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# ‘the personal clutter... the painterly mess...’ Tracing a History of Carolee Schneemann’s *Interior Scroll*

Victoria Horne

[...] the female body has been feared for its power to articulate itself.<sup>1</sup> (Susan Gubar, 1981).

Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019) first performed *Interior Scroll* in 1975, at an exhibition in East Hampton entitled ‘Woman Here and Now’. During the enactment Schneemann undressed and wrapped herself in a sheet, reading aloud excerpts from her book *Cézanne, She Was a Great Painter*.<sup>2</sup> The artist then dropped the sheet and daubed paint along the contours of her body and face before assuming a sequence of static life-modelling poses. The performance notoriously culminated in the artist removing a scroll from her vagina, which she read aloud, inch by inch, to the audience. Two years later Schneemann staged an improvised performance of *Interior Scroll* at Telluride Film Festival in Colorado, where she was incensed to discover her work being screened under the trivialising label ‘The Erotic Woman’.<sup>3</sup> Envisioned as a responsive intervention, the artist had anticipated that her body and its spoken words would ‘step into the fissure between live action and filmic images’.<sup>4</sup> This second streamlined action saw Schneemann disrobe from a white sheet, paint her body with mud from a local creek, and once again read from a secreted scroll. The ‘feminist text’ scribbled upon the unfurling scroll was adapted from her film *Kitch’s Last Meal* (1973-77) and opened with the lines<sup>5</sup>:

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 feeling  
the hand-touch sensibility  
the diaristic indulgence  
the painterly mess  
the dense gestalt  
the primitive techniques.<sup>6</sup>

**Detail from Anthony McCall,  
photograph of Carolee  
Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*,  
1975 (plate 5).**

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*Interior Scroll* has since entered the canon of twentieth-century performance art. Photographs of the action have been collected by a number of prominent museums as well as being widely reproduced in art magazines and art history textbooks. In line with the past decade-and-a-half's overdue institutional recognition of women's and feminist art, Schneemann's popular reputation has grown fantastically with high-profile publications including an edited volume of letters and a comprehensive evaluation of her career, a retrospective exhibition at MoMA PS1, and the award of Venice Biennale's prestigious Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in 2017.<sup>7</sup> The objective of this article is twofold: to consider how Schneemann's most renowned performance expresses her sustained interest in art-historical and critical representation, and to trace the artwork's ensuing historiography to uncover what it tells us about the artist's historical legacy and her active role in shaping it. Although focussed on a single artwork, the article aims to contribute to more expansive understandings of how Schneemann's materially and conceptually unruly practice deliberately eluded established narrative orders to forge alternative historical paths.

There is an already richly textured scholarly archive examining and theorising Schneemann's multimodal creative practices, which this article – following Schneemann's own bricolaging instincts – aims to weave together, in ways hopefully instructive. It expressly builds upon the editorial work of Kristine Stiles to examine the ways in which Schneemann developed strategies of self-presentation to control the reception of her artwork in the mid- to late decades of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> At this time, prior to and during the emergence of second-wave feminist politics, Schneemann exploited new publishing avenues in art, carefully documented and disseminated her practice, and managed a coterie of sympathetic commentators, thereby negotiating a sexist art world and shaping her historical legacy. In compiling the artist's letters, Stiles has persuasively positioned them as a form of autobiographical and creative expression coterminous with the production of art objects and bodily actions. However, certain of Schneemann's practices have proven trickier to engage historically, as this essay will illuminate by framing her writing precisely in relation to the themes of *Interior Scroll* and bringing these activities into conversation with the concept of *écriture féminine*. Working across film, painting, performance, installation, creative and critical writing, Schneemann left an unusually complex historical legacy. By following her evocative descriptions of 'personal clutter', 'painterly mess' and 'hand-touch sensibility', this article embraces the discomfiting ambiguity of Schneemann's disorderly artistic activities.

Although most artists work within their own networks to manage their reputations, Schneemann – who passed away in March 2019 – was an exceptionally prolific writer, editor and, as Martha Barratt argues, archivist.<sup>9</sup> Yet there has been little sustained attention given to Schneemann's unusually active role in the management of her critical legacy. This article intends to redress this omission by 'reading' *Interior Scroll* as a metonym for Schneemann's artistically and literarily labouring body, and exploring its reception history in relation to the artist's publishing strategies. In her dramatization of the performance's history, Schneemann voices a tension between her conscious wish to avoid the performance and a subconscious drive impelling it forward: 'I didn't want to pull a scroll out of my vagina and read it in public, but the culture's terror of making overt what it wished to suppress fuelled the image.'<sup>10</sup> To better understand this attitude of cultural alterity and antagonism, the article situates *Interior Scroll* in the philosophical contexts of its production by reading the performance and Schneemann's self-presentation strategies in relation to contemporaneous theories of *écriture féminine*.

### Cunt Mascot on the Men's Art Team

A brief look at *Site*, Schneemann's 1964 collaboration with Robert Morris, throws into relief the prevailing critical contexts within which the artist was working and attempting to intervene. The routine was performed on a minimalist stage against a background of recorded construction noises. Morris, dressed in workman's overalls and a mask, systematically removed sheets of plywood from a makeshift structure that was disassembled to reveal Schneemann at its centre, nude, reclining in a pose reminiscent of Édouard Manet's *Olympia*. Historians have highlighted Schneemann's legally enforced immobility in this scene. Henry Sayre quotes the artist as saying: 'the law at this time stated that persons could appear on stage naked [but only] without moving—that is, if they became statues. Movement or physical contact between nude persons was criminal.'<sup>11</sup> Schneemann consequently altered her original performance plans and became a still, mute (replaceable) body on stage.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, although Schneemann had intended her performance with Morris to foreground the issues of sexual politics with which she was becoming increasingly engaged, with hindsight the artist 'has said that she felt immobilized by *Site*, and that the project succumbed to Morris's apolitical "framing" in which she felt refixed'.<sup>13</sup> Against the dynamism of the male artist-worker, femininity was secured in a state of passivity and subjected to the audience's controlling gaze. Sayre has consequently described the performance in terms of Schneemann's submission to authority – both the state's and Morris's.<sup>14</sup>

In a 2013 interview, Schneemann framed her re-enactment of *Olympia* as an investigation: 'I'm interested in how history can marginalise and deform a figuration, how a woman becomes iconic – in male work.'<sup>15</sup> The critical reception of her performance in *Site* reinforced this study, emphasising the extent to which the labour of women in art history has been at once, paradoxically, exhibited and concealed. One hundred years earlier, Schneemann's antecedent Victorine Meurent had modelled for Manet, and his images of her remain iconic while her own artistic labour (she painted and exhibited at the Salon) was until fairly recently effaced from art history entirely.<sup>16</sup> The historical figure of Meurent is assimilated and obscured by the nude female body formally represented; moreover, the represented labour of prostitution is made highly visible in art history while the physical labour of modelling (necessitated by an uncongenial marketplace for women's art) is obscured. The 1860's painting, 1960's performance and their receptions underscore how different labours and labouring subjects are valued and thus move into historical focus. (Suggestive of second-wave feminism's own elisions, 'the black serving woman of Manet's *Olympia* had simply vanished' in the re-enactment, yet this would not be pointed out until much later by Rebecca Schneider.<sup>17</sup>) Separated by a century, and in spite of Schneemann's active intentions, writers mercilessly failed to acknowledge her artistic contribution to *Site*, and her body is configured equivalently to Meurent's, as fetish object authorised by the male artist. Confirmation of this critical elision can be found in a 1984 catalogue essay (see plate 1), where Schneemann is referenced only in parentheses: Maurice Berger describes how 'Morris manipulated a volume of space by shifting heavy wooden boards into various positions, ultimately revealing a naked woman (Carolee Schneeman [sic]) reclining...'<sup>18</sup> Lest we imagine such interpretations entirely superseded, writers in the twenty-first century have continued to dismiss Schneemann's agency in the performance.<sup>19</sup>

Schneemann's records from this period confirm an acute consciousness of the limited role available to her within the American and British art scenes of the 1960s and '70s: 'I WAS PERMITTED TO BE AN IMAGE, BUT NOT AN IMAGE-MAKER CREATING HER OWN IMAGE.'<sup>20</sup> An unsent letter from 1974 acerbically locates her position as the 'Cunt Mascot on the men's art team.'<sup>21</sup> Her scribbles across the 1984 exhibition catalogue

