

**Molding Myth:  
Carolee Schneemann, *Parts of a Body House*,  
and the Reality of Femininity**

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## Summary

This thesis explores the beginning of celebrated painter, performance artist, writer, and filmmaker, Carolee Schneemann's career. From the late 1950s through the 1970s, Schneemann's art practice and textual sensibility reflected and influenced the development of the Women's Movement in the United States. In the same decade that Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, Schneemann served as an alternative to the myth of the modern housewife. Schneemann's independence in the face of the societal expectation of both gender and class relegated Schneemann to the periphery of the art world where she created artwork which embodied an explicitly sexual form of expressive freedom that remains relevant to feminist artists through the present. Through this lens, this paper examines Schneemann's discursive interruption of the dominant fiction of post-war American women as she writes herself into the history of art. Schneemann created an aesthetic model of the domestic that is widely differentiated from the normative model. The house, for this reason, plays a central role in the reception and production of Schneemann. The central thread of analysis in this project is *Parts of a Body House*, a performative script by Schneemann that experienced two separate publications: the first by the Something Else Press in *Fantastic Architecture* in 1970 and the second by the Beau Geste Press in *Parts of Body House Book* in 1972. This artwork relies on Schneemann's concept of myth, which is informed by Simone de Beauvoir's seminal feminist text, *The Second Sex*, and acts a structuring device through which Schneemann shapes the environment and sensory framework of *Parts of a Body House*. This sensory framework and emphasis on environment is not unique to *Parts of a Body House*, rather characteristic of Schneemann's oeuvre in which she utilized the home as a space to reform stereotypes of the

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domestic servant and desexualized laborer. These concepts and boundaries, pertinent in the mid-twentieth century, are still explored and tested by present day feminist artists. In May 2017, Schneemann, received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. This acknowledgement of Schneemann's work is overdue, on the one hand, but has occurred at a precise moment when the six decade career in which Schneemann's dedicated feminist art practice appears more vital than ever.

“Anger has to go with humor and pleasure. Anger has to be honed; with your biggest iron mallet, you take the anger and you go at it long enough so that you can tune it. It has to become funny and outrageous and made back into something aesthetic. Its not good enough on its own. But it is good.”

--Carolee Schneemann<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, by a mere fifteen years after the end of World War II, the average age for women to marry had decreased from the middle twenties to fourteen million girls engaged by the age of seventeen.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the rate of women dropping out of college to marry, or dropping out because they feared too much secondary education would lead to the impossibility of marriage, rose to 60 percent.<sup>3</sup> Most remarkable about these statistics is how they illustrate the consequences of the myth of the model homemaker, which resulted in subjugating the intellectual and professional ambitions of the American housewife and steering many women back into traditional homemaker roles. In her pivotal critique of the American woman, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan writes, “the feminine mystique had succeeded in burying millions of American women alive.”<sup>4</sup> Friedan’s charged description explains the success of the myth of a domestic, even domesticated, femininity that stands in stark contrast to the capable women mythologized in the heroic World War II era of Rosie-the-Riveter.

This phenomenon of the independent woman being systemically, culturally corralled back into the home had far reaching and well documented effects which Anna Quindlen described in her afterword for the fiftieth anniversary of Friedan’s book, “the green lawns and big corner lots were isolating, the housework seemed to expand to fill the time available, and polio and smallpox were replaced by depression and alcoholism.”<sup>5</sup> The broad inclination for women to eschew further education and a career grew from the widespread doctrine promoting domestic stability as incompatible with women’s rights. Accordingly, Friedan

analyzes this proposed mutual exclusivity of the two concepts at length in “The Mistaken Choice”, the eighth chapter of her book. Using the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, Friedan notes the implication of the rejecting mother in every case history of the “disturbed American” that, ultimately, left American men “psychologically incapable of facing the shock of war...away from their ‘moms’.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, this indictment of mothers had devastating timing as it emerged just as mothers and daughters began to exercise their emancipation from the domestic sphere. The overt independence and individuality of the next generation of American women became synonymous with lost femininity. Friedan notes the evidence that supported the theory of lost femininity: the upsurge in psychiatric discharges during World War II, studies linking education with the inability of women to reach sexual satisfaction, and tension and competition between career driven spouses.<sup>7</sup> The practical implications of this myth resulted in culturally reversing women’s liberation in a way that was advertised as a natural process.

The artist, Carolee Schneemann, began her career as a painter, performance artist, writer, and filmmaker during the decade that was so deeply influenced by Friedan’s book. Schneemann did not fit into the frame of the suburban housewife as outlined by Friedan, instantiating, instead, an alternative to both stereotypes of the domesticated servant and the desexualized laborer, Rosie-the-Riveter. Schneemann deliberately refused to play the mother role in favor of concentrating on her career as an artist, a socially alienating role far from home and factory alike. This unwavering independence in the face of the societal expectation of both gender and class relegated Schneemann to the periphery of the art world. She was not politically crisp enough to be a political artist, nor was she disembodied enough to be a conceptual artist. She eschewed the duality of pop art and expressionism but remained

committed to painting. Unless one is particularly examining the women's artists' movement, or women's conceptual body art—both of which require the qualifier “women's” and an examination of what classifies the artwork as particular to women—Schneemann remains an auxiliary to male artists in virtually every movement with which she was engaged until the end of the millennium.

What Schneemann's artistic production does with this isolation for normativity is remarkable, as well as pioneering. She lay the groundwork for much later, sex positive feminism, embodying an explicitly sexual form of expressive freedom that remains relevant to feminist artists through the present. In addition, Schneemann works extensively in her home and, as a female artist working with a radical aesthetic that is also domestic, she proffers a modeling of the domestic that is widely differentiated from the normative model. The house, for this reason, plays a central role in the reception and production of Schneemann.

In Marielle Nitoslawksa's 2012 feature length documentary of Carolee Schneemann, *Breaking the Frame*, Schneemann fondly remembers the voice of her old farmhouse during her first encounter with the filmmaker. Schneemann recalls, “It's a place that reached out to me and said, ‘you have to save me’.”<sup>8</sup> The ramshackle farmhouse lies just outside of New Paltz, New York in the Hudson River Valley on a calm stream. Nitoslawksa's documentary oscillates between footage of Schneemann at her house beginning in the early 1960s through the shooting of the film in the 2000s, along with footage of Schneemann at lectures, museum events, and the *!Women Art Revolution* premiere. The film begins and ends with Schneemann's house, which remains a point of departure in Schneemann's artwork.



If the reader were to imagine a point-by-point alternative to the domesticated female stereotype that dominated American culture when Schneemann became an artist, Schneemann's use of her body in the house begins to make sense. Instead of a carefully sculpted bouffant, there is natural hair. In place of a crisp, clean apron, there is a naked body. Instead of a carefully organized, sparkling kitchen or bathroom, there is a meticulously managed hoard of artworks, paintings, and journals. And finally, in place of the woman as an image of domestic bliss in this house, we find a committed writing practice and proliferation of experimental word and image projects that adapt the traditional convention of representing women in art as classical nudes into a unique tradition of her own. These elements—the house, the body, and the printed word—collide in a unique way in Schneemann's oeuvre.

This thesis explores the space of the house, the body, and the word as symbolic structuring devices through which Schneemann articulates a theory of radical everyday life and expression. In Kaja Silverman's book, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, the author discusses a range of literary, film, and critical theorists whose work functions on the margins of traditional phallogentric masculinity, and therefore are commonly read as feminine. Of this traditional phallogentric masculinity, Silverman writes "our 'dominant fiction' or ideological 'reality' solicits our faith in above all else in the unity of the family and the adequacy of the male subject."<sup>9</sup> In accepting this statement, it is understood that the male subject and the family are the columns upon which classic masculinity rests and are instrumental in both creating and maintaining the "dominant fiction" through which society functions. This terminology, "dominant fiction", is so important because when alternatively thought of as, say, the central narrative through which social lives are written its hamartia is made apparent. The advantage with this fiction lies in the

ability to re-write or edit it. Here, Schneemann makes her discursive interruption into the subject of masculinity in art whereby femininity traditionally functions on the margins. Silverman relies heavily on French philosopher, Louis Althusser, in her argument on dominant fiction and quotes his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," where Althusser writes, "the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology."<sup>10</sup> Traditionally in art, despite the appearance of female bodies, the subject-supreme of these artworks is male subjectivity. Schneemann's intervention succeeds in and is characterized by her decidedly feminine subjectivity, thus making herself, her experience, her body the subject of every aspect of her artistic production. Schneemann deliberately and actively writes herself into the history of art in lieu of waiting for permission granted to her by the society in which she works so tirelessly to alter. With artwork that did not neatly fit into one category—political, performative, etc.—Schneemann invented her own ideology, her own dominant fiction, through the lived experience of her career as an artist and her resistance to conform to societal norms. This examination of Schneemann will rely on critical and historical analysis of two separate publications of Schneemann's scripted performance, *Parts of a Body House*, first, in 1970, as one of a variety of artworks in Wolf Vostell's and Dick Higgins' *Fantastic Architecture*, and two years later in 1972, as the conclusion to Schneemann's artists' book, *Parts of a Body House Book*.

