The Exploratory Nature of Carolee Schneemann’s French Influences and Travels

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The art world of the 20th-century was dominated by male-centered conversations, making it difficult for women to thrive in the same artistic environment. By the end of the century, after fighting for their rights, women were beginning to openly explore body and performance art more thoroughly. Carolee Schneemann, a central figure in those domains beginning in the 1960s to the 1980s, was a part of the ever-changing art world and a leader in the search for new paths of expression for women. Feminist art was barely emerging when she began her journey of facing the patriarchal system, looking to change the image projected upon women. Schneemann started her artistic journey influenced by Abstract Expressionism, using her body as an extension of her paintings. This led her to be one of the first women to disrupt the unbalanced depiction of the female nude always under the fetishizing gaze of the man. She was adamant about projecting her own gaze upon herself and depicting it, taking on both roles instead of the typical use of the woman as an object. Referenced by feminist theorists of then and today from Mary Beth Edelson to Amelia Jones, Schneemann holds, nowadays, a steady place in the history of feminist art. Often outspoken and controversial, she criticized those who tried to categorize her definitively. Despite there being vast amounts of written information about contemporary artists and their lives, there are often gaps in documentation. For Schneemann, this blurry part of her history is how strongly she was influenced by France and French people throughout her career. She traveled extensively throughout Europe for both personal and professional reasons, but the scholarship does not go into detail about these experiences.\(^1\) Instead, sources focus on the explicit nature of sexuality in her works, her

relationships (both romantic and platonic), and her biography. This essay will extend information about Schneemann’s life and analyze how French theorists and artists influenced her work and lifestyle. Her travels occurred long after her first encounter with French literature and art. Using her works, *Quarry Transposed*, *36 Eye Body*, *Meat Joy*, *Fuses*, and *Interior Scroll*, this essay will examine how her choices originated from these French concepts and will allow the scholarship of Schneemann to be more inclusive of her international inspirations. The childhood catalyst of opening her mind to French art through Paul Cézanne, theories of feminism of Simone De Beauvoir, theater studies of Surrealist Antonin Artaud, and cinematic endeavors in Cannes are all part of Schneemann’s appreciation for French persons.

Carolee Schneemann often wrote for private and public consumptions. *Imaging her Erotics*, *More than Meat Joy*, *Uncollected Texts*, and *Correspondence Course* are examples of Schneemann’s thoughts sporadically mixed in with texts from other authors. They are a combination of primary and secondary sources. Schneemann’s letters were to and from family, friends, professional circles, and acquaintances. They are compiled in *Correspondence Course* and interjected with commentary about Schneemann’s life and the world surrounding her by editor Kristine Stiles.\(^2\) *Imaging Her Erotics* and *More than Meat Joy* are also collaborations, but they are more centered around interviews, essays, letters, notes, and images to explain her

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\(^2\) Schneemann, and Stiles, *Correspondence Course*. 
art.\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Uncollected Texts} put together by Branden Joseph is filled with texts not seen as often or never seen together.\textsuperscript{4}

Performance and body art were written about extensively since the 1970s because of the changes in gender expectations; artists explored a more open acceptance of their gendered bodies as material for art. Dr. Amelia Jones, a prominent scholar, beginning in the 1980s, wrote extensively about feminist art and body art, often using Carolee Schneemann’s work as case studies. Jones also interviewed Schneemann and participated in a letter correspondence with the artist. Kathy Constandinides in “Carolee Schneemann: Invoking Body Politics” also delves deeply into Schneemann’s embodied relationship to her work and how it became framed as risqué to the general public.\textsuperscript{5} Nevertheless, their scholarship basically outlines her French influences without diving into their impactful impressions upon Schneemann.

For this essay, I look to cultural studies in order to analyze the varied attitudes towards sexuality by American vs. French culture. This cultural context is important to understand how Schneemann’s work was received in both countries and how these cultural attitudes about sexual subjects may have impacted scholarship. \textit{The Naked Truth} by Kevin Sandler analyzes Hollywood and its friction with the pornography industry. However, it also provides some

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insight into the cultural issues the U.S. has with sex and women as erotic subjects.⁶ Kevin White in *Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?* discusses sexual liberation in the United States and how sexuality drastically changed in less than one century.⁷ Sexuality in art and film was pertinent to Schneemann because she created movies and used sexual acts in some of her works. Both Michelle Chilcoat and Tim Palmer focused their research in French cinema and how the body was represented in specific movies and directors in “Analyzing Sexuality in French and Francophone Film” and “Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body,” respectively.

