film). Suspension on the rope (plumb line) analogous to electromagnetic or gravitational field—the target of the perception is psychic traces. Relation of dream and psychic trace has to do with disparities and contingencies in the seamless space and events; sense of dormant planes on which unexpected equivalences converge (jostle, flow, impinge, diverge, gather momentum, fade, shift... homologous to the body/rope/markings connections). Various units of UTAHL—narrative, anecdote, instruction, temporal fixity, impermanence, repeated imagery—all in multiple, sensory contact points which emphasize contradictory needs for distance and contact, separation and mutuality. Transference of information-processing between performer and audience involves questions of telepathy, parapsychology—the insights which bind us during the course of an action extend our physical and conceptual expectations—a synesthetic touching on extrasensory processes—areas between conscious and unconscious (always active but unusually scattered....).



Shelley Foxas

Plate 18 Carolee Schneemann, 'Up to and Including Her Limits' (1973-6)

Plate 19 Carolee Schneemann, 'Kitch's Last Meal' (1973-7)



Stills from Kitch's Last Meal, 1973-1977.

She accuses Schneemann of hiding her technical mastery under the guise of a 'womans sensibility'.

Wooster seems to be reacting to the contradictions within the entire piece - The use of such disparate media as Super-8 and video for example. However, I would argue that these contradictions are intentional - Schneemann is exploring her multiple notes - as Homemaker, Artist, Woman, Film Maker, etc. Different media are employed in different ways - in accordance with specific aesthetic conventions.

The 'blurry' homemade quality of the film 'Kitchens Last Meal' together with its 'trivial' subject matter - the daily life of a couple living in the country, seen through the eyes of their cat - is intended to jar with the technological projection of the edited sound and video tapes.

In her Article: "The Reflective Edge": A Female concept of self-representation' (22 PP.11-16), Silvia Eiblmayr discusses the element of 'display' which is found in so much performance art by women. She mentions works by Schneemann ('Eye Body', 1963) and also Valie Export Gina Pane, Ulrike Rosenbach and Helen Chadwick. She comments on the woman's problematic relationship to the representational system itself and acknowledges that there is no 'authentic' language of representation for women. She refers to the surrealists use of woman's image (as a threat of castration) to challenge the category of the 'picture' itself (22 P.11).

The female image implied destruction but it also figured as the material body upon which the destructive force was visited. These works predate the symbolic attacks against the canvas carried out by male artists of the 1950's and 1960's.

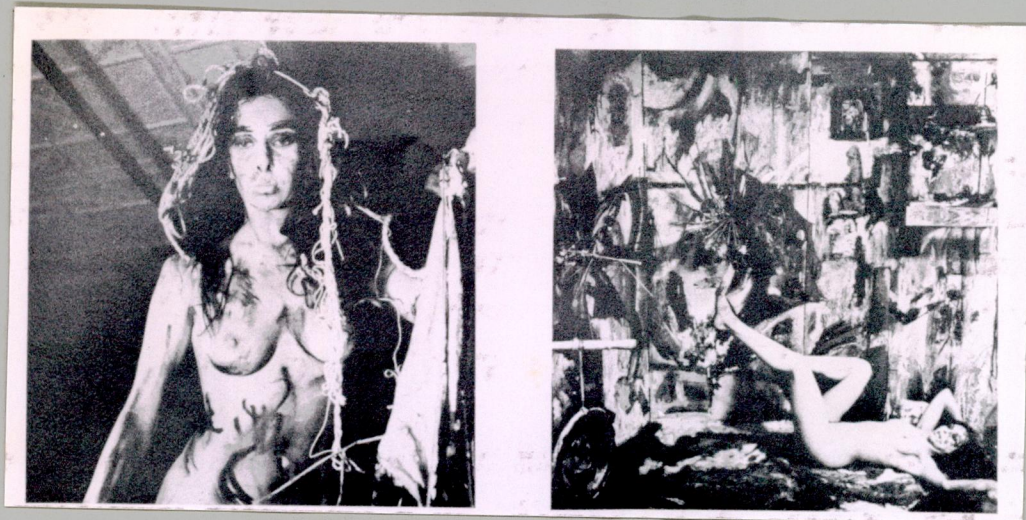


Plate 20 Carolee Schneemann, 'Eye Body' (1963)

Schneemann's 'Eye Body' is recorded as a series of staged photographs by the painter Erro. These show Schneemann next to other objects (fabrics, photographs of fragmented female bodies, lights, motorised umbrellas). Eiblmayr writes that: 'Both "Eye Body" and "Jeux D'Enfants" [A painting by Dorothea Tanning 1942] show a seemingly erotic pleasure in the affirmation of the Female "Status as a picture" but also by displaying the dialectic of their active passive position within the picture they reflect an ambiguous status that subverts the traditional male positioning of the female figure' (22 P.13).