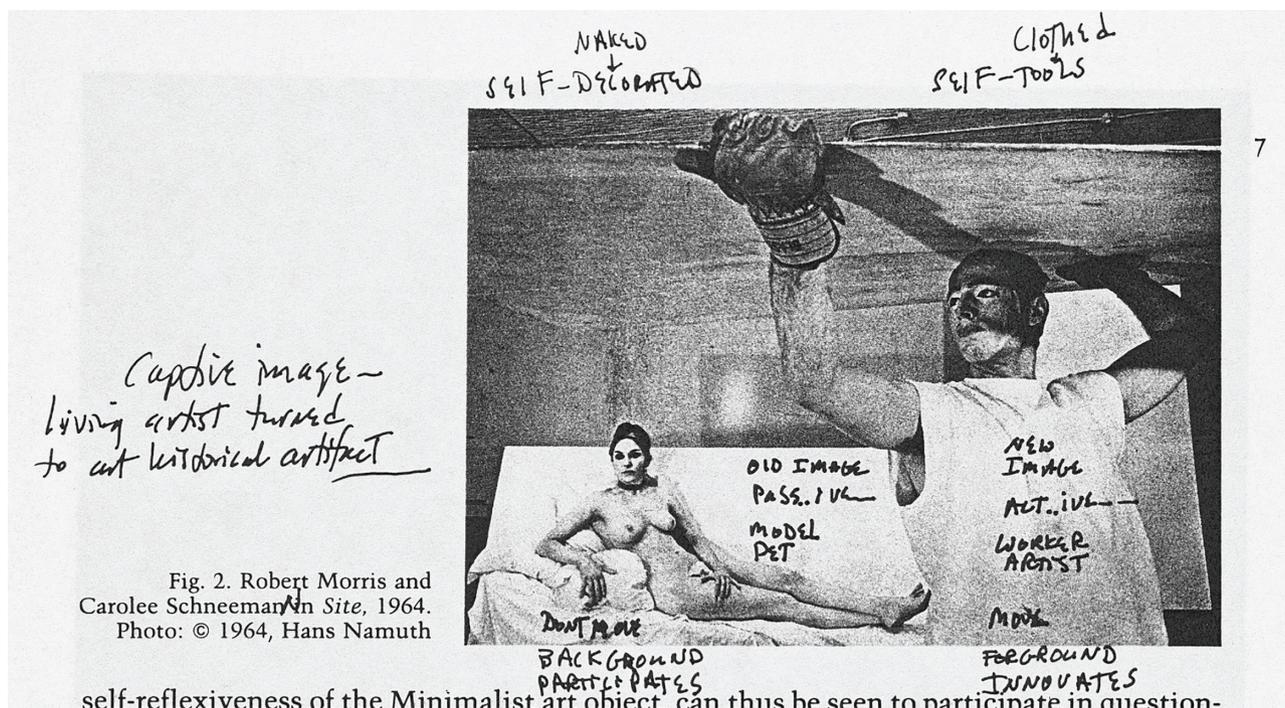


Fig. 2. Robert Morris and Carolee Schneemann *In Site*, 1964. Photo: © 1964, Hans Namuth

self-reflexiveness of the Minimalist art object. can thus be seen to participate in question-

1 Detail from Carolee Schneemann's annotated copy of Maurice Berger, *ENDGAME: Strategies of Postmodernist Performance*, New York: Hunter College Art Gallery, 1984, page 7, including photograph by Hans Namuth of Robert Morris and Carolee Schneemann, *Site*, 1964. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute (950001).

incisively contrast the artists' gendered positions in the action: Schneemann 'participates' while Morris 'innovates' (plate 1). The female is 'old image: passive, model, pet', set against the male as 'new image: active, artist, worker'. These scribbles – or 'puffs of exasperated feminist steam', as Schneemann later termed them in a letter to art historian Henry Sayre<sup>22</sup> – describe the result for women artists whose work could not be separated from their feminine bodies: 'living artist turned to art historical artefact'. Here, Schneemann writes back against the intellectual conditions of the period; the transformative defacement of the catalogue page offers a potent indication of the artist's persistent, and perceptive, engagement with the critical literature surrounding her work.

*Site* and *Interior Scroll* accordingly symbolise the changing conditions of production and reception for Schneemann's artwork. It is no coincidence, of course, that they bookend an incredibly turbulent political decade, during which the US witnessed – on the heels of a struggle for Black Civil Rights – the emergence of a popular Women's Liberation Movement. In 1973 the landmark *Roe v Wade* ruling granted greater bodily autonomy to women, fundamentally altering their legal rights to abortion, a context that was certainly felt by Schneemann, whose letters recount the harrowing anxiety of illegal abortion procedures.<sup>23</sup> These political transformations took place against a broader landscape of economic and cultural turbulence characterised by the transition to post-Fordism and the growth of a post-modernist art market that redefined artistic labour within an expanding creative economy.<sup>24</sup> In *Site* of 1964, Schneemann's live body is determinedly recuperated within fetishistic viewing structures and her artistic labour repeatedly silenced in art historical accounts. By 1975, however, her performance of *Interior Scroll* reflexively foregrounds an active, speaking, female form saturated with knowledge – words and ideas literally issuing from her body as a material trace of her developing feminist consciousness. This move from object to subject, from representation to creator, from creation to historical subject is one that was carefully managed by Schneemann, and what follows is an effort to explore these strategies of self-presentation and documentation as a mode of *écriture féminine*.

### The Historical Record

Schneemann ensured that the two performances of *Interior Scroll* were well-recorded by a number of photographers including Sally Dixon, Peter Grass and Anthony McCall.<sup>25</sup> These photographs were subsequently contextualised and disseminated via countless magazine articles and a self-edited collection of performance documentation and writings published in 1979. Consequently, and due in no small part to an accelerated institutionalisation of performance art from the early 1990s, *Interior Scroll* has since entered the art historical canon. Photographs of the action, as well as textured prints usually stained with urine and beet juice, have been collected by a number of museums in Europe and North America. These institutions were, however, glacially slow to acquire the work and it was not until around 2007, in the context of the artworld's heralded 'year of feminism', that *Interior Scroll* began entering permanent collections.<sup>26</sup> In the interlude the photographs had been widely reproduced in art history journals and textbooks, but given the tendency of publishers to reproduce a limited and recognisable number of photographs, as Schneemann wryly noted, 'I seem to be known for two iconic images'.<sup>27</sup> While this is not unique to *Interior Scroll* – as Amelia Jones explains, histories of performance art 'have tended to devolve around a handful of iconic photographs and textual descriptions'<sup>28</sup> – it has specific repercussions for this performance, considering its principal theme of female creative practice and cultural recognition. *Interior Scroll* was a dynamic, multivalent performance composed of a sequence of ritualistic actions which significantly encompassed key moments of reading: reading aloud from the artist's book and from the inscribed scroll. These literary and intellectual acts, which verbally foreground the historical delimitation of women artists, are blurred or eclipsed by the most widely reproduced visual documentation. Through repetition these photographs reduce the complex multi-part performance to a single moment: shot from a low angle, again and again viewers encounter Schneemann's naked body on a draped table as she removes the scroll mid-routine.

Hilary Robinson recently observed that,

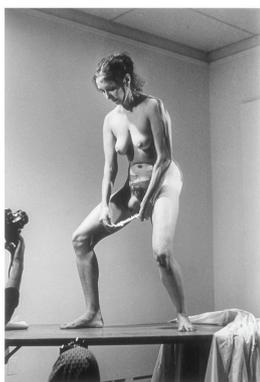
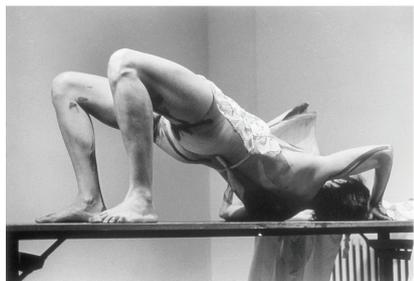
[O]ne still image alone can reinforce the issue she addresses in the text as a problem – how women and their work are represented as artists and as art. We end up seeing the image primarily as a "nude" rather than Schneemann as a dynamic performer determining the interaction of movement, physical elements and words.<sup>29</sup>

Robinson reminds her readers of the limits of photographic documentation, not to assert the ontological primacy of the live event, but to emphasise the way that performance artefacts, and the interaction between them, serves to mediate the event in particularly determined ways.<sup>30</sup> The encoding of *Interior Scroll* as a 'nude' would go some way toward explaining why its excessive visual prominence has not always been matched by a critical engagement with the meanings generated by its performance. Indeed, Schneemann has repeatedly insisted that 'the inclusion of my body as part of my work has obscured the major body of my work'.<sup>31</sup> In other words, her naked body's overdetermined representational status, conforming to the classical standards of the European nude, foreclosed – or at least, impeded – Schneemann's persistent efforts to assert her historical voice. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, large-scale photographs of *Interior Scroll* pop up on the pages of magazines in which the performance and its text are not, or scarcely, discussed, and later it frequently appears in art history textbooks as a metonym for some general idea about seventies feminism. One or two photographs of the 1975 enactment

**2 Anthony McCall, thirteen photographs of Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975. Stockholm: Moderna Museet. © Carolee Schneemann. Photo: Estate of Carolee Schneemann/Galerie Lelong & Co./Hales Gallery/ PPOW Gallery.**

shot by McCall have been most prominent in *Interior Scroll*'s publishing history (plate 2). One image freezes Schneemann in the act of retrieving the scroll: she squats slightly, one arm flung back while the other reaches towards her crotch. The awkwardness and exertion required of this action is palpable even as its eventual result cannot yet be observed. In the next shot Schneemann appears curiously static, a looming monolith filling the frame as she bows her head to read from the scroll.