*Fantastic Architecture*, edited by Vostell and Higgins, is a book of intermedia architectural projects presented by artists to challenge the increasingly narrow and normative methods used by contemporary architects and architectural theorists. It is also, more importantly, an artists' book that weaves writings by Vostell and Higgins, both individual and

collaborative, with photographs, scripts for Happenings and performance art pieces, proposals for a varying range of projects, and correspondence between artists and writers. *Fantastic Architecture* includes a facsimile of Schneemann's *Parts of a Body House* which consisted of a collection of texts which illustrate a coat room, Cat House, Bathroom, Lung Room, Heart Chamber / Cunt Chamber, Ice Palace, Liver Room, The Nerve Ends Room, The Kidney Room, The Guerilla Gut, The Genitals Play – Erotica Meat Room, and Hair and Fingers Room.

At the most basic, *Parts of a Body House* is distinctive from the other architectural projects in *Fantastic Architecture* because of its simultaneously scripted and performative structure. Schneemann constructs this text as a narrative to be read, in which case a sort of performance occurs in the mind of the reader. However, she also constructs meaning within certain parameters and direction of the performative aspect of the text, thus the performance is not totally open for improvisation by the reader. More apropos for this project, it is the only artwork in *Fantastic Architecture* whose visual accompaniment is a nude photograph (Figure 1, Appendix). The inclusion of this photograph was a point of contention for Schneemann because of its centerfold format. She originally submitted a series of detailed drawings of the rooms in *Parts of a Body House*, such as "Genitals Play Room I" (Figure 2, Appendix), but the images were not included due to apparent financial constraints, according to Higgins.<sup>11</sup> Schneemann's nude portrait in centerfold format arguably undermined her credibility in relation to the male artists in the book. Instead of her carefully articulated drawings, Schneemann becomes a contemporary rendering of the classical nude, sumptuously sculpted in shadow and soft light. Her piece, which characterized her in terms of a nude portrait, transforms her subject-shattering intervention into domestic normativity, into yet another

objectifying image of a woman casually consumed by the audience—that is until you read the text.

Schneemann's artists' book, *Parts of a Body House Book*, also features the *Parts of a Body House* piece in full. She published seventy-five of this edition, with text and illustrations, with the Beau Geste Press of Devon, England. In a letter from May 1972 from long-time correspondent, Clayton Eshleman, he advises Schneemann on some financial aspects of publishing the book— "be sure you get a contract and 10% royalties" —and wonders why she has chosen not to publish with Higgins' Something Else Press.<sup>12</sup> Schneemann's reasoning for publishing with a different press is not overtly clear, however, her distance from the New York art landscape at this time due to the recuperation of her mental health and personal image, which will be discussed in depth below, can be inferred as influential factors in this decision.

Formally, *Parts of a Body House Book* appears similar to an artists' notebook or a sketchbook with its compilation of comic strips, sketches/doodles in the margins of pages of text ranging from notes on film to conversations and correspondence between Schneemann and her circle. Notable aspects, however, include the cover and the preface. The cover is an illustrated copy of a photograph of Schneemann taken by John Drane at the Silhouette Art Booth at Brighton Pier from January 1971.<sup>13</sup> In the image, Schneemann is fully clothed, wearing pants and a scarf, with wild hair surrounding her face as she looks directly at the viewer. Above her, in giant, bold, all capital font and surrounded by stars, is the word "ARTIST," beneath this label appears her name in a stylized font, "Carolee Schneemann," again adorned with stars. To the left of the image, her right elbow points to a poster, titled "kitch", that seems to have the

negative image of a cat. This poster sits atop the bold statement, “ARTIST,” repeated. The title of the book sits along her left leg (Figure 3, Appendix).

This image is a stark contrast to the nude photograph of Schneemann in the original publication of *Parts of a Body House* published in *Fantastic Architecture*. Instead of a centerfold figure, upon which the audience may place their gaze, Schneemann asserts herself, as an artist, three times: twice in text and once with a powerful, yet convivial portrait. Next, in place of a preface to the artwork, Schneemann includes a sexual parameters survey compiled by her and four other women over the course of four years. In what seems to be a riff on the Kinsey studies, this survey is compiled solely from the female point of view and presented in a table with a range of metrics, including age, nationalism, duration, frequency of interactions, genital size and contact zones; additionally, Schneemann offers the disclaimer that the study was “unscientific, subjective, impressionistic, etc. etc.”<sup>14</sup>

Schneemann’s artists’ book concludes with a full-print of *Parts of a Body House* that includes the dates of creation for the various sections that will be instrumental for the remainder of this project as a method of dating when each section of the artwork was created. This timeline will place Carolee Schneemann’s personal life and the diachronic development of *Parts of a Body House* alongside the evolution of the feminist movement between 1953, the year Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal feminist text, *The Second Sex*, was translated into English, and the end of the 1970s. Furthermore, in the 1972 publication, there are no photographs used as watermark underneath the text of the piece, thus there is no risk of obscuring Schneemann’s written word or, consequently, silencing her voice. Schneemann’s artists’ book

is, from cover to cover, a statement of individual artistry and, again, a written insertion of herself into the history of art.

The year following the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Schneemann first performed her benchmark piece, *Meat Joy*, at Jean-Jacques Lebel's Festival de la Libre Expression (Festival of Free Expression) in Paris (Figure 4, Appendix: Judson Church, NYC). This first performance on May 29, 1964 would be followed by two others that same year, one at Dennison Hall in London in June and the other at Judson Church in New York in November. *Meat Joy* is a lengthy performance, between sixty to eighty minutes, and is continuously accompanied by a soundtrack of street sounds juxtaposed with popular radio songs of the period. The piece begins with the nine performers dressed in street clothes covering costumes of bikinis and feathers. While the audience is seated, the performers carry in a large table and proceed to finish applying their makeup for twenty minutes while a prologue plays. After this, a blackout occurs. The next section begins with men and women, as partners, engaging in a sort of choreographed removal of their clothes until all that remains are their bikinis and swim trunks. Next, the men proceed to bind their partners with paper and rope into "Body Packages" which are broken apart as the couples roll together in the space of paper pyres creating dynamic gestures and movements. After some time, and a second blackout, the Love-Paint-Exchange begins in which the partners continue their dynamic, sensual choreography while they paint each other. A third blackout occurs and one performer, the serving maid, drops animal flesh onto these painted, active bodies which respond with "spasms, twists, groans, and laughter; bodies and meat mingle."<sup>15</sup> The performance continues in this repetitive

and active manner until the central woman yells, “Enough, enough!” and the final blackout occurs.

Schneemann’s performance was, like Friedan’s book, immediately significant to the activation of the second wave of feminism. Ron Broglio describes the piece as “a touchstone for understanding Schneemann’s project of exploring desire through body performances and tactile surfaces.”<sup>16</sup> Later, Schneemann herself described the character of this work as excessively erotic, celebrating the materiality of flesh in a manner by which “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 audiences.”<sup>17</sup> *Meat Joy* utilizes a variety of materials, both natural—raw fish, chickens, sausages, feathers—and manufactured—paint, plastic, rope, brushes, paper—to activate and involve the senses of all participants. The performers are aware of the audience seated very close to the action of the performance, as they are informed by the audience’s reactions and presence, thus, the boundary between the two groups is somewhat blurred.

Schneemann continued to respond to the candy-coated mainstream culture in *Parts of a Body House*. Notably, the earliest written section of this artwork, the Bathroom, pre-dates both *Meat Joy* and *The Feminine Mystique*. In 1955, at the age of sixteen, Carolee Schneemann began Bard College in upstate New York on a full scholarship. Although she graduated in 1959, the remainder of her university career was not necessarily smooth. She was expelled for “moral turpitude” and subsequently spent time studying at the School of Painting and Sculpture at Columbia University in New York City.<sup>18</sup> At Columbia, Schneemann met composer James Tenney, whom she would marry in 1956 when she was seventeen years old. Schneemann and

Tenney proceeded to work closely through their split in early 1968. Additionally, in 1956, she and Tenney were given their cat Kitch, who would appear in much of Schneemann's ensuing artwork. In these projects, Tenney's importance mostly lies in his appearance in *Fuses* and his companionship with Schneemann during the time period in which she created *Parts of a Body House*.

