



CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN
IMAGING HER EROTICS

Essays, Interviews, Projects

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Illinois Central, 1968.

Body collage and montage by C.S.

Photo: Fred W. McDarrah. *Midwest Landscape #34*. Photo: Art Sinsabaugh.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While it feels as though this manuscript has been in process for a lifetime, its actual genesis was provided by Jay Murphy, writer and critic, who in 1989 published Christy Sheffield Sanford's interview with me in his journal of radical art and politics, *Red Bass*. During the ensuing years the elements of the book shifted like a surrealistic dinner table tipping over—its contents sliding out of frame, only to reappear in somewhat altered form. My intensive editing, the collating of photos and archives, the needs of an artist to seek work to support art-making, a lack of funds, and the sudden death of our literary agent Diane Cleaver, all occasioned changes to the original concept. Roger Conover of The MIT Press remained dedicated to this project, trusting in its outcome. The title *Imaging Her Erotics* originated with the video compendium of my work made in collaboration with Maria Beatty in 1993.

I owe the greatest thanks for the realization of the book to John Isaacs, who reviewed the material in detail, examined hundreds of images with me, and established the vital relation of text to image in his design of the book.

The author gratefully thanks the writers and photographers represented in this book, but if any have inadvertently been overlooked, she will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

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C.S.,
Summer 2001

IMAGING HER EROTICS



Personae: JT and three Kitch's, 1958.

Oil on canvas. 32 x 50 in.

THE PAINTER AS AN INSTRUMENT OF REAL TIME

Carolee Schneemann describes herself as a painter. Yet the relationship between her art and the practice of painting has been almost invisible. Why? Schneemann has used her body as the primary material, realizing her concepts in every media from assemblage, environments, happenings, and performance to kinetic sculpture, multimedia installations, film, video, and photography.¹ A cursory consideration of her visual practice in relation to painting is long overdue and becomes especially pressing in the context of the many interviews with and texts by the artist contained in this volume. For without understanding how her work relates to the problems of painting, the larger contribution Carolee Schneemann has made to the histories of art may continue to be occluded by the artist herself.

Leonardo da Vinci's notes on painting, written at the end of the fifteenth century and collected in the *Paragone*, are a good starting point for contextualizing Schneemann's work within the foundations of painting, which still inform its historical project today. Briefly, da Vinci described the painter as one who "renders things outside the eye so that the eye receives the similitudes as if they were natural."² Adapting the principles of "science" as executed by drawing, the painter determines "the figuration of any body."³ Moreover, painting becomes philosophy "because philosophy treats . . . the space interposed between [things] and the eye that sees." "The proof that painting is philosophy," Da Vinci wrote, "is that it treats the motion of bodies in the liveliness of their actions."⁴ "The painter makes you see everything at once," he concluded.⁵

Schneemann has been captivated by the problems of vision since her student days, when she painted in an abstract figurative style. Her early interest in how to organize visual structures is documented in a letter she wrote in September 1957 after a visit from Leo Steinberg, who came to discuss her paintings:

I told how I relate my work to what I NEED that is not in my work; so in a disciplined way I carry Cézanne while Monet and Rouault or Soutine are "given" along with my sort of temperament which I do nothing about except to structure in the other way, of the not given, of say Cézanne. I talked about what I don't want—the self-generating act and S. agrees absolutely and talked about this—about the "action" painting school which presumes to follow on Pollock. Psychology replaces vision I said.⁶

Even as a fledgling painter, Schneemann was more committed to disciplining vision in the formally structured manner of Cézanne than allowing automatic techniques to leave a record of the painter's inner psyche.⁷ This focus is related to the formal concerns at the core of Schneemann's work, which have been elided by the sensational aspects of its content. Schneemann was particularly interested in how Cézanne's compositional techniques drew the eye into the picture and simultaneously extended it back into the viewer's own space. In her paintings, Schneemann fractured figures in a pictorial space constructed of planes that reiterated Cézanne's picture surface so that the eye could move more freely inside the planes rather than cohere in the identification of the figure. At this time, she also began slicing into the surface of the canvas, cutting into layers of paint to destroy the illusory surface. Working toward unifying the inner and outer eye—"the one which is done to . . . and the other which is performed by"⁸ a person—she introduced projecting objects (umbrellas, lights, etc.) or sections of old timber into the assemblages that developed out of her paintings. She also began to motorize elements of the work and to create her "kinetic theatre" in the milieu of dancers of the Judson Church and of artists creating happenings and Fluxus.

Progressive construction and kinetic animation of the picture surface enabled Schneemann to develop her own means to render "everything all at once" (as da Vinci had earlier imagined). At the end of 1961, she wrote,

Happenings. Events. Circumstances. Blow up your life. Attune your senses. Oldenburg's *Store* full of delicious plaster cakes, dripping enamel; splattered plaster clothes over-sized for his wild wife who deserves them, dreams them on. Then from the gutting, sweating, kicking happenings, events, accidents, resplendent with paint, glue, dirt, blood . . . and so on, comes the turn to the Happening-in-the-Head.⁹

Pushing her structures further into space, Schneemann inserted her own body into her landmark work *Eye Body*, a series of visual actions made for the camera in late December 1965. In the photographs from *Eye Body*, it is possible to see how Schneemann achieved a continuous, albeit necessarily fragmented merger between the inner and outer eyes in three previously differentiated viewing spaces: the picture space, the picture maker's space (namely, her own studio environment), and the viewer's space. Schneemann accomplished this merger of spaces, in large measure, through the medium of paint by heavily overpainting the assemblages and her own body and similarly merging both with found objects. She succeeded in realizing what I want to call an *aesthetic of the transitive eye* by moving between the bodily eye (which dominates over actual things) and the body-

as-eye (which thinks its dominion in the mind). Indeed, resolving the dilemma between these two apparently oppositional states was, for Goethe, the measure of a true artist.¹⁰

Over a period spanning more than four decades, Schneemann has systematically developed a visual discourse emphasizing the infinite possibility of interconnected optical relationships that flow between the world of lived experience and the imagination. Her working method is particularly vivid in *Venus Vectors* (1987). Action takes place on multiple levels within a representation that is built of multiple references. Schneemann began with a continuous slide show of a vocabulary of images culled from nature, science (electrical currents, bridge structures), and archaic sacral objects. Then using her body in action, she responded to, and formed visual echoes of, the vectored representations, composing and recomposing physical shapes (opening and closing her arms, slicing space with her umbrella, and so on) in a performance documented on video. Next she edited the video to become a series of actions that were projected on two video monitors embedded in the *Venus Vectors* sculpture, itself composed of panels printed with the images. There, within the sculpture itself, Schneemann is shown on the embedded video monitors responding to and recapitulating the images embedded in the glass panels. This layering of visual information and action both presents and represents the interrelated and interdependent realities of nature, science, and culture, over and throughout historical time as mediated by bodily experience, education, and memory.

However unacknowledged works such as *Eye Body* have been in the history of painting itself, they made it possible for critics eventually to grasp that the relationship between the eye-body and consciousness constitutes one of the essential functions of painting. The formal and perceptual ideas explored by Schneemann filtered into art historical discussions of painting in various contexts. For example, some fifteen years after *Eye Body*, Sheldon Nodelman described the minimal, color-field paintings of Brice Marden, David Novros, and Mark Rothko in words that express a growing understanding of the aims Schneemann realized in that work:

The immaterial possesses . . . a forceful physical impact, reaching out of the void to transform our conduct in the here and now. Just as the apprehension of the picture as such and of its overall graphic scheme will affect our gross physical movement in space, so the subtle alterations in visual behavior which it induces are transmitted from . . . the eyes to the nerves and muscles of the whole body, profoundly affecting our inward experience. It is, of course, by means of, and in the service of consciousness, itself, in its striving after the intelligible, that these modifications are undergone.¹¹



Portrait of Jane Brakhage, 1958.
Oil on canvas. 46.5 x 31.5 in.



Aria Duetto (Cantata No. 78), 1959.
Oil on canvas. 51.5 x 45 in.



Three Figures after Pontormo, 1957.
Oil on canvas (incised layers). 46.5 x 31.5 in.

Perhaps unconsciously, Nodelman restates Schneemann's emphasis on the relationship of the body to lived and depicted space and to the operations of what I have called "the bodily eye" and "the body-as-eye."¹²

These ideas in painting came to prominent public attention in Frank Stella's *Working Space* (1986).¹⁵ Published two years after Stella gave the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University, this book traced the relationship of movement in Baroque pictorial space from Caravaggio through modernism to Stella's own painting practice. Stella emphasized his interest in the action that takes place between real and pictorial illusionistic space. During the very same time period that Schneemann fractured painted surfaces and placed her actual body into the pictorial frame, forever confusing the problem of similitude, Stella struggled with "relational painting." As he attempted to abandon figure-ground relationships from the late 1950s through the 1960s—all the while producing titles for these works that insisted on relational associations—his work progressively became more sculptural in the 1970s. Eventually it encroached into the very same space of the spectator that Schneemann had been "working" since the 1950s and fully inhabited by the early 1960s.

Schneemann's entire oeuvre has been devoted to exploring the painterly issues of relationality, figure-ground, and similitude. Moreover, she has produced a body of work that has succeeded in fooling the public, critics, and art historians alike precisely about the problems of relationality, figure-ground, and similitude. Indeed, most writers and audiences have mistakenly taken her art for her life—namely, for "the real." In so doing, they have failed to consider the contributions she has made to the formal problems of painting. Schneemann's art is not "real." She is the figure that relates bodies to grounds. Her art only *appears* to be "real" insofar as it inhabits and therefore demarcates the fissure between the natural world where she lives her life as a person and the world she invents and represents as an artist who sometimes also presents herself in her representations. Moreover, her life is not her work, no matter how closely the figure-grounds approximate each other over the territory of her body, which is the material membrane between the two. A closer examination of Schneemann's interest in depicting things outside the eye, through the eye-body, demonstrates that she does so *as if* what she shows is natural. This is the function of similitude: to create a counterpart or double. Schneemann draws observers' attention to the connection *between* actual things and conceptual representations *through* the material of the body. Because Schneemann has so convincingly animated the space *between* the eye and the body *as if* it were real, the formal and aesthetic developments she has made to the history of painting have largely been overlooked. This oversight can be attributed in part to the exaggerated attention paid to her own (ideally formed) body. Ironically, Schneemann has created a body of work through the body whose natural perfection has rendered similitude itself invisible.

In addition, Schneemann has enhanced similitude by employing animals and



Quarry Transposed (Central Park in the Dark), 1960.

Construction: masonite panels, wood, photograph, glass pitcher, nails, wire, paper, oil paint. 57 x 34 x 0.75 x 4 in.

nature directly in her work. Trees and cats, in particular, figure prominently—especially in her photographs, films, videos, and installations, where they function as a dilation of the real that is analogous to how her body amplifies the natural in performance. For example, in her film *Fuses* (1965-68), Schneemann filmed her beloved cat, Kitch, on the window sill of her bedroom, positioned to view the artist and her then partner, composer James Tenney, making love. Kitch may be understood as the visual intercessor, marking the contingency between the inner and outer eyes where the boundaries of vision relate to the thinking, feeling body that is and is seeing itself be. Kitch functions simultaneously as the interval that separates the lovers' internal private world from the world outside their window. The cat represents also the divide between inner and outer body, where nature is depicted in the trees that sway and an ocean that flows, as well as the oceanic scene—seen of their internal emotions. Indeed, the ebb and flow of the water's movement returns sight to the fictive, timeless action of the filmic space, as differentiated from the visual record of the actual lovers' experiences. Again, Schneemann created a structure that permits consciousness to shift between temporal zones, art, and nature (earth, sea, animals, and bodies). Furthermore, as Dave McCullough, one of the first critics to write about *Fuses*, insightfully recognized in 1969, Schneemann's film drew a parallel between the perceptual problems of vision and experience, emphasizing the artist's contribution to the formal problems of cinema:

***Fuses* is . . . intersubjective, merging two foci of sexual experience—male and female—analogously to the way binocular vision fuses two images. . . . Schneemann's main technical accomplishment is in overlaying forms to reiterate the theme at several levels, e.g. when the coupled bodies making it on the bed themselves make it with faces and forests, the trees with the sky, etc.¹⁴**

From her earliest paintings to a complex text and video installation like *Mortal Coils* (1995), Schneemann has paid close visual attention to the multifarious conditions of the world, "all at once." The very terms *mortal* and *coil* draw viewers into a dense range of connotations suggestive of Schneemann's work, method, and personal identity as *the painter as an instrument of real time*, as I have noted in the title of this essay. To be mortal, for example, is to be alive, in motion, fugitive and evanescent in time. The term *mortal* embodies the precarious conditions of life and equally represents something dangerously fatal. The coil also suggests time, a shape that visualizes duration in process, spiraling and undulating in a sinuous form associated with the serpent and the scallop, two ancient anthropomorphic signs signifying the phallus and the vulva. Indeed, as a symbol the coil

belongs to some twenty basic gestalt signs in Western ideography. Among its many uses, the coil appears in electrical contexts to represent transformers, electrical motors, and other similar equipment as the sign of an inductor—namely, an instrument that initiates and begins something. Curiously, the coil is also employed as a meteorological ideogram to denote a snowstorm, a visual semiotics that recoils back to the artist's name and identity: *Schneemann* = “snowman.” All of the aspects that are signified by the phrase “mortal coils” are qualities descriptive of the immensely complex art that Carolee Schneemann has developed throughout her career.

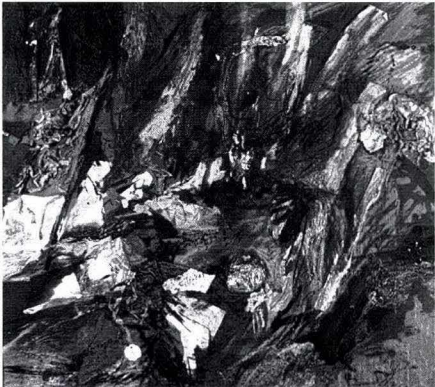
I would be remiss in this brief outline of the rigorous formal and conceptual pictorial structure underpinning Schneemann's oeuvre if I did not mention that all of her work is grounded in the act of drawing. Drawing, is, in fact, the psychophysical origin from which both her raw, gestural, visual aesthetic and her “aesthetic of the transitive eye” are formed. For ideas coil and uncoil from her mind through her hand to her work in a manner that is spontaneous, free, undisciplined by logic, and akin to trance. While she eventually translates these graphic ideas into exacting conceptual forms, she also maintains the qualities of abandon that the act of drawing on paper permits and that drawing on images generated by dreams, mystical associations, paranormal signals, and signs provides. As an artist, Schneemann has created a method for translating feelings, intuitions, and sensations into communicable information where instrumental reason, the scientific method, and logic-based epistemology have failed. *Plague Column* (1996-97) is connected to *Mortal Coils* through just such a process. Both works, for example, treat (in serial sequence) the impact of toxic environments and death on the living, acknowledging the uncanny ways in which they are related.

Carolee Schneemann's unique contribution to art history, and to painting in particular, has been literally to *draw* the eye back to the body that sees: both to the body's inextricable connection to what is seen and to its role in determining the nature of the seen. “What is seen is a scene wrapped around the body,” she once explained in the peerless poetry that is her textual voice.¹⁵ Schneemann focuses her attention on how the interstices of space are determined by the inner and outer eyes, and in doing so raises quintessential philosophical problems about how space—interposed between things and the eye that sees—comes to be shaped by the ideologies of gender, sex, and politics. Given the critical climate after 1968, these subjects became the central discourse about the meaning and purpose of Schneemann's art and have preoccupied critics and art historians at the expense of a closer examination of her immense formal contributions to art and its histories. While considering the ideological content of her work in this volume, I urge readers to grapple simultaneously with the ways in which Schneemann has disclosed what and how things are in the truth of material facticity—namely, how they are in themselves and then are imag-



Yellow Arbor (Sidney, Illinois), 1959.

Oil on canvas. 42 x 49 in.



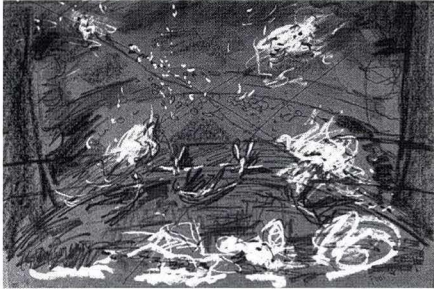
Daybreak, 1961.

Gouache, chalk, ink, and collage on paper. 21 x 22 in.



Wedding, 1960.

Gouache, chalk, ink, and collage on paper. 19.5 x 25 in.



Water Light/Water Needle I, 1965.
Ink, crayon, pastel on paper. 12 x 18 in.



Water Light/Water Needle II, 1965.
Ink, crayon, pastel on paper. 12 x 18 in.



Glass Relief, 1966.

Construction: glass, string, electric light, photograph on mirror. 18 x 25 x 0.5 in.

ined and constructed by “the space interposed between them and the eye that sees” that she visualizes. Fulfilling the deepest philosophical purpose of painting as laid down in the Renaissance, Schneemann has both continued and augmented the historical project of painting. But as a woman and a feminist, she has altered ways of seeing by refusing to accept the patriarchal world of autonomous objects and experience and by insisting on a new method of sight that asserts the contingency of, and fuses, bodies and things. Schneemann centers the body in the truth of the spaces that are negotiated between made and imagined worlds. She opens the visual identity of the places of action where aesthetic judgments are formed. In this regard, her art operates where the conditions of truth are named, first simply by being, then by being about being, and finally by what Heidegger calls the “deconcealing,” wherein “the truth of beings, happens in the work.”¹⁶

Notes

Thanks as ever to Edward Shanken for the conscientious attention to editing my work.

- 1 Schneemann has also produced artist books, poetry, feminist theory, essays, interviews, and forty years of letters to members of the international avant-garde. Her production as a writer has seldom been examined. See forthcoming *Correspondence Course: Selected Letters of Carolee Schneemann, An Epistolary History of Art and Culture*, edited and introduced by Kristine Stiles. Since my work on this book, Schneemann sold much of her archive to The Getty Research Institute of Art and the Humanities, Special Collections.
- 2 Leonardo da Vinci, *Paragone*, in Claire J. Farago's *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1992), 179.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 185.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 191.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 241.
- 6 Carolee Schneemann, letter to Naomi Levinson, September 1957, The Getty Research Institute of Art and the Humanities, Special Collections. I have retained the punctuation of Schneemann's original.
- 7 When she wrote “Cézanne, She Was A Great Painter,” in 1975, she no doubt knew that the appellation would eventually belong to her.
- 8 Hermann Bahr, *Expressionism* (London, 1920), reprinted in Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, eds., *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 166.
- 9 To an unknown correspondent, December 27, 1961, The Getty Research Institute of Art and the Humanities, Special Collections.
- 10 Johann W. von Goethe, *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, 5:12, quoted in Bahr, *Expressionism*, reprinted in Francina and Harrison, *Modern Art and Modernism*, 167.
- 11 Sheldon Nodelman, Marden, Novros, Rothko: Painting in the Age of Actuality (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1978), 56-58.
- 12 It is worth pointing out that Nodelman was, for a time, the intimate friend of art historian Moira Roth, whose pioneering feminist writings on performance art included a thoroughly informed knowledge of Schneemann's work, and that Roth was a friend of Schneemann. It stands to reason, then, that Nodelman learned a great deal both from Schneemann and Roth that informed his writing about Marden, Novros, and Rothko.
- 13 Frank Stella, *Working Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).
- 14 Dave McCullough, “Eat Movies,” *San Francisco Express Times*, February 25, 1969.
- 15 Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, ed. Bruce McPherson (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, 1979), 167.
- 16 Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Sein und Zeit* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1929).



James Tenney, C.S., and Kitch: Sidney, Illinois, 1960.

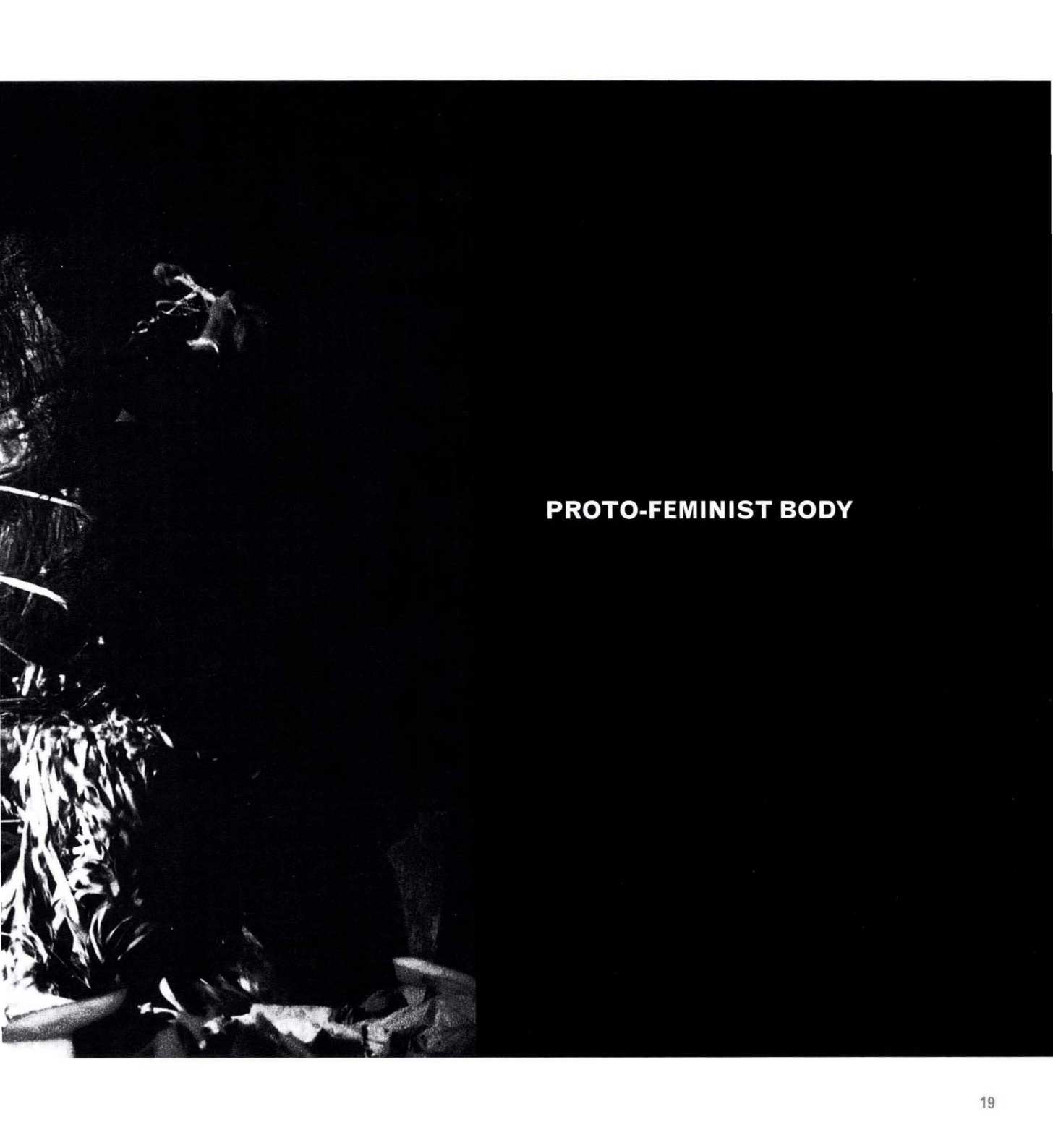
Photo: Oliver McGuinness.



Roundhouse, 1967.

Kinetic theatre. Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation, London.

Photo: Leena Kompa.



PROTO-FEMINIST BODY



C.S. editing *Plumb Line*, London, 1971.
Photo: David Crosswaite.

INTERVIEW WITH KATE HAUG

Kate Haug: I am specifically studying *Fuses* (1964–67) because I am looking at sexually explicit work made by women around the time of the women’s movement. While I was watching *Fuses* the other day, I was struck by its beauty. It is so pivotal, for many reasons, in the history of experimental filmmaking. But because it deals with sex, it has been left out of avant-garde film history and not really addressed by feminism. Is sex still the domain of men? Is that why it is so problematic for women?

Carolee Schneemann: Explicit sexual imagery propels the formal structure of *Fuses*. Initially, it was clear to me that people were so distracted by being able to have a voyeuristic permission to see genital heterosexuality that it would take them—if they ever came back to see it again—many showings before the structure was clear: the musicality of it and the way it was edited. *Fuses* is very formal in how it is shaped; that was crucial to making it have a coherent muscular life. Visualized erotic, active bodies deflect the very structures which shape montage: viewers are distracted by the simultaneity of perceptual layers *Fuses* offers.

Which is parallel to my own historic position. All my work evolves from my history as a painter: all the objects, installations, film, video, performance—things that are formed. But the performative works—which are one aspect of this larger body of work—are all that the culture can hold onto. That fascination overrides the rest of the work. It is too silly, but it is still kind of a mind/body split. “If you are going to represent physicality and carnality, we cannot give you intellectual authority.”

KH: As an artist, how do you see the work functioning beyond the sign of the body in terms of its formal structure?

CS: Well, it is a risk, but it has always been a hope; I am a formalist and my influences are rigorous and keyed to a sense of historicity. The older artists who were really influential on my own sense of what work demanded were composers like Carl Ruggles and Edgard Varèse. There is this famous anecdote about Carl Ruggles keeping Henry Cowell waiting when they were supposed to have lunch together at Ruggles’s little Vermont schoolhouse. Cowell was standing at the door hearing this one dreadful piano chord over and over and over, and he banged on the door and yelled, “Carl, what the fuck is going on in there? We’re supposed to go to lunch!” And Carl yelled, “Wait, Henry, wait! I am giving this chord the test

of time.” I took all that very seriously. What Bob Morris calls lag time is the delay that is involved with works that might bewilder cultural expectations by disrupting inherited principles. For instance, Cézanne or de Beauvoir—I came upon them in the early sixties when they were still in a state of academic marginality. Virginia Woolf’s writing was an immense influence for formal structure: reaching inside rhythms of the mind, the rhythms and linguistic motions of the phrase clarified as memory, as light, color—so that Woolf’s nonlinear narrative is never literalized. I recognized the vision her writing opened to me when I was fifteen years old, sitting on bales of straw in Vermont, dazzled by *The Waves*. With Cézanne, I studied the picture plane fractured into phrases of larger rhythms, contributing details; the body has to enter perception viscerally: each stroke is an event in pictorial space. These were my earliest influences, followed by Artaud, Wilhelm Reich. Now people want to know about it. But it would not have mattered very much in the past years—whatever I said. Many contemporary artists thought I was just doing something incredibly perplexing. Many of the men seemed to consider me as someone merely to be fucked or suppressed. That some men also fought for my work only further complicated the situation.

KH: This opens up a whole gamut of issues. As you were just talking about your influences, I was thinking about the repetition in *Fuses*. Were you thinking of that repetition in terms of structure or narrative? There is all this interplay between the layers within the images. Did you also consider it as a way to develop a type of play within the image?

CS: I did consider the different instrumental voices that Bach could weave and break apart in terms of a timbre, a pitch that had a certain weight and certain fracture—an instrumental clunkiness that would then suddenly reattract and reabsorb thematic elements and become ecstatic. In particular, I was submerged in the Cantatas—whose organic, strange, rhythmic dynamic that could conceptually and sensuously unravel in time. Since film is in time, I was thinking about time structure, and about [Charles] Ives being able to layer a dissonant, discrepant montage of sound. As I edited, I thought, “I am going to have a mass of blue and then this arm opens up, and that breaks the reach towards the figure with three frames of yellow, the arm completes its gesture and a mass of blue dissolves into . . .” So I had all these crazy notes, and that is how I would be editing and counting. There are beats . . . there are counts, frames of color, of gesture. . . .

KH: It’s very much like you are painting with motion and composing with color.

CS: With frames, it is almost like notes. So, yes, I am painting, but I am also time factoring. It is not just gestural. The gestures are subject to internal rhythms. Now, at the same

time, these internal rhythms are definitely shaped by the fact that it is a self-shot film. Often, I did not get back the film print I expected. If the camera was set on a chair or hanging from a lamp, the merge of the bodies might shift from the lens focus, and by chance the thirty-second wind-up Bolex camera would only capture my buttocks, or some area of all green. I would accept that as the film offering me the intercourse between the camera and my domestic space. I was always willing to adapt my explicit intentions.

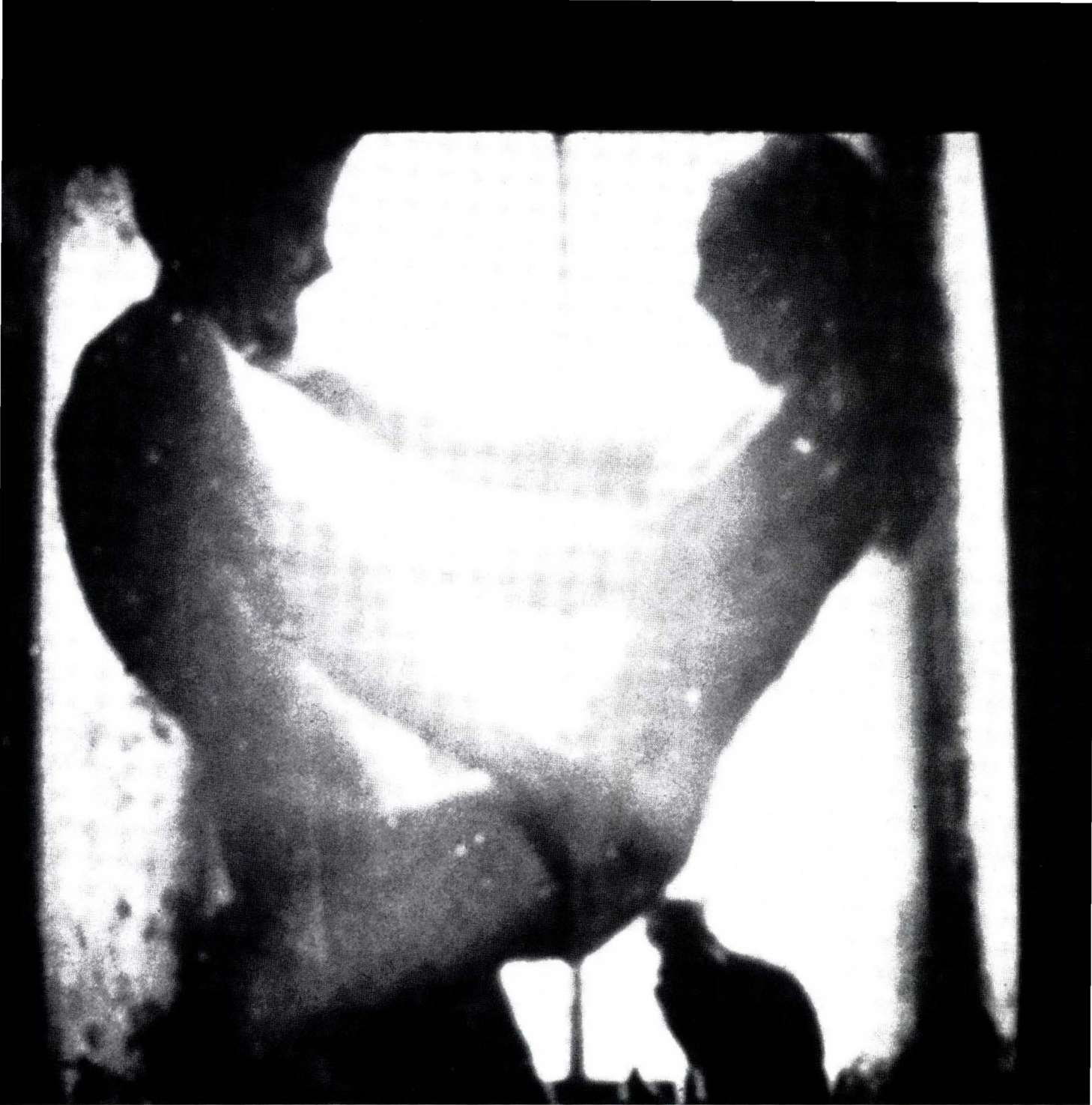
I wanted to allow film to give me the sense that I was getting closer to tactility, to sensations in the body that are streaming and unconscious and fluid—the orgasmic dissolve unseen, vivid even if unseeable.

KH: What was your impulse to make *Fuses*? Were you making it in reaction to something?

CS: Yes, it was in conversation with *Window Water Baby Moving* (Stan Brakhage, 1959). I had mixed feelings about the power of the male partner, the artist subsuming the primal creation of giving birth as a bridge between male constructions of sexuality as either medical or pornographic. Brakhage’s incredible authenticity and bravery was to take this risk, to focus on what was actual and real, actually looking at the body’s reality and leaving the protection of a constructed mythology. I know that Stan and Jane passed the camera back and forth, but I was still very concerned that the male eye replicated or possessed the vagina’s primacy of giving birth. The camera lens became the os, the aperture out of which birth was “expressed.” The camera gave birth as he held the camera; this was metaphoric for the whole gendered aesthetic struggle in our friendship. You must understand that in the early sixties, the terminology, the analysis of traditional bias was completely embedded. I really wanted to see what “the fuck” is and locate that in terms of a lived sense of equity. What would it look like? Now I can reference a suppressed history of the sacred erotic. Brakhage’s work touched into the sacred erotic. But we have to remind ourselves that throughout the sixties, only men maintained creative authority: women were muses, partners. Brakhage was unique in his willingness to focus on the actual birth. You must understand, there were no precedents that we knew of—only medical and pornographic models.

KH: You first showed *Fuses* in 1967?

CS: No, I showed it as I worked on it, in 1965, 1966. People were seeing it in my studio, in process, and it was becoming an influence right away. That early. People weren’t shocked—here was a visual construction which touched on the nascent nerve of “free expression,” “open sexuality.”



Fuses, 1964–67.
Film still.



Fuses, 1964–67.
Film still.

KH: When you were showing it, you were coming from this point of view that you wanted to take a look at “the fuck.” You wanted to see what it looks like in a situation of equality. Were people able to read that at all when you would show it to them?

CS: *Fuses* wasn’t programmatic. The fuck was inseparable from an intimacy, an erotic generosity that was evident. Jim Tenney and I were together for thirteen years—an extraordinary and rapturous loving life together. As intellectual equals, Jim had full participation in the filming; his belief in my work situated his participation as both object and subject. And I have to mention the influence of his daily work, composing, reading from Erwin Schrödinger on entropy, reading Proust, exchanging issues of theory and process, so that we were in a continual creative interchange. That was unique in 1965! Women would sometimes cry and say, “Thank you, thank you. This is the first time that I’ve seen a female genital and I’m going to be able to look at my own body! I’m going to look at my vulva!” Most of my contemporaries were pretty thrilled about the film. Others later admitted they considered it only “narcissistic exhibitionism.” Some felt envy and displacement from the shameless pleasure. I remember many comments. There were objections to the cunnilingus sequence: “That went on too long.” “We really don’t want to see that.” But others expressed feeling, “That was amazing to see. Yeah, that’s what it’s like.”

KH: That’s one thing I’m really interested in. How has the reading of your work changed over the years? You have had this opportunity to see *Fuses* play in so many different audiences and also so many different theoretical contexts. When the film was originally being shown, it was a proto-feminist moment before the women’s movement was actually consolidated or recognized as cohesive.

CS: Well, it was outrageous and it was sometimes wonderful, salutary for many people. Reactions were mixed. It was usually the men who were most appreciative. They felt a released identification with the lyric, energetic partnering and the overt penis as a source of active pleasure, that the film focused the power of pleased and pleasuring male sexuality. Did you find the Gene Youngblood article, the first review of *Fuses* ever? It was great. It says something like “a ninety-foot penis in CinemaScope.”

KH: It was a surprise for me to read that because it was so congratulatory, so excited about the work. It ran in contradiction to what I assumed public reaction would have been.

CS: It is interesting to measure critical regard by male writers against its utter neglect by feminist film historians—which is what you mentioned previously.

KH: That is why the screening history of *Fuses* is interesting; *Fuses* remained important through these different moments. When I talked to you originally, I was curious about that relationship to Laura Mulvey’s essay. It seems like *Fuses* really exemplifies so many of the different tenets of her particular argument. Even though her argument is directed towards Hollywood cinema, it is interesting that experimental cinema that doesn’t base itself in relationship to the narrative is completely left out of that discussion. Your film is such a fine example of something that alters that relationship between the viewer and the . . .

CS: *Fuses* was being shown in London, in 1968, 1969, and through the early seventies when I lived there—as Mulvey began writing her film essays. She talked to me about the rupture *Fuses* made in pornography—how important *Fuses* was as an erotic vision. It was going to change the whole argument and discussion of filmic representation of sexuality and . . . then she couldn’t touch it! Mulvey has never mentioned my films. But perhaps it was a touchstone behind critical theory for Mulvey. We were there at the same time, at the same moment, in parallel.

I showed *Fuses* first at the Roundhouse for the “Dialectics of Liberation” conference in London in 1968 and at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA). I was pulled out of the film booth by the conference coordinator who told me that in case of immorality charges, he would not defend me. I was on my own. He would have defended Stokely Carmichael, R. D. Laing, etc., if their political transgressions had been prosecuted. I felt incredibly alone, female, desired, and despised. I ended up living in London for four years. One of the only ways that I could get any income at all was due to the curiosity around *Fuses*. Derrick Hill, a courageous independent distributor, kept getting me little showings for it. It was written about a lot; it was seen all over London. I was on important censorship and pornography panels with editors, publishers, politicians.

KH: In terms of feminism in the seventies, did critics ever criticize you by saying that the film actually runs counter to a feminist political agenda?

CS: You mean, did they ever ask if I was aware that I was internalizing male fantasies?

KH: Did you ever get any reaction like that, or were people generally supportive of it?

CS: No, they were completely cowardly. They never told me. They never discussed that with me. Although I had terrible reactions to *Plumb Line* during a women’s film festival. I was hooted. I mean, they wouldn’t even look at it. All they saw was that traditional, all-American guy’s face in the opening sequence. Particularly the lesbian women, all they had

to do was see that face and they started screaming. I crawled out of that showing trembling on my hands and knees down the aisle to the elevator.

KH: Obviously, as a practicing artist, you are aware of the history of the female nude. In fact, I was just reading something that you wrote in Moscow about *Fuses* being censored there; you refused to speak to the reporters at a press conference in front of an exhibit of oil paintings of female nudes. Being aware of the history of representation, how were you conceiving of yourself as a nude woman in your own film?

CS: I had already done *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1965), where I posed the questions: Could I include myself as a formal aspect of my own materials? Could a nude woman artist be both image and image maker? Those were critical concerns at the time. I was constantly told that I shouldn't even be painting: "You're really good for a girl, but. . . ." My advisor said, "Don't set your heart on art because you're only a girl. You're really good, kid, but don't set your heart on art." He was a second-generation abstract expressionist and very sympathetic to me. I had naively anticipated a shared devotion, power, dynamic, energy that would envelop all dedicated artists to subsume, burn out sexual difference in creative pleasure and inclusion!

No, no. I had to get that nude off the canvas, frozen flesh to art history's conjunction of perceptual erotics and an immobilizing social position.

When I first came to New York, I was supporting myself as an artist's model. I was lying naked listening to these terrible men, most of them really ruining their students' drawings. I had to listen to them say all the things that would prevent the students from seeing fully and well. . . . Then I come back to the studio where the cultural message was, "You're incredible, but don't really try to do anything." I would just pick up my hammer and start fracturing my materials with a full armswing and focused aim. My work was about motion and momentum and physicality. The next step was to see what would happen if the body went in among my own materials. And would my rage at predictive rejection be supplanted by the gendered form exposed, displaced: active, present, and accusatory!? Once I saw the images, I thought I had done something incredible with *Eye Body*, but I didn't know exactly what.

KH: I think it is incredible that you saw the nude on the canvas as a direct challenge to your ambition to be an artist.

CS: I had to wrest my body out of a conventionalizing history. I must say that poets in New York were very supportive of me. If the art world was always confused and ambiguous,

my first solid insightful supportive response would be from poet friends—Robert Kelly, Paul Blackburn, Clayton Eshleman, Jerome Rothenberg, David Antin. That was interesting. We formed a coherent conversation: the body as central to language, to image. Of course, my partner Jim was always inspiring to me; our love gave me a coherent base. Malcolm Goldstein and Philip Corner, Jim’s close friends and musical collaborators, were unwavering in their regard for my visual constructions, objects, performances.

KH: Did you feel radically vulnerable when you were using your body that way?

CS: Yes. Not because I was nude, but because the culture was going to trash this. I did not feel erotically or personally so vulnerable. I felt vulnerable for what my art statement was going to set off or close off.

KH: On the one hand, you have this desire to be an artist. On the other hand, you are producing work which you know is highly controversial. It seems you would feel like you are taking an incredible risk; you know you are in a very combative situation.

CS: It’s not that I had a desire to be an artist. I’m in a very combative situation because I am an artist. Whatever an artist is or was, I was it. This wasn’t a choice, and that’s different. It means you have a certain character structure.

KH: How would you describe that character structure?

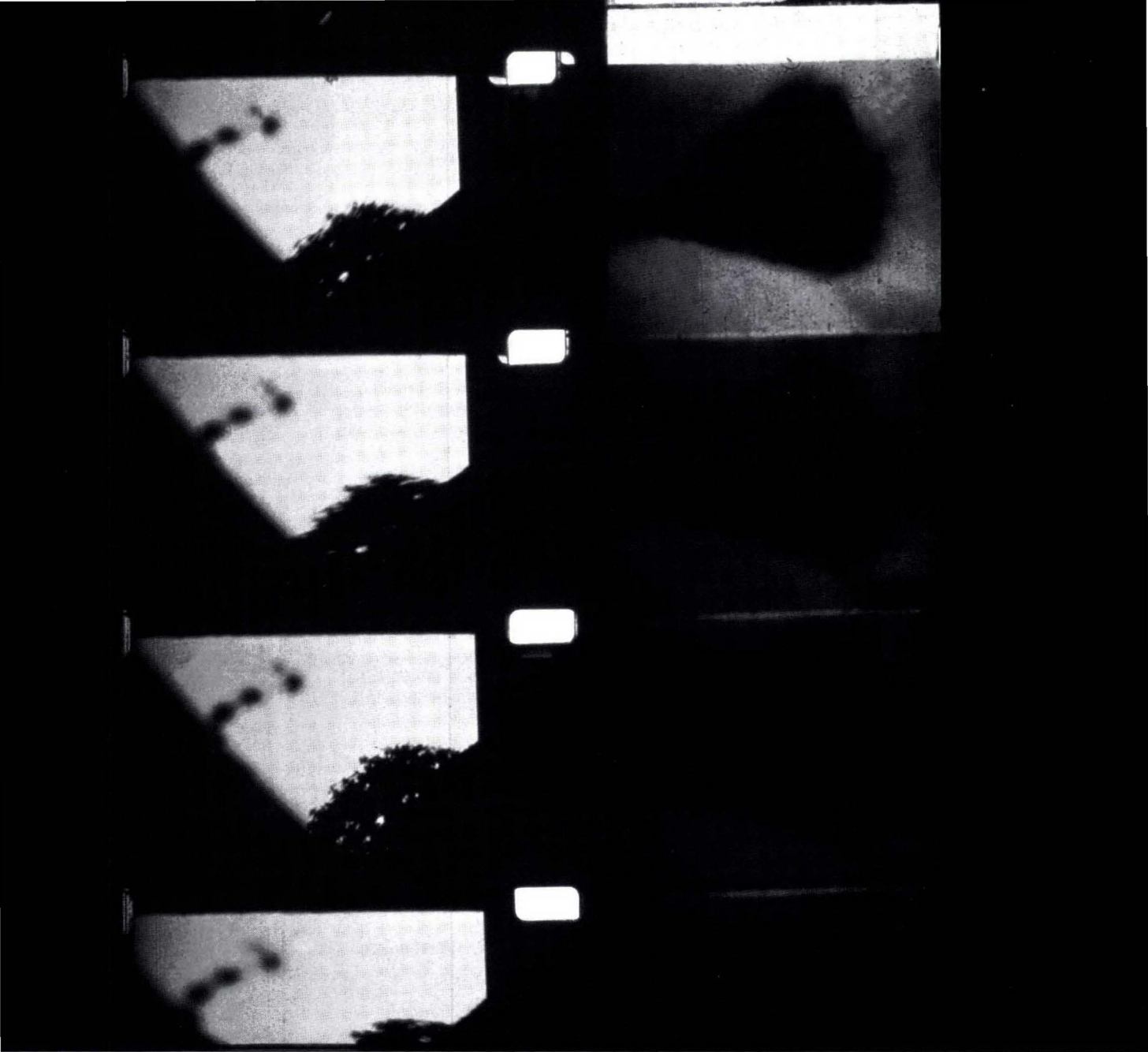
CS: You have to make images or you’re going to die, basically. That it is the most interesting, satisfying, compelling, necessary function—like love and sex and breathing. One hears people say “I don’t know what great art is, but I know it when I see it.” Somebody somewhere recently wrote a variation on this: “I can’t tell what produces a great artist, but I know a real artist when I meet someone who has to create images or she imagines she’ll expire.”

KH: In terms of a historical context, when you first started showing *Fuses* as a work in progress, who was your audience? Did you have discussions about the piece afterwards? What type of issues would come out?

CS: Other artists in New York. The thing to do now would be to review my early phone book. I would just call everybody up and say I’m going to show what I’ve been working on, and I would really like you to see it. When you are young and new in New York, everybody is interesting!



Fuses, 1964–67.
Film still.



Fuses, 1964–67.
Film strips.

The really early showings I don't remember well. I think people were a little flabbergasted. Yes, they said some insulting things, too. A lot of them thought it was just a "narcissistic exhibition." I remember that. So I was learning where the resistance would be and getting a sense that there was a lot of envy in the resistance.

KH: I was just showing my work as part of a panel at UCLA. I attended another panel of women artists where the first audience question was, "Do you find working with your autobiography self-indulgent?" I was struck by that question. Why is it that the first question about this work is whether or not it's self-indulgent? Will women making work about their experience always be accused of being self-indulgent and narcissistic? So it is interesting for me to now hear you say that people made the same comments to you in the early sixties. Could you speak to this? Do you think that this relates your teacher's comment, "Don't put your heart into art"?

CS: If a man crosses a threshold to depict or engage a lived reality, he becomes a hero. To deal with actual lived experience—that's a heroic position for a male and a trivial exposure for a woman. A woman exploring lived experience occupies an area that men want to denigrate as domestic, to encapsulate as erotic, arousing, or supporting their own position.

Culturally it has to do with the whole diminution of the feminine, what is female. Being so saturated with our own contradictory traditions and the degree of freedom that we have within these shifting traditions, it is hard for us to see where the deep hatred of the feminine still maintains its squirmy hostile boundaries.

KH: I think that *Fuses* is an incredibly sexy film. I watched it right before I came to New York. I had seen it only on video. Then I saw it on film, and it was like WHOA! . . . this is one really hot film. In your interview with Scott MacDonald, you say that *Fuses* is sexually political. Could you talk more about that description?

CS: A depiction of woman's pleasure, authentic pleasure, created by herself of her lived experience is rare. In pornography, the pleasure is when the man comes all over her face, or her pussy is getting licked to the point where either she is going to be raw for the next week, or she already came, and we missed it. Because female orgasm is mysterious. There is still this dichotomous evidence—or reporting—on the difference between clitoral and vaginal orgasm. Those are crucial issues for me; experiencing two kinds of vividly different orgasms can place me in another kind of heterosexual closet among women who don't know what I'm talking about. I insist on the separateness, the distinctiveness, the variousness of clitoral and vaginal orgasm. So *Fuses* opens up a sensory realm that people recog-

nize in different ways because it represents a lusciously privileged position—especially now with the counterthrust examination of the abject, abused, scarred, repelled, sadomasochistic vocabulary of visual images. It is essential that women reveal their “privileged” position to counteract all the ignorance, stupidity, and denial of heterosexual interchange. But it is suspicious that male culture is so comfortable with the feminine brutalized “abject”—the abuses of sexual experience, the erotic victim. And an abused body requires its defenses!

I wanted to put everything in *Fuses* that seemed normal and ordinary. Then I edited sequences so that whenever you were looking at the male genital it would dissolve into the female and vice versa; the viewer’s unconscious attitudes would be constantly challenged. You couldn’t start to say, “That’s disgusting!” or “I loved that!” before it became its equivalent.

KH: One thing that I really enjoyed was, I felt, when I was watching the film, that I would often get lost inside of the frame. That disorientation was what actually felt really sexual to me. I know that you have talked about your relationship to the frame. I was stunned at the intimate yet expansive sense of space, on a perceptual level for me as a viewer. A feeling of space that was intimate but yet very vast. Were you thinking about that at all?

CS: Yes, and that’s what that white section is. I wanted everything to suddenly drain into this open, indecipherable whiteness—like that orgasmic space where you are out beyond wherever you are. You don’t know where you are. You don’t know if it is his body or your body. I was wanting to move towards that kind of sensory place when the film goes all white. Actually, that is a snowstorm with cows in it. I was thinking of Altamira, something very ancient. I went out into the snowstorm naked, putting on a coat. It happened to have been some old scraggly fur coat, so I was thinking about fur and animal and flesh and the heat of the coldness but sizzling in snow . . . let it all get white, emptied. And of course, aesthetically, that was a kind of crazy thing to do. I anticipated people would get bored and restless and say, “Oh, I see splice marks, what’s happening, this looks speckled, it’s not clean. . . .” My film is always dirty because of the way I edited, with the cats moving around and the windows wide open.

So you seem like one of the ideal viewers. I’m wondering how much that has to do with your own sense of sexual pleasure and integrity in your own experience.

KH: I think it does come from my own belief that pleasure is fundamental to any political paradigm. Often there are many elements, even within a liberal situation, working to repress pleasure.

CS: It is very crucial to state here that for many women, pleasure is a defended territory

where they can't take risks because they have already been undermined, intruded on, abused. If you are lucky enough not to have suffered major psychic erotic damage, you can enter this arena of potential pleasure. But if damage has been done to you, this arena seems frivolous, dangerous, unprotected, and unrealistic. Yvonne Rainer used to say to me, "You make sexuality too easy." And I would say to her, "You make it too hard." We have been close friends since the sixties, tugged by our aesthetic closeness and difference.

In the sixties and seventies, women rarely confessed sexual trauma to each other. Personal experiences would become encoded in work in ways that were often very bewildering, occluded to the artist herself and to the audience. Why is this so cold? Why can't they touch? Why is this so oppressive? Why do I feel so much attraction but it's always repulsed? Why did my friend commit suicide?

Profound issues of hidden sexual abuse and victimization of the feminine really began to claim an explicit language and descriptive grasp in the eighties. By the time I was teaching performance in Austin, Texas (1989), rape was finally out as a major traumatic component of women's experience which had to be addressed. Women who had been raped or abused were not doing films about pleasure! They might be constructing big voluptuous ceramic vase-like sculptures with knives thrust all through those hollowed out forms. I can facilitate enlarging the erotic vocabulary, but now we have to look at the specialness of being able to inhabit our bodies with confidence and freedom.

KH: I think that it is really important to say. What is interesting is that at different moments in time, you have people working from different positions in their bodies. I think you're right in terms of the eighties. There was this complete sense of urgency around issues of rape and sexual abuse. It is necessary for people to be able to discuss these issues and make work about it. It is very telling that the discussion of rape and sexual abuse had been repressed for so long.

CS: It's a part of our suppressed, guilty male cultural history. When I started filming for *Fuses*, there was still an argument among some smart people—men, friends of mine—about rape; that women wanted to be raped, that it was good for them! That was still a commonplace piece of male philosophy! I remember the bitter arguments of women against this empathetic closure of the deluded men! The uncertainty of the men who doubted the pro-rape men. A bad dream . . .

KH: That seems so incredible to me . . . brutal that anyone could even argue about that. I come from a very different perspective, since I was in high school and college during the eighties and nineties. That discussion was very much a part of my academic education.

Also, as a contemporary student of art history, I studied how the formal components of art can make the female body signify a form of docility—which is why your work is so intriguing to me. It offers another perspective on women’s sexuality, a sexuality that is in concert with physical pleasure.

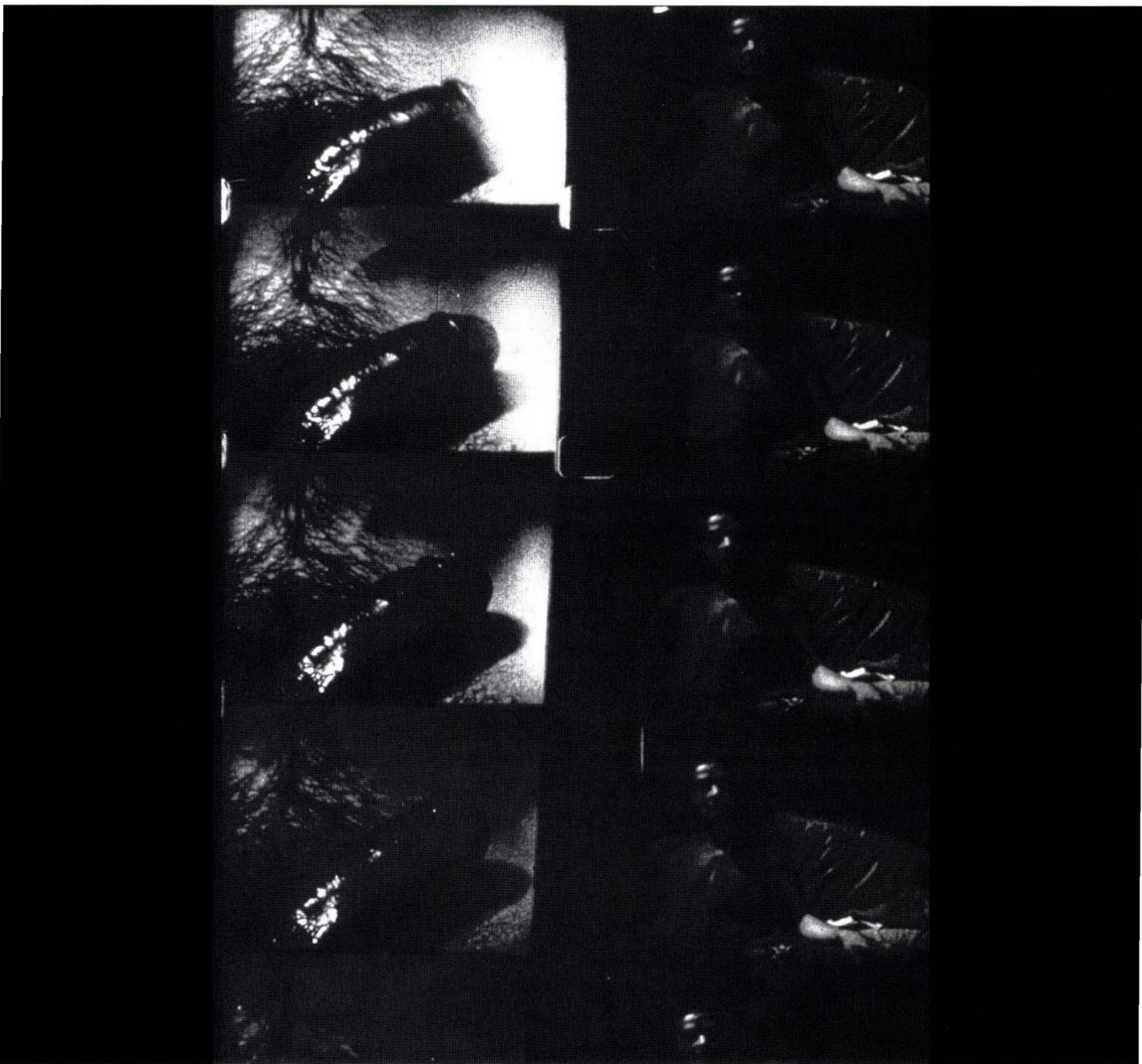
In *Fuses*, you appear as someone who maintains your identity in a sexual relationship and through your sexuality. You are very strong within the film as an individual. It appears that you and James Tenney are partners coming together—having this life experience but also so strong in yourselves that you can be so generous with one another. So often we have these images of sexually active women as victims. You hardly ever see a representation of a woman’s identity as something whole and autonomous and sexual, not victimized.

CS: Well, two things. One is that whenever I collaborated, went into a male friend’s film, I always thought I would be able to hold my presence, maintain an authenticity. It was soon gone, lost in their celluloid dominance—a terrifying experience: experiences of true dissolution. Frightening. Being in Brakhage’s films *Daybreak* (1957), *Whiteeye* (1957), and *Cat’s Cradle* (1959), being in a Dvoskin film—almost every time—and we were *friends*. I thought it would be okay. It was not okay for me. I was never filmed at my own work. In 1959 Stan insisted I put on an apron to be filmed. Peter Gidal had me nude in a bathtub. . . . I felt that whoever I really was had been obliterated and that they had needed to obliterate me. Just as in the “collaboration” with Bob Morris for *Site* (1964), I became historicized and immobilized. But it was a great adventure!

KH: In relationship to the individuality between the two partners, the collaboration between you and Jim Tenney . . .

CS: I wanted to also to indicate a linguistic sense. I had this sort of phallic objective—I wanted to penetrate the culture’s suppressions with my body. But I wasn’t sure I could do it. So I’m pretty content. They punished me in certain ways, but it is a very, very fortunate historic moment. We haven’t been burned as witches. We don’t have our genitals excised, we are not wrapped in chadors. My images have been met by the unconscious needs, sustained by the recognition of my culture. But my culture has not supported my work; I cannot afford to make new films or video works.

KH: I want to ask this question about documentary film practice. Did you have the desire or impulse to document your experience? Were you thinking about documentary film as a practice at all when you made *Fuses*? Did that enter into your conceptualization of it as you were editing it?



Fuses, 1964–67.
Film strips.

CS: Yes and no. I don't think of it as documentary. It's something different, which has to do with a desperate desire to capture the passionate things of life. Those could be very small things, very big. It can be war, it can be love, a cat whisker—but it involves a meeting, head-on, with some subject or material that can then become the process out of which a work develops. So it's kind of convoluted the way I need to work: dream, research, hands into materials, the invocation of motive, necessity—what I must see . . .

KH: One thing I'm asking the filmmakers I interview concerns the lack of precedents. In your case, there are very few sexually explicit images by women that came before *Fuses*. I look at the work and think it signifies this very revolutionary moment; these images were circulating, they were being made. In a way it does leave a document, like any art object does. Also going on at this time, a new style of documentary practice was coming onto the scene: *cinéma vérité*. So I begin to think artists were also in concert with these more sociological aspects of filmmaking.

CS: It's a proto-feminist issue again. I think it was influenced by the Vietnam War, by the civil rights movement. Documentary work begins to seize the actuality of lived experience in its contradictions and to start tearing away the horrible aggrandized mythology that comes out of the worst of self-righteous Americana. And the worst is replete with male overdeterminations: reconstructive, heroic modes into which all troubled, devious psyches fold and reemerge. A kind of reassuring hero-monster in which the feminine is always just the mascot. If she's really good, she gets killed; if she's really bad, she gets fucked and killed. It doesn't leave us much room. Better put that apron back on, even though you're stark naked!

KH: I think what you are pointing to is that people in the sixties were becoming conscious of the power of the image: the fact that images were being manufactured and made. This is especially true in relationship to your comment about the civil rights movement. I think images became a fundamental part of the political legitimacy of that movement.

CS: You're right. We were being moved, we were being affected by images bringing information that was startling and taboo and terrible and made you convinced you had to do something. To enter the image itself! Activation as an intervention into the politics behind the revelatory images.

KH: There seems to be a political expediency in the ability to take the medium into your own hands and produce images that had never been seen before.

CS: Expediency. I would take that as a latter-day interpretation of a blind fierce moment. A wonderful moment. I was full of naiveté and conviction that we were going to change things. Everybody one met as a young artist, who just turned up in New York from Illinois or anywhere, was definitely going to change everything—either in art, music, painting, sculpture, politics, economics, or farming. It was cumbersome as anticipation, as experiment—being able to hang out with Abbie Hoffman, Janis Joplin, and Robert Rauschenberg in the same night. Our world was completely charged up, charging . . .

KH: You were speaking about people saying they wanted to change things. At that moment, were people thinking in terms of the establishment?

CS: The arts were stultifying. My sense of it is that all the romantic, domestic fantasies of the fifties blew a foul breath in the cultural atmosphere which you could blow apart instantly. You came to New York and found a huge abandoned loft for \$68 a month, which nobody wanted to live in. We girls could teach each other wiring and plumbing because one of us would have figured it out. You could engage all the adventurous courage you could possibly imagine you needed as an artist and as a promiscuous, adventurous girl wandering the New York artist bars. Then you were impacted head on by an immense monstrous war coming—unconscionable, endless, and draining off our own generation. We had to fight that. There was no question about it. Each person of even slight political courage found a place as an activist. Everyone was politically engaged. The phone was tapped, mail opened, we were grabbed at protests by undercover police. I spent several years teaching guys how to avoid the draft. I had my own ideas for psycho breakdown in the face of the military, and they always worked! I had a little training camp. Friends would bring their boyfriends and lovers to me for training sessions. The guy would say, “I can’t do it; I’m going to crack up, I’m going to go nuts, I’m going to kill the wrong person.” And I said, “Fine, I think I can work with you on this.” I was also training people how to encounter police brutality; how to fall, how to crawl, how to be conscious of where you were within the group, with peripheral police assault breaking into the group—in the back, in the front, and with one another. Total immersion in physical principles of sensitization as riot control.

KH: I have read about your *Viet-Flakes* (1965) piece.

CS: The need to explore the passionate feelings that had not been clarified, the need to see women give birth, the need for political action. Young artists didn’t sit around making theoretical decisions to encapsulate subtle significations and signs. We’d call each other to an action. We’d learned not to use the phone, and we’d find a way to tell each other we had

to do something. And then actions were spread through the whole community . . . a huge, sensitive wave. I've written that with my film *Viet-Flakes*, the kinetic theatre performance "*Snows* was built out of my anger, outrage, fury, and sorrow for the Vietnamese—to concretize and elucidate the genocidal compulsions of a vicious, disjunctive technocracy gone berserk against an integral, essentially rural culture. The grotesque fulfillment of the Western split between matter and spirit, mind and body, individualized 'man' against cosmic natural unities. Destruction so vast as to become randomized, constant as weather. Snowing . . . purification, clarification, homogenization, obliteration . . ."

KH: It seems there was an agreement among people that something should be done and something must be done and we will do it.

CS: It was true. You smelled patchouli, you saw somebody who had mixed colors on their shirt, and you gave the V-sign. But the dynamic in daily life was tense . . . the buzz word was *polarization*. Some man would attack you with a knife and fork and try to stab you in the hand in an ordinary country diner if your guy's hair was long.

Now it's all mixed up. You can't tell what the mustache signifies, the long hair, short hair, tattoos, earrings, piercings, purple hair. Everybody has switched disguises. But in the sixties, the coding was absolutely crystal clear. We helped one another with our recognizable symbols. Volkswagen bus! Yes! Dreadlocks, guitars, graffiti, the Beatles, Traffic, Hendrix, Joplin. You'd be out hitching on the highway somewhere, going from one demonstration to try to disappear, and a Volkswagen van would always pull up. You'd always smoke some joints, and you'd always help each other go the next step. It was really quite extraordinary.

Currently, the position of women in the sixties has been presented in its worse aspect; the women were breeding machines, free sex machines. That's not the whole story at all. We were young women taking tremendous freedoms, maintaining self-definition and an erotic confidence in choosing partners spontaneously in the firm expectation of great times to be won together.

KH: That's one thing I'm really curious about. One of the more popular films reacting to that time is *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977). In that film, a young woman has a secret sexual life, but in the end, she gets killed. The culture as a whole could not absorb the idea of women's sexual independence. That is especially evident when I hear you saying that the sixties and seventies were actually a time when women felt confident, maybe, exploring their sexuality.