Primary sources of French authors figure prominently in my study, since they were some of Schneemann’s most important sources as well. Antonin Artaud, a figure important to experimental theatre going back to the Surrealist period, wrote both *The Theater of Cruelty and The Theater and its Double*, and was an important figure to analyze Schneemann’s performance work. In his books, he writes about his thoughts on how theater had to change.⁸ A few authors also wrote essays about his works, and they were put together in *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*.⁹ Gene A. Plunka also edited a book on how Artaud had affected modern theater and his impact on the stage after his death.¹⁰ Simone De Beauvoir and her writings about the woman’s role, specifically her texts *La Force Des Choses* and *The Second Sex*, resonated through the

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scholarly world. In “Sex, Love, and Letters: Writing Simone de Beauvoir, 1949—1963,” Judith Coffin details more personal experiences of De Beauvoir through her letters. Other Feminist texts compiled in Feminism-Art-Theory: an Anthology 1968-2014 come from different theorists, artists, and critics and will be useful in this study.

The relationship that artists have with people of the past or present that inspire them is essential to both their art and their theories, Schneemann was first inspired by Paul Cézanne, a famous French Impressionist painter as a child. She thought of him as a woman at first because she interpreted the first and last part of his name to be disconnected. For her, his name was Anne, and Schneemann loved her. Since she was introduced to him so young, there is more reflection of him within her early works, especially her paintings. She was fascinated by his use of broken lines and mentioned it multiple times within the books, letters, and essays. Mont Saint-Victoire, a painting by Cézanne in 1887, uses broken lines to create dimensions for the shapes such as the mountain, the main subject of the painting (Figure 1). It is a typical Impressionist landscape with evidence of human life, but an emphasis on nature since the tree is in the front view, and its branches suggest the movement of wind. The mountain stands dominant and still, but spatially pressed close to the branches. Some houses and an agricultural scene make-up the middle ground, sitting below the massive mountain. Cézanne’s small lines of different colors turn a simple small brush stroke into a tree in his paintings. Schneemann says in her book More Than

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14 Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics, 145.
Meat Joy, “the rigor of the action of paint in space was nowhere more demanding than in his works—my longing for the richness (engulffing all preconceived notions about what was an expressive image) and extensiveness of natural forms took courage and challenge from his experience,”.15 The physicality in his work and the colors playing with each other intrigued her, and she translated this to her mixing of media. One of her paintings done in 1960 named Quarry Transposed (Central Park in the Dark) includes different materials such as nails, paint, and wire (Figure 2). By using objects and diverse textures, she was breaking the typical painterly lines and shattering boundaries she had felt looking at Cézanne. The painting is full of organically shaped blocks of colors that range in hues of black or gray with some exceptions, such as beige and red. The strokes twist and turn, which creates chaos. This reminds the viewer of the action she felt from Cézanne’s work. Schneemann not only uses the line in her paintings and drawing, but it was reflected in all her actions. She felt as though he would follow the line in order to break it. In her performance, Interior Scroll, the paper she used, and her actions were centered in drawing; in other words, following the line. In a letter discussing Interior Scroll, she referenced Cézanne and his “fragile persistence of the line moving into space.” 16 This respective use of line for Schneemann affected her painting and her performance, and she felt connected to the way Cézanne broke it through his brushstrokes, as though she was meant to break it as well but in the less painterly sense. Through both her childhood and adult years, these facts resonated in her language and art.

16 Schneemann and Stiles, Correspondence Course, 420.
Influence from a young age affects the future of the person, and the French painter sparked the international interest of young Schneemann. Nevertheless, as time went on and Schneemann changed and expanded her artistic practice, she consciously lost hold of some influence of Cézanne, but she never fully disconnected from his impressions. He was part of her passion for art; in a letter he wrote in 1957, she discusses that her style no longer reflected Cézanne but that she did not care about what he did do but what he did not do. She became more interested in what he suggested to her through his art, the broken line, more than the simple brushstroke. This subconscious weight of a French influence stood the test of time for Schneemann, and even if she never lived in France for an extended amount of time, she was intertwined with it as a country. She continually found reflections of herself in their art and culture, leading her work to be compounded with French influences.

