

# Free Form

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# Recollections of New York

Written as a note to David Curtis, co-organiser with Simon Field of the 1970 International Underground Film Festival at the National Film Theatre, London, and included among the Festival programme notes. From the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection.

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EXPANDED CINEMA FREE FORM RECOLLECTIONS OF NEW YORK

Carolee Schneemann \*\*\* in London \*\*\*

Dear Dave: PUBLIC NOTICE -- Yugoslavian films lost to total black out on communications; at this late date it must mean "not possible". For the late evening program, 17th, where we hoped to have the Yugoslavian films, I'll present an expanded cinema piece (Kinetic Theater my name for it) juxtaposing "Fuses" and "Viet-Flakes" on buttresses outside, under the NFT Theater; a performance in a foam rubber environment which might engulf performers and spectators - an activation exchange. Call it for now, "Thames Crawling". Realization with John Lifton.

we had to break it up rake it up shake it up rattle roll movement went to emotion for me physicality "sensory bombardment" came out of university country girl in big city painter going beserk in space to approach new forms by "blind necessity" "primitive" freedom put your hands in put your body in we had all turned up from anywhere else fulcrum moment momentum in time 1962 dancers invited me to workshop (evolved from Bob & Judith Dunn experimental classes) - became The Judson Dance Theater ( I was first painter to choreograph for dancers/

begin sensitization exercises/collage environments -- my form of Happening which in New York developed as painters visual/tactile theater -- originally very structured, molded and in which the audience did not actively participate with the exception of Kaprow mythic journey events, and later Vostell's "You" burst in from Germany.)

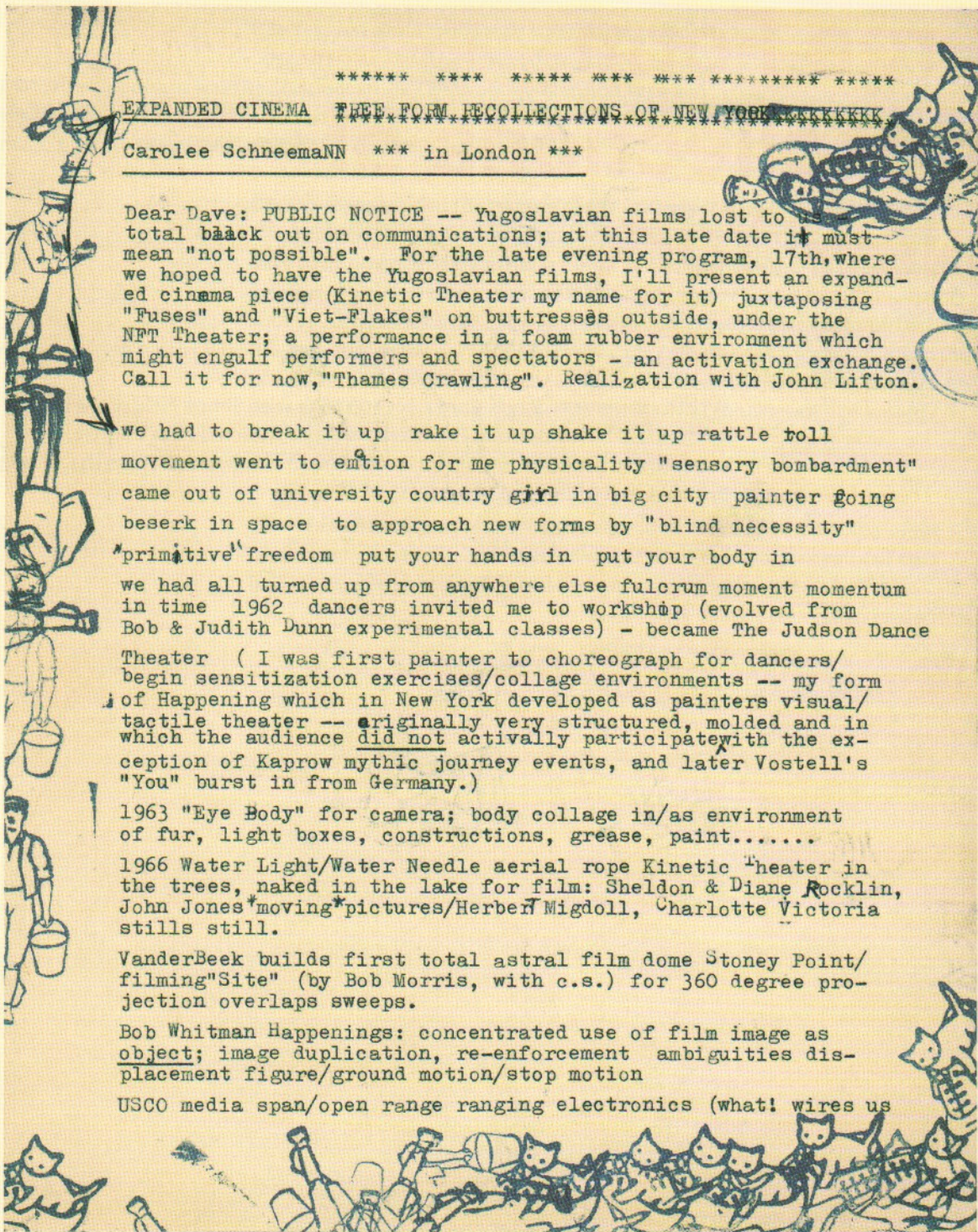
1963 "Eye Body" for camera; body collage in/as environment of fur, light boxes, constructions, grease, paint.....