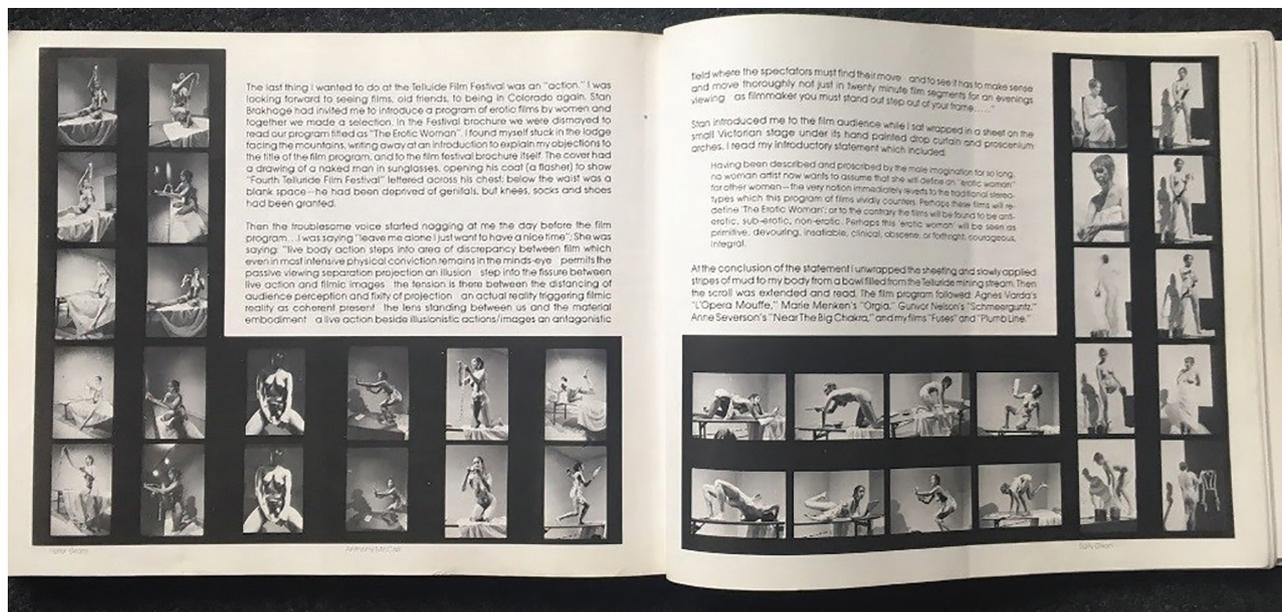
There is a robust and nuanced field of scholarship concerned with the ontological hierarchy of performance and its documentation, including the capacity



3 Still from Gideon Bachmann, 16 mm black and white footage of Carolee Schneemann, *Body Collage*, 1967. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art. © Carolee Schneemann. Photo: Estate of Carolee Schneemann/PPOW Gallery/Electronic Arts Intermix.



of photography to offer access to the historical experience of the performance. Schneemann's own attitude can be gleaned from her consistent dedication to the dense and unruly potential of a collage aesthetic, producing actions and documentation that seem purposely to blur distinctions between performance and historical record, body and text. These motifs, which are explored in *Interior Scroll*, emerge in her earlier work, *Body Collage*, a 3-minute 16 mm film made in 1967 (plate 3). The film captures Schneemann naked in her studio, pasting her body with glue before rolling exuberantly in piles of loosely shredded paper. The reel judders and jumps, and an instructive pattern emerges as Schneemann adopts classical poses and the frame freezes, sliding into a still-photographic image of her same pose reproduced in a book. Thus the artist's live body is continuously framed: by paintings and artworks on the studio walls, by the camera's lens, the torn paper (suggestive of knowledge and communication), and the freeze-frame book pages. The brief action sequence illustrates what Kathy O'Dell and Amelia Jones have described as body art's ability to reflexively highlight 'the "representational status" of such work rather than confirming



4 Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, Kingston, NY: McPherson & Co, 1997 [1975], pages 236 and 237, including photographs by Pater Grass, Anthony McCall and Sally Dixon of Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975. © Carolee Schneemann. Photo: Estate of Carolee Schneemann/McPherson & Co.

its ontological priority'.<sup>32</sup> The playfully unresolved blurring of body, self, image and text point toward the (female) subject's place in constructed histories – and, while this 1967 film enacted an investigation or exploration of those processes, Schneemann's performance eight years later articulated a forceful challenge to them.

It is no accident that in her 1979 book *More Than Meat Joy* Schneemann documented the performance through a facsimile 'reel' of photographs, conveying an energetic sense of the performance spilling across multiple pages, interspersed with text (plate 4). Schneemann's textual and textured records have persistently complicated the immobilising force of the iconic photographic document – which, according to Jones, is often too easily assumed to provide some authentic, unmediated access to the (true) performance and performing subject. Instead, the sequence of documentation – the photographs, scroll and supplementary writings – serves to amplify the 'insufficiency and incoherence of the body-as-subject' by emphasising 'the role of representation in momentarily securing its meanings'.<sup>33</sup> This article is not therefore interested in prioritising the historical moment of performance; rather, it tries to understand and conceptualise Schneemann's self-perceptive role in constructing and shaping the historical narratives giving meaning to both her body and body of work.

In 2016, a suite consisting of thirteen of McCall's photographs was packaged for sale by Carolina Nitsch gallery. One less-frequently reproduced image stands out from this collection because of its unusual, yet precise, perspective on the performance (plate 5). Schneemann is shown sitting on the familiar draped table, naked and marked, but relaxed and fully absorbed in reading the piece of un-scrolled paper held between her hands. Although the artist is dramatically spot-lit and commands focus, she is positioned in the background of the photograph, and three silhouetted figures stand between her and McCall's lens. The three figures hold recording equipment and crouch or stand, mid-step, around Schneemann, while wires and other filming accoutrements trail across the floor and clutter the nearby table. A large rectangular canvas hung on an adjacent wall adds a dramatic visual element whilst underscoring a delineation between artwork and audience, Schneemann positioned ambivalently in the middle. What is fascinating about this photograph is how it foregrounds the framing of *Interior Scroll* as a mediated live performance and emphasises the extent to which Schneemann's

live action is inseparable from her direction and, later, management of its photographic mediation.<sup>34</sup>

Peggy Phelan has pointed out that ‘the photograph cannot amplify the dramatic sound of Schneemann reading’, to which Clare Johnson adds that ‘the vocal dimension of the performance has turned into a purely visual artefact’.<sup>35</sup> However, it is also true that Schneemann’s voice refuses to stay silenced. We may not hear Schneemann’s words, but reading them again, and again, and again, in books and magazines, or layered into artworks, encourages reader-viewers to imagine their shape and sound as the words chime alongside the notorious images.<sup>36</sup> A screenprint held in the collection at Tate Modern, for instance, comprises one of McCall’s photographs flanked on either side by the performance script, once again demonstrating Schneemann’s resistance to detaching image from text.<sup>37</sup> Like so much of the artist’s output this document is layered and edited, stained with darkening fluids evoking the bodily alongside the textual and photographic. Lucy Lippard famously suggested that ‘collage seems to me to be a particularly female medium, not only because it offers a way of knitting the fragments of our lives together but also because it potentially leaves nothing out.’ In the compilation of words and images and forms, the collagist investigates ‘the cultural and social myths on which they are based’. The discontinuous, collage aesthetic that pervades Schneemann’s records is thus a deeply political means of navigating and making sense of the world rather than a discrete aesthetic choice.<sup>38</sup>

By studying the reception history of *Interior Scroll*, the concrete effects of Schneemann’s sustained mediation become swiftly apparent in that the artist’s spoken and written words have shaped and determined the critical discourse. Emerging psychically as a dream-inspired drawing in which a figure extracts a text from her

**5 Anthony McCall, photograph of Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975. Stockholm: Moderna Museet. © Carolee Schneemann. Photo: Estate of Carolee Schneemann/Galerie Lelong & Co./Hales Gallery/PPOW Gallery.**





**6 Carolee Schneemann, preparatory drawing for *Interior Scroll*, 1974. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute (950001). © Carolee Schneemann. Photo: Artists Rights Society.**

vagina next to the inscription 'the message' (plate 6), *Interior Scroll* materialised as two physical enactments, before returning to the printed page as performance document.<sup>39</sup> The performance proclaims the vagina as not only a site of physical procreation, but a source of understanding and creativity. The structural and psychic relations of body, text and image are implicated in this action and its subsequent inscription in art's canon; further analysis of this significant moment of art-historical agency is needed to start untangling those relations. *Interior Scroll* emblematises Schneemann's acute comprehension of the institutional and conceptual frameworks that enclose women's bodies and art. In a 1997 interview discussing her earlier artworks of the 1960s and 1970s, Schneemann alludes to these mediating frames, establishing *Interior Scroll* as an especially crucial enquiry: '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? ... And by gum... Once I got to *Interior Scroll* I was in deep shit!'<sup>40</sup>

### Writing Her Self

It is instructive to consider the feminist theoretical contexts within which *Interior Scroll* was produced. Of particular relevance is the school of 'French Feminism' and its theorising of *écriture féminine*. While there are inescapable distinctions between those associated writers, one can observe a consistent belief in the revolutionary potential of (albeit varied) feminine experience as an Othered position from which to deconstruct normative, patriarchal culture.<sup>41</sup> Within *écriture féminine*,

writing and sexuality assume an intertwined and prominent symbolic position. It is an idea most forcefully articulated by Hélène Cixous in her essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa', which famously begins: 'Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies... Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.'<sup>42</sup> The idea that women's culturally repressed, embodied writing would provide a joyful, alternative script to phallogocentric systems was an exciting and influential attitude; as Ann Rosalind Jones observes, 'to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of female writing, a powerful alternative discourse seems possible: to write from the body is to recreate the world.'<sup>43</sup>

The parallels with Schneemann's performance are instantly apparent and I am certainly not the first person to point out such a correspondence, although it has rarely warranted more than a few throwaway comments from critics.<sup>44</sup> In an interview given in 1991 Schneemann observed that her artwork had been coolly disavowed by many feminists who considered it 'essentialist', thus 'it is only with Cixous [sic] the French theoretician, that I get my kind of sensuous insight put into an analytic position.'<sup>45</sup> Cixous' foundational essay was published the same year as *Interior Scroll*'s initial enactment, but it was not translated into English until 1976. Although any direct influence is unfeasible, both performance and essay instantiate particular ideas about femininity, embodiment and creativity that were symptomatic of the period.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Cixous' admission of feeling 'so full of luminous torrents I could burst' finds pleasing correspondence with Schneemann's uninhibited extraction of the scroll, a torrent of written words expressed by her body.