CS: The waves of women artists, feminists, female energy building on radical politics of the sixties. Of course, what you are describing is part of the male cultural clamp; the greater value of women's self-determination pushes at very limited means, choices allowed by our society. You get all these films where the women are killed, the women are punished, or the women are vicious to men. Take *Thelma and Louise*, the talismanic women's buddy film of the nineties: they have to ecstatically commit suicide by accelerating their car over a cliff to escape male law and rule.

KH: Then there can't be a sense of equality.

CS: No. Hollywood's dominant myth production only envisions equity in which male symbology is diminished or overtly self-destructive. He loses power in equity.

KH: I'm interested in this trajectory in feminism, where feminism itself becomes slightly puritanical: what does that self-censorship produce on a political level? One question I had specifically, in terms of the film itself, is kind of a crude question. I noticed that some of the images of fucking seem animal-like to me—very lustful. The bodies are impulsive, and there is a hard, rhythmic sense to it. Did you see that when you were making the film? I love that when it goes from this really hot and heavy sex and then these really tender moments with Jim Tenney. How did it feel to put those together like that? I don't think that had ever been done before.

CS: Well, to me it felt completely ordinary and natural. Now I understand how very complex this is—for erotically uncertain viewers to accept this range of sensitivity and ferocity. I can only talk about my own experience. My partner's orgasm is really propulsive and it's fierce—his thrusting rhythms intensify my vaginal orgasm off into the ecstatic stratosphere. We just take off. With vaginal orgasm, you're blown out together at the same moment. It's big. Cosmic. I don't think I even got close to it in the film, and that's a regret. I could not capture the immensity of orgasm.

There was an approach. Of course, tenderness and sensitivity are part of that. In terms of cultural fragmentation and disease, dis-ease, the fact that sexuality has this full and complex range, you could say, "Touch tenderly, fuck fiercely." Both men and women have a great deal of contemporary confusion about phallic power, pleasure, and torment. The penis as a source of touching within, of friction, of momentum, is uniquely capable of giving rhapsodic pleasure, as well as being used as weaponry, brutality. So how do people address this crucial contradiction? How do they live that out in their own bodies? If a child or young woman has been raped or abused, what sort of trust, lubricity, receptivity, desire live in her vaginal walls?



Fuses, 1964–67.
Film strip.

KH: I think that harkens back to what you were talking about earlier in terms of personal experience with the body, with your own and others. The film does focus on male genitalia, but when I watched it, I felt I was seeing male genitalia for the first time on-screen--the way it was filmed, filmed from angles that were so intimate. Once again, I felt the penis wasn't represented like a weapon. It seemed very friendly and happy. I think at one point you have this shot of his balls breathing.

CS: The close-up on his testicles contracting. I have all these little sexual jokes in it--Tenney's "balls" resting on a little chair bordered with Christmas tree balls. Then I montaged a burning bush joke--there's a close-up of my "bush." Then the clouds over a silhouetted bush--the sun setting behind the shrub. I loved discovering those associations. Nobody saw those for years. I'd be the only person in the audience chuckling away. Like pussy/pussy--his hand on the cat and cut to his hand stroke on my pussy.

KH: When you showed those images of the male genitalia, how did people react to that? Did they see them as being playful?

CS: They see many different things. Tenney has a curved penis when it's erect and that confused people. They wanted to know if it was really erect--technical questions. I didn't have close-up lenses, so close-ups are a little fuzzily intimate. I never got a really beautiful cunt shot, which I've worked on since. That's how art builds on itself!

The fact that *Fuses* is filmed at home--the intimacy of lovers' own bedroom--I hope that there is a sense that there is no outside camera person. That's why the camera was part of our body. The cat Kitch watches with complete unrestrained interest. The cat becomes the filmic eye, a metapresence inviting the viewers. The film follows lyrical seasonal changes that I wanted of where I still live. I wanted what was around us to be coming in and out of season, of frame, of focus, of flesh.

KH: When I watched the film, it seemed like the sex was continual but inconsistent. I always have this feeling of erotic charge, but the type of eroticism that was happening was inconsistent. That goes back to the different rhythms of sexuality.

CS: And also how different we are. Even with the same partner, every touch is always different but familiar.

KH: That is something else unique to *Fuses* because most representations of sexuality don't acknowledge the variation of experience.

CS: And they don't acknowledge that it goes on forever, which is where Barbara Hammer's important film *Nitrate Kisses* (1992) comes in.

KH: In *Fuses*, the images of the body are fragmented; they are seen in a glimpse; there is interference of the body. That was one of the things that made it sexually charged. What were you thinking about in terms of creating a filmic image of the body?

CS: As a painter, paint is the power of extending whatever you see or feel, of intensifying it, of reshaping it. So I wanted the bodies to be turning into tactile sensations of flickers. And as you said, you get lost in the frame—to move the body in and out of its own frame, to move the eye in and out of the body so it could see everything it wanted to, but would also be in a state of dissolution, optically, resembling some aspect of the erotic sensation in the body which is not a literal translation. It is a painterly, tactile translation edited as a music of frames.

KH: That comes out of your formal training as a painter.

CS: That's why it is collaged, and cut and baked. I am also always radicalizing my materials. I have to be subversive with them so I am not repeating my same old habits. I have to be engaged so that some of it comes back with something that I might not expect from my material; that's why I risk it. That's why the original *Fuses* is so thick as a collage. It can't be printed! I never thought of that. It was a horrible shock, one of the worst—after three years of work, to be told by the film lab that *Fuses* in its collaged layers was too thick to run through the printer!

KH: When you were talking about subverting your materials, I was thinking about your use of your own body. The body is literally inscribed with culture. You used your body as a medium. Were you thinking about subverting your body in some way?

CS: I thought more that my body could subvert what was around me! It was a question: could I introduce the meanings of this body? To the extent that mine was an idealized body—could I make it insist on meanings conventionally resisted? Suppressed? And, by gum, once I got to *Interior Scroll* (1975), I was in deep shit!

KH: You are taking this very patriarchal visual vocabulary, the female nude, and recreating it outside of that vocabulary. That is an amazing challenge for yourself. It is also a challenge to exhibit that vocabulary, because no one wants to read it.

CS: It is much easier for this culture to read the abject. Consider the total economic neglect of my work. Was I just a little too early? Or is it because my body of work explores a self-contained, self-defined, pleased, female-identified erotic integration? Is that what the culture can't stand? It is interested. It gets tremendous courage, vitality, and feeds itself off this material I provided. But it will not come back and help me. It's almost as if it's saying, "If you've got all that, go feed yourself!"



Kitch's Last Meal, 1973–76.
Film strips.

NOTES ON *FUSES* (1971)

In the midst of developing my kinetic theatre works, I began an erotic film, *Fuses* (1965), because no one else had dealt with the images of lovemaking as a core of spontaneous gesture and movement. I hesitated to suddenly teach myself a complex and demanding medium, but I was compelled to make this film myself, much as I had been compelled as a painter to increasingly incorporate dimensional materials: to structure found film footage and slides, to compose sounds, design electronic systems, and to train performers for my theatre and environmental pieces.

Stan Brakhage's birth film of his first child, *Window Water Baby Moving*, was made with and of his wife Jane. Still, it was a masculine authentication of the primal act-of-life unique to women, the result of our underlying sexual realities, which remained closeted: a dark genital mystery instead of the luminous center of our life expression.

Fuses was made as an homage to a relationship of ten years—to a man with whom I lived and worked as an equal. We are perceived through the eyes of our cat. By visualizing the cat's point of view I was able to present our coupled images in the contexts of the rectangles and the seasons surrounding us. I also wanted to transmit fragments of a present to future time—in which the nature of the film would be constantly reappraised.

I did the filming even while I was participant in the action. There were no aspects of lovemaking which I would avoid; as a painter I had never accepted the visual and tactile taboos concerning specific parts of the body. And as a painter I was free to examine the celluloid itself: burning, baking, cutting, and painting it, dipping my footage in acid, and building dense layers of collage and complex A and B rolls held together with paper clips. I filmed over a period of three years using borrowed, wind-up Bolexes.

There is precise cutting between close-ups of the female and male genitals. I wanted viewers to confront identifications and attitudes toward their own and the other's gender. Perhaps because it was made of her own life by a woman, *Fuses* is both a sensuous and equitable interchange; neither lover is "subject" or "object."

After one of the first screenings of *Fuses*, a young woman thanked me for the film. She said she had never looked at her own genitals, never seen another woman's, that *Fuses* let her feel her own sexual curiosity as something natural, and that she now thought she might begin to experience her own physical integrity in ways she had longed for. That was in 1967.



C.S., New York, 1961, in front of *Sir Henry Francis Taylor*, (1961, painting-construction on board, 58.5 x 39 x 6.5 in.)
Photo: Michael Glass.

FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

1962-63

I assume the senses crave sources of maximum information, that the eye benefits by exercise, stretch, and expansion towards materials of complexity and substance, that conditions which alert the total sensibility—cast it almost in stress—extend insight and response, the basic responsive range of empathetic-kinesthetic vitality.

If a performance work is an extension of the formal-metaphorical activity possible within a painting or construction, the viewers' sorting of responses and interpretation of the forms of performance will still be equilibrated with all their past visual experiences. The various forms of my works—collage, assemblage, "concretion"—present equal potentialities for sensate involvement.

I have the sense that in learning, our best developments grow from works which initially strike us as "too much," those which are intriguing, demanding, that lead us to experiences which we feel we cannot encompass, but which simultaneously provoke and encourage our efforts. Such works have the effect of containing more than we can assimilate; they maintain attraction and stimulation for our continuing attention. We persevere with that strange joy and agitation by which we sense unpredictable rewards from our relationship to them. These "rewards" put to question—as they enlarge and enrich—correspondences we have already discovered between what we deeply feel and how our expressive life finds structure.

Anything I perceive is active to my eye. The energy implicit in an area of paint (or cloth, paper, wood, glass, etc.) is defined in terms of the time which it takes for the eye to journey through the implicit motion and direction of this area. The eye follows the building of forms—no matter what materials are used to establish the forms. Such "reading" of a two-dimensional or three-dimensional area implies *duration*, and that duration is determined by the force of total visual parameters in action. Instance: the smallest unit variation from stroke to stroke in a painting by Velázquez or Monet; by extension the larger scale of rhythms directing the eye in a painting by Pollock—this which is shaped by a mesh of individualized strokes, streaks, smudges, and marks. The tactile activity of paint itself prepares us for the increased dimensionality of collage and construction: the literal dimensionality of paint seen close-on as raised surface—as a geology of lumps, ridges, lines, and seams. Ambiguous by-plays of dimension-in-action open our eyes to the metaphorical life of materials themselves. Such ambiguity joins in the free paradox of our pleasure with "traditional

subject matter” where we might see “abstract” fields of paint activity before we discover the image of King Philip II astride his horse (Velázquez), or a rush of dark arcade concavities from which we learn, by his flying robes, that a saint is in ascension (El Greco).

The fundamental life of any material I use is concretized in that material’s gesture—gesticulation, gestation, source of compression (measure of tension and expansion), resistance, developing force of visual action. Manifest in space, any particular gesture acts on the eye as a unit of time. Performers or glass, fabric, wood—all are potent as variable gesture units: color, light, and sound will contrast or enforce the quality of a particular gesture’s area of action and its emotional texture.

Environments, happenings—concretions—are an extension of my painting-constructions which often have moving (motorized) sections. The essential difference between concretions and painting-constructions involves the materials used and their function as “scale,” both physical and psychological. The force of a performance is necessarily more aggressive and immediate in its effects—it is projective. The steady exploration and repeated viewing which the eye is required to make with my painting-constructions is reversed in the performance situation where the spectator is overwhelmed with changing recognitions, carried emotionally by a flux of evocative actions and led or held by the specified time sequence which marks the duration of a performance.

In this way the audience is actually *visually* more *passive* than when confronting a work which requires *projective vision*, i.e., the internalized adaptation to a variable time process by which a “still” work is perceived—the reading from surface to depth, from shape to form, from static to gestural action and from unit gesture to larger overall structures of rhythms and masses. With paintings, constructions, and sculptures the viewers are able to carry out repeated examinations of the work, to select and vary viewing positions (to walk with the eye), to touch surfaces, and to freely indulge responses to areas of color and texture at their chosen speed.

During a kinetic theatre piece the audience may become more active *physically* than when viewing a painting or assemblage; their physical reactions will tend to manifest *actual* scale—relating to motions, mobilities the body does make in a *specific* environment. They may have to act, to do things, to assist some activity, to get out of the way, to dodge or catch falling objects. They enlarge their kinesthetic field of participation; their attention is required by a varied span of actions, some of which may threaten to encroach on the integrity of their positions in space. Before they can “reason,” they may find their bodies

performing on the basis of immediate visual circumstances: the eye will be receiving information at unpredictable and changing rates of density and duration. At the same time their senses are heightened by the presence of human forms in action and by the temporality of the actions themselves.

My shaping of the action of visual elements is centered on their parametric capacities in space. In performance the structural functions of light, for instance, take form by its multiple alterations as color—diffuse, centralized, (spot and spill) mixture, intensity, duration in time, thresholds of visible/invisible. The movements of performers are explored through gesture, position and grouping in space (density, mass), color, and their own physical proportion.

The body itself is considered as potential units of movement: face, fingers, hands, toes, feet, arms, legs—the entire articulating range of the overall form and its parts.

The performers' voices are instruments of articulation: noises, sounds, singing, crying, commentary on or against their movements may be spoken; word-sound formulations are carried forth which relate to, grow from the effect on the vocal chords of a particular physical effort they experience. The voice expresses pressures of the total musculature so that we may discover unique sounds possible only during specific physical actions. These provide an implicit extension and intensification of the actions themselves.

The distribution of the performers in space determines the phrasing of a time sequence: levels of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal or the need for larger rhythms carried visually by an independent figure which moves in relationship to the overall environment—shifting dimensions, layers, levels. Every element contributes to the image. The active qualities of any one element (body, light, sound, paper, cloth, glass) find their necessary relation to all other elements, and through conjunction and juxtaposition the kinetic energy is released.

My exploration of an image-in-movement means only that its realization supersedes (or coincides with) my evocation of it. This is *not* a predictable, predetermined process: in the pressure to externalize a particular sensation or quality of form, other circumstances or "attributes" may be discovered which are so clear and exact that the function of the original impulse is understood as touchstone and guide to the unexpected. "Chance" becomes one aspect of a process in which I come to recognize a necessity—the way to unpredictable, incalculable advances within my own conscious intent.



Monograph I of diptych (from *Controlled Burning* series), 1961.
Collage on board. 20 x 31 in.



Newspaper Event, January, 1963.
Judson Dance Theatre.
Photo: Al Giese.

“MAXIMUS AT GLOUCESTER”: A VISIT TO CHARLES OLSON

1963

Iconography and instrumentality function as two structural poles in my work. Iconography and instrumentality—the sense of the body as the instrument of investigation and the instrument of available sensation—is something I recognized in the Maximus poems of Charles Olson.

His poetics influenced my work in the 1960s: the phrase as a structure in motion about actual space; knowledge in motion of word shape; vitality of research; probity; his notion that an image sustains duration and energy in relation to its factual referents. How do we comprehend this latent force field, when we are, ourselves, part of that force field? The question is, “How do you as an artist know what you’re doing?” The answer is, you don’t know, *exactly*, but Olson’s work offered a key, a clue: provocation, inspiration, fury, and delight. Works that I hate have also been inspirational; they helped me know exactly what I *wasn’t* going to do. Some of my anti-influences have been contemporary works not considered reactionary in any way, or at least not at the time of their realization.

Jim Tenney and I wanted to meet Olson for all the inexpressible reasons that drive shy young graduate students towards a presumptuous need to actually stand eye-to-eye with an inspiring progenitor. Only now do I appreciate our folly and Olson’s generosity in accepting our visit. We had composed a collaged, graceful letter with burnt edges and a compressed, admiring text—not a sycophantic letter but one with adequate knowledge and appreciation of his work. We wrote with a mystical purpose, into coincidence and hidden affiliation. We were astonished to see, within a week, a Gloucester postmark, then “Dear James & Carolee—Sure, come visit, you are welcome. Charles.”

October birthday gift. This journey to Olson in Gloucester touched on early clandestine searches for the absent feminine. Betty Olson had left a plate of cookies for us—she was away for the day. Obsession about the function of women artists or partners of powerful male artists led me to snoop. It was easy to find her paint brushes, dry and stiff as fossils on a large dusty wooden easel pushed into a corner of the small apartment. The smell of turpentine had long dissipated into salt air’s woody sting. In the bathroom I examined Betty’s hairbrush—long, silky brown hairs. There was no other sign of Betty. (Six months later she would be killed in a senseless automobile crash, driving to the Laundromat.)

Olson had been waiting for us with a genuine delight, bewildering to two young interlopers. We were touched, thrilled; our wish to meet had been warmly accepted. On the walls of his tiny study (crowded by his heroic bulk) were maps of Dog Town and Cape Ann. . . . The place name “Tenney” threaded through these maps of Rowley and Dog Town! Unknowingly, Tenney had returned to a central place in Olson’s archaeology and to the place where Tenney ancestors first landed near Gloucester, in the New World. That night, Jim and I slept in our old wagon in the Tenney graveyard on Tenney Path, behind the white frame church (Kitch nestled by our heads).

Next day we walked together on the shining October beach, Jim and Charles discussing music, poetry connections. Olson asked about my work, and I explained I wanted to take painting into real time and lived actions, even using fragments of language. In this context he said, “Remember, when the cunt began to speak [when women were finally allowed to perform], it was the beginning of the end of Greek theatre”—he meant the introduction of the actual feminine onto the Greek stage became a distraction and weakened the pure concepts of language and mythology. . . . “The feminine shifts the scale away from abstraction to emotion.”

At that moment I considered that I must belong to the realm of “cunts”—about to enter my culture in motion and speaking. Was there something I would destroy?*

* Though my memory is correct, ambiguities surround Olson’s statement because, as I would later discover, the exclusion of women in Greek culture was rigidly determined. “Even if some women did attend performances, this would not alter the fact that tragedy was essentially a man’s affair. Men wrote, staged, and acted the plays, including the numerous female parts and choruses. . . . There is no stranger spectacle that we can reconstruct from public life in ancient Athens than these day-long gatherings of men in the theatre. . . . On stage, these men impersonated, out of the dimly remembered ancestral past, powerful, fearsome women, driven by superhuman passions” (Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* [New York: Harper and Row, 1985]).



Four Fur Cutting Boards, 1963.
Studio-loft environment (reconstruction), 1997.
Photo: David Sundberg.

EYE BODY: 36 TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

1963

In 1962 I began a loft environment built of large panels interlocked by rhythmic color units, broken mirrors and glass, lights, moving umbrellas, and motorized parts. I worked with my whole body—the scale of the panels incorporating my own physical scale. I then decided I wanted my actual body to be combined with the work as an integral material—a further dimension of the construction.

In December 1963 I was encouraged by my friend Erró (the Icelandic, Paris-based painter) when I told him I wanted to do a series based on physical transformation of my body in my work—the constructions and wall environment. I considered that the ritual aspect of the process might put me in a trancelike state, which would heighten the submission of self into materials.

Covered in paint, grease, chalk, ropes, plastic, I established my body as visual territory. Not only am I an image-maker, but I explore the image values of flesh as material I choose to work with. The body may remain erotic, sexual, desired, desiring, and yet still be votive—marked and written over in a text of stroke and gesture discovered by my creative female will.

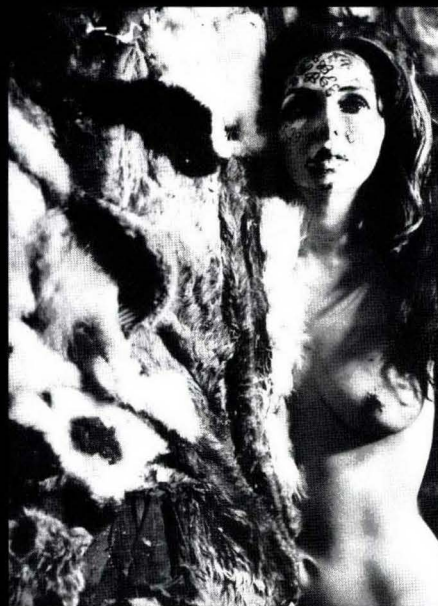
I wrote “my creative female will” because for years my most audacious works were viewed as if someone else inhabiting me had created them. They were considered “masculine,” owing to their aggression and boldness, as if I were inhabited by a stray male principle. An interesting possibility, except that in the early sixties this notion was used to blot out, denigrate, and deflect the coherence, necessity, and personal integrity of what I made and how it was made.

Using my body as an extension of my painting-constructions challenged and threatened the psychic territorial power lines by which women, in 1963, were admitted to the Art Stud Club, so long as they behaved enough like the men, and did work clearly in the traditions and pathways hacked out by the men. (The only artist I know of making body art before this time was Yoko Ono.)

The nude was being used in early happenings as an object (often an “active” object). I was using the nude as myself—the artist—and as a primal, archaic force which could unify

energies I discovered as visual information. I felt compelled to “conceive” of my body in manifold aspects which had eluded the culture around me. Eight years later the implications of the body images I had explored would be clarified when studying sacred Earth Goddess artifacts from four thousand years ago.

Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions, 1963. Studio-loft environment, comprising painting constructions (*Four Fur Cutting Boards, Gift Science, Music Box Music, Ice Box, Glass Hat Stands, December Remembered, Maximus at Gloucester, Fire Lights, Fur Landscape, Colorado House*), works-in-progress, collage materials including motorized umbrellas, piles of fur, paint, shattered glass, transparent plastic, live garter snakes, cow skull, plaster-covered dress form, assorted detritus, and tools. Approximately 36 x 40 x 10 feet.



Installations

Artist Studio, New York, “Mink Paws Terret” (1963).

MAX, Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna (1998).

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, “Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979” (1999).

Museau d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona (1999).

Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (1999).

Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna (1999).



Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions for Camera, 1963.

Photos: Erró.



Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions for Camera, 1963.

Photos: Erró.





Meat Joy, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Peter Moore.

MEAT JOY

1964

Meat Joy developed from dream sensation images gathered in journals stretching back to 1960. By February 1964, more elaborate drawings and notes accumulated as scraps of paper, on the wall over my bed, in tablets. I'd been concentrating on the possibility of capturing interactions between physical/metabolic changes, dream content, and my sensory orientation upon and after waking: an attempt to view paths between conscious and unconscious organization of image, pun, double entendre, masking, and the release of random memory fragments (often well-defined sounds, instructions, light, textures, weather, places from the past, solutions to problems). Because the transition between dream and waking, envisioning and practical function, became so attenuated, it was often difficult to leave the loft for my job or errands. My body streamed with currents of imagery: the interior directives varied from furtive to persistent, either veiling or so intensely illuminating ordinary situations that I continually felt dissolved, exploded, permeated by objects, events, persons outside of the studio, the one place where my concentration could be complete.

The drawings of movement, and notations on relations of color, light, sound, and language fragments, demanded organization, enactment, and that I be able to sustain the connection to this imagery for an extended time—through the search for space, performers, funds, painstaking rehearsals, and the complexities of production down to the smallest details—all to achieve a fluid, unpredictable performance.

Meat Joy has the character of an erotic rite: excessive, indulgent; a celebration of flesh as material: raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, rope, brushes, paper scrap. Its propulsion is toward the ecstatic, shifting and turning between tenderness, wildness, precision, abandon—qualities that could at any moment be sensual, comic, joyous, repellent. Physical equivalences are enacted as a psychic and imagistic stream in which the layered elements mesh and gain intensity by the energy complement of the audience. (They were seated on the floor as close to the performance area as possible, encircling, resonating.) Our proximity heightened the sense of communality, transgressing the polarity between performer and audience.

In precisely determined patterns, vertical, diagonal, and horizontal shafts of movement and lighting cut through the overall circular structures of *Meat Joy*. The popular songs occurring throughout most sequences are “circular” in their thematic and rhythmic three-minute

disc-spun durations, and they introduce a literal, istoric time—popular “ritual” sound centering the sensory flow. Tapes of Paris street sounds were superimposed: the cries and clamorings of rue de Seine vendors selling fish, chickens, vegetables, and flowers beneath the hotel window where I first composed the actual performance score. These shouts dominate a layering of traffic noise and displace the songs’ recognizable continuity, interfering with their associative range.

Certain parameters of the piece function consistently. Sequence, lights, sound, materials—these were planned and coordinated in rehearsal. Other components vary with each performance. Attitude, gesture, phrasing, duration, relationship between performers (and between performers and objects) became loosely structured in rehearsal and were expected to evolve. For instance, “The Paint Attack” was rehearsed as a *projective* exercise with brushes and dry sponges: the actual paint, fish, chickens, hot dogs introduced during performance came as a visceral shock.

Lighting is keyed to the larger rhythms of the work—sound and action—by washes and sudden concentrations of strong illumination on energy clusters. Here again, within certain determined bounds (I knew when I needed, for example, “a muddy light in a pool over there which turns to diffuse gold” or in another place, “something blue and wet-looking with a blast of green”) the lighting and sound technicians were free to improvise. They followed formal cues but had to be able to make choices relating to energy shifts of both performers and audience. Four blackouts were used to compact or shatter sequences, to insert a *blank* in which perception is halted and the imagery settles into the mind.

As the audience enters, the tape of “Notes as Prologue” begins: a collage of my voice reading the written notes formative to *Meat Joy* (so that the work is verbally revealed before it begins, including discarded unrealizable imagery), beginning French exercises (from a book titled *Look and Learn* and a dictionary), a ticking clock, and the noises of the rue de Seine.

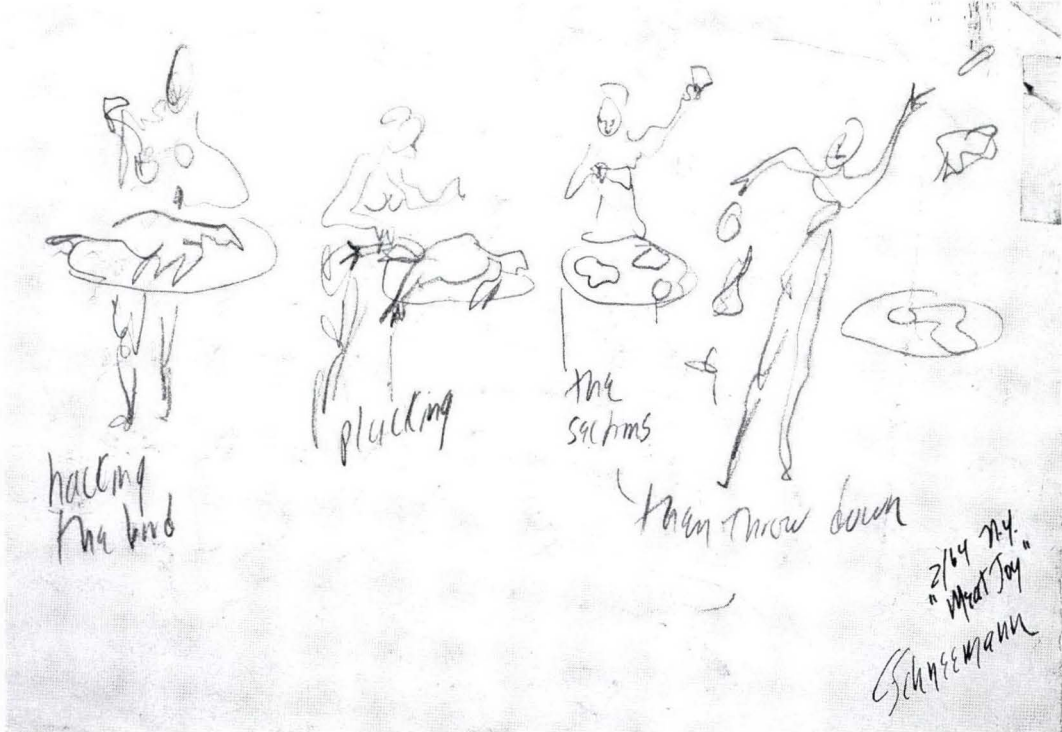
Meat Joy, 1964. Performance: raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, plastic, rope, paper scrap, 60–80 minutes.

Performances

Festival de la Libre Expression, Paris (May 29, 1964).

Dennison Hall, London (June 8, 1964).

Judson Church, New York (November 16-18, 1964).



Drawings for *Meat Joy*, 1963.

Pencil on paper. 9 x 12 in.

Collection of Gilbert and Lila Silverman.



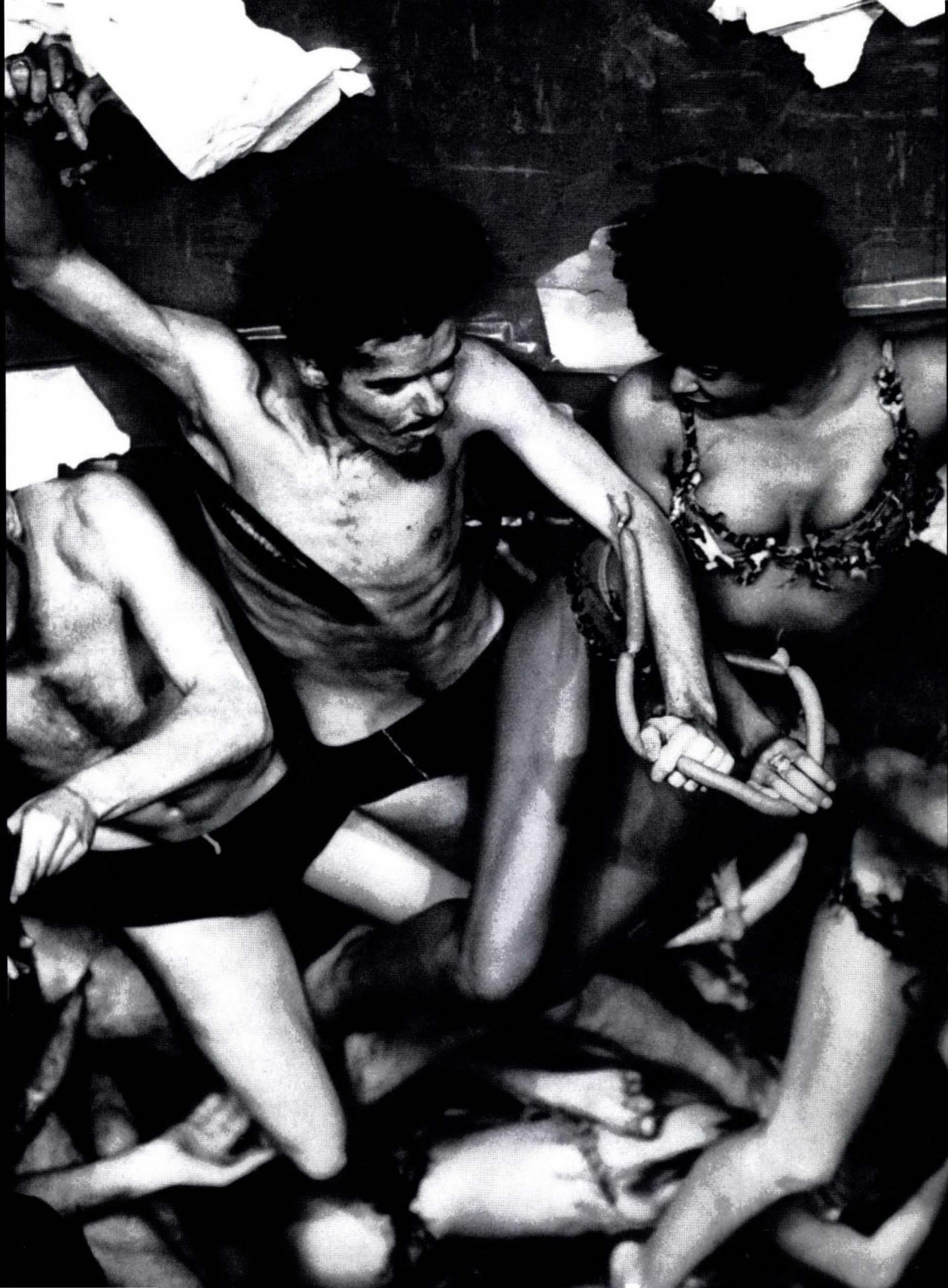


Meat Joy, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photos: Harvey Zucker.



▲ **Meat Joy**, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Tony Ray-Jones.

► **Meat Joy**, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Al Giese.







Meat Joy, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photos: Harvey Zucker.





◀ **Meat Joy**, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Harvey Zucker.

▲ **Meat Joy**, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Al Giese.



Meat Joy, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Robert McElroy.



Meat Joy, 1964.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Arman.



SNOWS

1967

Snows was built out of my anger, outrage, fury, and sorrow for the Vietnamese. The performance contained five films, *Red News*, *Bavarian Sports*, *Travel Diary #1*, *Travel Diary #2*, and *Viet-Flakes*, whose related content triggered juxtapositions of a winter environment and Vietnam atrocity images. Of the films, *Viet-Flakes* formed the heart and core of the piece, a source of confirmation and insistence from which movement and related imagery spilled onto the “snow-bound” audience.

As in *Ghost Rev*, I wanted to integrate film and performance, while emphasizing film’s contrasting visual *language*—handled as tactile, palpable material. I saw film as a conveyance—a passage of realistic imagery—a powerful spark to memory. But film interested me also as a textural and structural element extending the visual densities of the kinetic theatre works.

With film I could introduce literal information in rhythms spread spatially through performed movement sequences—the tension of live and celluloid “frames” of action. I didn’t want to insert film as subordinate image concentration; nor did I want image juxtapositions apart from the overall spatial texture. Each element (movement, film, lights, sound) was created to hold its defining edge and to merge with surrounding units.

Each film spilled out of its fixed frame, projected onto surfaces throughout the theater, to encapsulate as much physical stretch and shift as the performers themselves. It was as if film could be projected back into/onto film, a collision and absorption of images, like the collisions of our bodies falling together, spiraling apart. Dual projectors swung 360 degrees across space. The structural intervals and gradations of light and darkness, the paper-layered walls, the water-lenses and revolving-light sculpture, the performance movement, the highly visible technicians: each element was drawn into a vortex of increasingly disturbing energy.

I prefer my work process to be as exposed as possible, while equally disguising the motivating source, the “textual” content. Had I told the performers that *Snows* would be a work based on Vietnam atrocity images, they would have assumed a particular method and attitude. Unaware of the central metaphor, the performers created movements that could evolve with spontaneity, suspense, immediacy, both directly and indirectly, from the related films and tapes. The cultural discrepancies were constantly in mind: our inability to act directly on

a situation where we humanly wanted to intervene, to make a difference. The evidence of the personal experiences of the Vietnamese was reaching us at a great remove, through reproduced photographs—the situation depicted in a twilight zone between its unknown outcome and the ambivalent role played by the photographer (whose life was also threatened) “taking pictures” as people burnt, bled, fled, and were tortured.

With one exception, none of us was formally trained in theatre or dance. We discovered the nature of our work together by experiencing and creating it. Although sequences were fixed, durations were determined in performance: light cues for partnered actions and group convergences were always varied, made unpredictable by the audience-activated electronic systems.

We were actually frightened in *Snows*. The experience was all-enveloping, making us aware of the audience as an extension of ourselves, but not of ourselves in self-conscious presentation. Walking the planks was dangerous, and the central imagery of *Viet-Flakes*, once fully apparent as dire and agonizing, confounded our own pleasurable expectations and collaborations within the glistening white environment.

The film *Viet-Flakes* had been made a year earlier with Vietnam photographs clipped from papers and magazines over a six-year period. I used a close-up lens and magnifying glasses to “travel” within the photographs, giving the effect of rough animation. Broken rhythms trail the in-and-out-of-focus movement as abstract motions and shapes converge into the terrified frozen expression of people burning, drowning, dragged; pointillistic black specks when brought into sharper focus become a rain of bombs; the blurred faces of American soldiers leading girls from a shadowed hiding place decompose into a montage of a Rembrandt ink drawing eclipsed by a house going up in flames.

Snows begins with a five-minute 1947 silent newsreel of one catastrophe after another. I found this film by “closed-eye vision”; that is, I stood in front of a rack of remaindered 16 mm newsreels in a camera store, waiting for some impulse to guide my hand to a packet which seemed to “speak.” Projected at home, the film justified my “blind faith.” The newsreel opens with a ship exploding; next comes a scene of tiny figures massed in a riot; then more tiny figures, these red Chinese being shot by a battalion of national guard; then it cuts to the Pope blessing surging crowds, followed by more “newsworthy” events: a volcanic eruption in Bolivia; peasants running through a broken landscape; an American Legion parade in Philadelphia in a snowstorm; an automobile race; car crashes; more explosions. I discovered, amazingly enough, that I’d already used an image from this very same newsreel in *Viet-Flakes*, having found it in an obscure book.

During the early sequences of actions, our figures are washed over by two films from swivel-head 16 mm projectors. The two projectionists also sweep the films—of Bavarian winter sports made during World War II—across the theater beyond the edge of the performance area. Later, an 8 mm color film is projected on the torsos of the three women leaning against the white “moon” disk. Images from a winter diary I’d shot flash over us: the neighborhood of my loft, the Martinique Theater, Gimbels, Greeley Square Park in a blizzard, the whitened city outside while driving on Riverside Drive into the night, and country landscape.

James Tenney composed the sound collage for *Viet-Flakes* by breaking music sources we selected into sound fragments so small they became recognizable only cumulatively, in time: Mozart’s *Piano Concerto No. 20*, Bach’s *Cantata No. 78 (Aria Duetto)*, a Bach *Partita*; Alleluia from Bach’s *Christmas Cantata*, the Beatles’ “We Can Work It Out,” Jackie de Shannon’s “What the World Needs Now,” Question Mark and the Mysterians’ “96 Tears,” Vietnamese folksong, Laotian love song, south Chinese folksong.

The other tape used in *Snows* is a collage of trains shunting, whistling, moving in and out of an Illinois depot, overlaid and juxtaposed with sounds of orgasm (gathered on a reel-to-reel tape deck Tenney and I kept by our bed for this work).

The audience has been led into the theater through the backstage door. In the dark they squeeze through two floor-to-ceiling foam rubber “mouths.” Already disconcerted, they must then crawl over and under two long silver planks which stretch from the stage to the rear wall across aisles and over the seats. Technicians rest on these planks—either assisting the audience or not. The performers, wearing gray shirts and work pants, are squatting in a circle.

The Red-Newsreel begins. Train Orgasm sound-collage. A woman sweeps snow debris along the stage. The performers watch the film. They disappear behind the water-lens.

The light machine flickers dimly. Silhouettes of the performers appear as shifting shadows behind the water-lens construction. The performers creep or fall through empty apertures and begin a slow animal-intense crawl toward the audience with some moving onto the planks. They then turn back into the center of the stage to form a tangled knot as they crawl in, through, and around one another’s bodies.

Blue floor lights. Snow Speed and Winter Sports are projected across the ceiling, then center on side walls at varying levels.



▲ **Viet-Flakes**, 1966.
16 mm film still.

▶ **Snows**, 1967.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Charlotte Victoria.



Performers slowly move apart, crouching, staring at one another to begin *Grabs & Falls*. Bodies thunder onto the stage, colliding instantly with each other: a giving over of weight and impulse upon impact.

An unspecified series of alternating encounters occur: a man, about to perform a *grab* with a woman, instead lifts her. Two men stand, leaving their partners where they have fallen in "snow," foil, and foam rubber debris.

Passing Woman: in clumsy walks and holds, the men pass and carry a body, finally placing it on the white horizontal disk.

The remaining two women are passed between the men until all are seated on the disk. *Creation of Faces* begins.

Black Out. Strobe begins. T & O tape.

The preceding sequence determines the pairings-off of the performers who now begin covering each other's faces with white clown's paint. Each partner silently responds to the other in a series of exchanges until both faces are covered. Then one partner begins to shape the other's face, which takes on whatever aspect is pushed and prodded into the musculature. This transformation induces a corresponding but unpredictable emotion. The created face turns toward the audience in blind focus until the muscles relax, the expression fades.

Simultaneous overlappings of faces among the six are caught in the *flashing strobe*.

Unspecified series of face creations. One person will begin to move another (not necessarily the face partner) into *Body Sculpture*.

The audience shifts and settles, triggering the lights overhead which slowly brighten. *T & O tape. Films.*

Initially the men shape the women, who accept and hold whatever position they are given. Suddenly one of the women being sculpted will grasp the hand shaping her; the shaper freezes his action and becomes the one to be sculpted.

Body sculptures shift between partners as the men center the women on the white disk; they are gradually sculpted onto the floor. Here they hold the position, immobile, fading into shadows.

The white disk is raised vertically. The women disentangle to prop themselves against this circle. *Color film* shot earlier of a snowstorm outside the theater is projected against their torsos. Lying on the stage, one of the men watches the film; the other two climb onto the water lens. From behind the water lens, "snow" flurries down over the women, who sink into a whitening heap.

The sculpture lights flicker sharply as audience motions are monitored on the SCR system. *Then flashing blue side lights.* Scrambling across the floor, two performers fall and roll, choosing to be the "body balls"; of the four remaining, two become the "pushers"; while other two are "watchers." The *Body Ball* is pushed, rolled, and shoved in an uncertain journey by the Pusher. No hands can be used, only body parts.

Crawl & Capture: body balls become "victims"; watchers become "pursuers"; pushers become "interference."

Flat on the floor the Victim crawls to escape the "pursuer" as the "interference" hangs onto the "pursuer's" ankles. When the "pursuer" catches the "victim," "interference" shifts position to grab from the other end: a tug-of-war. (Usually, each victim will gather enough force to leap from the clutches of both tormentors: the leap and cry arrests the action of the other two in midmotion.) Audience reaction triggers *sudden flashes of blue floor lights* through the SCR.

"Victim" instantly chooses between "pursuer" and "interference," with the one chosen becoming the "dragged body" (circular dragging ending in the body being hung from a looped rope by the wrists). Gathering foil, a team completely covers the first body hanged; the second team covers the second body.

These foil bodies become the two "silver walkers." Two of the remaining performers become separate "cocoon"; the other two, wrapped together, form a double "cocoon." The clinging pods fall together.

The fallen "cocoon" slowly, slowly twist from their silver wrappings without using their hands. *Silence*, except for the crackling foil. The "silver walkers," nearly blind in their wrappings, walk out onto the planks into the audience area; projectionists with blue flash lights guide them. The planks are slippery and slope upward. The walkers, silver arms extended, precariously make their way to the end of each plank and sink into a sitting position.

The freed "cocoon" become "rescuers."

***Viet-Flakes* is projected onto the white disk. A rescuer crawls up the plank and drags a walker back down to the performance area.**

"Walkers" are corpselike, barely being able to move. Freed "cocoon" wait prone at the end of the planks to assist the rescues. Desperate struggle, clumsy haste: a collapsing pile. The film projection covers, shadows the shapes moving in the animal pile under the white moon disk. The snow from the snow machine falls on it, covering the eyes and ears of the performers.

Violence is not always destructive. Destructiveness is essential to creation. *Snows's* imagery is, finally, ambiguous; performers shift between being aggressor and victim, torturer and tortured, lover and beloved. We set each other on fire and extinguish the fire. We create and destroy each other's face and body. We abandon each other and save each other. We take and lose responsibility for each other. We bury and reveal each other. We activate and respond. We choose our actions, but someone else prevents our actions. We build and are wiped out finally at the end.

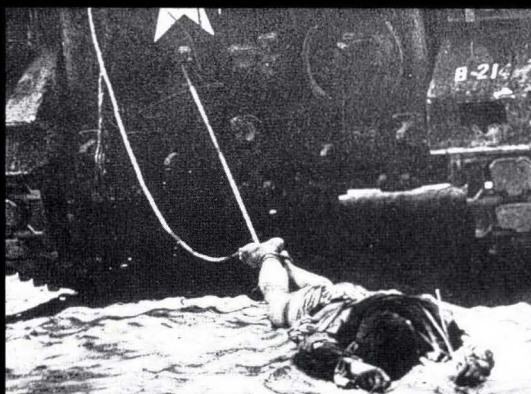
***Snows*, 1967. Kinetic theatre for 6 performers on an apron stage. Installation: revolving light sculpture above 20 x 15 x 4 foot rear wall construction in an open grid filled with plastic sacks containing colored water. 20 x 30 x 6 foot floor-to-ceiling collage of torn white paper. 75 white branches hung in semicircle from stage curtain rod. Manila rope, 2 bales of pink plastic foam, 2 silver planks, floor lights. Floor covering: plastic sheeting over silver foil. 4 contact microphones under stage floor. 30 contact microphones placed randomly under theatre seats. 5 films, 3 16 mm film projectors, 3 sound tapes, 5 speakers, SCR switching system.**

Cast

Shigeko Kubota
 Tyrone Mitchell
 Phoebe Neville
 Carolee Schneemann
 James Tenney
 Peter Watts

Performances

Martinique Theater, New York (January 21-22, 27-29; February 3-5, 1967). Presented as part of "Angry Arts Week/Artists against the Vietnam War." Technical assistance from the Foundation for Experiments in Art and Technology, and Bell Telephone Laboratories.



Viet-Flakes, 1966.
 16 mm film still.



Snows, 1967.
 Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Herbert Migdoll.



▲ **Snows, 1967.**
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Herbert Migdoll.

▶ **Snows, 1967.**
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Herbert Migdoll.



Robert C. Morgan

Carolee Schneemann's *Viet-Flakes* (1965)

In December 1990, Carolee Schneemann showed her film *Viet-Flakes* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. . . . *Viet-Flakes* is a film shot out of necessity. It is a film that is theatrical, even though all the actors are the subjects already taken in news media photographs. . . . Given the year 1965, *Viet-Flakes* was made before the war in Southeast Asia had become what we know today as “the Vietnam War.” The effect of the United States military in this area of the world had not as yet achieved popular currency or understanding at home. The antiwar marches and frequent demonstrations, so often identified with this war, were just beginning to occur. The focus, at the time, was on civil rights. It was a moment in recent history when attention to domestic issues were absorbed into the international spotlight. . . .

In Schneemann's film, the formalist issues of the sixties seem utterly out of sync with the more pressing concerns of world events. The desire to construct an ideological position outside of formalism was implicit, to be sure, but more to the point was the real-time, real-world issues that Schneemann wanted to address. *Viet-Flakes* is a strange title for a film packed with some horror and reverberations of inhumanity. There is little relief from the intensity and shock of her media explication. It is a film that deconstructs as much as it establishes an ideological position that contradicts the normative power structure both in art and in government at the time. . . . Schneemann realized that the modest means of working with a kinetic medium could have an audience, and therefore express an idea that far exceeded the stasis of painting. Yet she used film in a way that reiterated her own subjective desire for painting as theater. . . .

The pop irony in the title *Viet-Flakes* suggests an absurd relationship in the clash between American popular culture and the devastation and horrors being produced in the jungles of Southeast Asia. In that the subject matter of her film is based entirely on the optical inspection and scanning of media photographs describing various wartime atrocities, one may find the absurd connotation of the film's title paradoxical . . . in that one feels the symbolic impact of the news media in the United States as one might adapt to Corn Flakes for breakfast. It is like an ideograph made of two opposing elements, an oxymoron, in which Corn Flakes and Vietnam can be synthesized by the media as “Viet-Flakes”—ready to eat, ready to absorb, but never to reflect upon the language of the media or to agree on the complexity of the situation in which war is being waged. *Viet-Flakes* is an exegesis on wartime reportage and the desire to understand its fundamental cause and effect relationship. Schneemann was able to retrieve photographs from the Liberation News Service before they appeared in American newspapers and magazines.¹ The gruesome subject mat-

ter of these images which revealed scenes of torture, executions, and the contorted faces and bodies of the wartime dead, was at the time unknown to the American public. The *effects* of the war—the human toll—were unknown. Only statistics and numbers were reported as fact. More often than not these statistics were either misleading or inaccurate. Schneemann felt that the Vietnam War was a clandestine war being fought without the full knowledge of the American people. She has recounted the fact that it was being kept a secret as if it was not actually happening. . . . Once she had gathered over sixty photographs together, Schneemann placed them in a triple arc in front of her on the floor so that she could easily reach with her Bolex and scan the images in various integral connections. She would use repetition, inversions, and permutations of the selected images in order to construct a dramatic event, almost as if she were directing characters on stage. The dramatic intensity of *Viet-Flakes* is considerable. It is one of the most startling features of this 11-minute film. The entire sequence of effects, however, was done with the camera, moving in and out of the photographs, deliberately blurring them, not allowing the optical gaze of the viewer to fully capture their effect or their content.

Schneemann's collaboration with composer James Tenney was a necessary and significant part of *Viet-Flakes* in that the soundtrack aided and abetted the visual effects. . . . [The] bricolage of structural effects in sound gave an eerie atmosphere to the images that is difficult to articulate. The formal linkage between the soundtrack by Tenney and Schneemann's readymade photos places the viewer always on the verge of recognition. The fact that recognition of the image or the sound bite is never completely resolved, but instead dissolved, is a perennial condition of the film's experience. . . .

What is impressive . . . is how well *Viet-Flakes* holds up today as an independent film, a deconstruction, in fact, of the news media, especially of wartime reportage. One reason for this staying power, other than the topical relationship the film has to the present situation in the Persian Gulf, is its dramaturgical component. *Viet-Flakes* is not merely a documentary based on a series of documentary fragments (are not documents always fragmentary to such a context?), but the manner in which Schneemann constructs a sense of the tragic dimensions of the war at a time when the true impact of the Vietnam War was scarcely understood. In her own way, using the medium of film as a plastic medium to make a metadocument of the war, Schneemann manages to give the viewer a sense of the dimension of these atrocities, to put the war in a human perspective, to go directly to the source of the tragedy in the way that the great Greek dramatists were able to offer this impact so convincingly. Schneemann's irony, mixed with tragedy, offers a vision of the absurd; hence "Viet-Flakes"—the synthesis of American pop and Southeast Asia. . . . [Yet] the tragedy is so real that one suspects oneself of having seen it someplace before, somewhere out of touch with conscious memory.

January 22, 1991. The war in the Persian Gulf started a week ago. The primary tactic thus far has been “surgical bombing”—the exact placement of a missile, one that is capable of descending into an air shaft to do its damage. This would be in contrast to “saturation bombing” which is what the American forces used in Vietnam and Cambodia. In the earlier war, the bombs were not so precise. This war has become more high tech, more accurate, more electronic. Remote control. The causes are studied and rehearsed but the effects are uncertain; that is, the real effects, the effects that wear a human face, the effects contained within human minds and bodies, the interactive effects, the global effects. No effects are certain. The tragedy is yet to unfold. Seeing *Viet-Flakes* again today is a bold reminder that for every action there is a reaction. Schneemann seems to suggest that this is not only a physical law but a metaphysical concern as well. In wartime, the spirit suffers through neglect and denial. Wholeness is sacrificed for fragmentation, more documents, more pans and repetitions of another tragedy, the same tragedy, where only the resistance of the eye can secure itself—a bodily action, a mediated response. Once again, the body holds out for resistance against the “truth.”

Notes

A longer version of this essay was published in *After the Deluge: Essays on Art in the Nineties*, edited by Jay Murphy (New York: Red Bass Publications, 1993), pp. 36-40.

- 1 All facts about the making of the film were obtained from xeroxed statements given to me by the artist or in various conversations since my initial viewing of the film in April 1989 at the Anthology Film Archives.

Snows, 1967.
Kinetic theatre.
Photo: Herbert Migdoll.



SOLANAS IN A SEA OF MEN

Andy Warhol was an enchanting magician-vampire who sucked and suckled expressivities into an unpredictable community. Andy's creativity thrived on aspiring artists who flocked to the Factory to become fluctuating stars in his constellation. The Factory, always in production, stirred up drug-induced inspirations, unexpected materials, meticulously crafted experiments; someone was always on the phone arranging exhibits, traveling shows, drug deals, art-supply deliveries, film shoots, and presentations. It was exciting to enter the state of simultaneous projects; cans of paint lined the floor; silkscreens being squeegeed; aromas of paint, ink, and cigarette and marijuana smoke enveloped the artists concentrating with brush, roller, camera, hammer, ladder. At the same time, the Factory played host to visiting luminaries, organizing parties for artists, musicians, socialites, and absorbing the presence of people off the street dropping in. Valerie Solanas arrived as a skewed correlative: no one paid much attention to her, but she would fracture Warhol's productivity with a trajectory of bullets: she'd got *him* in *her* viewfinder.

For Solanas, Warhol's Factory was the counterculture in action. This was the wildest outlaw aesthetic group around, and she wanted in! Andy cast Valerie to play herself in his film *I A MAN*. Was she just more living material of use in a film project? She had been pestering him to read her *S.C.U.M.* manuscript, which had, in fact, disappeared. She would finally force Andy to confront her dislocated power—for an endless moment—by shooting into him with real bullets from a real gun. She would project back into him the impact of the exclusion she experienced—his Saturnalian universe: vivid, relentlessly phallo-centric. If her words couldn't get her in, her bullets would.

Andy positioned himself at the center of a male confidence game which declared aesthetic seductions as the stakes. For me, he exemplified the tradition of the court painter, the artist within a glamorous nexus. Warhol's connections pooled people from across the political spectrum—radical to reactionary. His revelatory mirrorings became particularly transcendent if one glimpsed the uncanny mix of entrepreneurs, celebrities, collectors, curators, and tax accountants investing in his work—a unique meltdown of U.S.A. boundaries—entertainment, museums, armaments, fashion, publishing. Astronomical financial rewards fueled his inventive production, extended the scale of his mirrorings. (His was the mirror Solanas stared into, hypnotized by silver-reflecting surfaces.) Another mirroring surface trembled between a depictive cowboy gun from the Elvis silkscreen and the gun Solanas used to

shoot Warhol's own fleshed "screen." I myself was a tame witness, a sometimes image imprinted in Andy's celluloid collection. Within the density of filming and transient capture of community, I would never have imagined Valerie's attempt to murder him.

S.C.U.M. Manifesto exploded particular gender contradictions on which society in 1968 uneasily relied. Solanas's manifesto anticipated and contributed to the acceleration of issues that would carry feminist theory and practice into our present moment. In the introduction to *S.C.U.M.*, publisher Maurice Girodias expressed his doubts regarding Solanas's belief in her own capacity for violence and phallicizes her attack, as if the masculine gun assumed intentionality. An aura of disbelief is evident as Girodias describes his interpolation of the event :

She could not possibly have convinced herself that she was able to carry out the greatest *genocide* in the history of *mankind* single-handed. (*S.C.U.M.*, Publisher's Preface).

Girodias situates this singular act within "the history of *mankind*." A woman shot Warhol. Hey, how many times do we have to shoot you before we even get a feminine pronoun? Then Girodias adds:

And to miss her first man. And to humbly surrender four hours later, of her own volition, to a (male) traffic cop in the middle of Times Square! . . .

Solanas shot at/into the phallocracy Warhol literalized—affronts and deformations by which patriarchy had shaped her; she was the castrator now, taking aim. But during this prefeminist era, several assaults had already opened fissures in the patriarchal hegemony. At the Factory, gay aesthetics and explicit sexuality began to dislodge, to abrade the traditional male-heterosexual art hero—hard-drinking, hard-fucking. Male artists had had to defend themselves against the persistent U.S. work ethic which fantasized that they were all really pansies dabbling a paint brush—fags, unable to do a real day's work or accomplish a real man's work:

Although he wants to be an individual, the male is scared of anything in himself that is the slightest bit different from other men; it causes him to suspect he's not really a "Man," that he's passive and totally sexual, a highly upsetting suspicion. (*S.C.U.M.*)

Within the conflation of artist-homo, Warhol's Factory might have suggested the possibility for radical female participation, an equity of outlaws. My friends in the Factory were beautiful women playing out Andy's version of the feminine. Someone as strong-willed and expressive as Viva could not easily be overprinted, replaced by a boy's body in a yellow wig resembling her own shock of hair. Edie Sedgwick, National Velvet, they floated and vitalized his filmy waters—sumptuous, real-life dolls:

Completely egocentric, unable to relate, empathize or identify, and filled with a vast, pervasive, diffuse sexuality, the male is psychically passive. He hates his passivity, so he projects it onto women. (S.C.U.M.)

When I looked for a corresponding association of distinguished women artists, I found none in 1968. I saw that women artists either had male artist-partners or were, less exclusively, constellated at the edges of one or another group of male artists:

To be sure he's a Man, the male must see to it that the female be clearly a "Woman," the opposite of a "Man," that is, the female must act like a faggot. And Daddy's Girl, all of whose female instincts were wrenched out of her when little, easily and obligingly adapts herself to the role. (S.C.U.M.)

Solanas gave Warhol the manuscript of her play *Up Your Ass*, which she was convinced Andy would want to film. He lost the manuscript. Why would Warhol have paid any attention to an annoying, disruptive, unwashed female? She was a pest, not on the productive team; what use had he for an ugly nag, even less seductive than a transvestite? While, for Valerie, Andy was a weird fag directing an aesthetic adventure which excluded her! She shot into Warhol as pop American visionary—she shot into this fabulation of appreciations. Warhol had become all that smothers the resistant feminine (I've got to kill it. I've got to put the stake through its heart before it devours everything in sight.):

Women, in other words, don't have penis envy; men have pussy envy. (S.C.U.M.)

What is Andy's relation to the feminine? Being gay, the female genital held an aversion—he certainly did not want to kiss suck penetrate fuck ejaculate in a vagina. He did not wish to stroke nuzzle kiss caress a clitoris or breasts. His desire was for young men like himself, a mirror lover in all his richly varied aspects.* Aversion to the female genital is linked to an underlying, compensatory glamorization of female attributes:

* But he was "mated" to his art; most of us considered him to be erotically suppressed—sensual pleasures focused outward through the mediums of photography, film, etc.

The farthest-out male is the drag queen, but he, although different from most men, is exactly like all other drag queens . . . insecure about being sufficiently female, he conforms compulsively to the man-made feminine stereotype, ending up as nothing but a bundle of stilted mannerisms. (*S.C.U.M.*)

These disguises of attraction and repulsion were woven into the social fabric of the Factory. The sensuous malice of the dangerous female body was converted to an erotics of glamour and dazzle—decorations to deflect the interiority of wound, wetness, stain, to deflect the pulsing channel of every birth.

In the Factory, women may have been instigating creative agents, but remained imaged as tarts, pop art icons—the recipients of fetishistic adoration and commodification. The Factory dynamics encapsulated seductive modes of control—feminine images of lived actual experiences were reduced to glamorous referents: surfaces of print, plastic, ink, celluloid. Solanas shot into Warhol's hypermasculine American Disaster silkscreen prints: car crash, electric chair, cowboys, assassinations, hustlers, race riots:

It's not for the kid's sake though that the experts tell women that Momma should stay home and grovel in animalism but for Daddy's: the tit for Daddy half dead to hang onto, the labor pains for Daddy to vicariously groove on. He needs awfully strong stimuli to make him respond. (*S.C.U.M.*)

Monday, June 3, 1968, we woke to wailing sirens alternating with echoing silences, as if the city had been sucked away and spilled back out. A balmy June morning. We lit the hash pipe, turned up Traffic's *Mr. Fantasy*. Our drenched bodies enveloped each in the other. It's the end of our own shape of time. The Black Panthers betrayed, Martin Luther King assassinated, the Weather People in flight, the bombing of North Vietnam. "Robert Kennedy Dead" replaced the headline from the day before: "Warhol Shot Fights for Life."

On these historic margins, *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* was published by Maurice Girodias—infamous entrepreneur of erotica, with a noble history of providing allotments to keep impecunious writers productive. *S.C.U.M.* emerged as the first feminist frontal attack, as the destruction of Vietnam reached a crescendo:

Money matters and prostitution work in prevention of an automated society. There's no human reason for money, or for anyone to work. Everyone can have as much of the best of everything as she wants. (*S.C.U.M.*)



FIG. 62. Testing energy expenditure

TWO LONDON LETTERS

1971

Prick of the Week

Dear Friends,

In my native land there is a growing cult called "The Genital Reverencers," also known as "Fuck Cherishers." These primitive and animalistic people believe fucking is their most rapturous, expressive, and integral act. They believe genitals are mysterious energy sources and are dedicated to respect, and even worship them; they find genitals so compelling or beautiful in all their variations that they are known to make imagery of them, sing about the genitals of a beloved in secret language, and have dreams laden with sexual references! In fact, they imagine the genital function of man and woman embodies some electrical cosmic ecstasy pulse of all organic nature. Perhaps you have heard of this cult?

Due to the pervasive influence of "The Genital Reverencers" I am unable to understand certain of your English customs. Can Friends clarify the following? Gentle Ghost heads a column "Cunt of the Week"—a politician who accepts the starvation of 5,000 people with equanimity.

A couple signal to a cab. It does not stop for them. The man screams after the cab, "You cunt!"

Men and women are watching a sport on television. A player drops a ball. The men yell, "Cunt! Stupid cunt!"

Some men are discussing another man who has betrayed them; they detest him and sum up his character as "An utter cunt."

My questions: is a "cunt" something that makes men angry? or afraid? Does it stand for what they hate? or what betrays them? Do English women call each other "You cunt"? Or do English women scream "You prick!" when the taxi won't stop. Do English men who say "You cunt," caress, stroke, kiss, put their fingers on and in a real cunt?

Sincerely yours,

Cuntalee Snowball

London NW3

From *Friends* (London, February 1971); *Ink* (London, December 3, 1971).

WOMA..., 1970.

Collage on paper. 13 x 9 in.

Missing Gender

Dear INK,

Intrigued to see that the Anti-University has a course on "Poetry as His Master's Voice." Whose master? Who is de master? Does this course exclude female voices? Is it ironical, detailing the facts of men addressing themselves to other men, that our language itself maintains this? Feminine gender is subsumed, occurs by dispensation, is the exception. Would I benefit from this course?

Who am I?

I AM HE WHO

**I AM EVERY ONE WILL DEVELOP HIS
POTENTIAL**

**I AM ONLY MAN CAN TURN THE
TIDE**

**I AM THE DREAMER AND HIS
DREAMS**

**I AM THE GRAND OLD MEN OF
LITERATURE**

**I AM EACH CHILD WILL HOLD UP
HIS HAT**

I AM THE CHOICE IS IN MEN HANDS

I AM ALL MEN UNDER GOD

**I AM THE INDIVIDUAL THROWN ON
HIS OWN**

**I AM ANY PERSON MANY MANIFEST
HIMSELF**

We need a course on "Missing Gender"!

Carolee Schneemann

London NW3

VALIE

London, 1970. Before too long, we all know each other—radical artists, political activists, Vietnam War resisters, CIA “organizers” of alternative art spaces, an underground emergence of young women artists. Valie arrived at my basement flat, corner of Belsize Park Gardens and Belsize Road. Hospitality provisions a budgetary toss-up: something to eat from the greengrocer, the bakery, or a small bag of coal for the tiny gas burning hearth, a flask of scotch whisky, ten Silk Cut. We didn’t require food for our instant rapport; fervid issues of the body to be put at risk, in action; to fracture predictability, aesthetic formalizations, to pull the female body off the art historical walls, out of suppressive idealizations of muse and model. We told each other how we were in risk of losing everything but our art vision: the Austrian government had taken Valie’s child from her, as an unfit mother, and considered her unemployable. I was in exile from my partner, home, job. Both fragile, fierce. Together our purposes were confirmed—the potentiality of the destabilizing powers of the female body in our own hands.

She had arrived from Austria for her action event at the Filmmakers’ Cooperative, then in an abandoned dairy distribution center in Camden Town. A short walk north of the Roundhouse, aromas of soured milk and old cheeses emanated from pale, cracked, tiled walls. Filmmakers had been squatting in the building and set up printing, distribution, and projection areas. The dairy combined atmospheres of flophouse, production center, editing lab, exhibit space, alternative theater, rehearsal hall, and drug den. Valie was going to ayer the floor with windowpane glass, lie down on it naked, crushing it with the movements of her body.

In one dank corner I had mounted a 3/4-inch 12-foot long manila rope from the ceiling: in the light of a filmless projector, I hung a harness, for the prolonged swinging which would guide crayon strokes, marks, color slashing floor, walls, from my extended hand and body.