The lifestyle of the young artistic crowd of France in the 1960s and ’70s was appreciated by Schneemann during her travels; she connected to their social behavior and their openness. This swift adaptation was because of her rural upbringing during her youth. Childhood highly influences a person, whether it is subconsciously or not, and these influences can change a person’s life and become the catalyst for their future. For Schneemann, it was apparent to her that her influences ranged from her medical father’s career as a doctor to fearing the gender roles she was brought up in. Coming from a small rural town in Pennsylvania, it was more convenient for medical exams to occur in the homes of the patient or doctor. Therefore, Schneemann was present for different medical procedures, usually involving bodily fluids, and

17Schneemann and Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 18.
19 Ibid.
raw pain. Both subjects became significant presences in her work. Interior Scroll, used birth, and Meat Joy and 36 Eye Body had splattered liquids or raw meat. As a young girl, she also spent time in nature, connecting to the earth and her body. She said that “drawing and masturbating were the first sacred experiences I remember. Both activities began when I was about four years old. Exquisite sensations produced in my body, and images that I made on paper tangled with language, religion, everything that I was taught...” She claimed childhood friends called her a “mad pantheist” because of her atypical rituals taking place among trees. Specific trees she felt were more important to her or laying outside only at certain times day or night; she would also hide in a well filled with wildflowers because she felt the transition from day to evening was overwhelming to her senses. Schneemann says that these activities connected to her desire to break through gender roles since she later saw her mother as solely existing in order to complete her family’s life. She wanted to act differently than the “typical” young girls’ roles and would continue doing so into her adult years. It was a concept that would be developed through her artwork, letters, and feminist discourse.

Her childhood was private, and she only discussed it occasionally, but she was known for writing hundreds of letters throughout her lifetime. Schneemann’s letters reveal that she pursued social interaction constantly, and she had a wide circle with whom she regularly communicated, both in the United States and abroad. These letters detail her experiences of being influenced by the French authors she would read or even how she felt walking around the

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22 Ibid, 131-132.
streets of Paris. Many of her letters were to James Tenney, her first husband of thirteen years. Their relationship extended to her work as well, as he became a prominent partner in several of her performances. They stayed together through her travels to Europe in the early 1960s and pursued their avant-garde lifestyle by moving around for their careers and passions but keeping a studio in New York for Schneemann.\textsuperscript{24} They later divorced as their opinions differed over whether to have children, with Tenney having a strong desire, and Schneemann unwilling to let her life become like that of her mother.\textsuperscript{25} Tenney was one of many recipients of letters throughout Schneemann’s life (even long after their marriage, they intimately kept in touch). Even so, Schneemann also interacted with Jean-Jacques Lebel and Errò, both artists living in France, Stan Brahkage, a platonic work partner, her family, and countless other people. However, with Tenney, the intimacy allowed Schneemann to detail experiences that could have been low importance to others, such as the emotions of being in Paris, or the small successes she felt in her artwork. These letters allowed people to understand why she went to Europe and how her friendships and travels affected her.

Schneemann’s international social life led her to be inspired by French people; she communicated with French people, using French references, and she felt that they reflected her own beliefs and thoughts. She often read and wrote in order to develop her theories, works, and self. One of the influential texts she read was from Simone de Beauvoir, born in 1908. The writer of \textit{The Second Sex} changed the patriarchal world with her open and loud challenges to women being the lesser sex in the dichotomy of male vs. female. She focused on gender

\textsuperscript{24} Schneemann and Stiles, \textit{Correspondence Course}.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
existing as a concept constructed by society and how the role that women were forced into playing was the true fear of the patriarchy.26 Simone de Beauvoir struck a chord with Schneemann, even becoming to her, in a letter she wrote in 1958 a “truer scale and more revealing than Freud... It is the most important book I’ve read...”.27 De Beauvoir analyzed the gender relationship history, including how men were creators and women were trapped in the biological system of childbearing.28