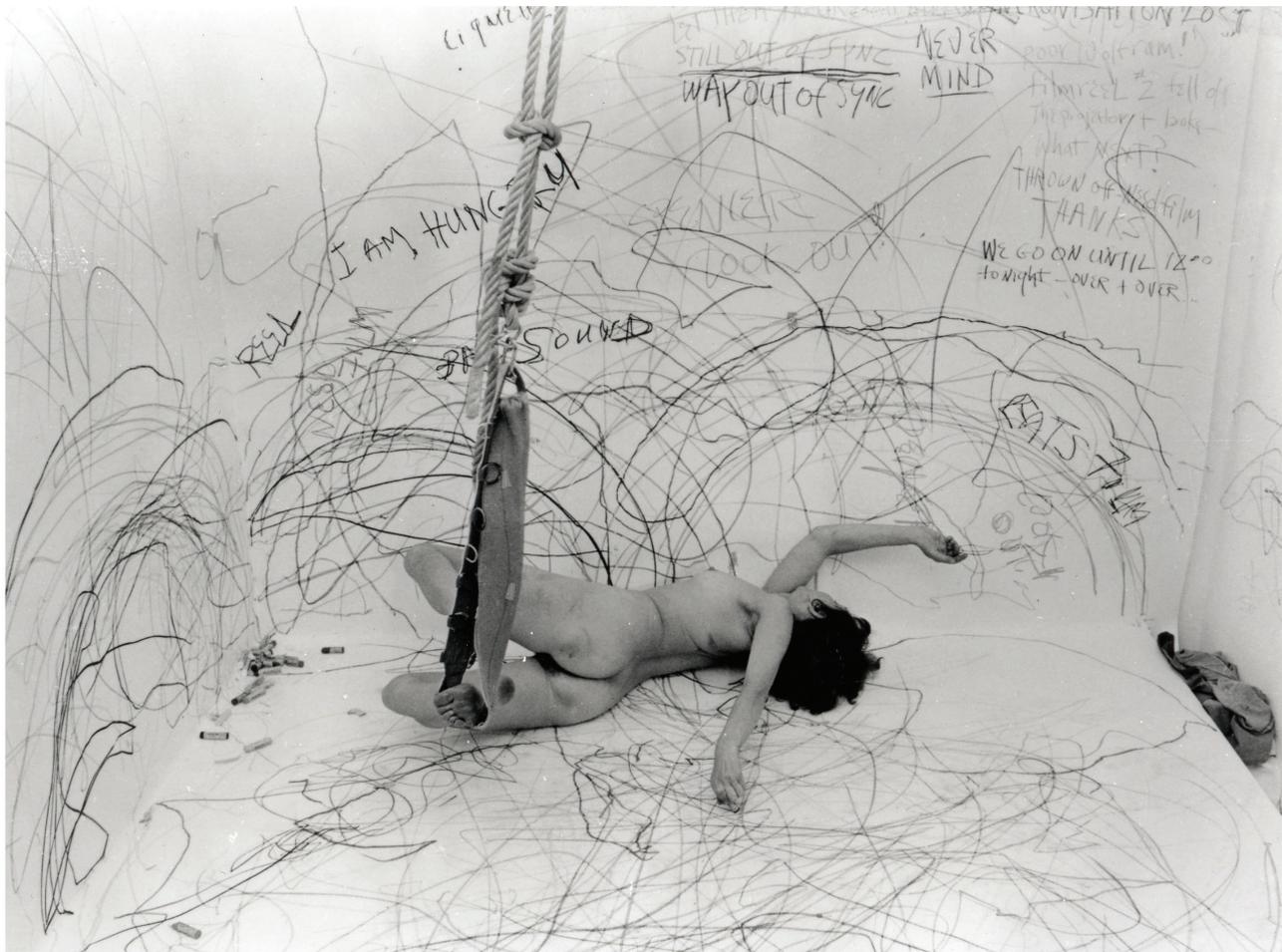
Much of Schneemann's assemblage and performance work in this period explores the hazy borderlines between body and text, action and knowledge, materiality and rational thought. This is indicated by the recurrent presence of shredded and collaged newspapers, or handwritten materials, print often forming an environment within which the body can play (plate 7 and plate 8, and see plate 4). The evocative exchanges between bodies and texts hint at the ways in which these boundaries have been marked inescapably by gender. If modernist art historical judgement had been founded on Cartesian dualism, on an ontological distinction between the rational thinking self and the embodied sensate self, Schneemann's artwork counters these divisions by explicitly staging knowledge as an always embodied phenomenon.<sup>47</sup> As the artist commanded, 'Go back into the body, which is where all the splits in Western culture occur.'<sup>48</sup>

In an important essay of 1981, 'The Blank Page and Women's Creativity', Susan Gubar sheds further light on this distinction. Gubar begins with Pygmalion and Galatea, a tale that is contended to be structurally significant because its mythic sculptor of human life has 'evaded the humiliation, shared by many men, of acknowledging that it is he who is created out of and from the female body.'<sup>49</sup> An extensive glossary of Western literary history follows, demonstrating that '[t]he model of the pen/penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation.'<sup>50</sup> Schneemann understood this burden of representation all too well. Records of the artist's body, rooted time and again in textured print environments, constitute an investigatory project upon this problem. Following her experiences of participating in *Site*, *Interior Scroll* demonstrates Schneemann's expanding comprehension that her material body was marked and could not be separated out from its documented, framed, already-written status in masculinist art history (and society) of the time. Schneemann acknowledges the representational burden

in her own writing, referencing distortive creation myths including that of Athena produced out of Zeus's head, Dionysus sprung from his father's thigh, and Jesus Christ born of a virgin mother. In the artist's view, '[p]olitical and personal violence against women is twinned behind/within this stunting defeminisation of history.'<sup>51</sup>

Cixous proposes that the emancipatory pleasure of women's laughter acts to disturb the weight of mythic literary representation – the Medusa's laugh of the article title. Because, as Gubar plainly puts it, 'the female body has been feared for its power to articulate itself.'<sup>52</sup> Schneemann's drawing of a written text from her vagina provocatively stages this articulation, conflating nature with culture whilst mocking the counterfeiting man of mythology who aims to usurp feminine procreativity with his art. Schneemann's, we might say, is a mode of hysterical production, of excessive expressive words issuing uncontrollably from the womb.<sup>53</sup> And yet, like Schneider, I am wary of too simply inscribing Schneemann's performance within the essentialising discourses that have been so thoroughly examined and nuanced within feminist discourse. Instead, what 'literally comes out of Schneemann's incontinent body... is deeply conflicted, split between an invocation of sacrility and a recitation of the history of her delimitation within patriarchy.'<sup>54</sup> The script Schneemann reads acknowledges the specifics of a film industry that 'cannot look' at her personal, cluttered films, recognising how subjects come to signify always in relation to history and mechanisms of social organisation. Schneider has written compellingly about the 'binary terror' engendered by Schneemann's performances of this period, describing her 'double

**7 Henrik Gaard, photograph of Carolee Schneemann, *Up to and Including Her Limits*, 1971-76. New York: Museum of Modern Art. © Carolee Schneemann. Photo: Estate of Carolee Schneemann/Galerie Lelong & Co./Hales Gallery/ PPOW Gallery.**





8 Al Giese, photograph of Ruth Emerson in Carolee Schneemann's *Newspaper Event*, performed at Judson Memorial Church, 1963. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute (Series X, Carolee Schneemann Papers, Album 2). Photo: Estate of Carolee Schneemann/Galerie Lelong & Co./Hales Gallery/PPOW Gallery.

gesture' of appearing 'paradoxically essentialist and constructivist at once'.<sup>55</sup> This dual agency, and the paradox of being both *female* artistic subject and object, generated an ontological 'messiness' that resisted art history's categorising orders, complementing the material disorder of Schneemann's multimodal, collaged and 'hand-touched' artistic outputs.

There is, however, further value to considering Schneemann's action in relation to *écriture féminine* and its joyful celebration of the expressive female body.<sup>56</sup> As Schneider writes, for women artists 'The explicit body itself was not the problem – there had been exposure in art for centuries – but the lines by which the explicit body was explicated, by which it was framed, displayed, and, even more importantly, "authored", had been very well policed, by juridical and avant-garde establishments alike.'<sup>57</sup> Following her performance of *Interior Scroll*, Schneemann sets about framing the performance and securing a space in art history within which her art production might register. In addition to the management of photographic documentation discussed above, an examination of her active authorship (through publishing) and interlocution (via countless interviews and letters) demonstrates the extent to which Schneemann engaged in a mode of communication that put pressure on art history's encoded operations. It is in this expansive sense that *Interior Scroll* materialises aspects of *écriture féminine*, in that the theoretical project is scripted, rehearsed and lived through the body of the artist, initially as a performative gesture and, thereafter, as an authorial intervention within the historical operations giving shape to her corpus of work.