1966 Water Light/Water Needle aerial rope Kinetic Theater in the trees, naked in the lake for film: Sheldon & Diane Rocklin, John Jones \*moving\* pictures/Herbert Migdoll, Charlotte Victoria stills still.

VanderBeek builds first total astral film dome Stoney Point/filming "Site" (by Bob Morris, with c.s.) for 360 degree projection overlaps sweeps.

Bob Whitman Happenings: concentrated use of film image as object; image duplication, re-enforcement ambiguities displacement figure/ground motion/stop motion

USCO media span/open range ranging electronics (what! wires us



2.

IN)metaphor link up banalities streaming transformed context repeating being atmosphere of visibility electric and curious nerve to POP

we wanted to make visable I wanted Wiscera we were ourselves visable carriers we did everything lights sound leaps borrow a camera what if I solder these two things together? what if I break this taboo about not touching stroking carrying farting laughing licking pinching grappling sew rig hammer saw chop paste paper pile tapes what happens if I superimpose two tra\_cks what happens if we throw sixty banana peels over the audience when John gets to the top of the ladder

dancers Elaine Summers, then Beverly Schmidt early use of film as doubling to their dance movements as radical juxtaposition lyrical wacky

meanwhile even before: Red Grooms probably expanded cinema when he was seventeen years old and maybe Al Hansen did too (Al did it even if he didn't actually do it) (how did any of us do anything? nobody had any money Oldenburgs magical Store Days in the tenement store front and after performances if he had six dollars from "the house" we would all have beer and salami sandwiches thinking we were really eating & drinking substances Claes had found left in his plaster & paint pots)

we were we were an uncircumscribed community cooperative competitive audacious; unconscious of how deeply we moved within one another's dreams and efforts to dramatize to concretize visual imagery as sensation all extremes in touch with our deepest impulses our natures streaming contrast of one another's expression definition of personal vision provoked, fired each to indulge go forward an un-conscious re-enforcement all madness hard work celebrated individuated aiding

Charlotte Moorman's Avant Garde Festival each September -- expanded robots, apes, cellos on ceilings, deranged dogs (sublime chaos -- who could bear it! on and on

Meanwhile downtown in a scruffy loft on Canal St. the International clearing sorting shafting FLUXUS - now called "concept art". And before Paik and his exploded televisions and broken pretzels Yoko Ono's loft events (we were still in Vermont) - the first La Monte Young concerts...perhaps the first "bag" engagements. (And Mary Bauermeister didn't you tell me about your open-loft events in Cologne? then...1960?)

Who knows who know who put the first film projection on naked breasts and bellies?

Judon Dance Theater spinal column to which we all related and all to each other ((cept Ken Dewey who had gone to Europe-in Finland! Copenhagen 1963-4, Italy, doing what related)

Musicians: James Tenney, Malcolm Goldstein, Philip Corner all involved in performance/electronics/audience involvement. I know Philip was the first to cast bread (whole grain) upon an audience....Dine Oldenburg Whitman - Bob, Simone, Yvonne Rainer Red Grooms & Mimi Gross Hansen Hendricks (Bici John Goeff) Higgins & Knowles Joe Jones Karpow Segal's farm dancing in bright sun roof of the chicken coops and Kosugi freeing silk kits Lebel (tn from Paris reading poetry) Ayo Maciumas MacLow (Jackson bridge conscious issue sorrow - we followed) Bob Morris Paik Patterson Bob Watts.....