“Her whole moral future is shaken by it. Indeed, from childhood woman is repeatedly told she is made to bear children, and the praises of motherhood are sung; the disadvantages of her condition—periods, illness, and such—the boredom of household tasks, all this is justified by this marvelous privilege she holds, that of bringing children into the world. And in an instant, the man, to keep his freedom and not to handicap his future, in the interest of his job, asks the woman to renounce her female triumph.”29

These words spun a negative light on motherhood and long and arduous effort of it. This deeply affected Schneemann, through both her fear of being her own mother to being affected by De Beauvoir’s book, it was no wonder she wanted to avoid having children. The association of men with creation is reflected in the action that Schneemann took in her first work transitioning from painting to performance, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (Figures 3, 4, and 5). This work was a painting, an environment, a performance, and a series of thirty-six photographs all in one. The different mediums, including that of her physical presence and

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26 De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.
27 Schneemann and Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 19.
28 Schneemann and Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 100.
paintings, was called an assemblage. The word is from the French word to assemble.

Schneemann, for this specific assemblage, was adamant about her being the creator and the subject, changing the woman’s role of solely having to be the object. The assemblage consisted of her body completely covered in paint, grease, rope, chalk, and plastic.\(^30\) She discussed the area being “built of large panels interlocked by rhythmic color unites, broken mirrors and glass, lights, moving umbrellas, and motorized parts.”\(^31\) She felt as through her ‘self’ was becoming a part of the materials, submitting herself to them. The photographs taken of her in the assemblage, focused on her face or her body, either exclusively or both. There are some of her standing, lying down, and sitting, all with her legs closed or open. Sometimes she had a rope on top of her, referencing a snake, commonly associated by her to the vagina. A theme of Schneemann’s would be accepting the female image of nudity from a position of strength. In these photographs she is gazing directly back at the viewer, using her positions and face to resonate that she is making herself the artwork. This in turn connects back to women to looking back and combating the masculine gaze. De Beauvoir also had referenced mythological women that were created in order to reinforce the patriarchy. However, as she analyzed the sexism hidden within the story, she repositioned how the strength of femininity contradicted patriarchal society’s construction of women with weakness and passivity.\(^32\)

De Beauvoir’s point that gender is a construct and women are judged not by their actual hormones but by the societal femininity that they must abide by is dealt with by Schneemann in 36 Eye Body. In one of Schneemann’s most famous books, Imaging her Erotics, she explains that

\(^{30}\) Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics, 55.
\(^{31}\) Ibid.
\(^{32}\) De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 256-260.
for this particular work, she “wrote ‘my creative female will’ because for years my most audacious works were viewed as if someone else inhabiting me had created them. They were considered ‘masculine’ owing to their aggression and boldness, as if I were inhabited by a stray male principle.” 33 Confronting the viewer with her nakedness and her gaze back at the camera was a message that she thought the woman’s role had to be more inclusive of the woman as a creator. This courage to speak out in her terms was linked to this feminist energy rapidly developing. Schneemann often spoke of what she meant to exude in her art. Questioning the role of women was central to both Simone de Beauvoir and Schneemann’s identities, but it also was becoming a relevant topic in both America and France.

The French nation was not too far beyond America for women's rights, but their culture was more inclusive for the woman’s thought. 34 Famous upper-class French women centuries before De Beauvoir and Schneemann had enough freedom to express their opinions about society. 35 They did this through fictional stories or diaries, as De Beauvoir analyzes. The woman in France, occasionally, before she was married, had status equaling a man, compared to a more traditional Italy. 36 In the 1960s, both Schneemann and De Beauvoir were criticized. However, as discussed in his book Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?, Kevin White explains that America was still governed by Victorian standards in the 1960s, with the general population following the traditional family roles that were important post-World War II. 37 This was a glass ceiling for Schneemann and De Beauvoir, but as Schneemann notes in her letters to

33 Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics, 55.
34 Constantinides, “Invoking Body Politics,” 134.
36 Ibid, 138-139
37 White, Sexual Liberation or Sexual License? The American Revolt against Victorianism, 106.
Tenney, in France, men were less inclined to harass women and bother them. Women were noted as being more than just mothers and wives, though they still were categorized as less important, as De Beauvoir analyzed. The role of women was not the only interest of Schneemann; her readings dove into theater and culture as well.