### The Artist as Historian

There was limited critical literature available on performance art throughout the 1960s and 1970s, beyond art press reviews and specialist magazines such as *High Performance* and *Avalanche*. Writings about Schneemann's art consequently emerged in the contexts of experimental film, poetry and dance, which her intermedia creations traversed.<sup>58</sup> The artist was most well-known for her controversial group performance *Meat Joy* (1964); but, although described as 'one of the most consistently interesting Happeners', critics insistently filtered Schneemann's contribution through the pioneering work of male artists with whom she was associated (the 'Art Stud Club' as she termed it).<sup>59</sup> Even Roselee Goldberg's trailblazing book of 1979, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, scarcely alludes to Schneemann's significant contribution to the field. Faced with this limited critical response, as one of Schneemann's most constant supporters Kristine Stiles puts it, the artist made the 'decision to write herself into history'.<sup>60</sup>

Schneemann's writing had been circulated in influential experimental poetry journals and anthologies, and alongside her industrious letter- and diary-writing she produced two books in the early 1970s.<sup>61</sup> One mainstream publisher praised *Parts of a Body House Book* as 'provocative, unique, sensuous, disturbing', and yet, perhaps acknowledging the heterogeneous, tactile, experimental form of the material, he added: 'But totally and absolutely impossible for this particular establishment NY publishing house to get involved with.'<sup>62</sup> *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings* of 1979 extended this aesthetic with a densely textured volume chronicling Schneemann's numerous artistic endeavours. Organised with the assistance of publisher Bruce McPherson (also her partner at the time), it was her most commercially shrewd book to date and thus more explicitly geared towards countering the critical silence that had enveloped her artwork. The book, described as a *festschrift*, comprised a variety of documents including photographs, performance scores, drawings, letters, notebook and diary entries, which are layered throughout in the form of a scrapbook collage.

Despite its careful formatting and ordered chronology, the book's palimpsestic layout instantiates the 'painterly mess', 'personal clutter' and 'diaristic indulgence' that Schneemann describes in the script of *Interior Scroll* (see plate 4). Refusing the ordering logic of medium, such tactile 'messiness' suffuses Schneemann's output, and the artist persistently describes her trans-media artworks as an extended mode of painting, beginning with mark-making and drawing on paper before taking particular forms.<sup>63</sup> As an object, *More Than Meat Joy* provokes a dynamic engagement somewhere between reading and viewing. The formative influence of avant-garde film is perceptible in the overlaid collage layouts of the book – and, indeed, can be detected in the 'interior scroll' itself which resembles a spooled film-roll, each fold a frame.<sup>64</sup> Schneemann's typewritten letters also stage a dramatic encounter somewhere beyond reading, the pages teeming with doodles, corrections, illustrations and otherwise manipulated by hand. Viewed as an archive, her literary and visual works intimate an enveloping, continuous pattern of creation that traverses drawing, painting, assemblage, performance, and filmmaking, returning to writing and drawing in the letters and diaries. This cyclical, non-linear, eccentric mode of production bears formal resemblance to the kinds of transgressive, heterogeneous and fluid creativity described in *écriture féminine*. Schneemann contended that 'writing is diverted drawing. . . the drawing unravels thought', suggesting an investment in the discontinuous and generously open-ended creative production that Cixous viewed as fundamentally feminine.<sup>65</sup> It also alludes to a connection between the hand drawing on the page and the drawing of a scroll, as two embodied acts that explore and generate knowledge. As Karen di Franco argues: 'Just as Schneemann's body acted as an obstruction to those who critiqued her performance, her embodied

writing and lack of neutrality as represented visually within [Parts of a Body House Book], formulates a particular type of possession within the writing, that compels the reader to voice Schneemann's thoughts off the page.<sup>66</sup> The associations between bodily interiority and the book structure are certainly clearest in her 1972 publication, but linger in later writings and of course the *Interior Scroll* performance itself.

Schneemann was not alone in seizing the opportunities afforded by developments in commercial printing and production technologies. As Tony White describes it, 'From the early 1970s and into the early 1980s, many artists were self-consciously producing or publishing artists' books that can be best described as democratic multiples. They were intentionally promoted and distributed in part as a reaction to the artists' books of the 1960s that were still seen as part of the gallery system.'<sup>67</sup> This decentralising mission was especially significant for a woman artist (a circumscribed 'cunt mascot') who had been consistently relegated to the edges of both the alternative and commercial art fields. It is clear from her tenacious engagement with the publishing sphere that Schneemann possessed a markedly self-conscious awareness of contemporary art's expanding magazine and book culture, particularly its function in inaugurating the tone of an artistic legacy. Even as she assiduously produced artwork and participated publicly in various transatlantic artistic groups and events, Schneemann did not lose sight of the void in art's recorded history, and she continued to develop her long-term 'istory' project - dropping the 'h' to invoke historiography's gendered dimension.<sup>68</sup>

At the time of its publication, observant reviewers of *More Than Meat Joy* picked up on Schneemann's tactical determination of the critical and art-historical terrain. In a glowing review of 1980, Lawrence Alloway wrote: 'Something of the elusiveness of Schneemann's position, the difficulty of interpreting body use, can be gauged from Roselee Goldberg's failure to cope with the artist in her recent book *Performance*. Hence the importance of *More Than Meat Joy* as a solid dossier of an original work in progress.'<sup>69</sup> Schneemann, he added, 'knows the lure of documentation and uses it very well to arrest and record the sequences of performance.' Three years later Sayre provided another sympathetic reading of the book, suggesting: 'What is new, precisely, about Schneemann's art is the way it historicises both the body and performance art itself'.<sup>70</sup> The book possesses not only a formal coherency but 'a narrative and historical coherency as well'.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, it was primarily through this publication that Schneemann forged a historical lineage for her own practice and cleverly shaped the logic of her own historical legacy. Its effect, in the words of Stiles, was to 'co-opt criticism and establish a blueprint for how her history would be written'.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Schneemann struggled to attract serious reviews and did not secure a dealer until Max Hutchinson agreed to represent her in the early 1980s.<sup>73</sup> The heterogeneity of Schneemann's output may be partly to blame here, or as Dan Cameron described it in 1983, 'the art establishment's continuing inability to digest what she does as art'.<sup>74</sup> It was also, pressingly, the artist's unashamed celebration of sexuality and nudity which foregrounded her gendered body and deterred critics.<sup>75</sup> Thomas McEvilley bluntly highlighted the sexist double standard of the industry when he wrote in 1985, 'It was not, I think, considerations of quality that caused Schneemann's works to receive virtually no attention while those of her male contemporaries were spotlighted'.<sup>76</sup> According to Schneemann, Hutchinson had only agreed to represent her on the condition that she focussed on her kinetic/assemblage works, explaining: 'I will not be able to establish the seriousness of these constructed works unless you promise not to perform in New York for the next few years because the culture just can't handle that double aspect of your work'.<sup>77</sup> Heading into the 1980s, this confluence of factors including gallery representation and a growing art market

worked to enhance her critical reputation, while the artist's publications operated to establish a tone and language with which to discuss the performance work.

### The Artist as Interlocutor

Documentation of *Interior Scroll* surfaces across the pages of alternative art and visual culture magazines into the 1980s. The continual recurrence of Schneemann's own words - quoted or paraphrased from interviews or the artist's publications - indicate an interpretive aperture, an absence of critical language or conceptual framework with which to apprehend the work. Instead her words persistently shaped the critical terrain. The steady development of performance studies, however, together with feminist perspectives on visual culture, gradually unfurled a disciplinary script within which Schneemann's work would register. Schneemann credits a 1983 exhibition catalogue edited by Moira Roth as that 'which brought the work into real discussion two or three years after it was made'.<sup>78</sup> *The Amazing Decade: Women's Performance Art 1970-1980* instated Schneemann as a 'veteran' of women's performance art: Roth's historical survey essay began with a discussion of *Interior Scroll* as well as a full-page photograph of Schneemann removing the folded paper, unmistakably showcasing the female artist as producer of meaning by emphasising her extraction of cultural knowledge from the body.<sup>79</sup>

Beyond this tribute, however, Schneemann's artwork was not smoothly received within feminist scholarship of the period. The artist's invocation of pre-patriarchal goddess culture and exuberant celebration of her naked body did not correspond with prevailing feminist poststructuralism and its suspicion of essentialism and binary gender logic, nor with its demands for the destruction of visual pleasure. These debates are by now well-rehearsed. However, the uneasiness of feminist critics was possibly embedded in the performance itself. In 1988 Schneemann revealed that the dismissive 'happy man' to whom she refers in the scroll's script was in fact the pioneering film theorist Annette Michelson. This is interesting as it suggests 'maleness' and 'femaleness' do not cohere in the body but in the mind, speech and practices of the subject. Schneemann has associated a particular, theoretical, structuralist approach in critical writing as 'male', insofar as it seeks to delegitimise, mock, or castigate celebratory, body- and pleasure-centred feminism by deeming it essentialist, messy, or too personal. However, to my knowledge, no one has questioned whether this was true at the time of the performance or an embellishment added after the fact, given the context of 1980s feminist criticism. Again, this raises questions of how and to what extent Schneemann has shaped readings of the artwork - and continued to unsettle established or tidy understandings of the performance.