Lost in time—which of the artists associated with the Dairy would have told Valie that we had to meet? It could have been among the expatriates who found each other in London escaping the endless Vietnam War psychosis of hometown U.S.A.: Barbara Ess, Ann Lauterbach, Susan Hiller, Pamela Zoline . . . the Brits: Dave Curtis, John Hopkins, John Lifton, David Coxhead, Malcolm LeGrice

NOTES FROM FIRST VIEWING A FILM BY DUSAN MAKAVEJEV: W.R. MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM

Organism, n. Organized body with connected, interdependent parts sharing common life, (material structure of) individual animal or plant; whole with interdependent parts compared to living being. (f; see organize, -ism)

Ism n. Any distinctive doctrine or practice.

-ism. suf. forming abstract n. as heroism, barbarism . . . 3) . . . catchword as conservatism, Aryanism, jingoism

Reich, ethos, reign, rich, state, organization (*German*)

Taste of tears tears of rage of joy dear lover dear doctor dear film director dear fool you fool
dear grocer dear dictator daddy hitler friend dear woodsman ice skater fascist murderer
lover—as she says from her severed head “he was a true revolutionary, impatient”

his hands dripping her blood, he dances through the snow, sticky fingers, arms extended,
the end of the opera, the tag line, the melancholy familiar strains pure tenor which we know
so well and never heard before—the folk ballad, the peasant song, the gypsy farewell:
*Give to each what they need—money to the rich, wisdom to the wise . . . but spare a thought
for me.*

(now how sweetly he sings—hadn't he just told her he cannot bear music, it torments his
nerves, he loses himself?)

Slavic soul . . . these tears belong to me . . . to the snow, to the frozen blond doll man
ice skater wooden woodsman hunter mutilator the rigid man whose frozen sexual passion /
orgasm-burst murderous passion was the **ONLY** passion in the tale to equal her saving,
converting, apostolic fury to link sexuality, freedom, expression . . .

he dances thru the snow the white horse walks to greet him, the peasants by the cheery
fireside at the top of the hill her dead head smiles he sings sweetly bereft in bloodshed—as
she said “you can love causes but not one human being”—

Give to each what they need . . . give to . . . the wandering jew . . . a road . . . and please spare a thought for me.

these tears belong to Tuli court-jester alter-ego to Dusan who Fugs sorrow and rage in rusty fatigues toy ack ack gun stalking Lincoln Center Madison Avenue Morgan Guarantee Trust Bank who sings screeches the songs of The Enemy KILLKILLKILL KILL FOR PEACE mocking demystifying breaking arrow jam to flow thru sentimentality anger despair will to change to proselytize to liberalize revolutionize liberate spirits pure bio-cosmic energetic will! WILL! WILLIE!

to haunt the sleep of sheep
worn pasture the release of irony Reich loved Eisenhower yaya! Stalin weeps for her severed head the naked roommate & her faceless lover scrabble frame by frame a mocking fucking

the impossible romantic slob proletariat convert worker bore joker comic lover drunk
"I believe I believe hand it over, let's have it!"

Back in New York Lowen & Pierrakos (his voice & hands) guiding the pulsating, throbbing, strained, flowing, crying, howling, hitting, beating, screaming patients of bio-energetic therapy . . . there is my beautiful friend S! face gnarled in contortions . . . liberating pain that lived in her (was that why she once loved a handsome Swiss count too sophisticated to cut off her head with his skis?)

"Why do you have this terrible picture?" asks the ice skater lover. Protectively Milena holds the photograph of a benign Hitler seated among dozens of rapturous women across her lap . . . Milena replied "there was a moment when something monstrous happened . . . everyone was crying and weeping . . . and he didn't do anything" (raw intuition, the photograph against her torso cutting her in half ice skater wants to understand his murder of her lies in his blank intent blue eyes as the photograph she holds lies in her unconscious)

Makavejev's kaleidoscope twist. The organism, spectrum in its human declensions, hideous dreams—a normal life.

Frame/break/release/image/bridge between conscious and unconscious. Troubled waters . . . thin ice. This parable. Milena as brave and humorless as any dictator.

"Reich"—says the Rangely State Policeman, who used to be his barber—"didn't want his

hair cut like ordinary people . . . sorta up in the air," he says making devils horn gesture.

Back down in New York Jim Buckley's cock being efficiently encouraged in the friendly hand of the plaster caster girlie—image maker! From his red balls and risen cock shot from angle of two cold feet toes curling—cut to parade of communist dignitaries, and the music! That same zither violins Viennese cake waltz with which Makavejev insured we enjoyed the relentless slow panning of red brick stretch walls around Lewisburg (Pa.) penitentiary (penitent—ain't you sorry now?) (in the pen . . . PIGGY) where "Reich died a free man."

What ran free under your hands . . . and dies before our eyes. Yr vision as path make way calcium potassium para-sympathetic streaming warmth free against that withered tree cancer DOR. This film, this framing not the idealization we want to see, not a fair "exposure" (all grainy, pebbled, scratched . . . old funny stuff) of what you revealed. Your wife in the gray green Maine garden knows it all so well she makes no sense, cannot in camera focus compress reality of your work—how it lives in our flesh, our cosmos. She said "we have tried to continue making a life here." Yr son tries to remember what actually happened the day the locals came for you and yr "Commie Orgies." You had a rifle. *Mysteries* is about repression, about damming life-positive energies, about a lunatic struggle for spontaneous warm generous unfearful emotion to take hold, to have reign. It is a howl, a laugh, a shriek, a scream, a song of irony to viscera twisted brain waving overload mad where no ideality takes form as it *should* . . . no mythos, no structure, no cause, no reich . . . floundering, rigidifying, mutilating, compressing, castrating within its own fierce, hapless intent. A film.

The neighbor sheep salute Milena (khaki jacket over mini-nightgown, khaki cap, hair flying, zealot eyes), her fiery imprecations to fulfill the revolution. Free Love! They applaud behind the lines of socks and underwear. They march behind Hitler, behind Stalin, or in madhouse thrashing heaps at weekend Bio-Energetic workshops, they flow in tight patterned ice skater whirl silver pink formations, munch popcorn and fondle each other, sit around a fire in the snow . . . beat their heads against a wall.

Perfect sense this black comedy comes from Yugoslavia. Made in U.S.A. with West German money, technicians.

The drama of murder is more comprehensible to us than the physical dramas which live in our bodies.

Or WHO IS REAL? Dr. Reich? Señor Ice Skater? Mr. Herr Hitler? A Heroine? The Actor Being Stalin? Lenin Being Lenin? Trotsky Being Blasted? Lowen Explaining? Sandra

Screaming? Jackie Licking? Tuli Stalking? Buckley Erecting? Dusan Directing Reeling Cutting Assembling Flowing into his finger tips eye so compelling in itself no one even considers it as a work of Imagination?

Irritation, annoyance, a modest appreciation a bad joke what a betrayal of Reich's theories and practices no mystery to the sex scenes at all there wasn't much to that fucking
**NO KIDDIES HOORAY YOU GUESSED ALL BY YR SELVES THREE STEPS FORWARD
 YOU WANT TO SEE WHAT YOU WANNA SEE SORRY ITS A BLACK BIG DOR DEADLY
 ORGONE RADIATION ILLUMINATION JOKE HOKE HOKEY IF YOU EVER FEEL THAT
 PAIN & WONDER MOVE IF ANYTHING CAN MOVE YOU REALLY FLASH OFF MOVE
 INTO THAT DULL STIFF ANTICIPATORY FLESH BAG YOU CARRY FULL OF FEAR
 SHOCK THE HOKE IS U.S. KIDDIES THE JOKE IS YOU KEEP ON ICE SKATING!**

Well, kiddies that was the true tale and you saw what it's like in easy rider land we dug it eh? well yeh but the real life life was before that for Reich in Rangely, Maine, pure high pine air but then good Austrian air didn't save him either before did it?

not by air alone alone in the penitentiary Harvey Matusow was a few cells away . . . a few cells

and that was funny how Milena and her naked roommate lived in that crazy apartment with neighbors all around all facing the courtyard and they had no privacy but that joke is true joke I saw it myself everybody was killed in 2nd world war but there's still **TOO MANY PEOPLE** and they all live in divisions of great private houses—that's what it was or huge tower dreary apartments still no pavements and the roads in Zagreb all muddy

so Milena keeps eating cakes nicely shares them out courting the russian ice skater lover murderer guest comrade because she feels sweet wants sweetness for her passion her intellectual clarity her hot thighs and sweet little knees and fuzzy hair

she will put herself "in his hands"

she wills to take him in her body

Milena you DUMMY YOU LOOK LIKE A DUMMY!

your convictions risked in your cunt the enemy sets you on fire skating on ice

(even Kafka's Milena . . . how she died in "their" hands)

oh heavy I said when in the movie she's spotting hunger idealized lust to pick that slick man

doll ice skater dear Makavejev doctor how well you knew this creature man his vanity pride rigidity and Milena when he socked you after the kiss couldn't you guess you were victim finding torturer, the conversion was cosmic (as yr severed head told us) as the inspector said "overabundance of seminal fluid" a crime of love a crime of imagination or revolution and as Dr. Ollendorf (the real one on film) said about Reich's work "what if suddenly truly healthy people were released in this world" **WHAT IF The Serbs The Croatians The Montenegrans jammed from without as Yugoslavs having fought each other partisans conspirators, collaborators underground fascists nationalists liberationists communists the Yugoslavs are not what they were intended to be and they know it. The Americans are not what they intended themselves to be and they suffer psychic rupture. Yugoslavs and U.S. energy closest psychic-cultural shock energy unites them—as Dusan knows. Communist control of free energy flow, U.S. within free flow of energy generating fascist controls . . . Hello Cancer!**

What can it mean of range to home that I know everyone in the film except the Yugoslav actors. Didn't I meet Makavejev when I showed *Fuses* at Zagreb's Erotic Film Festival two winters ago? Zooming the roof to Rangely, Maine. In '59 Jim and I "discovered" the writings of Reich. Was *Function of the Orgasm* one of the arcane books I used to find in the mammoth alleys of University of Illinois Library. In mystic hunter grace for somber dusty hours wandering the aisles slowly slowly until I felt an energy pull from the shelves. yes just like that, which is how in '65 I found or was found by the films I needed as media core for kinetic theatre work Vietnam reverie particle fall death *Snows*—then by going to library of out of date 100-foot 16 mm film, stack upon stack closed my eyes, stood quiet until reach to *Winter Sports* circa 1941 Bavarian black and white fat pink faces assembled in ritual thrill as skiers flew thru white on white frame, ice skaters twirled Olympic slice, bobsled shudder speeding down & up high higher. And *Man in Space*, men (and women sure enough) skiing. And *News of the World* Pathé 1949 eight minutes compression of one catastrophe after another; boat sinking, Peruvian village volcanic explosion, the red Chinese guard shooting in slow precision the man, hands tied behind his back blood slow drool coloration under his fallen head, the crowds running specks, cut to Santa Claus American Legion Parade snow fall confetti in Philadelphia Pa., cut to Pope giving blessings raised arms dove bat wings white gown, crowds throwing roses). The books then in Illinois library: how I found Marie Baskirtseff diary, refound Focillon, D'Arcy Thompson *On Growth and Form*.

"Casting" for *Meat Joy* 1964, by watching people in the streets, in restaurants—anywhere and went up to strangers whose physical presence was unself-consciously sensuous, sensitive, integral when I approached these strangers to explain we would come into unpre-

dictable exemplary celebration of flesh and physicality in motion, light sound, many or certainly several had been in Reichian therapies. And I said Reich inspired my work, his writings had been the kick in the pants to my courage, audacity—to make vision concrete.

of course being an artist is a primary way of combining and making contact with things in the world. Artists, lovers and murderers combine with what most moves them

decoration to commemorate to mark to precipitate relatedness cosmic organic displacements the diverted streaming of a rhinestone collar around a poodle's neck, or symmetrical rows of tulips, buttons, silverware, vases, tinsel, holidays, the forgone forlorn fetish but the monster's diversion, grandiose phobia . . . everybody sing

"And the rockets red glare showed our

cock was still there . . . America, America god shed . . ."

inks paper vowels blue green magenta rose yellow

inky line scrap fuzz petals hairy balls shells over walnuts over chestnuts

dry leaves: fresh sticky green leaves clouds which skitter a sneeze, a fart, hiccup—amazing

orgasm for the esophagus and cream and come and snot and blood and shit and tender

necks and callused hands and nails and goose bumps or broken glass a cat singing your

long pink tongue leaving yr mouth and sliding into mine! Hallow commemorate sing praises

or as Kitch does in solitary trance to space, night and the long soft furry throat (not purring)

but sings sings sacred slowly in space of habitation, singing. I wake with tears slicing my

cheeks. Why does this cat sing? What is the meaning of her song?

From Daniel Farson, "Food for the Thoughtful," *Sunday Telegraph* (London, October 1971):

Everyone admires the bee.

They are such wonderful creatures, every bee has the community

at heart. When it stings, the bee dies—for the others.

Only in sultry weather when the bees become irritable does

Brother Adam wear a face mask, though nothing on his hands.

'How often do you get stung?'

'How often do you breathe?' he smiled icily.

London, December 27, 1971



SEXUAL PARAMETERS

London, 1971

Portrait Partials, 1970.
Self-shot photo grid. 48 x 48 in.
Private collection, New York.

Sexual Parameters

This survey represents an attempt to note some main parameters* of lovemaking, exclusively from a woman's point of view. The survey does not meet strict scientific standards; its subjective and impressionistic information presents a range of sexual experience to establish a basis for exemplary erotic expression.

The survey carries practical and far-reaching implications if one accepts the biological need for full erotic intimacy, for unselfconscious sensuous pleasure, free of prohibitions and taboos.

The two charts reproduced here contain answers from forty respondents.†

Number—instead of name

Age—at time of composing chart

Nationality—tendencies of different cultures

Duration of Encounter—acquaintance

Average Frequency—indicates range

Body—Motility, overall bioenergetic indication

Hands—what the women felt, judged: fully active, moderate, etc.

Mouth—"withheld" has sense of conscious reservation; "blocked" is a deeper, less personal sexual trouble.

Genital Size—impressions, we didn't measure!

Genital Charge—probably corresponds to degree of body motility. Assumption that the genital itself expresses unconscious energy.

Genital Movement—active & varied, moderate, slight, brief, etc.

Ejaculation—convulsive, semi-involuntary; slight variations

* **Other parameters not included: Eyes, Desire; Personal Attitude** (hostile, impersonal, withdrawn, warm, loving—all can be appealing to certain women, in certain situations);

Pleasure—joy of differentiation; **Aggression; Self-Involvement; Phallic Projection; Mystery of magnetism**—grace, desire, recognition.

† Many more notes and charts were compiled from this home-grown exploration. These had

Clitoris—Hc. Mc.: hand contact, mouth contact. **To O:** orgasm, separate from vaginal orgasm or combined with it. **Contact** itself not an exemplary indication since it can be linked to aggression/sadism—hurtful, not sensitive. Also what we call “the engineers,” whose foreplay is purposeful but mechanical—things done to us more than with us, absence, of tenderness, streaming. **Broken feedback.**

Vagina—hand contact, mouth contact. O: vaginal orgasm

Anus—Hc., Mc., hand contact, mouth contact. **P:** penetration

Fear—sense that lover was afraid of woman or of sexual abandon.

Sadism—wanting to be sexually hurtful to the partner.

Sleep Contact—constant, close, moderate, slight.

Use of Words—verbal expression during and after lovemaking. Words can be used to deflect, distract from physical sensation or as an intensification, enhancement of the feelings between the couple. The notation here simply indicates range. Many men are verbally shy but free and expressive physically.

Orgasm Sound—expressive, involuntary sounds may depend on the surroundings; people in next room (or same room), unfamiliarity etc.

Impression—characterize overall sexual quality of the man.

Work—profession, employment (his)

SMD OW—single, married, divorced; other woman (at the time)

Physical—generalized note on physical type

Memory—first words in mind remembering sexual interchange

X and Taboo—no contact. Certain men, tender, close as friends, loving to fuck will never touch the genitals with their hand, much less their mouth or tongue. **If I were such a man, afraid of the cunt, before I stuck my precious cock in, I'd certainly risk a finger to see if she really had teeth, ground glass, marbles or slime inside!**

to do with taboo body areas—parts that smell (mouth, feet, belly button, genitals); the face (touching the face to express tenderness, for example); the effect a woman's orgasm has on the man and his own orgasm produces in himself. Further notes refer to mobilization of expression and descriptions and measurements—continuity, intensity, and flow around resistances, such as the man's fear and the woman's response to it.

	Age	Nat.	Duration of encounter	Average frequency	Body	Hands	Mouth	Genital size	Genital charge	Genital movement	Ejaculation
1	32	USA	10 years	5/week	full act. hot	full act.	moderate	large	intense	active, varied	strong
2	33	USA	1 year	3/day	part. act. hot	full act.	full	large	intense	active, varied	strong
3	30s	UK	2 days	4/night	part. act. warm	mod. act.	blocked	average	normal	normal	strong
4	40s	F	days (1)	2/night	part. act. warm	mod. act.	moderate	average	slight	normal, prolonged	strong
5	30	F	friend (1)	2/day	withheld cold	withheld	withheld	average	moderate	swift, brief	moderate
6	40s	SA	days (1)	2/night	withheld cold	clumsy	blocked		dulled	slight	moderate
7	30s		day	1/night	part. act. warm	active	moderate	less average	normal	normal	moderate
8	20s	FR	week	2/night	active warm	active	moderate	average	normal	active	strong
9	20s	FR	days (1)	1/night	withheld cool	moderate	withheld	less average	slight	moderate	moderate
10	30s	UK	week	3/night	part. act. warm	active	active	large	intense	active, varied	moderate
11	30s	USA	friend	2/night	fully act. warm	active	active	average	intense	active, varied	strong
12	30s	USA	acquaintance	1/night	active hot	mod. act.	moderate	average	normal	active, varied	moderate
13	30s	USA	days	1/night	blocked hot	moderate	moderate	average	dulled	slight	moderate
14	30s	USA	day	4/night	active hot	active	active	average	intense	active	strong
15	30s	F	day	2/night	active warm	active	moderate	less average	dulled	slight	moderate
16	30s	USA	acquaintance	2/night	active warm	moderate	moderate	average	normal	moderate	moderate
17	20s	CH	acquaintance	2/night	active warm	moderate	moderate	less average	slight	normal	moderate
18	30s	USA	night	2/night	active warm	active	withheld	average	normal	normal	moderate
19	20s	USA	night	4/night	active hot	active	active	large	normal	active	moderate
20	30s	USA	years	1/night	active cool	moderate	moderate	large	moderate	moderate	moderate

Clitoris	Vagina		Anus	Fear	Sadism	Sleep contact	Use of words		Orgasm sound	Impression	Work	SMD OW	Physical	Memory
	HC MC	O	HC				During	After						
HC MC to O	HC MC	O	HC	no	none	close	slight	some	howl, cry groan, howl	clear love phallic devil king	artist		lithe	a whole life devouring rapture
HC MC to O	HC MC	O	HC MC	yes	some	constant	intense	intense		English reserved sexual technician	laborer	D, OW	tall, solid, fair	
HC MC	X	O	X	yes	none	slight	none	none	moan	repressed violence sexually disturbed	film	S D, OW	tall, thin, fair	companionship
HC MC to O	HC	O	X	yes	none	moderate	none	none		repressed	design	OW	med., solid	lonely
HC MC	X	O	X	yes	repressed	X	none	none	growl		political	S	med., lithe	smoothing over
HC MC	HC	O	X	yes	repressed		none	many	yells		artist	D	med., heavy	oppression
X	X	O	X	yes	none	moderate	some	some	cry	conventional wholesome tender	sports	M	tall, thin, dark	amusing sexual companionship
HC	X	O	X	no	none	usually	some	some	murmur	rapacious aristocrat sensuous	film	M	med., dark	
HC MC to O	HC	O	HC	yes	repressed	X	none	none	grunt	verbal vitality warmth self-	finance	M	small, dark	oppressive
HC MC to O	HC	O	X	no	none	close	intense	intense	cry	contained Catholic damage sensuous vital	film	M	tall, solid, dark	making love
HC	HC	O	X	no	none	close	none	none	exclaim		film	D	small, supple	fucking
taboo	X	O	X	no	none	moderate	none	none	groan		artist	S	tall, thin, fair	moving wildly
HC	X	O	X	yes	none	close	some	some	moan		writer	D	tall, solid, dark	smoothing over
X	X	O	X	no	none	close	some	some	howl		artist	D	small, fair	delight, skin
HC MC to O	HC	O	X	yes	none	moderate	some	some	groan	dull	finance	M	small, dark	vague
HC	X	O	X	yes	none	close	some	some	murmur	constraint	publishing	D	tall, dark	awkward
HC	X	O	X	no	none	moderate	some	some	cry	tenderness	artist	S	tall, thin, fair	shutter
HC MC to O	HC	O	X	no	none	X	some	none				M		none
HC	X	O	X	no	none	constant	some	many	shout	cowboy sensuous, fire	poet	S	small, dark, lithe	delight, body, penis
HC	X	O	X	yes	none	moderate	some	some	moan	conventional	film	D	tall, thin, fair	eyes, buttocks

	Age	Nat.	Duration of encounter	Average frequency	Body	Hands	Mouth	Genital size	Genital charge	Genital movement	Ejaculation
21	29	USA	month	3/night	full act. warm	full act.	full	large	intense	active, varied	strong
22	20s	D	acquaintance acquaintance (1)	2/night	moderate rigid	moderate	moderate	average	moderate	active	moderate
23	30s	USA		1/night	warm withheld	blocked intense blocked	blocked	?	dulled	passive	weak
24	20s	UK	week (1)	1/night	warm full act.		withheld	average	intense	moderate	moderate
25	20s	UK	friend	3/day	hot active	active	full	large	moderate	active	strong
26	20s	YU	day	2/night	hot active	active	full	average	intense	active	moderate
27	20s	YU	1 night	2/night	hot blocked	active	full	average	moderate	moderate	strong
28	30s	UK	1 night	3/night	hot blocked	blocked	blocked	average	dulled	moderate	weak
29		UK	acquaintance (1)	2/night	warm withheld	partial	moderate	less average	dulled	moderate	moderate
30	30	USA	acquaintance (1)	1/night	warm active	partial	moderate	average	dulled	active	strong
31	30s	UK	weeks	2/night	warm active	active	full	unaverage	normal	active	strong
32	29	UK	4 months	3/night	hot partial	active	full	less average	intense	active, varied	strong
33	25	UK	5 months	3/night	sweaty part. act.	intense and blocked	moderate	average	intense	passive & varied	moderate
34	25	UK	months	4/night	warm active	full	moderate	large	normal	varied	strong
35	30s	UK	months	2/night	hot active	full	moderate	large	normal	active, varied	strong
36	27	UK	days	2/night	warm part. act.	full	full	large	intense	active, varied	moderate
37	27	IS	days (1)	2/day	warm full act.	moderate	moderate	less average	slight	moderate	strong
38	26	NL	night	4/night	warm rigid	full active	full	average	intense	active, varied	moderate
39	37	USA	friend (1)	1/night	damp withheld	clumsy	blocked	less average	slight	active	moderate
40	35	UK	neighbor (1)	2/night	warm	withheld	blocked	average	normal	active	moderate

Clitoris	Vagina		Anus	Fear	Sadism	Sleep contact	Use of words During	After	Orgasm sound	Impression	Work	SMD OW	Physical	Memory
HC MC to O	HC	O	HC	no	none	constant	intense	many	howl	health, deep consciousness	adventurer	S	tall, solid, fair	making love magical
X	X	O	X	no	none	slight	none	few	moan	constrained sexuality	finance	M	tall, solid, dark	talking
X	X	X	X	yes	none	X	many	few		damage constraints	psychologist	S	medium	imposed upon
X	X	O	X	yes	none	close	none	many	groan	impulses high	artist	S	tall, thin	fucking warmth pleasure
HC to O	HC	O	X	no	none	close	some	some	groan	sexuality vitality	media	M	tall, dark	
HC	X	O	X	no	none	close	few	some	moan	delight	film	S	tall, thin, fair	morning
X	X	O	X	no	none	close	none	few	cry	mystery strangeness	actor	S	tall, fair	Zagreb chimney
X	X	O	X	yes	repressed	slight	none	none	groan	danger	laborer		med. solid	danger
X	X	O	X	yes	none	X	none	few	groan	flat	architect	D	med. solid	embarrassment
X	X	O	X	yes	none	slight	none	none	murmur	flat	media	S	medium	awkward
HC MC to O	HC	O	X	no	none	moderate	some	some	growl	sensual emot. detached	law	D	solid med.	voice
HC MC to O	HC MC	O	HC	yes	none	close	some	some	cry	intense sexuality	architect	OW	med. solid, fair	making love
X	X	O	X	yes	none	constant	some	some	moan	sensuous vulnerable	artist	D	med. slender, dark	face under the sheets
HC MC to O	HC MC	O	HC	no	none		some	many	"ooooo" moan	sensuous vulnerable	writer	S	tall, solid, dark	
HC MC to O	HC MC	O	HC	yes	none	close	some	some	groan	warmth solidity	design	D	tall, solid, dark	sexual play
HC MC to O	HC MC	O	HC	yes	none	moderate	few	many	exclaims	magical ardent strange	artist	D	fair, slender	making love talking
HC	X	O	X	no	none				moan	flat rigor	information	S	tall, solid, fair	a sweater
HC MC to O	HC MC	O	HC	no	none	constant	none	few	growl	high sexuality	TV	OW	tall, solid, fair	making love
X	HC	O	X	yes	none	slight	some	some	moan	damage violence	finance	S	short, stolid	whiskers
X	HC	O	X	yes	repressed		none	none	grunt	repress. homo.	trucker	S	tall, solid	attractive face

IVES

VARESE

FELDMAN

RUGGLES

CAGE

MORTON

**TONE ROADS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE presents
A CONCERT OF 20th CENTURY AMERICAN MUSIC**

Charles Ives - Tone Roads # 1 & # 3, Over the Pavements

Edgard Varèse - Octandre

John Cage - Ensemble from Concert for Piano & Orchestra

Carl Ruggles - Angels

Morton Feldman - Projection # 2

James Tenney - Conductor



G. Schneemann

Friday December 20th, 8:30 p.m. at the auditorium
of The New School for Social Research 66 West 12th St.

Reservations: phone TR 9 - 8875 between 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. every evening

Admission by contribution - \$1.50

INTERVIEW WITH ND

ND: Our first reading encounter of you was through Stan Brakhage and his film, *Cat's Cradle*. I understand he and Jane knew you and Jim Tenney.

Carolee Schneemann: I met Jim Tenney in New York through a series of “mystical” events during my senior year at college. No woman from my family had ever gone to college. My father wanted me to straighten up and stop the art stuff. Bard gave me a complete scholarship. During one of their field periods I saw this guy eating in three different dreadful student restaurants near Columbia University. I had another scholarship in painting there on a leave from Bard College. We finally met when he “accidentally” sat across from me at a concert of Ives and Bach. The first thing I said to him was, “I’m at Columbia University School of Painting and Sculpture,” and the first thing he said to me was, “I’m at Juilliard.” I said, “I’m a painter and I treat space as if it’s time.” And he said, “I’m a musician and I treat time as if it was space.” And off we went for thirteen years.

ND: So your first encounter with experimental film would have been with Brakhage?

CS: Yes. The three of us had this sense that we were going to carry major strands of change. We were obnoxious, visionary kids. I was going to transform the visual world. Jim was going to radicalize sound, and Stan was going to open thresholds of poetry and film. We each shared and interconnected all the older artists who were important to us as influences. We provided amazing mergings: I met Maya Deren, Joseph Cornell, and Robert Duncan very early through Stan. And through Jim he got to know Carl Ruggles and Edgard Varèse. I became Edgard’s secretary in his and Louise’s old Greenwich Village house.

ND: Did you know Duchamp? He was there at the time.

CS: Yes, of course. I met him when Jim and I came to New York from Illinois. Duchamp liked to ask me to recite a litany of place names from Illinois. We would sit down with a drink or be driving in a car and he would say in his charming French accent, “Carolee, could you please name me those towns.” I would start: “Mayview, Tolono, Monticello, Broadview, Sidney, Philo, Matoon, Rantoul, Mahomet, Saborus, Homer . . .”

From *ND* (Austin, Texas), no. 14 (1991), pp. 5-10. Reprinted by permission.

Tone Roads Chamber Ensemble flyer, 1963.

13 x 9.5 in.

ND: How did you become involved with the happenings?

CS: I did my first breaking away from the canvas when I was in college. I was torturing the fixed surface—cutting, chopping, putting it on wheels, trying to activate the dimensionality that I felt was implicit in the abstract expressionist heritage. Jim and I had this tiny little shack in the only town near Champaign-Urbana, which was surrounded by trees. Sidney, Illinois, had three hundred people and three hundred trees. Coming from New England, that was the only way I could bear Illinois. It really scared me, it was so vast and empty. Our first spring, a tornado knocked a tree down on the little house, crushed part of the roof, and smashed through the window. It was a disaster of course. But our cat Kitch, who was always an important teacher to me, took the broken window and the tree in the kitchen as a passageway. There I had been in my little room, looking out while painting. I was a landscape painter and to some extent I still am; the body resituates the visual surrounding of landscape. I watched Kitch use the tree as this transposition from inside to outside. I thought, this is really something I had to do—I want to get out like that. So the first thing I organized was *A Journey through the Disrupted Landscape*. I invited about ten people from the university and gave them little cards with instructions such as, “crawl, climb, negotiate rocks, climb, walk, go through mud”; the field was flexible, trees down, so these participants crawled over them and circled in the mud, and came to a pile of rocks, where I built a fire. I was really excited about this and had no idea what it really meant. Then I read about Kaprow’s accumulations and wrote him a letter. He sent me a card telling me to meet him when I came to New York. We met in a deli on 8th Street and he said, “Well kid, are you buying or selling?”—which was the most astonishing remark because I was used to very rarefied, metaphysical, and metaphoric artists who only talked in extreme states of poetic reference. So we split a sandwich and invented an event in which we took an audience onto a barge in East Hampton and gathered them all there and then cut ropes loose and set them out to sea. (laughs)

ND: Did you know Red Grooms, Claes Oldenburg, and Jim Dine?

CS: Yes, we were all together. As graduate students, Jim and I had no idea of what would ever become of us. Unexpectedly, a letter arrived at the Sidney, Illinois, post office from Bell Labs informing Jim he had been invited to be an experimental composer of computer music in residence there! That’s how we came back east. I found a vast, filthy old furrier’s loft on 29th Street for \$68 a month (which is still my city studio). To pay the rent I had strange jobs—being in porno films on Saturdays as an extra and teaching Sunday school art class. I was also a life model and a dog dryer in a pet shop. This is 1962. Billy Kluger, an

C.S.'s studio-loft, 1963.

Photo: C.S.



associate of Jim's at Bell Labs, told us a friend of his was doing some kind of painting-performance over on East 2nd Street, that I would like him and could be in it. I was immediately given a purple-spangled dress, a knife, and a position over a tiny fireplace in Oldenburg's *Store Days* space. I was instructed to balance on a small shelf. I was to walk back and forth in the dress, stabbing the wall with the knife. So that was my introduction to Claes and Patty Oldenburg and Lucas Samaras. Through Jim we met more artists. I decided to give a party for all these remarkable people: Red Grooms, Mimi Gross, Bob Whitman, Jim Dine, Claes and Patty Oldenburg, Billy Kluver, Olga Adorno, Richard Bellamy, Sally Gross, Shindy Tokayer, George Brecht, Simone Forti, Philip Corner, Malcolm Goldstein, Arlene Rothlein, John Chamberland, Neil Welliver.

ND: This is 1962, so none of the pop art such as Warhol had really hit yet?

CS: Nothing had quite hit yet. Still, we felt this enormous wave of energy: something significant was under way. Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and George Sugarman—those guys were starting to get a little bit of success by then. Rauschenberg was the most generous artist and he liked to party—he's a Libra as I am. Every time something was sold he would have a party and spend all his money on food to feed the troops.

ND: Did you ever work with Cage or Cunningham?

CS: No, but we were always friendly. Jim, Malcolm Goldstein, and Philip Corner did the first concerts in New York of Cage, Ives, Ruggles; they founded a group called Tone Roads to "penetrate the dead beat denial of contemporary aesthetics." There was really no money; the musicians associated with them included Philip Glass, Jon Gibson, Morton Feldman, Bob Ashley, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich. So we all knew each other and were cooperative and collaborative.

ND: Do you keep in contact with a lot of these people?

CS: Some. We are still very much the people we were when we were just starting to do work.

ND: It seems with times like these that there is at first a lot of bonding and then, later, sometimes you get enemies.

CS: Well, aesthetic lines were very strictly drawn all along; there were very strong

aesthetic disagreements from the beginning. But we paid close attention to each other's work.

ND: What about the abstract expressionists, who more or less were in a metaphysical base?

CS: I followed them around like a shadow. I met them all and was especially obsessed with the stroke and line layerings of de Kooning. The second time I went to the Cedar Bar I saw a bunch of men in a booth drinking. Suddenly a golden ray of light sprang out and sizzled around the head of one of them. I exclaimed, "Who's that man with the light spilling out of his head?" My friends didn't see any lights, but told me, "That's Bill de Kooning!"

ND: Do you get that often, see auras?

CS: Sometimes, neon signs appear over people's heads with messages, and I might not know what they foretell. I somehow have to go meet these people without telling them, "I saw a neon text go over your head." I was especially intent on sneaking around to try and understand the position of the women because the only women artists were those associated with the powerful men; and they were sidekicks to these men, more like secondary attributes constellated around them. It was an important subject because my own position was in question. I felt desperate because I was being denied real potential authority with my work.

ND: At that point, were you still considering yourself as a painter?

CS: I was doing painting-constructions. Around 1963 I asked the dealers around the older guys to come by and look at the work. They all found the work repellent and obnoxious. After that I didn't invite a dealer to come and look at my work for eighteen years. Painters and other artists came, such as Mary Bauermeister, Arman, Allan Kaprow, Malcolm Morley, Daniel Spoerri, and Erró. Oldenburg was always telling me to go to Europe. I may have been OK there; but it would have caused another disruption—making it seem that this work could only make sense if presented elsewhere.

ND: At that point it was a male-dominated art world.

CS: It still is, but it's a lot more interesting now, fractured and available.

ND: What about the beat poets?

CS: They were all active in New York, doing readings between trips out west. Ginsberg, Orlovsky, and Gregory Corso came to some of my parties. I didn't really like the beat poets. They had an alcoholic macho hostility and weren't much fun for me. The first understanding and support for my work came from a number of other poets who published my theoretical writings, early notes on the body, and used my imagery on their magazine covers: Robert Kelly, David Antin, Jerome Rothenberg, Clayton Eshlemen, Paul Blackburn, Rochelle Owens, and George Economou.

ND: When did it all start changing, the attitudes toward female artists?

CS: Marisol was an important figure, subtly effecting change by her silence and the particularity of her position. I remember a very early panel of "The Artist's Club"—Guston, Rivers, de Kooning, Arman, Gottlieb, Rothko, and Marisol the only woman. She came to this panel wearing a South American animal mask, sat at the end of the table and never once spoke. I was shocked, enthralled by her silence. I don't recall that anyone on the panel or in the audience addressed what her mask meant. It took twenty years for me to be able to contextualize her iconic statement of speechless presence. At the same time, I revered Joan Mitchell's painting and studied the works of Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Jane Wilson, Nell Blaine, and Jane Freilicher.

ND: So that was the earliest sign of significance you were starting to see?

CS: Marisol emphasizing marginalization and tokenism. Even as her work was exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery, and she was the female artist-star of pop art. She dramatized it in a very subdued way through her intensely quiet manner. But in the performance realm, Judson was able to position female creativity as an intelligent, adventurous, and transgressive force, blowing away decorous performance traditions. Everyone in the group went on to do significant work: Yvonne Rainer (in film), Lucinda Childs, Deborah Hay, Elaine Summers, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, David Gordon, and the exquisite Valda Setterfield.

ND: It seems like the strongest course for women in the late fifties and early sixties was dance or performance.

CS: But, you see, those were areas that had already been feminized. Males who wanted to perform took on that problematic aspect linked to the perception that they were gay if they wanted to display themselves—to express pleasure with physical power. It had to do



with the bias of the male imagination, wanting to have the erotic body represented by the female. Expressivity and the ecstatic were particularized as a female domain to be viewed. Judson really toughened, formalized, broke into existent conventions. The women originated unexpected forms of physical power, the deaestheticized body, complex influences for movement as varied as Zen ritual, ordinary actions of labor, animal motions, games.

ND: Would the mass media, even art magazines, only cover women's performance if it was presented in a traditional mode?

CS: That was what we had inherited. Deborah Hay once said that it was as if we were a bunch of bandits stealing the jewels from under their noses—outlaws. But what worked for us was the cultural ferment, the Vietnam War, and the political dissolution of the inherited traditions. Everything was breaking up at the time, so we were recognized by young critics, journalists, and underground papers. Our worlds were so close at that time. If we did a performance on a Tuesday night in which someone jumped through hoops, threw blue paint, one of the yippies or Weather People would have seen it. They would be at the Stock Exchange two days later in the balcony, blowing down dollar bills from a blue plastic sack. Creative energy was constantly breaking through class, race politics, and art structures.

ND: It seems the U.S.A. has now gone from an era of activism to one of amnesia.

CS: It's a state of amnesia. But history has its own strange wave forms. It's like patterns on the rug there. (*points to a swirling rag rug on the floor*) The sixties might be one of those blue swirls, and the periods around it are still influenced by it, holding its shape, which is parenthetical to the overall energy.

ND: Are you interested in science?

CS: To some extent. Heinz Pagels was a close friend of mine. He could illuminate issues in an unexpected way. D'arcy Thompson is an essential influence. I'm very suspicious of our inherited kinds of science, its masculist authority and righteous will to power and fixed meanings.

ND: I think that as an artist you sometimes have to be.

CS: The use to which this will to power is directed is terrifying. As a feminist you have to be suspicious of its hierarchies and terminologies; in gene theory, for example, a particu-

lar gene is labeled dominant. (Did you know that the fertile female egg selects the sex chromosome from the sperm—it chooses to accept an x or a y !) Feminist scientists search for evidence of mutuality, an interplay, a stress, a push and a pull involving the unification of forces. Masculist interpretations of the same material are typically monolithic, sustaining a hierarchical vision which influences and even distorts physical information.

The Reality Club in New York invited guests on the so-called cutting edge of their fields: physicists, chemists, theoreticians, molecular biologists doing advanced work. In every case their presentations ended up being highly competitive and stressful. Each male scientist sought to overthrow the theories of his rival. The theories under attack were those of older scientists. The use to which these “challengers” directed their investigations would benefit existing power structures, expanding the military’s and technology’s control over outer physical space and inner biological-medical space.

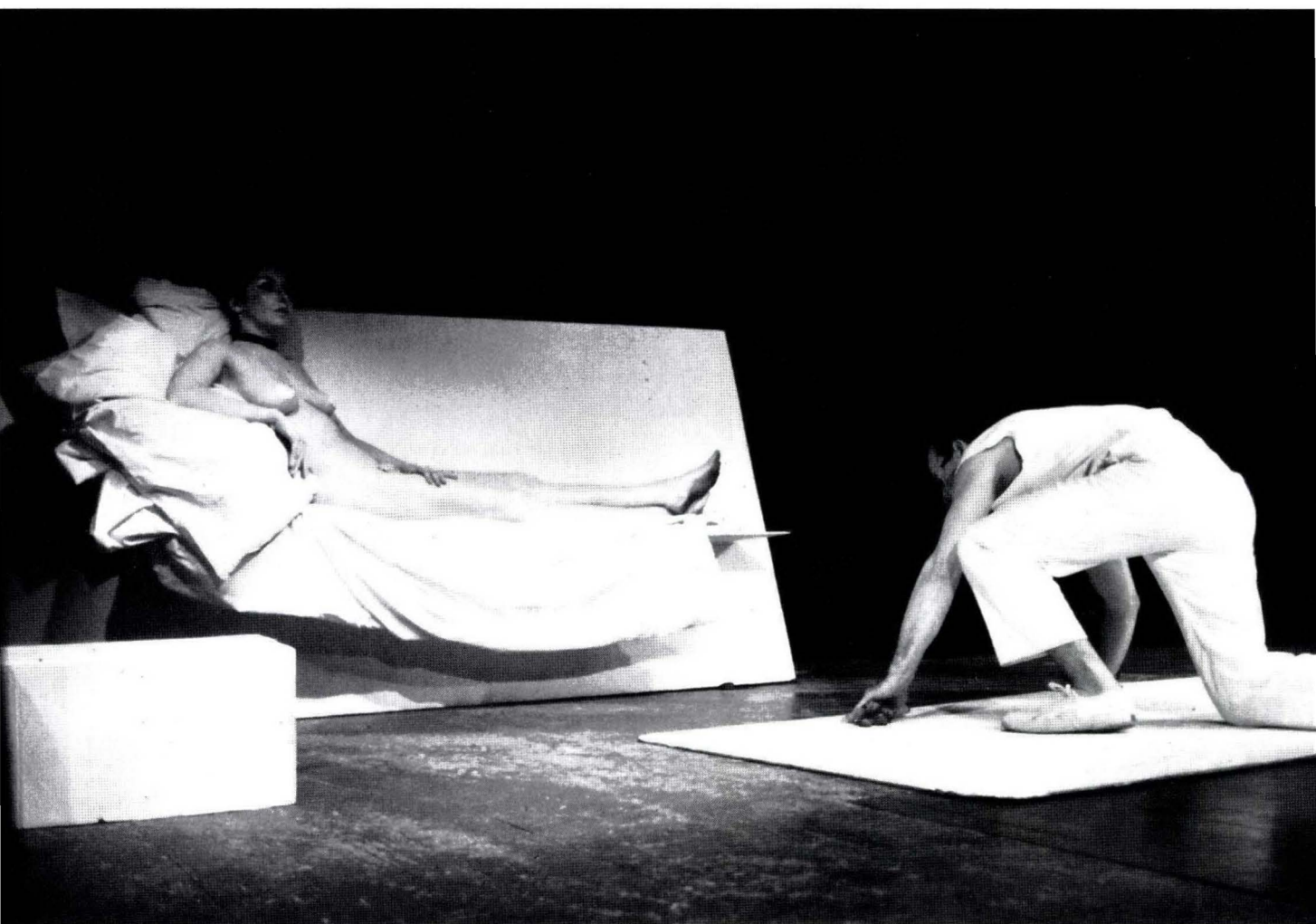
ND: I would like now to ask you about the pieces, *Ghost Rev* and *Eye Body*, which seemed to be caught up in the mythological realm.

CS: Yes, but the mythological has caught up with them. At the time I did *Eye Body* in 1965—with the serpents on my body and those transformations of the self as an extended material of the painting—nobody knew what the hell it was about. It took another ten to fifteen years of feminist, mythical, anthropological unraveling to situate the underlying archetypes of this work. That’s a wonderful thing to happen to an artist because I didn’t “know” what I was doing at the time. I just had to do it. I always felt I was being guided by certain forces or presences. The purpose of research is to discover what those underlying forms are. The identification I make with preliterate artifacts is cognate with my own energy. The Paleolithic and Cretan goddess sculptures offer a way of reestablishing a realm of signification that my own culture had lost. Somehow it was there for me to approach with a “blind intuition”—which brings in Jungian principles (despite Jung’s patriarchal bent).

ND: You seemed to recognize the past and the future, but you were in the present.

CS: Almost all of my work comes from dreams, a synesthesia between waking and sleeping. I think I had an instinct that this was the only way to cut through predetermined ideas of what a female imagination and creative will was supposed to be about, which was not what I was about. And somehow I was able to hold onto that—follow it and pursue it.

ND: I’d like to now ask you about *Fuses*.



Robert Morris, *Site*, 1963.
Performance with C.S.
Photographer unknown.

CS: I shot it in 1965 with wind-up Bolexes I borrowed—that’s the 30-second version. But that was fine, since it had so much to do with collage process and also introduced a Buddhist sensibility because I had to wait so long for every hundred feet to come back! The only lab that would develop it—where we thought we had a chance—was Brakhage’s lab in Denver. He was helpful in this regard. He said they were used to such odd stuff, to send it there. But they refused to process it unless each reel was accompanied by a letter from a psychiatrist. This posed a dilemma. Who would be willing to write a letter to accompany this raw footage? My friend Marty Edelheit’s husband thought it was a riot and said he would do it. The xeroxed letter sent with every little reel read, “Carolee Schneemann’s current film work is an examination of the archetypal evolution of the cross.” That was the letter (*laughs*). Like a letter to your gym teacher excusing you from gym.

ND: The film primarily seems to be concerned with touching and handling, or the sensual aspects. Almost a deconstructed pornographic image leading into an erotic approach. One book described it as “a tie-dyed acid bath.”

CS: Who said that!? (*laughs*) Well, I’ve written about it a lot; it certainly had nothing to do with pornography. It’s anti-porn in concept, having come out of my personal relationship and my actual lived life with the partner I would be with for thirteen years. *Fuses* began as a response to *Window Water Baby Moving* (Brakhage, 1959), a film in which the male persona or the male eye was, I felt, absorbing and repossessing an essential, unique female process, until the film became, in a way, the birth giver. Brakhage shifts the primacy of the erotic relationship that would produce the baby. He makes the baby part of the male’s realm of self-extension through the encapsulating authority and power of the camera eye. Some male poets I knew during the sixties had an intensive linguistic and metaphorical obsession with giving birth: somehow everything in the universe was created through their language and perception. Anything female was available for their milking—there to be rearticulated. Nature vs. culture; that’s how we understand the gender split now. I was struggling with all this and wanted to be both nature and culture and more! Not driven off to one corner or the other. I had never seen anything in my culture that corresponded to what sexuality felt like. I wondered what it would look like, if it would be different if I filmed it. It turned out it was different. I never know what’s going to happen with it. In 1985 *Fuses* was arrested in El Paso. They took the projector with the film on it. Maybe I’ll be arrested when I’m an old, old woman (*laughs*).

ND: A quote I want to read to you, from you in *Expanded Cinema* (Gene Youngblood, 1970): “The thing that is disreputable in the idea of pornography for me is that it tends to

do with the absence of feeling, the absence of really committed emotions. I was after some kind of integral wholeness; the imagery is really compounded in emotion”—which is just what you told us.

CS: I have always had to use myself. I would never direct or try to transpose to someone else. That was the male mode of mythologizing, taking power by recreating himself through an idealized other person. This was the paradox I experienced with my very close friends, the poets. I was always the exceptional young woman in their lives and they could value me in their work, but their wives were in the kitchen weeping because they hadn't been fucked in two weeks, trying to cook spaghetti that they would serve to these important people. I really felt split by this basic dichotomy.

ND: Your name means “Snowman” in German.

CS: That's right.

ND: And you also have piece called *Snows*.

CS: It's all part of the web, it's all interrelated. I plan to die in the snow. When I'm old and feeble I plan to go out and lie in a blizzard and die that way. I changed my name in high school because so many painters had these big heavy names. So I took this old family name.

ND: One thing that intrigued me was a quote by you about perception, where you call it an “eye journey” or an “empathy drawing.” I was wondering if Stan Brakhage had a lot of influence there in the ideas you were following, such as in his book *Motion Picture Taking and Giving*.

CS: Check the dates. I guided him towards an organic visual universe. When I met him, he was doing psychodrama films and working with invented situations. One of our early arguments sprang from my feeling that a visual artist had to be able to build a vocabulary with nature in order to break with inherited theories. He went into that.

ND: You started moving into having film projected on you or beside you. That seems to be an ongoing dialog.

CS: That's true. I'm still working with that. I wanted to destroy the film frame.

That's what *Ghost Rev* was about. It was a proposal to collaborate with U.S.C.O.'s films. I think they wanted me to do something in tandem with them or as an additive element. I felt it necessary to integrate movement—destroy the linearity and propulsion of the projection, which I did with Phoebe Neville. We painted on the screen and shredded it. We became part of the image.

ND: Did you coin the term *kinetic theatre*?

CS: Yes, that was my theatre and may actually have been the origin of kinetic sculpture in the 1960s as a descriptive term—everything happens so fast. Also my term for the body as a source of knowledge—*eroticized body*—became part of the vocabulary. At that time, the erotic hadn't yet become an aspect of the sacred but was considered something nutty. After I did *Meat Joy* (which owes association to Michael McClure's *Meat Science*), there was a whole spate of “meat” this and “meat” that, and then *Oh, Calcutta!* was produced.

ND: It was a sort of rebellion against the static culture?

CS: I never thought of it as a rebellion. I thought everyone would recognize what I was doing as the curative, necessary step. I was shocked that people were shocked.

ND: You were also running parallel with Pop art in its heyday.

CS: Yes, and that parallel led people to say that what I did was excessive, indulgent, and narcissistic—to marginalize it. The battle of the nudes.

ND: Well, at least you know what you are doing.

CS: No, I don't know what I'm doing. That's what is so interesting about it. I mean, I do and I don't. The conscious “I” tries to be very permeable and available for the information that I care about, which my research is always fueling.

ND: What about Warhol? Were you part of the Factory contingent?

CS: Yes, to a certain extent. Andy, in his very droll, deadpan way, thought I should have gone to Hollywood with *Fuses*. I first met Andy when he was the lover of Willard Maas. Willard would say, “This is a wonderful artist,” but I never expected that this quiet, pallid young man would become the famous artist Andy Warhol. One day, a few years ago, I saw

him eating his lunch with a companion perched on the wall just outside the Whitney Museum. “Andy, what are you doing here?” “We always eat lunch here on Tuesday.” People inside the museum were saying, “If only I could meet Andy Warhol!” And they’d probably walked right past him on their way in.

ND: So you hung out at the Factory?

CS: Viva and International Velvet were friends. I often hung out with them at the factory, where we were called “The Beauties.”

ND: What about Edie Sedgwick?

CS: She was so stoned all the time. You really can’t communicate with someone who is on the ninth planet. But I can tell you a story about Robert Rauschenberg and Janis Joplin. Janis Joplin was a casual friend of mine. Rauschenberg loved her music and wanted to meet her. What’s more, both of them were from Port Arthur, Texas. She turned up at Max’s Kansas City one night, and we were drinking together. I told her, “There is a guy in the back who really wants to meet you,” She asked, “Who’s the dude?” I suggested we go to his table. “He’ll buy us drinks.” We arrived at his table. “Bob, here’s Janis, whom you wanted to meet.” Rauschenberg, with his great charm and his wonderfully visual and metaphoric artist’s lingo, turned to Janis and said, “I really admire your music, it’s so tactile.” Janis turns to me, “Who is this creep and what’s his deal?”



From left: Kusama, Louis Abolafia, unidentified, Charlotte Morman, C.S., Emmett Grogan
at Andy Warhol's Factory, 1967.
Photo: Stan Goldstein.



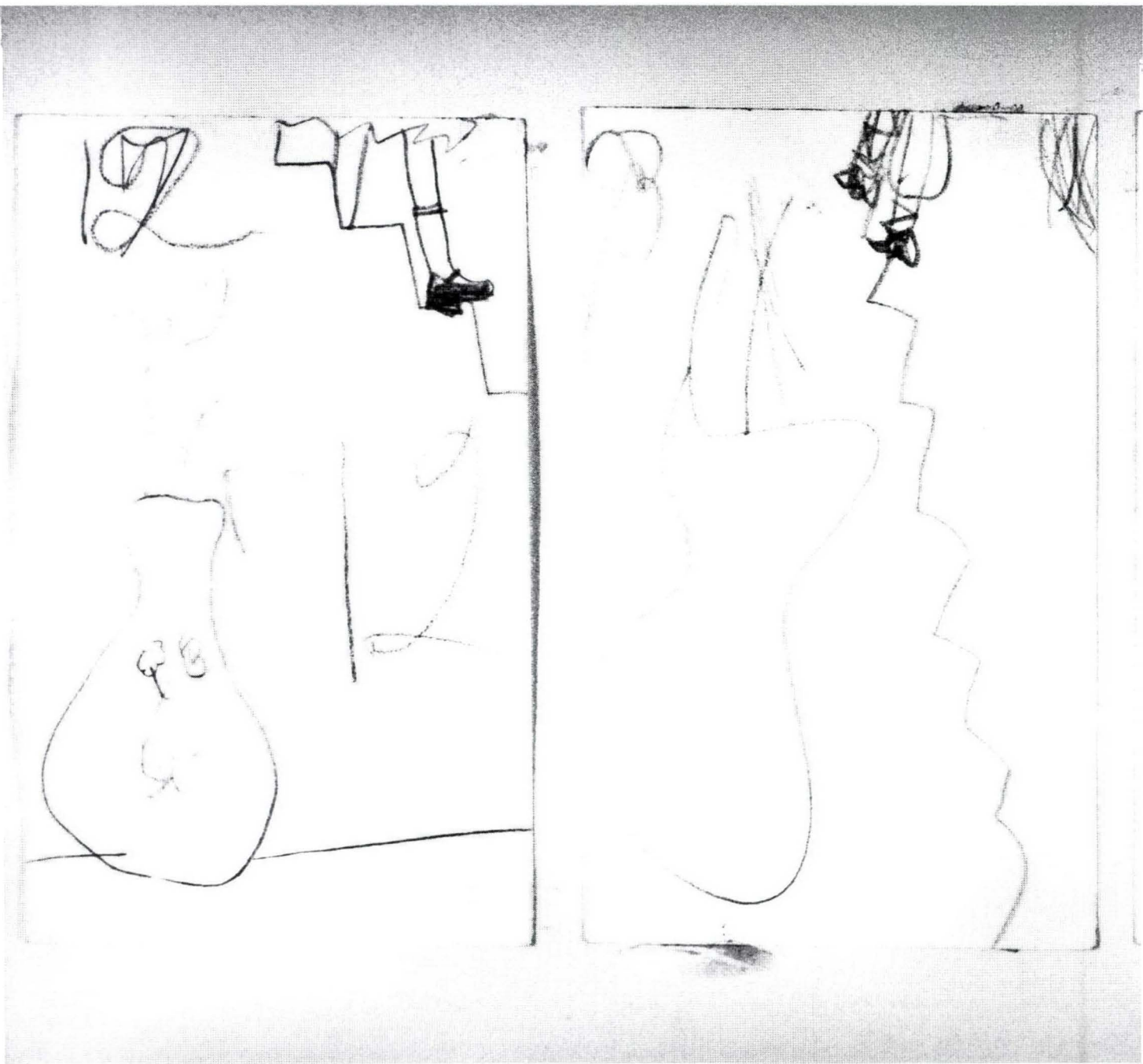
Ghost Rev, 1965.

Phoebe Neville and C.S. Kinetic theatre. New Cinema Festival, Cinematheque, New York.

Photo: Ted Wester.



**FEMINIST EROTIC
ICONOGRAPHY**



Staircase and Vase, 1944 (detail).
Pencil on paper. 5 x 17 in.

INTERVIEW WITH LINDA MONTANO

Linda Montano: How did you feel as a child about sex?

Carolee Schneemann: Drawing and masturbation were the first sacred experiences I remember. Both activities began when I was about four years old. Exquisite sensations produced in my body, and images that I made on paper tangled with language, religion, everything that I was taught. As a result, I thought that the genital was where God lived. “He” took the form of a kind of Santa Claus and inhabited me. Santa Claus was the good version of Christ because something awful had happened to Christ, and I didn’t want that to embody me. Having Santa Claus in my body gave me a sense of effulgence, gifts, mystery, and renewal . . . down the chimney, into the house, out of the house, up the chimney . . . Christianity and Christmas were two cards that led the pack, and I felt that by choosing Santa Claus over Christ, I made the pleasurable choice and was therefore able to deflect the other possibility, which was more painful, confusing.

LM: Were your parents liberal in giving you sexual or bodily permission?

CS: They weren’t prohibiting. I remember their sexual pleasure with each other was all-pervasive, and I was part of that. We’d all lie in bed on Sunday mornings. They would teach me to read the comics. More than any prohibition, I remember their deep intimacy and sensuousness and delight. I built my own erotic fantasy life with various invisible animal and human lovers inhabiting my bed, influencing common objects. By the time I was five or six, I was playing kissing games and blind-man’s-bluff in the fields with the Catholic boy across the road, who was afraid when I grabbed him. Growing up in the country was very important. The animals were sexual creatures, and I identified part of my nature with them. Nudity was also clear and direct. We turned hay as adolescents. In the afternoons, after working, we would just take off our clothes to swim naked in the river.

LM: Your parents and environment supported your naturalness. Were there any other supports?

CS: Yes, my father, as a rural physician, took care of the body—the living body, the dying body. . . . People would come to the house with bloody limbs in their arms; we were

trained to sit them down, put a towel around something that was bleeding, and then run and get him. I would also peek through the keyhole of his office because it was on our side of the house. Sometimes I'd see a woman's foot sticking off the edge of the examining table, and I'd crouch there listening to him say strange things. For example, he asked one woman when she had "menstruated," and she asked, "What's that?" and I heard him say, "Bleed." I had *Grey's Anatomy* to look at, and it gave me a peculiar, inside-out visual vocabulary.

LM: Did that kind of relationship with naturalness and the body continue? Did you direct those experiences into art at a certain point?

CS: I knew that I could locate that naturalness by making images and by loving. When I was young I was called "a mad pantheist" by older friends. I didn't know what that was. I hoped it was a female panther but was told that a pantheist is a nature worshipper. I had elaborate ritual places to go and lie at certain times of the day or night. There were special trees that I had to be in contact with, and I would hide in a well that my mother had filled in with wild flowers. I did this at dusk because I found the transition from day to night painful. I would get dizzy listening to the birds, smelling night aromas. That was what I had to do.

LM: You never lost that way of exploring, and your work attests to that.

CS: When sex negativity and the ordinary sexual abuse and depersonalization that females experience in our culture intruded, I tried to judge it, sort it out, not internalize it. I suppose that not internalizing prohibitions gave me some messianic sense that I was going to have to confront or go against erotic denial, fragmentations.

LM: When did you start using sexual themes in your work? What form did that take?

CS: There are different strands. One theme emerged when I was four or five, and I did visual dramas on prescription tablets. The tablets were thick, and so I made a sequence of drawings, not just one on a page. It would take fifteen pages for an image to emerge. These primitive drawings were filled with sexual implication.

LM: You were making movies?

CS: Yes, they were about making visual dramas (even before I had seen a movie); they all projected weird, erotic events between male and female figurations.

The second theme became clear in college. I posed for my boyfriend because we

didn't have nude models at Bard. He would do studies of me but not include my head. So I thought that I would paint him, only would include his head and actually work from his head to his feet. There was great upset about his genitals appearing in the portrait. Then I did a self-portrait, open-legged—my entire body and exposed genitals. The painting was glowing, red, and dense. I got indirect reports that this was improper. The female was the constant preoccupation of the male imagination, but when I wanted to examine it fully myself and have actual parts depicted, I was accused of breaking essential aesthetic boundaries. I remember feeling that I would have to keep my eye on that, that I was myself both an idealization and a center of intense taboo. I didn't want to feel that taboo projected onto me.

LM: Was your work a continuation of and a way of maintaining this freedom that you've always had?

CS: No, not quite. In the mid-sixties, when I began my film *Fuses* and the performance *Meat Joy*, I was thinking about "eroticizing my guilty culture." I saw a cultural task combined with a personal dilemma. My work was dependent on my sexuality—its satisfaction, integrity. I couldn't work without a coherent sexual relationship—that fueled my imagination, my energies. My mind works out of the knowledge of the body. An erotic sensibility is inevitably going to experience conflicting messages in a masculinist culture that is basically divisive, sex-negative, that traditionally controls female expressiveness—our imaginative domain, our creative will, our desire.

LM: Did you have any models in this work?

CS: In the early sixties my personal relationships were sustaining, as well as the writings of Reich, Artaud, de Beauvoir. Researching the "lost" paintings and writings of women artists was very important. (I did research in obscure books in Dutch, German, French, just to discover unacknowledged women as precedent.)

LM: You were a pioneer in a time when there wasn't that much support for what you were doing.

CS: It was a lonely, stroke-by-stroke position; I had to resist, analyze, and reposition sexual/cultural attitudes.

LM: Did you ever suffer from sexual guilt yourself?

CS: I might feel guilty if too many sexual events pile up close to each other. It's worse for me to judge or deny sexual feelings or experience. I've only really regretted the times when I felt that I wanted to become lovers with someone, and there was something socially or interpersonally uncertain about the situation, and I said no.

LM: You had guilt in reverse?

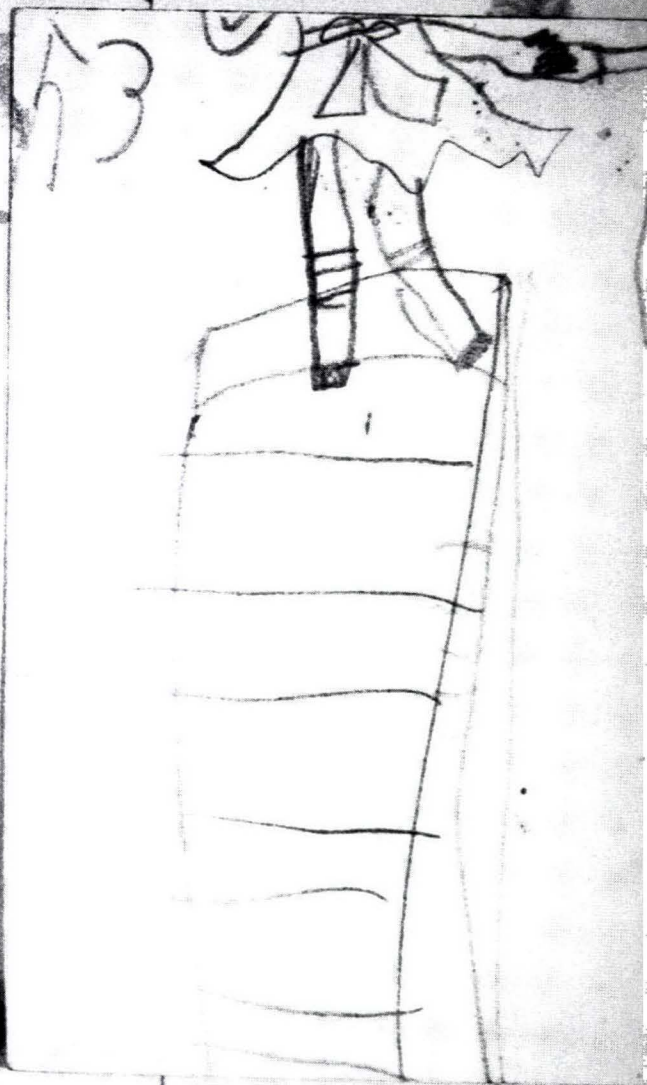
CS: There are levels of reversal here.

LM: Have you ever thought of writing a handbook for the sexually guilty?

CS: I wrote one in 1970 for the sexually curious: "The Sexual Parameters Survey." It's in the form of a chart, collating all aspects of lovemaking. I was alone after having been in an equitable, loving relationship for more than ten years. I began to encounter areas of sex-negativity in relationships I assumed would be spontaneous, whole, passionate—even if temporary. At times, my body seemed a battleground of projected taboos, contradictions. So I posited a range of analysis—the sexual parameters to which three other women friends contributed their personal "data." It was exhibited as a five-foot long chart in a London gallery and was printed in my book *Parts of a Body House Book* (Beau Geste Press, 1971).

LM: Your work has been celebratory and didactic. It's been for others in that sense. How has it helped you?

CS: It's made me concentrate on formal structures. My work presents particular difficulties because its source and its forms examine eroticism; but that can also be used against it. The content can be used to trivialize the formal complexity. Recent audiences and critics are doing somewhat better. It seems that feminist analysis has deepened perceptions for the process of the work.



Staircase and Vase, 1944 (detail).
Pencil on paper. 5 x 17 in.



Objects by Dorothea Baer ♥ Jackie Ferrara ♥ Marty Greenbaum ♥ Lulu ♥ Carolee Schneemann

March 27 to April 18, 1965

Tuesday thru Saturday 10:30 - 6:00

Objects by Five flyer, 1965.