Thus, the Bathroom, which dates to February/March 1957, was written before Schneemann turned eighteen and in the midst of her tenure as a student at Bard College. The full section reads as follows:

When you leave the Cat House you enter a Bathroom, it is at the back of the head of Body House.

1. stormy afternoon. A cat is swimming the bathtub. In the bottom of the bathtub is a large, crumpled burnt oil painting of nudes. The cat soaks and swims a long time. You sit on the toilet watching. Something must be let in from the storm. You go and get chairs and pile them into the bathroom. You will have to stand in the bathtub to load them all up. Crawl in and out of chairs, piling chairs until they reach the ceiling. Stand in the tub among the chairs. Pick up the wet cat and dance blue raining blue light.
2. winter night. Get into the bathtub – which is full of warm water and pine bubbles – with someone you love. Make love in the water. The only light is blue-black night, gold and blue flashes. A cat comes to swim in the tub. It paddles and sneezes, it is fur-soaked. Then the cat sits on the edge of the tub watching you in the dark water. A film is made of this.<sup>19</sup>

The Bathroom, although sequentially the third room in *Parts of a Body House*, is the first of this project and situates the reader firmly in a residential setting. Additionally, and aptly, it is placed at the back of the head of the *Body House*, where the brain resides in the human body. It stands as the center of thought, activity, and production. Schneemann's construction of the Bathroom, or what might be called a less-elegant-toilette, contradicts such canonical representations of the same subject. Consider François Boucher's *Madame du Pompadour at*



*her Toilette* painted in 1758 (Figure 5, Appendix) and Edgar Degas' *Woman at her Toilette* drawn between 1900 and 1905 (Figure 6, Appendix). The former, Boucher's painting, was a rather common depiction of a woman in the private sphere during the French Rococo, a scene whose basic components had changed little by the time of Degas. Conventionally, scenes of women at their toilette would show a stylish, contemporary woman in the process of preparing herself for the day with underpinnings of eroticism. The woman is eternally in a state of undress—whether her sleeves are not yet pulled over the shoulders or her hand delicately clutches a powder pouf—and the viewer is forever voyeuristic, peering in on this scene directly at the woman as she gazes into a mirror or at the mirror through which the woman's reflection can be seen. Continuing in an art historical tradition, Schneemann's inclusion of a cat in this scene follows a strong tradition of the cat and the nude female body. Manet's *Olympia* exhibited in 1865 (Figure 7, Appendix) was viewed as shocking for the confrontational gaze of the model as opposed to the historical precedent for a reclining nude female in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* painted circa 1510 (Figure 8, Appendix), which shows the canonical depiction of the sensually displayed body engaged with the audience. For the purposes of Schneemann's artwork, Manet's painting is more overtly influential through his use of the cat as an animal companion, symbolizing independence, rather than the use of the dog in Titian, symbolizing fidelity.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Schneemann performed the role of Olympia in Robert Morris' 1964 performance *Site* at the Surplus Dance Theater in New York. In this piece, Morris donned a mask as he removed plywood boards to reveal the nude Schneemann.

Carolee Schneemann's *toilette* is unlike either of these conventional *toilettes* in Figure 7 and Figure 8. Aside from the unique form in which it is written into the imagination of the

reader as text, it seems to exist in a completely internal world; she is alone with the cat and the storm. In other words, she creates room for the audience to participate in this experience intimately instead of voyeuristically. Schneemann's representation is a bathroom, an alternative and inward form of self-preparation as compared to the outward attention in, say, Boucher's painting of a *toilette*. Schneemann's bathroom is powerful in the unique intimacy that never leaves the presumably solitary reader alone to explore the space: the cat is present in both scenarios, there is a human companion in the second scenario, and Schneemann's voice is ever present as it narrates the environment. Moreover, the domestic immediacy Schneemann creates for the reader in these scenes, a sense of being there with her, lies in the intimacy of the embodied experience in Schneemann's writing. In this section, she directs and commands the reader through the space, but the language used in instructing a dance with the cat or the notation that the cat sneezes indicates a familiarity of the space only Schneemann, as author and artist, could offer the reader.

As participant/performer, the readers' experiences are shaped by how they interact with their environment and how that environment responds. For example, Schneemann does not demand that the thing be let in from the storm in the first scenario, rather she notes its existence. The conjectural participant/performer has the agency to refuse this step, which would have consequences for their bodily interaction with the cat and the blue raining light. There are a range of possibilities for the Bathroom performance. Nonetheless, Schneemann retains authorship of the performative script with her finite conclusions and onward propulsion through the remainder of *Body House*.

Carolee Schneemann gives attention to both experientially shaped environments and the dynamic agency of the artwork in this early section of *Parts of a Body House*. This sensory framework is apparent in artworks such as *Meat Joy* (1964), *Fuses* (1964-1969), and *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1973-1976). Moreover, Schneemann's introduction to Simone de Beauvoir at the end of the 1950s provides a most definitive influence for such themes. Simone de Beauvoir's seminal feminist text, *The Second Sex*—with the oft quoted and now-revered revelation: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman"—precedes both Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Carolee Schneemann's career.<sup>21</sup> Even so, this text holds numerous passages that read almost as if they were written with Carolee Schneemann's aesthetic and legacy in mind. For example, in "Part III: Myths", de Beauvoir writes, "perhaps the myth of woman will be phased out one day: the more women assert themselves as human beings the more the marvelous quality of Other dies in them. But today it still exists in the hearts of all men."<sup>22</sup> While de Beauvoir argues for reason and philosophy over myth, Schneemann works in a school of myth in which the female body is associated with the mystical goddess as well as in a school of reason exploring how goddess mythology functions in a modern society that still attempts to confine women to the singularity of such a role. More concisely, de Beauvoir discusses the myth of constraint as one that confines women to the role of Other while Schneemann utilizes the assumed power given to women in myth, a feminine power, to expand and assert their tangible power in the world.

In an early 1958 letter to her close friend and feminist ally, Naomi Levinson, Schneemann discusses both de Beauvoir and myth as a call to arms alongside the Russian painter and child prodigy, Marie Bashkirtseff. Using Bashkirtseff as exemplar, De Beauvoir

describes the notion of myth and, more specifically, women as myth as an uneasily defined entity. Women are defined vis-à-vis their connection with man. But there is always a sense of captivation and pleasure in the power of myth, or woman-as-myth, to summon the agency of men; one might think of the power of myth as the same power of the face of Helen of Troy to launch a thousand ships. How, though, is this regulated? Who has the agency? Being that they are the object of myth, the object of desire and object of control, men do not hold all agency of myth. In fact, it would seem that narcissism of women plays a vital role. In her application of myth to historical life, de Beauvoir draws on Marie Bashkirtseff's narcissism, detailing Bashkirtseff's need for attention and need to be praised for her intelligence and beauty. The result of this created a legacy for Bashkirtseff in which she became an exemplar of the genre of women diarists centering all of their production on themselves. In fact, Bashkirtseff's novel was titled *I Am the Most Interesting Book of All: The Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff*. Furthermore, her avowedly politicized narcissism and desire for power prevented her from marrying before her untimely death. De Beauvoir writes, "Bashkirtseff never met a man superb enough to alienate herself through him. It is one thing to kneel before a far-off god shaped by one's self and another thing to give one's self over to a flesh-and-blood man."<sup>23</sup> When Schneemann describes Bashkirtseff's legacy, she writes, "an instance where love of self—of the unique being gracing the World and being graced by it—directs itself very consciously to art, for as she says she could be a Princess! where [sic] the basic nobility of her intelligence turns into art, into the process of creativity...seeing beyond the motivation of self-preserving, of...being through art."<sup>24</sup> Schneemann's letter indicates a sort of camaraderie in how Schneemann views herself, Bashkirtseff's legacy, and the politics of de Beauvoir.

In de Beauvoir's reading, Bashkirtseff's narcissism is imperative to expand her power and assert herself in society instead of conform to the myth of the beautiful woman. Schneemann's reading of Bashkirtseff illuminates a different understanding of how the myth beauty functions whereby the beautiful woman utilizes fascination with herself as a tool to be publicly and politically assertive. By considering the title of Bashkirtseff's book, *I Am the Most Interesting Book of All*, and from de Beauvoir's perspective the quality of being interesting and aware of how interesting she is a threat to Bashkirtseff—marriage would threaten her narcissism. And narcissism is essential. Schneemann's definition of myth plays into this quality of being interesting and uses it as a threat to the marginalization of femininity. Narcissism is still essential, but it acts as a combative tool for Schneemann rather than a defensive tool. In this sense, Schneemann opens up a new myth that functions as a hyper-real allegory. There is a unity in the inward and intentionally narcissistic feeling of *Parts of a Body House* where Schneemann's focus on the body is born out of the conditioning of women to place their physicality at the forefront of their sociality. Schneemann's internalization of this through the creation of artwork that posits her physicality as a house for more than just beauty and self-preservation can be seen as a further step of Bashkirtseff's reflective diaries.