Eiblmayr claims that the woman artist's apparent acceptance of her 'Status as a Picture' is a necessary condition for the problematization of this position.

Therefore the importance of the performance is not that the woman is on display (for she omits discussion of artists such as Hannah Wilke and Lynda Benglis who have been actively engaged in the parody of 'display' images). Rather it is the obvious staging of a picture with the woman as a material element which is important. The woman must enter the picture and allow herself to be contained within its frame.

I am not entirely in agreement with Eiblmayr's assessment of these works - for example, the masochism of Gina Pane and Valie Export threatens to overwhelm their other objectives. However, 'Eye Body' is clearly an intentional problematization of the pictorial space - It is obviously different from other works by Schneemann in that it is documented by 'staged' still photographs where the body is immobile and posed within the frame.

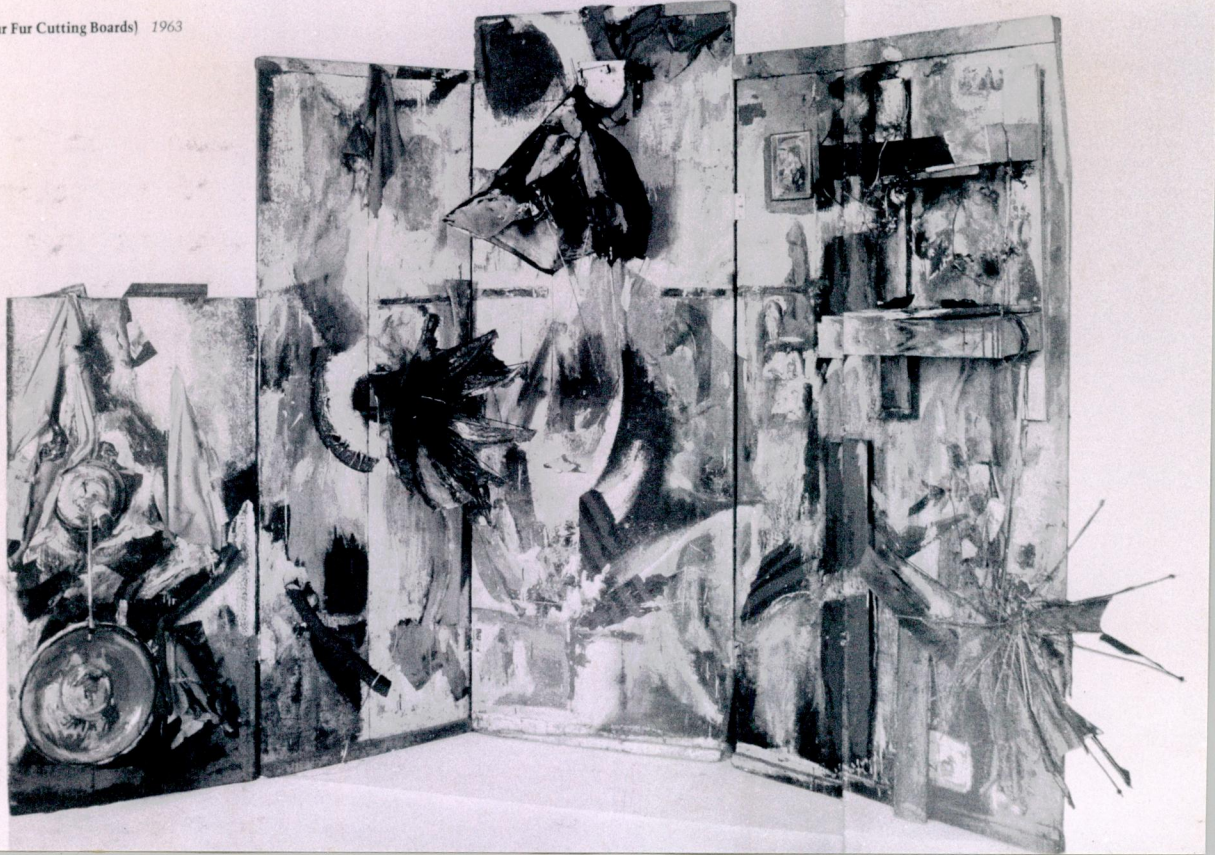


Plate 21 Carolee Schneemann, 'Painting' (1963)

CHAPTER III 'DOCUMENTING'

THE RETURN TO PAINTING

Schneemann began her career as a painter but, after 1963, she concentrated her energies on performance and film-making. However, in the later 1970's, she began painting again. She exhibited early and new works at the Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York in 1982 and again in 1983. Most reviewers focused on the importance of the paintings as source material for the performances. (See 28 PP.55-56).