Van Bovenkamp Gallery, New York.

ISTORY OF A GIRL PORNOGRAPHER

1974

Istory has been my solution to the history/herstory tug and pull. Whenever possible I use a neutral noun or pronoun instead of a specific gender. A few years ago, Clayton Eshleman asked about my use of Istory: did I know Olson's reference to Istorin in the Greek as "the root of history?" Eshleman explained an ancient conflict. Thucydides defined Istorin as "history as facts"; Herodotus defined Istorin as "the personal search for the real."

On the poster for the Van de Bovenkamp exhibit, *Objects of Five*, the usually "dignified" artists appear naked—four women, one man, hands on their knees as if poised for a skirmish. (The image I had clearly envisioned, to which the other artists gradually became committed as well. The woman on the left holds a sign across her body inviting you to the opening because her husband had insisted her naked body—only ink on paper—not pass into public domain.)

This was one of the motivating factors in my determination to integrate the nude body in all my work: performance, kinetic theatre, film, paintings, photocollage, events. The others:

I want to confront the paradox that we deal with in creating images—painted, sculpted, performed—as "reality." As if paint, plaster, celluloid, stone, paper exist to convince us of a life force as vital as our own flesh and blood and subject to our social moralities! This is as childlike as spanking our dolls for making imaginary pee-pee and shelters an unconscious, debased primitivism—surrounding and endowing inanimate objects with projections of our repressed vitality.

I want to bridge the conventionally public/private areas of experience.

For a painter, no part of the body should have been considered taboo, relegated to a sub-physical "actuality"! As a student, I painted self-portraits using my entire body as one which stood for all or any human shape from which I would learn. I was free to study, perceive my own genital shape and form—as well as my ears and elbows.

My art professor told other students this study was narcissistic. I was dumbfounded. I thought I had "objectified" my own fragile but concrete reality in a stream of istic image-making. Further, this small coed liberal arts college did not have live models for its art students. The male students doing their endless self-portrait studies were not considered "narcissistic." But then they did leave out their bodies!

Three slide sequences from **Ask The Goddess**, Performative lecture, 1990.

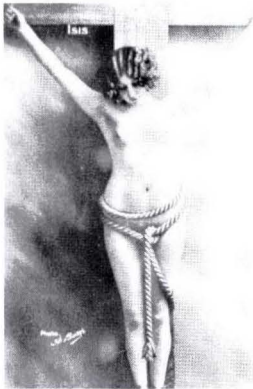
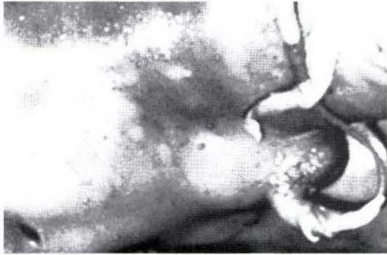
Top: *soldier throws grenade*; *President Truman throws snowball*; *breast milk squirt (squirt)*.

Middle: *war wound*; *self-shot*; *diapering a baby*.

Bottom: *Victorian postcard "Isis"*; *crucifixion painting (Mantegna)*; *Cretan serpent goddess*.

Still, I was astounded when in the midst of *Meat Joy* a man came out of the audience and began to strangle me. Steeped in the writings of Wilhelm Reich, I understood what had affected him, but not how to break his hold on my neck! And I was terrified that the audience closest to us would think it part of the performance. No one made a move. Even if I could have squawked, the din of the continuing performance was overwhelming. I was saved by three middle-aged women, who may have had no previous experience of the excesses of the avant-garde; they simply *felt* I was being assaulted apart from the often violent performance. They threw themselves as one onto the man and dragged him off me.

Again I had a shock when the Institute of Contemporary Art in London invited me to screen *Fuses* and talk about how it was made. The space was comfortable, the projection smooth. But the audience sat stony, rigid, as if commonly subject to deadly paralysis. At the conclusion of the film there was silence, no rise of conversation, applause. In the front row, a huge red-faced man, in the uniform of a colonel, clutched a walking stick in one hand, a portly woman with the other, and boomed, "Come my dear! Away from what only a deranged frigid nymphomaniac could make." So much for the question and answer session. A young critic (close to my own age) rushed up to me and snarled: "Madam, you have assaulted my sexuality." The critic from the more liberal paper shook my hand saying, "I'm afraid we deserved that film."







Americana I Ching Apple Pie, 1974.
Performance. Greene Street Gallery, Women's Festival.
Photo: Su Friedrich.

AMERICANA I CHING APPLE PIE

1974, 1979

The Americana I Ching Apple Pie recipe was presented in May 1977 as a cooking demonstration for the Heresies Magazine performance and jumble sale benefit. With the exception of a dozen apples which I brought, all the cooking "material," utensils, and props were discovered in the jumble. Objects which functionally approximated actual cooking utensils were used: nails, hammers, an arrow, a flower pot, ball bearings, rags. The cook's apron was a rippled mini skirt; I covered my hair with a stained rayon slip and wore mismatched black gloves.

**FROM THE LIBERATED COOK BOOK FOR WOMEN AND OTHERS
FROM THE LIBERATED COCK BOOK FOR WOMAN AND OTHERS**

Americana I Ching Apple Pie

1 Go into the kitchen with defiant joyful anger. On this scruffy battleground you will lay down the cookbook forever. You will cease competition with untold legions of sublimated female psyches engaged over the centuries in a pursuit of excellence through flour grease onion turnips pots blenders colanders strainer boilers mincers graters shoppers fork whiskers beaters

DESIST DESIST STOP STOP NOW!

2 Put on an apron and . . .

Liberation Through Joyous Aggression. (I Ching)

The Abandonment of False Illusions.

You are in the kitchen because you do not have a penis. Keep this in mind as you crush the garlic with the heel of your shoe. You are in this kitchen because you have or might have a baby.

3 Apple Pie As Direct Contact With Materials. A recipe based on my principles of kinetic theatre (1962-72 and good forever). This pie offers self-realization. You will be **The Best Woman In The World. AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE. JUST LIKE MUM'S.** Remember: the oven is your womb! Let's do it right!

4 INGREDIENTS: apples 1 sack whole wheat flour (100% stone ground) Barbados sugar egg yolk safflower oil butter honey cinnamon lemon

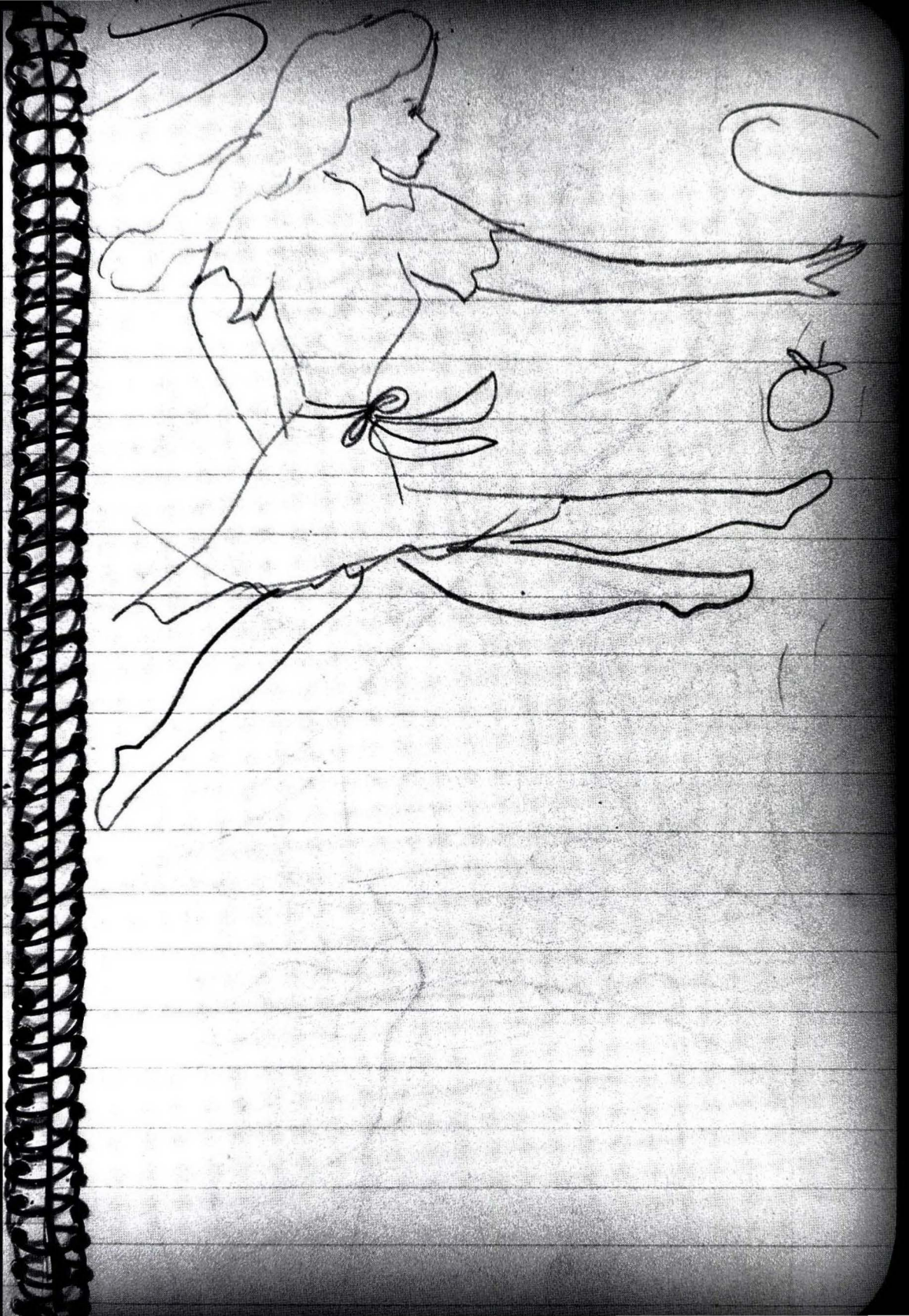
Open flour sack with yr right hand & scoop up 3 handfuls, drop into a bowl. Pinch off a big lump of butter, drop into bowl. Pour in 2 quick turns of oil. Add small pile brown sugar. Use both hands to scrunch it all up in yr finger tips to nice crumbly mass—soft. Sprinkle a few drops of cold water on top, mix again. Now it is sticky & ready to be patted into a baking dish or two. Might as well make two pies. Slide hunk of butter all over baking dishes.

Wash apples (don't peel if organically grown). Pat pastry all over the dish. Use small lumps which you press flat until they all mesh & cover dish. Now you can make those cute finger indentations along the top! Sprinkle with cinnamon, bits of sugar, butter bits, lemon juice, drops of honey. If you have some yogurt or sour cream, take yr fingers & smear it over apple tops. . . . Have Faith! Note: if any ingredients fall on the floor just pick them up & put them where they should have gone. My father always said: "People eat about 3 lbs of dirt every year."

5 Now for the butterfly! Take bits of remaining pastry in yr fingers & flatten out—makes a vague sort of butterfly shape. Lay these over apples; pinch them onto edge of pastry on sides of dish. Keep laying the bits out until the top is covered. **THAT'S ALL.** Stick in oven.

6 I do not "preheat" the oven because I think it gives a cruel shock to apples & flour & dish. Rather a nice gradual baking. Baking is like waiting for pubic hair to grow when yr 12 yrs old. Put it in & go away. Pretend nothing is happening. You will suddenly remember pies in the oven! Just in time to run. look. find they are still raw. Be patient & haughty. After a time you will see butter bubbling, smell absolute evidence. . . . Check pastry at bottom for crispness. Sample some. Amazing! Verdict: very sensuous & easy to do. Not up-tight making. A True Apple Pie. Archetypal. Serve to friends whose adoration you wish to bind forever.

Tested in the Belsize Park Kitchens, U.K.



CÉZANNE, SHE WAS A GREAT PAINTER UNBROKEN WORDS TO WOMEN— SEXUALITY CREATIVITY LANGUAGE ART HISTORY

1975

I was drawing before I could speak.

By the time I was four, I was embarked on endless and engrossing sequences of “action-dramas,” which were admired by grown-ups. But they often asked things like, “Will you be a little Mommy when you grow up?” I had a secret idea I was born “a draw-er”—that I wanted to make pictures all my life. I said “I’ll be a draw-er when I grow up.”

Later I learned there were grown-ups who made pictures. Somehow my mother overcame her phobias about children eating paint and making messes: for Christmas when I was ten I received a tiny box of oil paints. My first canvas was painted from a postcard of an icy stream glittering between snow encrusted pine trees—much like the landscape outside my window. I accepted the box and the instruction to paint from the postcard with utter devotion and joy. Around twelve years old I knew a few names of “great artists.” I was afraid to ask if any of these names belonged to women—what if my worst suspicions were confirmed! If I wanted to spend my life making pictures, surely woman in the past had been similarly claimed?

I decided a painter named “Cézanne” would be my mascot; I would assume Céz-anne was unquestionably a woman—after all, the “anne” in it was feminine. Were the bathers I studied in reproduction so awkward because painted by a woman? But “she” was famous and respected. If Cézanne could do it, I could do it.

This article first appeared as the introduction to *Cézanne, She Was A Great Painter* (New Paltz, N.Y.: Tresspass Press, 1975), a self-published book incorporating notes, essays, letters, including statements. Previously, some of the letters and notes appeared in my book, *Parts of a Body House Book* published in 1972 by Beau Geste Press in England—a hand-painted edition of 75, and 300 mimeograph copies. Earlier, “Notations” appeared in Clayton Eshleman’s poetry magazine *Caterpillar* (1968-69) and in *Elima, A Journal of Women’s Writings*, edited by Annie Gottlieb.

Running Girl with Apple, 1945.

Pencil on paper. 4 x 6 in.



Venice Biennale, 1990. From left: Achille Olive Bonito, Shigeko Kubota, Alison Knowles, Mieko Shiomi, Yoko Ono, C.S., Sara Seagull.
Photo: Larry Miller.

WOMEN IN THE YEAR 2000

1977

By the year 2000 no young woman artist will meet the determined resistance and constant undermining that I endured as a student. Her studio and history courses will usually be taught by women; she will never feel like a provisional guest at the banquet of life; or a monster defying her "god-given" role; or a belligerent whose devotion to creativity could only exist at the expense of a man, or men and their needs. Nor will she go into the "art world," gracing or disgracing a pervading stud club of artists, historians, teachers, museum directors, magazine editors, gallery dealers—all male, or committed to masculine preserves. All that is marvelously already falling around our feet.

She will study art history courses enriched by the inclusion, discovery, and reevaluation of works by women artists; works (and lives) until recently buried away, willfully destroyed, ignored, or reattributed (to male artists with whom they were associated). Our future student will be in touch with a continuous feminine creative history—often produced against impossible odds—from her present, to the Renaissance, and beyond. In the year 2000, books and courses will be called "Man and His Image," "Man and His Symbols," "Art History of Man" only to probe the source of disease and mania which compelled patriarchal man to attribute to himself and his masculine forebears every invention and artifact by which civilization was formed for over four millennia.

Our women will have courses and books on "The Invention of Art by Woman," "Woman—The Source of Creation," "The Gynocratic Origins of Art," "Woman and Her Material." Her studies of ancient Greece and Egypt will reconcile manipulations in translation, interpretation, and actual content of language and symbolic imagery with the protracted and agonizing struggle between the integral, cosmic principles of gynocracy, and the aggressive man-centered cultures gathered as the foundations of Judeo-Christian religion in the Western work.

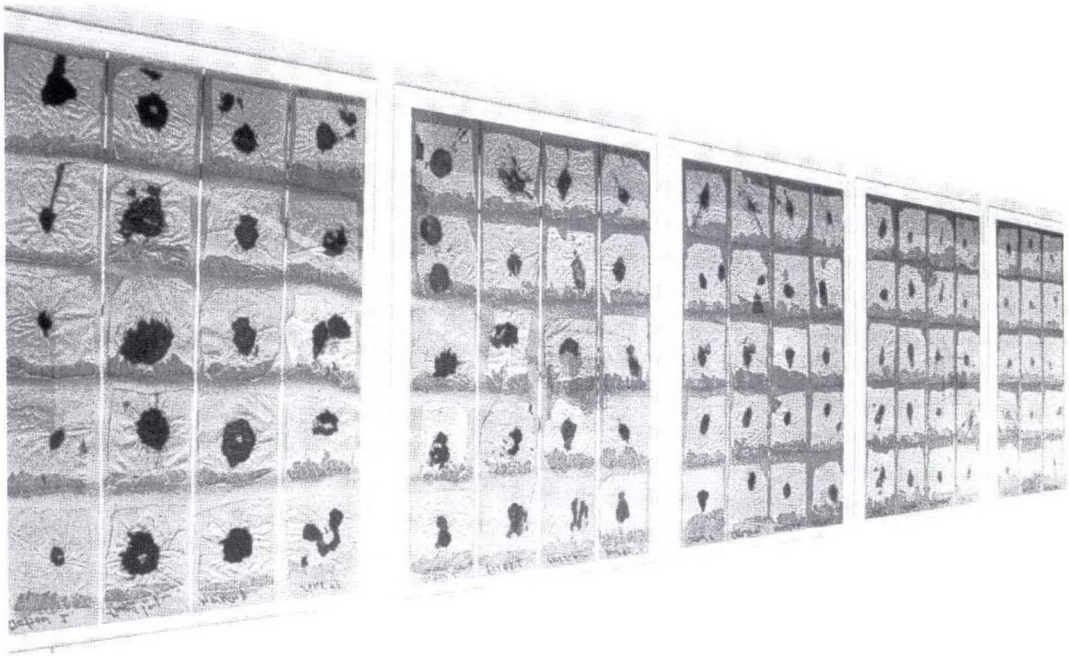
Fifteen years ago, I told my art history professor I thought the bare-breasted women bull jumpers, carved in ivory or painted in fresco about 1600 B.C. in Crete, could have been made by women depicting women. And I considered that the preponderant Neolithic fertility figurines might have been crafted by women for themselves—to accompany them through pregnancy and birth-giving. And I wondered if the frescos of the Mysteries, in Pompeii—almost exclusively concerned with feminine gestures and actions—could have been painted

by women. He was shocked and annoyed, saying that there was absolutely no authority to support such ideas. Since then I have given myself the authority to support and pursue these insights. By the year 2000, feminist archeologists, etymologists, biologists, sociologists will have established beyond question my contention that women determined the forms of the sacred and the functions—the divine properties—of material, its religious and practical formations; that she evolved pottery, sculpture, fresco, architecture, astronomy, and the laws of agriculture—all of which belonged implicitly to the female realms of transformation and production.

The shadowy notions of a harmonious core of civilization under the aegis of the Great Mother Goddess, where the divine unity of female biological and imaginative creation was normal and pervasive, where the female was the source of all living and created image, will once again move to clarify our own conscious desires. The sacred rituals of forming material to embody life energies will return to the female source.

One further change will be the assembling of pioneer historians—themselves discredited or forgotten by traditional masculine authority. In the year 2000, they will be on the required reading lists. What a joy to welcome Helen Diner, J. J. Bachofen, Michelet, Rilke, Gould-Davis, Jane Ellen Harrison, Robert Graves, Jacquetta Hawkes, Ruth Benedict, Robert Briffault, Erich Neumann, Marie de LeCourt, Ruth Herschberger, Bryher, H.R., Minna Moscherosch Schmidt, Clara E. C. Waters (1904), Elizabeth F. Ellet (1859)!

The negative aspect is simply that the young woman coming to these vital studies will never really believe that we, in our desperate groundwork, were so crippled and isolated; that a belief and dedication to a feminine history of art was despised by those who might have taught it and considered heretical and false by those who should have taught it. That our deepest energies were nurtured in secret, with precedents we kept secret—our lost women. Now found and to be found again.



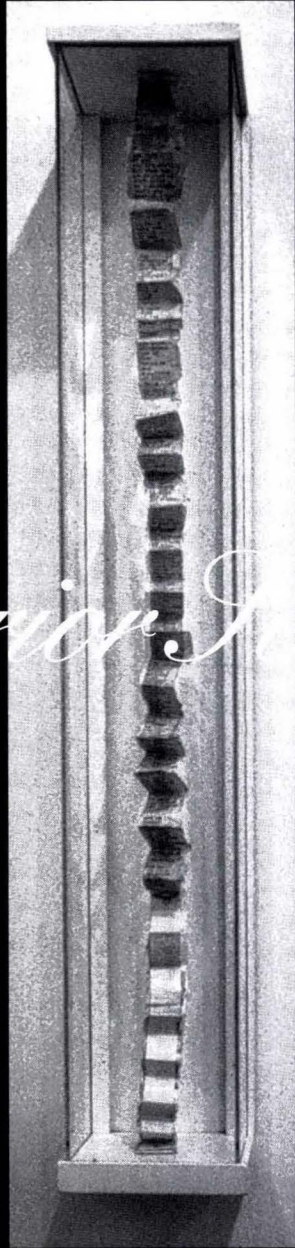
Blood Work Diary, 1972.

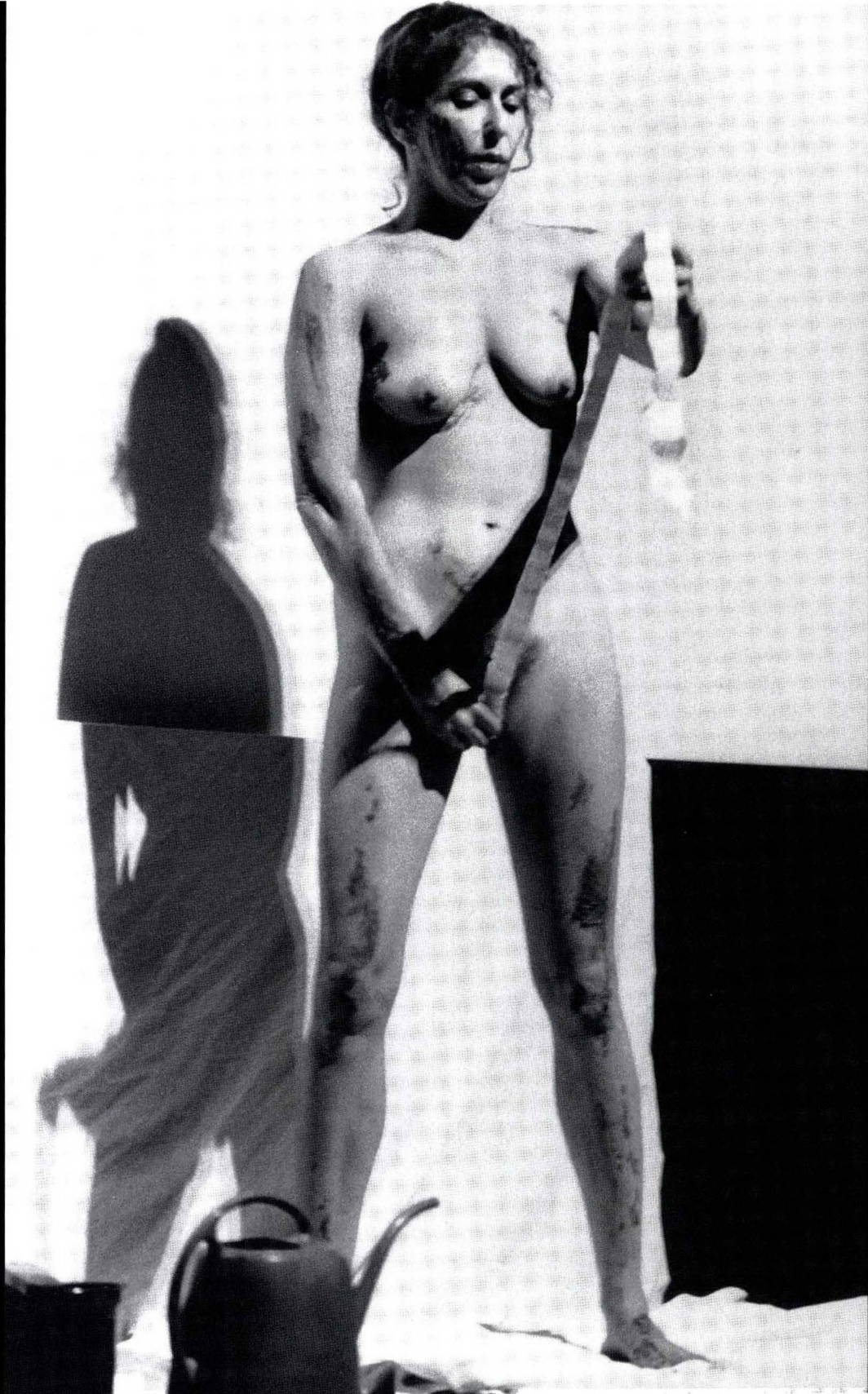
Menstrual blottings on tissue, egg yolk, silver paper. 5 panels 26 x 26 in. each.

Interior Scroll, 1975.

Photos of performance, paper scroll, text on folded paper in plexiglass box. 39 x 8 x 7 in.
Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica.

Interior Scroll





INTERIOR SCROLL

1977

I first wrote about "vulvic space" in 1960 as a result of an art history assignment on symbolism. I chose to do research on the "Transmigration of the Serpent," never suspecting that the transmutation of serpent symbolism in the wall paintings, carvings, and inscriptions of ancient cultures—this traditionally "phallic" symbolism—would lead me to a concept of vulvic space and this in turn to the disappearance and misattribution of Goddess artifacts and imagery, to a total inversion and reinterpretation of myth and symbol. My studies continued as a secret project, for nothing at that time confirmed the interrelations I saw and the fury and anguish they inspired (the relief of substantiation by Gould Davis, Gertrude Levy, H. R. Hays, Helen Diner, etc. ten or twelve years later was indescribable). Nevertheless it was usually the works of male scholars who first intensified my study—both by links they established and by denials and obfuscations. In MacKenzie's *The Migration of Symbols* I read that Cro-Magnon people believed in a Mother Earth Goddess; their cave paintings exaggerate the female sexual characteristics. Water and wind were of fundamental importance and were symbolized by natural spirals. The snake symbolized whirlpool, whirlwind, cosmic energy. Snakes originally symbolized the cosmic energy of the female womb, which protected and nourished the embryo, as they believed the ocean originally did the earth (school notes from *The Migration of Symbols*, 1926).

From my identification with the symbology of the female body I made the further assumption that carvings and sculptures of the serpent form were attributes of the Goddess and would have been made by women worshipers (artists), as analogues to their own physical, sexual knowledge. I thought of the vagina in many ways—physically, conceptually, as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the source of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation. I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual powers. This source of "interior knowledge" would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship. I related womb and vagina to "primary knowledge," with strokes and cuts on bone and rock by which I believed my ancestor measured her menstrual cycles, pregnancies, lunar observations, agricultural notations—the origins of time factoring, of mathematical equivalences, of abstract relations. I assumed the carved figurines and incised female shapes of Paleolithic, Mesolithic artifacts were carved by women—the visual-mythic transmutation of self-knowledge to its integral

connection with a cosmic Mother—because the experience and complexity of her personal body was the source of conceptualizing, of interacting with materials, of imagining the world and composing its images.

The message I read for *Interior Scroll* is from the feminist texts in *Kitch's Last Meal*. The image occurred as a drawing; this image seemed to have to do with the power and possession of naming—the movement from interior thought to external signification, and the reference to an uncoiling serpent, to actual information (like ticker tape, rainbow, Torah in the Ark, chalice, choir loft, plumb line, bell tower, the umbilicus, and tongue).

I think the action was also influenced by two films seen at the “Women in Film and Video” conference (Buffalo University, Center for Media Study, February 1974). First, Sharon Hennessey's *What I Want*, in which she appears in a fixed frame shot for the duration it takes her to read from a paper endlessly unfolding like a scroll. The text is one simple statement after another of what a woman wants in her life—direct and full of rich contradiction. The other film was Anne Severson's *Near the Big Chakra*, in which a continual relay of thirty or more different vaginas are filmed in close focus. Like *Fuses*, it becomes a film about nature and confronts, dismantles the convention of the genital being “obscene,” that is, forbidden to be seen. Our three films presented an ethic about knowledge itself—received from and in the body.

Interior Scroll was performed twice. Each “reading” required a ritual preparation for the action, a gradual inhabitation of the space, increasing concentration. For *Women Here and Now* I placed a long table under two dimmed spotlights in a corner of the exhibition/performance hall of the old town meeting house. The audience was largely composed of other women artists who work during summers in East Hampton, and they assembled during the exhibit of paintings for a series of performance works. I approached the table dressed and carrying two sheets. I undressed, wrapped myself in one sheet, spread the other over the table and told the audience I would read from *Cézanne, She Was A Great Painter*. I dropped the covering sheet and standing there painted large strokes defining the contours of my body and face. The reading was done on top of the table, taking a series of life model “action poses,” the book balanced in one hand. At the conclusion I dropped the book and stood upright on the table. The scroll was slowly extracted as I read from it, inch by inch.

The last thing I wanted to do at the Telluride Film Festival was an “action.” I was looking forward to seeing films, old friends, to being in Colorado again. Stan Brakhage had invited me to introduce a program of erotic films by women, and together we made a selection.

In the festival brochure we were dismayed to read our program titled as "The Erotic Woman." I found myself stuck in the lodge facing the mountains, writing away at an introduction to explain my objections to the title of the film program and to the festival brochure itself. The cover had a drawing of a naked man in sunglasses, opening his coat (a flasher) to show "Fourth Telluride Film Festival" lettered across his chest; below the waist was a blank space—he had been deprived of genitals, but knees, socks and shoes had been granted.

Stan introduced me to the film audience while I sat wrapped in a sheet on the small Victorian stage under its hand-painted drop curtain and proscenium arches. I read my introductory statement, which included this:

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 that this program of films vividly counters. Perhaps these films will redefine "The Erotic Woman," or to the contrary, the films will be found to be anti-erotic, sub-erotic, non-erotic. Perhaps this "erotic woman" will be seen as primitive, devouring, insatiable, clinical, obscene, or forthright, courageous, integral.

At the conclusion of the statement I unwrapped the sheeting and slowly applied stripes of mud to my body from a bowl filled from the Telluride mining stream. Then the scroll was extended and read. The film program followed: Agnès Vardas' *L'Opera Mouffe*, Marie Menken's *Orgia*, Gunvor Nelson's *Schmeerguntz*, Anne Severson's *Near the Big Chakra*, and my films *Fuses* and *Plumb Line*.

Interior Scroll, 1975. Performance: paper scroll, text on folded paper in plexiglass box: 39 x 8 x 7 in. Scroll: 36 x 2.25 in.

Performances

- Scroll 1: "Women Here and Now," East Hampton, N.Y. (August 29, 1975).
 Scroll 2: Telluride Film Festival, Telluride, Col. (September 4, 1977).



Scroll 1 (1966)

BE PREPARED:

to have your brain picked
to have the pickings misunderstood
to be mistreated whether your success
increases or decreases
to have detraction move with admiration—in step
to have your time wasted

your intentions distorted
 the simplest relationships in your thoughts twisted
 to be **USED** and **MISUSED**
 to be "copy" to be copied to want to cope out
 cop out pull in and away
 if you are a woman (and things are not utterly changed)
 they will almost never believe you really did it
 (what you did do)
 they will worship you they will ignore you
 they will malign you they will pamper you
 they will try to take what you did as their own
 (a woman doesn't understand her best discoveries after all)
 they will patronize you humor you
 try to sleep with you want you to transform them
 with your energy
 they will berate your energy
 they will try to be part of your sexuality
 they will deny your sexuality or your work
 they will depend on you for information for generosity
 they will forget whatever help you give
 they will try to be heroic for you
 they will not help you when they might
 they will bring problems
 they will ignore your problems
 a few will appreciate deeply
 they will be loving you
 as what you do as what you are
 loving how you are being they will of course
 be strong in themselves and clear they will **NOT**
 be married to quiet tame drones they will not say
 what a great mother you would be
 or do you like to cook and where you might expect
 understanding and appreciation you must expect **NOTHING**
 then enjoy whatever gives-to-you
 as long as it does and however
 and **NEVER** justify yourself just do what
 you feel carry it strongly yourself

Interior Scroll, 1975.

Performance.

Photo: Anthony McCall.



Interior Scroll, 1975.
Performance.
Photo: Sally Dixon.

Scroll 2:

From *Kitch's Last Meal*,
Super-8 mm film (1975)

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 I
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
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 though 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."



Interior Scroll, 1975.
Performance.
Photo: Sally Dixon.



Up To And Including Her Limits, 1973–77.

Performance.

Photo: Shelley Farkas.

UP TO AND INCLUDING HER LIMITS

1973–77

Berkeley Notes (1973–77)

Structural concept of the actions.

I TRACKINGS: tracks in space map a time process

Marks referential to actions producing them—both visible and invisible, durable and non-durable

Suspended on the rope, the “automatic drawing” maps time process and the time process is “charted” (factored) by spatial signs

II The architectural space of the museum: political and personal

1 what it imposes, provokes, permits what I discover, adapt to, change: embedded modes of behavior and an aesthetic ideal taken for granted—invisible cultural assumptions

2 drawings and notes before seeing the actual space, a “re-view,” projective (like automatic writing) preparatory work: imagining the architecture, geography, food, temperature, light, tonality inside and outside, water sources, energy—my own and the place (materials, dimensions, containment of the body . . .)

3 first time in California istory of the museum—what is its community? how is Berkeley distinctive? when and why is a living artist invited (acceptable in a museum?)

III Dismantling the fixity of museum patterns/cultural sets

1 arrive at the museum when it opens—with the cleaners, guards, secretaries, maintenance crew—remain until closing

2 NO “performance”: museum become my home, studio; my cat Kitch lives there with me

Construct, arrange a "home," work environment: kitty litter, table, chair, bowls of water, food for Kitch, green plants, clock, typewriter, change of clothes, papers, books, drawing materials, rug, pillows

3 **ON & OFF** the canvas

the artist, the nude—at home, at work

still life elements: fruit, eggs, clothes, dishes—use in actions of exploring and organizing the space

aromas: of the canvas—rags soaked in turpentine (old art odors); fresh oil paint, palettes (not used)

IV **THE TRACKS**

1 attaching rope from 25-foot high ceiling side of lower gallery suspended on the rope—sustained duration so long as concentration endures
chalk in hand—motion of body by tension/relaxation with the rope mark motions on floors, walls . . . accumulative

2 nude woman (artist walks through the museum)

3 *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*: nude outside on the grass has lunch people gather to observe her the cat walks in the grass the people and the nude in conversation

Statement for *Texte Zur Kunst* (1999)

My need had been to occupy a place of visual simultaneities, to bring forward evidence of a changing multiplicity. As a landscape painter I occupied fields of shifting forms, physical sensations of wind, light, temperature effecting my perceptions. I sat in fields, marshes on the edge of frozen ponds. My oil paints were warmed over the flames of candles stuck into the snow. These early paintings were always failures. By the sixties I took the painting surface into three dimensions with collage, objects, and motorized elements. This was the obvious implication of abstract expressionism. The works of Pollock, de Kooning, could only be viewed with optical muscularity—the entire body was active.

***Up To And Including Her Limits* was the direct result of Pollock's physicalized painting process. In *Up To And Including Her Limits*, I am suspended in a tree surgeon's harness on a three-quarter-inch manila rope, a rope which I can raise or lower manually to sustain an entranced period of drawing—my extended arm holds crayons which stroke the surrounding walls, accumulating a web of colored marks. My entire body becomes the agency of visual traces, vestige of the body's energy in motion.**

My intentions were TO DO AWAY WITH: (1) Performance, (2) A fixed audience, (3) Rehearsals, (4) Improvisation, (5) Sequences, (6) Conscious intention, (7) Technical cues, (8) A central metaphor or theme. What was left?

***Up To And Including Her Limits*, 1971-77. Performance/installation: 2 large-scale crayon drawings on paper wall, 72 x 96 in. each, tree surgeon's harness with manila rope, 2 video decks with 6 monitors, 8 mm film projector, video compilation of various performances edited by Carolee Schneemann, 1982; dimensions variable.**

Performances

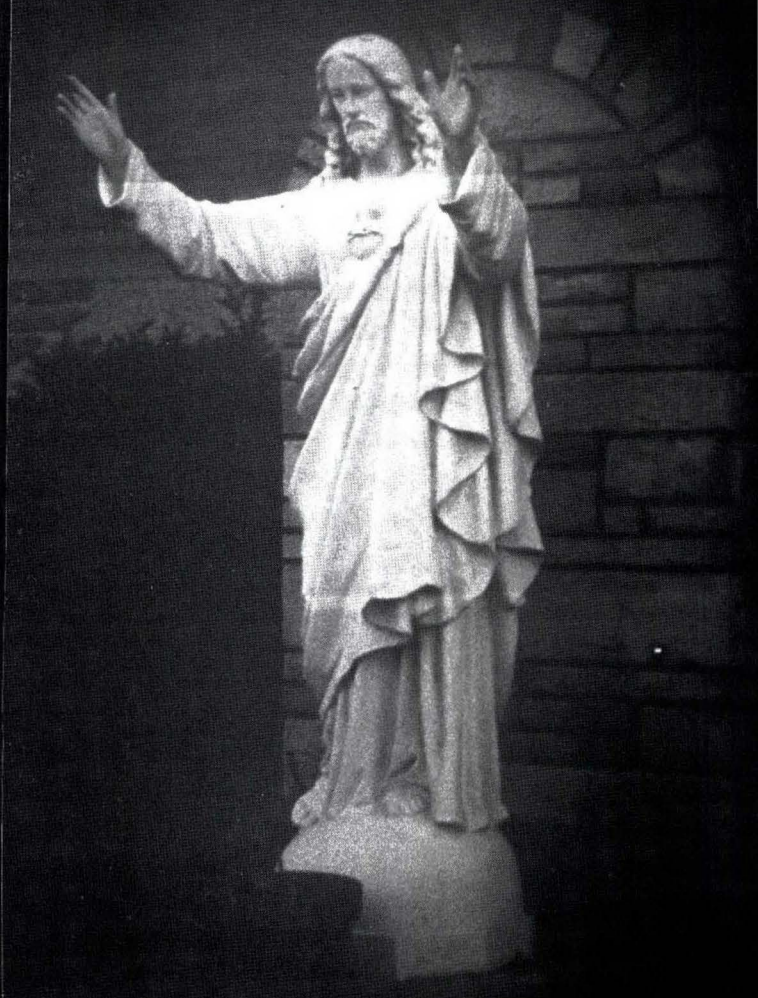
There are different versions of this piece. The first version was titled *Trackings* and was performed as part of the Avant-Garde Festival #10 held at Grand Central Station, New York in 1973. Subsequent performances included the University Art Museum, Berkeley (1974); Artists' Meeting Mace, London (1974); London Filmmakers Cooperative (1974); Artists Space, New York (1974); Anthology Film Archive, New York (1974); The Kitchen, New York (1976); Studiogalerie, Berlin (1976); Basle Art Fair (1976); Fluxus Flux Forum, Venice Biennale (1990).

Installations

Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (1995).
 Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (1995).
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1995).
 Kunstraum, Vienna (1995).
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1996).
 New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1996-97).
 Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (2000).

Video

Super-8 mm film relay (1984), edited by C.S., brings together video footage of six performances, including Berkeley Museum (1974), The Kitchen, New York (1976), and Studiogalerie, Berlin (1976).



Dirty Pictures, 1979.

Performance.

Photo: Artemisia Gallery, B. J. Ciurej and L. L. Lochman.

DIRTY PICTURES

1979-80

Dedicated to Charlie Berg, 1942-79

Dirty Pictures is a *viniculum*, a copulation of domestic and preliterate artifacts which answers the question: Can a lonely, impoverished genital lexicon find happiness in a forgotten mining town?

A performance work for five to ten participants, each of whom contributes text sources and movements compressed into an exchange of questions and answers concerning their early suppressed erotic memories. *Dirty Pictures* was first organized as a workshop for painters and sculptors to explore randomizing conjunctions of imagery and text. I shaped the unpredictable development of text and movement to integrate it with slide sequences, prerecorded dream narratives, and film projections. The following are excerpts from the complete work.

"Art Is Reactionary"

A solo with text and actions. I move back and forth between two different microphones to maintain the contrary question and answers. My movements cast shadows within the double slide projection.

The introductory text for three voices: statement/question/explication. A comic rondo, which encapsulates a social framework for the units of the piece.

Voice 1 statement: speaks from chair "station 3" within audience area.

Voice 2 question: walks between stations 4-7. Voice 2 is a male "interrogator."

Voice 3 explication: a naked woman, back to audience on the examination table; her position refers to Velázquez's *Portrait of Venus*, but she is framed within a slide projection of Delacroix's *Drowning Woman*. She speaks into a hand-held microphone; unmoving except for her legs, which make a continuous almost imperceptible (slow) scissors kick. (Her accent may be Viennese or Russian?)

art is reactionary / why is art reactionary?

because so old so stolen

sex is reactionary / why is sex reactionary?



BLADDER

SYMPHYISIS

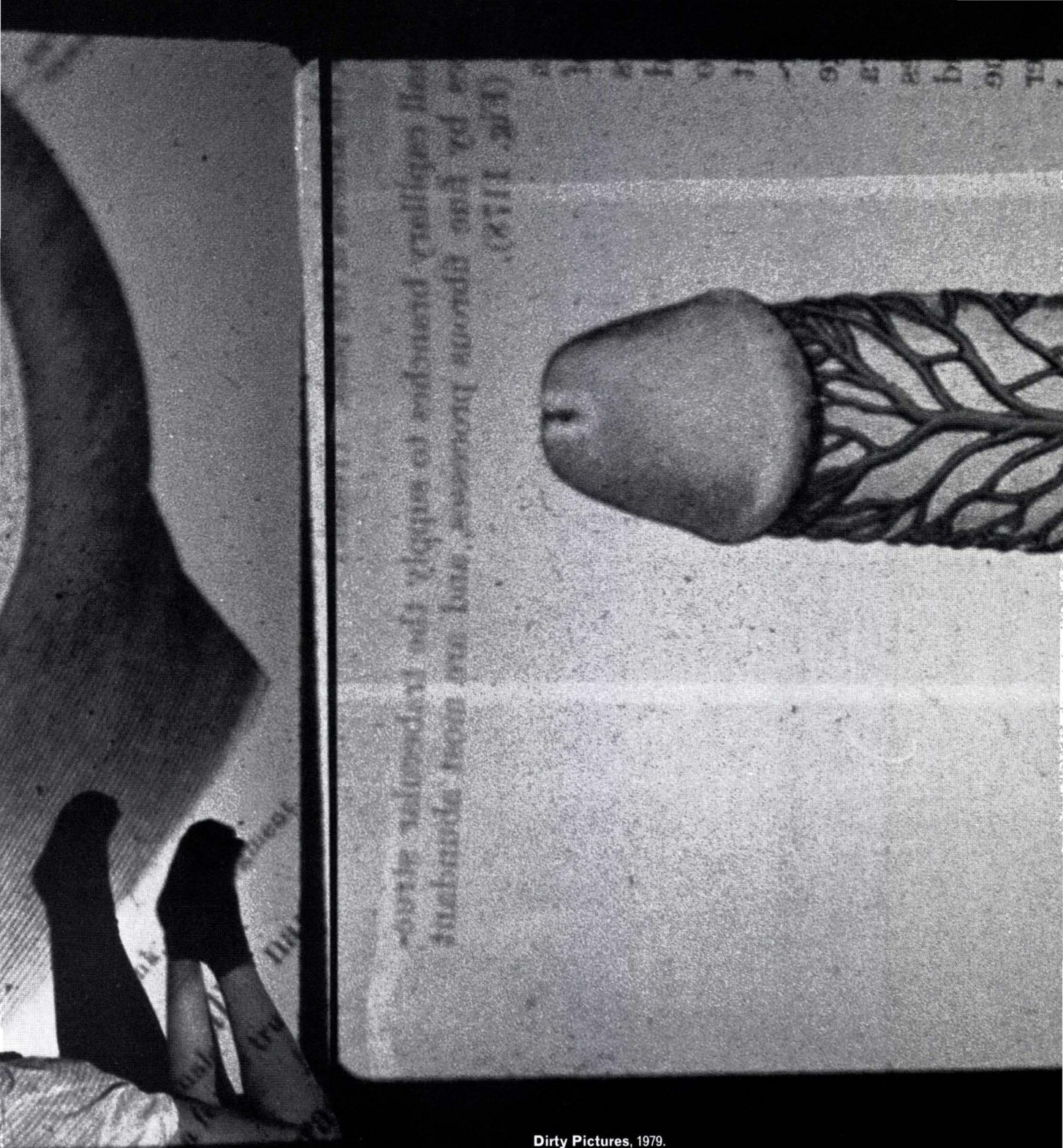
RECTUM

VAGINA

URETHRA

US

UTERUS
LABIUM



Dirty Pictures, 1979.

Performance.

Photo: Artemisia Gallery, B. J. Ciurej and L. L. Lochman.

because same movements same sounds
nature is reactionary / why is nature reactionary?
because so old so penetrated
food is reactionary / why is food reactionary?
because you must to eat
shoes are reactionary / why are shoes reactionary?
because always show style
cats are reactionary / why are cats reactionary?
because they expecting justice
love is reactionary / why is love reactionary?
because always personal
family at a table is reactionary / why is a family reactionary?
because false optimism
travel is reactionary / why is travel reactionary?
because you bring money & germs
Wilhelm Reich is reactionary / why is Wilhelm Reich reactionary?
because orgasm energy diverted political energy
semiotics is reactionary / why is semiotics reactionary?
because it is a binary form
Marxism is reactionary / why is Marxism reactionary?
because builds on patriarchal constructs
religions is reactionary / why is religion reactionary?
because based on monolithic authority
language is reactionary / why is language reactionary?
because it must to mean things
marijuana is reactionary / why is marijuana reactionary?
because they want us smoke watch TV
you are reactionary?
why am I reactionary?
because you ask many stupid questions

"Interrogation: Erection" (#3 of 7 Interrogations)

(Man in white doctor's coat asks the questions. Below the coat a transparent pink nightgown can be seen. A woman answers the questions. She wears a man's white shirt and under-shorts. Specific slides are coordinated with each interrogation.)

Why did you once say “my biggest problem was with the structure of the penis”? . . . what was the meaning of that?

oh yes well for several months I was quite confused as to which end was up . . . which end was up?

well you know when you're pressed together and both wearing clothes the erection feels like a bar . . . a vertical . . . I couldn't tell at which end it was attached to his body . . .

perhaps perhaps I see what you mean . . . is there something else you want to mention?

well there it was rigid between us and I was all secretly wet but I couldn't tell how it could get inside me . . . I mean what was its aim? what was its angle between where it was on him and where I was inside me I mean if it was attached at the top would I need to stand on a chair? or if it was attached at the bottom would I bend over?

she stands up on table, positions herself to dance with anatomical section; he stands behind her on floor, shadows coming as he mimics her dance—black out

“Mother Lexicon” (For two male performers)

two male voices on tape

two voices read live over tape

the men are seated at the table side by side

they wear beige nylon nightgowns and are smoking cigars

C. on top of adjacent table doing movements with “attributes”

(Slides of the “primary objects” are projected by score)

first man reads the complete line excepting upper case

second man reads each underlined word simultaneously (more or less) and the upper case phrases

once upon a time there was a great mother who made the world and everything in it came from her body and she was the source of material and spirit and we all belonged to her

everything was called “she” or “comes from she” and the men liked that and wanted to be part of “she”

THAT'S POSSIBLE YEAH YEAH

(they are studying the text, echoing the tape; they smoke cigars)

everything was called “she” the birds were she the bees were she the trees were she the ocean was she the earth was she the sky was she the light was she the night was she the sun

was she the seeds were she the cup was she the threads were she it was all called "she"
because of how it went together

the knife was us the plow was us the screw driver the key of course the stick all those imple-
ments

ISN'T THAT A BIT MECHANISTIC? EH?

In Sumerian in Hopi the words, make clay hand building block stroke image, all have female
gender

ARE YOU SURE? ARE YOU SURE?

well wait you just wait a minute the marauding males make separate tribes the male aggres-
sive principles will change all that the Romans and Christians will chop up the sacred
spaces

YES THEY DID YES THEY DID INDEED THEY DID DIDN'T THEY?

(C. has been revolving on a platform/table top holding large phalli in her hands moving them
in the air as wand baton lightning rod)

now we must search for the archaic roots in modern languages

OH YES THAT'S A THOUGHT O.K. YES

now look at the French language it is very funny how all the genitals are reversed so the
female genitals have a male gender and the male genitals have a female gender she says
when she asked about this the man said oh but it is because we belong to the other each to
the other one

it's a heterosexual clamp on the language if we were women and lovers would you want to
call each other's sex by a male word? on the other hand if we were male and lovers would we
find it amusing to name each other's sex by a female word

OH THAT WOULD BE FUNNY YES WHY WHY?

(C. has been making "obscene" combinations with two shell vulvas above her head and in
front of her body)

here . . . cunt is le cul. . . cock is "la peine." . . . a suggestive word like pouch has two forms
. . . le sac la poche . . . parent is male le parent for instance and also parasite and parsley . . .
le persil . . . but peonie is female la pivoine . . . but perfume is male le parfum perhaps
because he thinks of smelling her genital? . . . it is not logical . . . **NO IT DOESN'T REALLY**
SEEM TO BE LOGICAL the men must have taken authority over naming over lexicon
a bitter battle even among themselves **OH IT WAS A BITTER BATTLE OVER LANGUAGE**
/ WHOSE WORDS ARE WHAT? . . .

lexicon and interpretation they made a synthesis of what they wanted for themselves and
then what might be fairly appropriated designated as female except where they wanted the
designation encapsulated by the male gender dominance **DO YOU THINK SO? IT'S POS-**
SIBLE YES IT'S POSSIBLE fantasy is female . . . phantom is male . . . perhaps the males are

actual things and the females are states of being? **COULD BE A PATTERN THERE PAS-SIVE / ACTIVE I MEAN ACTIVE / PASSIVE THAT'S A PATTERN**

let's see . . . pedestrian and pediatrician . . . are male . . . but a petal is la pedale and pearl is la perle . . . feather is female . . . la plume . . . faucet is male . . . le robinet and fate is male . . . as le destin . . . but female as la fatalité . . . so she's negative there . . . fabric is male . . . and fable is female . . . farm is female la ferme . . . but farmer is male . . . fermier . . . the idea he works the farm but agriculture is female la agriculture . . . brush is female la brusse do you understand why we're doing this? **IT'S POSSIBLE I THINK I SEE**

in Italian pen is female . . . la penna . . . hole is male il buco . . . while hold is female la stiva the lying-in . . . to give birth il accouchement is male . . . birth is male . . . birthday . . . birthplace . . . both male . . . you see how greedy they were to take her powers for themselves . . . building blaze bleat blend block blood are male . . . blanket blemish blessing bliss blizzard bloom are female in that column . . . in Italian . . . the baker is male the bakery is female the balance is male . . . and the balance sheet . . . and the balcony . . . and ballet is male . . . il balletto . . . but the ballroom is female LA SALA DA BALLO

Performances

- Art Institute of Chicago (1973).
- Collective for Living Cinema, New York (1973).
- A.I.R. Gallery, New York (1980).
- Artemesia Gallery, Chicago (1980).
- Art Institute of Chicago (1980).
- Collective for Living Cinema, New York (1980).
- Benefit for *High Performance* magazine, Los Angeles (1985).
- San Francisco Art Institute, "Polyphonique" (1985).
- College Art Association, New York (1986).
- Hillwood Art Gallery, C. W. Post College, Brookville, N.Y. (1987).





Dirty Pictures, 1979.

Performance.

Photo: Artemisia Gallery, B. J. Ciurej and L. L. Lochman.

ANTI-DEMETER: THE MORE I GIVE THE MORE YOU STEAL

1994

She stood framed: open closet, shadowed textures a backdrop, clothes filled with her body's sensual shape. Cylinders filled and moving or hanging, lateral fabric edges press into each other. On their wide blue bed, my child hands shift piles of clean socks. Dad's largest rolls of brown, black, or green. Hers—white rough cotton for gardening and snaky brown nylons draped in separate layers. Mud-stained, big white ones for football are the brother's. Sister's multicolored, small thin cotton ones. The matched balls accumulated while her terror unhinged my concentration, my placement as witness. She stood framed by the closet doors, undressed—pink bra, pink panties with lacy sides, hand raised over her left breast. Her startled face turned to my face. "There is a lump in my breast. Feel this!" As if I were her sister or a friend, my fingers pull away from cotton and wool to touch her skin. A small little lump . . . there, where I touch my mother's breast.

That year my brother began sleepwalking. Somehow she would know, alert in sleep, hearing the hushed tread no one else could hear. To rush down the stairs in a fluttering robe to find the front door open . . . golden ruff of hair, a moon moving slowly down the silent road—those long solid ruddy legs running ahead of her.

I scrub at his pink skin, he closes his blue eyes. One Christmas, when he was four, he was given a miniature carpentry set. I found the face of my antique porcelain doll smashed in, the "real" eyelashes buried in ceramic dust. Later, the ivory piano keys—her pride and dreams for music—were hammered off at the edges, hostile biting broken teeth.

Her few solitary pleasures: to be bent over the clattering sewing machine, domestic alchemy, aromas of starch mildew springtime, a dense shifting clutter of fabrics, threads, pins, buttons. There were lengths of rayon, flannel, silk, cotton to become curtains, flowered dresses for my sister or me, or something envisioned from swaths of silky fabric cut on the bias, if they planned a trip to the city—dancing, a concert. Companionably at her side on its metal leg stood a bronze-colored fiberboard replica of her own exact shape, but headless, armless, almost sexless. The month *before* she discovered the lump in her left breast, she had found the left breast of the sewing model smashed in, its idealized bronze-colored breast indented, broken. Small hammer blows. No one ever spoke of this assaultive prediction, his guilt, the destructive impulse foretelling an invitation to Cancer, the point of invasion marked in advance.

A dream reiterates the search for my/our mother. Both books are missing! The diary and the flower-covered notebook . . . phone calls . . . messages left that she *had* been seen . . . was at a certain hotel, but my father and brother told inquiring friends that she was definitely “missing.”

You are not invited into my body. I did not invite an alien being, a “child,” into my future. I had a mountainside to climb, my back pushing against a heavy rucksack filled with paints, turpentine, oils, brushes, the roll of canvas. There were sharp rocks to climb, horizons to see into. And lovers to mesh with unencumbered. I did not accept swelling tender breasts, rounding belly, the constant need to leave what I was looking at in its transformative swift tonalities under passing clouds, to drop wet brushes, to piss again in shrubs. Pregnancy was constant pissing and terror, not nausea but terror. I was taken over. I was no longer an “I.” Someone unchosen was inhabiting me, would claim love, attention, care, would use me to become itself, would live in my thoughts and intentions. The umbilicus unfurled years of eternal distractions, demands, needs to be fed, washed, dried, clothed, walked, spoken to, taught everything! There was a lump growing in my body.

To see, to make images was to be alive. Not possessed, inhabited, coopted, distracted, and at the mercy of male pride. But each pregnancy posited a “higher value” than making work: The explorations I choose to follow—total concentration, the bliss of coherence and unexpected discrepancies, rhythms within one rectangle. Painting into the night and, on waking, to go immediately to the studio to engage with history—personal, ancient. Pregnancy meant a social usurpation of the private products and processes of my body—even the ecstatic fucking.

I'm not your dog bone your hearth and cupboard your steaming kettle on the stove your stack of pancakes I'm not your socks folded and matched.

(In sixth grade I had a crush on Bert, a farmer's son. His yellow hair stood up like straw. One morning he squeezed onto the seat beside me, mixing his soapy smell with the pungent gasoline aroma of the orange school bus rumbling along. He put his hand on the edge of my red and green plaid skirt, looked into my eyes and said, “You're so pretty. When we grow up, would you breed my children?” It was indelibly clear that, no matter my dreams and wishes, there was a cowlike destiny in store. I never let him kiss me again during spin-the-bottle.)

By going public with my body I deprivatized it.

Every time she got pregnant it was more work for me, more problems. I caught on after the first one, but it was already too late. I became a wise insightful helping little mother.

Tell me: what is more forbidden—a positive conscious association—than the comingling of artist/mother? mother-as-artist . . . mother-and-artist . . . female . . . muse . . . blank canvas . . . unnamed . . . unexplored territory . . . daunting . . . unknown. Western male aesthetic myths strike a bargain with the displaced femaleness of their own unconscious as space to be penetrated, defined, brought to life. If women artists already occupy the space of the once devoted/eroticized but bloodless muse, then his high heroic stakes are contaminated and diminished! (Mad woman in his attic.)

Now I see: our father stole us from her arms, from her escape from death, back into his arms where she would be filled again with another baby from him, just as Jesus stole Mary from the fertile goddess pantheon. Daddy runs toward us in a flapping apron—huge feet in laced-up boots, his arms are full, ecstatic smile. He has stolen another baby from a woman's wide-opened legs: son adored among sisters becomes doctor deliverer. He charmed the children's hearts away—loving blue eyes, candy in pockets, forgiving our crimes, which she had punished with systematic slaps and screams. Her weary artificial cheer at meals, the plates burned into her extended hands. Daddy is dancing around the cozy fire-lit room, Christmas tree lights flicker between his raised arms, feet poked into the center of her narrow navy sling-back pumps. Daddy is dancing and singing. She is abashed, charmed, fearful . . . a zany little hat, a long wavering feather perched on his head. We scream *Daddy Daddy Daddy*, throw us in the air! Our wild hearts explode with joy and wonder—our handsome laughing Daddy. When *she* sings, I crawl under the dining room table and weep, my brother sleepwalks and smashes things with his toy hammer, my sister twitches under her hands. "Don't touch me, Mom!"



HOMERUNMUSE, 1977.

Performance.

Photo: Bill Thompson.



HOMERUNMUSE, 1977.

Performance.

Photo: Bill Thompson.

HOMERUNMUSE

1977

Introduction

A work-in-progress to explore derivations of the concept "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.

Slide projections and prerecorded or written texts are precisely scored; speech and live actions are improvised. There are four slide units:

- 1 Details of the museum architecture and objects in its collection, juxtaposed with prehistoric artifacts.
- 2 Double projections from the "Women Artists" exhibit.
- 3 Images of my earlier performance actions having affinity to Cretan and Etruscan sculptures.
- 4 A free-floating image of an equatorial island Owl Goddess.

These establish equivalencies between architectural space, the objects/artifacts of the museum, and depictions of the female body. Periodic runs through the museum break up the actions performed in relations to the slides and text: video cameras positioned in selected corridors relay the runs onto monitors in front of the audience.

The following texts are from the Brooklyn Museum version, which took place in a small gallery after being designed for the spacious Victorian rotunda. Three days before the installation-performance, cancellation was threatened because an official dinner for Henry Kissinger was to take place in an adjacent museum gallery.

16 November 1972

Searching in a high library shelf for still-life reproductions. An old (1960) Art News Annual toppled down falling open to image of "Cretan toreador." Hairs on my arm rise up . . . as I realize my "running image" for Illinois Central performance flyer is a gestural mirror to this sculptural action—carved in marble 2500 B.C. to commemorate the bull leaping priestesses. The flyer was made in November 1967.

* Organized by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin. Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Brooklyn Museum, New York, October–November 1977.

October 1963–October 1973

An early, complex kinetic theatre work, *Chromolodeon* (1963). I made costumes from colored silk found among the boxes of discarded fur coat linings, tossed out on West 29th Street, shaped by stitching and burning. Late into the night, I draped the cloth on a dress-maker's dummy and gave it the head of a horned bull, mystified by this configuration. Seven years later, a Swedish woodsman passing through New York took me to meet his closest friends in a loft one block from mine. On a table, in their studio, I saw a book with a startling cover—it was the prototype of the bull's head (*The Art of Crete and Early Greece*).

22 November 1973

Thanksgiving visit to family, I help mother clear out closets. A pile of old magazines slid from a shelf, one randomly split open to a color reproduction of a Minoan snake goddess—*Medical News Magazine* (1966). Here is the connection, the ironical transposition of the healing, regenerative serpent attribute of the ancient Goddess cultures usurped by a Greek male figure holding the wands of Asclepius, the contemporary symbol of modern medicine. I see a relation to my impulsive use of two snakes in the 1963 transformative actions for camera, *Eye Body*; and subsequent considerations of the serpent as embodiment of transgressions and mysteries; penetrating from visible to invisible space, tunneling to “the center of the earth,” symbolizing the female (vulvic) power to activate and transform the phallic oblation.

(We remind ourselves these images are made by women.)

. . . Decoration, a balanced geometric patterning . . . It was too rigid to have been put to any practical use, and this particular example did not seem to have been cut as a whistle. It may therefore originally have been intended for some “magical” ceremonial, sacred, erotic phallus.

In the summer of 1973 I improvised movements naked in the country landscape, spontaneous physical actions in the environment—mud, leaves, suspension in trees, and on a railroad track. A student pointed out the association this image made to a Cretan bull jumper figurine.

We were staying with friends in an ancient farmhouse in the Tuscany mountains. In a dream the Goddess said, “My forgotten sanctuaries are all around you now. See with your own eyes. Our gestures are the same gestures.” Prayers in movement to this spirit. Driving through the Tuscan countryside, by a mountain we found caves, labyrinths marked by small signs: “Madonna of the Tears.” The old museum was filled with artifacts of Goddess worship and matriarchal culture. I assumed this funeral urn held the ashes of a female warrior; her image on the urn had been sculpted by a woman artist in homage to the defense of their culture and reverence for their sister.

The museum was deserted. The old attendant seemed curious about my rapturous attention. I ask him if the objects and sculptures are sacred to an ancient Goddess. He laughs, "No Goddess. Many things found in the caves we call 'Madonna of the Tears'." I photograph the surviving works of an obliterated culture.

July 1974

We are in the small wooden beach house of our friends, on a deserted stretch of Fire Island. We make love to the sound of the crashing waves; our skin is salty. We sit in bed reading, sand particles on our fingers, as we turn the pages of our books. I have been reading Elizabeth Gould-Davis's *The First Sex*, writing notes on my researches into the disappearance and obfuscation of art created by women. At dawn, the four of us make blueberry pancakes and coffee, take acid, and go the beach. The rising sun light sizzled. The sand is iridescent. My body streamed into particles of sun, attached to infinite rays lifting out of the sea. A Goddess presence said, "Enter the sea." I went naked to the foaming edge, ready to leap into the waves, but suddenly unable to enter the glimmering blue waves. She said, "You must learn to ask for help from younger women." I went to Judy and asked, "Could you take me into the ocean?" Smiling, naked, small body, glass beads shine on her neck, she said, "Of course." We clasped hands and entered the ocean. I dive, she turned back, I swam on. Salt water buoyant. As I swam, the presence indicated work I needed to do, several problems which must be faced. It was very clear. She said "I have a gift for you." I swam and floated, ecstatic through the waves, when my legs were suddenly entangled, encumbered. Diving, I grasped a tangle—and found "the gift" caught between my legs: a cleft stick! Raising it out of the waves: Bulls horn. Crescent moon. Draped crazily with colored threads, sea weed, wire, and a popped red balloon. Fragments of every sculpture I had ever made caught in the cleft branch.

Battle scenes are traditionally ascribed to male artists depicting male warriors; historical evidence is adjusted to these assumptions; a female figure represents a mythological "war muse," a supporter of the embattled heroes. Feminist perceptions may be at variance with these conventions. I analyze the fresco (from *The Color Book of Egyptian Mythology*) as a depiction of women warriors repelling an attack by invading men. The dominant warrior leads her female troupes and two male banner carriers into a foray in which the attacking bearded males are crushed and overrun. The cobra headdress is symbolic of a goddess spitting flames at enemies of the pharaoh. (The term *pharaoh* stood for a queen or a king,). I further assume that the priestesses of the female pharaoh would undertake sacred writing (the hieroglyph), and painting to celebrate their victory; the historic text, may have been destroyed but the painting survived, probably through misattribution.