Schneemann admired many aspects of France and was intrigued during the early 1960s by the work of Antonin Artaud. He was a participant in French theater during the latter 19th century to the first half of the 20th, but he was not a traditional artist and performer. His theories, which became well-known post-humously, dealt with, according to Schneemann, “the exploration of the mind-body dichotomy of Western culture, still unequaled in depth, breadth, or anguish.” He investigated the bodies of people suffering from illnesses and focused on subjects not often included in theater studies such as alchemy and Balinese theater. His writing, similar to Schneemann’s, made heavy use of vocabulary that referenced the brain and its’ different realms such as dreams and trances. In her 36 Eye Body notes, she writes that the creation of the work as relating to a trance, with rhythmic objects moving or changing. Edward Scheer, a scholar who wrote a critical reader to Artaud’s many texts and artworks, mentions in his introduction that Artaud thought of culture, language, and art not as ends but as places where force could be channeled. Schneemann used her body to channel the inner sexuality of women in her performances or her assemblages. This was a way for her to be an

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38 Schneemann and Stiles, Correspondence Course, find page.
39 Jay Murphy, “Assimilating the Unassimilable: Carolee Schneemann in Relation to Antonin Artaud,” in Imaging Her Erotics, ed. Schneemann, 226.
40 Artaud, The Theater and Its Double.
41 Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics, 55.
42 Scheer, Antonin Artaud, 3.
extension of the paintings, giving them never-ending circling energy, connecting them to Artaud’s concept. Resembling Artaud’s continual beliefs that culture, art, and language were not the way the society made them seem, he also believed that theater needed to rid itself of boundaries between the spectator and audience. This became an essential concept in performance art, a mid-way between theater and traditional art. Amelia Jones, a body art scholar, wrote in her book, Body Art/ Performing the Subject that performance must, “abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind…..Body art is viewed here as a set of performative practices that, through such intersubjectivity engagement instantiate the dislocation or decentering of the Cartesian subject of modernism…”.  

Schneemann collapsed these boundaries several times; In 36 Eye Body she made herself the creator and the performer but allowed the viewer to see both at the same time, creating a scene in her loft. In Meat Joy she allowed the audience to stand around the work and she interacted with them by spraying perfume. In most of her other performances she never completed the work on a traditional stage but she chose areas that were well-crowded in order to continually question the boundaries of the past, those which Artaud was also combating. This was not the only important aspect of his theories for Schneemann, as her interest in alchemy was mentioned and in the book, Imaging Her Erotics, there is a text from Jay Murphy in which he writes, “Artaud perhaps holds the key to Schneemann’s own radical feminist version of an alchemical resurrection of the body,”. It could be said that her synthesis of multiple senses with lived, bodily processes in works such as Meat Joy were alchemical in

43 Jones, Body Art/ Performing the Subject, 1.
44 Murphy, “Assimilating the Unassimilable,” in Imaging Her Erotics, 229-230.
nature, and she often described this work as an erotic rite. The performance was the end to the alchemical process. The importance of senses and alchemy from Artaud became an important endeavor for Schneemann in her work and led her down more bodily focused language and performance.

A Schneemann performance that was rooted in Artaud’s theories of alchemy and theater was her Meat Joy performed in 1964 at the Festival de la Libre Expression in Paris (Figures 6 and 7). The work was based on movement and dream-like trance. She created this by having a group of performers dressed in undergarments in constant movement. They danced standing up and laying down but did so in a playful way while a mixture of sounds played. These sounds included recordings from markets around La Seine, French grammar exercises, and music. Schneemann whilst wearing a maid uniform both directed but also threw a mixture of objects into the group, including raw meat such as full chickens and sausage links, raw fish, rope, paper, and paint. The performers moved organically according to each other and the objects, relying on improvisation. According to Artaud, when actors have completed actions in a performance, the energy negates itself since it is not the real completed action. Universality was important to understand how Artaud believed energy was negating itself because the inspiration of the action in theater vs. reality was key. The actor never truly fulfills the action on stage. Instead, the energy of the actor dissipates into the universal realm and it will continually survive through inspiration and theater compared to reality, where when something is done, there is no going back to it. The performances created by Schneemann, have the energy coming