Although Schneemann had always considered herself a 'painter', the return into object-making was not easy for her. She insisted that her constructions and assemblages were her primary work but at the same time, she continued to perform.

Her performances during the 1980's were usually concerned with 'an interest of image and text' and required 'less media, less technology' (29 P.21). These smaller works, which include, 'Fresh Blood' (1982) 'Infinity Kisses' (1982-1988) and 'Venus Vectors' (1987) were virtually ignored by the art press, possibly because of Schneemann's insistence that her paintings/constructions were her 'primary work'. In return, the performance work prevented Schneemann from being accepted as a painter (29 P.20).

SELLING PERFORMANCE

In his article "Carolee Schneemann: Objects Vs Persona", Daniel Cameron discusses Schneemann's position in relation to the art establishment. He claims that 'she is allowed the note of paradigm only in Performance Art', but that in fact her influence can be seen in the work of William Wegman, Cindy Sherman, Lucas Samaras and others (19 P.125). Cameron claims that her position as an 'avant-garde household name' has not benefitted her career.

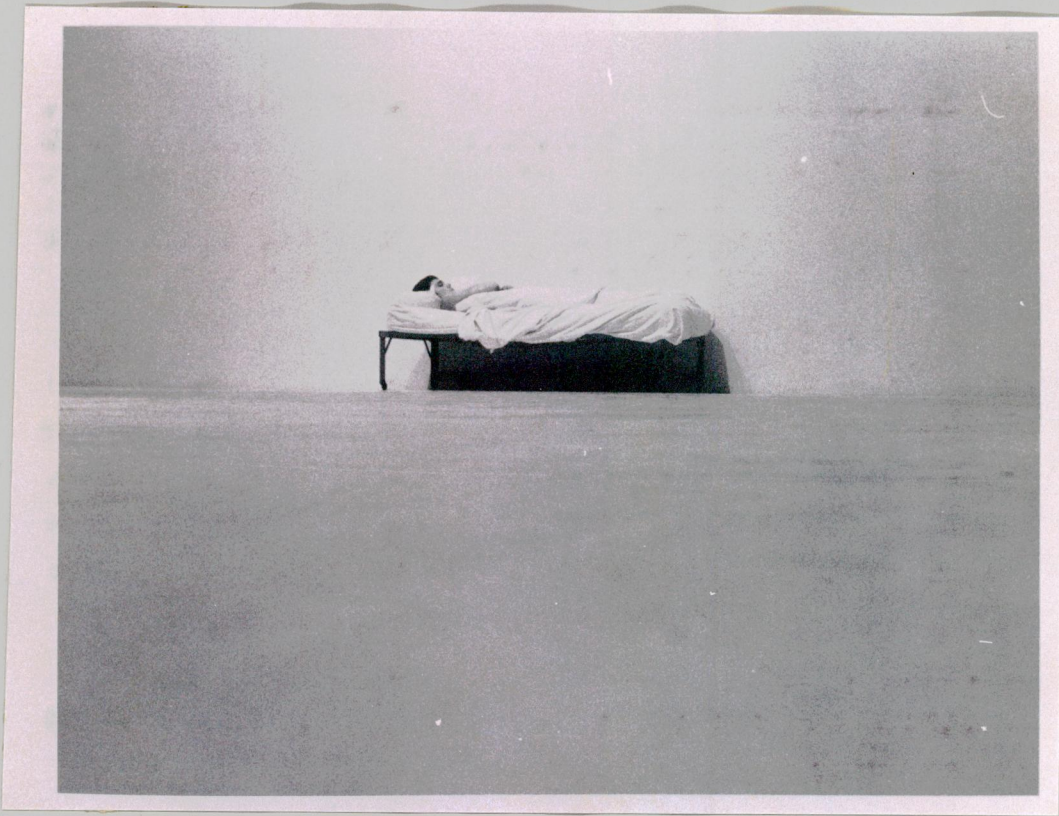


Plate 22 Chris Burden. 'Bed Piece' (Feb. 18 - March 10 1972)

Sculpture in Three Parts

Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco, California
September 10-21, 1974

I sat on a small metal stool placed on top of a sculpture stand. I was positioned directly in front of the gallery entrance, an elevator door. A sign on the stand read: "Sculpture in Three Parts. I will sit on this chair from 10:30 a.m. 9/10/74 until I fall off." About 10 feet away, a camera was constantly attended by changing photographers waiting to take a photograph as I fell. I sat on the chair for 43 hours. When I fell, a chalk outline was drawn on the floor around my body. I wrote "Forever" inside the outline. I placed another sign on the stand which read: "I sat on this chair from 10:30 a.m. 9/10/74 until I fell off at 5:25 a.m. 9/12/74." The chair, stand, and outline remained on exhibit until September 21.