Throughout her life and career, especially in her conviction to eschew convention in lieu of fostering her career, Schneemann's writing served as an indestructible record of herself in the history of art. In her epistolary history of Schneemann, *Correspondence Course*, Kristine Stiles writes that by analyzing herself—and the world her *self* occupies— “from inside out and outside in Schneemann performed reversals that required dissociating from emotional experiences.”<sup>25</sup> Writing one's own history requires a certain level of separation between

emotion and an event, thus normalizing one's experiences as both exceptional enough to merit historical inclusion and systematic enough to fit into an historical narrative.

The most acute example of this self-dissociation in the effort to self-assert is seen in Schneemann's choice to terminate numerous pregnancies, thus allowing her to pursue a career, mentor young women, and occupy the world in her most authentic fashion. Stiles notes, "Schneemann's courageous decision to permit the publication of letters about her abortions is perhaps the most tangible evidence of her commitment to assisting other young women in thinking through the consequences of their life decisions" as her abortions occurred both before and after *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973 and within different partnerships.<sup>26</sup> In her personal life as well as her career as an artist, Schneemann's self-determination and individualism informed her each and every choice.

In a letter to poet Clayton Eshleman in 1974, Schneemann responds to his provocation about her and Tenney's early years as a couple and her first abortion as follows: "No one else told me/showed me it was well for a young woman to put her creative work before domestic service I could never stop feeling the thank you in my love to him thank you for being able to love such a bright high monster as I am didn't my father say so my teachers my lovers before didn't they constantly twist their heads saying you can be this?"<sup>27</sup> Unquestionably, Schneemann's determination to fulfill the precedent of a woman artist who lived every aspect of her life as an artist—something which she felt was unavailable to her—influenced her relationships. But, as the preceding passage from Schneemann indicates, speaking of an abortion she underwent over a decade prior to this letter, her choices were not impetuous,

rather they were made from years of simultaneous encouragement in her artistic ability alongside societal pressure to conform to a domestic ideal.

The year 1959 constitutes a pivotal moment in Schneemann's career and in the broader context of this project. 1959 is the year Schneemann cites discovering the two female precedents who most influenced her artwork: Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. Woolf's 1931 classic, *The Waves*, is the book through which Schneemann began her life-long apprenticeship with Woolf. Named sixteenth on BBC's 2015 list of the "100 Greatest British Novels," *The Waves* mirrors many of the positions Schneemann would encounter due to her feminist values in a more conservative society than was primed for her.<sup>28</sup> Popularly called her most experimental literary work, Woolf's novel "turned away from realism and created a synthesis of genres that served as a vehicle for her feminist politics."<sup>29</sup> In her own words, Schneemann relates this "talisman" to her work as an illustration of how art could be embroiled in simultaneities: "It was musical. It was structured. It was associative. It was metaphoric. It was colored and emotionally generative."<sup>30</sup> Woolf's *The Waves* was a literary source to which Schneemann could return for guidance on both formal, structural qualities of her written and art practice as well as an archetype of the possible contradictions common in art practice.

As for Simone de Beauvoir, Schneemann describes her work as the tool that made all gender politics clear to Schneemann. She states, "de Beauvoir lays it right open. It's crystal clear. Now I *understand* everything! From de Beauvoir, I can go to [Antonin] Artaud for other suppressed meanings of the body and its larger extensivity...[Wilhelm] Reich, with de Beauvoir and Artaud, gives me permission to begin introducing the body into a literal space."<sup>31</sup> De Beauvoir is imperative in mapping Schneemann's life and work as well as 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism.

Schneemann's feminism became more acutely defined over the span of her career due largely to the fact that her introduction to de Beauvoir allowed an avenue from which to understand these critical theorists.

Here, it is important to note the discrepancies between date and memory. Schneemann recalls, in an interview with Alexandra Juhasz from around 1995-1996, attending the Putney School in Vermont for one year when she was fourteen. During this time, she had access to a book wagon—which appears to have functioned as a cross between covered wagon and a portable library—where she discovered *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>32</sup> In a 2014 interview with Jarrett Earnest, Schneemann recalls the instance of the book wagon nearly word for word as she discussed it with Juhasz two decades prior. To Earnest, she describes her poetic and simple attraction to Woolf as follows, “I, of course, had never heard about Virginia Woolf, but I liked the double letters of the name, and the cover was painterly, so I took that out. I went to the barn and sat on a windowsill and just wept for the next two hours.”<sup>33</sup> Earlier, to Juhasz, she recalls “a beautiful, painterly, flowered cover” that “had a strange name, a woman’s name, which had double letters” like Schneemann’s own.<sup>34</sup> In each interview, Schneemann notes this book wagon as the same moment in which she discovered the work of Simone de Beauvoir. Schneemann’s memory in these interviews dates the book wagon instance to 1959, but Kristine Stiles’ *Correspondence Course* cites Schneemann’s first encounter with de Beauvoir in 1958.<sup>35</sup> At this point, Carolee Schneemann would have been nineteen or twenty years old. However, based largely on Stiles’ book and the contemporary words of Schneemann within *Correspondence Course*, it would appear that Schneemann did not begin to create artwork overtly influenced by de Beauvoir



until 1959. For all intents and purposes in this chronology, the introduction of de Beauvoir will range from 1953 English translation of *The Second Sex* to 1959, when these groundbreaking ideas were resolutely ingrained into Schneemann's artistic and social practice.

Moving forward through Carolee Schneemann's pre-feminist enlightenment of the 1950s to the 1960s, her work began to develop alongside the other female artists working at Judson Dance Theater at Judson Memorial Church in New York City. In the Juhasz interview, Schneemann notes collaborations between her and the other female artists that would be integral to the Judson Dance Theater before the formal beginning of the entity in the summer of 1962 calling it "a coming together of young dancers, almost all women..." who "knew no one was going to take over the meaning of the body and new forms of motion except us."<sup>36</sup> The 'us' Schneemann refers to includes artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Elaine Summers, Lucinda Childs, Ruth Emerson, Phoebe Neville, and Judith Dunn. This decade and this collaborative period see Schneemann in the throes of the proto-feminist art landscape of the New York avant-garde. There was a consciousness in the ability of a cohort of women to construct meaning around the female body in a revolutionary, unprecedented way. It would be impudent to generalize the formal and theoretical ambitions of these women artists; forced homogeneity in the career of female artists is, in fact, one of the many concerns in the work produced by Schneemann and her peers.

In 1964, as discussed previously, Schneemann first performed *Meat Joy* in Paris. Perhaps the most cogent summary of Schneemann's production, and in this project of the broader application of *Meat Joy*, is Elise Archias' chapter "Concretions" in *The Concrete Body* in which she states, "Schneemann gave her audience an opportunity to consider the everydayness

of sex—the pleasure of erotic relations being something everyone presumably already has, or potentially has—as something both immediately felt and shot through with systems of codification and control.”<sup>37</sup> Schneemann’s artwork was revolutionary in many aspects, but mostly in her ability to highlight the dichotomy of sex as pleasurable and particular, but also structured by culture’s representation of it. *Meat Joy*, of all Schneemann’s artwork, positioned this theory in the foreground of each performer’s action. This was made possible, too, through Schneemann’s timing in the greater context of the mid-century sexual revolution, which was more theoretical than factual, as sex had been widely depicted and debated in popular culture for some time. Archias cites the Kinsey Reports, which had also been crucial in de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* as a tool that propelled the state of sex in American households into a mainstream topic of discussion.

In her dissertation, “Dangerously Sensual: The Sexual Revolution, Feminism, and Grrl Power in Postwar America”, Bonnie Traymore elaborates on how the sexual revolution came to dominate popular culture as a result of the continual failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. She writes, “As women quietly went about their paid employment, and as a growing minority of women, most of them middle-aged, started to articulate dissatisfaction with the status quo, most women of the early 1960s, married and single, struggled to maintain their femininity, uphold the feminine ideal, and still find personal fulfillment.”<sup>38</sup> In response to their continued blackballing in the boardroom, many women, influenced by readily available literature on sex like the Kinsey Reports, turned towards sexual fulfillment. Propelling sexual enjoyment into the mainstream spotlight, also, tended to cause women to question their own sex appeal and femininity. The average American woman, especially in her teens and twenties,

wanted nothing to do with the images of feminists as “unsexy, unfeminine battle-axes.”<sup>39</sup>

Simultaneously, the image of bachelorhood became a prevalent ideology promoted by sources like Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy* in 1953 and the first James Bond franchise novel, *Casino Royale*, released in 1953 and televised in 1954. The first feature length James Bond film, *Dr. No*, would be released to an even more wide-scale audience in 1962.