In the tomb frieze from Tuscany, women warriors are positioned at the side of two embattled men, but they are active—not symbolic—fighters, aiming spears and shields. The ambiguity in both upper and lower frieze centers on the division of the male figures; are the male antagonists representative of patriarchal invaders encountering defending male warriors—men who would have fought to protect their own gynocratic religion? The evidence in Tuscany points to a relatively late destruction of the local goddess worship. The sculptors of the friezes could have been male or female. Among the artifacts of goddess worship are fragments of bowls and plates depicting highly erotic and tender heterosexual acts; my sense is of a full male participation in worship of the goddess principle.

In gynocratic culture, biological reproduction was meshed with the creation of art, the creation of sacred forms & images. Because she gave birth woman had the power and the authority to render images. Because she created living “forms,” she was responsible for the vitalities of inanimate forms. Because man did not form, contain, and deliver human life, the religious rituals of shaping material to embody life energies were restricted for him. We have to remind ourselves that these images were created by women.

Section Three

Projectors I and II in the center of the walls—slides of my performance works and mystical affinities. Projector III on far right wall, relays of my paintings, etc.

Speaking and movements done to the images improvised from material in the following texts:

Drawing before I could speak. . . . I thought everyone was born with a special work they would want to do all their lives . . . at four years old a friend and influence was my Scottish nanny.

(Image of hammered gold male “moon” face, photographed through a curtain.)

She also believed that the visible world was permeated by invisible energies. Late in the night when the moon was full and my family slept we crouched in front of the East window. . . . She taught me prayers to see in the moon when my grandfather died his face emerged in the face of the Moon Mother and he spoke to us. . . . By the time I was four I was drawing endless & engrossing sequences of “action-dramas” . . . each crude image required many pages to fill a final page—a flip book asking itself: where was this image before I drew it?

Performances

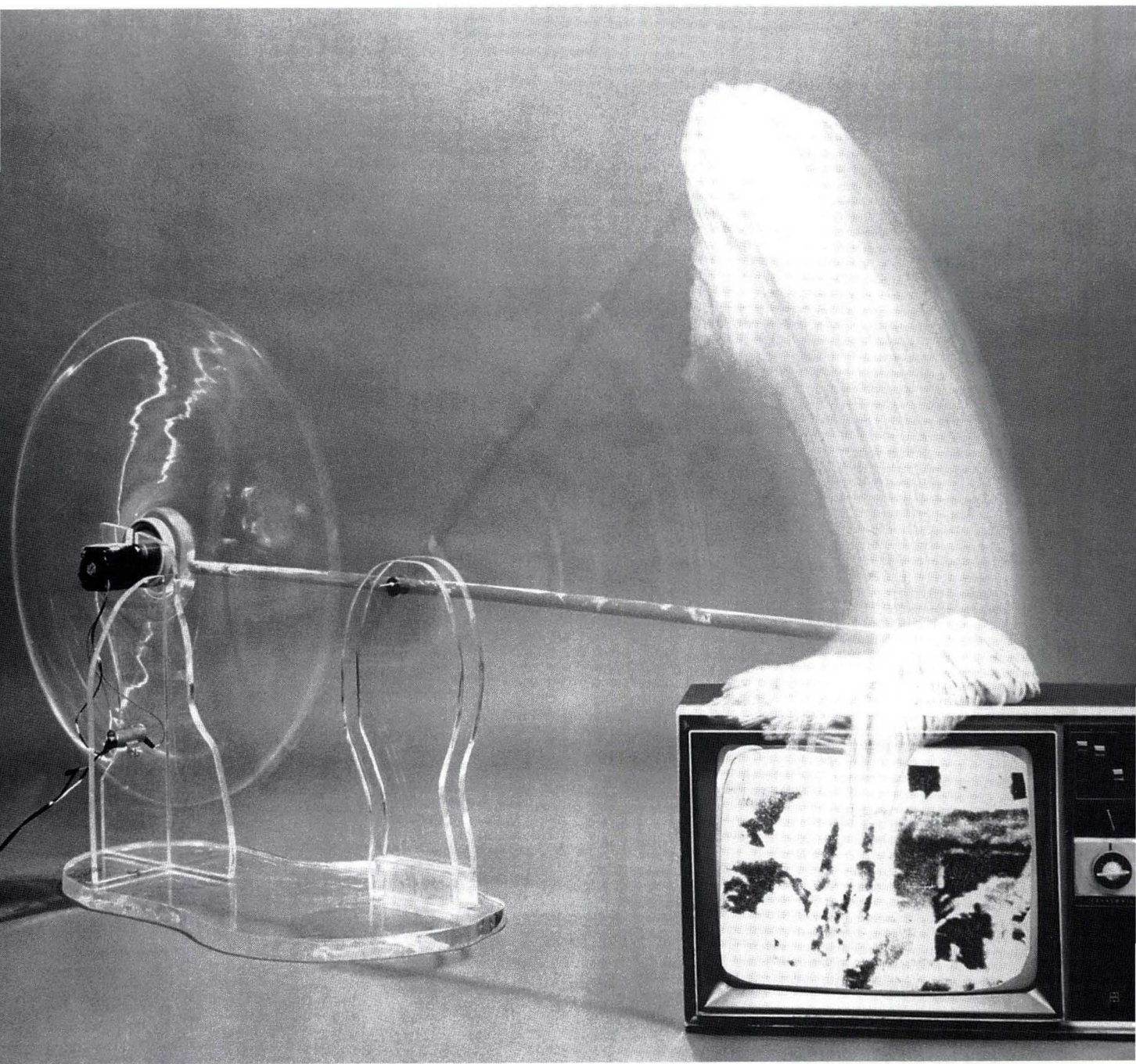
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York (November 1977).

Lions Walk, Pittsburgh (January 1978).

Franklin Furnace, New York (1979).

Hallwalls, Buffalo (1979).

The Music Gallery/A Space, Toronto (1979).



War Mop, 1983.
Sculpture with video.
Photo: Scott Bowron.

THE LEBANON SERIES

1983-91

War Mop (1983)

War Mop is a kinetic sculpture in which a mechanized mop on a plexiglass fulcrum flails its TV monitor in relentless rotations. The videotape shown on the monitor intercuts news footage of the skeletal remains of the Lebanese town of Damour, panning to a Palestinian woman in the wreckage of her home. I intercut slides from the Lebanese tourist bureau, before the Israeli invasion, with black and white photographs of the relentless destruction of Beirut.

War Mop, 1983. Plexiglass construction, mop, motor, video monitor (videotape of destroyed Lebanese/Palestinian villages). Sculpture: 24 x 62 x 20 in. TV: 12 x 18 x 10 in.

Exhibitions

Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York, "Recent Work" (1983).

The Sculpture Center, New York, "Sound Art" (1984).

Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, New York, "Modern Machines: Recent Kinetic Sculpture" (1985).

Artists Space, New York, "Dark Rooms" (1987).

Dana Art Center, Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y., "Subjective Lines—Objective Video" (1989).

Scroll Painting with Exploded TV (1990-91)

The *Lebanon Series* began as a series of dreams in 1981. The conceptual work is activated through my body—a sense of physiological invasion, impaction. The political information that's coming to me—which anyone else might have access to—physicalizes itself as dreams, hallucinations, sensations of being in a place I have never seen literally or actually been. With the increasing bombardments of Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 1982, I began to see imagery—on the threshold of sleeping—of very specific buildings blowing up, being bombed: an old stone library blasted by rocket fire and imploding. I pursue these chimera back into the world where they are located, to deepen what that world might be. In the case of Lebanon—as in Vietnam—my research begins with the poetry of the place, what the writing was like, who was writing it, its characteristics. With poetry I enter into a kind of *ethos*, the topographical power of language: where the political takes its voice, in a culturally specific way, and where the feminine aspects of the culture are situated.

Reading Arabic poetry offered a sense of the historic traditions shattered when the dream-library blew up. Our obfuscations—that there was no culture to blow up or shatter—are of course similar to our erasure of the Vietnamese culture and history. I trace back to my having first heard about this mysterious Vietnam war before it was public knowledge, from a Vietnamese exchange student at the University of Illinois, who was studying English and giving talks about Vietnamese poetry in 1960. It was not common knowledge that American soldiers and advisers were in Vietnam in 1960. According to the student, U.S. advisers and soldiers were already there. In my memory of it, no one knew what she was talking about. Viet what? No one had heard of such a place much less that we had an army there.

In each instance the U.S.A., or the agents for U.S. interests, ransacked preindustrial or non-Western cultures that identify their history and sufficiency within agricultural traditions. Their economic organization is not technological. Our victim cultures are preindustrial compared to our potentially decimating superior technological forces and international machinations. Expansionist power, weapons, war mechanics displace negotiation, conciliation. This imbalance suggests another metaphor for the iconic feminine beaten to shreds, without boundaries. The “enemy” is demonized even to the extent that it cannot match the force or violence of the invading powers, so that self-determination dooms itself in its aspirations of integration and negotiation.

If you are not powerful enough to resist my brutality, then my brutality is going to increase. You're asking for it because you're not as monstrous as I am. I am as monstrous as I am because you're there to be savaged by the worst I can do.

Sunken Red by Jeroen Brouwers is a painful novel of misogynist revelation, concerning a hypermasculine compulsion to separate from and demean the feminine. Brouwers is a renowned Dutch writer of male heroic mysteries, but he was haunted by the profound emotional disassociations that *Sunken Red* explores. As a five-year-old child, he had seen his mother raped in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. Blood running down her legs, she collapses, brutalized—invisibly wounded—senselessly punished, and he is helpless. Kicked into the dirt, she is covered in blood, convulsed—his young, beautiful mother who has risked her life for his. His horror of her blood and defilement define his *deepest being for the rest of his life*. Revulsion and disgust at her having been a victim underlie his adult detestation of all he associates with her: nature itself, menstruation, animals, all fuzzy things, vulvas, cunts, blood, love, tenderness, caring, submission to feeling. . . . He invents myths of powerful men to displace association with that victimhood which is female (and his own helpless position as child and male). When his mother dies, home in Holland, old and alone,



Scroll Painting with Exploded TV, 1990.

Multimedia installation.

Photo: Baruch Rafic.

Brouwers forces himself to write what underlies his previous constructions of defended, hypermasculine identity, the victimization of his mother, his own alienation.

Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies: Women floods bodies history* delves into the overdetermined masculine, how this psychosis is politicized and coded within an acceptable narrative. The action hero exemplifies militaristic political structures devoted to compulsive aggression. Right now (1995!) those codes are active in the destruction of Yugoslavia. The split of self and other embeds a narcissistic deformation: I can only be who I am because I have you to destroy. I know I am not female if I can rape, I am a victor by assaulting with my cock-weapon.

I believed the destruction of Beirut was gratuitous, that there was no military necessity. I have to idealize it slightly to justify my position, but, for all its craziness, Beirut was polyglot in that part of the world—hedonistic, optimistic, excruciating beautiful, and constantly improvising itself. It was the active, cosmopolitan, tolerant, center of the Arab intellectual world. It had excellent universities, publications, experimental theater. In Beirut, women were working in the arts, as well as medicine, social sciences—areas that are still closed to women in the villages of the traditional patriarchal clans of Lebanon. The destruction of Beirut and major cities by the Israelis often involved collaborations with the most repressive Maronite, Shiite, Sunni patriarchs who themselves contested for sections of Lebanon. The stirring of conflicts benefited the adversarial power groups in certain ways, but could also lead to their own devaluation and disintegration; their power would be gone. If Lebanon were to become more like Beirut, then all these suppressive, entrenched traditions would be challenged.

Beirut fulfilled a military sexual metaphor—they could not stop jerking off on this harlot. Beirut was asking for it. They could not stop raining down their toxic ejaculations—rockets aimed into the half-moon curve of the sea. The language that's always used—"penetrating the southern border," "raining down bombardments," "coming in low and hard," "pounding villages," "blasting off." What they were "blasting off" into was often unarmed populations (and sacred sites with archeological remains of Goddess worship). It's one anguished set of gratuitous destructions after another. Male photographers constantly demonstrate an unconscious, irresistible attraction to the injury of women and children—predominant subjects are civilian victims dying or wounded or blown apart (also because the victims are evidence). Often the valorous, unspeakable shattering of the enemy will be characterized by images of woman and children in the ruins. Our press never reported that these Israeli aerial raids could not be countered because the Lebanese had no airplanes. They only had

battered old anti-aircraft artillery dragged up to the roofs of apartment buildings which then become targets. Of course, under those buildings were dozens of families with no means of escape. The feminine as land, city, mother state represents the disputed territory of male forms of differentiation: invader/protector, colonist/heroic resister, rapist/savior, bully/Santa Claus. . . .

Systematically everything in Palestinian culture (displaced by the Israeli land grab) taking root in Beirut became a target—libraries, hospitals, social services, schools, women's community groups. A fifth column developed between the Israelis and those Lebanese who wanted the Palestinians out. This fifth column was everywhere, and they undermined the most fragile parts of the infrastructure, while the Israeli Air Force targeted the larger organized resistance. And of course the Israeli bombardments on the refugee camps! Obliterating the people displaced by Israeli demographic incursions. The research I did was so interesting: the Palestinians are historically related to the Philistines—and the Philistines are historically a breakaway tribe from the tribes of Moses. The severity of Mosaic canon—monotheistic, patriarchal law—was resisted by various pastoral tribes. Most decided on the benefits of Mosaic rule and law—adherence would promote power and religious identity. One group decided to head north. They didn't want any part of it, it's no fun, it suppresses, denies the ancient polytheistic worship rituals, and they go north! Lebanon was still rich with sacred sites of Astarté, Cybelle, Aphrodite. . . .

They maintained ties to pantheistic, matriarchal, gnostic elements that are still configured in disguised sites, relics, sculptures, traditions of dance, cooking, embroidery! The Hebrew patriarchs wanted to obliterate the mother cults. That's the root I wanted to research—the common, shared origin! What are Semites anyway? The Palestinians from early Palestine share the same tribal, genetic root group as the Philistines. "Philistines" became pejorative only because the early patriarchs hated them; but they invented purple dye, a beautiful Aramaic alphabet, they invented ways of balancing freestanding stone arches. (My research was limited to only four or five years, in country libraries, reading religious history and archaeology.)

You can start anywhere for forbidden information. I usually start at the little New Paltz library. With books in the stacks that are forty years old, I find lost information, suppressed information, also certain kinds of prejudicial patterns, historically anomalous. Next, I go up to a larger university library and try to deepen research. My point is that it starts right where I am, it comes right in these walls. . . . I give myself permission to reinvent this history.

As a transgressive female artist, I have a heightened sense of implicit threat. At the same time,

the concerns develop from a position of safety, privilege, and self-determination. I am only *threatened* with historical disappearance, I am only *threatened* with emotional betrayal, loss, and disappearance. Banal, stupid injustices accumulated to sharpen my understanding that as female, as a girl, if my art books were stolen that really didn't matter, because I was told those books won't mean as much to me as they do to the boy that stole them—that contradictory pattern.

Since I was excluded from creating cultural value and cultural history and because I was expected only to take care of a husband and children, it gave my early self-determination as an artist a criminal aspect, a slightly terroristic approach to enter where I was forbidden.

If you don't send me to school, you don't think I need to make images or think about these things, if there isn't anything in this culture that supports my creative necessity, then I am going to find a way somehow to do it myself. He might be stealing my books, but I am going to steal his fucking culture, and I am going to shove it back in his eyes, his nose, and his ears! "You steal one more book from me, buddy, and your culture will never look the same! Your culture is dead meat!"

That's a principle of the feminist-vicious-return, which of course is the great threat in the male paranoid imagination—that something *even slightly proportionate* to what's been done to the feminine might come ricocheting back at them! (For instance, the cultural denial, the missing inclusion in our history of ten generations of women burnt as witches. What does that do to the unconscious of husbands, sons, fathers who facilitated, observed, or became implicated themselves?) It doesn't take very much: any woman who fights back is a maniac. So male fear fills and swells historic discrepancy, in enormous disproportion. All those unconscious guilts and envy codify patriarchy and the defensive overdetermination of what's male and acceptable to maintain power.

Friends told me that in Beirut after the conflagration everyone was more or less psychotic—all those years of endless bombardment—weirded out by ceaseless explosions, by random and systematic destruction of neighbors, families, neighborhoods, beautiful buildings, historic sites. Then left to reconstruct life in rubble! You don't get back what you imagined you could with all of your energy, will, hope, and heart. There is no infrastructure. It's gone. It's overwhelming. No provision for helping people deal with the trauma. Many people can't sleep, are hallucinating, having eating problems, children are traumatized. The population is traumatized. The war is over, and it's time for investment bankers and real estate developers to take over. They'll build a *new* Beirut.

In my slide lecture “An Erotic Iconography,” the image of a rocket launcher is a terrifying shape—a pure exaggeration of demonic phallic extension. Penetrating, exploding in space, the rocket obliterates *things* we can’t even see. War machinery is acceptable to view. What is destroyed is forbidden to view as an intimacy. I juxtapose that slide with a mutilated penis, a war wound being drained. A forbidden image. More taboo than any genital depiction. A truth of denied consequences, “collateral damage.”

If there is a depiction of full frontal male genital sexuality, then it has to be placed within an idealized mythology—Greek god, young warrior, muscle man. Otherwise male genitalia are taboo. Why forbidden? War wounds, photos of baby shit, all codes of male shame: loss of power, control, integrity. Male shame locates itself in any antiheroic representation.

The male need to differentiate is more extreme: because he cannot be female, he must insist in all his modalities that **HE IS NOT**. He devalues or takes possession of the medical agency of pregnancy, birthing, bodily transformations of the feminine. *He* is not what he came out of. (And then we see in contemporary male erotics—gay, transvestite, androgynous appropriations of feminine costume, decoration, elaboration; longings to inhabit a voluptuous space of shameless tactility, to be silky wet, sparkling with false jewels, seductive and luscious.) Why do we imagine worship of the feminine must be destructive to the male, inhibitory to individuation? What is the compensatory replication of self in worshipping a male godhead; either an all-knowing, cruel, and moral Father, or a crucified God Son? Can you imagine a Mother God both stabilizing and unstabilizing—ringed with fertility and sensuousness. Positing creativity, fluorescence as divine?

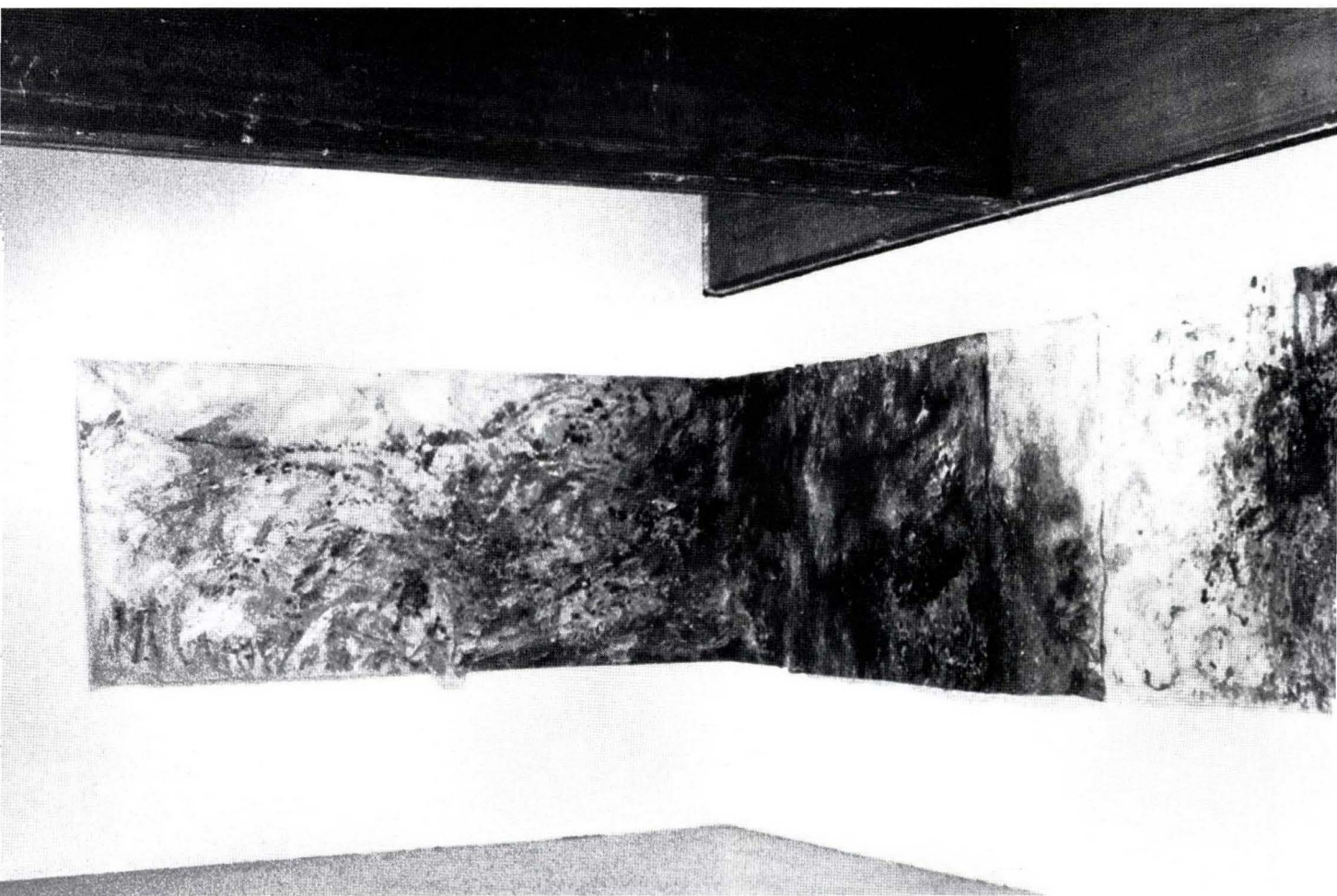
Unless we are convinced of the monstrosity of male constructs in their gender divisions, we will always imagine an inevitable, punishing feminine replication. My position has always been that the real declivity is within the men. That the men are in danger of being destroyed by the other men and that males identified with feminine processes and power are always going to be threatened by the destructive, psychotic mechanistic male convictions. The men struggle with each other through women. That’s where the anguish lies.

Scroll Painting with Exploded TV, 1990–91. Installation. Ashes, pigment, glass, dust, ink on canvas, motorized mops, video monitors, ropes. Painting: 52 x 211 in. Other dimensions variable. A series of paintings produced with motorized mops (the giant paint brush). The mops were dipped in paint, and the canvas was positioned under the mops, set in motion by their motors, moving back and forth over the canvas. The video monitors depict the paint falling on the canvas.

Installations

Walters-McBean Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute (1991).

Nahan Gallery, New York (1990).



Scroll Painting with Exploded TV, 1990.

Multimedia installation.

Photo: Baruch Rafic.



INTERVIEW WITH CARL HEYWARD

Carl Heyward: I first saw you in 1984 or 1985 in Los Angeles at a *High Performance* magazine benefit with Rachel Rosenthal and Paul McCarthy.

Carolee Schneemann: It was a benefit performance where there was no prep, no set-up. I did not want to go on as part of a group, so I did an extract, “Art Is Reactionary,” from the larger work *Dirty Pictures*.

CH: I remember the humor, with the pseudoscientific tracts being read, the slide projections, and you reclining languidly, nude on stage.

CS: In “Art Is Reactionary,” I am both interrogator and the one who must answer. A double slide projection sets up contradictions, predictive of an improvised litany between the image sequences.

CH: What is your intent in that piece and in your work in general?

CS: Most of my performances share a motive of pleasure and rage. Because I am really a painter—a media artist—there must be some compelling material that can only be enacted live, so I become an instrument of real time. *Dirty Pictures* examines my usual realm of cultural taboos—initiated as visions, which become drawings that indicate visual structures and actions. As the drawings accumulate, there is a pressure towards making a work manifest.

For *Dirty Pictures*, simultaneous, side-by-side slide projections envelop the performers. They are surrounded by a relay of images which explore erotica in all its unexpected variousness: scientific depictions of human organs, animal viscera, non-Western holy genitals. Mixed in with these examples are representations of the female body in Western art. Their occurrence in this series is intended to demonstrate their affinity with sentimental soft-porn and a latent, violent obscenity.

Paradoxes of gender in language provide a second thematic. Two men sit at a table piled with books. They’re clothed in transparent nightgowns and smoke fat cigars. Together they ruminate over the gender reversals signified in the French and Italian languages, where the word for the female genitals carries a masculine article and the word for the male genitals carries a feminine one. In their verbal duet one tells the other, “In Italian,

pen is female: *la penna*. Hole is male: *il buco*. And ballet is male: *il balletto*. But the ballroom is female: *la sala da ballo*.” Their dialogue proceeds as a droll, metaphoric unravelling of linguistic “things,” how objects are feminized and masculinized.

CH: Can you explain the physicality of your work, in painting as well as performance? For instance, your exhibition at San Francisco Art Institute, *Scroll Paintings with Exploded TV*, seems not just kinetic, with the motorized mops and continuous video monitors, but also has a sense of a “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” sequence.

CS: It relates to, for example, the incredible young Asian women walking around in skin-tight clothes at the Art Institute, who come from cultures where a woman’s body for centuries conformed to male conventions of modesty and seduction and where self-display or a physicalized self-definition was forbidden. Having been surrounded by all sorts of macho prohibitions myself, I motorized these mops to produce the largest brush in town!

CH: You are a seminal performance artist, with a backlog of thirty years of work, at a time when many women are dealing with issues of sexuality and male dominance with greater acclaim than you have been accorded.

CS: After rejections by the art world in the sixties, many younger feminist artists and art historians of the seventies began to club me over the head with their negative definitions of earlier performance works from which their own theories took direction and issue. To establish their own significant territories they proclaimed my body-identified work as “essentialist and naive,” as being less significant in comparison to a whole list of work by other women they now want to put forward. David James published an extraordinary history of contemporary film, *Allegories in Cinema*, in which he elucidates a contemporary recontextualization of *Fuses*. During our interview, he asked if any of the distinguished feminist film theoreticians now engaged with issues of gender and representation had spoken with me about my films. I assured him not one of them had ever approached me.* The feminine erotic is currently analyzed as a strict construction of patriarchy and has become so “problematized” that there can be no inclusion of an experiential erotic body. For strict constructivist feminist historians, a “sex positive” body is not sufficiently “problematic.” According to their analysis, female sexuality is inhabited and constructed by male need, desire, control, and therefore cannot escape internalizing the phallicized projection of femininity as the place of absence, void, and the abject.

CH: Power may be the operative word. You use terms like “sacred sexuality” and

* Scott MacDonald, Gene Youngblood, and Robert Haller wrote intensively on the early films.

“sacred eroticism,” but power is what keeps coming back to me, your control over yourself, your body, your art.

CS: Pleasure. I have a body that’s not conflicted about its pleasure. It’s not about “control”—submission can be ecstatic, fluid, melting into the power of the penis, enfolded, penetrated, merged in motion—orgasm consists of physiological properties which are magnetically charged and indescribable.

CH: What would you say has changed in the past thirty years, in your response to a male-dominated society? What has your growth been like?

CS: There are some wonderful changes. When I was eighteen years old, I began searching for women artists in art history. They had been obliterated and their works reattributed to more dominant male artists. I was obsessed with what I called “missing precedents.” Early research took me into the stacks at the University of Illinois. I would take out old books on seventeenth-century nature morte. I would find in a German or Dutch text an occasional name with a feminine ending—Artemesia, Antonia, Angelica, Vigée—and I would carefully note the names. It seemed there really had been women painters who had put brush to canvas. While at Bard College, I did work-study at the Cloisters in New York. One of my assignments was to polish the attribution plaques sent up from the Metropolitan Museum. One day I was polishing a plaque engraved “DAVID” in big letters and underneath in smaller letters: “attributed to Marie Joseph Charpentier.” When I asked the curator what the double attribution meant, she curtly replied, “If it’s by David it’s priceless, but if it’s by Charpentier it’s worthless!” This painting, which had been positioned at the main entrance to the European galleries, has now been properly attributed to Charpentier—her exquisite *self-portrait*.

In the early sixties, I found two obscure, elegantly bound Victorian volumes, *Beautiful Women in Art*, a survey of women painters, renowned for their beauty! They were subjects of an art history book solely because they were considered beautiful.

For my graduate painting thesis I began researching archaic visual forms based on MacKenzie’s *The Migration of Symbols*, published in 1926—another remarkable discovery made possible by open access to the collection of the University of Illinois library. This thesis traced the morphology of serpentine and circular patterns in ancient tradition; an early unconscious approach to formal and mythic systems that would continue to encode my work. Two years later, far away from Illinois—in my New York loft on 29th Street—I would include the garter snakes in *Eye Body*. But it would be another ten years before I found images of the Cretan serpent goddess and saw their sculptural depictions. It was then that I

understood what the priestess was actually performing. Seeing her arms extended, a serpent in each hand, and evidence of a snake bite in the form of a painted dot on each wrist, I concluded that these sculptures record a visionary rite. The venom from the snake bite induced hallucinations which, I believe, would have aided in divination. Having taken hallucinogens, I recognized her staring eyes as drug-induced.

The hallucinating serpent priestess led me to consider her as a sacred channel transmuting a toxin into revelation. Could I inhabit this area of risk and gift within my own work? In decoding these sculptures, I considered how thoroughly Western patriarchy disrupted the shamanistic exchanges between animals and humans. Both animal and female powers had been banished from religious practice, as had the enlightening, sacred ingestion of any hallucinogenic agent. This taboo was overcome in the sixties when a whole generation slipped down the rabbit hole to enter forbidden psychic territory. Here we communally and individually experienced the dissolution of ego, the breakdown of hierarchical patterns maintaining myths of domination. Sense perception, sensuality was heightened. Under hallucinogens we entered a place of cosmic merging and calibration of self with one another, nature, with things in the world. Tripping also allowed us to come face to face with the latent violence in the culture and in ourselves.

By the end of the sixties, feminist consciousness was about to rediscover and reintegrate aspects of these lost affinities: ritual embodied by a female power. I decided that art history must continuously be interpreted with my own eyes; I would build on lost historical traces. My influences were increasingly centered on African and non-Western depictions of human-animal forms. In my slide lecture “Is There a Feminist Erotic Art History?” I address the sacred erotic by juxtaposing “primitive” images with Western conventional ones. I tell the audience, “One of these is obscene and one of these is sacred.” They become intrigued in comparing a Nigerian vulva goddess (staring eyes and clitoral nose) to a Victorian marble madonna.

CH: What denotes that which is obscene and that which is scared? Societal agreement?

CS: Oh, it’s completely coercive, variable, occluded. I have had to travel outside my own culture, sneaking away from the house of the fathers to look into “primitive,” forbidding, dark, perverse cultures. In these hidden rooms, by comparison, I find erotic clarity and confirmation. I begin to see where the taboos and censorious conventions are embedded aesthetically. During a slide lecture, I showed a little votive Inuit vulva goddess next to a Victorian madonna figure. In presenting these two separate images it becomes clear that the sacred erotic is either implicit or displaced. The little vulva goddess is chunky, scarified all over, with huge staring eyes. This particular vulva goddess sculpture only goes to her

knees—probably she was inserted into the earth—and she has no arms. I told my audience, “In this case I am able to recognize my genital sexuality, but my arms are missing.” The vulva goddess probably did have arms, made of fragile material—reeds, stalks, woven fabric. On the other hand, the marble madonna has arms, but no vulva! Her marble arms hold emblems that exemplify feminine attributes—a male infant against her perky breast, a bunch of luscious fruit in the outstretched arm—while she balances on one toe.

CH: Is it possible in the late twentieth century for women to have a clear sense of themselves without having to go through the morass that a male-dominated culture presents to women?

CS: It’s what I describe as “double knowledge.” We are privileged by our culture and all it provides. We are simultaneously complicit and resistant, as we struggle to examine our racist, sexist, exploitative, and rapacious social dynamics. We bring forward alternative and parallel knowledge.

CH: You have both a fire and a resignation: your “double knowledge.” It’s not so much for women to change or for racial/cultural minorities to change, it’s for the greater culture to change, those with power to change their hearts and minds. We are viewed at this time as threats, aberrations. Do I have to have a constant migraine headache, walk with a machete, and watch my back all the time? Apparently I do.

CS: Yeah, you do. And you have to watch your front. There is also a pervasive prejudice about the sixties, that we could be impulsive, just get it on, and could do whatever we wanted. There is a calculated ignorance aimed at depoliticizing work done in the sixties, substituting an artificial heroics of singular achievement in place of activist social structures that formed interconnected communities of resistance. There are very few art historians able to deal with those political works that were provoked by the Vietnam War.

CH: You have said on several occasions that you trust your body, that you follow your body, that it never leads you astray. Is this close to intuition?

CS: It is paying attention to how the ecstatic sexual body maintains its sensory richness, merging physicality and aesthetics. I trust the body in terms of dreams, in terms of tactility. Painting came out of the whole organism, using the extended arm, the erotic body in the “eye,” so it does not get stratified or constrained or constricted. This leads to different layers; for instance, hormonal shifts trigger different kinds of dreams—different kinds of

energy; different forms of perception can provoke aesthetic structures, forms in space. Menstrual dreams have a very particular kind of physical impress and power to them . . . or dreams when you have a fever. The body is going to give you a different kind of imagistic formation when you are hungry, when you are tired. (If your lover's leg is on your leg you might dream of a log that you are trying to move.) So all the ways that the body is informing the energy of the mind is where I start.

Some constructivist feminists insist that any analysis of a feminist erotics must first recognize internalizations of male desire, that female sexuality has been *constructed* by persistent demands and conditions of Western patriarchy. I insist on the value of my experience as a heterosexual who knows her pleasure is in and of her body and that this body provides an integral source of self-knowledge. Within a woman's lived experiences are areas of authority that deflect masculist projections. Feminist theory that is cut off at the waist is dangerous and becomes susceptible to promulgating a psychoanalytic theorist such as Lacan, who has absolutely no value or terminology for the erotically pleased body. With Hélène Cixous, sensuous insight drives an analytic position that can destabilize the fixed contentions, the historic polemic over the feminine, which we inherit through the insights and obfuscations of Marx, Engels, Freud, Jung, Lacan. Nevertheless, these are the traditional sources from which feminist principles continue to develop.

CH: Would you say that your work is about transformation?

CS: Transformation. Layers of metaphor are moving through any of the visual imagery that I am developing. The material or the materiality is various, but there is the sense of metaphoric slippage that recharges and is often visually disjunctive. This work is never symbolic; one thing does not represent something else. The forms impress a whole set of processes and associations that are historic as well as immediate, which have to do with the struggle to embed the material—the real dance is with the material. Every construction or image struggles with the clarification of space as a time figuration.

CH: Did your formulations come before the work, or did you recognize impulses and antecedents in retrospect?

CS: This is protohistory: I was drawing before I could speak. When I was four and five, I filled my Dad's prescription pads: each image formed part of an event-process requiring ten to twenty pages. They were like early flip books. There would be a line, then you'd flip it and there would be two lines, and then the lines would be moving into the page left to right, and the lines would be moving in on the page, and finally, after twenty pages, there

would be two crude figures attached to those first gestures! They are remarkable little films. I still refer to that process. When I was little, I thought that everyone was given something that they made, and then they could choose to be something—I was a “drawer,” and I could grow up and be a nurse. That sense of formation was linked to the excitement of my body, of my sexuality being sacred. I was masturbating when I was four, and that experience was where Santa Claus and Jesus lived, in that pleasure in the body. I had that all worked out. By the time the culture moved in to try to get the pencil out of my hand and my hand off my body, it was too late. I knew where the truth was! The rest was not the truth.

CH: How do women, girls, who are thwarted from the kinds of investigations that you had the courage and luck to continue, make the adjustment? What was different for you?

CS: My father was a country doctor. There was always physicality around us—leaking, spilling out of boundaries, wounded farmers with bleeding limbs, broken bones, hemorrhages, infections, bodies that were not intact. No fantasy of the sanitized body in this household—my parents’ relationship was sensuous, devoted.

CH: So what were the limits, the restrictions?

CS: My mother was the teacher of a constant subtext, a veil of bodily threats and morality. You did not sit with your skirt up, you did not muddy yourself or run around with the boys. You did not go into their tree house or hide out and disappear for four hours while you played doctor. There were aberrations—the piano teacher who put his hand up under my skirt (he disappeared very quickly). Walking on the main road as an eleven-year-old in summer shorts and having a truck come to a grinding halt; he wanted to say something about my body. I knew instinctively that I had to run away.

CH: Do you feel that women are under siege?

CS: Constantly, endlessly. Our “siege” is privileged: we are under siege but able to observe, comment, criticize. We are always a potential sexual victim: it’s going to be our fault because we were walking in the wrong place at the wrong time, we were wearing something provocative. I lived in London after my long-time companion and I separated. I was used to making great love all the time. My body ached with desire. I would go out and pick up young men—it was the sixties, and experiment was very magical—but that required a protective instinct, otherwise I might bring home some sadist, someone who really had a hostile, punishing erotic message to convey. Perhaps I was always safe because of a keen instinct?

CH: Talk about *Scroll Paintings with Exploded TV*.

CS: Since 1981, I had been working with imagery of the destruction of Palestinian sites and culture, a series of painting-constructions, as the bombardment, in effect, invaded my work. With *Domestic Souvenirs*, I was layering photographs of ordinary things in my life, fragmenting images, moving them between three or four panels so that variations and sequences were simultaneous. At some point I could no longer afford to concentrate on the ordinary images, as my life was invaded by this gratuitous, psychotic assault and systematic destruction of an unarmed population in displacement camps and in the ancient Lebanese cities. It was affecting me in much the same way the Vietnam War did, with that same sense of outrage. I collected newspaper photographs, research, going to all kinds of history books to find out who the historic Palestinians were, where they come from, the significance of Lebanon.

I went to the Lebanese tourist office in New York, just as they were “indefinitely” closing. I was the last visitor there! They gave me all their travel and history slides. With these I composed a slide lecture of before-and-after imagery, with inserts from newspaper clippings, which I had to get from English and Italian newspapers, combined with reports that were coming into the States. The slide lecture evolved as I began to rephotograph some of the images, blow them up, cut them down. I concentrated on the destruction of displaced Palestinian social organizations in Lebanon for about six years and on an intercultural booklet with before-and-after-war sequences. Then strange things started to happen. I had an exhibit of these Lebanon-based painting-constructions at the Max Hutchinson Gallery. A company prints and mails all his invitations. My mailing was the only one in eleven years to have disappeared! It never got out. They had sent me overprints, and I had an instinct, an intuition. I don’t know why, but I started addressing the overprints. I stayed up until 3:30 a.m. At that time, I could not know that the regular mailing wasn’t going to get out. While we were installing the show, the center panel of a major triptych disappeared; it was stolen.

Abdul Ahmed and Edward Said came to the exhibit on the last day, a blessing of insight and appreciation. I was very glad they could see it. Part of the exhibit also included *War Mop*. A 19-inch TV monitor is attacked by a mop rising up and falling down on a very elaborate set of plexiglass cams. It cost a fortune to fabricate this monster. It bangs onto the front of this TV every twelve seconds. On the TV, a videotape pans through destroyed Lebanese villages. The rubble is exquisite—stained glass and iron, archaic arches, pink stone—the sea is seen floating on the left side of ruins. The camera pans continuously down an empty road and then comes to a Palestinian woman, with a scarf around her head, who is screaming at the camera. Behind her is her house, with her sofa, her bookshelves, her lamp, and then a bird flies through. It’s like a stage set. It takes you a little while to realize

that the house is only half there, there is no front and there is no side. Everything is surrealist, almost normal, but half-destroyed.

Collaged with that document are before-and-after-war slide images, interspersed with very appealing slides: the Beeka mountains, skiers in glittering snow, men weaving purple nets from the ancient Phoenician purple dyes (the Phoenicians and the Palestinians are historically linked). This imagery was enveloping me, and by the end of the eighties I was exhausted. Then Saad Hadad—the fifth columnist who had betrayed all his people in southern Lebanon and become an agent of Israel, who was personally responsible for an enormous amount of death and destruction—died on October 12, my birthday!

Alone in the house in the country, I was carrying the ashes from the pot-bellied stove to dump them in the snow under the lilac bush. I looked at these richly variegated ashes and thought, “Wonderful material: some coals, some charcoal, and all this dust that still has substance.” I carried the ash bucket into my studio and started these spills and throws onto adhesive-treated papers. Residual tactile particles. The dust paintings. The monochromatic surfaces thickened. I incorporated into each one a computer chip board (printout of a lost civilization). (Computer chip boards were in bins at a junk shop in Kingston, where IBM had abandoned all their outdated technological detritus.) As elaborately soldered as weaving, these panels must have been assembled by anonymous women or children. (The smaller the hand, the more minuscule the paycheck.) The scrapped computer boards began to change. I couldn’t find the bronze ones with the pastel-colored wires. They became brilliant, bright; and my dust paintings began to have particles of pigment thrown in, causing density. I modified my normal gesture with brushes, rollers, household tools, scrub brushes, sponges, toilet bowl cleaners. I considered ways to activate the surface, even as I was casting dust in random motions, still establishing a coherent internal rhythm that would bind disparate motions of layering. The panels became glorious, luscious. They were part of a continuum, starting with the early dark, dour monochromatic pieces—dust and ashes on heavy paper. The transition from paper to canvas was difficult because paper is so alive; it has a bite, it responds. A canvas holds its surface, it does not give back, does not absorb the way the paper does. That was a tricky formal transition. The dust-painting canvas became thirty-two feet long.

TV color particles have a strange affinity to acid vision—the same palette, the same primary, saturated high tone that you see when you are on an acid trip! That relates to the impressionist palette, to the pointillists. In the work at the McBean Gallery, I incorporated dust drawings with TV. The drawings are the rectangle of the TV, which explodes and the pixels charge the space around it. I had a dream in which I was filming with the video camera and, as I was working, five-by-seven color prints were flopping out the back, escaping from the camera, falling off all over, spilling onto a floor. I love that idea of the controlled

form losing its containment. That led to making the videotapes of the dust painting process, in which the particles accumulate in the frame of the monitor without evidence of hand or brush. Blowing itself rather like colored snow.

In my video works I pose a question: in a video culture, what is going to be more actual and immediate, the painting itself, its literal dimension and tactility, or the videotape in which the action of the painting is compressed without any agency? It was essential that there be no hand, no shadow, and no brush—get rid of the heroic implication—that there would be no self there. It took twenty-two hours to edit it all out.

CH: In the January 1980 issue of *Fuse* magazine you said you would no longer use nudity in performance because it was no longer emotive, that you wanted to thwart conservative audience expectations, that you are no longer looking for communal ecstasy—that unless the audience can meet your own expectations, there is no communication, no art.

CS: I have constantly been shifting the context in which I will use nudity. My most recent performance, *Ask the Goddess*, is a very funny piece that is didactic but invites a complex layering of randomized procedures. I don't want to repeat my old messages; the messages have to change for me to rediscover where the taboos have shifted because they are shifty, in the way that censorship is shifty. So in *Ask the Goddess*, I am not the Goddess; the Goddess is actually a set of double slides that are continuously projected behind me. The only thing that I have established are the juxtapositions of slide image sequences: they come out of my own iconography, my own vocabulary of images. They are sacred, obscene, and ordinary objects. The audience is given a set of cards on which they are to write any question that they want to ask the Goddess. I have found three assistants who carry sets of cards in little strawberry baskets tied to their waists. One assistant has a set of cards which impose physical actions on me; I have to do whatever the card says. Another set of cards has to do with props that have to be involved in this action. Then I have five audio tapes which are given to a third assistant to interject between actions. Whenever those audio tapes are introduced, everything stops. The slides are volatile, provocative, and they work like a Tarot deck. The assistant takes a card from the audience; I pay attention to the question and study the slides for the answer. Some amazing things happen. Someone wrote the question "What should I do about premature ejaculation?" The slide that came up was a crucified Christ by Tintoretto, juxtaposed with a Victorian postcard (Isis) whose image displayed a mock crucifixion of sorts—a woman with her ankles tied together, her hands spread apart and tied on to the cross, and her head slightly drooped. She has coifed hair, and her waist and pubic area are wrapped in coils of rope. She invites a necrophiliac approach: she's not dead, and all you have to do is take off that rope and you can have her.

So I took that question about premature ejaculation in terms of the passivity of the crucified male and the tied up feminine: these erotic emblems indicate that it is dangerous “to come” at all because you formulate sexuality in terms of its sacrificial aspect.

CH: You said that Karen Finley has “divine gorgeous rage,” but we also lump her in a group of shamans and angry women.

CS: Her divine gorgeous rage is being fueled by very concrete social issues. Divine gorgeous rage is growing out of unbearable kinds of neglect and psychosis in the culture. To make a difference, to envision a deepened awareness, you *have* to have an enormous rage. But you can’t live that rage out, or you would be a nutcase, wandering around, babbling to yourself, and screaming at people in the streets.

CH: There is an equality which is central to your art messages, about the demand and respect for the equality of female sexual pleasure.

CS: Here comes the fire and water: our bodies are the coherence between labor and pleasure, all of a piece. I was raised as a Quaker; there was always an equity, anybody could stand up and speak. The town idiot could stand up and speak with the same attention because everybody was a piece of the human puzzle. As with square dancing, you have your partner, you lose your partner, and you get in contact with and are responsible to everybody else in your circle, and then you get back to your partner. The form offers all this intimacy, this physical, social intimacy, and a recurring pattern—there is always a return, another chance.

CH: Is there a predisposition for women to be performance artists, regarding taboos, intuition, etc.?

CS: The forbidden erotic is generated by the dominant sexual totems. The domination-submission fantasies of conservative Western men eroticizes what they cannot deal with directly in their own experience, what they are afraid of. Sexual anxieties are displaced. In that displacement, the female as performer becomes fetishized (as lewd or glamorous) because that’s how the male gets aroused and feels that he has power over the image that arouses him—to be aroused, in a way, is potentially to be fucking this pleasure. That pleasure is misappropriately, overdeterminedly identified with the power of white male sexuality. This has to do with why in the art world a female would be admired and revered and offered support if she was a really amazing dancer and not a painter, not a sculptor. I am

talking about the early sixties, when I was just starting out, and I thought that it would be all of us together with a vision that had to be explored. But the brush belonged to abstract expressionist male endeavor, the brush was phallic. Longing for sensuous abandon—this is what the males really despised in themselves and had to project outward onto women, and in other performance aspects onto black culture. It's a strange combination of sully and sanitization, making it filthy because pleasure is conflicted, then fetishizing the sexual fracture by making it more glamorous, more pure, more big, more vital, more expensive. And here comes your poor performance artist who wants to have power over all the available materials.



Illinois Central, 1968.

Body collage and montage by C.S. 14 x 19 ins.

Photo: Fred W. McDarrah. Midwest Landscape #34, Photo: Art Sinsabaugh.



CENSORSHIP



Unexpectedly Research, 1992.

Images made and performed, 1962–82. 90 x 51 in.
Laserprints on board with text.

ON CENSORSHIP: INTERVIEW WITH AVIVA RAHMANI

Aviva Rahmani: You've dealt with aggression in your audiences in your career, from both men and women. In your recent trip to Moscow you traveled all the way there, they put you up and gave you a translator, only to censor your work! That's a tremendous blow to your adrenaline, isn't it?

Carolee Schneemann: How about tremendous spark? Censorship breaks your integrity; it's sinister because the work is endangered and embedded in a falsification of motive. In Moscow I was struggling against invisible powers and was always the fool because I didn't know where my enemy was. The Russian organizers were cordial, gracious, and every day they had increasingly unbelievable stories as to why the showing of *Fuses* was postponed or canceled. I was fortunate to have a translator who became a defender, champion, fighter—very aggressive on behalf of the film. Every time *Fuses* was diverted, he would arrange for TV and journalists to be present; we would have interviews about whether or not the film was to be shown.

One TV interview was under the direction of a small round woman in her sixties, who arrived at my hotel room with a full crew. She was the head of "Sexual Education in the Soviet Union." She would introduce the interview, then Vladimir my translator would translate her questions, and he would then translate my response. She was smiling approvingly, looking into my eyes as she spoke into the microphone. "What's she saying?" I asked Vladimir. He paused. "She's saying you are a pornographer and a dangerous woman."

AR: Of course you are dangerous. Jesse Helms speaks for a lot of people who intend to resist having their traditional convictions threatened by "dangerous people." But sometimes it comes from unexpected sources.

CS: In Cannes, in 1968, *Fuses* was shown as part of a special jury selection. This sophisticated French audience went berserk. I was standing in the back with Susan Sontag, expecting a pleasurable audience response. Instead, a great commotion erupted in front of the screen. French men were ripping up the seats with razor blades and screaming because it was not truly pornographic. It wasn't satisfying the predictable erotic, phallogocentric sequences they wanted. It was a source of frustration and anger.

AR: Carolee, I feel a great deal of rage and bitterness over this censorship issue, but not

for the reasons I hear everyone else raging about. The reason I accuse the art world of hypocrisy on this is that no one stood up to defend or protect twenty years of feminist artists and feminist work that got trashed. Anyone who doesn't think that has their head in the sand—the backlash against all of us who challenged the established norms of sex and power began in 1968. It seems ironic to me that, after twenty-five years, America and Russia have reached parity over censoring your work. Glasnost and American conservatism equal out. If the art world had cared to acknowledge what was happening all along and resisted years ago, the right wouldn't have such a podium today. The art world has failed itself by failing those of us who knew all along that we were at war. At best they were either cowards or indifferent.

CS: Judy Chicago puts a sacred vulva on dinner plates in celebration of historic women of unique creative authority. And she wants people to sit down, say grace, and eat! We're not going to get approval and funding from the Bridal Registry, not even Duchamp's. We're examining deflected censorship and violent censorship (consider abortion rights), individual and communal censorship (consider AIDS research and care). My experiences with censorship cover a wide range: from the man who attempted to strangle me during the Paris performance of *Meat Joy* (1964), to the U.S. government's intervention against my anti-Vietnam War performance *Illinois Central* (Chicago, 1968), to the manager of a world-famous rock group spiking the sangria passed out to two thousand participants in the *Celebration of the Chicago 8* (London, 1969), to the El Paso, Texas police arresting the projectionist and the projector with *Fuses* still on it (1985).

My work within erotic and political taboos has been fueled by the constraints of sexism; some men *and* women have been offended by my work, while other men and women have defended it; my work has offended some granting agencies and institutions and been supported by others. I like the margins to slip on the uncertainty. From the margins, I've been free to attack, to sniff out the leaking repressions and denial of subordination. Head-on is too much—that kind of machismo will get you knocked out of the ring: your body will be chopped up, your head cut off, your children “disappeared.” In male power structures you purchase incivilities for their own self-justification. Better to run free out here. It's a relatively recent social process in which the good guys don't get blown away. They can play with the girls and find meaning, value—a complementariness of action, insights, and force, a repositioning of the old heroic mold. But we still build on the underlying pattern that good guys get blown away—that identification with the female, interiority, the unconscious, puts them in jeopardy. The male psyche will unearth lost attributes when it stops representing the female as the victim-self. Well, it's really a privilege to produce work that provokes censorship! Although I don't believe that is my intention, nor that of

Judy Chicago, Mapplethorpe, Serrano—even the contentious actions of Karen Finley do not “invite” censorship—rather, controversy, confrontation, an unraveling of submerged, denied, latent content. Volatile erotic, sexual denial underlies the self-righteousness of our reactionary censors. Each of our transgressive visions rises from a particular brew, a churning of contradictory values and our insistence on cutting through cultural delusion and psychosis. Our lived insights merge with our imagining and materials.

So the real dilemma of the censor is to corral the imagination and the passage of visceral insights into aesthetic and political contexts. Denying a few photographs an exhibit, canceling screenings of *Fuses* only heightens our necessary bite and gnaw—to cut into layers of taboo, denial, and projection.

AR: Tell me about your experiences with other artists, writers, or journalists in Moscow.

CS: Our conversations were curtailed—not by overt censorship but by a disparity of analytic precedents. The erotic and political thrust of my work has particular cultural referents which we take for granted: the writings of Artaud, de Beauvoir, Wilhelm Reich were early influences; Freud, Jung, feminist investigations in art history, psychology, linguistics, concepts of the sacred erotic, of an ecological economy, even the gender constructions of Russian Marxism were not implicit in Soviet discussions. Issues of sexuality pivot on authoritarian constructs. Our feminist issues that have assertively dismantled male definitions of female value have not reached into the newly shifting Soviet morality. The intellectual sophistication of my Russian friends—their sharp, ironic perceptions, and the depth of Western influence—merges with Russian metaphysical traditions. This combination fuels profound longings: to be released from paranoia, to express those convictions and passions that were punishable by incarceration, exile, and repudiation for the past forty years. It is impossible for us to realize that Stalinist terror and suppression spared no one, neither person, place, or thing. How do they now contemplate a life of economic scarcity and hardship with the new creative frankness allowed? In an economy in which soap, tampons, condoms, toilet paper, and diapers are usually unavailable, in a demanding daily struggle which exhausts everyone, how can an examination of erotic intimacy not seem like a luxury, a risk?

Despite all the sexuality in U.S. films, *Fuses* hit a taboo button in perestroika. But the great achievement lay in the many Soviet films that had disappeared “off the shelf,” to be shown publicly for the first time since they had been “purged.” The issues of women in the Soviet Union were addressed in a remarkable program of documentary films.

Patriarchal gender constructions systematize transference and mythification

lurking within the idealization of the arts. We are looking at different forms of denial/censorship: one form instigates public outrage, outcry; the other acts as a slow smothering, a constraint. In the former instance you might have to fight for the immediate fate of your work; in the latter you have to wait it out, persist, live in the basement.

It's interesting that this year, twenty-four years after *Fuses* was made, it could be both censored and uncensored at the Moscow Film Festival and receive its most intensive structuralist analysis in David James's *Allegories of Cinema*—an analysis in which my deepest motives and methods are clarified.

So I understand your rage and fury at the dissimilar reaction to suppression of works by feminist artists versus those by Mapplethorpe and Serrano. I have this naive, messianic streak: given my instinct for the cultural distortions which surround me, the only way I even learn how transgressive my works are is by denigration, denial, and attempts at obliterating and trivializing my work and its direction. But in the Soviet Union there would have been no chance ever to produce such work! I recognize the measure of society's psychosis when I realize there are only two roles offered me to fulfill: either as a "pornographer" or as an emissary of Aphrodite!

Given our contemporary morality, women artists and gay artists have to fight like guerrillas from the edge of the aesthetic encampments, from under and over the banquet tables. I think gay men can assume a particular posture—it's often superphallic or metaphallic—to challenge and flush out the underlying grandiosity of male erotic fantasy and its concomitant castration fears. Conservative straights hate to face the paradoxical magnification of their own suppressed desires. Female sexuality incites another sort of proscriptive idealization to ward off detestation, envy, and fear.

AR: In the process of working with sexuality can you describe an evolution in the material?

CS: My exhibit in March 1989 at the Emily Harvey Gallery in New York raised all the same difficult issues about the perception of the body and the body as a source of structuring form. *Infinity Kisses* is a composition of over one hundred forty color photographs displayed in a nine-by-seven-foot arc. Over a six-year period I shot, under available light, close-ups of my cat Cluny's morning ritual mouth-to-mouth kisses. Because in many of the photographs you can see tongues touching, many people found the sequence obscene.

AR: But by using a cat, you're going even further and making it "nonpornography," taking the erotic issue out of the context of heterosexual mating into eroticism for its own sake. Eroticism becomes a language of communication not necessarily attached to specific organs, actions, people, but simply part of being alive.

CS: My work seems to occupy a zone corresponding to the art world's blind spot. The sexually negative reactions to so much of my work has enraged me. I always felt I was doing the obvious next step. In *Fuses*, the necessity was to investigate the absence in my culture of a visual heterosexual intimacy that corresponded to my own experience. If there was no example, could I possibly produce evidence? *Fuses* does. It became a classic work despite resistance; some people used to think of it as this narcissistic jerk-off. The invisibility of "self" that I experience means I don't really see *myself* there. I'm a conscious form available for use. The culture obfuscates lived experience, the female erotic, and the sacredness of sexuality. There's a similar motive in my performance piece *Interior Scroll*. I didn't want to pull a scroll out of my vagina and read it in public: it was because the abstraction of eroticism was pressuring me in a way that this image occurred, which said you must demonstrate this actual level.

AR: It sounds like you are saying that sexuality, as it presents itself in our culture, became a form, a metaphysical structure on which to hang the whole issue of human intimacy and the deeper experience of intimacy itself. It's a double-edged sword, of course, because of the baggage our society brings to sexuality and nudity.

CS: I'm using myself in a culture that surrounds me with artifice, lies, obfuscations, grandiosity. Every time a film is made, you are cast to act, constrained to "represent" someone and something that you're not, or in semiotic structure you are abstracted into a set of propositions to demonstrate something you may or may not believe. In using the actual lived life, that's the only chance for me to see: Is there a sensory and conceptual correspondence between what I live and what can be viewed and seen? It's not normal to be phallicized or dephallicized! The world is a great vulva that mirrors and imprints the phallic shape, not the reverse! So you see, for me to get clear, I have to make it all inside out and backwards. But there's a way I protect myself from thinking this is "myself."

AR: That sounds like it has a painful aspect.

CS: This is the work, and I'm an element in it, the best available material for investigative work. With the cat imagery, I have that same surprise and bewilderment when people say this is "bestiality, obscenity." Their negative response seems a measure of erotic dislocation and cultural deception. Tenderness, sensitivity, yielding, wetness, permeability are all taboo aspects, isolated as "female." The cat is an invocation, a sacred being, profoundly devoted to communicating love and physical devotion, and the cat is self-directed.



C.S. and "Vladimir," 1988, Moscow Film Festival.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND: A FEMINIST PORNOGRAPHER IN MOSCOW

1989

July's stars blaze. Lights within the six thousand dull glass rectangles of the Hotel Rossiya are extinguished. Somewhere behind us, a Los Angeles film executive passes a guard five U.S. dollars, pushing through the iron gate to take his midnight plunge into the feathery blue Moscow river. The sound of his long body breaking the glassy surface is explosive.

Ahead, the Hotel Rossiya shimmers, pierced on its four symmetrical sides by six thousand windows, six thousand rooms. The mezzanine terrace restaurant is mobbed. We push into a babble of languages, squeezed between flutters of fabric, colors, textures, perfumes. The gypsy orchestra plays rock and roll—Stevie Wonder, heavy on the violins. A Bengali film director is bribing a waiter for bottles of champagne. The Berlin film producer presses dollar bills into a waiter's hand, and a table and chairs materialize for his group. Vladimir and I drink the burning shots of vodka passed around and then join the shrieking dancers.

On the opening night of the Moscow Film Festival, *Fuses* is screened as a short, following *Heavy Petting* by Obie Benz. The audience seems stunned; not a chair squeaks. Vladimir, assigned by the festival to be my personal translator, is transfixed. I feel his breath move with the film cuts, all the risks it represented in 1965 renewed in this hushed Moscow theater twenty-four years later.

The next morning we meet in the lobby. "Vladimir, I've been trying to phone you. I've been here only one day and the phone in my room is dead!"

"Moscow joke! Don't worry," he says. "I've been here thirty-five years and this morning my phone is also dead."

Trying to find out which films are showing where and when is an easygoing sort of adventure in chaos. Notices appear and disappear, like the piles of rubble left around building projects.

Moscow joke: Our workers always leave some piles of debris so the cold, characterless consistency of the new apartments have an organic reminder nearby of life's imperfections.

In the Hotel Rossiya lobby, everyone involved in the Moscow Film Festival mills about, looking for someone or being looked for. Film directors—famous and unknown—entrepreneurs, journalists, photographers, actors, actresses from all over the world all suffer the indignity of squeezing past each other through the only open door, where a guard firmly checks IDs hanging on strings around our necks.

We are looking up at the walls with today's sidebar film listings. In addition to its opening night screening, *Fuses* was supposed to run repeatedly as a short throughout the one-week festival. All the titles for "Sexuality in American Films" are listed in both English and Russian—except *Fuses*.

"Vladimir, my film isn't on the schedule for this afternoon! Let's go to the office and ask."

"But they typed the program. Wait here, they're calling the movie house. . . . They said, 'The projector is broken.'"

"Vladimir, go back please. Ask them how can there be only one 16 mm projector in Moscow, film capital of the Soviet Republic, during the International Film Festival."

He goes to the telephone once more. "They said, 'That's a very clever question.'"

Meeting many young English-speaking translators, writers, teachers, and artists, I sense a gender split. Among the men, there is a shared irony and skepticism. But among the young women, sadness, cynicism, and desperation dominate. They face an almost certain defeat of creative identity: highly educated women do not make proportionately higher salaries; marriages are compressed in assigned housing and suffer all the woes reported in the Western press—lack of space, etc. Women anticipate the prospect of a rigorous job, raising children often all on their own, and the struggle to provide for daily sustenance. Ambiguity, metaphor, irony, layers of personal and historical meaning move smoothly in intense conversations. At home, I disbelieved much of what I read about the Soviet Union, mistrusting as exaggerated the grimness described, while my Russian friends believed the veiled information they received on Western society—shaded luxury, greed, plenitude, indulgences of creative and material possibilities. With perestroika, many of the intelligentsia traveled to Europe and the States for the first time. They say, "It is exactly as I imagined."

I pester Vladimir with questions about managing with scarcities. He tells the domestic joke of his week. The good news: His grandfather (a retired mathematician) stood in line for

three hours to purchase three bars of soap for the family. The bad news: Although the grandfather also waited in another line for several hours, he could not get any toilet paper. The good news: Even though they have not had any toilet paper for months, now when they wipe with their fingers, they can wash off with the new soap.

Moscow joke: Many friends and visitors bring gifts of Walkmen and music cassettes, but we have no batteries to run them.

Moscow joke: When light bulbs burn out and there are none to replace them, we read by the light of the TV.

The absence of consumer goods in the Soviet Union underscores the erotic materialism with which the U.S. economy diverts both political will and social engagement and measures social function. For us, indulgence in the consumer economy is an erotic act and a contribution to an illusory societal well-being. Our consumer culture provides levels of expressiveness—a connection to products as artifacts with which we can involve and satisfy our essential needs and nonessential desires. In the Soviet Union, there is no such relief or distraction from a grim, boring struggle to provide for basic needs. Capitalism and communism stand like inverted hourglasses draining sands of gross profusion, gross scarcity.

“Vladimir, let’s go to the office and ask what’s going on today.” Svetlana greets me, “How’s your room? Are you enjoying yourself? We are typing Vladimir’s Russian translation of the critics’ notes on Fuses, as you requested. Your film is definitely scheduled for midnight tomorrow at the cultural center. No problem.”

Vladimir manages to arrange for a TV crew and journalists to meet with us at each scheduled screening of *Fuses*. We will have interviews about the film process if it’s shown, or concerning censorship/perestroika if it is not. I continue my reading of the *Introduction to Marxism* pamphlets given me by the Soviet airline Aeroflot. Alone on the narrow bed in the narrow room, my mind spins between reform and repression, repression and reform. What is being censored? Where does my will to demystify intersect with their will to posit psychotic taboos as normal, sexual repulsion as idealization.

Everything seems familiar but results from a different historical event. Perestroika may invite its version of “a thousand flowers to bloom,” but reactionary forces—as close under the surface of change as those in China—could emerge to punish the persons and institutions effecting liberalization. There may be a happier spirit these days in Moscow, but its

translucent underside admits the Russian “dark soul.” They have no faith, no optimism. The attempted censorship of *Fuses* remains a small index of the wavering forces for liberalization.

We were walking in a large park—lovely, gloomy. A young couple passed us, arm in arm. She was wearing navy blue shorts. Our Moscow friends are debating: “She’s foreign.” “No, Russian!” “She must be foreign.” “No, you can do that now.” “What? Walk arm in arm?” “Until last year she would have been arrested for wearing shorts—indecent exposure.”

At home, facing the Shawangunk cliffs, I can write anything I wish about this trip to Russia. Even though *Fuses* is a small fish in the festival pond, it causes consternation, conflict. I am considered “a pornographer” and “a dangerous woman.”

“Vladimir, here’s the program for tonight. Fuses isn’t listed.”

“Wait for me in the dining room; I’ll go find out. . . . They said, ‘Don’t worry, this isn’t the final program.’”