1961 Hansen living in the subway; sleeping between the D train to Brooklyn and the F to Flushing...collecting every scrap Hersey Bar wrapper for the infinite Hersey collage series (who WHO could have imagined in seven years they'd be in the jittering gloss of Castelli Gallery...sic transit.....)

meanwhile off in Woodstock (yeh!) rickety cottage-Gerd Stern & Judy in the "firzt commune" (we didn't call it that we said its crazy how they all of 'em live together in those two rooms which smell of socks) -electronics wizard kids gathered to electrify his poetry of highway signs (YIELD ENTER AT OWN RISK) (fuck high way americkana lava flow continent trip) turning us on to DMT night crickets gasping Gerd & Tenney rapping perched on a log top of mountain where I went flying thru trees to be caught spread eagled by the moon.....

\*(Ibid: Professor Yankwank "Archetypal M<sup>+</sup>ind Blowing; Northern Lights and The Cathode Ray as Gestalt Patterns in Expanded Cinema, circa 1965". U-Haul Press.)

or, Ken Jacobs (1966?) phoneing: could you come over & stand behind a screen while I try some shadow mime & projection ideas?

and.....back in in rambling lofts \*\*\*1962-65 \*\*\* we celebrated anything/everything...loft dancing parties two or three times a week; if we had a performance, a concert, a birthday, sold some workthen gallery dealer, patron, friend would lay on beer, whisky, chopped liver, black bread, a rock band, a juke box or tapes.....energy...the more we used the more we generated...

TimeLifeLookGrove began crawling up the fire escapes; fat white cadillacs, bla ck limosines pulling into our littered dank streets





music streaming the night corridors running in the empty streets follow the sounds! ("I wanna hold yr handdddde"....."Sally go round the roses.... ") up endless flights of oily stairs SPLAT! 100 sweating rocking streaming rapturous stamping flying artists....(and the collapsed bodies in the mountains of coats making it...and who locked themselves into the only loo for the last hour! And Chamberlain still got in fights & broke liquor bottles over whatshisnames head and girls in love leapt out of loft windows and landed in the trash bins and Freddie Herko danced off the roof top of his bliss and died in the street below.....

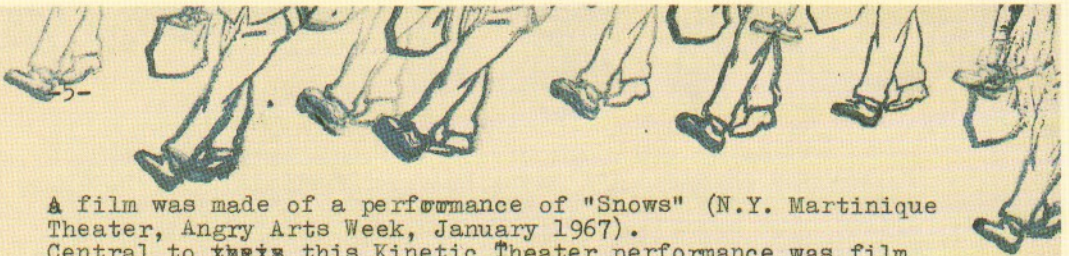
we moved we never stopped being about moving working we were "discovered" we were split apart we became "figures" "images" mediasized by the media we had "liberated" we were interviewed filmed played celebrated hosted hoisted invited this way that way less wild dancing more roast beef splayed over "auschenbergs paint table Warhols "actory silver flames forgein Journalists socialites collectors new galleries directors (who had been the enemy? where ever could he have got to now?) They let us all into their museums, their cocktails, openings, receptions, dinners, swimming parties photographed each entrance & exit...enough Campagne to slide up and down the Jewish Museum bannisters, sit necking in huge glass ashtrays, Mus. Mad H. enough ~~pot~~ potatoe chips to cover the parquet floor and dance barefoot crunching them to salty dust

nature of material expanded into what seemed possible -- or impossible from paint & canvas to collage to light boxes sculpture to the studio as an environment in itself to incorporating the body...that meant putting my body where the eye had governed the paint on the brush on the arm on the body in the eye vision.....

film mirroring duplicating re-enforcing greater information simultaneities and juxtapositions

OR we were expanded cinema cinama mythos living act living out art act synapse turned fragile flash frame motion out of our spines -- out of our heads!-- where we were became the reel unreeling yup yup we were moving pictures so deeply documentation of "expanded ~~cinema~~ cinema" incredible mirror of mirrowings (and the photographers going nuts in the darkness -- how to get the media to hold the media as media???) ("can't you do it with more light?" "It IS ALL Light!")