In the few years after performing *Meat Joy* in Paris, Carolee Schneemann was working on her first original film, *Fuses (1964-1967)* and continued to write *Parts of a Body House*. Between 1966-1967, she completed the section, Cat House. Also, during this time, Schneemann was still partnered with James Tenney, but more importantly for this section of *Parts of a Body House*, their cat, Kitch, was still alive and inspiring her work. Schneemann and Tenney were given Kitch in 1956 and he would continue to appear in Schneemann’s work until Kitch’s death on February 3, 1976. Schneemann describes her erotic film, *Fuses*, as an exploration of painting that pushes its frames “through the exigencies and energies of [the] body into a lived circumstance that is [tears] apart the projected superimpositions of male mythologies that have been deforming everything I know.”<sup>40</sup> And, in a letter to Wolf Vostell in January 1965, she uses the term “genital landscape film” in reference to *Fuses* (Figure 9, Appendix).<sup>41</sup> Aside from this letter appearing to be one of the earliest correspondences between Schneemann and Vostell, this usage of terminology that is simultaneously cheeky and aggressive is notable.

By creating a landscape of genitalia that is dominated by heterosexual love making, Schneemann disrupts academic landscape painting, which is ripe with the curves of earth and the conquests of men. Or, even later, she rejects the post-structural landscape film, as in

Michael Snow's *Wavelength* from 1967, in which Snow's hardened, industrial landscape merged into an image of a restless sea resembles none of the severance between expectation and experience in Schneemann's film. As a still shot, *Wavelength* is composed in a predictable frame; one could place a grid articulating the rule of thirds in a compositionally balanced photograph atop the dominant image of the film. As the film slowly melts toward the image of the sea that will eventually dominate the frame, this balance is never broken, not by light, time, or sound. This works well to illustrate the rejection of binary opposition of, for example, the author and the reader. In this case, the reader is the viewer of the film who is not directed to a particular meaning of landscape made by an author, rather the range of viewers who experience this can create as many meanings of the landscape composition. On the other hand, Schneemann's film severs the set of expectations associated with erotic filmmaking and the viewing of female sexual pleasure, instead delivering a democratic landscape of female and male eroticism. There is no conquest of Schneemann by Tenney, or vice versa.

*Parts of a Body House* utilizes such an alternative style of landscape to disrupt and to structure the space for the reader. For example, the intimate and interactive iconography of Cat House paints a scene and organizes the space for the reader. It reads as follows:

When you enter the Body House you walk south and north for a long time; you come to an open circular structure—a staircase of ribs, smooth and shiny white. You will see a fat knotted rope of black hair hanging down. The circular space has become dark. Take off your clothes, leave them. Hoist yourself up the rope; the hairs spread out and become a carpet you crawl along. It has lead you into the Cat House which is somewhere behind the eyes of the house.

Cat House is a tiny room filled entirely with cats. They have their own small door and enter and exit at will. Lie down among cats cats kiss stroke and brush walk sleep turn gently up and down your body some cats knead your hairs or belly they sniff your chin your ears your thigh your armpits your sex dozens of furry shapes different weights textures walk on you move around you brush against you lick you cats eyes shift shine

blink off blink on cats purr hum vibrate there is a tail against your neck lights of cats eyes flashing.<sup>42</sup>

Schneemann's Hudson River Valley house continues to shape the construction of *Parts of a Body House*. The Heart Chamber / Cunt Chamber, which was written around October 1967, reads as follows:

A leap into the dark from an easterly lung: falling briefly, a sudden landing in the Heart Chamber / Cunt Chamber. Enormous soft velvety warm damp walls rounded ridged pulse gently. Your whole body is squeezed up and down; between pulses you can clamber around holding onto the ridges. Each ridge you touch emits a flash of brilliant colored light. It is slippery, the muscle walls expand, contract, push you slightly up or down. You may doze in the strange rocking. Only one or two persons at a time in this chamber. When you wish, begin to crawl down, head first, pushing between contractions. Exit.<sup>43</sup>

While clearly an image of giving birth, Schneemann also creates a scene of ecstasy and indulgence in this room. It possesses many of the same characteristics as the bathroom through a sense of intimacy and solitude as Schneemann guides you through the experience. While there is room enough for two persons in this space, which is meant to feel familiar and encompassing through the use of language such as "velvety" and sensation of "strange rocking" leading to sleep, Schneemann allows the agency for the participant/performer to remain in this room for as long as they would like.

This room is reminiscent of Schneemann's film, *Fuses*, from 1965 which was shot with her then-partner, James Tenney, at the real house which eventually impacts *Parts of a Body House*. In a letter to the artist from 1970, after Tenney and Schneemann separated, he recalls her working on the *Body House* project during 1967 while they occupied the Hudson River Valley house together.<sup>44</sup> In the letter, Tenney notes the humor in the play on words between "body house", a house of the body, and "bawdy house", a brothel. In an interview with Judith

Olch Richards, Schneemann describes *Fuses* as an effort to imagine her “sense of lived sensuality and actual experience, the pleasures of the body, [and] the intelligence of the body” which she felt that she could not find in artistic representations of the nude female body or in pornography of the time.<sup>45</sup> With this desire in mind, the Heart Chamber / Cunt Chamber serves as a literary summary of the intent and the experience of making of *Fuses*.

To move outside of Schneemann’s home, yet remain within the scope of the *Body House*, I would like to present one more room, the Kidney Room, which was also written in October 1967, during the revolutionary fervor in the United States that was focused on resisting the Vietnam War. It reads,

In the Kidney people come together to discuss revolution—that is changing or transforming political forms which are repressive, exploitative, divisive and life-negative. It is a simple outdoor space (a vague sheltering landscape); daytime light; a luminescent green bile river runs by. There are three large kidneys to sit on; they are made of stone; they form a semi-circle on a grassy bank.<sup>46</sup>

The function of the kidney in the human body, which acts as a mechanism to regulate the pH of the body by filtering waste and extra fluid out of the blood, in a sense is the most fitting organ in which to stage or analogize revolution. Biologically, the kidney cleanses and restores the body to a state of equilibrium; revolution is to the people what the kidney is to the body. This is the first space in *Parts of a Body House* that is explicitly set in the outdoors. Schneemann describes the landscape around her house in terms of the body. In the *Breaking the Frame*, Schneemann describes her “snow covered Hudson farmhouse” and the way the landscape in which the house was set was “a powerful, engaging, welcoming presence” for her.<sup>47</sup> This scene is accompanied by a visual of Schneemann swimming in the stream upon which her house sits, although it is filled with water as opposed to green bile.

In *Fantastic Architecture*, the page for this room is partially obscured by the nude portrait of Schneemann. She is seen crouching with her hands on her knees, staring directly, confrontationally out at the viewer, while her long, dark hair falls over her front shoulder, thus highlighting her breasts. The bent over nature of Schneemann's pose results in the entire horizontal upper half of her body—from nose and shoulders to buttocks—being covered with text. Beginning on the following page, right at Schneemann's bent knees, is The Guerrilla Gut. Each word in this room is clearly legible and it is the first time in *Parts of a Body House* in which the reader has a visual image to associate with the body through which they are travelling. In this moment, the reader is not imaginarily participating in the action of Schneemann's body, the filtering of the Kidney Room, and the planning of the Guerrilla Gut, rather they are inside of and become the ecstatic body Schneemann creates. Due to the placement of the nude portrait of the artist, the visual image of *Parts of a Body House* is implicitly linked to Schneemann's particular body rather than a nameless female body or the physical home. In one sense, the revolution Schneemann alludes to is silenced by the presence of her own nude image.