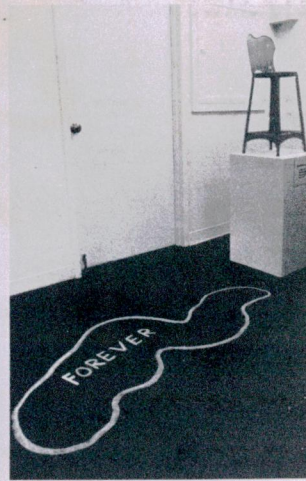


Plate 23 Chris Burden, 'Sculpture in Three Parts'

'Unless a woman artist in the 1960's made a genuine crossover into object-making, she is still not given the status attributed to those male contemporaries who also went past the object barrier but who came back with hardware based "things" that still aptly serve as commodities within the art-market'.
(19 P.122)

He cites as examples: Andre, Morris, Nauman, Serra, Sonnier, I would also add, Acconci, Burden, Oppenheim. These latter three were all active as performance artists during the 1970's but have easily returned to object-making and enjoy respected positions within the art establishment. Performances by these male artists were far more 'conceptual' than Carolee Schneemanns. Usually they consisted of simple isolated actions performed within the gallery space.

Burdens work frequently dealt with the relationship between artist and art-object, e.g. his 27-day 'Bed Piece' in a gallery or the 48 hr. pose on a gallery pedestal. In "Pygmalion Reversed" Max Kozloff discusses this type of work. He points out that an artist may create a piece which is dependant on media transmission for broadcast to the Art-World 'and may frequently conceive of a "media-form", photos optionally accompanied by words 'as the prime stimulus for the viewer. (25 P.30).

This approach permits the enlargement of extremely small scale incidents (e.g. Dennis Oppenheims' slicing of his thumb). The audience of these events is much larger than that of Schneemann's 'theatrical' events. She has said in a recent interview 'I discovered that you might get images into anthologies and never perform' (29 P.21).

Many works by male artists mentioned above seem designed to be neatly documented through books and magazines as part of the history of performance.



Plate 24 Carolee Schneemann, 'Fuses' (1965)

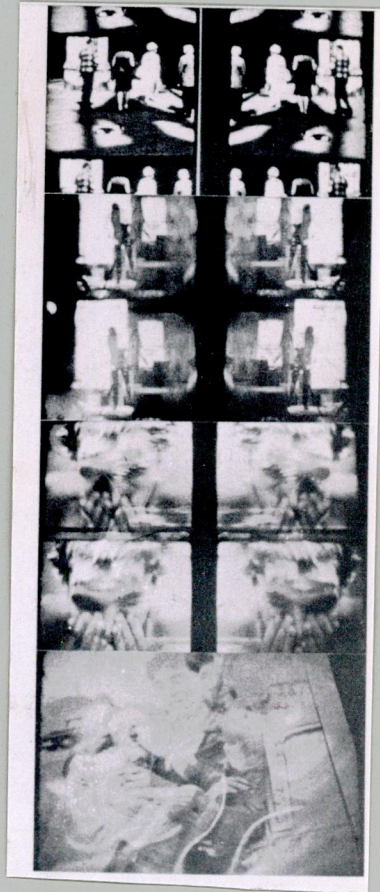


Plate 25 Carolee Schneemann, 'Plumbline' (1968-1971)

Max Kozloff notes how these artists, through a succession of violent Minimalist Acts (which mimic the earlier competitive statements by Klien, Manzoni, Vaultier, etc. See 26 P.63). Move towards the denial of life and then hopefully, the attainment of immorality. (25 P.30).

There is a difference in attitude between Schneemann and her male contemporaries. The latter's performances are visibly calculated. According to Thomas MacEvelley 'The exercise of will is framed as a kind of absolute.' (26 P.68). This type of work is characterised by the making of a decision which is then acted upon.

In Schneemann's work the 'decision' or 'will' of the artist is obscured by the layering of different media and the multiplicity of actions performed by others. Her role as author, as I have already stated, is often unclear. Perhaps because the male performers actively occupy the role of author they are in a better position to produce an art-object.

THE EROTIC FILM

Carolee Schneemann has made a number of films; 'Snobs' (1967), 'Kitch's Last Meal' (1973) and her most famous 'Fuses' (1965).

'Fuses' was made over a period of three years and is mainly composed of shots of Schneemann and her companion, James Tenney making love. It is a 16 mm silent film, made with borrowed wind-up Bolex cameras. 'Fuses' belongs in the tradition of avant-garde artists films.