In 1991 the artist diagnosed the problem as follows: 'The disavowal and proscription of "essentialism" by academic critics has left much of my recent work in suspension. Are there structures of evasion within feminist analysis? ... Is critical neglect of my current work a form of censorship?'<sup>80</sup> This evasion or neglect makes palpable the difficulty that Schneemann's 'messy' body and body of work presented for both mainstream and feminist art history. Kathy Constantinides, one of the first writers to provide a serious historical appraisal of *Interior Scroll*, wrote to Schneemann in the early 1990s to explain the challenge she faced in convincing a publisher to accept her article: 'I got nowhere with *Art in America* or *Genders*.'<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, within a mutable critical landscape, the work's reception would continue to evolve, and by 1992 Lynda Nead could remind readers that 'the problems of essentialism should not obscure the radical intervention that this work made.'<sup>82</sup>

Another critical sea-change saw the historical and conceptual reassessment of performance art begin in earnest at the turn of the 1990s. Henry Sayre's influential book *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (1989) celebrated the 'new

feminist avant-garde' and included extensive, supportive analysis of Schneemann's artwork. According to Stiles, 'the 'most valuable contribution he has made. . . is to rescue Schneemann's work from the margins of history where it has suffered neglect for nearly 30 years.'<sup>83</sup> Major survey exhibitions and catalogues about performance art followed,<sup>84</sup> as did scholarly monographs including Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Rebecca Schneider's *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997), Kathy O'Dell's *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (1998) and Amelia Jones's *Body Art/ Performing the Subject* (1998). A summary of their various positions is not needed here, except to point out that O'Dell, Jones and Schneider each offered complex theoretical examinations that revisited and resisted the criticisms of essentialism or of the artist's exploiting her own body and sexuality, which had dogged understandings of Schneemann's work. Writers continued to revisit and nuance readings of Schneemann's earlier works, updating and discovering new meanings in the performances. Johannes Birringer, for example, argued that Schneemann's joyously affirmative performances counteracted new disciplinary regimes of the body, and he insisted that those artworks 'remain absolutely pertinent to contemporary debates about sexual politics in a phobic, brutalist society obsessed with a pathological fear of uncontrollable bodies.'<sup>85</sup>

Most significant for this investigation is not only that performance theorists, historians, curators and critics began revisiting *Interior Scroll* at this time, but that so many were within Schneemann's correspondence circle. The artist's anxieties over misinterpretation had been freely showcased in her self-edited collections and on public platforms, such as a 1983 debate with McEvilley on the letters pages of *Artforum*.<sup>86</sup> However, driven partly by financial necessity, in the mid-1990s Schneemann sold large sections of her correspondence archive to the Getty Research Institute, and combing these private letters reveals the extent of her desire for interpretive control. Schneemann's hand is remarkably visible on the papers and the article drafts that she sent back-and-forth to writers, with embellishments, editing, scrawls and disagreements – a palimpsest of entangled critical interactions. At times these were extensive discussions: Constantinides' 1990 article reveals additions and Schneemann has encouragingly marked passages as 'good', or suggested sections to 'open up'. In 1993 Kathy O'Dell sent a friendly post-it note: 'Hi Kiddo!', alongside a draft of 'Fluxus Feminus' which Schneemann has written upon and added an exclamatory 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' to a particularly admired passage.<sup>87</sup> Schneemann received and advised on publication drafts from Joan Semmel, Amy Christine Straayer, and established a particularly rich rapport with Sayre, inviting him to 'send more chapters' of *The Object of Performance*.<sup>88</sup> In these exchanges Schneemann is revealed to be a thoughtful reader although occasionally also a critical one, scrawling 'could be better' upon an early draft of Joanna Freuh's 'Polymorphous Perversities', and more often than not adding factual and typographic corrections to authors' manuscripts.<sup>89</sup> Her archives contain countless heavily edited interviews, in which she would revise and emphasise certain discussion points (for instance a 1991 interview with Carl Heyward later published in *Art Papers*). At times she also assumed the role of publicist, as in an exchange with art historian Nick Kaye in 1993 where, in addition to annotating a 10-page article draft, she enclosed a copy of a recent article, writing, 'here is a truly wonderful analysis of my recent work by Johannes Birringer.'<sup>90</sup>

Schneemann could be flattering and persuasive, responding to Sayre with the exclamatory: 'You have the fullest sight of SITE; it will never be seen as a titillating sort of minimalist salon-piece with me as its decorative object. . . again. Thank you for the consciousness of my conscious "role".'<sup>91</sup> Indeed numerous writers acknowledge Schneemann's camaraderie and support. Schneider writes in the acknowledgments of her book that Schneemann 'has been more than generous, making her home, her personal

archives, and her friendship available to me throughout the research and writing process.<sup>92</sup> Stiles has also thanked the artist for her friendship and wrote directly in a letter of 1985: 'It was important seeing and having you here. I need your friendship and value it a lot.'<sup>93</sup> It is impossible to trace decisively the effects of these affective exchanges, although they certainly had some influence upon the artist's growing reputation as her historical legacy was pulled into place. In her pioneering body-art study of 1998, Amelia Jones mentions that a letter 'sent to me by Schneemann... encouraged me to revise my earlier, more blunt readings of her work; swayed by her powerful self-readings, I have done this in places.'<sup>94</sup> While Jones's footnote discloses a generative exchange between the art historian and artist, it also indicates the extent to which Schneemann strove to manage the historical mediation of her work. Accordingly, the correspondences and essay notations reveal a rarely seen mode of agential labour, demonstrating how Schneemann maintained a coterie of supportive writers, historians and critics, as she passionately orchestrated her own entry into history. This was an intriguing point of agency for a woman artist of the period, as writing, networking and editing all served as strategic tools in Schneemann's incursion within art history.

### **Could I Introduce the Meanings of This Body?**

Schneemann's publications and dynamic exchanges permit a glimpse of the artist's editorial labour as she engaged in a supportive dialogue over decades with critics and historians, at times providing her own 'powerful self-readings' in a persistent struggle for historical representation, as well as building a professional and financially profitable career from her art practice.<sup>95</sup> To some extent Schneemann is not unique in these professional activities. Indeed her ambitious strategies of self-presentation and affective exchange reflect more general transformations of the figure of the artist in the social imaginary, as s/he shifted from that of romantic pioneer to networked cultural worker. These writings and correspondences demonstrate the labour involved in accumulating the kind of cultural and social capital required to maintain a professional career in the contemporary art sector.

The mid-twentieth century was witness to many avant-garde intermedia projects and the expansion of visual arts publishing industries in which artists' voices could be heard. Schneemann's artistic and literary outputs therefore correspond to this changing cultural landscape. However, read in relation to *Interior Scroll*, her publishing acts take on specific characteristics with regard to gender, representation and history. While this essay has begun tracing the pragmatic forms of affective and immaterial labour that go into building a professional art career, by treating *Interior Scroll* as a keystone, Schneemann's determined interlocution correspondingly reveals the distinctive labour requirements necessitated by being a woman artist, working prior to and largely in isolation from an organised feminist art movement, striving to carve out a space in which her works could register publicly. In the exchange of ideas and friendship, one can observe the creation of a supportive network within an art environment only beginning to recognise and accommodate the work of women artists and understand the important contribution of performance art.

Viewed in its entirety, traversing medium and movements, Schneemann's oeuvre often registers as clutter, inchoate, a painterly mess – and there is much value in this assessment, an unfinished quality that suggests process, a life unfolding. But looking at the artist's careful editorial processes facilitates an appreciation of the life-long labour of networking, negotiating and writing art history that was demanded by her position on the periphery of both male avant-garde and feminist art circles. According to Stiles, the value of these letters is to be found in Schneemann's self-construction, the act of

writing ‘permitting her to observe herself as if from the outside’.<sup>96</sup> This implication of measured, logical and critical self-reflection is, significantly, all the things her inchoate and exuberant work is habitually characterised as not. However, these reflections are not intended to impose a coherent, ordering narrative to *Interior Scroll*’s historiography, but to point towards its unsettling plurality. While *Interior Scroll* is frequently acknowledged as expressive, playful and personal, a 1989 interview with the artist is notable for describing the hard work of the performance: ‘I was folding up these little strips of paper, folding them into accordion shapes, and writing a message on them. . . it hurt, like all the edges were cutting, so we got out a lot of cold cream. . . the strip was this long [indicating arm’s length] I said somehow I have to get something that long inside. And that was real hard; and not only that, I had written in ink so that when I pulled it out it all ran. And I knew that since I had that image I had to make it work and that it should be this wonderful kind of thread of knowledge that was going to be emerging.’<sup>97</sup> The faintness with which this physical labour was registered is extended in the illegibility of Schneemann’s historical and editorial labour, efforts which are only now coming into historical focus as part of her continuous and non-differentiated life-long practice.

The performance of *Interior Scroll* in 1975-77 is a key moment that symbolises Schneemann’s psychic and institutional emergence into historical visibility. The performance dramatically stages the inescapable mediation of the female body across numerous cultural vectors including photography, film criticism, fine art, and history. Schneemann experientially understood what Cixous would put in writing that same year, that ‘Woman must write her self. . . Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.’<sup>98</sup> Schneemann’s self-authoring required not only the one act (the performance) but myriad subsequent acts of writing, speaking and insistent inscription to put pressure upon the calcified cultural operations of art history. Viewed panoramically as in this article, we can see clearly how Schneemann’s performance and determined interlocution coalesces as a lucid if richly unresolved assemblage, an answer to the question: could I introduce the meanings of this body? Could I make it insist on meanings conventionally resisted?