The bed is narrow as a child’s bed. Arms enfold me, a body stretches beside mine. His shadow rising, he whispers in English, “I must go home now.”

I try to guess how far he must walk to reach the family apartment. Small room cluttered with books, manuscripts, journals, dumbbells, music cassettes. Later that week we hear about the raid on the hotel. Young women—called “prostitutes”—without proper ID cards have managed to sneak past the guards to be lovers with foreign men in the film festival. The police arrested many of them. Have Russian men been arrested recently for being in the room of a foreign woman after 11 p.m.?

Soviet joke: Everyone agrees we need better sex education and freer pleasurable sexuality to help the many marriages that founder on sexual repression. Birth control is a key, but there are no condoms or I.U.D.s or spermicide or . . .

What radical economic changes can avert the grinding contradictions everyone endures?

“Vladimir, we’ve invited all those artists and journalists and the film isn’t listed on tonight’s schedule!”

"I'll get you a vodka, wait here for me on the stairs. . . . They said, 'The projector is being fixed—tomorrow, no problem.'"

Fallen down on the rough green carpet which wraps the length of six thousand identical rooms. So drunk—imagine we are spinning into a resort hotel by the sea in a forgotten part of the world, where I've never been, this best friend at my side, devoted, stolid, caring, whose shoulder my hair falls over; he is holding my hands so I will not fly out the window. Who knows? We could be arrested for prostitution, for "uncivil behavior," lying here on the sixth floor hallway of the Hotel Rossiya, our lips merging in an unexpected gesture of glasnost. (Last night in my little red-walled room, his legs layered across mine, Vladimir exclaimed, "I feel relaxed! This might be the first time I've felt relaxed since I was a child in the Ukraine!" We drink another vodka to soften the contradictions.)

Moscow joke: How do you know your business deal is underway with a Lithuanian? When he tells you, "Don't worry, your check is in my mouth and I won't come in your mailbox."

Moscow joke: Do not ask more than two questions a day—it will overburden the system.

Back in the U.S., friends say, "Well, if it's like that, why don't they rebel?" I tell them what the Lithuanian rock drummer told me in the airport on his way to an unprecedented gig at Lincoln Center: "For seventy years they fought and destroyed, fought and destroyed. Nothing was left intact, nothing. They never found a compromise. They never achieved a concept which was not destruction. They never made a positive step."

Moscow joke: See that huge office building in the center of our city? Do you notice that it has two symmetrical sides with different facades? How curious. Why is that? The architect took two designs to Stalin for his choice. Stalin was very busy. He looked down at the layout and said, "Fine." Unable to have another interview, the architect built half of each design.

The legislated "equality" of women in the Soviet Union has been used against them—to standardize their social and maternal contributions, just as artists have been required to fulfill social realism to idealize the State mythology if they are to participate in any of the rewards of the State: a studio, relatively decent housing, positions with reasonable salaries, etc. Female "equality" has been defined by a sexist, male-dominated, authoritarian society. Feminist analysis, which has exposed and dismantled suppressive male cultural traditions in the West, is only now resurfacing in the Soviet Union after a hiatus of forty years.

During the Russian Revolution, women's rights were legislated: equal pay for equal work, guaranteed child care, maternal leave, abortion on request. But with all they lost in World War II, the Soviets also lost connection to Western cultural contexts, including the exploration of human sexuality as evinced in the works of Freud, Reich, Jung, as well as Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, and other feminists. So this innocent "pornographer" or "dangerous woman" introduces echoes of early Russian radicalism. Where did it get them back then? Only greater repressions, as if such consciousness stirs tyrannical self-righteousness to greater justification and outrage. As recent critics have written about Jesse Helms's attempted suppression of erotic art, we are looking at the same thing but seeing completely different things.

Moscow joke: What's the difference between Romania and Auschwitz? In Auschwitz they had gas and light! (Treading our way down four flights of broken stone stairs with no light whatsoever from the apartment of a celebrated film director.)

At the PROCC cultural center, a crowd mills around the ticket desk and swirls away. Vladimir's face is turning red, his eyes enlarged. "What's going on now?" I ask, my skin prickling.

"Look at this!" he shouts. Posted on the wall, the program of tonight's midnight showing has an X drawn across it. "Yes, that showing is canceled," says the helpful young woman at the desk.

Tiny Mme. Lavritskaya (director of Soviet Sexual Education Programs), who considers me a "pornographer," is pushing through the crowd. She's probably responsible for this, I think, glowering down at her; but she is genuinely alarmed, stunned, asking Vladimir in Russian, "What's happened to the film screening?" Video crews, journalists are setting up lights around me.

"Get me a double vodka now. Get the print of Fuses in my hands before there is any interview or discussion; I will not leave this building until I have my print. If they do produce the print I will not be photographed here in front of these degraded, suppurating oil paintings of nudes (females, of course). And I want an explanation for the cancellation.

Vladimir agrees. "In a bureaucratic cultural center like this, there's a bureaucrat to be found."

I have left Vladimir with all my books and magazines, tins of sardines, herrings, vodka, and chocolates from the special store for foreign currency. He's arranged with a network of journalist friends traveling in Europe to forward his letters to me in the States and has given me an address where I can write to him with less chance of my letters disappearing. He hugged me, held me, pushed me into the lines straggling towards inspection and the departure gate. The flight will be on Pan Am, not Aeroflot. The hours and the crowd seep into disjunctive, exhaustive delays. Leaving my place on the floor, I struggle through crowds to get a bottle of water, but there is no more. Only the Americans settle down on the floor, leaning their shiny heads on each other's hips and rucksacks, accepting the delay of one hour, two hours, three hours, as nap time.

The overt censorship of *Fuses*—as if it among all the “sexual” films was “too much”—differs from the classic response in the U.S.A.: the implicit suppression of rewards, recognitions withheld from those feminist artists who pioneered essential, lost meanings of the body. Nonetheless, I could describe a common paternalistic morality in which the sacred erotic and the lived experience of female sexuality are denigrated. I recognize the same male structures which disguise fantasies and which mask fears of the unconscious, the forces of nature, the female body. I recognize familiar posturing: the heroic at the expense of the domestic; authoritarian delusion at the expense of ecological common sense.

Crushed into a line, entering the steel body, collapsed into the narrow seat. The steward pushing a drinks cart down the aisle asks, “Would you like juice? Apple, grapefruit, or orange?” Large unexpected tears begin to seep down my cheeks. I say, “Orange!” In two weeks I'd completely forgotten such a drink existed. Balancing the glass of juice, reaching for the headphones and clamping them on, I hear the voice of Bill Cosby trashing President Reagan. A flood of tears takes me by surprise. The plane taxis, lifts off. In my heart I am blessing my unknown Russian ancestors who long ago left this vast green sparkling expanse and whose leaving added to the random toss of my own life, so that I can depart Russia, having been only an invited guest of the 1989 Moscow Film Festival, their own “pornographer and dangerous woman.”

DREAM MORPHOLOGIES

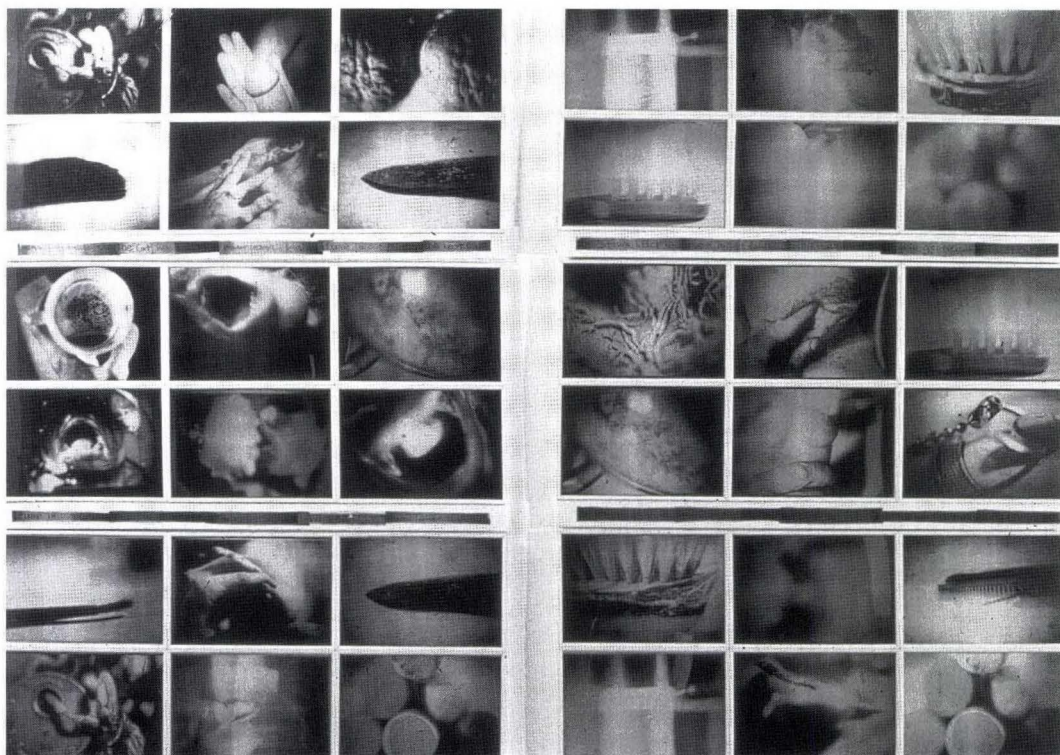




Water Light/Water Needle, 1966.

Kinetic theatre.

Photo: Peter Moore. © Est. Peter Moore/VAGA, New York.



Saw Over Want, 1980–82.

Photographic prints. 88 x 216 in.

Collection of Plácido Arango, Madrid.

JAY MURPHY

ASSIMILATING THE UNASSIMILABLE: CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN IN RELATION TO ANTONIN ARTAUD

Carolee Schneemann's work in various media invariably foregrounds the processes of her own body, highlighting its dreams and its sensory and physiological bursts of inspiration. In the early sixties Schneemann took the precepts of action painting into boundary-smashing performances and "body-collage" environments, fueled by what she called her feminist "double knowledge"—a combination of bold intuitive leaps and scavenging scholarship into archaic sources. Her insistence on the radical alterity of the body helped make her work opaque for at least a generation of feminist theorists, while, for Schneemann, the linguistic turn and elaboration of sexual difference in feminist art of the eighties could only come as a displacement and veiled suppression, rather than a fulfillment, of a fierce sexual politics. Given the trends in feminist theory, Schneemann finds it ironic that critical champions of her work have tended to be male and that only quite recently has a new generation of feminist art historians taken up an extensive study of her career.¹ As David James writes, when Schneemann's film *Fuses* (1965) was shown in London in 1968, "the film could hardly be seen, either by the avant-garde establishment or by the women's movement."²

By giving Schneemann her first one-person museum retrospective, the New Museum of Contemporary Art³ has at long last provided some official art-world legitimization to a career that has exerted a tremendous but underacknowledged influence on much art in the nineties. At the same time, the Museum of Modern Art has shown for the first time in the United States the drawings of the famed *poète maudit*, dissident surrealist Antonin Artaud (1896-1946).⁴ Artaud's exploration of the mind-body dichotomy of Western culture, still unequalled in depth, breadth, or anguish, was a key source for Schneemann's performances in the early 1960s. Given Artaud's widespread influence on the artistic avant-garde, the theoretical links between him and Schneemann may not be so surprising, yet the graphic works by the two artists show a more intimate relation. Both exhibitions may have been intended to answer questions about the art-world standing of their subjects, but they only succeed in raising such questions further. The nineties have been characterized by a veritable flood of art works concerning the body, yet both Artaud and Schneemann are oddly incongruent when seen in relation to these recent developments. Artaud's cries for a "true body" or "body without organs" have new resonance as artists grapple with the implications of the virtual or electronic body in cyberspace,⁵ but in an art-world environment that often revels in eliding differences between high and low culture, and in its complicity

with the fashion and entertainment industries, Artaud's search for a primordial language of pure signs is inescapably, quintessentially modernist. Schneemann's assertions of female power and sexual pleasure, often based on an archetypal feminine, have an overwhelming positivity compared to the works of many young feminist artists who engage an erotic ambivalence that frequently and aggressively invites the abject. For these artists, as well as for feminist art in a more general sense, Schneemann remains a problematic pioneer.

Her troubles of placement and definition within feminism notwithstanding, Schneemann's work has been cannily included in several recent international exhibitions. In "féminin/masculin: Le sexe de l'art,"⁶ Schneemann's mixed-media, kinetic *Vulva's Morphia* (1981-95) deploys images which form an archaeology of vulvic space against reigning phallocentrism. In *Hors Limites (Out of Bounds)*,⁷ Schneemann's propulsive beginnings—in an interdisciplinary milieu of dance, film, music, performance, painting, theater, and collaborations with the Judson Dance Theater, the Living Theater, and Fluxus, a polyvalency difficult to even imagine today—were suggested through the juxtaposition of two key 1963 works by Schneemann next to the paintings, films, and documentation of actions by Hermann Nitsche and Otto Mühl of the Vienna Aktionists. The sculpture *Five Fur Cutting-boards* was made according to Schneemann's own physical scale, incorporating abstract-expressionist strokes of rhythmic color; a quixotic, kinetic umbrella; shards of glass; bits of fur. The series of *Eye Body* photos document Schneemann's first experiment with her nude body as the unifying force-field, the votive, oscillating subject-object in the environment. The sense of shattering prior self-image and enclosed social definition, of literally breaking the mirror into fragments, has a strong visual affinity with the color photos of Aktionist performances where Otto Mühl is shown suffering, writhing under immense piles of congealed blood, egg yolk, and various other substances, trying to expunge what Wilhelm Reich described as the socialized "body armor" that is the legacy of an erotically stunted civilization.

For all their immense differences, Schneemann and the Vienna Aktionists raise a common voice not frequently heard in these days of AIDS and prepackaged sexuality—advocating the abolition of sexual taboos, the emancipation of maimed humanity from what Herbert Marcuse had called unnecessary or surplus repression.⁸ Schneemann and the Aktionists both saw their work as inseparable from the radical political cauldron that gave birth to it. But whereas Schneemann—whom the Aktionists regarded as their "crazy sister"—offered an optimistic paean to sexual liberation, the Aktionists headed pell-mell into scatology, masochism, S/M ritual, and quasi-sacrifice. In Mühl's work, particularly, participants were violated with objects in ceremonies crossing boundaries of brutality; in a July 1968 event, Mühl's group whipped a masochist wrapped in newspapers.⁹ In *Shit Guy* (1969) a woman stripped off Mühl's clothes, tied him up, and defecated on his face. In contrast,

Schneemann's *Meat Joy* typically opened with Schneemann spraying cheap perfume over the audience, while verbal, dream-text cues would unleash a slowly intensifying erotic ritual of diffused light, audio collage, pop music, and movement. The performance culminated in a simulated dance/orgy of painted bodies writhing amid fish, sausages, chicken, and scraps of colored paper. Impresario Michael White recalled the London premiere: "Various tableaux unfolded before the entranced audience. A girl had a picture of the Pope projected on her bottom. More girls were painted, slapped about with wet fish and strings of sausages, parceled up in polythene bags. Two schoolgirls flogged a policeman. It was sensational, I suppose. But many of the performances were very evocative and effective."¹⁰ Schneemann's Eros was challenging Mühl's Thanatos.

The New Museum showcases *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1973-76), a key transitional piece from Schneemann's ensemble performance works—a group that includes *Water Light/Water Needle* (1966), *Snows* (1967), and *Illinois Central* (1969), among others. In this performance/installation Schneemann uses herself as a seismograph or the planchette of a Ouija board; suspended in a manila rope harness for the daily eight-hour run of the gallery or museum, she makes meditative strokes with chalk on the adjacent walls and floor. Certain incarnations of the work consisted of live performances, others video installation, and still others a combination in which the live action took place while video monitors displayed edited sequences of prior performances. Influenced by the theories of John Cage, Schneemann stripped herself of all previous accoutrements and trappings, including fixed audience, rehearsals, predetermined durations, even any central theme or conscious intention. It would have been difficult to stage a more dramatic departure from the complicated "happenings" of the previous decade. Her works began to feature a more conscious, quotational use of her researches in feminist archaeology and to explore language as a material, seeking to give "a phrase, a sentence, an idea the primacy, the immediacy, and physicality of a stroke of paint."¹¹

If Freud and Lacan built their model of female sexuality around its lack of a phallus, Schneemann has operated from the opposite pole: "I thought of the vagina in many ways—physically, conceptually, as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, source of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation."¹² Her original sources and inspirations—early anthropological studies of ancient matriarchal societies, Wilhelm Reich's orgonomic model of sexuality, de Beauvoir's adamant advocacy of female selfhood, and Antonin Artaud's unplugging of centuries of Western metaphysics and mind/body dualisms—have remained central. But of these crucial sources, the now-paradigmatic Artaud might best represent Schneemann's own relationship to theory. For Schneemann, Artaud's synthesis of the visual and theoretical was a constantly mobile positioning, "a depth charge that detonates unconscious energies"; thought was a lived, bodily process that

fed his graphic work. Artaud perhaps holds the key to Schneemann's own radical feminist version of an alchemical resurrection of the body:

It's so easy for the rest of us, once he's gone through his abominable contortions and that real shredding and torment he underwent to put the mind and the body, in the same texture and the same tonality. Artaud is a depiction of the degree of resistance that has to be imagined. . . . It's like an epiphany.¹³

Artaud's thinking refused to deflect or defuse itself, to stop or give pause to its sensations, an absence of self-censorship that was at least one facet of his so-called madness. His emphasis on the mark and the gesture, on subverting the legibility of the image, suggests the dissolution of form characteristic of Schneemann's paintings, and she has on occasion made works intended as healing talismans, like Artaud's *Spells*. (An example of these is *Jim's Lungs*, 1986.) The energy and fluidity of line evident in her works on paper, like the drawings for *Chromolodeon* (1965), the watercolor studies for *Water Light/Water Needle* (1965-66), and *Cycladic Imprints* (1992), radiate a synergy common to Artaud's drawings; like Artaud, Schneemann seeks the blurring of boundaries between the graphic and the performative, between art and life. In taking and enlarging archetypal strokes from Cézanne and de Kooning, she activates a living environment, a "body collage" in a numbed sensorium. Artaud, too, said that he was "not sure of the limits at which the body of the human self can stop," and produced drawings that "are mixtures of poems and portraits, of written interjections and plastic invocations of elements, of materials, of personages, of men and animals" concerned, above all, "with the sincerity and spontaneity of the line."¹⁴

To see Artaud—or Schneemann—simply as an originator of "body art" may be to miss a larger revelation. In Artaud's drawings, the boundary between bodily experience and its two-dimensional, visual expression is erased: "The canvas is the body."¹⁵ In these convulsions and operations-upon-the-self, "body art" can only seem a redundant procedure. Even in many of Artaud's last portraits at Ivry-sur-Seine, in which recognizable likenesses appear, the gestural marks seem to form a force-field around the subject, as if in protection or to manifest the interior significance of each figure. These drawings, too, are laced with warnings or prayers. In the burned, scarred, and bloody *Spells*; in the "anatomy-in-action" figures, whose interiority is scraped, ripped, and spewed forth (as in the Rodez drawings); or in the later portraits, it is the phenomenon of possession (and representation) that Artaud is obsessed with resolving. Each drawing is "a machine which is breathing" which, through his marks and gestures, attempts to open up what is innate to it; each drawing is a trial, an act of rebirth.

As *Hors Limites* demonstrated, after about 1968 getting to know the body increasingly meant to abolish it, cut it up, subject it to endurance tests—a process Méredieu calls a “theatricalization” or “miming” of castration and death that relied on real pain in places like Auschwitz, Chile, or El Salvador to make its point. It was only in retrospect that Vito Acconci realized that works like his *Trademarks* (1970) were intimately connected with protest against the Vietnam War.¹⁶ The more notorious body art of the seventies by Acconci, Chris Burden, or Marina Abramovic, for example, could be seen as actions directly performed on the body which destroy its symbolic boundaries; this is the inverse of the operation Artaud lives/performs. Artaud was enough of a Gnostic to see that quotidian events and appearances were themselves traveling, symbolic borders. With Artaud the body from its inception is already myth and symbol: “Because reality is terribly superior to all history, to all fable, to all divinity, to all surreality.”¹⁷

Artaud is such a terrifying “black sun” because the notion of artistic activity as product cannot be further from his volcanic, self-consuming furor, what Méredieu called his “creative self-cannibalization” in a body which “ceaselessly makes and unmakes itself.” Artaud made it clear that “there will be hell to pay for whoever considers them [his drawings] works of art, works of aesthetic simulation of reality. Not one properly speaking is a work.”¹⁸

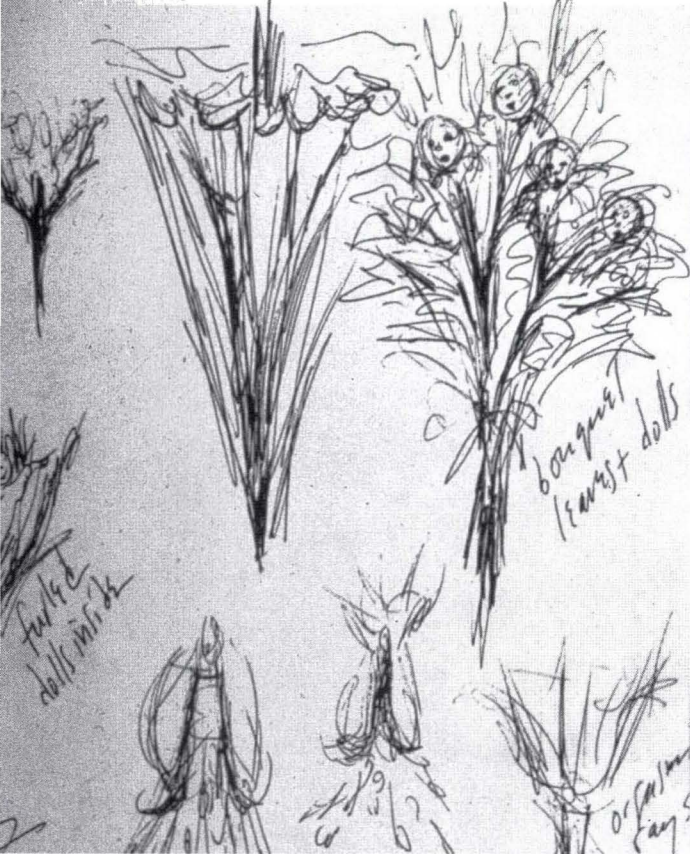
Artaud provided Schneemann, as so many others, with a certain indispensable trigger to her own life, performance/theater, and art. But what Lawrence Alloway called Schneemann’s “dionysiac cul-de-sac” leads not to the inalterable, inconsolable loss of “self” but to an activated space where full, orgasmic sexuality opens a door to the psychic.

The paranormal seems to be invited to hover more closely because it has to do with this dematerialization of the normal envelope around the self. You didn’t lose something; something came through you.¹⁹

The torturous, excremental economies of Artaud or the Aktionists thus become for Schneemann the ecstasy of excess, where obedience to the pleasure principle leads to a glorious expenditure. Despite its myriad embodiment in prints, photographs, sculptures, and films, Schneemann’s work—like the sources of its inspiration—keeps moving just beyond complete grasp or assimilability.

Notes

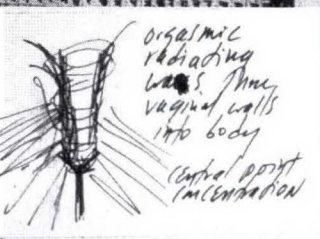
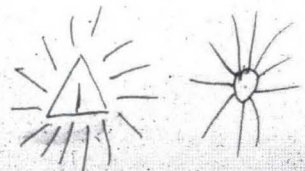
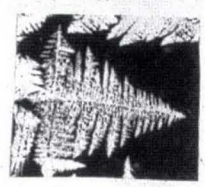
- 1 This includes commentary by Kristine Stiles, Joanna Frueh, Kathy O'Dell, Amelia Jones, Laura Cottingham, Kathy Constantinides, and Rebecca Schneider. Although Schneemann was certainly mentioned and supported by other women critics, the main essays on her works have almost invariably been by male critics: Dan Cameron, Frederick Ted Castle, Thomas McEvelley, Lawrence Alloway, Henry Sayre, Robert Haller, Robert C. Morgan, Johannes Birringer, Gene Youngblood, Scott MacDonald, and David James. Major exceptions to this include articles by Ann Sargent-Wooster, Valie Export, Julia Ballerini, and Carey Lovelace.
- 2 David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 321. For contemporary responses to Schneemann's early performances, see, for example, Jill Johnston's ambivalent review, "Meat Joy," *Village Voice* 10, no. 6 (1964): 17. Johnston writes, "I like the spirit of *Meat Joy* but I tend to agree with the observer who saw the meat and missed the potatoes. Miss Schneemann prefers culture in its rudimentary state before and after the refinements of pride and parlor . . . the beginning and the end of a thing are commonly considered to be bedfellows in chaos: the matrix of unformulated activity whirling into shape and the phoenix which burns into rubbish and rises from its ashes."
- 3 "Carolee Schneemann: *Up To And Including Her Limits*," curated by Dan Cameron, November 24, 1996 to January 26, 1997, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.
- 4 "Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper," curated by Margit Rowell, October 5, 1996 to January 7, 1997, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 5 At least one group, Floating Point Unit (<http://www.thing.net/~floating>), has dedicated a performance/installation *Body without Organs* (1996) to Artaud, whom they "acknowledge [for] his ability to hear the disembodied voices of the internet 50 years prior to its existence."
- 6 Curated by Marie-Laure Bernadac and Bernard Marcadé, October 24, 1995 to February 12, 1996, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Photographs of Schneemann's *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1976) were included in the "Identity and Alterity" exhibition at the 1995 Venice Biennale.
- 7 Curated by Jean de Loisy, November 9, 1994 to January 23, 1995, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.
- 8 There was much discussion in the Vienna press comparing the sex-positive Schneemann with the still controversial Vienna Aktionists when her work *Mortal Coils* was displayed at the Wiener Kunstraum, April 13 to May 13, 1995. See Christoph Blash, "Frau unter Kontrolle," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 38. May 3, 1995, 38; Doris Kruppl, "Die amerikanische Schwester der Wiener Aktionisten," *Der Standard*, April 11, 1995, 23.
- 9 See Hubert Klocker, "The Shattered Mirror," in *Viennese Actionism 1960-71*, vol. 2., ed. H. Klocker (Klagenfurt: Ritter Verlag, 1989), 211.
- 10 Michael White, *Empty Seats* (London: Hamish Hall, 1984), 77. Although photographs of *Meat Joy* may suggest that the performance was a wild melee, in reality this "celebration of flesh as material" was a carefully rehearsed and imaginatively structured evocation of the body's sensitivity to different combinations of materials, light, color, and sound. For a description of the structure of *Meat Joy*, see Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, ed. Bruce McPherson (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, 1979), 62-87.
- 11 Interview with Schneemann by the author, September 21, 1991.
- 12 Carolee Schneemann, "Erotic Taboo," talk delivered at the Hartford Symposium, October 19, 1989.
- 13 Interview with Schneemann by the author, April 9, 1995.
- 14 Antonin Artaud, *Watchfiends and Rack Screams*, ed. and trans. Clayton Eshleman with Bernard Bador (Boston: Exact Change, 1995), 278-79.
- 15 Florence de Mèredieu, *Antonin Artaud, portraits et gris-gris*, trans. Charles Doria (Paris: Editions Blusson, 1984), 62.
- 16 Mark Hinson, "Interview: Vito Acconci," *Art Papers* 11, no. 2 (March-April 1987), 41-42.
- 17 Antonin Artaud, *Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965), 143.
- 18 Artaud, *Watchfiends and Rack Screams*, 278-79.
- 19 Interview with Schneemann by the author, April 9, 1995.



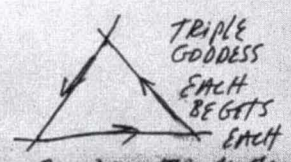
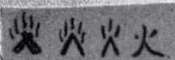
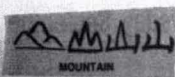
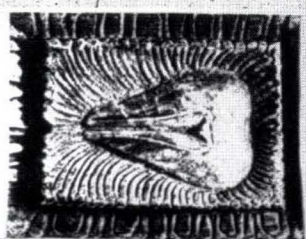
bouquet
leaves + dolls

furled
dolls into it

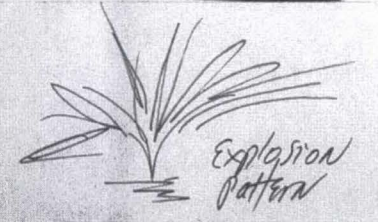
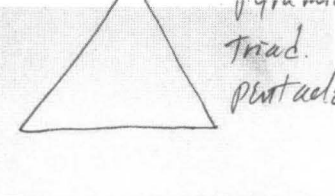
THE HEART
THE LIVER
THE LUNGS
THE ARTERIES



orgasmic
radiating
waves thru
vagina/canals
into body
Cervical point
incubation



TRIPLE
GODDESS
EACH
BEGETS
EACH



Explosion
Pattern

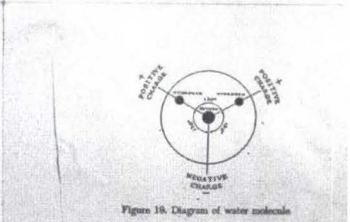
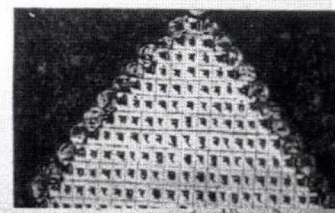


Figure 10. Diagram of water molecule



Vertigo
Vertiginous

- △ The heart
- ▽ The liver
- ▽ The lungs
- △ The arteries



flexible spiral wrap
inside-out side



Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology, 1983.

Performance.

Photo: Dan O'Connor.

FRESH BLOOD—A DREAM MORPHOLOGY

1981-83

Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology took form from a menstrual dream in which two dominant objects of the dream narrative posed a question: *What do a red umbrella and a bouquet of dried leaves have in common?* (I would follow implications of this dream for the next six years!)

This dream hovered in great detail, the way dreams often do when sleep is broken. I had begun menstruating in the middle of the night. This dream drew my body into the two objects: a red umbrella, with which I accidentally pierced a man's thigh while getting into a taxi, producing a great spurt of blood from his thigh; the other object was a bouquet of dried leaves that had little babies' heads tucked in it, which had been given to me by my lover. I had accidentally left this bouquet of dried leaves babies' heads in the "Famous Viennese Veterinarian's Waiting room" (the first Freudian joke). I wrote an essay on blood taboos based on a feminist analysis that skewed both Freudian and Jungian principles, positing the menstrual dream as a generative force of sacred interiority, or *prima materia* (biochemical, visual, conceptual, alchemical).

I began drawings of the umbrella and the bouquet of leaves, and as I drew I saw the umbrella was both vulvic and phallic. It was container and contained; it related to the interiority of the female body as a metaphor for a physicalized interiority of insight, of knowledge, of the dark unconscious itself. It further posited a morphological set of images, visual connections between archaic artifacts which reoccur in my work: the bull horns as an archaic referent to the lure of ovaries, of the new moon's curvature—like a primitive x-ray of the curved cervix. As I typed the dream narrative, I considered taboos surrounding menstruation and that a male can only bleed by assault or accident, so in the dream I "accidentally" pierced the man's thigh with the tip of my red umbrella—producing the spurt of blood. This event posits a transference into masculist prohibitions. The dream narrative was poised on two despised secrets: the dream itself with all its dark, murky, wet, forbidden information, and the culture's horror of the menstruating female body as a loathsome thing to be hidden and denigrated. My visual associations would need to be layered, suggestive. I would research the meaning of menstrual dreams in various other cultures—particularly where they are considered sacred, holy, a source of insight: gifts of female physiology activating special paranormal healing powers and the key to fecundity, renewal, reproduction. Menstrual dreams have an extra vividness, a potential power for insight which I relate to the menstruating

body's increased sensitivity: during intercourse the vaginal sensations are excruciating. I imagined my lover's penis as a paintbrush stirring my blood as *prima materia* in a dramatic fluid exchange. Red drench to White ejaculate.

The connecting visual element between the umbrella and the bouquet of dried leaves was a V, a very simple vector shape. The V is also the archaic, most primary symbol of the female. It occurs as early as the Paleolithic era and recurs in ancient Indo-European, African, East Asian goddess figurines—the simple incised vulvic vector. Research into ancient artifacts, erotic art, patterns in nature would build a vocabulary of form out of unexpected affinities. At the same time, I began an essay on the taboos of menstrual blood, interweaving the interiority of the female body and the unconscious itself. The dream became a narrative, an essay, and a visual vocabulary. This visual vocabulary accumulated as a “morphology,” basically derived from my own library, so in a way I was scavenging my own unconscious.

Discovering an image of the sacred Tantric Umbrella Tree, for instance, concretized my research. It is depicted with a stem (or slender trunk) to grasp like the handle of an umbrella. An object of worship, the triangular tree-shaped hieroglyphic inscriptions mean “sacred vulva.” “Sacred umbrella formed out of the Sanskrit alphabet, whose sounds are the dwelling place of the goddess” (Rajasthan, nineteenth century, ink and gouache on paper, 11 x 9 inches, in Philip Rawson, *Tantra, The Indian Cult of Ecstasy*, Thames and Hudson, 1973). In this one image, my thematic search was fully encoded. In conjunction with Freudian and Jungian umbrella jokes, I was able to bring in confirmation from another culture for my personal umbrella (vulva) explications.

I compiled sixty V-shapes depicting vulvic symbols—from the human body and other organic forms (snow crystals, branches, molecules) to sacred artifacts and common objects (umbrella, tent, alphabet characters, bicycle). I photographed these images from books, nature, my own drawings, and then edited them into twenty-six units (the alphabet or vocabulary). The images formed a continuous slide relay, combined with an essay/lecture. Enthusiastic audience response to the lecture led me to consider performance to reenter the dream text, turning my body into vector shapes, responding physically and interactively within the slide projections and with spoken and prerecorded texts. I could activate the dream's content and analysis, even as I was the embodiment of its actual materialization. As I was developing the solo performance, an alter ego appeared in a series of dreams. My dream partner was to be an African American woman who repeatedly appeared as an interruption, a fracture in the unfolding dream actions.

She arrives as a drunken grandmother, as a nurse carrying paint-stained jockey shorts on a pole, as a messenger from Western Union chanting, "Don't forget . . . it all comes back . . . in other forms," and as my twin, in matching red pajamas. All her guises occurred to me as a series of vivid dream instructions, as I was editing the original essay and visual sources. Her guises connected to cultural suppressions that had diverted women from our active links in a shared if disparate history—personal, social, racial, political, and sexual. Clad in the red pajamas, my partner offers me "the prize"—a watering can from which I pour soap-flakes, stars, snow, effluvia. *Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology* concludes as she and I mirror each other's motions, holding one another as we speak the final fragments of the text.

Score for Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology

Since the early 1960s I've been using dream as an active process in my film and performance works. I keep pens and paper next to the bed and often find dreams will generate ideas or images directly related to the problems of particular works in process. Hypnagogic messages often guide and define the work; drawings which occur persistently on waking indicate the tenacity of a new work emerging.

Dream-Language: Coherence/Distortion

Language or drawings are used to transcribe dream information which is itself an imagistic residue influenced by physiological sensation among other phenomena, so that the transcription into text or image is already a reconstruction of an elusive realm. I guard the state of synesthesia between sleeping and waking with the hope that there will be dream detritus producing drawings, marks, energetic images, titles, and even specific instructions for creative work.

A Notation of Five Residual Dream Voices

- 1 *directive voice*—carries through memory of dream passage; reformulates events, plot, story—fills out remembered shape of setting, colorations, durations of activities and recalls seemingly accurate "dialogue" . . . can carry many dream personas distinctively . . .
- 2 *reporting voice*—does not censor or change or "improve," does not make coherent what may be illogical, "impossible," unrecognizable, or trivial. Resists tendency to bridge discordant elements.

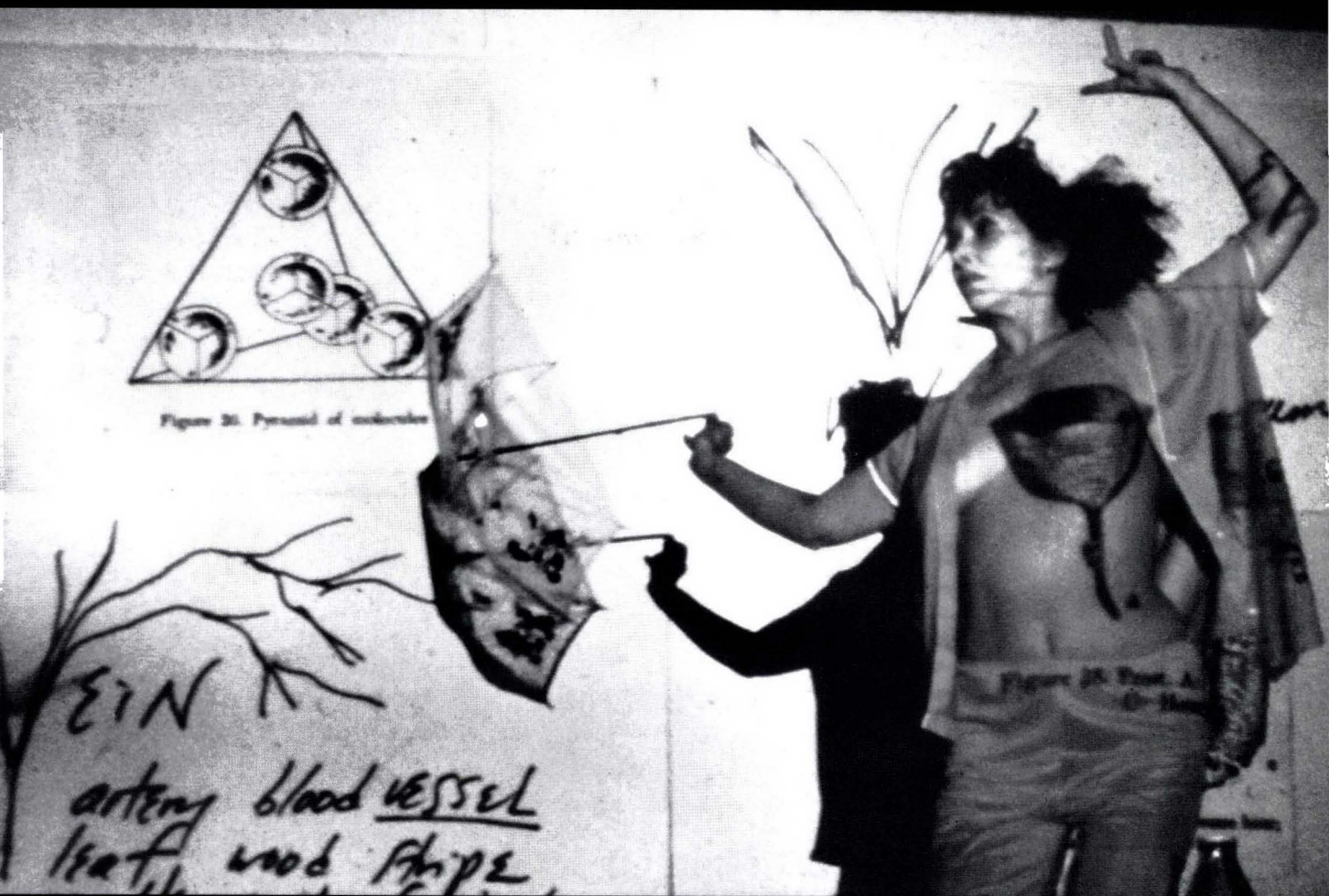
- 3 *audience voice*—responds, reacts; total susceptibility to own dream program; needs to convey undigested convictions: “I have to tell you this dream/Who was that person in green?/Why didn’t you jump when I screamed?/Was a woman in the boat?”
- 4 *analytic voice/linguistic analysis, imagistic association*—moves through mental layers, releases impacting images/texts, opens associative clusters. Links jokes of conscious mind observing unconscious connectors, insights “right there before your eyes.” (Interpolations, building coherence is reflexive. In working with Oscar Kollerström I learned to follow the *remembering-dream-body* as part of *dream process* itself—so that the flow and branching of associations, equivalences were valued for whatever kind of attachments they could trigger. Not hierarchical, not “aesthetic” and not predictable.)
- 5 *truth/divination (clear dream voice)*—practical, functional transmission of dream information that releases creative energy; frees the constructing will which may have to proceed apart from “logical” structures or cultural justifications (traditions). The “truth” usually obscured within dream morphology, disguised in trivial objects/symbolic referents: contrary of “wish fulfillment”—the painful truth, the actual outcome of occluded life/work circumstance.

To increase the potential communication I address the dream process before sleep, requesting a further step, solution, clarification. Empty the mind, concentrate on disciplines which sharpen the dream arena, stimulate unconscious recognitions. The sensuous body is coiled with unconscious archetypes of culture, symbol, and myth emerging from within the isolation of personal dreaming. Physiological forces will be as instrumental as psychological ones in dream events.

Something about the bouquet of “dolls and leaves” contains the umbrella symbol . . . what is it?

The dream question she must answer: What do an umbrella and a bouquet of dried flowers stuffed with little dolls have in common? . . . begins to draw . . .

The morphology—visual analysis of the two dream objects—gender attributes and physical permutations.



Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology, 1981.
Performance, Washington D.C.
Photo: Ginerva Portlock.

Performance Text: Part One (tape)

Collage tape (roof ripping distorted song—"When You Wish upon a Star"—kitchen timer "ding"). Audience enters performance space.

C. beneath the table hits hidden mike to signal voice tape. With each taped sentence a slide is projected of the Venus Vectors morphology.

C. slowly rises from behind the table. Venus Vectors images are projected eight feet high by ten feet wide. Silhouetted on the broad table are a bottle, a transparent umbrella. C. is wearing bright red silk pajamas, hair disheveled, face dusted white. With each slide change she evolves movements silhouetting her body and umbrella within the changing images of Venus Vectors.

Voice on tape:

to what to what extent do shared cultural recognitions influence the language of our dreams
their signification significations interpretations

WE ALL KNOW WHAT AN UMBRELLA IS . . . BUT WHY DO I DREAM OF IT ?

the transmogrifications of the umbrella umbrella in the dream *Fresh Blood* can only be registered in reference to her particular particular graphic and feminist graphic and feminist concerns

the permutations of the umbrella emerge from female sexual sexual experience and painterly painterly tactile signification tactile signification of body object material the mythic attributes attributes draw on feminist research in archaeology the organic structural energies relate to relate to morphology of form form

delineate delineate the interrelations structuring her dreams and films allow the "things" "things" to be central in focus keep focus on preverbal quality of objects their entrances durations shifts from dark to light dark to light obscure to specific and words also maintain a hypnogogic object form

explain the concentration on the form of the dream refer to refer to the fact work is based on background as a painter

she felt the mind was subject to the dynamics of its body the body activating pulse of eye and stroke the mark mark signifying event transferred from actual space to constructed constructed space

it was essential to dance before going to paint in order to see better see better to bring the mind's-eye alert and clear clear as the muscular relay of eye/hand could be could be

symbolic range of dream material images and texts symbolic range does not determine how the dream content enters into her works the dream content enters

our creative work our dream works our dreams were habitually denigrated ignored if not corresponding to what the male imagination required as antagonist or consort or complement

his dream of us so culturally pervasive that we still ask: are we dreaming ourselves or dreaming the dreams of the men dreaming us?

perhaps maybe perhaps it's possible for all of these considerations refer to the "dream body" which incorporates "mind" an implicit emphasis denied to the primacy of body in Freud's use Freud's use of "dream-mind" I refer to "dream-body" not "dream-mind"

unconscious cultural distortions resist integrating active physiological networks networks of the "dream-body" body as triggering informing partner collaborator of "dream-mind" there can be no separation (and if the archetypes of male/mind/culture— woman/body/nature are still active in the communal unconscious we will collectively dream the negative male negative destruction fantasies just as reactionary "politics of the unconscious" will surface in creative and analytic work)

Fresh Blood analysis spontaneous process associative layers emerge from dream-object layers become graphic could be thought of as physical/ topological/ morphological finally as "psychological" symbol implication equivalences reference attached to specific dream-source: to the visual object thing thing or word word in which the symbol-form is moored

the object quality thingness is what guides occurrence density of dream dream material active activates activating films/performance

free the symbolic "content" to unravel itself magnetize reattract associative elements may be repressed denied elements which would otherwise be conventionally determined

circumnavigating traditional "resistance" to what underlies what underlies permissions to face the unknown taboos within

she is aware of dismantling those analytic authoritarian hierarchies which male conventions projected onto the scope and implication of her creative imagination even our dreams and unconscious recognitions recognitions were subjected subject to pervading male interpretations

our realm of symbolic event has been confirmed by the male creative will when integrated into his own work his own words (the Muse for instance) our unique biological experiences experiences have been permitted definition as a masculine invention His description of a female psyche and persona psyche and persona

topological topological in the sense of "science of place; assisting the memory by associating the thing to be remembered with some place"; morphological as relating to form and structures of organic materials homologies and metamorphoses governing influencing influencing form.

(End of tape text.) Transition as Messenger knocks from "off stage." C. stops movement. C. sits at the table facing audience reads with hand mic as slide progression continues.

Performance Text: Part Two (The Dream Read Live)

(C. reads while conforming her body and umbrella to changing shapes of projected vector vocabulary.)

Two English men, Bruce and I sitting in a circle, back of a large taxi (London-style or New York Checker). We are being driven to a concert. They are famous writers or "producers." We are relating anecdotes about unexpected violence at "rock" concerts or unexpected little daily accidents . . . in any event, the handsome older man in suit and raincoat says, "I'm bleeding, you know." Bruce and I think it's a metaphor or a joke, until later during this ride, B. looks over and comments, "Why yes, there's a spot of blood on your trousers."

We wonder how this cut came about, confined as we are. I have a sudden fear it might be from my umbrella! Perhaps I inadvertently jabbed his leg getting into the taxi. He smoothly opens the trousers along the crease over his thigh: we can see a vivid, fresh "flower" of blood spurting there. I exclaim, "This could be serious, we must tell the driver to take us to

a doctor." I immediately sense that the driver of the taxi is a doctor!

(Knocking is heard from outside)

KNOCK KNOCK "Who's there?"

KNOCK KNOCK

(A woman dressed in black long coat and crazy hat carrying a door appears in front of the performance table into projection light (no slide image). She stands in the beam after leaning the door on the wall.)

"Who's there?" **"GRANDMOTHER"**

"Grandmother who?" **"GRANDMOTHER WINTER"**

"What do you want?" **"A GLASS OF BEER"**

"A glass of beer?! Get out of here you drunken bum!"

(She slowly lifts her door and exits. C. remains standing on the table looking after her. C. returns to her text and takes position on the table in front of the next slide.)

My shoes were too delicate. I couldn't remember which direction led to the center of town. When I went to the department store—a very dusty failing sort of one—I realized the bouquet of "dolls and leaves" you had brought me seemed extremely heavy. I left you in the cafeteria/restaurant on the mezzanine. The basement waiting room of the famous European Veterinarian was crowded. I considered your gift of the bouquet of "dolls and colored fall leaves" might be appropriately left there.

She crawled out from your arms and the cats in the bed to take a pee. The dream recall was triggered when she realized her thighs were covered with blood. (Each month she forgets to expect the period—unless late—and experiences the "surprise." Other women have mentioned the same sort of repeated "forgetfulness.")

Last night they made love on the couch. She got into a curious acrobatic position tipped up, almost balanced on her head upside down; your penetration so intensely deep, full, felt "he came out the other end of her," or "made a hole in the top." Later they went down the hill for a drink at the local country bar. In the back room they heard an incredible rock and roll band. Five men were dressed in bizarre sequined outfits. They stayed to dance.



Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology, 1981.
Performance, New York (C.S. and Linda Bryant).
Photo: Leigh Williams.

As for the Englishmen: I had been reading Waugh off and on. Another mutation of you and A. McC.—your shared British ancestors—A recurrent dream interweaves relays the past into present; spaces in me with me you both have or do occupy . . . or the years lived in England now “dreamlike”; where studied dream analysis. . . . (Blood taboos . . . made the first blood pages and blood performance works London '71,'72.)

KNOCK KNOCK “Who’s there?”

KNOCK KNOCK “Who’s there—?”

“THE NURSE!”

(From central aisle woman in nurse’s outfit slowly steadily advances. She holds a long pole extended into the projector light (no slide). On the pole is a pair of men’s jockey shorts with a large blood stain visible in the center. She knocks on tables as she advances.)

KNOCK KNOCK “Who is it?”

“THE NURSE” “I don’t have a nurse”

“NOW YOU DO” “What do you want?”

(She extends pole with blood-stained pants towards audience.)

“I THINK YOU’RE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS”

(Exits.)

She has the umbrella: instrument—covers, protects, shields, pierces. In England the furled umbrella—sartorial convention in case of rain can be used as a weapon for defense, and quixotically, props open doors, dislodges cats from trees.

Jokes of switching, stealing umbrellas. Can indicate endearment, cherishing, as in: be sure to take your umbrella. Use of umbrellas on motors in early constructions/environments she built; turned at different rhythms, speeds. Living four years in England and does not remember her umbrella there. Remembers his black one with instant spring-opening.

You are responsible for a man bleeding. He bleeds from a flesh surface adjacent to genitals—as if there is no way to project a vagina “into” a man. He has to be “wounded” to bleed—no other way. (A. had periodic nose bleeds.) This reverses the male projection of female as “wounded” inside. Your menstruation brought on by fucking (cock/umbrella opens up inside to start flow, blood/rain). The male can only release cleanse from within-to-without burst, “flow” by ejaculation. Fluid transmission. But in reactive male mythologies the men wound each other . . . “spill blood” blood revenge blood lust bad blood between them blood brothers. This grandiose blood in contradistinction to proportionate periodicity of menstrual blood. The usual male taboos around menses . . . often exaggerated, disproportionate fear, revulsion.

The weapon. The wound. Physical complexity of female genital: cunt strength vulnerability transformation. (Blood nourishment, birth canal . . . passage, journey out from within. Creates two genders: one in her own mold, the "other" is male.) Clitoral and vaginal orgasms further shift cunt as homologous with cock—multiple range of functions, sensations increase male/female differentiation. (Which should not be antagonistic. How to avoid internalizing male archetypes.) The negative-male aggression on "what lies within": attacks, rape, mutilations enacted on women, and is trope for the . . . unconscious, the dream—to tear into the invisible rip apart to turn his body into brutalizing instrument to use physical power as instrumentality subsuming procreative instrumentality of the female by assault on his source. Distortion of desire pleasure mutuality drained into overdetermination of cock-weapon. All women live along the fine thread delineating "good men and bad men" all the time. For men (though they often obfuscate the facts) there is no correspondingly constant daily condition of living as potential sexual victim; an object provoking rage attack by the "other" gender.

KNOCK KNOCK "Who's there?"

KNOCK KNOCK. "Who's there?"

"WESTERN UNION" "western union?"

(Woman in running suit cuts into projector beam runs in tiny quick steps forward and around the table. C. standing on table twists around to watch her.)

"What do you want?"

"WE HAVE A MESSAGE FOR YOU" "Oh a message . . . what is it—"

"DON'T FORGET" "Don't forget?"

"IT ALL COMES BACK" "What comes back?"

"IN OTHER FORMS" "Other forms?"

(The messenger runs in place then circles around the table. Exits. C. returns to read text and move with slides.)

In the dream the blood "flower petals" his thighs: depicts as dream image the sensation of blood actually spurting within me flowing out as I slept. The coursing expanding blood flows from source in an "umbrella" shape spread from an apex. The vagina itself is represented by a V (apex below). Add the vertical cock in cunt from above or below: Add a little curve—as if for balls.

UMBRELLA!

Now I think I'm getting a "handle" on the dream; but also the inverted handle introduces a question mark!

umbrella cunt umbrella both cunt and cock unfurling it expands and contracts covers the body the head is a hollow shaft a tissue thin fabric rigid supports umbrella is ridged ribbed tactile ridges of cunt cock is wet and covered with rain rain pours down

cunt full of dolls dolls equal babies leaves kittens born wrapped up in leaves (summer Milano dream) leaves—who leaves sheds goes away drops down mulch penis “leaves”—goes out of vagina cock leaves bouquet of little babies dolls inside cunt the ridges are full inside has shape of umbrella or the bouquet of leaves

umbrella/cunt/cock: rises up opens out all wrapped up furled unfurling cunt clasping

**THE POWER OF THE BLOOD MADE OVERT HAS THE RISK OF SOCIAL CENSURE
EMBARRASSMENT PUTTING OUT SECRET ESSENCE INTERIOR FLOOD FLOWS IF
BLOOD WAS A MENTAL PRODUCT WOULD IT BE ACCEPTABLE?**

(If males bled would it be sacred life essence—rather than taboo?)

KNOCK KNOCK “Who’s there?”

KNOCK KNOCK “Who’s there?”

(The woman appears in projection beam dressed in red pajama identical to C.’s.)

KNOCK KNOCK

(She raps on Performance table as C. looks down at her.)

KNOCK KNOCK “Who’s there?”

“**THE JUDGE**” “The judge? I don’t have a judge”

“**NOW YOU DO**” “What do you want?”

“**YOU’VE WON THE PRIZE**” “The prize?”

(The JUDGE extends a large metal watering can to C. on the table. C. lifts the watering can into the projector beam and tips it over—a stream of glittering white snow pours out onto the floor. C. reads messages written on the watering can as the JUDGE stands on table and mirrors her motions.)

silverware and crystal glasses in one tight drawer visceral reaction against persistent male poets word “slime” for our lubricity creaming butter honey domestic utensils the silver can be phallic objects as well as sensation of what is held within in the drawer we fell asleep you still in me my walls still grasping you softened the crystal light transparency shines is an enclosed form but permeable

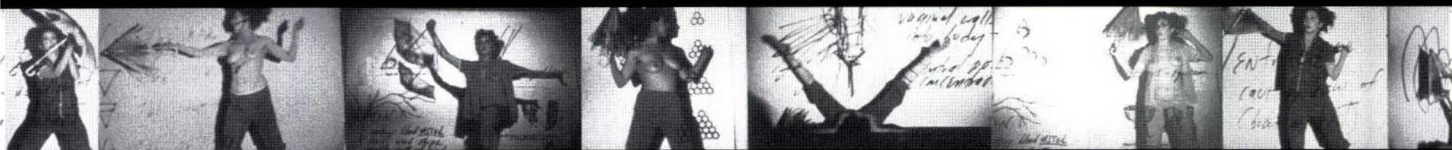
the washing machine the wetting machine—the body is not a machine

how to chart a course disjunctive move to cut the thread being followed let it break open edges curve pick it up link again *in the interstices the power unravels* (Cézanne's broken line)

this "tactile arrangement" is touching amusing ordinary utensils but very fine quality rare don't want to be clumsy with them enjoy the banality not grandiose within hands grasp to be used over and over piled up full of light keep handling

(Drops microphone into watering can; feedback noise "stirred" through speakers as she slips down under the table. The final slide is held—begin "collage" tape.)

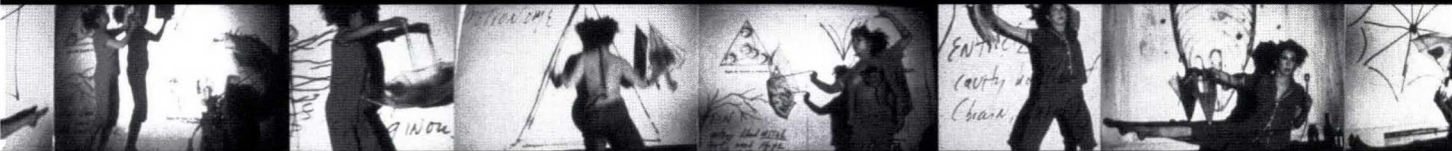
Fresh Blood: A Dream Morphology, 1981–87. Performance: 2 slide carousels/zoom lens, dissolve unit (projection area 8 x 12 feet), ceiling side-lights, raised platform, microphone, speakers, metal watering can, transparent umbrella, door, etc. 2 monitors, video camera, live video relay.

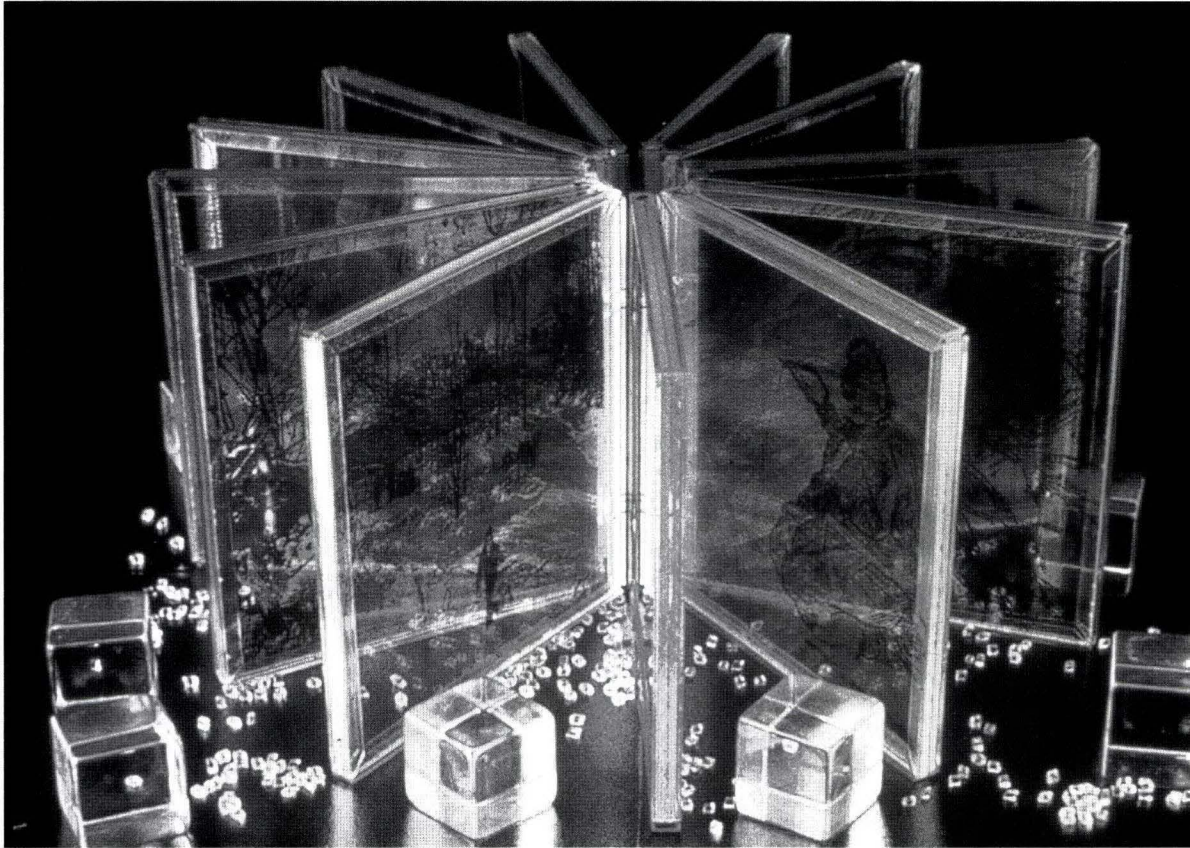


Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology, 1986.

Performances

- San Diego Performance Festival, San Diego (1981).
 Collective for Living Cinema, New York (1981).
 The Women's Gallery, New York (1981).
 Baltimore Institute of the Arts, Baltimore (1981).
 Feminist Art Institute, New York (1981).
 Gemeentelijke Culturele Dienst, Middelburg, Holland (1981).
 Gestures and Language Series, East Main Street Gallery, Richmond, Va. (1981).
 International Cultureel Centrum, Antwerp (1981).
 REAL ART WAYS, Hartford, Conn. (1981).
 International Congress of Psychoanalysis, New York, "Sex and Language" (1981).
 Sheldon Film Theatre, Lincoln, Neb. (1981).
 Symposium International d'Art Performance, Lyon, France (1981).
 University of Oklahoma (1981).
 Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C. (1982).
 State University of New York at Buffalo, "Performing the Person: Displacements of Life Narrative" (1982).
 Second Intermedia Performance Festival, University of Iowa (1982).
 International Performance Arts Festival, Winnipeg (1986).
 Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y. (1986).





Maquette for *Venus Vectors*, 1987.
Plexiglass, mylar laserprints. 10 x 22 in.

VENUS VECTORS

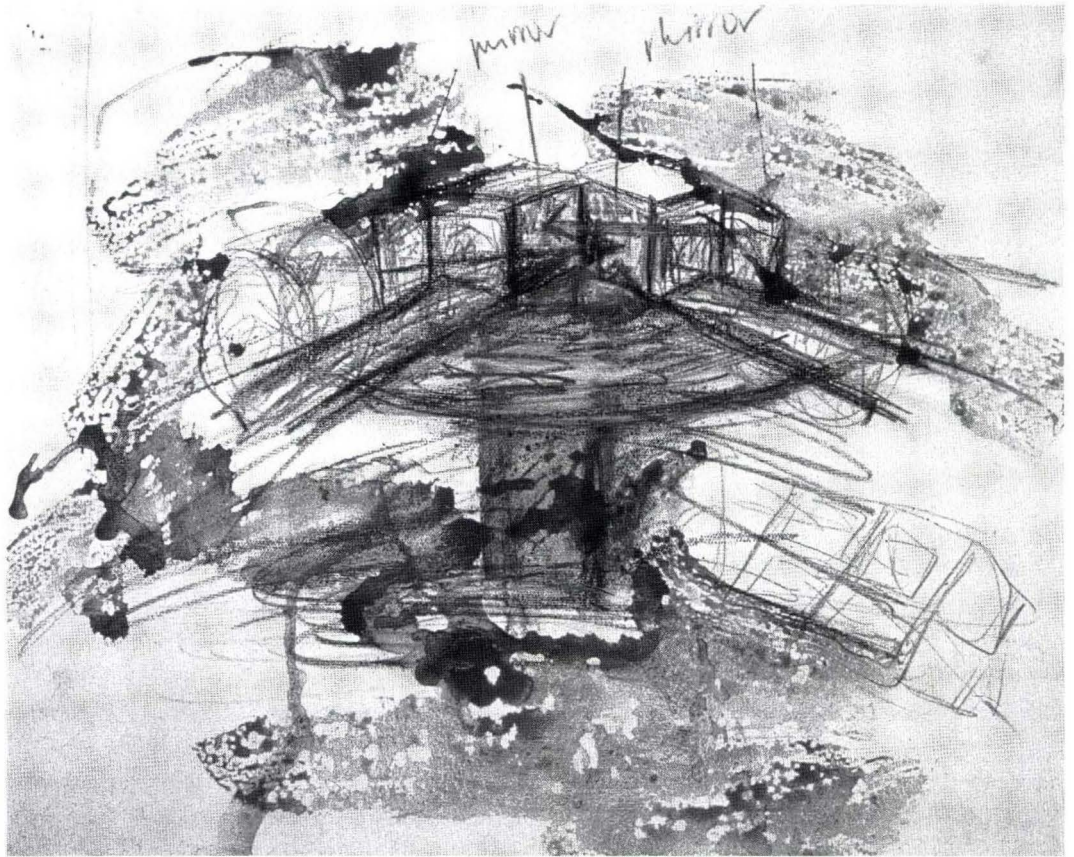
1987

The sculpture/video installation *Venus Vectors* merged techniques from my various disciplines. In *Venus Vectors*, ten transparent acrylic panels, radiating on edge like a star, depict an iconography of related images, the “vector vocabulary grids.” Edited performances of *Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology*, are shown on two thirteen-inch video monitors built into one panel of the sculpture.

The vector images on the panels and in the video performance come from the human body; other organic forms (snow crystals, branches, molecules); sacred artifacts; common objects and symbols (umbrella, tents, alphabet characters).