In her article "Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde" Laura Mulvey defends the formalist approach to film-making which foregrounds the cinematic process and 'forces attention to the means of production of meaning'. (11 P.129). According to Mulvey this 'foregrounding' challenges the spectators



place. In 'Fuses' Schneemann deliberately exploits the materiality of the film. It is 'baked, stamped, stained, painted, chopped and reassembled'. (24 P.71). Because of the nature of equipment used, the film was collaged together from thirty second segments. The editing of these fragments was based on elaborate time and colour charts organized by gestural directions of the bodies and mathematical counts of colour changes. (29 P.22).

In her article, Mulvey comments on the two different uses of 16 mm film - for political propoganda and for artists films. While she defends the formalism of the latter, she praises the strength of the former. (e.g. Kate Millets 'Three Friends') which she sees as closely linked with consciousness-raising.

She maintains that a feminist film-making practice must evolve through the problematization of both form and content.

She points out that many films of the propoganda type are bound by the 'assumption that the camera by its very nature and the good intentions of its operator, can grasp essential truths, and by registering typical shared truth can create political unity, through the process of Identification' (11 P.117).

'Fuses' however is both formalist and propoganda film. Schneemann was motivated by the fact that she 'had never seen any pornography or erotica which approached what loving sexuality felt like' (29 P.22). Perhaps 'Fuses' is motivated by the 'good intensions' which Mulvey dismisses. Certainly Schneemann's method seems naive; 'When there is a close-up of the female genitals it cuts to the male so in an instant one organ transforms into the other'. (29 P.22).



Mulvey writes: 'individual intentions do not transcend the language and aesthetics of the cinema' (11.P.117). She maintains that a feminist film making practice necessitates an awareness of cinematic codes and structures . Mulveys famous article: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is an analysis of the voyeuristic and fetishistic structures which organise the male gaze. It highlights the historic abuse of woman's image through cinematic representation. This text parallels the work of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz ('Apparatus Theorists').

They argued that the machinery of image production and projection was inseparable from the psychoperceptual machinery of scopophilic identification and fetishism. "Visual Pleasure" is specifically a discussion of the dominant (narrative) cinema. It includes no reference to experimental or 16 mm film. The conditions of projection and the structure of the cinema theatre which Mulvey describes are important elements in her argument.

These conditions simply do not exist in the display of 'experimental' films. In reference to avant-garde film Constance Penley writes: 'the films are presented as near-scientific investigations of perceptual processes. We come to them in a more active manner, knowing they will be difficult, challenging and that we have come to learn something'. (14. P.587). However, she goes on to argue that although these strategies may be valuable 'they also tend to suppress knowledge of the imaginary of the image by asserting the objectivity of the images and the rationality of our relation to them'. (14 P.587). Here, experimental film provides no real way out.

The approach of the Apparatus Theorists effectively works to deny the possibility of a feminist film-making practice. If the neutrality of the apparatus itself is in question how can there be a feminist film practice?



In Sexuality in the Field of Vision Jacqueline Rose discusses the work of Metz and Baudry and she challenges the concept of the Imaginary which is crucial to Metz's important text 'The Imaginary Signifier' (1975).

The concept of the Imaginary was used to refer to the way in which, in narrative cinema, the spectator identifies with the camera itself and is seduced into a regime of specularity, caught by the very apparatus itself and identifying necessarily with the positions of desire and sexuality which each individual film puts into play. (15 P.217).

Rose challenged this position on the grounds that Metz's Imaginary was confined to the question of perception - the reality of what is seen on the screen. But no image can have meaning in itself, given directly through vision, but only acquires it within a particular cultural order.

The problem is not located simply in the means of image production or projection but rather in the wider social and psychological structures through which sexual difference is established.

'Fuses' is a problematic film. It is intended to counter pornographic representations of sexuality and it deals with this subject directly. It is not an orthodox feminist film, it is in no way informed by psychoanalytic theory and yet the editing, formalist treatment, and the actual conditions of production, distribution and exhibition all distinguish it from the conventional 'porn' film. Schneemann's approach may not be theoretically informed but it at least poses a challenge to existing structures. That is preferable to the position of other film-makers - such as Peter Gidal for example (who elects instead to eliminate the woman's image from his films).



Plate 26 Carolee Schneemann, 'Naked Action Lecture' (1968)

DOCUMENTATION

Eye Body (1963) deals with the problematic status of women's self-representations 'Fuses' (1965) is an attempt to reclaim 'pornographic' images, if that is possible. 'Naked Action Lecture' (1968), 'Interior Scroll' (1975), 'Upon and Including Her Limits' (1973-76) and 'Homerunmuse' (1978) are all concerned with serial and cultural stereotyping. Schneemann explores her position as artist, woman, filmmaker, lover, etc. However, documentation of these complex and layered works (through photographs and text) often distorts the original intention. The nudity in so many of the performances seems out-of-place - especially in the early, group works. The inclusion of a photograph (in More than Meat Joy of Schneemann riding naked on Robert Rauschenberg's shoulders, ('At a party for the Film "Head" ' See 16 P.118) tends to trivialise the significance of nudity in the work. It appears to contradict the otherwise serious function of the body within Schneemann's performances. But Schneemann has always been adamant that she wishes to experience her life and work harmoniously. Her healthy and open relationship with her body facilitates the exploration of powerful taboos which others must first overcome.