#### Notes

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- 1 Susan Gubar, ‘“The Blank Page” and Female Creativity’, *Critical Inquiry* vol.8, no.2, Winter 1981, pp. 243-263, p. 246.
- 2 The book was published in three editions on 1974, 1975 and 1976. Schneemann explains the title: ‘Around twelve years old I knew a few names of ‘great artists.’ . . . I decided a painter named ‘Cézanne’ would be my mascot; I would assume Cézanne was unquestionably a woman – after all the “anne” in it was feminine.’ Reprinted in *Imaging her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (MIT Press: Cambridge M.A., 2002), p. 145.
- 3 Mindful of focus, I have chosen to exclude from this article the 1993 re-performance of *Interior Scroll*, as it opens questions about temporality and re-enactment that are addressed more thoroughly elsewhere. See, for instance, Catherine Grant, ‘A Time of One’s Own’, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol.39, no.3, Dec 2016, pp. 357-376, and Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2012).
- 4 Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings* (McPherson and Co.: New York, 1979/1997), p.236.
- 5 The first performance iteration also included a segment, ‘Be Prepared’, from Schneemann’s publication, *Parts of a Body House Book* (Devon: Beau Geste Press) 1972.
- 6 *More Than Meat Joy*, p. 238.
- 7 Kristine Stiles ed., *Correspondence Course: an Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and her Circle* (Duke University Press: Durham NC, 2010). Carolee Schneemann: *Unforgivable* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2015). Schneemann: *Kinetic Painting*, at MoMA PS1, New York, Oct-March 2018. This institutional recognition was accelerated by a series of blockbuster exhibitions in 2007, the so-called ‘year of feminism’ which has been widely written about.
- 8 Such self-presentation strategies were not entirely unique to Schneemann; indeed, prior to the emergence of a cohesive feminist political and art movement such agential activities may have been necessary for many women artists. Suzanne Hudson has proposed comparable arguments about Agnes Martin in *Night Sea* (Afterall; MIT Press: Cambridge M.A., 2016). Stiles has worked closely with Schneemann since the 1990s to produce an edition of her letters and is also the first person to seriously theorise those writings as part of her wider practice.
- 9 It was only after completing this article that I was introduced to the fantastic work of Martha Barratt, who has proposed Schneemann’s

- archives as a 'constitutive element of her performance practice [demonstrating a] critical attitude towards the structure of the traditional archive'. Our arguments about Schneemann's auto-documentation and determined management of her critical reputation have clear parallels, and perhaps this suggests something about the direction of research as a generation of artists sprung from the feminist 'second wave' confront the challenges of later-career archival historicisation. See Barratt, 'Autobiography, Time, and Documentation in the Performances and Auto-Archives of Carolee Schneemann', *Visual Resources*, Vol. 21, No. 3-4 (2016): 282-305.
- 10 Carolee Schneemann, 'The Obscene Body/Politic', *Art Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (1991): pp. 28-35, see p. 33. In a lecture Schneemann described it as 'a piece that I never wanted to do'. Boston Museum School of the Fine Arts, 22 February 1988. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 73, folder 2, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
  - 11 Sayre, *The Object of Performance: the American avant-garde since 1970*, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p.76.
  - 12 I say replaceable as, during a later performance in Philadelphia, Olga Adorno Klüver substituted Schneemann as the Olympia-esque model.
  - 13 Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, p.31. Schneider discusses the performance at some length pp.27-31.
  - 14 Sayre, p.76. As David Getsy reminds us, however, muteness and stillness are not synonymous with a total absence of resistance, and he directs readers to consider the 'theater of power relations between active viewers and passive statues'. Although writing in relation to statuary, Getsy's observations appear pertinent to a discussion of Site, which cast Schneemann in the role of human statue or tableau. In this latent labour of holding the body motionless, Schneemann's Site might benefit from comparison with Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, first performed in Tokyo that same year. David J Getsy, 'Acts of Stillness: Statues, Performativity and Passive Resistance', *Criticism*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Winter 2014), pp. 1-20, 1.
  - 15 Interview with Priscilla Frank, 'Carolee Schneemann, Feminist Performance Pioneer, Talks 'Olympia,' Deodorant and Selfies', *Huffington Post*, 12/11/2013. Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/11/carolee-schneemann\\_n\\_4415261.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/11/carolee-schneemann_n_4415261.html). Last accessed 15/02/2017.
  - 16 Until, that is, the feminist historian Eunice Lipton made strides towards recovering and re-imagining Meurent's biography in *Alias Olympia*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.
  - 17 Schneider, *Explicit Body*, p.31.
  - 18 Maurice Berger, *ENDGAME: Strategies of Postmodernist Performance*, Hunter College art Gallery, 16 May-20 June 1984, p.4. Schneemann has made corrections on her copy, including the spelling of her surname.
  - 19 Virginia Spivey goes so far as to grant an anthropomorphic agency to the sheets of plywood Morris wields; an agency the living, breathing Schneemann is said to 'lack completely'. Virginia Spivey, 'Sites of Subjectivity: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and Dance', *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2 / Vol. 36, No.1 (winter 2003 – summer 2004), pp. 113-130, see p. 124.
  - 20 Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Documentext, 1979), p. 194. Schneemann's contributions were overlooked in early publications relating to Fluxus and Happenings in the US. For more detail on the sexism she experienced while living and working in London see Sylvie Simonds' doctoral thesis, 'A Countercultural Movement: Examining Carolee Schneemann's Kinetic Theatre Between 1963 and 1970', McGill University: Montreal, 2013, pp. 162-198.
  - 21 Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Documentext, 1979), p. 196. This unsent letter to Allan Kaprow was also published in her earlier book *Cézanne She Was a Great Painter*.
  - 22 Letter from Schneemann to Henry Sayre dated 15 July 1986. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 71, folder 4 Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
  - 23 See Stiles ed., *Correspondence Course*.
  - 24 See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art-Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
  - 25 According to Schneemann, the first performance was also filmed by a feminist filmmaker who withheld the footage. See 'Interior Squirrel and the Vicissitudes of History', in Jones and Heathfield eds., *Perform: Repeat: Record: Live Art in History*, Bristol; Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2012: 441-456.
  - 26 The Brooklyn Museum acquired a McCall photograph by gift in 2005, presumably in anticipation of the 2007 launch of its Center for Feminist Art. Stockholm's Moderna Museet acquired a suite of 13 photographs in 2007 as part of the 'Second Museum of Our Wishes', an acquisition project addressing gender disparity in the collection. In 2009 the Herbert F Johnson Museum in New York acquired the same portfolio of 13 images and, in 2012, London's Tate purchased a screenprinted edition of McCall's photographs flanked by the scroll's text.
  - 27 Michael Bracewell, 'Other Voices: Interview with Carolee Schneemann', *Frieze Magazine*, October 2001, np.
  - 28 Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence', *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2011, pp. 16-45, 21.
  - 29 Hilary Robinson ed., *Feminism-Art-Theory: An anthology, 1968-2014*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boston: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), p. 9.
  - 30 Amelia Jones deconstructs the ontological hierarchy between performance and its record in her well-known essay, "'Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation', *Art Journal*, Winter 1997. She argues that live access to the performer's body is no less mediated than when accessed via its photographic documentation and that this cultural myth serves to maintain an illusory belief in the coherency of the subject and of stable historical truth.
  - 31 'Interior Squirrel and the Vicissitudes of History', in Jones and Heathfield eds., *Perform: Repeat: Record: Live Art in History*, Bristol; Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2012: 441-456, p.449.
  - 32 "'Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation', *Art Journal* Vol. 56: No. 4, Winter 1997: 11-18.
  - 33 Jones, "'Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation', *Art Journal* Vol. 56: No. 4, Winter 1997: 11-18: pps. 13 & 14.
  - 34 As Clare Johnson incisively observes, 'The tension *Interior Scroll* sets up between the mediated and the live is labyrinthine.' *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art*, London: Palgrave, 2013, p. 71.
  - 35 Clare Johnson, 'Preposterous histories: Maternal desire, loss and control in Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* and Tracey Emin's *I've Got It All*', *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2010.
  - 36 I borrow David Abrahamson's useful term, 'reader-viewer', which he uses to describe an individual's multivalent engagement with magazines. It seems just as relevant to describing someone's relation to Schneemann's layered text-image artworks. 'Introduction: Scholarly Engagement with the Magazine Form: Expansion and Coalescence', *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research: The Future of the Magazine Form* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-5.
  - 37 See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282>.
  - 38 Lucy Lippard, 'Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s', *Art Journal* Vol.40, No.1/2, Winter 1980, pp.362-365: 365.
  - 39 'Again it was one of those dream images that produced a drawing. It was a very simple little drawing. It looked sort of like a tampon ad when I did it and looked at it.' Lecture, Boston: 1988. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 73, folder 2, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
  - 40 Interview with Kate Haug [1997], reprinted in *Imaging Her Erotics* (MIT Press, 2002), p. 47.
  - 41 Ann Rosalind Jones succinctly summarises the distinctions between Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig in 'Writing the Body: Towards an Understanding of l'écriture féminine'. *Feminist Studies* Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 1981), pp. 247-263.
  - 42 Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1976), pp. 875-893.
  - 43 Jones, 1982, p. 252. Emphasis added.
  - 44 In a 1996 catalogue essay, for instance, David Levi Straus writes: 'Schneemann stood naked, slowly unwinding a scroll from inside her vagina while reading from it, giving a whole new slant to écriture féminine.' (reprinted in *Imaging her Erotics* 2002: 318) See also: R. Bruce Elder, 'Her artistic beliefs resemble those of the French Feminists, but she did not actually draw her ideas from them.' ('The Body in Film',