Raised to eye level on a six-foot circular platform, *Venus Vectors* creates the illusion of a printed vector morphology penetrated by flickering motions from the double monitor. The circularity of the work is emphasized by the structure of the sculpture: the panels are transparent so that no single image can be isolated from the others. As viewers walk around the eye-level sculpture, they experience the layering of images from one panel to the next. The twelve hinged panels suggest the pages of a huge open book; the transparent “pages” and printed grids are multivalent and multidimensional. Within the thirteen-inch video monitors, my performing figure, active in a past-time frame, is seen moving in the virtual space. The movements in the monitors are refracted through the transparent plexiglass rectangles, escaping their borders and passing as shadow and reflection from one panel to the next. This paradoxical shift in scale between monitors, viewers, and performer fuses with themes and materials in the performance *Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology*. Objects, images, symbols, archetypal associations gradually come to consciousness, transmuted, as in dreams.

Venus Vectors, 1987. Sculpture/video installation: acrylic, aluminum, video monitors, 2-channel video, photographs on mylar between 10 radiating plexiglass panels, each 42 x 50 in. Overall radius 72 in.



Drawing for *Venus Vectors*, 1987.
Acrylic, ink, crayon, pencil on paper. 14 x 18 in.



Venus Vectors, 1987.
Sculpture/video installation.

Exhibitions

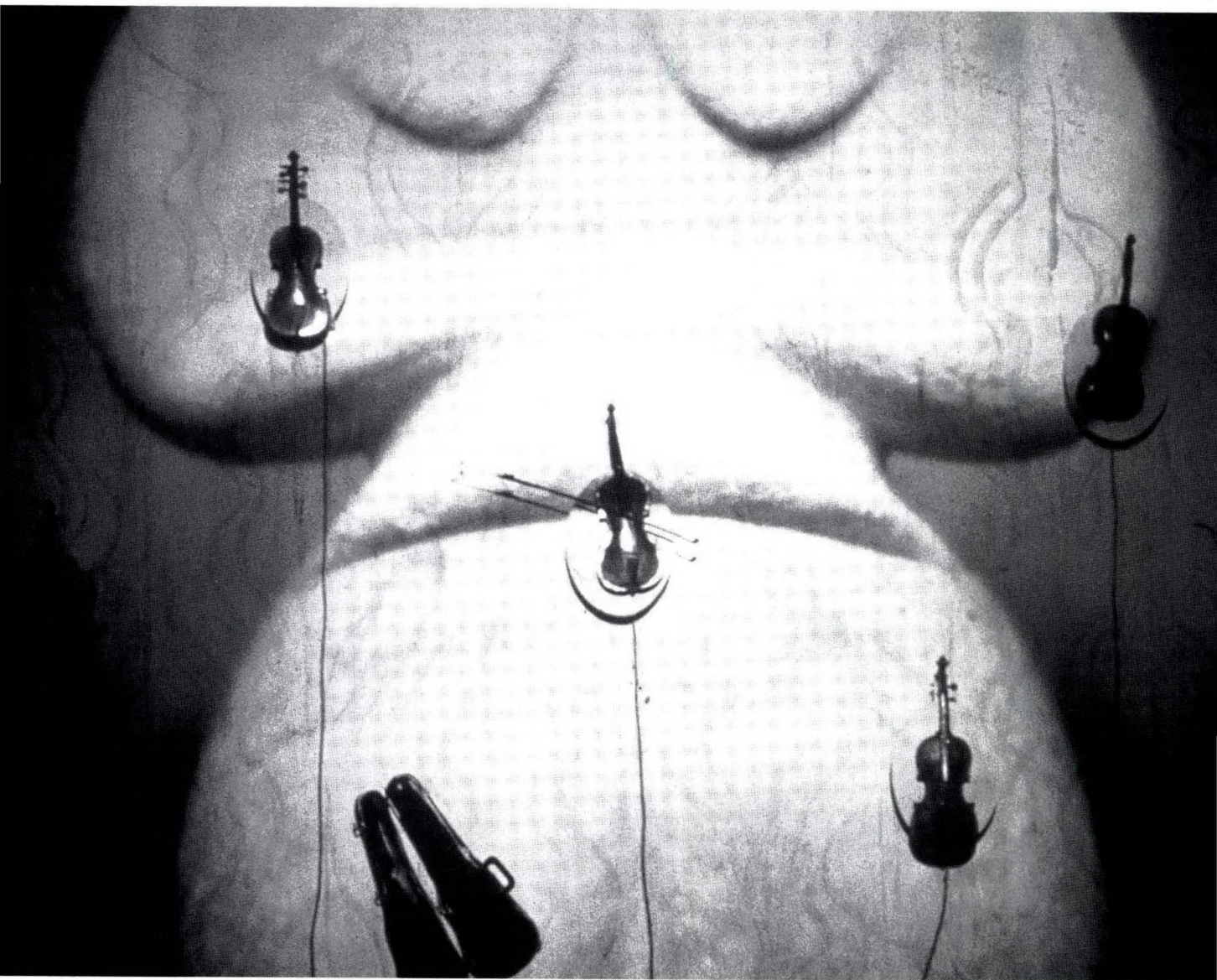
Everson Museum, Syracuse, N.Y., "Sacred Spaces" (1987).

Museum School of Fine Arts, Boston, "New Rituals in Contemporary Art" (1988).

Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, "Fluxus & Co." (1989).

Cleveland Center for Contemporary Arts, "Outside the Frame: Performance and the Object" (1995).

Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, N.Y., "Outside the Frame: Performance and the Object" (1995).



Cycladic Imprints, 1991 (detail).

Multimedia installation.

Photo courtesy of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

CYCLADIC IMPRINTS

1988–92

Cycladic Imprints developed from a 1988 conversation with composer-violinist Malcolm Goldstein. Goldstein mentioned that when he played the violin he thought of the iconic double curves of the female body and was now questioning why such an association was “politically incorrect.”

The concept of the double curve, connected to my series of visual iconographies, had originally developed from a consideration of Cézanne’s broken line. Cézanne’s layering of space into shifting planes had demanded an increased kinetic response of eye and body, which was carried forward by the Abstract Expressionists. This influenced my inclusion of ropes as wavering or shifting line—coiling, elongated—adding dimension to the early painting/constructions. The coiled rope prefigured the garter snakes on my torso in *Eye Body*.^{*} I studied engineering and construction principles in order to rig layers of manila ropes for the aerial performance *Water Light/Water Needle*. In *Up To And Including Her Limits*, it is while being suspended from a vertical rope that I produce a webbery of strokes. The folded scroll extracted from my vagina in *Interior Scroll* can be seen as a coiled rope. The rope, later, becomes central in the projection systems of *Mortal Coils*.

In 1988 I had just completed the *Venus Vectors* sculpture, which incorporated a morphology of V-shapes, so the double curve offered the possibilities for a related sculptural vocabulary. Goldstein and I mailed clippings of our research into double curves—musical instruments, shells, fossils, Cycladic sculptures, the vulva, the human torso, etc. I began to photograph, reprint, colorize, scale, and edit sequences of these images. Then the difficult search for “ruined violins” was also underway. I accumulated seventeen old violins, which were then motorized to be positioned within the evolving concept for a projection system. I wanted the images to fill a wall at least 15 feet high and 30 to 40 feet wide, so that the enormous slide projections would be in motion—merging, dissolving. At the same time Goldstein collected, edited, and composed sources of cross-cultural violin sounds layered as a subtle and dense audio parallel to the visual images.

* The inclusion of garter snakes in *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1965) predicted her affinity with the archaic Cretan attributes. It would be several years before Schneemann’s research would clarify the embodiment of the priestesses’ shamanic powers through the serpent.

Schneemann's multi-image installation *Cycladic Imprints* developed from her study of Cycladic sculpture, her belief that the pottery heads and carved figures evolved from articulations corresponding to the sensory, tactile shapes of the female body. As a young artist, she further imagined that the meditative powers of these sculptures could have been sculpted by women themselves. The installation interpolates well-known art historical representations of the female body from painting, sculpture, and photography onto a wall-bound assemblage of mechanized violins and painted, hourglass-shaped silhouettes. In this installation, Schneemann creates a theatrical space in which she challenges what she perceives as the master narrative of men of genius inspired by the female nude as muse. The amalgam of body, instruments, and machine defines the gallery as an arena of shared consciousness in the tradition of Schneemann's "kinetic theatre," transforming the female image from impuissant object into active subject. She triumphs in her mission to reclaim the female body and its pictorial representation from its role as passive conscript of the male gaze.

(Robert Riley, curator of media, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *The Projected Image* 1991 [San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1994]).

Cycladic Imprints, 1988–92. Multimedia installation: 360 slides; 4 synchronized slide projectors; 2 dissolve units: continuous image sequences of Cycladic sculptures, stringed instruments, and human torsos projected onto the painted wall where 17 motorized violins are mounted; 2 speakers; cassette deck: audio collage by Malcolm Goldstein containing cross-cultural sources of violin sounds. 20 x 36 x 2.5 feet. Continuous projection sequence: approximately 15 minutes per sequence.

Installations

New Music America, Miami (1988).

Emily Harvey Gallery, New York (1990).

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1991).

Carnegie Mellon International, Pittsburgh (1992).

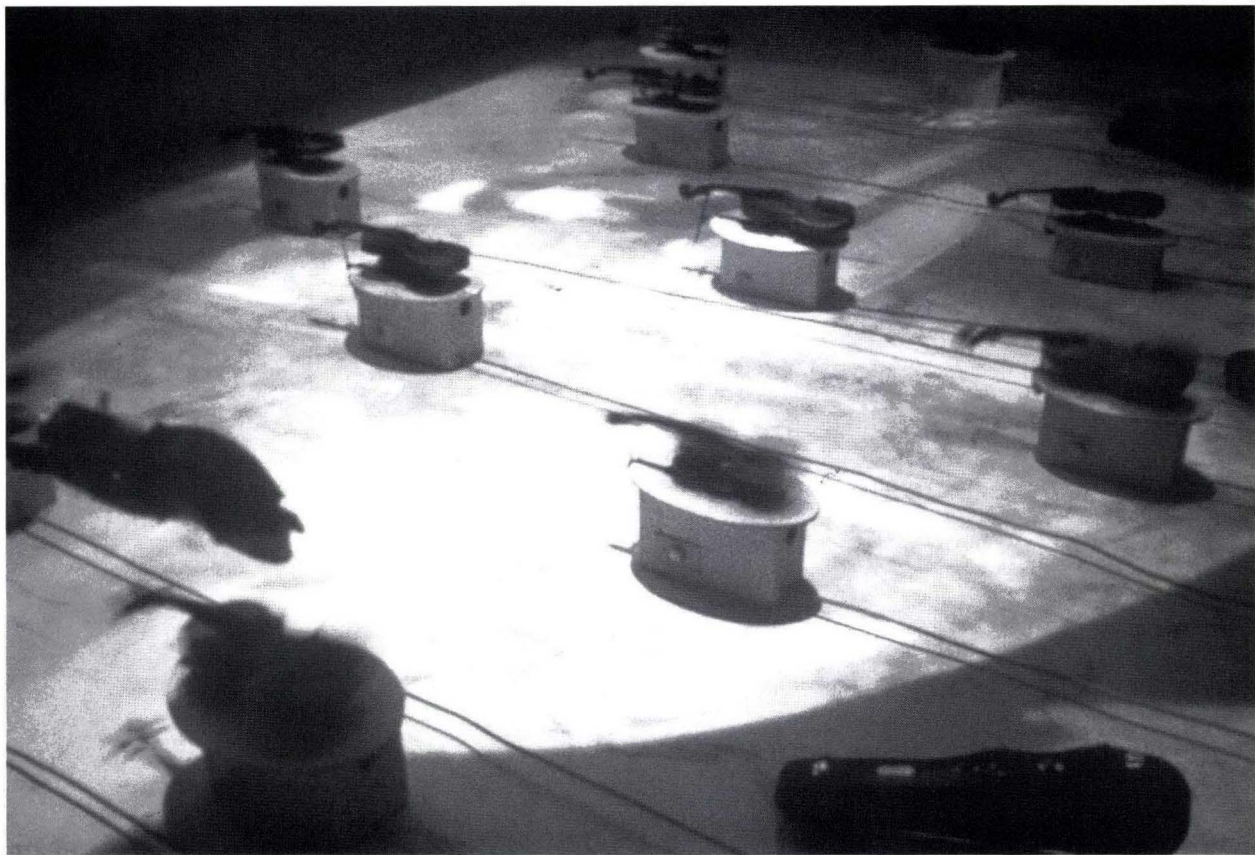
The Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (1992).

Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago (1992).

Cycladic Imprints, 1991 (detail).

Multimedia installation.

Photo courtesy of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Cycladic Imprints, 1992 (detail).

Multimedia installation.

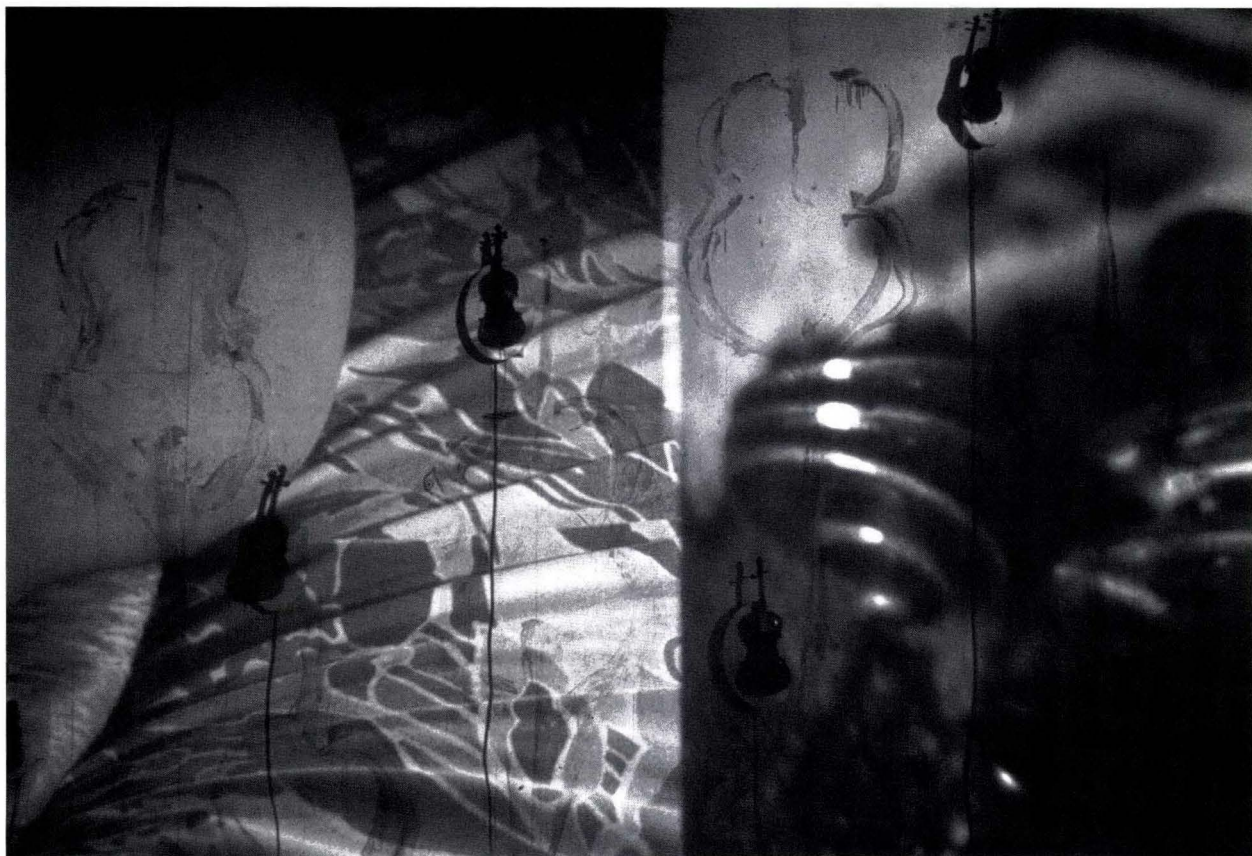
Photo courtesy of Paul Brenner, Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago.



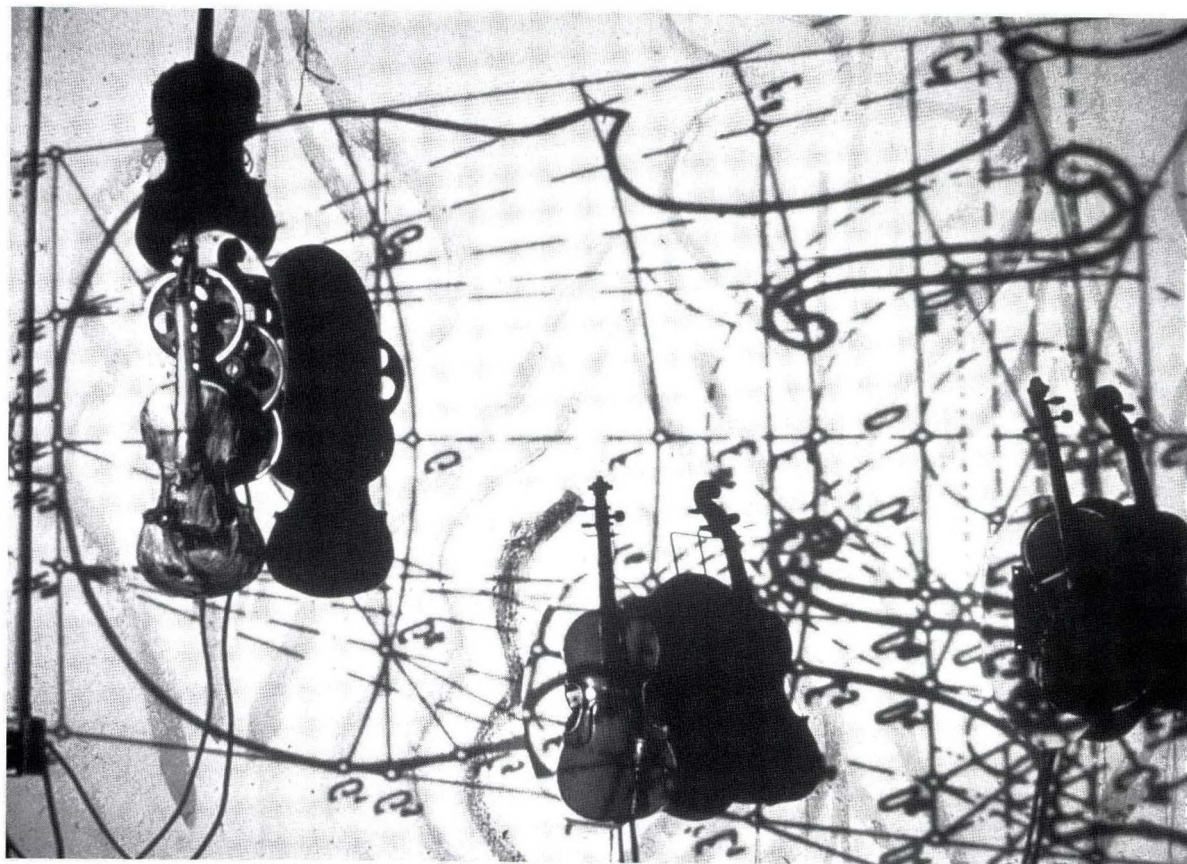
Cycladic Imprints, 1991 (detail).

Multimedia installation.

Photo courtesy of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Cycladic Imprints, 1988 (detail).
Multimedia installation.
Photo: Ben Blackwell.

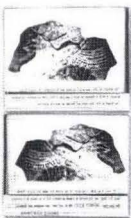


Cycladic Imprints, 1988.

Performance, New Music America Festival, Miami.

Photo: Anna Korotki.





ROBERT RILEY

INFINITY KISSES

1981–98

Infinity Kisses is a group of one hundred forty photographs by multimedia artist Carolee Schneemann. For five years, a camera, positioned next to her bed, framed a moment each morning when Schneemann was awakened from sleep by her pet cat Cluny.

While the work engages modern mechanical reproduction processes such as surveillance photography and the saturation of photocopy dye on paper, it evokes ancient symbology in its reference to the stylistic use of serial repetition in art. It also refers directly to an Egyptian relief, which Schneemann has photographed and inserted into the structure as a key to the significance of the whole. This image fragment is included to renew our hope and belief in regeneration: according to Egyptian mythology, a lion that kisses a goddess restores peace to civilization. Similar to the artist's "kinetic theatre" work, which was characterized by the combination of a number of mediums in the construction of one work of art with stylized imagery and multiple themes, *Infinity Kisses* contains intermedia processes that cross the disciplines of painting, sculpture, photography, and film.

Schneemann often uses herself as a subject in her work and frequently engages the human body itself as medium for her art. In the early 1960s, when the very nature of artists' materials and subject matter changed, her vanguard, unapologetic work was considered hostile to an art marketplace based on the value of objects and insistent on their categorization. Schneemann's application of media and mechanical devices, her unadorned nudity, and her expressions of female sexuality challenged art institutions and galleries, and ultimately restricted the reception of her artwork to underground audiences. The artist's legendary film and multimedia environments such as *Eye Body For Camera* (1963) and *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1973-77) create the context for *Infinity Kisses* and anticipate a trend in contemporary art practice, largely feminist, that invokes representation and its expression through innovative methods and materials. *Infinity Kisses* is the first of Schneemann's artworks to be acquired by a museum in the United States.

From Robert Riley, curator of media, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *The Making of a Modern Museum* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1994). Reprinted by permission.

Infinity Kisses, 1981–87.

Self-shot photogrid. 84 x 72 in.

Collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Since he was a kitten, my cat Cluny woke me every morning with deep kisses. During each week—even half-asleep—I reached for a hand-held Olympus camera to film our kissing. Lighting, angles, exposure, and focus were always unpredictable. Each resulting 35 mm slide image is mirror-printed in Xerachrome. These “flipped” images introduce permutations of repeated form as a time process, and the repeated rhythms of convexity, concavity eroticize the shapes surrounding the human and animal mouths. The intimacy between cat and woman becomes a refraction of the viewers’ attitudes to self and nature, sexuality and control, the taboo and the sacred. Cluny died in 1988 after being bitten on his mouth by a rat. He was reborn as Vesper in 1990 and continued the kissing expressivity until his death, of leukemia, in 1998.

Infinity Kisses I, 1981–87. Photogrid. Wall installation, self-shot 35 mm photographs; Xerachrome on linen. 140 images: 84 x 72 in.

Exhibitions

Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, “Self-Shot” (1988).

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, “System Aesthetics: Works from the Permanent Collection,” (March 1995).

Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles, “Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s *Dinner Party* in Feminist Art History,” (1996).

William King Art Center, Abingdon, Virginia, “Bestial Angels,” (1996).

Infinity Kisses II continued the dissolution of the boundaries between human and animal, reason and the irrational. In *Infinity Kisses*, the expressive self-determination of a cat is captured in recurring sequences as he ritualistically, ardently kisses me on the mouth. Photographed over an eight-year period with a hand-held 35 mm camera in available light, with uncertain focus, the images raise questions of interspecies communication, as well as triggering unexpected cultural taboos.

Infinity Kisses II, 1990–98. 24 self-shot 35 mm color photographs printed as laser images. 96 x 120 in.

Exhibitions

Pori Art Museum, Finland, “Animal, Anima, Animus” (1998).

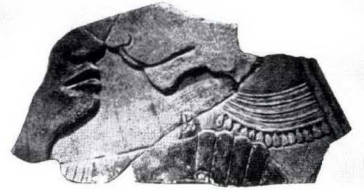
Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Arnhem, Netherlands (1998).

P.S. 1, New York (1999).

Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg (2000).

Baily Art Museum, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va., “Animal Animal” (2000).

Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, “Here Kitty Kitty” (2000).



Infinity Kisses, 1981–87 (details).

Self-shot photogrid.

Collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Video Rocks, 1987–88.
Installation. New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

VIDEO ROCKS

1987–88

The disparate materials that compose *Video Rocks* first appeared in a dream concerning diminishing perspective. I was unsure whether the dream was a unique instruction to concretize the image dimensionally or whether I was dreaming a version of another artist's work. Several weeks of research were required before I felt reassured that the drawings I had begun from the dream did not already exist. Grief and personal loss also became motives. I made a commitment to hand-cast four or five "rocks" a day. Pouring, stirring, shaping provided a ritual concentration.

The conceptual question proposed by the dream concerned tactility and virtuality. A flow of one hundred hand-made "rocks," resembling Monet's *Water Lilies*, cow manure, or huge cookies lead the eye into a row of video monitors on which sequences of various feet were edited to rhythmically cross the virtual rocks. While the monitors displayed a physical action made virtual as video, walking on the actual rocks is forbidden, due to their evident fragility and arrangement as a sculptural accumulation.

By repeatedly pressing my feet and my body into the rock mixture, a canvas wall was composed of the same gritty materials as the rocks.

The luminous light rods are a translation of narrow beams of yellow spotlights randomly marking the rocks in the dream.

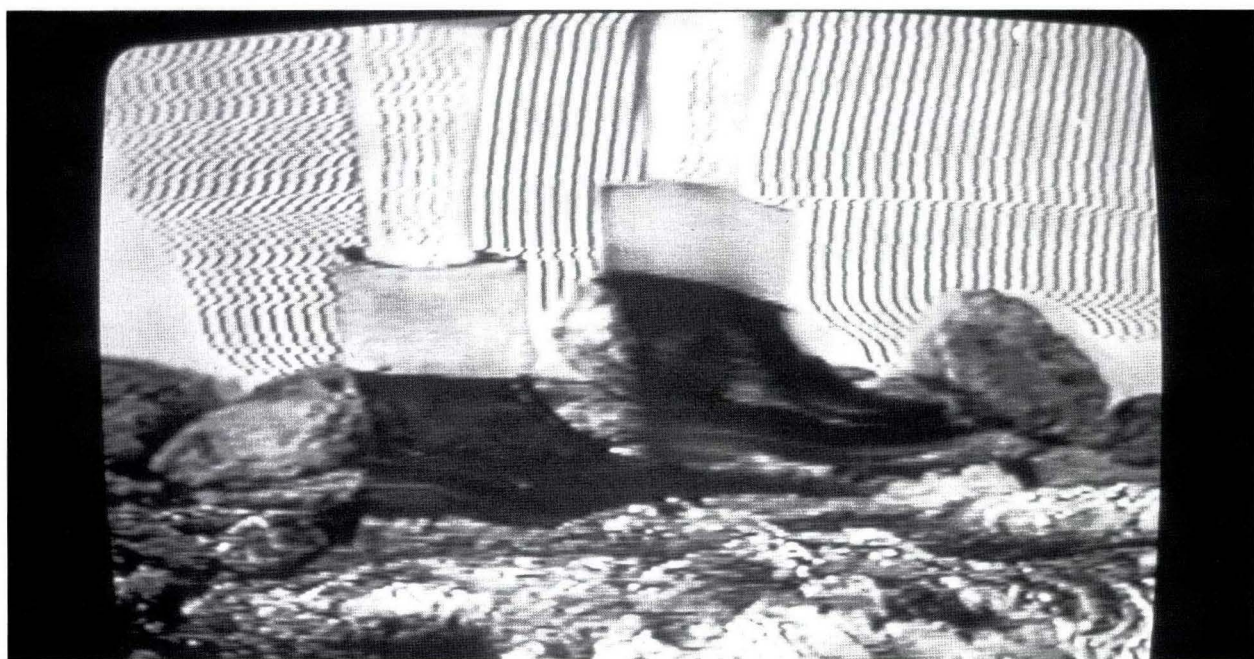
Video Rocks, 1987–88 Multimedia installation: 200 hand-cast rocks (cement, ashes, sawdust, urine, ground glass, wood), 5 plexiglass rods with halogen lights, 4 video decks, 8 video monitors, feet walking on rocks; wall-scale canvas (ashes, cement, paint, sand). 108 x 144 in.

Installations

Plug In Gallery, Winnipeg (1989).

Walter/McBean Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute (1990).

New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, "Carolee Schneemann—Up To And Including Her Limits" (1997).



Video Rocks, 1987–88 (details).

Installation. New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.



TV Sprouts, 1987.

Acrylic, inks on paper. 24 x 26 in.



Images Escaping TV, 1987.

Acrylic, inks on paper. 24 x 26 in.



CATS, DREAMS, AND INTERIOR KNOWLEDGE— CAT SCAN

Cat Scan, 1988.

Performance. Medicine Show Theatre, New York.

Photo: Plauto.





Cat Scan, 1988.
Performance. Medicine Show Theatre, New York.
Photos: Victoria Vesna.

There is always a research motive behind or around every performance, film, photo grid—this I only really understand retrospectively. (I couldn't have made *Fuses* in 1965 if I hadn't been reading Reich, de Beauvoir, and Artaud.) Research in relation to *Cat Scan* took direction from insistent dream imagery. My awareness of unconscious images or instructions cannot be calculated: I strengthen unconscious/conscious connections by reading, drawing, sitting in the woods, studying particular art or artifacts that provoke a deepening perceptual field. Paranormal elements, coincidences, apparitions, unexpected literary references, and instructions kept occurring after my cat Cluny's death. A crucial dream image instructed me to open a red file folder and find within it Cluny's raised paw! The dream hallucination guided me to move his paw in a specific gesture. This dream action subsequently became a central gestural motif out of which other related movements were explored by the performers of *Cat Scan*.

The central dream originated in Austin, Texas, where I had come to interview for a teaching position at the university. Deborah Hay had offered me a sleeping mat in her dance studio, a large, white space with a small Buddhist shrine. We have been close friends since the Judson Dance Theater days. Before I could perform myself, I choreographed for the Judson dancers and considered Deborah to be my alter ego: in *Newspaper Event* (1962), *Chromelodeon* (1963). For the past ten years, she has sustained a unique community project for untrained dancers in Austin; our reunion was especially thrilling.

I looked out her kitchen window and observed a black and white cat crossing the street, coming up onto Deborah's lawn. I hurried outside to greet the cat, and it was as I reached to pet the cat that the bright morning tumbled inside out around me.

As I stroked this strange cat, a dream flashed with a vivid message from Cluny: I was about to write some notes to facilitate my teaching interview. My red plastic notebook was slightly larger than normal (it had inner sleeves with pockets). As I opened it, I was shocked to find in the middle of the booklet Cluny's arm—his paw up to the elbow—his fur, his shape, his marks, all slightly larger than life-size. Seeing his paw I started to cry, "Thank you, Cluny. I'm glad that you could show me something of yourself." He replied—the way these ghostly presences speak—"This is all I can give you right now."

He demonstrated a gesture in which the larger-than-life cat's paw and arm meshed with my arm. Seated, I was to lift my right palm resting on my right knee across to my chest—over the heart—and slowly back again to the right knee. I had no idea what effect or feeling this gesture would produce. Later I brought it to my performance group to try—without giving

them any information. It variously induced deep breathing, tears “as if in mourning,” a trancelike bliss, and, for several people, an association with “something Egyptian.” They felt entranced, released by this exercise.

During these months of work, feathers kept appearing in front of me. During his life, Cluny was obsessed with bringing me gifts of feathers: blue jay, dove, blackbird, owl. This cat communicated devotion, a providence—a transcendent shift emblematic of his movement between animal and human realms—through feathers. In Egyptian symbology, the feather means truth; it’s represented as an attribute of the goddesses of truth. (Seemingly random feathers appeared in front of my feet in the woods, in cities, and often became talismanic guides to difficult decisions.)

I told Deborah, “I’ve got to get to a bookstore with material on Egypt! There’s some Egyptian key to the dream action, and I don’t know what it means.” I drew her the limb resembling a rod or a sacred scepter with a paw on the end of it. We drove to a little bookstore in an Austin mall and were smugly astonished to find a book of Egyptian hieroglyphs. It wasn’t the first scepter dream I’d had, and it seemed crucial to decipher the rod (scepter, pole), the paw, and the crossing of the body with that dreamt gesture—this gift instruction from Cluny. (Ten years later, I still have not found a precise scepter-paw referent.)

Back in New York, I asked each performer to get books on Egypt and from these books to choose images that they wanted to activate. They were to study various photographs of friezes, frescos, sculptures of standing figures: they were to assume the position, the pose of that figure and then to follow its implied gesture into a completed action, a full movement. They knew the piece was called *Cat Scan*; I did nothing to alter their assumptions that the working metaphor was of a scientific measurement, a technological interiority.

Would my personal sources and motives emerge within our collaboration? The cat began to possess all of us. John chose a photograph from a book of Egyptian friezes: a gesture of a hand going to a mouth. He enacted that by picking up some implied object: carrying it up, lifting it, and putting it to his mouth. I had them repeat these simple actions many times to draw on their interior rhythms and whatever that particular gesture activated in the musculature of the whole body. I asked John, “If you could say what was in your hand that you were lifting to your mouth, what would it be?” He said, “I think it’s a small fish.” Rosalind had picked a complicated, double-armed, lateral gesture which had a scooping, lifting, forward motion. I asked her, “If there is anything that was determining the weight and position of your hands, what could you imagine it would be?” She said, “Oh, two cartons of milk.”

I have to pay attention to such an unlikely scale of information; if I imagine that I'm receiving a gift from a cat, it's in terms of what's significant to a cat!

For the performance *Cat Scan*, dream imagery is physicalized, while layered in metaphoric, psychic, and analogous connection to lived events and to research in ancient history, indicated by the dreams.

Drawings explored dream actions and sensations; with these and visual research sources (for instance, Egyptian friezes or hieroglyphs), I introduced my performers to interconnections of chaotic movement, disruptions with visual projection (slides, film), a profusion of ordinary objects (tables, chairs, suitcases, TV sets, monitors, ladders, ropes). Live and pretaped sound was sequentially ordered and fragmented. Duration and interaction remained unpredictable. The performers developed a concentration of fleeting actions and shifting intentionality parallel to that of a dreamer's experience of drifting, intercutting fractured content. The performers become conduits of embedded unconscious physicality and associative meanings.

Cat Scan is a work situated in mourning, grief, addressing spirits of the dead. It sustains aspects of previous works built with dream instruction, positing the interchange of intimacy and physicality, the erotic and the obscene, the incubation of dream, enactment. *Cat Scan* centers on the death of a beloved cat as a means to ritualize mourning and bring forward some ghosts of history.

Cat Scan, 1988. Performance: Slide projection system, including 15 video monitors, ladders, furniture, suitcases, and debris, for 5 to 8 performers; prerecorded and live sound. Duration: approximately 90 minutes.

Performances

Beyond Baroque, Venice, Calif. (1987).

Performing Language, State University of New York at Binghamton (1988).

Medicine Show Theatre, New York (1988).

Edge 88, performance festival, London (1988).

HOMAGE TO ANA MENDIETA

1988

Many artists, particularly women artists, felt that part of us was killed when she was killed. Her death was such a gratuitous, wrenching obliteration of female energy and power.

She picked the wrong bull. The bull was seen in Mycenaean culture as an attribute of the Goddess, her most powerful archetypal consort; Ana picked the one who broke her on his horns. She wanted equity, the fierce discussion of equals. Claw marks on his nose and back. Drunk out of his skull. How deeply did he want her “away”? What kind of amnesia shrouds her disappearance? He passed out. He woke up. He called the police: “My wife is missing.”

The February after she died, I received a dream from Ana. I felt uneasy talking to a stranger, Robert Katz, about it. He was interviewing her friends for his book, *Naked by the Window*, about her death. I did not want to share my dream from Ana. Finally I did because it was a pivotal gift I believed was from her. Then when I read the book *Naked by the Window: The Fatal Marriage of Carl Andre and Ana Mendieta*, I discover an entire chapter on dreams! Ana! You can't keep her down; even from the beyond, she's out there sending information back to us, fierce spirit and will. Twelve friends and artists had these dreams related to mine, which they believed came from Ana.

I was to go out in the snow and put blood and ashes in the snow and lay some part of my body in the snow, sequentially. I ran outside in my nightgown to enact an image, but it was bitterly cold. So I ran back upstairs and started making drawings of the image sensation in the dream, which involved a lot of red paint at that time. I came downstairs—my partner was still with me. I resembled Lady Macbeth; I had red paint all over me and I was smiling—“I have this good idea of images for the memorial exhibit for Ana.” He said, “It looks kinda bloody.” We went upstairs, and as I showed him the drawings I began to cry. The sequence of falling through space was there. I had covered my hands with red paint and imprinted my extended hand. Then I clawed the paper first this way and then that way. When I looked at the paper prints I thought, “I wasn't in the room; I hadn't seen Ana's hands falling in empty space.” The dream had come through my system and through my body, my hands—and the strokes of reaching, grabbing, and falling away. I called a local photographer who does shots of accidents and sports, and we worked on the blood in snow sequences to complete the triptych.

***Hand Heart for Ana Mendieta*, 1986.**

Center panel: chromaprints of action: paint, blood, ashes, syrup on snow. Side panels: acrylic paint, chalk, ashes on paper. 136 x 46 in. (triptych).

Exhibitions

Zeus Trabia Gallery, New York (1986).

Ceres Gallery, New York (1987).

Emily Harvey Gallery, New York (1988).

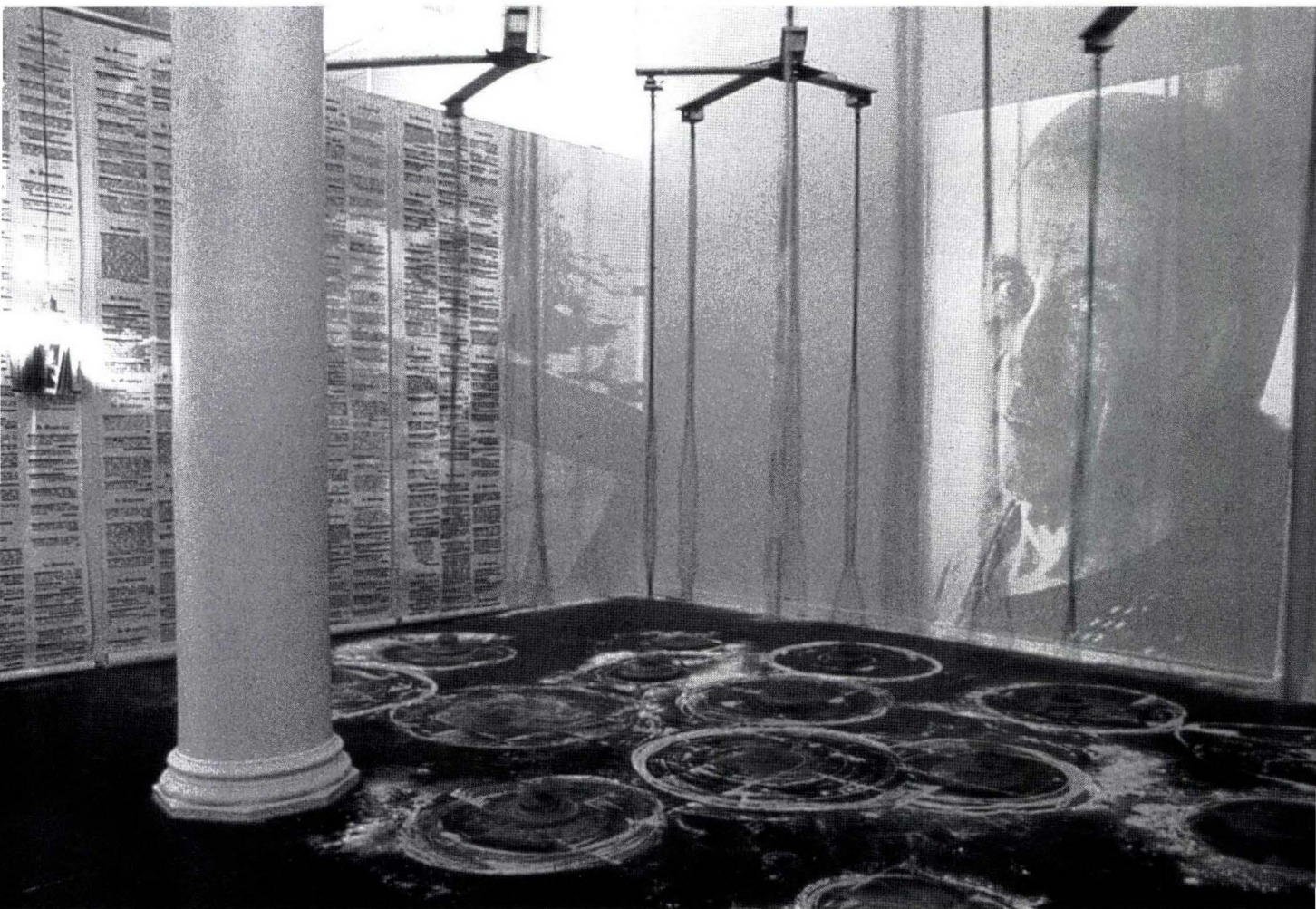
University of Rhode Island Art Gallery, Kingston, R.I. (1990).

New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1997).



Homage to Ana Mendieta, 1986 (detail).

Color photographs and drawings. 136 x 46 in.
Collection of Plácido Arango, Madrid.



Mortal Coils, 1997.

Installation. New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

Photo courtesy of New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York..

MORTAL COILS

1995

“You must put the body out when it’s dead, to see if it is really dead.” One of the instructions that came to me in a 1976 dream, when my nineteen-year-old companion cat Kitch died. I understand the compulsions to go dig up bones, to retrieve the beloved body, the “remains” at all cost. To cherish the container, the imbued physical shards of dissolving connection. Observing the dead connects us to pictorial fictions and perceived convictions. Even as the cherished body is dematerializing, we look at pictures of the person, kiss it, or weep for its representation—just a grouping of Benday dots printed on a page, stirring our emotions.

Between 1992 and 1995, seventeen friends died, each death altering the interchange of our work, our lives. *Mortal Coils* is an installation in tribute to their memory. It addresses symbolic and figurative representations of death and the incapacity of our culture to attend to personal loss and grief.

Those dead:

Alf Bold, John Cage, John Caldwell, Juan Downey, Lejaren Hiller, Derek Jarman, Joe Jones, Marjorie Keller, Barbara Lehmann, Peter Moore, Charlotte Moorman, Frank Pileggi, David Rattray, Paul Sharits, Hannah Wilke.

There were funerals all year long, one startling loss after another (I was beginning to have a secondary career as a speaker at memorials). Our forms of grief seemed inadequate: mourning rituals are inadequate if they don’t involve our bodies, if we are not held, clutched, touched, contacted—as a correlative to powerful emotions of loss. We want to be dispassionate, frightened as we are of mortality, of grief’s isolating absorptions. I remember going to an Armenian funeral; as we got off the train, women in long black skirts circled around us on the open station platform, weeping, pulling at their clothes, tearing at their hair. They demonstrated permission to sob, to weep, to let grief move physically. That seemed to me perfectly appropriate—a physical wellspring. We have no physicalized forms for mourning—the comfort we need receive or give. It’s all in our eyes, staring straight ahead, quietly tearful. We sit like hot stones. We look at each other for comfort, we touch each other on the shoulder. The dead person, laid out in a coffin, to be observed, confounds us with the stillness of her remove. The dead friend can’t return our gaze. (We ask the same questions every time. What did she die of? How old was he?)

In 1995, scheduled to do an exhibition with the **Penine Hart Gallery**, I was preoccupied, thinking about the friends who had died recently. **Could I create forms of memorializing? Photo blow-ups of these friends in a relay on the walls? Objects in correlation to the photos?** I spent a few months with an artist friend, pouring very toxic polyurethane into molds placed over enlarged, colorized images of the dead, as if they were under ice looking up. I told **Penine Hart** that it was going to be a floor piece. Then I had a dream where the dead friends protested against being imaged on the floor. In a later dream they complained they didn't want to be on walls. I continued to examine images of my dead friends, laserprinting, permutating, rephotocopying photo details as if to absorb their absence, to sustain contact with a photographic presence. Each morning I'd examine the photographs, studying their faces, the enlarged textural details. I began composing brief obituary notes for each friend. I didn't want to literalize. **Or freeze. Or deform. Or possess.**

Six months after they had been taken, a group of snapshots arrived, photographed during a party at **Muir Beach** (the rocky **Pacific** beach that naturalist **John Muir** had put under protection years ago), the last summer party for **Dean Rolston**. He had left **New York**, his gallery, and his swirl of friends to prepare for his death from **AIDS**. He had created another delirious circle of loving friends who partied with him as ever—even as he strictly merged **Buddhist** practice, exercise, massage, nutrition, anti-**HIV** drugs, sequenced marijuana, vodka gimlets, puffs on forbidden cigarettes, and active (if protected) romancing. The first photo I pulled from the folder was incomprehensible. I didn't know what I was seeing. Each person passing the camera at the beach party had somehow missed our faces and our bodies as the subject of the photograph. **Billowing pink, melted shapes** escaped into the edge of each photo. **Bare pink lozenges of feet, flying away, out of the frame.** **Twenty exposures** came out like this: in dissolution, as if the camera had swallowed a tab of acid, shimmering and shaking. **This is what my dead want!**

Back to projection systems. I had constructed slide, video projection, and film installations since 1965. I now undertook a search for the best dissolve unit—finding the engineer who had earlier fabricated one for me (in sixteen different projection systems I have never had the same dissolve unit twice). **All the photographs** had to be reshot onto 35 mm color slide film. For months, I collected "In Memoriam" notices from the *New York Times*. These represent our only overt psychic, public convention: the bereaved family pays to print a notice by which they communicate to their dead. **Small haiku-like communications** range from poetic to banal to heartbreaking. I accumulated dozens of these texts, enlarging them to be printed as scrolls of vertical wall paper.

The title *Mortal Coils* was floating among some others in my mind. Then the dream of the ropes occurred, a vivid instruction in mechanics: three-quarter-inch manila ropes suspended from a ceiling and in motion—"at 6 r.p.m." the dream insisted! The bottom of the rope was coiled, moving inexorably. I constructed a metal sleeve to attach the rope to a 6 r.p.m. motor, suspended it from the ceiling and plugged it in. The rope coiled exactly as in the dream! Slow slippage, inexorable coiling. A motorized rope for each of the dead.

At this time, poet David Levi Strauss visited my studio. He studied the motorized rope, projections of a few slide images on the wall, and then told me the ancient Greek story of "the first photograph," as described by Pliny the Elder. A young man was being sent away to war, his lover longed to capture his image. She lit a candle and put it in front of his face so that he cast a shadow on the wall. With a charcoal, she slowly traced the silhouette of his face reflected on the wall. The first photograph. Around this time I read an essay by Edward Wachtel (in the journal *Leonardo* 262 [1993], pp. 135–40, in which he proposed that the layered paintings in Magdalenian caves in Spain and France had been "cinematic predecessors to photography." The viewers moved in the cave, holding a wad of burning moss or oil in a hoof as a candle. Sequences of images and superimpositions became animate, requiring more than one viewing position, connected in motion to one another by the rhythm and position of the person carrying illumination! They would have "appeared to move, dissolve, and disappear."

Archaic affinity is confirming. Once my dead were in projection and motion, they offered a spirit of simultaneous release and presence. They were active, layered, dissolving into one another, filling the space, enveloping the visitors.

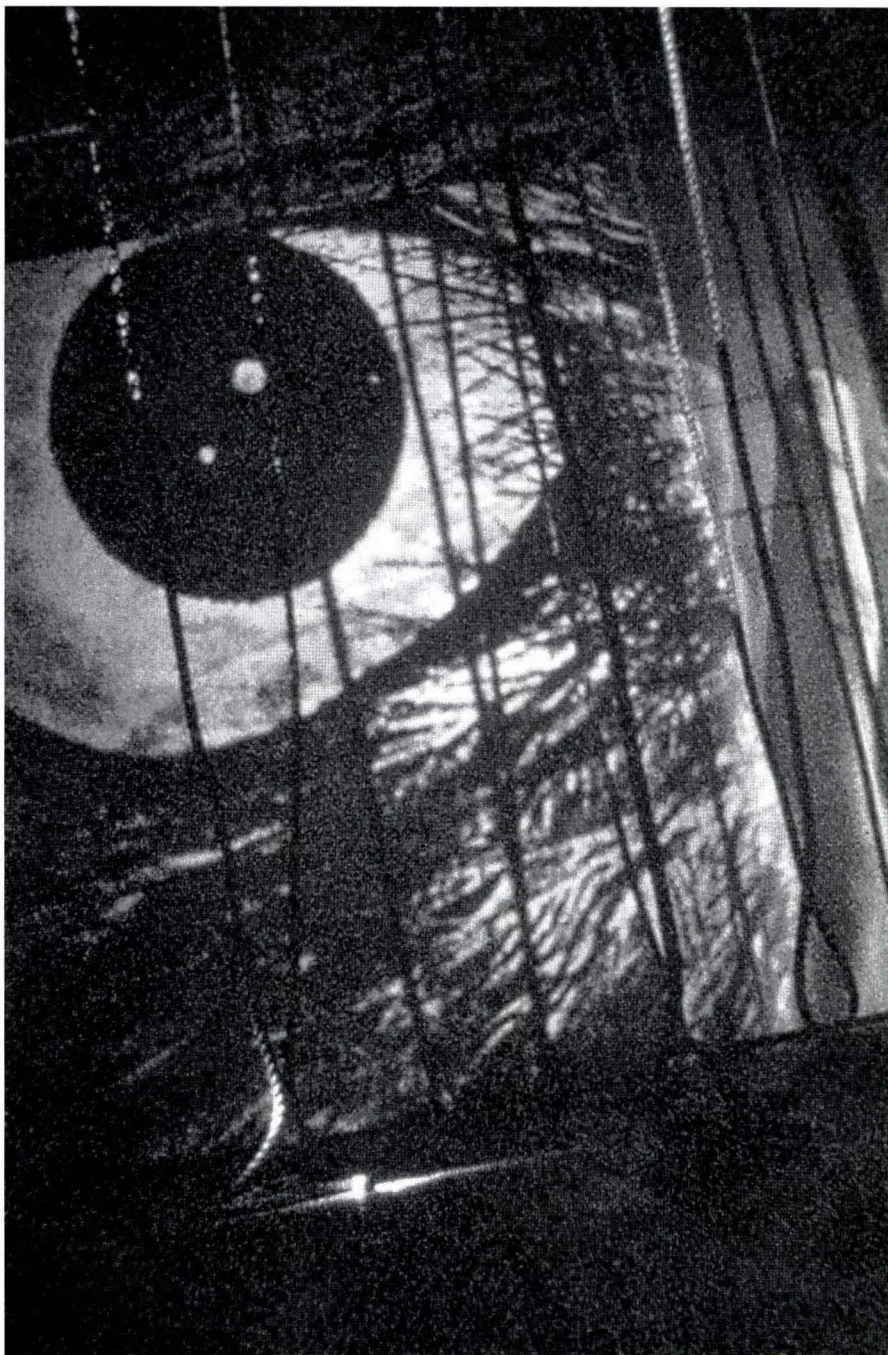
Mortal Coils, 1995. Multimedia installation: 4 slide projectors, 2 dissolve units, motorized mirror systems, 16 motorized 3/4 in. manila ropes, suspended and revolving from ceiling units, "In Memoriam" wall scroll text.

Exhibitions

Penine Hart Gallery, New York (1995).

Kunstraum, Vienna (1995).

New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1996–97).



Mortal Coils, 1997 (detail).

Installation. New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

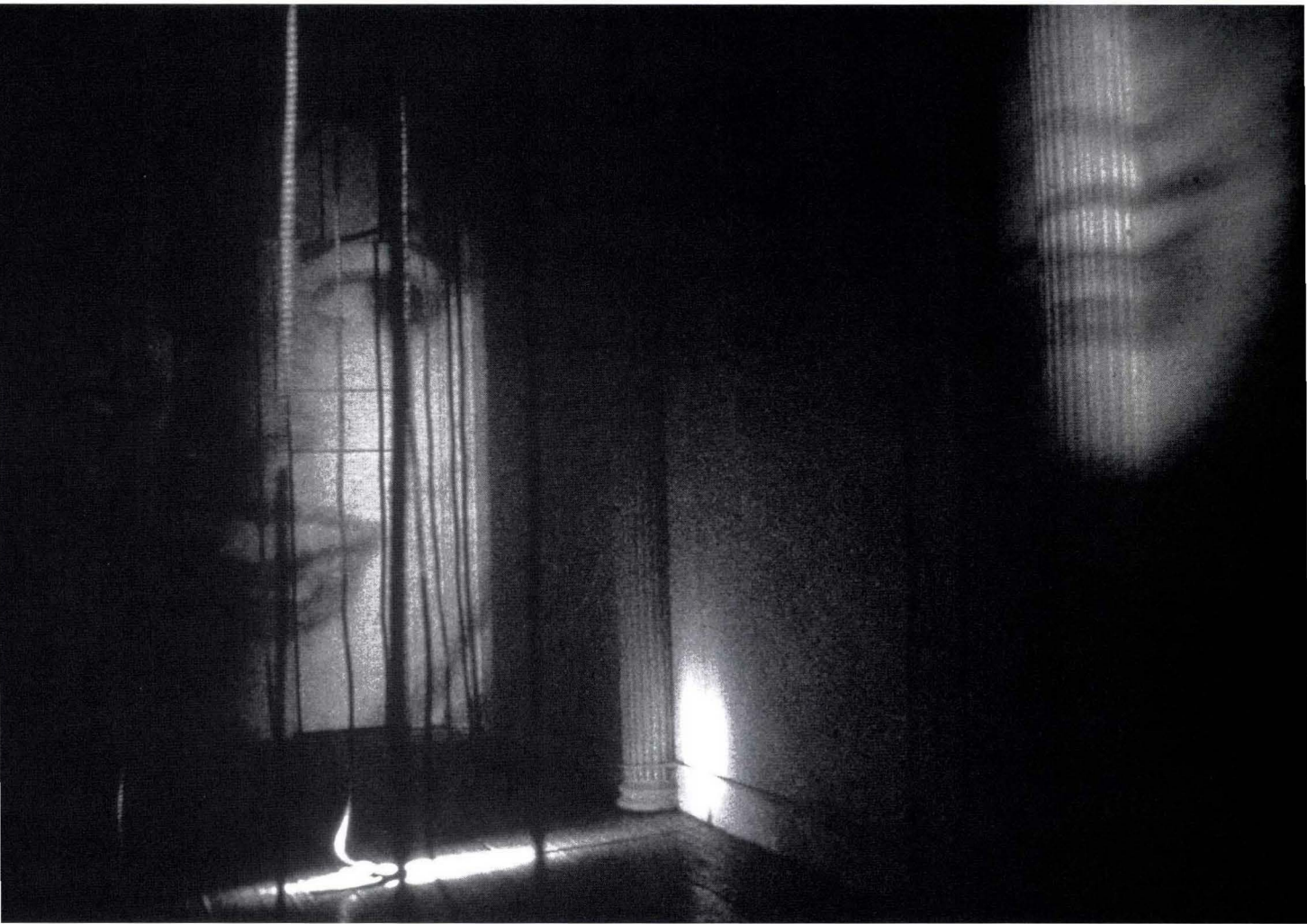
Photo: Melissa Moreton.



Mortal Coils, 1995 (detail).
Installation. Penine Hart Gallery, New York.
Photo: Hank Guild.



Mortal Coils, 1995 (detail).
Installation. Penine Hart Gallery, New York.
Photo: Hank Guild.



Mortal Coils, 1995 (detail).

Installation. Penine Hart Gallery, New York.

Photo: Hank Guild.



Plague Column: Known/Unknown, 1996 (detail).

Installation. Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York.

Photo: C.S.

PLAGUE COLUMN: KNOWN/UNKNOWN

1995

Plague Column: Known/Unknown combines photographic, video, and sculptural elements in an intermedia work that investigates transgressive and denied aspects of the unconscious, gender, and disconcerting images of health and illness. Cellular and microscopic representations shift the implications of biological data away from the guise of objectivity to collide with personal experience. I both filmed and gained access to various strata of cancer cells, enabling me to perceptually invade hidden aspects of the body—cellular, erotic, and clinical.

March 1995

Installing a work in Austria, I visited the small St. Josef's Church in the Vienna woods, where I discovered a compelling Baroque sculpture. I managed to take a snapshot, before a monk appeared to wave me away. I considered the sculpture: the feminine split into the moral dualism of patriarchal religious projections—pure/impure, good/evil, life/death, love of god/erotic lust, the ascendant/the driven-down. This feminine ethos split in two embodies a male religious narrative. Christianity is a golden-gowned madonna—angel souls are in attendance. A cherub drives a holy staff into Paganism's shriveled witch. The sacred maternal goddesses of body and spirit, generation and decay, healer, shaman, sage are deformed, murdered, "hounded, subdued, constrained and bound into service."* The sculptor embellishes her dreadful breasts with serpents escaping from her nipples. Just as a suppressed erotic escapes his shaping hands, the base supporting this moral drama is a circle of roiling silvered forms—voluptuous, hallucinatory as clouds of breasts, penises, and labia.

November 1995

In the fall, I began a research project on cancer, healing, and immunology. At the same time, I was drawn to reexamine the snapshot of the sculpture from St. Josef's Church. Could this torturous configuration function as a metaphor for Western medicine's attack on cancer? Was the shriveled witch cancer or an aspect of embodied disease configured as feminine? Was the lost female authority of healer and shaman hidden in a cellular pathology? Could the mechanical print processes I was engaged with bridge invisible connections between the St. Josef sculpture's forms and cellular clinical data?

February 1996

The head does not go with the body. The work was probably created by itinerant artisans

* Katherine Ketchum and Jason Elias, *In the House of the Moon* (New York: Warner Books, 1995), p. 45.

traveling from their own monastery. They would base a feminine face on an idealized one of their own. Her androgynous expression is blank, lobotomized. The political father lurks behind this mask put on an Aphroditean body. The personification is in drag.

Chaos, Eros and Gaia struggle in this manifestation. The gold body indicates a significant budget. Ten generations of women were tortured, burned in religious witch hunts up until 1775 in Germany. How does this sculpture, made in the 1600s, relate to contemporary persecutions of women and the increasing scientific domination of nature? (Jennifer Barker in conversation with C.S.)

Plague Column Report

May 1996

They couldn't help but believe people got the cancer they deserved.

She asked the doctor if any women had refused treatment. He replied, "There were a few who bolted." She left the office repeating "bolted" like a mantra.

When his sister called from Atlanta, she said, "Don't worry, I know enough not to inquire about your health."

They realized their life would now depend on ranges of Bilirubin, Ketones, Occult Blood, Leukocyte Esterase, MCH, MCHC, RDW, Platelet Count, Absolute Neutrophils, Neutrophils, Lymphocytes, Monocytes, Absolute Eosinophils, Eosinophils, Absolute Basophils, Basophils, and the Differential Platelets.

R. said, "Every piece of information is contradicted by another. You must follow your demiurge."

She could always make a doctor flinch when he reminded her of the urgency of a mastectomy: "My breast is an erotic organ—as your penis is—I'm keeping it with me."

He decided to treat his cancer as if it were a dumb art critic invading his meanings.

Allopathic cancer treatments in the 1990s were based on a warfare model. There might be collateral damage.

P. said, “You will deal with this crisis the way you have dealt with the rest of your life.”

They believed cancer was a systemic breakdown and that the body's immune response could be strengthened by alternative treatments.

Her old friend, the Jungian therapist, was at the party. He told her, “You look well, but death is certainly an option.”

They advised him to accept his illness as a blessing.

For those doctors, surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy provided a “window of opportunity” for saving lives.

V. said, from all she's studied about breast cancer, “It almost doesn't matter what you do.”

It was illegal to practice alternative cancer therapies in the **United States**.

Instead of sacrificing a body part to surgery, she would give up cigarettes, coffee, vodka, hamburgers, bitter-sweet chocolate, and **BLTs**.

They couldn't help feeling belligerent after he ignored all their advice and improved by following a nutritional regime.

He asked what would happen if he first imagined his death and then worked backwards?

The friends comforted themselves by discussing whatever they could surmise.

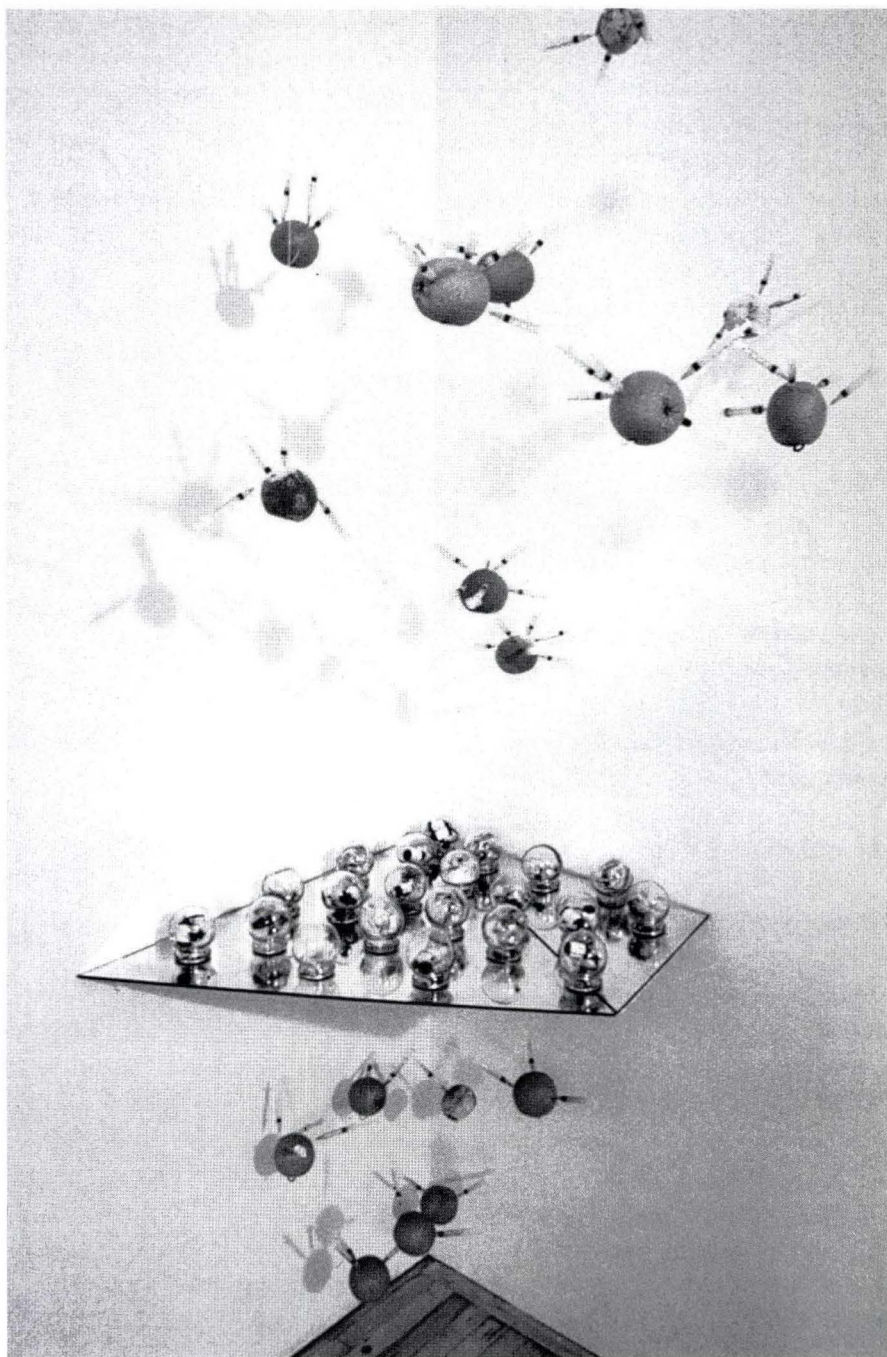
D. said, “One-fifth of the population is seeking out alternative forms of health care.”

Finally, there was no “**Cancer**” personality, just as there had been no “**Black Death**” personality.

People would feel enormous sympathy for her because they had been spared.

His hips were black and blue from giving himself vitamin therapy shots.

The epidemiological research established the parallel rise of cancers and the corresponding pollution of earth, air, and water.



Plague Column: Known/Unknown, 1996 (detail).