from the actions that negate the societal constructs of mimicking sexual movements. The reality of the movements cannot survive but the inspiration does, through her theories and the performance itself. The dancers changed their moves with what felt appropriate, moving to the sounds, to each other, and the space around them. The eroticism of raw flesh from both the humans and dead animals created an environment that reminded the spectators of sexual actions. However, the actual physical acts of sex were never included, just alluded to. The naked touch is therefore sublimated into more than just a sex act, rather something that can be shared with the audience.

The energy in *Meat Joy* comes from an intimate physical relationship, that is both human and artistic, but this physical intimacy was at issue with America’s association of naked bodies with sex. America’s repression of the body and simultaneous fetishization of the body as sexual is exemplified in the absence of the true nude woman in their movies, specifically pubic hair and the explicit parts of the woman’s sexuality. However, French movies had a closer relationship to showing nude bodies, as European movies had less inhabitation to nudity in general. Both Artaud and Schneemann focused on the body though it was not always about nudity for Schneemann. The details in systems of the body was also essential. Artaud writes in *The Theater and it’s Double* that he wanted to make theater a function in the most precise and specific way, just as an artery circulation of blood does for created images in the brain when dreaming. Schneemann details her creation of the work as wanting to capture the conscious and unconscious changes, their content, and sensory feelings. She also created specific

48 White, *Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?*, 139.
reasonings for her performances by writing an extensive amount per artwork, often published in her books such as *More than Meat Joy* and *Imaging her Erotics*. These detailed texts were places where she could explain her new undertakings, such as new vocabulary or ideas that she wanted the artistic world to note.

Artaud’s theater was the catalyst for Schneemann’s creation of Kinetic Theater, which she began writing about in the early 1960s, linked to her notes from *Meat Joy*. This very active type of performance is a good reflection of her continual use of different aspects of life. Her theater included many parts of the everyday human world coming together, just as Artaud often used concepts from all over the world and life to explain his theories of theater, art, and performance. The movement of *Meat Joy* was rooted in the new artistic endeavor, and for Schneemann, it was a juxtaposition of many senses that could play onto each other from the inside to the outside; images in the brain and tactile sensations, a journey for the eyes and the body as an active unit. Schneemann was searching for the “formal-metaphoric activity possible within a painting or construction, the viewers’ sorting of responses and interpretation of the forms of kinetic theater will still be equilibrated with all their past visual experiences.”

Artaud wrote in, *The Theater and Its Double*, that theater was a “social disaster so far-reaching, an organic disorder so mysterious—this overflow of vices, this total exorcism which presses and

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50 It is also important to note that Artaud’s words and drawings began showing in museums, specifically Museum of Modern Art in New York City during the 1990’s, the same time that they did a one-person retrospective about Schneemann. The two had ties that were too obvious to ignore, especially with Schneemann and Jones often associating Artaud with Kinetic Theater. During this time the museum was as well realizing their importance in their respective domains.


52 Ibid, 42.
impels the soul to its utmost—all indicate the presence of a state which is nevertheless characterized by extreme strength...”  

This active language explains the intense passion Artaud felt for the theater and the ways it should be, relating to Schneemann’s persistent search for changing the performance world through her body art.

*Meat Joy* was debuted at a French performance art festival, put together by Jean-Jacques Lebel, a close French friend of hers’. Though the French spectators were willing to see her avant-garde work, there were plenty of extreme reactions during the performance, including a man who attempted to strangle Schneemann. People thought it was part of the performance until they realized it was not, and the man was escorted out with security. There was also a complete silence during the spectacle, something that Schneemann had never witnessed from the French public. This intense feedback was felt near and far, including male art critics commenting on her performance and her headlining European art newspapers. However, Kathy Constantinides has hypothesized that the Parisian atmosphere was more prepared to accept *Meat Joy* than the United States would have been had it premiered there. Schneemann lived in Paris when she was creating *Meat Joy*, and through love letters with Tenney, she wrote about how France treated her and how she felt there. The letter remarks that she felt comfortable and at home. It also mentions that she created new friend groups by uniting people that had never met, giving her a sense of belonging. *Meat Joy* was one of her