- 1989) Tellingly, on Schneemann's archival copy she has marked this passage from Elder with a stroke of her pen. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 68, folder 3, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- 45 Interview with Carl Heyward, Nov/Dec 1991, later published in *Art Papers*. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 73, folder 8, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. The interview includes many misspellings and typos, including Cixous.
- 46 It was not, of course, only women's body art that explored such issues, although writing on men's performance from this period tended to celebrate transgressive, painful and even harmful actions. See for instance Max Kozloff, 'Pygmalion Reversed', *Artforum*, November 1975, 30-38.
- 47 The critique of Cartesian thinking can be found in much feminist art historical writing, including, most relevantly, Amelia Jones' discussion of body art and its challenge to the 'mythic disinterestedness' of Kantian aesthetics. See *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 75.
- 48 Quoted in Strauss, in *Imaging her Erotics*, p. 324.
- 49 'The Blank Page', p.243.
- 50 'The Blank Page', p.246.
- 51 Schneemann, *Art Journal* (1991), p.28.
- 52 'The Blank Page', p.246. Italics added.
- 53 'Women, for Kristeva, also see and write as "hysterics", as outsiders to male-dominated discourse...' Jones, 'Writing the Body' (1981), p.249.
- 54 Schneider, p.132.
- 55 Schneider, p.36.
- 56 This reading suggests Schneemann's self-authoring as a valuable precedent to current debates about feminine auto-fiction and its relation to autobiography and the construction of self through writing. See Claire Boyle, *Consuming Autobiographies: Reading and Writing the Self in Post-War France* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007).
- 57 Schneider, p.40.
- 58 For instance, dance critics Sally Banes and Don McDonagh reference the artist, see *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1976; *The Complete Guide to Modern Dance*, Garden City: New York, 1976. As did photography magazines: 'Carolee Schneemann: Image as Process', *Creative Camera*, no.76, October 1970, pp. 304-309. Or books on film: Youngblood ed., *Expanded Cinema*, New York: EP Sutton & Co., 1970.
- 59 Notably Alan Kaprow and Robert Rauschenberg. See for instance, Michael Benedikt, 'What's Happening with Happenings?', *STORY Magazine*, May 1967, pp. 56-61. See Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*, p. 52.
- 60 Kristine Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, p. xlii.
- 61 'Notations: 1958-1966' in Clayton Eshleman ed. *The Caterpillar Anthology*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971, see pp. 280-298. *Six Pack*, no. 78, 1978, pp. 233-36. 'Excerpts: 1971-76', *Unmuzzled Ox*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1996, pp. 112-118.
- 62 Letter from Ed Victor at Alfred J Knopf to Schneemann, 25 May 1972. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 2, folder 3 Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. I am grateful to Karen di Franco for sharing this information from her research with me. Di Franco's doctoral thesis at the University of Reading in collaboration with Tate Britain contains further information on *Parts of a Body House Book*.
- 63 Martin Sundberg discusses the challenge that Schneemann's approach to medium poses for museums: 'Her own understanding whether an artwork is a painting or not might also be of little relevance when it comes to conservation and other museum specific aspects where the concerns of the museum might overrule the artist.' 'A One-Work-Artist? Carolee Schneemann and the Reception of her Work', *Konsthistorisktidskrift/Journal of Art History*, Vol. 80, No. 3, 2011, 168-179.
- 64 Here I am following a 1972 *Time Out* review of *Parts of Body House* which suggested Schneemann 'uses language like photography... The book is like a piece of collage film, or sculptural construct; compiled and overlaid with love and care.' No. 115, April 28, 1972.
- 65 For an evocative discussion of Schneemann's embodied drawing in *Up to and Including Her Limits*, see Marsha Meskimmon and Phil Swandon, *Drawing Difference: Connections Between Gender and Drawing* (London; New York: IB Tauris, 2016).
- 66 Karen di Franco, 'Reading Carolee Schneemann's Body Without Organs'. Unpublished essay – with thanks to the author.
- 67 Tony White, 'From Democratic Multiple to Artist Publishing: The (R) evolutionary Artist's Book', *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 45-56, p. 46.
- 68 'Istory' is a term often used by Schneemann, see e.g. *More Than Meat Joy*. This strand of Schneemann's work encompassed writing, documentation and performance-lectures (famously Naked Action Lecture at the ICA in 1968).
- 69 Lawrence Alloway, 'Carolee Schneemann: The Body as Object and Instrument', review of *More Than Meat Joy*, *Art in America*, March 1980, pp. 19-21, p. 20. Although wholly positive and wishing to assist Schneemann out of the 'Dionysian cul-de-sac' she had been pigeonholed within, Alloway is only able to do so by establishing her art in relation to a series of male artistic precedents (Oldenberg, Rauschenberg and Paolozzi).
- 70 Henry Sayre, 'Review of *More Than Meat Joy*', *Minnesota Review*, no. 20, Spring 1983, pp. 112-114, p. 113.
- 71 Sayre, 1983, p. 114.
- 72 Kristine Stiles, 'At Last! A Great Woman Artist', in Webb ed., *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 213-237, p. 226.
- 73 'It wasn't...that she was trying to hide her light under a bushel: it was simply that she couldn't seem to interest a dealer in giving her a show.' Grace Glueck, *New York Times*, Friday 10 September 1982.
- 74 Daniel Cameron, 'Object vs Persona: Early Work of Carolee Schneemann', *Arts Magazine*, 1983, pp. 122-125, p.122.
- 75 An interview in *Performance Art* (1979) indicates the tone of the prevailing discourse, where the interviewer Robert Coe simply repeats the quip: 'Claes Oldenberg said you had the best body in New York.'
- 76 Thomas McEvilly, 'Carolee Schneemann: Max Hutchinson Gallery', *Artforum*, vol. 23, no. 8, April 1985, p. 92.
- 77 In interview with Kathy Constantinides, 14 November 1987. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 73, folder 5, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- 78 Michael Bracewell, 'Other Voices: Interview with Carolee Schneemann', *Frieze Magazine*, October 2001, np.
- 79 By elevating Schneemann to the position of 'pioneer', Roth arguably seals *Interior Scroll* within the 1970s and establishes the performance as a matrilineal foundation for the work of younger artists she discusses, including Nancy Buchanan and Suzanne Lacy. *The Amazing Decade: Women's Performance Art 1970-1980* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983). See Clare Hemmings' writing on 'narratives of progress' in *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- 80 Schneemann, 'The Obscene Body/Politic', 1991, p. 34-4. Schneemann has also said that the film theorist Laura Mulvey praised her film *Fuses* when it was screened in London in 1968, but 'was never able to write one word about it because it would somehow compromise or jeopardize the position that she wanted to structure and build.' Interview with Kathy Constantinides, 14 November 1987. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 73, folder 5, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- 81 Constantinides, letter to Schneemann dated 27 March 1991. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 73, folder 5, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. The article was later accepted and published as: 'Carolee Schneemann / Invoking Body Politics', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Winter 1991, pp. 127-145.
- 82 Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 66.
- 83 Kristine Stiles, 'Performance and its Objects', *Arts Magazine*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 1990, pp. 35-59, p. 41.
- 84 E.g. Paul Schimmel, ed., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and The Object 1949-1979*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998; Robyn Brentano ed., *Outside the Frame: Performance and the Object: a Survey History of Performance Art in the USA since 1950*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1994; and, indicatively, the Live Art Development Agency was established in London in 1998.
- 85 Johannes Birringer, 'Imprints and Revisions: Carolee Schneemann's Visual Archaeology', *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1991, pp. 31-36, p.34. Emphasis added.
- 86 There is a lengthy discussion between Schneemann, McEvilly and Adrian Piper on the letters page of *Artforum*, October 1983.
- 87 Eventually published in *TDR: The Drama Review*. Vol. 41, No. 1, Spring 1997, pp. 43-60.
- 88 Semmel ed., *A New Eros*. Straayer, Screen vol. 31, no.1, 1990.

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- 89 Later published in *Erotic Faculties*, University of California Press, 1996.
- 90 Letter to Nick Kaye dated 27 September 1993. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 73, folder 11, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- 91 Letter from Schneemann to Henry Sayre dated 15 July 1986. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 71, folder 4, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- 92 Schneider, *The Explicit Body*, p. x.
- 93 Letters from Stiles to Schneemann dated 6 November 1985. Carolee Schneemann Papers, box 71, folder 11 Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- 94 Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 242, n. 9. As Jones fully explains in "'Presence in Absentia'", 'Once I know the artist well, I can write about her or his work in (I hope) revealing ways, but ones that are (perhaps usefully, perhaps not) laden with personal feelings and conflicts involving the artist as a friend (or not, as the case may be).' 1997, p.11.
- 95 As James Boaden also points out, the correspondences reveal Schneemann's financial challenges and how she worked to build a professional career out of her art practice. Review of *Correspondence Course*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2012, pp. 169-170, p. 170.
- 96 Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, p.li.
- 97 William Peterson, 'Of Cats, Dreams and Interior Knowledge', *Performance Magazine* no. 59, Winter 1989/90, pp. 11-24, p.24.
- 98 Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1976), pp. 875-893.



## **‘the personal clutter... the painterly mess...’: Tracing a History of Carolee Schneemann’s *Interior Scroll***

*Victoria Horne*

Carolee Schneemann’s performance *Interior Scroll* has become iconic in twentieth-century art history, yet little attention has been directed towards the artist’s uncommonly active management of her work’s reception and historicization. Schneemann seized the opportunities created by contemporary art’s expanding publishing culture to document and disseminate her work as a professional artist, and communicated with a coterie of writers, curators and historians to generate a space for her work in the art-historical archive. This point of agential labour was essential for a woman artist working prior to, and alongside, the emergence of second-wave feminism. In this essay Schneemann’s insistence on ‘clutter’ and ‘mess’ is adopted as a means of conceptualizing the artist’s passionate and persistent incursions within art history. It proposes *Interior Scroll* as a keystone for understanding Schneemann’s extensive multimedia outputs, by reading the performance and its reception in relation to the framework of *écriture féminine*, a popular notion in poststructuralist feminist philosophy at the time of the work’s production.

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