Installation. Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York.

Photo: C.S.



Plague Column: Known/Unknown, 1996 (detail).

Installation. Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York.

Photo: C.S.

W. said, “Treat cancer like a museum curator. Don't let it take over your intentions.”

Each instance of the plague was uniquely configured within each body.

She was aware of a *collectioneuse* attitude toward the female body: genital mutilation is “only a social custom,” hysterectomies only remove out-of-date parts, mastectomies might capture alien cancer cells. In the U.S.A., clitorodectomies were recommended for sexually disturbed women (“hysterics”) up into the 1940s.

He received the radiation into his body as if it were a healing sunlight.

Her research intensified. More than twenty doctors and researchers advised radical surgery. A few doctors and researchers disagreed with all the others.

K. advised, “Get all the information you can, find your own center point, don't give your own power away to the doctors.”

The five-year survival statistics didn't add up. “A group of treated patients can be considered statistically cured if their subsequent death rate from all causes is similar to that of a normal population group.”

After the first mastectomy, she followed a strict macrobiotic diet, daily swimming, and meditation. Later, the surgeons told her they had bad news, the cancer had metastasized to her bone. She asked, “Well, then, could we please send out for a ham and cheese on rye with mustard?” (Ann Bar Tur).

His surgery scars healed in record time.

They shared a secret language which confirmed their faith in potions of modern witchcraft: astragalus, ganoderma, ligustrum lucidi, codonopsis, ophiopogon, polygonum he shou wu, atractylodes alba rhizome, eleuthero, dendrobium, angelica tang kuei, schizandra, eucommia, rehmannia, akebia, schizonepeta, sophora ku shen, atractylodes alba rhizome, siler, periostracum cicada, arctium, anemarrhena, and licorice.

J.T. was adamant, “Don't depend on alternative medicine—it's a snare and delusion.”

That group of five-year survivors call themselves the “Lymphomaniacs.”

She put herself completely in their hands.

Most of his friends only knew of one treatment system and in their ignorance were adamant about it.

They experienced some confusion as to how to combine komucha, green magma, wheat germ, Co Q 10, botanicals, phyto chemicals, enzymes, germanium, sexquioxide, wobenzym, selenium, and cod liver oil with their vegetarian diet.

S. said, "You must depend on regular medicine, be quick and intensive, because lymphoma is very tricky and can spread fast."

The healers who believed in miracles, produced some miracles.

Even though they had managed to get group health insurance, all their compensation claims for nontraditional treatments were denied.

She believed Hannah's images of her ravaged body served as a warning.

His doctors gave him two years at the most. He moved to an ashram for meditation, yoga, massage, organic foods, and vitamin therapy. He continued to smoke dope, drink martinis, and bring home various men as lovers. He lived happily and at great expense for six years. (Dean Rolston)

The statistics show that of people with autoimmune diseases 80 percent are women.

A. advised them, "Don't let the medical profession get their hands on you."

People would envy the drama of his being contaminated.

Cancer cells are present in most people. Susceptibility is based on DNA profile, toxic environmental or work factors, prolonged or sudden immune suppression.

There was no rhyme or reason to it.

She reviewed every stubborn, ill-advised, courageous action she had ever followed in the past for guidance.

At the end of his will, joy, determination, in unremitting pain, he organized the farewell party around his bed overlooking the San Francisco skyline. His closest friends gathered to prepare his favorite foods and drinks for themselves. The friends watched over him as he swallowed the pills, took his last breath.

The cancer treatment was composed of stagings: surgery, radiation, chemotherapy.

She would be so frightened of the radiation treatment that her immune system would be further compromised.

In retrospect, his only symptom had been the sudden need to take naps last summer.

One radical group followed an intensive regime of raw food, acupuncture, Chinese herbs, exercise, enemas, yoga, meditation, vitamins, and oxygen therapy. Later their surgeons told them they were in "spontaneous remission."

He knew of someone who had healed himself, but he had worked at it to the exclusion of everything else in his life.

M. said, "Concentrate on whatever increases your probability to survive."

No one knew what to believe. They said they could save him, but what about his quality of life?

The doctors said they would recalibrate her hormone structure. She refused the intervention, believing her hormone balance was still perfect.

He wanted it blasted away. Alien monsters were hidden within his cells and his body was his enemy.

She wouldn't join a support group. She needed all her energy to figure it out on her own.

Among all the friends, only one was able to help with the overwhelming medical expenses.

H. dreamt he left his body and found Christ in a Hindu shrine, there he kissed her wounds.

They believed cancer was too powerful for the body's immune system to rally against it.

She (Charlotte Moorman) had miraculously struggled for fourteen years with different forms of cancer. Everyone believed she would always revive. When she came out of the final coma, he was holding her hand, leaning forward to hear words of love. She struggled to speak: "Frank . . . darling . . . don't . . . throw . . . anything . . . out . . ."

He told her he knew a woman who had a very pretty breast reconstruction. She reminded him that the reconstructed breast had no erotic sensation at all.

The nurse said it would be a few more days before the report determined whether his lymphoma was fast or slow moving, stage I, II, or III; he heard himself replying " . . . or whatever . . ."

***Plague Column: Known/Unknown*, 1995. Installation: 4 video monitors (continuous play with sound collage); mirror shelf with floating oranges, hypodermic needles, glass balls, plastic tubing, cast latex breasts, lighting components with photographic wall panels.**

Installations

Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York (1996).

Galerie Samuel Lallouz, Montreal (1996).

Dinnerware Gallery, Tucson, "Treatment: Women's Bodies in Medical Science and Art" (1999).

Video showings

SoHo Arts Festival, New York, "Meet the Artist" Series, Carolee Schneemann at Elga Wimmer Gallery, installation "Plague Column—Known/Unknown" (1996).

Factory Theatre, Toronto, Images 97 Festival of Independent Film and Video (1997).

University of California, San Diego, Glare Screening Series, Schneemann's videos *Plague Column—Known|Unknown*, *Interior Scroll—The Cave*, *Instructions Per Second* (1997).

Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film and Video, New York, "Big as Life: An American History of 8 mm Films" (1998).

Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester, U.K. (2001).

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Plague Column: Known/Unknown, 1996 (detail).

Installation. Galerie Samuel Lallouz, Montreal.

Photo courtesy of Galerie Samuel Lallouz.

Eleanor Heartney

Carolee Schneemann: Installation of *Plague Column: Known/Unknown* at Elga Wimmer

In this provocative exhibition, Carolee Schneemann brought her long-standing interests in eroticism, mythology, and the representation of gender to bear on an investigation of the meaning of disease. Extending Susan Sontag's inquiry into the analogies that govern our understandings of illness, Schneemann explores the notion of treatment as metaphor.

In a series of works in various mediums, she investigates modern medicine's quasi-military approach to illness, in which it is seen as an alien invader to be severed from the host body whatever the cost in physical and psychological damage. Long vertical strips of photographic images of cancerous cells frame a text woven together from statements by and about cancer patients, including poignant expressions of hope, despair, and anger. Many involve resistance to dominant medical wisdom and touch on the often heartbreaking search for other forms of treatment. The raw emotions triggered by cancer provide a striking contrast to the photographs' aura of cool, scientific objectivity.

A video work in the center of the gallery unmasked this pretense of coolness. Four monitors were set on the floor amid a bed of cast-latex breasts and straw that suggested veins and arteries. The video intercut surgical footage with closeups of genital intercourse and a cat killing and eating a mouse. The effect was to bring back the pulsing, bleeding corporeal body that medical terminology obscures.

The most philosophical work here revolved around a seventeenth-century Baroque sculpture that Schneemann saw in a small church in Austria. Wall texts revealed that it was created as a "Plague Column" to ward off epidemics. Schneemann's commentaries focus on the iconography: a beautiful avenging angel crushes a grotesque hag beneath her feet. In her view, the angel serves as an agent of a patriarchal Christianity while her victim, the ugly witch, represents the defeated vestige of a once-vibrant matriarchal culture in which women were the healers and shamans. She suggests a continuity from Catholicism's traditional misogyny, which embodies disease in female form, to modern medicine's warfare model of disease control. Hence the well-documented number of unnecessary hysterectomies and mastectomies, and hence the resistance to the nontraditional healer.

As a whole, this exhibition offered a thought-provoking approach to disease. By providing for a variety of voices, Schneemann managed to keep her critique from becoming overly one-sided or didactic. In the process she called for the restoration of long-severed connections between science, art, and religion.

* From *Art in America* (October 1996). Reprinted by permission.



Vulva's Morphia, 1992.

Suspended photogrid with electric fans. 96 x 60 in.

VULVA'S MORPHIA

1992-97

For many years I researched depictions of the power of genital sexuality found in cultures nominally excluded from Western art history. In the mid-nineties, I was developing an essay for the issue of the journal *Lusitania* on female sexuality. I had accumulated reams of notations: female genital mutilation, the pope protesting feminism and witchcraft, Lacanian deformations of female sexuality, punishment of pregnant adolescent girls in high schools, current garbled research on female orgasm. I had been struggling for weeks to compose and edit this material. One night I had a dream, with an instructing voice that stated: "You will never be an artist back in your studio working with your hands while you have that great messed-up pile of notes all over the floor. **WHY DON'T YOU LET VULVA DO THE TALKING?'**"

VULVA'S SCHOOL

Vulva goes to school and discovers she doesn't exist. . . .

Vulva goes to church and discovers she is obscene. . . .
(quote St. Augustine)

Vulva deciphers Lacan and Baudrillard and discovers she is only a sign, a signification of the void, of absence, of what is not male . . . (she is given a pen for taking notes . . .)

Vulva reads biology and understands she is an amalgam of proteins and oxytocin hormones, which govern all her desires. . . .

Vulva studies Freud and realizes she will have to transfer clitoral orgasm to her vagina. . . .

Vulva reads Masters and Johnson and understands her vaginal orgasms have not been measured by any instrumentality and that she should only experience clitoral orgasms. . . .

Vulva decodes feminist constructivist semiotics and realizes she has no authentic feelings at all; even her erotic sensations are constructed by patriarchal projections, impositions, and conditioning. . . .

Vulva reads *Off Our Backs* and explores tribadism; then she longs for the other gender's scratching two-day beard, his large hands, and insistent cock. . . .

Vulva interprets essentialist feminist texts and paints her face with her menstrual blood, howling when the moon is full. . . .

Vulva strips naked, fills her mouth and cunt with paint brushes, and runs into the Cedar Bar at midnight to frighten the ghosts of de Kooning, Pollock, Kline. . . .

Vulva reads Gramsci and Marx to examine the privileges of her cultural conditions. . . .

Vulva recognizes her symbols and names on graffiti under the railroad trestle: slit, snatch, enchilada, beaver, muff, coozie, fish, and finger pie. . . .

Vulva learns to analyze politics by asking, "Is this good for Vulva?"

VULVA'S BESTIARY

Each lover was a psychic manifestation of secret geographies, geomancies misted in time. Each penis a boat Vulva entered into. Little figure in his boat tides waver to the horizon line (diminishing perspective) to have a penis is to be castrated from the mother's body to be apart from her powers of replication oval and ovoid container pushing pulsing channel patience of the egg to be expelled patience of the os to engulf the flailing spermatazoa to be male is to be cast out from the duplications of the female source to adventure to venture forward the body as a phallic thrust phallic defines an overt organ vulnerable powerful and other not female not sustaining generative not the complex matrix—impregnation pregnancy birthing—her varied orgasms

The wars in Bosnia and Rwanda reminded the world how vulnerable women and their families are and "demonstrated that the deliberate violation of the human rights of women is a central component of military strategy in all parts of the world," the report said.

—Edith M. Lederer, "Amnesty International Sees Denial of Women's Human Rights," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 7, 1995

. . . to be male is to be molded by Vulva in desire fear separation and return Vulva ecstatically receives his body and his body of knowledge: descriptions obsessions anatomizations fantasies and projections how stunned? how acquiescent? disbelieving? or psychically



Vulva's Morphia, 1997.

Performative lecture "Boudoir-in-exile." New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

Photo: Barbara Yoshida.

tangled in the embrace of his confusions? . . . unconscious will to heroicize . . . riven torn . . .

Women are not allowed to work or even go out in public without a male relative; professional women such as professors, translators, doctors, lawyers, artists and writers have been forced from their jobs and stuffed into their homes.

—“Women in Afghanistan,” *Email Extract*, October 8, 1999

His heroic mono-organ affirms membership in the brotherhood every other penis evading its maternal source. Competitions, confrontations for primacy valorize powers beyond her fold/her body/her worship, her denial/her denigration/her power . . . each male recognizes other males as “of female” and “not female” . . .

He told her, “Since my daughter was born I’m completely against abortion . . . except in the case of rape.” Vulva protested, “What about my situation? If I had to carry those pregnancies to term, I could have never accomplished my work.” He exclaimed, “BUT YOU MIGHT HAVE HAD AN ARTIST!”

If the traditions of patriarchy split the feminine into debased/glamorized, sanitized/bloody, madonna/whore . . . fractured body, how could Vulva enter the male realm except as over-terminated or “neutered” or neutral—as “castrated”?

During the depraved witchcraft trials of the twelfth to seventeenth centuries, women accused of witchcraft were examined in their “privy parts” for any protrusion or “teat”; the discovery of which gave proof that she suckled a familiar from this excrescence, and was hereby condemned to hanging.

—Lauran Paine, *Sex in Witchcraft* (New York: Taplinger, 1972)

If her body was torn from her perceptions, her creative will, her erotic generative center, how would Vulva analyze psychocultural deformations surrounding her?

The word that the Bible, with evident distaste, translates as “grove” was not really a grove at all, but an Asherah: the stylized multibranch tree symbolizing the Great Goddess of Canaan. Asherah’s Canaanite titles included “Lady Who Traverses the Sea” and “She Who Gives Birth to the Gods.”

—Barbara Walker, *The Woman’s Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988)

Projection deforms perception of the female body. As bizarrely consecrated in Western creation myths as Athena emerging from Zeus's head; as usurpative of Mother Right as the birth of Dionysus from his father's thigh; as biologically contorted as a Lord Jesus born from the body of a virgin mother. Political and personal violence against women is twined behind/within this stunting defeminization of history. For many of us, the layers of implicit and explicit censorship constructing our social history combine with contemporary contradictions to force our radicalization.

Vatican City—Pope John Paul warned American bishops yesterday that Christianity is in danger of being undermined by radical feminists—including nuns—who have led some Catholics into nature worship and pagan rituals. He warned in particular about some Catholic nuns performing these rituals, which frequently pay homage to the goddess earth.
—*New York Post*, 1993

Invocation efflorescence attentive eye hand of the cunt center cave command central command post the brushes are feathers and horse hair her strokes flow over the rock—birds, genitals, bison, horse gray flint, raw pigments—ochre, sienna, blue—and menstrual blood she inscribes her cycles and seasons on stones, bones, pressing palm and foot into clay.

In a seventeenth-century execution fourteen cats were shut in a cage with a woman who was roasted over a slow fire while the cats in misery and terror clawed her in their own death agonies.

—Carl Van Vechten, *The Tiger in the House* (New York: Knopf, 1936)

Vulva finds the recipe she's been searching for—a medieval prescription to calm the cunt's gnawing desire to fuck.

By the seventeenth century, it became fashionable to link the afflicted uterus with unsatisfied "love." Clysters were a specified treatment in such cases. When used as purges they voided corrupt humors and irrigated the inner body. Applied vaginally to cool and moisten the heated womb, clysters contained "refrigerative" herbs such as endive, plantain, or poppy. Clearly, then, enema apparatus was associated with the female generative system from the earliest times, which accounts for the unmistakable element of eroticism that accompanies the excremental associations of enemas in clyster scenes.

—Laurinda S. Dixon, "Some Penetrating Insights," *College Art Journal* (fall 1993)

The conflation by a woman scholar writing in this issue, devoted to the scatological, of



the vaginal channel with the anal channel is bewildering. An enema involves forcing liquid or gas into the rectum or colon. A douche uses liquid to flush the vagina.

Houston, Texas—Petition for Reinstatement: Under the new policy, any of the three pregnant girls—who have not practiced or led cheers at games for nearly a month and a half—will be allowed to petition for reinstatement to the cheerleader squad. Along with their petition, they are expected to include a note from a doctor attesting to their physical ability to participate.

—*New York Times*, November 3, 1993

If the penis is an anxious object, vagina becomes a suppressed space of his hostile or envious projections. These projections are defensive so that female genitals are divested of motility, muscular strength, lubricity, grip, and pulsation. The clitoris is divested of delicacy, surface sensitivity, subtlety—the variousness of her responsiveness, pleasure and orgasmic drama is diverted, denied.

An estimated 100 million girls and women around the world have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM takes different forms in different countries: the cutting of the hood of the clitoris (circumcision), the removal of the entire clitoris (excision), or in its most extreme form the removal of all external genitalia and the stitching together of the two sides of the vulva, leaving only a very small vaginal opening (infibulation).

—*Women's Action Newsletter* (November 1993)

The transformative variousness of the female genital disturbs mechanistic intent and rationalized homologies. Vulva relates this to a Western art-historical tradition of diminishing perspective, the extensions of depth of field to a vanishing point—the “Circle of Confusion”—Is this pictorial reach to the suppressed state of os? Entrance to the womb?

For what is inside of you is what is outside of you, and the one who fashions you on the outside is the one who shaped the inside of you.

—Nag Hammadi, *Thunder, Perfect Mind*

Vulva ruminates on “negative space”: if cock is a thing and cunt a place. As a painter, Vulva has never accepted the concept of “negative space” as anything more than a construct by which to emphasize “things” in a foregrounding . . . as if space started and stopped according to concept or will, rather than tactility, light, chaos, a shifting gestalt. The aesthetic perceptual convolution of “negative space” corresponds to masculinist sexual delusions: the

concept of vagina as “empty,” as “hole.” (Vagina: tight firm ridged active muscle a moist channel of paradoxical qualities—subtle and not homologous to the phallic measure: clit not miniature penis, and vagina not hole for cock.) The difference between **THING** and **PLACE**. The concept of “negative” space was as contradictory for Vulva the painter, as was the idea of vagina as a “hole” or an “absence” was for her as female.

*Cunt: Derivative of the Oriental Great Goddess as Cunti, or Kunda, the Yoni of the Universe. From the same root came kreirikunt country, kin, and kind (Old English cyn, Gothic kuni). Related forms were Latin cunnus, Middle English cunte, Old Norse and Frisian kunta, Basque cuna. Other cognates are “cunabula,” a kehto cradle, or earliest abode (maja, asuin-paikle); “Cunina,” a Roman Goddess who protected children in the cradle; “cunctipotent,” karklerviopa all-powerful (i.e., having cunt-magic): “cunicle,” a hole or passage. —Barbara Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983)*

Shock when critics view the early glass and fur collages: a common comment: “These are dangerous, castrating.” But these works explore reflection, refraction, transposition, mirroring—you will see yourself in the shards as well as the space around you.

*Dr. Burt, once a well-regarded physician considered merely eccentric, began the special surgery in 1966. Explaining his philosophy in his 1975 book, *Surgery of Love*, Dr. Burt wrote: “Women are structurally inadequate for intercourse. This is a pathological condition subject to surgery.” The surgery often included removing the hood of a patient’s clitoris, repositioning the vagina, moving the urethra and altering the walls between the rectum and vagina. It was intended, the doctor wrote, to redesign the vagina to increase sexual responsiveness. Instead the surgery caused sexual dysfunction, extensive scarring, chronic infections of the kidney, bladder and vagina, and the need for corrective surgery in many patients, according to the Ohio medical board. —New York Times, December 11, 1988*

A pure female desire not aroused discovered and possessed by his sexual particularity becomes threatening and repellent.

The torture of animals, especially cats, was a popular amusement throughout early modern Europe. . . . To protect yourself from sorcery by cats there was one, classic remedy: maim it. Cut its tail, clip its ears, smash one of its legs, tear or burn its fur, and you would break its malevolent power.

—Robert Darton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984)

It has to do with the absence of concept of vulvic space, the symbolic fracture of the female body. I made the assumption that archaic carvings and sculptures of serpent forms were attributes of the goddess created by women artists, worshipers, and analogous to our own physical, sexual knowledge.

According to a recent World Health Organization study, fifty-eight women are known to die each day on this continent from the consequences of attempting to end their pregnancies using homemade "cures" or in unsafe underground clinics. Many public health experts, however, say this figure probably represents an infinitesimal tip of the iceberg.

Did you know a few Dead Sea Scrolls were smuggled from Iraq in the vagina of a secretary, onto the airplane flying Vulva scrolls from cave to plane cabin safe and sound (Furia: winged Vulva embracing serpent)?

You creep like a bird and crawl now like an insect

—African song sung after clitorodectomy of young girls

Vulva's Morphia, 1992–97. Suspended photogrid: 35 hand-painted color laser prints on paper, mounted on board, each 11 x 8.5 in.; text strips, 58 x 2 inches. Four small electric fans, side-mounted. Total wall installation 60 x 96 in.

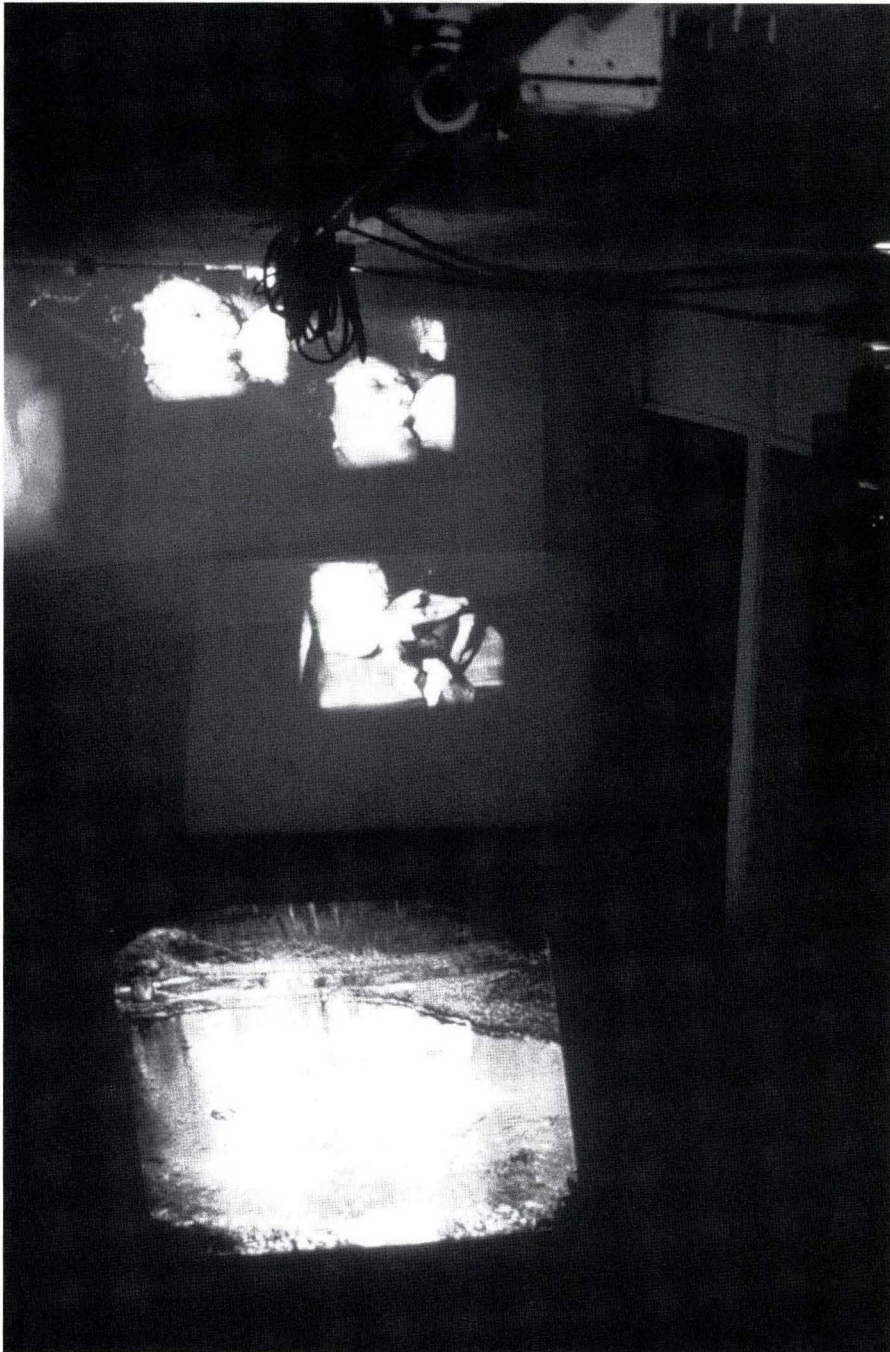
Exhibitions

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, "Féminin/Masculin: le sexe de l'art" (1995).

Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, "Women on the Verge (Fluxus or Not)" (1995).

Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Trondheim, Norway, "Sexuality, Love, Gender" (2000).

Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst, Skovvej, Denmark (2000–01).



Vespers Pool, 1999.
Installation. ArtPace, San Antonio.
Photo: Reily Robinson.

VESPERS POOL

1999–2000

The video installation *Vespers Pool* is preceded by a corridor lined with illuminated niches that contain artifacts—a dead dove, a bloody nightgown, a deer tail, splintered wood from a tree struck by lightning—lit within the facade. These artifacts presented as rare objects—while of no explicit value—point to a set of coincidences, to paranormal events centered on a death.

In *Vespers Pool*, I reconstitute psychic spaces as part of ordinary phenomena. The installation raises questions of interspecies communication, deepened by the wall of artifactual coincidences, as well as suggesting unexpected cultural taboos.

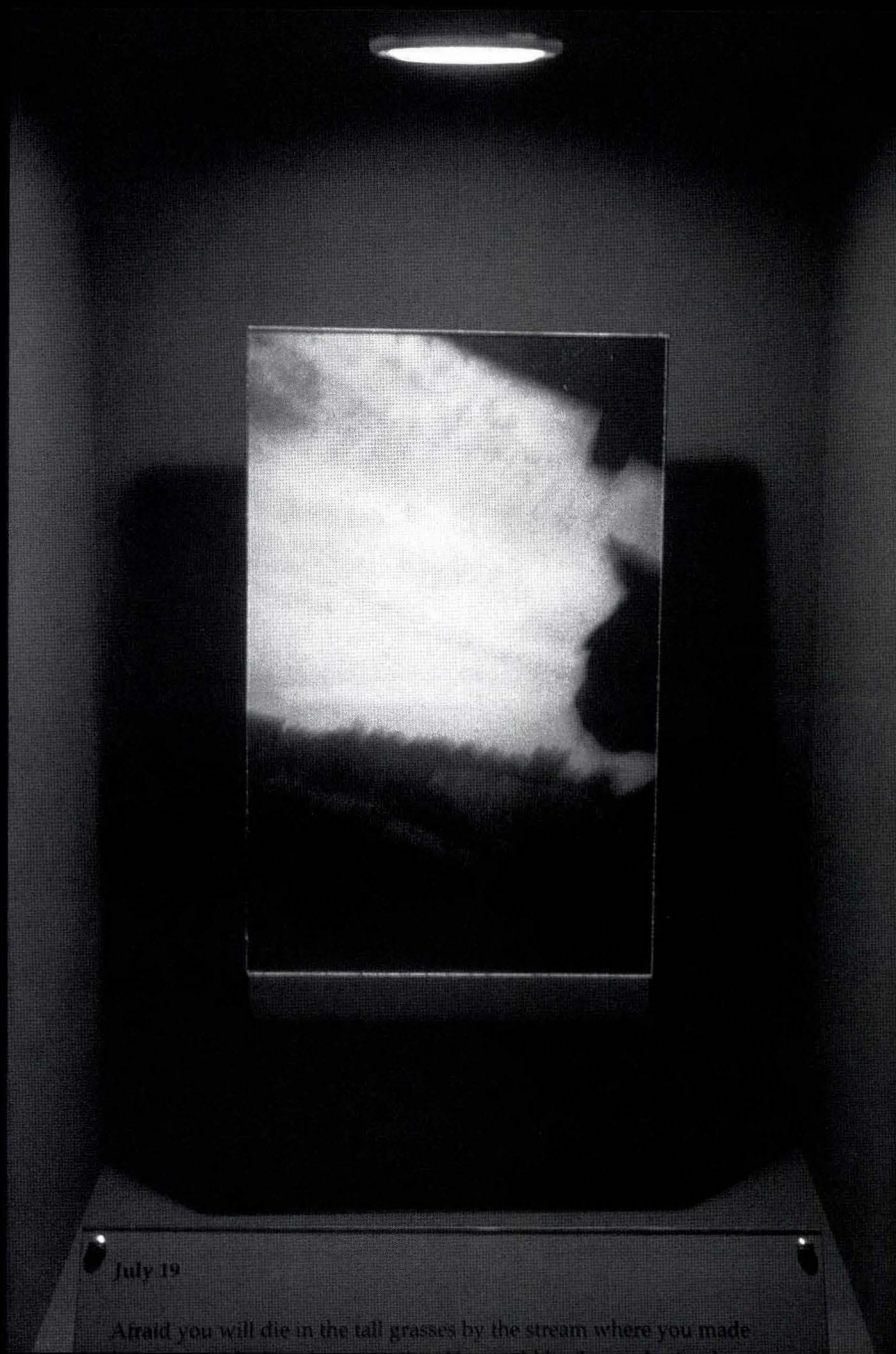
As the viewer enters the darkened gallery, seven video projections display a stream of images on a far wall of a cat (*Vesper*), ardently kissing a woman; these images flow vertically into a projected pool of water. The continuously kissing faces—human and animal—were self-photographed spontaneously over an eight-year period, as *Vesper* ritualistically initiated kissing before sleeping and on waking.

Three video projectors cast sequences of the kissing cat vertically down a wall. Simultaneously a continuous slide relay projects seasonal changes of a pond spilling into a circle of sand on the gallery floor. Motorized mirrors move dissolving images (of the pond at my home, through the seasons) onto the ceiling and across the room. On an opposite wall, a video projection cantilevers the six-minute video loop detailing the life and death of this companion cat.

Vespers Pool, 1999–2000. Installation. Wall of artifacts (7 x 14 feet x 15 inches), display units containing 14 display niches, each painted blue with an artifact illuminated by an insert halogen light); 4- or 5-channel LCD projectors and 4 or 5 continuous rewind video decks; Kodak Ektographic zoom lens slide projectors; slide dissolve unit with rotating motorized mirrors; speakers wired to video decks. Video edited on a Media 100 system. Multi-channel soundtrack.

Exhibitions

First Commissioned by and exhibited at the Art Pace Foundation, San Antonio (1999).
Emily Harvey Gallery, New York (2000).



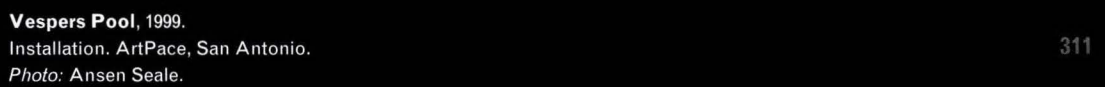
July 19

Afraid you will die in the tall grasses by the stream where you made

Vespers Pool, 1999.

Installation. ArtPace, San Antonio.

Photo: Ansen Seale.



Vespers Pool, 1999.
Installation. ArtPace, San Antonio.
Photo: Ansen Seale.



Vespers Pool, 1999.
Installation. Emily Harvey Gallery, New York.
Photo: Robert Pugliese.



Figura 10
 Este objeto, hecho de madera ligera, viene usado para preparar tinta negra por los habitantes de San Bartolomé. Es un tipo de tinta que se usa para pintar las paredes de las casas y para hacer los dibujos que se ven en las paredes de las iglesias. También se usa para hacer los dibujos que se ven en las paredes de las iglesias.

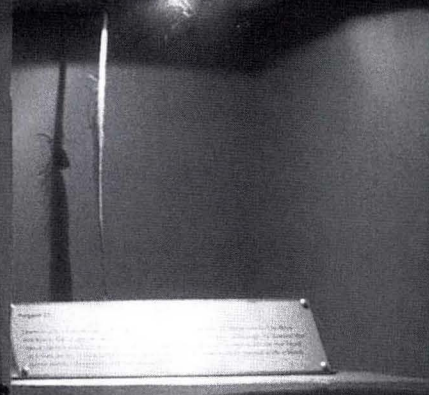


Figura 11
 Este objeto, hecho de madera ligera, viene usado para preparar tinta negra por los habitantes de San Bartolomé. Es un tipo de tinta que se usa para pintar las paredes de las casas y para hacer los dibujos que se ven en las paredes de las iglesias. También se usa para hacer los dibujos que se ven en las paredes de las iglesias.

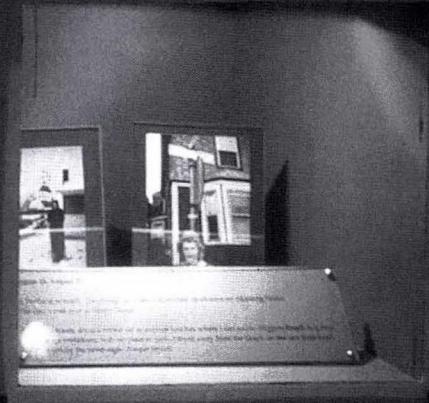


Figura 12
 Este objeto, hecho de madera ligera, viene usado para preparar tinta negra por los habitantes de San Bartolomé. Es un tipo de tinta que se usa para pintar las paredes de las casas y para hacer los dibujos que se ven en las paredes de las iglesias. También se usa para hacer los dibujos que se ven en las paredes de las iglesias.

Thomas McEvelley

Carolee Schneemann Exhibit *Vespers Pool* at the Emily Harvey Gallery, March 2000

Carolee Schneemann's work has remained committed to the facts of women's cultural reality as recorded in history. Some artists of her generation, who made a similar commitment and kept it, found themselves ghettoized as one-issue artists producing work not only about women but for them. Nothing necessarily wrong with that—still, Schneemann's work has seemed too big to fit that ghetto. In a smoothly articulated inner contradiction she overleapt the limits of her subject matter while at the same time affirming them, or accepting them, in her work.

Some of her famous early works attained archetypal stature in the realm where performance art is almost an aspect of the history of religion (a realm which includes body art as well as ritual art). Works such as *Eye Body* (1965), *Meat Joy* (1964), and *Interior Scroll* (1975) were forthright products of the first generation of the women's movement, frankly based on the need (not just desire) to posit a neolithic matriarchy. The scholarship of Maria Gimbutas might roughly locate it in the dark depths of neolithic Old Europe. But at the same time these works acted upon the history of religion they also acted on the history of art, as self-conscious ripostes to the body art that "the boys" were heroicizing themselves with.

Vespers Pool (2000) occupies related areas of feminist aesthetic. Autobiographical and intensely personal it yet invokes another archetypal realm of women's history—the witch with her feline familiar. Vesper, Schneemann's cat, who had been a collaborator in her recent works, died on July 19, 1999—a small matter, seemingly, but still, to regard it as less than monumental would be, again, to ignore the long history of religion. Akkadian Ishtar was represented by a lioness; the Great Goddess of Catal Huyuk, by leopards; André Leroi-Gourhan has suggested that the association of the female with the carnivorous feline may go back to the Magdalenian caves.

Entering the installation, one first saw in a vertical vitrine the blood-stained nightgown which caught Vespers's hemorrhaging of July 15. It hangs there almost like a priestly garment, seeming to refer to the blood-stained white cassocks of Hermann Nitsch's own incursions into the realms of ancient religion. But Schneemann has characteristically skewed the material into another riposte to the overweening scale of men's ambitions; the nightgown is clearly feminine and has to do with intimacy in bed rather than with temple ceremonial. In terms of the long-standing antifeminism of male clergies, it seems to commemorate a sacrilege, while in terms of the reality of women's cultural history, it has the accumulated dignity of millennia of child-bearing, corpse laying-out, lamentation, and rending of garments. The priestesses of Ishtar lamented so the annual death of Tammuz.

One walked on among a laying out of moments in a series of glass-fronted niches, like the card-by-card appearance of a Tarot hand. The death of the small incubus is recorded as a staged transition from healthy moments of great flying leaps between buildings to the tragic sopping outflow of life-force-as-bodily fluid. The July 15 hemorrhage is followed by fragments of the tree split by lightning on August 10, through other momentary intersections of the tangled web, to the dove (of Aphrodite) that fell dead in her hands while invoking Vesper by the pond on September 27, the deer (of Artemis) found dead in the pond on October 5.

The corridor led to a darkened space that was at once theatrical and outdoorlike; on walls and floor various projections of Vesper-in-action-in-nature move in orchestrated ways on six video projectors while various sounds—trains on tracks, coffee percolating, a cat purring, a veil of insects murmuring, bells ringing cacophonously—interweave and seep into one another. The artist's archaic quality of experiencing psychic affiliation with her materials is offset by forcing it through cool high-tech means.

Here as in some earlier works, Schneemann insists that one function of art objects is to be fetishistic channels into the death place. In *Mortal Coils* (1994), an interaction of oneiromancy and mediumism was embodied in multiple projections among slowly twisting ropes as if something were dimly viewed while transpiring underwater or in a netherworld. *Vespers Pool* further develops both the theme and the mood as a mini-*gesamtkunstwerk* combining sculpture, film, projective environment, performance, and sound sculpture. As the various strands of history weave through the work, Vesper, Schneemann herself—and the moment of art history—take their places in a continuum of life force that flows on into the future.



DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

LOVE RIDES ARISTOTLE THROUGH THE AUDIENCE: BODY, IMAGE, AND IDEA IN THE WORK OF CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

We prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.

—Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, I

A critic saw in my last plays an attack on history, the linear concept of history. He read in them the rebellion of the body against ideas, or more precisely, the impact of ideas, and of the idea of history, on human bodies As long as there are ideas, there are wounds. Ideas are inflicting wounds on the body.

—Heiner Müller, *Germania* ¹

Carolee Schneemann has been putting her body on the line for over thirty years in art. The line is that “threshold of consciousness” where, as Heiner Müller says, “desires and fears reside,” making “laughter and crying equally subversive.” It is the last line of resistance in the rebellion of the body against disembodied ideas of history, whether political or aesthetic. Working always at this line—this broken line, border, and threshold—has put Schneemann’s work as an artist in continuous conflict with history, defined by Müller as “the arrangement of bodies according to a law.” Schneemann’s work has always involved the arrangement of bodies *against* the law, toward justice. (The law, “that which is laid down,” marks the failure of justice.) As Bachofen has it, “Justice and strife coincide. The two are identical.”²

Schneemann’s continued insistence on the rights of the female body and feminine mind in a sex-phobic and misogynist culture have led over time to a radical metaphysics that is equally at odds with social conventions. “She threatens mythological revolution,” wrote Lucy Lippard, “an anarchy that is neither economically feasible nor socially accept-

From Carolee Schneemann, *Up To And Including Her Limits* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), pp. 26–54. Reprinted by permission.

able. As an emissary from the Goddess she bodes no good for the tightassed backbiting esthetic status quo.”⁵ So it should come as no surprise that Schneemann’s work has often received harsh treatment from theorists and art historians, including feminist theorists and historians, many of whom have charged her with “essentialism” and dismissed her work as being “theoryless.” In a conversation with historian Kathy O’Dell in 1994, Schneemann responded to these charges:

My whole problem with theoretical structures has to do with their displacement of physicality, as if there is a seepage or a toxicity from the experience of the body that is going to invade language and invalidate theory. The struggle with my work from the very beginning has been that it’s smart work, it’s mentally aggressive and assertive. It locates theoretical constructs in the experience of physicality. And that might be called “essentialist.” It might be called, in Lacanian terms, “absence and lack.” Or in Freudian terms, “envy of male linguistic expressivity.” The projections onto the body are my area of investigation, and my work is to assault and aggress and claw and shred the projections that surround the experience that’s of the body, that encapsulates certain theoretical structures.⁴

This dismantling of projections has necessitated a refusal to remain within established disciplinary boundaries. A pioneer of “performance art,” “body art,” “multimedia,” and “site-specific installation” before any of these terms existed, Schneemann’s influence as progenitor is so pervasive that it has become invisible. She has repeatedly been accused of being superficial for having moved among so many different media. (Imagine this charge being made against Joseph Beuys, Vito Acconci, or Matthew Barney.) She has worked across media from the beginning—in painting, collage, performance, film, writing, photography, and installation—but has always defined herself as a painter, to insist on the physicality of all her artmaking. (The apparent exception here is writing. But even here the usual characterizations are deceptive. Schneemann’s companions in writing have always been poets, and especially those poets for whom the act of writing is manifestly physical: Robert Kelly, Clayton Eshleman, Paul Blackburn, Jerome Rothenberg, Michael McClure, and others. It was the poets, and poet-filmmakers, who first recognized what Schneemann was trying to do in her work. And it was from the poets that I first learned of her.)

In one of her most notorious performances, *Interior Scroll* (1975), Schneemann stood naked, slowly unwinding a scroll from inside her vagina while reading from it, giving a whole new slant to *écriture féminine*. The text of the scroll is a cut-up of something that first appeared in the film *Kitch’s Last Meal* (1975-75). It is a characterization of, and

rejoinder to, the dismissive criticisms of Schneemann's films by an unnamed "happy man/a structuralist filmmaker."

Interior Scroll was first performed in 1975 before an audience of mostly other women artists in East Hampton. The second time it was performed, the context was quite different. Stan Brakhage had put together a program of erotic films by women for the Telluride Film Festival in 1977, and he invited Schneemann to introduce it. When the festival brochure arrived, giving the title of the program as "The Erotic Woman" and picturing on the cover a drawing of a naked man in sunglasses opening his coat to reveal "Fourth Telluride Film Festival" written across his chest but with his cock and balls erased, Schneemann was incensed. When it came time for her to introduce the film program, Schneemann got up in front of the screen, read a short statement, then removed a sheet wrapping her body, applied stripes of mud to her skin, and extended and read the interior scroll once again.⁵

Because Schneemann had lived with the filmmaker Anthony McCall from 1971 to 1976, many of those in the audience at Telluride assumed that the "happy man/a structuralist filmmaker" was McCall. But in an interview with Scott MacDonald published in 1988, Schneemann made the startling revelation that the *Interior Scroll* text is actually a secret letter to the critic and art historian Annette Michelson, "who couldn't look at my films," said Schneemann. "It's a double invention and transmutation: it's not to a man but to a woman. The projected quotes are from her students."⁶

Now jump ahead to 1994. In a round table discussion titled "The Reception of the Sixties," the editors of *October* (Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson, Silvia Kolbowski, Denis Hollier, Hal Foster, and Benjamin Buchloh, with Martha Buskirk) gathered to respond to the negative reception of the Robert Morris retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum by Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* and others. Addressing the different "challenges to the pictorial" that occurred in the 1960s, Silvia Kolbowski said:

[A] number of women in the 1960s engaged the space of the tableau and the insertion of their own bodies into a tableau-like or pictorial space. For example, the work of Carolee Schneemann or of Valie Export, who contextualized herself by means of a performance, with the residue of that performance surviving as a sculptural piece.

After which Rosalind Krauss commented:

I certainly agree that challenges to the pictorial within its own domain arose from body art—Valie Export is an example, but then so is Hannah Wilke. It

had to do with framing the body in relation to the photograph and then performing operations on that photographic representation, which Wilke's work does. So it's true that there were guerrilla actions on the pictorial that were tremendously important.⁷

As the discussion continued, the importance of body art by women artists in the sixties, and its "suppression, exclusion, and neglect" by historians and theorists of visual art, became a central topic. Near the end of the discussion, Annette Michelson came to this conclusion:

But there may be a more general way in which an indictment for the kinds of suppression, exclusion, neglect, that you've mentioned, is in order. Perhaps what's at fault is that historians or theorists of the visual arts have had too minimal a range, have conceived of their task and their field too narrowly. Certainly, the work of the performers of the 1960s, of Yvonne Rainer in particular, has not gone undocumented or unassessed or unevaluated. Together with other work—that of Lucinda Childs and Carolee Schneemann, for example—it has been folded in to that period. But that work has not been done by art historians. It may be that a recent shift from the notion of "art history" to that of a field of "visual culture" may remedy that situation, although we've yet to see abundant and significant results.⁸

Isn't this very much like saying: "We are fond of you; you have made some charming contributions to visual culture, but don't ask us to consider your work in the context of art history?" Is the suppression, exclusion, and neglect of women artists with radical social imaginations somehow built into "the notion of 'art history'"?

The first illustration accompanying "The Reception of the Sixties" is a photograph of Carolee Schneemann posing as Olympia in Robert Morris's 1964 action *Site*. As the Olympia of Minimalism, Schneemann occupied the site vacated by Manet's model Victorine Meurent, so compellingly tracked in Eunice Lipton's 1992 book, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire*:

The model surveyed the viewer, resisting centuries of admonitions to ingratiate herself. Locked behind her gaze were thoughts, an ego maneuvering. If later on Freud would ask, "What do women want?" then this woman's face answered. You knew what she wanted. Everything. Or rather she wanted, she lacked, nothing. And *that* is why in the spring of 1865 men shook with

rage in front of *Olympia*. She was unmanageable; they knew she had to be contained.⁹

A hundred years later, when Schneemann moved as a painter off the canvas and outside the frame, she was only doing what was necessary in order not to be contained, as image or as image-maker. She would not be satisfied either with being the object of art or with making detached art objects. She wanted *everything*. Wanting everything meant putting her own body, the object, into the work, always. And it meant “putting her body where her mind is”; that is, refusing the conventional Dionysian/Apollonian split. Artaud was a guide:

Life consists of burning up questions.

I cannot conceive of work that is detached from life.

I do not like detached creation. Neither can I conceive of the mind as detached from itself. Each of my works, each diagram of myself, each glacial flowering of my inmost soul dribbles over me.

Excuse my absolute freedom. I refuse to make a distinction between any of the moments of myself.

...

This is what I mean by Flesh. I do not separate my thought from my life.

...

There is a mind in the flesh, but a mind as quick as lightning. And yet the excitement of the flesh partakes of the high substance of the mind.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the society of the time, including the art world, didn't see it that way and couldn't see beyond Schneemann's naked body. As Lawrence Alloway observed in 1980, “Schneemann's use of nudity has somehow acted to limit her career, to seal her off in a Dionysian cul-de-sac. In fact her works are flexible and speculative, but the impact of her body has blocked recognition of that fact.”¹¹ It was the impact of her body, and the impact on her body of conventional ideas of what a woman's body was for and could do, that made reception impossible. The image obscured the image-maker. Schneemann's refusal to separate the two, to detach one from the other, is a radical integration that she has sustained for over thirty years. This desire for integration is everywhere evident in Schneemann's approach to visual images; in her endless permutations and manipulations of images of her own body and of the bodies of others, in the splitting, decomposing, and recombining of images, and in her concern for their rhythms and morphologies. Again Artaud:

This is the function of the visual language of objects, movements, attitudes, gestures, but provided their meaning, their physiognomy, their combinations, are extended until they become signs and these signs become an alphabet.¹²

In Schneemann's early silent film *Fuses*, made in 1967, the images of lovemaking (picturing Schneemann and her lover, the composer James Tenney) are cut apart, superimposed, layered, and recombined in rhythmic sequences that reflect an experience of lovemaking that no other film has managed to do, before or since. The action is nonsequential, nonnarrative, and doesn't build to a climax. Schneemann's physical manipulation of the film stock—burning, baking, cutting, scratching, painting, coloring, dipping it in acid, leaving it outside in the weather—serves to bring the images through the body. This integration or *fusing* of subject and method, fact and facture, is at the center of Schneemann's practice:

I insist my materials are not fetishistic or romantic but “naturalistic;” I care about their *visual functions*, not their connotations . . . you have to **SEE what they do, not what they are made up of; *the materials function as a way to establish certain visual energies*. Simply that they **Are**. Smashing glass, throwing resin, setting on fire—these actions were directed to removing or making ambiguous the direct intervention of hand to material—to *combine elements out of which a visual fusion would develop beyond my intentions*.¹³**

And also beyond the artist's intentions came the unbelievably hostile reactions to *Fuses*, a whole series of catastrophic abreactions. Schneemann recalls that when it was first shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 1968, “About forty men went berserk and tore up all the seats in the theater, slashed them with razors, shredded them, and threw all the padding around.”¹⁴ And more recently, at the Moscow Film Festival in 1989, the film was banned as obscene and the filmmaker branded as a pornographer, not because the film is sexually explicit (porno films both soft and hard run daily in Moscow) but because it is *politically* explicit, combustible, and explosive. As Schneemann says, “Here comes the fire and water; our bodies are the coherence between labor and pleasure, all of a piece.”¹⁵ It is that integrated articulation, from a woman's point of view, that has proven to be perennially unacceptable. What Schneemann considered a philosophical inquiry, the audience took as a provocation:¹⁶

When I made the film of my longtime lover and me lovemaking, basically I wanted to see if the experience of what I saw would have any correspondence to what I *felt*—the intimacy of lovemaking. It was almost a

Heisenbergian dilemma: will the *camera* distort everything? (There was no camera person present.)

The camera brings back very strange hallucinatory imagery, and *it's not real*—its representations are imprinted on this material and then projected. And to imagine that it's "real," and therefore can be censored, seems to me almost a depraved attitude, because it's not real, it's *film*, and mine in particular is baked, stamped, stained, painted, chopped, and reassembled. And I wanted to put into that *materiality* of film the energies of the body, so that the film itself dissolves and recombines and is transparent and dense—like how one feels during lovemaking. . . . It is *different* from any pornographic work that you've ever seen—that's why people are still looking at it! And there's no objectification or fetishization of the woman.¹⁷

The film *Viet-Flakes* (1965), from the same time, performs a similar transformation but on the images of others. A collection of Vietnam atrocity photographs collected from foreign magazines and newspapers from 1958 to 1964 were laid out in arcs on the floor and then scanned or tracked gesturally with the camera by Schneemann, producing a rough animation, a reanimation of these silenced, stilled bodies. The soundtrack by James Tenney collages Vietnamese religious chants and secular songs with fragments of Bach and American pop songs of the time. *Viet-Flakes* is a profoundly moving meditation on the effects of history on human bodies and a poignant attempt to recollect the shards, to put the shattered bodies back together again.

The most difficult challenge to an art based on the primacy of the body and physicality is the body's ultimate transitoriness. Bodies are always disappearing. For this reason, Schneemann's work moves back and forth between joy and grief as between magnetic poles. The grief (source of all anger) arises in the work as an acute awareness of and response to the effects of disintegration—on images, materials, relationships, and on the physical mortal body. And the joy arises from moments of integration—in love, art, body and mind.

The installation *Mortal Coils* (1994) is a work of memory and mourning. Schneemann's images of faces and bodies of fifteen friends of hers who all died within two years' time (Alf Bold, John Cage, John Caldwell, Juan Downey, Lejaren Hiller, Derek Jarman, Joe Jones, Marjorie Keller, Barbara Lehman, Peter Moore, Charlotte Moorman, Frank Pileggi, David Rattray, Paul Sharits, and Hannah Wilke) are projected along with images of totemic objects and body parts related to each person. Motorized mirrors split the projections and scatter them around the room, like shards of a disintegrated picture, while coiled ropes turn slowly in the light. It is a study in grief, an attempt to reanimate the lost bodies, to recover their physicality.

In a statement for the 1995 exhibition “Action/Performance and the Photograph,” Schneemann addressed the importance of the photographic image in her work:

My various works begin as drawings and all eventually take form as photographs, slides, film, video—either as the primary material of the work itself, or as its documentation. As a visual artist/performance artist, I am both a photographer and a subject for photographers. Photographic media bridge the public act and its private appraisal, the private act and its public dissemination. When the entranced action is over, the photographers have disappeared, when a cultural attribution is in question, or research is stymied, a painting destroyed, a friend has died—in all cases, my photographs remain as source of investigation, quandary, conviction, retrieval, and myth.¹⁸

Schneemann’s work has repeatedly involved “framing the body in relation to the photograph and then performing operations on that photographic representation.”¹⁹ In a series of recent performances, Schneemann projects slides and then reads out of and into the images. In *Ask the Goddess* (1991), she impersonates the Goddess with tongue in cheek and double ax in hand, performing a sort of divination by slide projection. As people in the audience ask her questions, Schneemann turns to consult the image oracle before answering. In the midst of a good deal of Mae Western hamming (Q: What is the cure for premature ejaculation? A: More of it. The more you do, the less premature it gets.), Schneemann traces the iconographic histories of images of women, men, and animals, and of her own performing history. She instructs one querant to “go back into the body, which is where all the splits in Western culture occur.” She speaks of turning the passive, suspended form of the crucifix into a “rephallusized, reenergized force” and describes the image of the bull as something that “can work with and for the feminine.” At one point she gets up and performs a silly and terrifying dance, blindfolded, in heels, shaking her head to the music (“We think of you as a dancer”). At times she seems to be in a trance, and the images speak through her, bypassing her intentions:

**Q: What is the meaning of art? A: The meaning of art is destruction.
Loss of history, loss of authenticity, loss of integration.**

It is not just history and ideas that inflict wounds on the body, but life itself. The integration of labor and pleasure is always momentary and fleeting. The images are all fragmentary, and the bodies keep disappearing. When “Love rides Aristotle through the audience,”²⁰ we recollect the shards.

Victorine Meurent is reading the Tarot for Carolee Schneemann. The first card drawn is the number two card, the Priestess. Victorine and Carolee raise their eyebrows at one another and laugh. "You can probably have everything you want," says Victorine. "But it will change you."²¹ And Carolee replies, "We set each other on fire, we extinguish the fire, we create each other's face and body, we abandon each other, we save each other, we take responsibility for each other, we lose responsibility for each other, we reveal each other, we choose, we respond, we build, we are destroyed."²² As she finishes speaking, the woman on the face of the card is transformed into a Minoan bull dancer. She vaults off of the card into space, passing neatly between the horns of the bull, leaping precisely from danger to ascendancy.

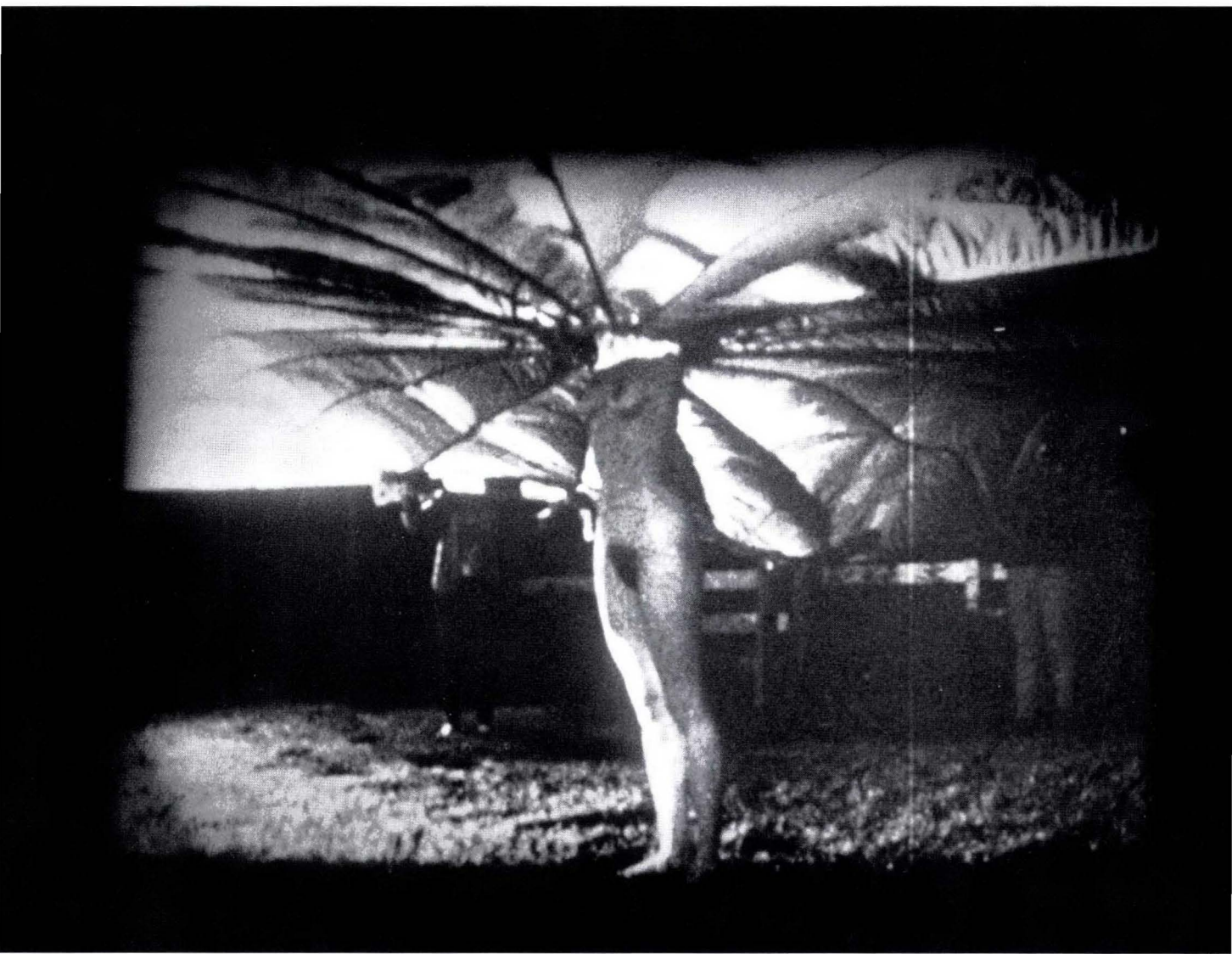
Notes

- 1 Quoted as epigraph to the poet Paul Blackburn's book, *In. On. Or About the Premises* (New York: Grossman Publishing with Cape Goliard Press, London, 1968), one of the inspirations for Schneemann's *Up To And Including Her Limits*.
- 2 J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1967), 187.
- 3 Lucy Lippard, in a jacket statement for Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, ed. Bruce McPherson (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, 1979).
- 4 Conversation with Kathy O'Dell at "Artists Talk on Art," New York, December 1994.
- 5 The program included Agnès Varda's *L'Opéra Mouffe*, Marie Mencken's *Orgia*, Gunvor Nelson's *Schmeerguntz*, Anne Severson's *Near the Big Chakra*, and Schneemann's own *Fuses* and *Plumblin*.
- 6 Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 143.
- 7 Rosalind Krauss, "Round Table: The Reception of the Sixties," in *October* 69 (summer 1994), 10.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 9 Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* (New York: Meridian, 1994), 4.
- 10 *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1976), 59, 110-11.
- 11 Lawrence Alloway, "Carolee Schneemann: The Body as Object and Instrument," *Art in America* (March 1980), 19-20.
- 12 Antonin Artaud, 242.
- 13 "Carolee Schneemann to Daryl Chin: Regarding *Up To And Including Her Limits*," May 28, 1975 (emphasis added).
- 14 MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema*, 141.
- 15 Carolee Schneemann, interview with Carl Heyward, published in *Art Papers* (January-February 1993).
- 16 The sense of "fuses" as combustible and explosive was only one of the senses intended by the artists. The title came to Schneemann and Tenney as a transliteration of the Greek word *fusis*, concerning the order of external nature—natural, physical. *Fusikon* names one of the three branches of early Greek philosophy. The other two are the moral or ethical and the logical, reasonable, or rational orders.
- 17 Andrea Juno's interview with Schneemann in *Angry Women, RE/Search* 13 (1991), 70.
- 18 *Action/Performance and the Photograph*, Turner/Krull Galleries, Los Angeles, 1993, catalogue for the exhibition curated by Craig Krull, essay by Robert C. Morgan.
- 19 Rosalind Krauss, *October* 69 (summer 1994), 10.
- 20 Stage direction in the 1962 score for *Banana Hands*, performed in 1969 by a group of English schoolchildren, reproduced in *More Than Meat Joy*, 27.
- 21 Carolee Schneemann, *ABC—We Print Anything—In the Cards* (Beuningen, Holland: Brummense Uitgeverij Van Luxe Werkjes, 1977). 158 cards, photos, and text, boxed. Edition of 151.
- 22 Carolee Schneemann, description of performance imagery of *Snows*, in *More Than Meat Joy*, 132.



C.S. performing in Claes Oldenburg's *Waves and Washes*, 1966.

Photos: Stan van der Beek.



ON MY DESK

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Films and videos by C.S. or edited by C.S.

Meat Joy, 1964. Film. 16 mm. Color, sound. 12-minute version edited by Bob Giorgio and C.S. from original film footage of 1964 performance of *Meat Joy* in New York City. Filmed by Pierre Dominique Gaisseau. This film was reedited for video in 1991.

Viet Flakes, 1966. Film. 8 mm printed to 16 mm. Sound collage by James Tenney. This film was transferred to video in 1991. Black-and-white, toned. 11 minutes.

Fuses, 1965. Film. 16 mm. Color, silent. 22 minutes. Part of "Autobiographical Trilogy." Filming began in 1964. This film was transferred to video in 1992. Color, silent. 18 minutes.

Water Light/Water Needle (Lake Mah Wah), 1966. Video. Original footage by John Jones and Sheldon Rocklin. Color, sound. 12 minutes.

Plumb Line, 1970. Film. Super 8, step printed to 16 mm. Color, sound. 18 minutes. Sound by Carolee Schneemann. Part 2 of "Autobiographical Trilogy." Filming begun in 1968.

Kitch's Last Meal, 1973–75. Film. Super 8. Double projection. Color, sound. 5 hours.

Up To And Including Her Limits, 1976. Video. Black-and-white, sound. 60 minutes.

Judson Project Interview, 1980. Video. Colorized, sound. 10 minutes.

Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology, 1983. Video. Color, sound. 11 minutes.

Vesper's Stampede to My Holy Mouth, 1992. Video. Color, sound. 15 minutes. Filmed and edited by Victoria Vesna and Carolee Schneemann.

Four Recent Installations, 1993. Video. Color, sound. 5 minutes..

Imaging Her Erotics, 1995. Video. Color, sound. 5 minutes. Filmed and edited by Maria Beatty and Carolee Schneemann.

Western Front Interview, 1995. Video. Color, sound. 17 minutes.

Interior Scroll—The Cave, 1995. Video. Color, sound. 12 minutes. Filmed and edited by Carolee Schneemann and Maria Beatty.

Films and videos by others

Water Light/Water Needle (St. Mark's Church), 1966. Video. Original footage by Elaine Summers. Black-and-white, silent. 4 minutes.

Snows, 1967. Film. 16 mm. Black-and-white, silent. 24 minutes. Filmed by Alphonse Shilling. Unedited.

Body Collage, 1967. Film. 16 mm. Black-and-white, silent. 6 minutes. Filmed by Gideon Bachmann.

Illinois Central Transposed, 1969. Film. 16 mm. Color, silent, 10 minutes. Filmed by John Heinz.

Art Is Reactionary, 1987. Video. Color, sound. 10 minutes.

Interview with Christy Sheffield Sanford at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, 1988. Video. Color, sound. 14 minutes.

Lecture at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1988. Video. Color, sound. 16 minutes.

Cat Scan, 1990. Video. Color, sound. 15 minutes.

Sphinxes without Secrets, 1990. Video. Black-and-white. 16 minutes. Video by Maria Beatty.

Ask the Goddess, 1991. Video. Color, sound. 7 minutes.

Is There a Feminist Iconography?, 1992. Video. Color, sound. 15 minutes.

Vulva's School, 1995. Video. Color, sound. 7 minutes.

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CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN IMAGING HER EROTICS

Essays, Interviews, Projects

Carolee Schneemann is one of the pioneers of performance, installation, and video art. Although other visual artists, such as Salvador Dalí and Yves Klein, had used live self-portraiture and performance as a vehicle for public provocation, Schneemann was among the first to use her body to animate the relationship between the world of lived experience and the imagination, as well as issues of the erotic, the sacred, and the taboo. In the 1960s, her work prefigured the feminist movement's sexual self-assertion for women, and by the mid-1970s, her work anticipated the field of women's studies and its critique of patriarchal institutions. In the 1980s, she was one of the first to experiment with virtual environments.

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Carolee Schneemann teaches in the MFA Program at Bard College.

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