A different nuance of this same section appears in Schneemann's publication of *Parts of a Body House Book* in 1972 where the Kidney Room is part of the same entry as The Guerilla Gut. Instead of two separate entities, as they appear in *Fantastic Architecture*, they are part of the same outdoor landscape. The Guerrilla Gut portion of *Parts of a Body House*, as it appears in both publications, reads:

On the opposite side of the Bile River is a long tract of jungle and forest in which four city blocks are situated, a military installation, and a harbor. This complex is called the Gut. In the Gut people gather to enact various guerilla exercises which last from a few hours to a few months. A basic guerilla-life-theater which includes: living alone, living together confined, loving, arguing; how to build and choose together, how to fulfill tasks, finding food and water and their distribution, cooking without an open fire,

sewing, first aid; jumping, catapulting across obstacles, crawling for hours, scaling walls, running, carrying and lifting bodies, hiking from one place to another without directions in the night, in the day; climbing trees, hide and seek, planting traps, sleeping under leaves, in mud and sand, etc. In a continually improvised environment—using found materials—basic skill in building will be tried; making traps, simple explosives, rope knotting; blocking roads buildings and the harbor will be attempted. And within the Gut labyrinth the people have reunions after separations, celebrations around fires, dancing before difficult tasks, reading the stars, gardening falling in love for moments or years. In an open field they may develop self-defense methods; camouflage, masks, disguises [sic], pageantry....Nonverbal communications will be set up using fire and light signals, marks and signs made or found in the landscape, and communication by mutual body energy awareness. Special technical effects and certain physical relationships of people and materials will be monitored from the Nerve Ends room and may be adapted to uses for the Gut.<sup>48</sup>

The description of this complex keeps the reader/participator active, moving, and performing a variety of tasks and production. Much like the biological function of the human gut, which includes the esophagus, the stomach, the small and large intestine, and the colon, and is responsible for digesting food, the Guerilla Gut carries out the digestion, so to speak, of the revolutionary ideals of the Kidney Room. In this vein of thought, it makes more sense for the two sections to be combined as one larger section as seen in Schneemann's 1972 artists' book. This is not to say that these two sections do not function when they appear separate. By Schneemann's later publication of this artwork, her decision to combine the two sections indicates a progression or unity of her feminist theory beyond the statement made in the 1970 publication of *Parts of a Body House*—the revolution of the Kidney is not possible without the mobilizing of the Guerilla Gut.

Schneemann describes the political climate of the 1960s as a "consuming and really intense" political configuration especially in which the latter portion of the decade was characterized by the Civil Rights Movement and opposition to the Vietnam War.<sup>49</sup> This divisive moment in history and the widespread opposition to the United States government, which



served as both a detractor from the fledgling women's movement and a preserving catalyst, coincided with Schneemann's personal breakdown between 1968-1969. Two major occurrences during 1968 that affected Schneemann's personal health were the Tet Offensive beginning in January and Schneemann's split with Tenney in February. Within the next year, Schneemann also split with her lover, Tom Molhom. The United States and Schneemann's personal life were both in upheaval and, in May 1969, Schneemann self-exiled to Europe.<sup>50</sup> Schneemann's letters from this time do not mention the publication of this artwork with Something Else Press with much significance, but her statement to Alexandra Juhasz about this time period seems to offer insight. She says, "everything cracks apart about 1968 or 1969."<sup>51</sup> In essence, Schneemann's need to exit the United States overshadowed almost all other events in her life at the time. Her correspondence, too, from this time period appears less voluminous than prior to and after her period abroad.

Schneemann's choice to publish with Beau Geste Press, too, is significant when considering her choice to remove herself from the New York art world. Partners Martha Hellion and Felipe Ehrenberg began the Beau Geste Press in 1970, which disbanded by 1974, as a collective to produce artists' books with the intent to "protest rigid thinking, to engender a sense of community and to foster an international network of fellow travelers."<sup>52</sup> Donna Cowell's survey article of Beau Geste Press furthers this notion and takes into account the broad result of the press as "evidence of creative networks and exchanges that existed between Europe and Latin America in the period—relationships that have not received adequate attention."<sup>53</sup> As a result of her collaboration with artists outside of the more familiar New York avant-garde, and especially due to the presence of the artwork *Parts of a Body House*

in the Beau Geste publication of her artists' book, the painterliness—the goopy, soft bodiliness of the separate rooms and the action of moving through these rooms—is critical to the iconography of representational imagery. Moreover, this created an environment that resembled nothing of the vanguard artwork hostile to painting or the concrete, linear Kaprow environment, that Schneemann removed herself from by moving to England.

Concurrently, as Bonnie Traymore notes, this period saw the proliferation of the Hugh Hefner brand, which “spurred on others and resulted in many ways in a cheap, pornographic female sexuality in American society.”<sup>54</sup> This image of femininity and female sexuality in a consumer driven, sexual revolution was contradictory in its own right—the battle-axe versus the centerfold. The sexual revolution within this context was possible due to a rise in expectation of women to perform a public identity in postwar America. This dichotomy created a void into which Carolee Schneemann, who came of professional age in this period of women struggling to define femininity, inserted herself and her work. Returning to Schneemann's nude photograph in *Fantastic Architecture*, the depiction of her in a pin-up format is a problem and likely contributed to her decision to publish *Parts of a Body House Book* without Something Else Press in 1972. Rather than risking her credibility as an artist once again at the hands of needless and unearned sexualization, Schneemann chose to publish her artwork on her own terms.

During Schneemann's time abroad, the feminist movement in the United States continued to gain popular traction. In 1970, Kate Millet published her pivotal, radical feminist text, *Sexual Politics*. The thesis of Millet's book revolves around an analysis of patriarchy as a structure which sponsors political domination of males over females. Through close literary

analysis of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer, *Sexual Politics* analyzes the manner in which sexual stereotypes transcend and undermine the reformation of the condition of women's lives. The second chapter, "The Theory of Sex Politics," states, "coitus can scarcely be placed in a vacuum; although of itself it appears a biological and physical activity, it is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes."<sup>55</sup> Millet's definition of politics which "refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another," is imperative.<sup>56</sup> Politics, here, focuses on the function of control—who has and wields it—versus a presumed biological condition in a manner that encapsulates all realms of human life: the personal, the professional, the social, and so forth. Undoubtedly controversial at the time of its publication, critics lambasted the book as an incendiary, emotional misreading of Freud that over-simplified American literary works. However, Marcia Seligson's article, "De Beauvoir, Lessing — now Kate Millet," in the *New York Times* noted Millet's work as "a rare achievement. Its measure of detachment is earned by learning, reason and love...It is a piece of passionate thinking on a life-and-death aspect of our public and private lives."<sup>57</sup> Millet, through her book, was able to reflect the tension and expanded understanding of gendered and sexual politics in modern American history.

In relation to Schneemann specifically, *Sexual Politics* was published at the beginning of Schneemann's exile to Europe. It was Millet's first major work, but over the next four decades, the two artists remained friends and peers, exchanging letters and dialogue about one another's artwork. In a letter from August 1990, Schneemann congratulates Millet on her most recent book, *The Loony Bin Trip* and recalls their shared experiences with mental illness. The

letter states, "Returned, restored here after times of loss, exile, the flip out years in which we passed each other. To have had you in my dank Belsize park flat, sipping whiskey in front of the feeble coal fire when I [sic] was barely functional...present, companionable, not betraying in the welter of contradictory perceptions."<sup>58</sup> Both artists experienced periods of artistic growth followed by personal discord and both utilized this broad emotional spectrum in their artwork.

Schneemann returned to the United States during 1973, the same year of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the signing of the Paris Peace Accords to remove U.S. troops from Vietnam, and during the height of the Watergate scandal. Moreover, Schneemann returned on the upswing of radical feminism. Schneemann's work during the remainder of this period can be described as introspective or reflective of how her art had been publicly perceived in the fifteen years prior. Unwilling to be slighted by the rejection of her drawings for *Parts of a Body House*, Schneemann continued to explore the interior space of her body as an interlocutor with the external world. In *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1973-1976) and *Interior Scroll* (1975), Schneemann continued to utilize her body as the initial location of representation.

In the former artwork, *Up To and Including Her Limits* (Figure 10 Appendix), Schneemann's body creates artistic gestures in the most literal sense through the use of paper, crayon, and rope. As she is suspended in the air by rope, the crayons trace an interaction between her canvas and her bodily movement. Schneemann describes the physicality of this performance in an email to Cliff Eyland, author of the article, "Carolee Schneemann", for Gallery One One One (now the School of Art Gallery) at the University of Manitoba in Canada. She states, "My actions...involved endurance of 8 hours or more on and off the rope [and] the physical demands of supporting the body, balancing, swinging, stretching depended on a

condition of entrancement.”<sup>59</sup> The physical strenuousness required of Schneemann as she worked to both control the manner in which her body hung and moved in space, as well as to control the mark making that occurred as a result of her body in space, are visible in the array of strokes and gestures seen in her multiple performances of the artwork. Elyand’s essay concentrates on Schneemann’s 1976 film, also titled *Up To And Including Her Limits*, which was edited in 1984 and includes footage of the six performances of this piece between 1974 and 1976: the Berkeley Museum, 1974; London Filmmakers Cooperative, 1974; Artists Space, NY, 1974; Anthology Film Archives, NY, 1974; The Kitchen, NY, 1976; and the Studio Galerie, Berlin, 1976.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Elyand acknowledges her connection to and influence from Jackson Pollock and abstract expressionism as particularly visible in this artwork, citing the “fast and decisive” gestures shared by the two artists.<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, Schneemann’s mark making in this piece, while bearing initial formal characteristics to Pollock, reads as methodic and calculated due largely to her arduous position within the art space for extended periods of time. Schneemann’s textuality, as a whole, is rich with prolonged production in order to precisely examine the use of the body, space, and the written medium.