Her visible body remains constant regardless of whatever role she enacts 'Naked Action Lecture' (1968) is a concise demonstration of this fact. It took place at the I.C.A. in London. Schneemann lectured on her visual works and their connection with antecedents in painting while both dressed and undressed, dressing and undressing. At the end of the lecture, (during which Schneemann had taken questions from the audience if directly relevant to the slides, etc.). She asked for volunteers to demonstrate the 'principle of collage'. Two male volunteers came forward and with her, on stage, they undressed and covered each other with glue, then leapt into a mound of shredded paper.

from tape 2 "Kitch's Last Meal"
(super 8 film 1973-77)

I met a happy man
a structuralist filmmaker
—but don't call me that
it's something else I do—
he said we are fond of you
you are charming
but don't ask us
to look at your films
we cannot
there are certain films
we cannot look at
the personal clutter
the persistence of feelings
the hand-touch sensibility
the diaristic indulgence
the painterly mess
the dense gestalt
the primitive techniques

(I don't take the advice
of men who only talk to
themselves)
**PAY ATTENTION TO CRITICAL
AND PRACTICAL FILM LANGUAGE
IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY
ONE GENDER**

even if you are older than me
you are a monster I spawned
you have slithered out
of the excesses and vitality
of the sixties.....

he said you can do as I do
take one clear process
follow its strictest
implications intellectually
establish a system of
permutations establish
their visual set.....

I said my film is concerned
with **DIET AND DIGESTION**

very well he said then
why the train?

the train is **DEATH** as there



Plate 27 Carolee Schneemann, 'Interior Scroll' (1975)

For Schneemann, this work posed a number of questions: 'Can an Artist be an Art Istorian? (sic). Can an Artist be a naked woman? Can she have public authority while naked and speaking?' (16 P.180).

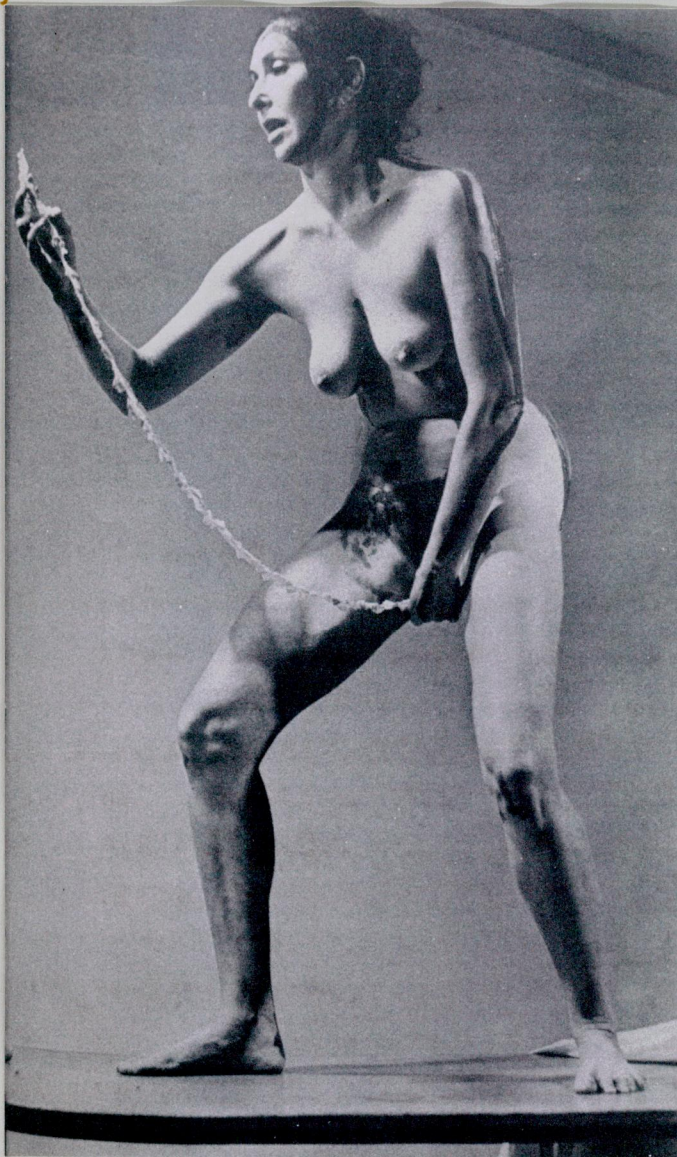
Schneemann's performances demonstrate the functionality of the body too, through movement and interactions with objects and surfaces. In her discussion of performance by women, Catherine Elwes writes that 'Women have often been the victims of voyeurism and fetishism however a performer can fight this objectification if she remains mobile never staying still long enough to be named or fetishised' (4 P.173). Furthermore, 'unlike the actress on stage or screen the female performer is returning the gaze' (4 P.173).