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54 Schneemann and Stiles, *Correspondence Course*.
56 Schneemann and Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 83.
58 Ibid.
59 Schneemann and Stiles, *Correspondence Course*, 81.
first performances, and the sexuality within it was debated upon. However, in France in a place where even Schneemann felt less harassed by men, it thrived, and it was a social performance made in a city where social life was key to happiness. The work was shown, front cover, on several French newspapers the day after its’ premier and Carolee Schneemann mentioned to Tenney in a letter that her work covered Paris.\footnote{Schneemann and Stiles, \textit{Correspondence Course}, 83.} This environment, compared to America, a more reserved place with fewer groupings and less acceptance of women being liberated was the better place to debut the work.\footnote{Ibid, 81.} The theatrical actions of Schneemann during this time were connected to her beginning in the filmmaking community. During the same years as \textit{Meat Joy}, she was also filming of her well-known film, \textit{Fuses}.

The handheld camera was an essential part of the increased use of film as a medium for the avant-garde art scene; it allowed collectives and individual artists to create videos that would exemplify their messages in more than simple photography. This became a powerful medium for Schneemann. Experimentation through film was popular as technology was evolving, and filming was becoming a more relevant medium for multi-disciplinary artists. Schneemann became a filmmaker by the mid-1960s and had integrated her focus on sexuality into her movies, mainly in her work named \textit{Fuses} (Figures 8, 9, and 10). Created between the years 1964-67, the unusual filming style was a combination of nature, negative space, and videos of sexual intercourse between Tenney and Schneemann. It premiered in 1969 in Cannes, by then, her second project to premier in France, but this time, the audience started rebelling by getting up and yelling. The film was explicitly sexual, unlike \textit{Meat Joy}, and the perspective
was coming from a woman instead of a man. The approximately 20-minute film showed graphic sex scenes, including genitals, faces, and even a cat, all with the constant sound of an ocean environment, including the birds, waves crashing, and winds. The soothing sounds of the ocean also change the erotic mood into a more calming, silent, action movie. The movie had two color washes, it began with red, the color of aggression and passion but then switched to a green wash midway. These colors created an unnatural look and allowed the sexual aura to dissipate a bit through the sounds and colors that did not match up with a real sexual act (Figures 8 and 9). The rhythmic movement of the filming, the film strips being painted to create effects, and the colorful washes all point to Schneemann’s natural painterly essence. Inspired by Cézanne with the color blending, the rhythmic action, and the use of line in the destroying the film strips for effects demonstrated that was forever inspired by him (Figure 10). Though the abnormal filming style was important, the reaction to the film and the explicit nature are what is more discussed today.

Adverse reactions happened not only in Cannes but in Russia and America as well; it likely would have happened in any country. The world, up until this time, was used to a more patriarchal view of sex, as Kevin White writes, “promiscuity was not respectable, nor was esoteric sexual practices,” both of which are clear in the film itself. The truth was when Schneemann visited Russia, many years later, her film was censored, and this had also happened in the United States. These events happened because, according to Michelle Chilcoat, author of “Analyzing Sexuality in French and Francophone Films”, “In psychoanalysis,

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63 White, Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?, 14.
‘straight’ male sexuality....is the normative ‘one’ against which all others are judged incomplete, if not pathological. In cinema, it was a common topic; Laura Mulvey wrote that women were fetishized continuously, and therefore, Schneemann was according to the male community, fetishizing herself. This would be true only through the masculine gaze, but once this gaze is taken out of the picture, it becomes self-expression. The deconstruction of the male view is necessary in the cinema world as today men still dominate it. Even so, back in the 1960s and ’70s, Schneemann was barely acknowledged as a filmmaker, and Fuses was referenced as a “film maudit”, a naughty film that involved inappropriate subjects. These subjects are used then and today by French filmmakers, and as Tim Palmer says, they have an “affinity for the squalid and disreputable.” The film affected both the French and American industry but the censorship in America is what reflects the differences between the countries. The extreme reaction in Cannes was bound to happen because of the sexism of the time; however, the film was handled negatively in America, hiding parts that were too unpleasant to the culture. This created a more welcoming environment in France. The influences through film and performance were not only secluded to French people performing similar things with Schneemann, but they also led her to create some of her more famous works.