In his article, “In the Flesh,” for the retrospective, *Carolee Schneemann: Up to and Including Her Limits*, at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York in 1996, Dan Cameron summarized the shift of Schneemann’s artwork during this vocal period as follows: “the candor of Schneemann’s work took on a more overtly politicized feminism during the mid-1970s, at precisely the same moment, Barbara Kruger and other artists of her generation began to fuse a savvy knowledge of photomechanical know-how with a cooler, more semiotically precise feminist critique based on mass media.”<sup>62</sup> Essentially, while Schneemann’s work never

faltered in its feminist ambition, other artists like Kruger created artwork that was more accessible on a mass-scale due to its less bodily commentary on patriarchal privilege, in addition to the more compact, portable aspect of such works. The method of Schneemann's reflection on the gender-based hierarchies in art, as Cameron terms, "[to challenge] the historical dynamic of possession and control between the artist and (her) subject," resulted in art that was less easily consumed by the fledgling feminist art consumer.<sup>63</sup>

There is a certain lack of fear and confidence necessary to integrate such unashamed use of the female body in a society that was just beginning to confront its puritanical social structure. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s emergences of sex-based (-positive and -negative) feminism that Schneemann's radical, sex-positive artwork received the critical reception it deserved. The period of the late-1970s and early-1980s shifted interest away from Carolee Schneemann's brand of immersive, radical performance and use of the body, however, the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century have seen a re-acknowledgement of Schneemann's prowess as a visual expression of an alternative to normative modes of representation.

*Interior Scroll* (Figure 11, Appendix), on the other hand, radically transforms the body as a space to construct and deliver messages. In August 1975, Schneemann first performed her most famous piece, *Interior Scroll*, at the exhibition, *Women Here and Now*, in East Hampton, New York. The second performance occurred just over two years later in September 1977 at the Telluride Film Festival. In both, prior to the proper reading, Schneemann performed a sort of ritual preparation that invited meditation on the space of her body. First, she placed a long table in the corner of the exhibition hall under two dim spotlights. Schneemann approached

this table, fully dressed, with two sheets and a copy of her book, *Cezanne, She Was A Great Painter*, in hand. Next, she undressed and covered her body with one sheet and spread the other over the table. To define the true performance space, Schneemann painted large, contouring lines on her body and face then mounted the table where she read aloud while taking a variety of “action poses”, always balancing the book in her hand.<sup>64</sup> To conclude the piece, Schneemann stood in an upright squat—like a hunched Venus—and extracted a scroll from her vagina that she read, inch by inch.

*Interior Scroll*, another work which was developed organically for many years before she unveiled it to a public audience, is the most confrontational piece associated with the artists’ oeuvre, exploring her continued radical use of the female body and overtly inserting the vagina at the center of her artwork. The text that Schneemann read for *Interior Scroll* was an excerpt from the texts in her film, *Kitch’s Last Meal* (1973-1975). It reads like a grocery list of critiques and biases against Schneemann’s work, one line condemning these critiques on a larger cultural scale, “PAY ATTENTION TO CRITICAL AND PRACTICAL FILM LANGUAGE IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY ONE GENDER [sic].”<sup>65</sup> Focusing in on the peculiarities of film, Schneemann acknowledges the radical nature and the added labor of women in the professional sphere, who have had to either mold their artwork into the male canon or expand the canon to fit their artwork. Schneemann recalls first conceptualizing about “vulvic space” for an assignment on symbolism in which she researched the traditionally phallic symbol of serpents across ancient cultures, ultimately identifying with the notion that snakes symbolized the cosmic energy of the female womb.<sup>66</sup> Over time, her concept of this space becoming more elaborate, Schneemann developed a relationship of the womb and vagina as a source of primary knowledge to an

exterior manifestation of that knowledge in the form of a serpent. In *Interior Scroll*, the serpent uncoils in the form of a scroll extracted from Schneemann's vagina as she reads text from it, thus she transmits her interior knowledge to the audience through the form of the symbolic serpent scroll. Returning to de Beauvoir, Schneemann molds the mythology of the serpent goddess into an expression which addresses contemporary efforts to subjugate her work to the periphery of the New York avant-garde.

This glimpse into two decades of Carolee Schneemann's illustrious career illuminates a theory of radical everyday life that developed alongside—both due to and influential on—the socio-political climate of postwar America. Betty Friedan's analysis of the myth of the modern homemaker in *The Feminine Mystique* offered a widely accessible platform for the second-wave of feminism to speak. Her aversion to the notion that female social and political independence and femininity were mutually exclusive was revolutionary in the 1960s. Simone de Beauvoir, before Friedan, articulated the impossibility of the current condition of women in her pioneering text, *The Second Sex*. Each of these literary masterpieces illustrated a future that Carolee Schneemann's artistic production brought to life. In the spirit of provocative text and image making, *Parts of a Body House* combined Schneemann's use of the body as interlocutor to one's environment and to representation through a scripted performance of mythical space. This piece took on the expectation of the woman as Other and molded it beyond social recognition into a landscape of exploration, comfort, pleasure, sex, and violence.

Carolee Schneemann, using the lens of Friedan, reformed the stereotypes of the domestic servant and desexualized laborer. Through the entirety of her career, her use of the house, the body, and the printed word plow over the dominant expectation of women and



women artists, thus offering an alternative to the myth of femininity through a thoroughly individualized form of feminist expression. Schneemann's body is used as an essential facilitator in the intimate exploration of how her environment informs her every artistic notion, however, over time, her environment expands beyond her Hudson River Valley home to include the New York avant-garde art landscape of the twentieth century, the American political and social landscape of the same time, and beyond. Through a climate of questioning femininity catalyzed by Friedan and sharpened by de Beauvoir, Schneemann produced an oeuvre which articulates a theory of radical everyday life and expression upon which present day theories of gender politics and sexual freedom rely.

Although Schneemann's form of expression—in which her literal home and the abstract home act as unremitting and intersecting presences—started to take shape prior to the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan's poignant critique of the normative American life became a point of reference through which Schneemann's artwork could later be accessed. Friedan's book is not without its faults—for example, there is a total absence of the intersectional effects of race and class on gender politics and an omnipresent heteronormativity; similar critiques could be applied to Schneemann's artwork, though they would miss the autobiographical orientation and generalized critique of sexual politics in American culture. Also, it could be said that Schneemann works in a relatively conventional view of heteronormative beauty. Moreover, Schneemann overlooks the immediacy of and her ability to step outside of her positionality—privileged, affluent upbringing, well-educated—and, in this sense, neglects her situational ability to speak as a not only an artist, but a radical artist. Schneemann is not working in the same arenas as laborer Rosie the Riveter, the women she is

speaking to are not desexualized cogs in an industrial machine. In fact, the women to which Schneemann's artwork speaks are full of agency and assertively wield their power to pursue pleasure and eschew social convention. Nonetheless, Schneemann's work is imperative for its original impact on Euro-American feminism upon which the foundation for the critiques of intersectionality rely. Even so, just as Friedan circulated in every discussion among women involved in the culture of consciousness raising and feminism from the moment of its publication, Schneemann's artwork stands up beyond its shortcomings to remain influential today.

Until recently, Friedan's prevalence as a principal figure in an era where women began to shun the responsibility and expectation to conform to mainstream ideals of femininity has outshone Schneemann's popular prestige. But, Schneemann's long overdue awarding of the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia in May 2017 underlines her innovation in the larger frame of feminism. Schneemann produced a visual expression of an alternative to the myth of femininity through artwork that incorporates the mythology of the domestic in an alternative form than what one might expect to see in post-war America. Moreover, her artwork laid foundations for sex positive feminism prevalent today through her practice of embodying an explicitly sexual form of expressive freedom. Christine Macel, curator of the exhibition, "Viva Arte Viva", at the Venice Biennale, summarizes Schneemann's importance by highlighting her examination of "the possibilities of political and personal emancipation from predominant social and aesthetic conventions" through a range of media and an extensive span of time.<sup>67</sup> For Schneemann and her artistic legacy, emancipation does not occur in the form of shunning the cultural conventions

associated with the female body, rather her art offers a sense of the negotiations required to live in a particular culture.