This highlights the importance of appropriate documentation. There is a vast difference between a provocative and challenging performance - witnessed live and the photograph on video which documents this event.

Frequently, documentation of Schneemann's performances does not properly contextualise the action. The success and impact of the piece must be considered in relation to the objectives of the artist. If these are not implied by the work they may require elaboration in accompanying texts.

The discrepancy between live action and the represented is exploited by Schneemann in her performance 'Interior Scroll' (1975). More than Meat Joy includes writing by her which clearly contextualise this action and thus it cannot easily be misinterpreted.

Schneemann performed this piece for the second time, at the Telluride Film Festival (1976). Her films 'Fuses' (1965) and 'Plumb-line' (1968-1971) were included in a program of erotic films by women (selected by Schneemann and Stan



Anthony McCall

is die in diet and di in digestion

then you are back to metaphors and meanings
my work has no meaning beyond the logic of its systems
I have done away with emotion intuition inspiration—those aggrandized habits which set artists apart from ordinary people—those unclear tendencies which are inflicted upon viewers.

it's true I said when I watch your films my mind wanders freely.....
during the half hour of pulsing dots I compose letters dream of my lover write a grocery list rummage in the trunk for a missing sweater plan the drainage pipes for the root cellar.....
it is pleasant not to be manipulated

he protested you are unable to appreciate the system the grid the numerical rational procedures—the Pythagorean cues—

I saw my failings were worthy of dismissal I'd be buried alive my works lost.....

he said we can be friends equally tho we are not artists equally I said we cannot be friends equally and we cannot be artists equally

he told me he had lived with a "sculptress" I asked does that make me a "film-makeress"?

Oh No he said we think of you as a dancer

Plate 28 Carolee Schneemann, 'Interior Scroll' (1975)

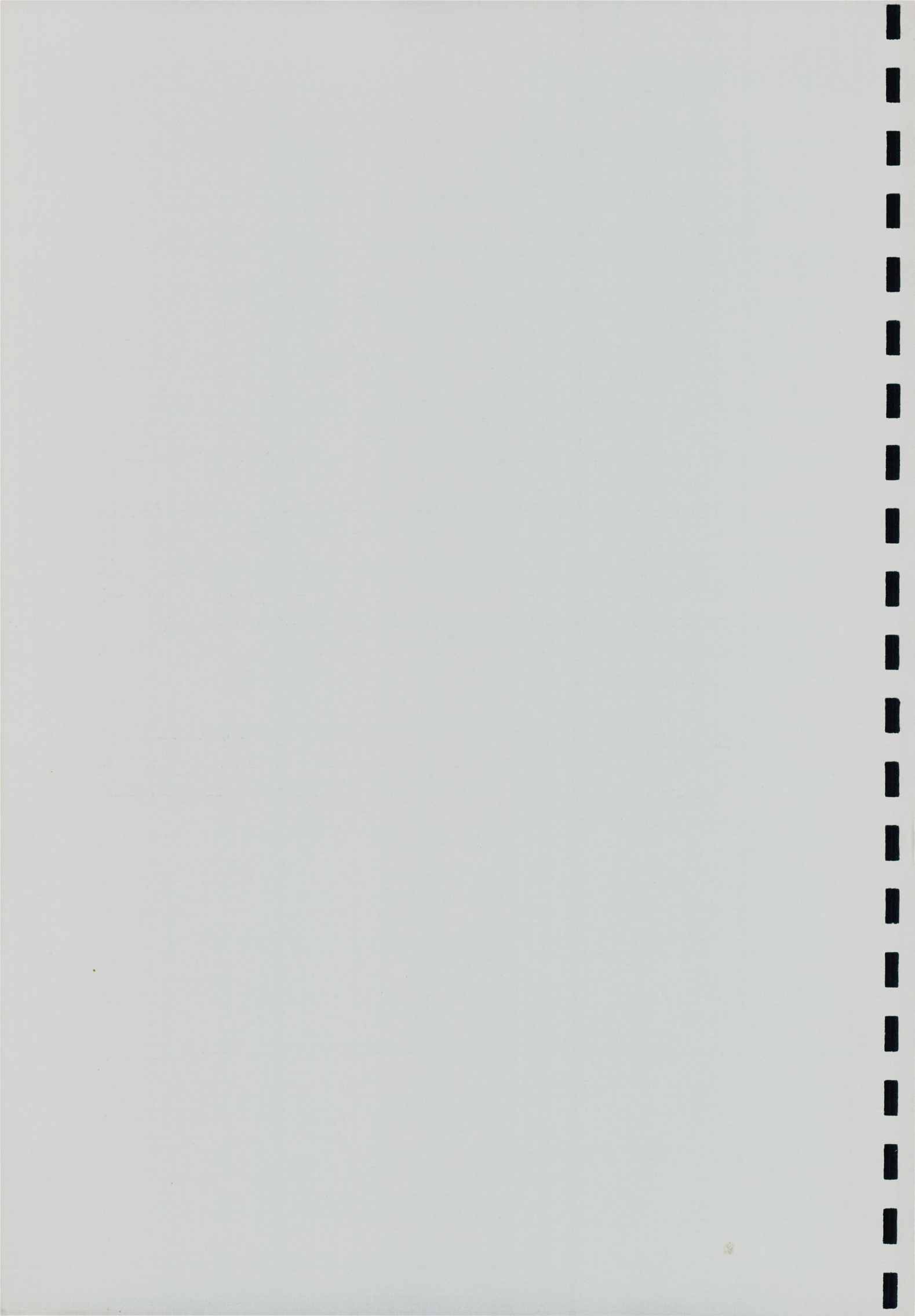
Brakhage) which was subsequently titled The Erotic Woman. The program cover depicted a 'flasher' opening his raincoat. (16 P.236).