A film was made of a performance of "Snows" (N.Y. Martinique Theater, Angry Arts Week, January 1967). Central to ~~this~~ this Kinetic Theater performance was film animated from stills of Viet-nam atrocities -"Viet-Flakes". Dualities. Sensation, insight, emotion from speckles printed on paper?! The images. Out of focus - whiffling, lyrical darts. In focus - bombs falling. Out of focus - detail of a Rembrandt drawing? In focus - village on fire. Detail of a button filling the screen/the frame. Zoom back from photo -- button on the body of a young man hung upside down. Information: Photo of women and young children swimming in terror, village in flames behind them. The photographer as witness. After he "shot" them, what did he do?

"Viet-Flakes" film juxtaposed with "Snow Speed" and "Winter Sports" circa 1939 silent reels of ruddy Bavarians at play.

All performance movement evolved from the Vietnam images. All performance elements: film, slides, lights, tapes, sequences, durations, sculptural light machine, determined by audience response. Contact mikes under their seats relay their motions and sounds; SCR switching systems feed into color organ, amplification from which we (performers) took cues. Experiments in Art & Technology lent materials and technicians to realize my system.

Before "Snows" Gerd Stern asked ~~to~~ me to collaborate with USCO -- "in a world of simultaneous operations you don't have to be first to be on top"...still, "Us Company" were the first in New York: multi-media/mixed-media. We created an Usco/Kinetic Theater combine for the Film\*makers Cinematheque Expanded Cinema program. (November 1966).

My first impulse; to attack media celluloid hallucination flat linear dimension stream light beam: flesh it paint it draw dimensions from projected imagery into image in concrete motion. Actual. That audience is going to FEEL us and we're going to feel them. Phoebe Neville and I in wacky overalls ~~sawlix~~ crawling on the audience; spilling candies, bubbles, ropes, balloons. Contact with every person there. Gently. The need. Cathode Ray films three screens wrap around us all. There.

It is all in our bodies stretching into materials! How you gonna be another set-to of rectangles! Technicolor, black & white plug in - brain radiation (not rectangular!) Those are our nerve endings (beginnings) pulseing 24 frames a second! In a black cave! Whose arm meat is aside your arm meat? "hose eyes





parallel yours beamed straight ahead to hobble image after image -- straight ahead to screen rectangle, That is insane when we turn, twist, curve are made for re-revolution!.....fevolving. With Usco I splattered action all over that cave cinema, to break light beam with other light, to pull screen over screen in multi-layers/levels marking the images in flight with paint; mixing ourselves into flesh puddles to encapsulate, discharge fixity of projection. (And simply ironed a shirt vertically using the board as a screen.)

Random Shutters:

Vision is not a fact, but an aggregate of sensations.

I am after the interpenetrations and displacements which occur between various sense stimuli; interaction & exchange between the body & the environment.....total fabric shape image, taste touch, contact impulse aligned, luminated by various chemical changes & exchanges with the organism and their effect on immediate present, on the passage of memory into the present. Perception should lead to action. Perception as eye journey. My theater has simply carried visual/tactile experience into the body; the body become active unit (where it was the hand previously) in its environment.

*(painting)*

But: concentrated act of perception of cinema assumes physical reality of film image motion -- we learn to go over to eye response, take it into blood body muscle.

Audience participation in a visual environment changes perceptual levels to expressive, functional (self-timing); the visual environment scanned rather than focused on; reaction replaces attention.

attend, v.t. & i. Turn the mind to; apply oneself; be present

I want both visual attention (consideration/care) and physical involvement (wrap, entangle, implicate, include) as possibilities for the audience....let sensitization be flow, sensory input lead to activations.....The All Stars.\*\*\*\*\*

*9 Sept 70*