The durability of Carolee Schneemann as a feminist exemplar is due to both the breadth and duration of her artistic production. In a time when women had such tenuous agency over their existence, Schneemann's career demonstrates the tempestuous reputation of the house and the body in any form of feminist expression. Moreover, Schneemann has successfully molded both spheres in her artwork for over fifty years. Her career and the deployment of a radicalized domestic sphere within the arts function in a symbiotic relationship, which Schneemann recalls in her desire to purchase her farmhouse, "I had no money, I had no job...But I was quite obsessed with this house. And it turns out the house was also obsessed with me."<sup>68</sup> Schneemann's *Parts of a Body House* reveals an inescapable bond between environment, body, and expression. She situates her body and her house in an exchange that creates an intimate exploration of how the domestic environment—the typically female realm—can still be an erotic and bodily space that is both unfamiliar and recognizable, but also exciting and grounding—a new myth.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Juhasz, *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 406.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 479.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Marielle Nitoslawksa, *Breaking the Frame*, directed by Marielle Nitoslawksa (2012; Canada; Stereo), film.

<sup>9</sup> Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Kathy O'Dell, "Fluxus Feminus," *TDR* 41, no 1 (Spring 1997), 49.

<sup>12</sup> Kristine Stiles, ed., *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2010), 193.

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- <sup>13</sup> Carolee Schneemann, *Parts of a Body House Book* (Devon: Beau Geste Press, 1972), cover.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 2.
- <sup>15</sup> Ron Broglio, "Body of Thought: Immanence and Carolee Schneemann," in *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art*, 25-56 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 138.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>17</sup> Carolee Schneemann, *Imagining Her Erotics, Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 61.
- <sup>18</sup> Richard Martin, "Painting for Pleasure: An Interview with Carolee Schneemann," *Apollo*, August 12, 2017, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/painting-for-pleasure-an-interview-with-carolee-schneemann/>.
- <sup>19</sup> Wolf Vostell and Dick Higgins, *Fantastic Architecture* (New York: Something Else Press, 1970).
- <sup>20</sup> A few years later, Schneemann would emulate Manet's *Olympia* in Robert Morris' performance artwork, *Site* (1964).
- <sup>21</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 283.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, 162.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, 361.
- <sup>24</sup> Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 20.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, xlii.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, xliii.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 214.
- <sup>28</sup> Jane Ciabattari, "The 100 Greatest British Novels," *BBC*, December 7, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20151204-the-100-greatest-british-novels>.
- <sup>29</sup> Justyna Kostkowska, "Unpacking the Holographs: Genre, Gender, and Female Creativity in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*," (PhD Dissertation, University of Delaware, 1995), 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 67.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Jarrett Earnest, "Carolee Schneemann with Jarrett Earnest," *The Brooklyn Rail*, December 6, 2016, <https://brooklynrail.org/2016/12/art/carolee-schneemann-with-jarrett-earnest>.
- <sup>34</sup> Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 67.
- <sup>35</sup> Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 19.
- <sup>36</sup> Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 67.
- <sup>37</sup> Elise Archias, *The Concrete Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 77.
- <sup>38</sup> Bonnie L. Traymore, "Dangerously Sensual: The Sexual Revolution, Feminism, and Grrl Power in Postwar America," (PhD diss., University of Hawai'i, 2003), 31.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, 32.
- <sup>40</sup> Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 70.
- <sup>41</sup> Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 95.
- <sup>42</sup> Vostell and Higgins, *Fantastic Architecture*.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 169.
- <sup>45</sup> Judith Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann," *Smithsonian Archives of American Art*, March 1, 2009,
- <sup>46</sup> Vostell and Higgins, *Fantastic Architecture*.
- <sup>47</sup> Nitoslawska, *Breaking the Frame*.
- <sup>48</sup> Vostell and Higgins, *Fantastic Architecture*.
- <sup>49</sup> Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 68.

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<sup>50</sup> In this same year, 1969, Wolf Vostell and Dick Higgins published a German version of *Fantastic Architecture* (*Pop-Architektur*) with the Droste Verlag press; the English publication from the Something Else Press was published in the following year, 1970. However, the German publication is very rare and I have been unable to obtain or see a copy of the book.

<sup>51</sup> Juhasz, *Women of Vision*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Jennifer Higgle, "Beau Gest Press," *Frieze*, February 16, 2017, <https://frieze.com/article/beau-geste-press>.

<sup>53</sup> Donna Cowell, "Beau Geste Press," *Getty Research Journal* 2 (2010), 190.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>55</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 23.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> Marcia Seligson, "De Beauvoir, Lessing—Now Kate Millet," *New York Times*, September 6, 1970, [http://www.nytimes.com/1970/09/06/archives/de-beauvoir-lessing-now-kate-millett-sexual-politics-sexual.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/1970/09/06/archives/de-beauvoir-lessing-now-kate-millett-sexual-politics-sexual.html?_r=0).

<sup>58</sup> Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 403.

<sup>59</sup> Cliff Eyland, "Carolee Schneemann," *Carolee Schneemann: Up To And Including Her Limits*, Gallery One One One, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://www.umanitoba.ca/schools/art/content/galleryoneoneone/schneemann01.html>.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>62</sup> Dan Cameron, ed., *Carolee Schneemann: Up to and Including Her Limits* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Schneemann, *Imagining Her Erotics*, 154.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 159.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

<sup>67</sup> La Biennale Di Venezia, *Carolee Schneemann Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement*, 2017, <http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2017/golden-lion-lifetime-achievement>

<sup>68</sup> Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann," 2.

## APPENDIX

Figure 1: Scan of “The Kidney Room” from *Parts of Body House in Fantastic Architecture* by Vostell and Higgins, 1970.

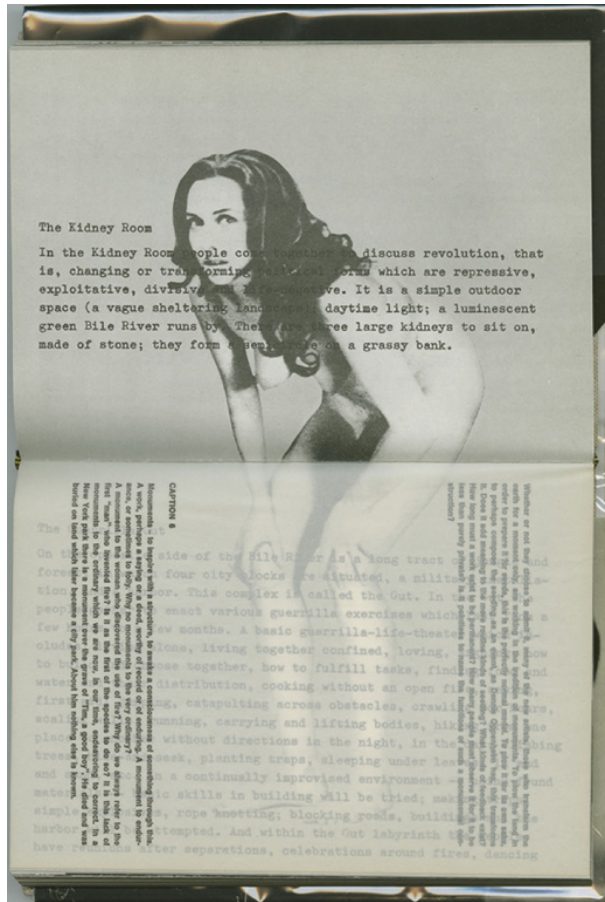


Figure 2: Carolee Schneemann, “Genitals Play Room I”, 1966, watercolor and ink on paper.  
[http://www.ppowgallery.com/exhibition/2453/work/fullscreen\\_exhib#&panel1-13](http://www.ppowgallery.com/exhibition/2453/work/fullscreen_exhib#&panel1-13)

Figure 3: Scan of *Parts of a Body House Book* cover, 1972



Figure 4: Carolee Schneemann, "Meat Joy", 1964, chromogenic color print of the performance in New York (<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/works.html>)

Figure 5: François Boucher, *Madame du Pompadour at her Toilette*, 1758 (public domain)



Figure 6: Edgar Degas, *Woman at Her Toilette*, 1900/05 (public domain)



Figure 7: Édouard Manet, *Olympia* 1865 (public domain)



Figure 8: Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, ca. 1510 (public domain)





Figure 9: Carolee Schneemann, still from *Fuses*, 1964-1967  
(<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/works.html>)

Figure 10: Carolee Schneemann, still from *Up To And Including Her Limits*, 1973-1976  
(<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/works.html>)

Figure 11: Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975  
(<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/works.html>)

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