Schneemann staged her performance as a protest . Her introductory statement (which she read, wrapped in a sheet) began:

Having been described and proscribed by the male imagination for so long no woman artist now wants to assume that she will define an erotic woman for other women. The very notion immediately reverts to the traditional stereotypes which this program of films vividly counters. (16 P.236).

Standing on a table between audience and screen, she then unwrapped her sheet and applied stripes of mud to her body. She assumed a series of 'life-model' action 'poses' and read from her book, Cezanne she was a great painter (1974). At the conclusion, she dropped the book, stood upright and removed a scroll of coiled paper from her vagina. The text which she read from the scroll originates in the sound tapes of 'Up to and Including her Limits' (1973-76). In More than Meat Joy she states the reason for the action. 'The body action steps into the area of discrepancybetween film which even in the most physical connection remains in the minds-eyea live action beside illusionistic actions/images - an antagonistic field where spectators must find their move' (16 P.236).

Carolee Schneemann's work has found a new audience. Her book More Than Meat Joy places her at the heart of the 'counter-culture' movement. She is usually portrayed by the art press as a social rebel on the basis of this background and her performances. This reputation has not benefitted her career.



I have shown how inappropriate documentation threatens to reduce her powerful performances to mere titillation. Both her documentation and reputation undermine her position within the art establishment, but they add to her appeal as a counterculture icon. Publications such as Research (which promotes/reviews films, books, music, etc.) highlight Schneemann's past notoriety and the controversial aspects of her work.

The most recent issue of Research is subtitled "Angry Women" and it includes '16 cutting edge performance artists [who] discuss questions such as how can you have a revolutionary feminism that encompasses wild sex, humour, beauty and spirituality plus radical politics' (24 P.2)

Schneemann's work is presented out of context. Photographs of performances are reproduced without any information concerning the structure or purpose of the action. The interview which accompanies these photographs includes details about the artist's private life and some reference to her intentions, aims, etc. However, none of it relates specifically to the work shown.

Research only promotes performance artists whose work could be perceived as violent or obscene. When viewed in connection with these other works Schneemann's documentation will inevitably be misread.

Through Research, Schneemann's work reaches a wide audience however only her personal 'myth' survives - her ideas and actions are effectively rendered insignificant.

Schneemann's theatrical performances shocked and challenged audiences because of their formal presentation and structure. The work of the 1970's is equally unconventional in its juxtaposition of live and pre-recorded action. However, this work cannot retain its



'shock value' when taken out of its original context. The documentary photographs are not confrontational or challenging in themselves - they can be easily assimilated as titillating images.

In conclusion, it is clear that Carolee Schneemann's work has been neglected by critics during the 1980's. There are several reasons for this. Her use of 'essentialist' imagery (Mother Goddess icons, etc.) and her Reichian view regarding sexuality conflict with contemporary feminist (psychoanalytical) theory. Her work runs counter to orthodox feminism.

Performance art as a medium has become marginalised because of the widespread return to object-making during the 1980's. This situation only intensifies the need for appropriate documentation.

Schneeman's current position (like her work itself) serves to highlight the problematic role of the performance artist both within the art-world and within feminism.



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