Often under the scrutiny for her risqué art, Schneemann connected her works with her distinct concepts and ideas. The strong French influences are apparent in her art, and one of her most famous performance works, Interior Scroll, holds evidence of all three main French influences.

65 Chilcoat, “Analyzing Sexuality in French and Francophone Film,” 112.  
impressions. *Interior Scroll’s* first performance was in 1975 at a conference named the Women Here & Now in East Hampden, New York (Figure 11 and 12).\(^6^9\) It was attended by mostly women and focused on female artists. Schneemann discusses in multiple notes and letters that the work came from the concept of “vulvic space,” a topic she undertook in 1960. Relating to the womb and the Goddess, she conceptualized a way to make the personal body linked to the cosmic Mother. She saw the “vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpant was an outward model: enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual powers…” \(^7^0\) The performance itself entailed of Schneemann approaching a table dressed and carrying two cloth sheets and a book. Breaking the audience and performer boundary by coming out from the audience itself was a common occurrence for her. She did this inspired by her reading of Artaud, removing the social construct that came with the artist being the sole focus of the room and not the energy and environment and the audience itself. She took her clothes off, climbed onto the table, and proceeded to put one sheet under her and wrap herself in the other. \(^7^1\) She told the audience that she would be reading from the book, *Cézanne, She Was A Great Painter*, and then Schneemann dropped the sheet covering her, she had on an apron and began painting on her face and body with a dark paint in long strokes. \(^7^2\) She then read from the book and started taking the apron off. She was left fully naked and began to pull a thin and long piece of paper from her vagina. Both the long unwinding paper and the long


\(^{7^0}\) McPherson and Schneemann, *Carolee Schneemann More than Meat Joy*, 234.

\(^{7^1}\) Ibid, 234.

\(^{7^2}\) This was a book similar to *Imaging Her Erotics* and *More Than Meat Joy* as it was filled with her thoughts, drawings, letters, and her typical writings.
stroke of action paint upon Schneemann’s body remind the viewer of Cézanne’s themes, lines and the severed brushstrokes. It is no coincidence that she mentions she will read from her book with his name in the title. This performance was done another time at the Telluride Film Festival in 1977, and another speech, completely different, was read. The first of the texts on the scroll, Schneemann says is from, Kitch’s Last Meal. It is about a filmmaker that accepts Schneemann as a dancer and a woman but does not accept her films. The subject brings up several issues for women. Mainly, they struggled to be acknowledged in the United States as true artists, yet they were praised for their sexual power as dancers and actresses. Their position in motherhood was also highly valued, but when stepping out of the narrow definition, they were not considered, just as Schneemann was not considered a filmmaker. The second text touches the same subject using different examples. It explains that women are always “to be mistreated whether your success increases or decreases…they will worship you they will ignore you, they will malign you they will pamper you….” The dichotomy of the woman being accepted for one factor but not the other is the reason why Schneemann felt such a strong urge to create, using French influences to back up her concepts and ideas as a strong feminist woman. De Beauvoir’s influence in the Interior Scroll is seen as Schneemann used the gender roles that governed society in the performance. She birthed the scroll, challenging what a woman could create. It is the birthing and creation of artwork, unlike the patriarchal role of birthing a child, the woman as an artist, not as a mother. The performance rang as risqué to those watching it and even to the Telluride Festival a few years later but the impact of the truth

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73 Schneemann, Imaging Her Erotics, 151-62.
within it allowed Schneemann to continue being relevant in the art world. The clear connections to the French persons whom she admired enabled the meaning of the work to be conclusive and a true resonation of what she believed.

During the 1960s and 1970s, both decades where Schneemann was at the peak of her career, she acknowledged the better treatment she received or the gravity of a book by a French author, and instantly she was sucked into a new culture and new way of thinking that allowed her a different space to process her work and theories. The way she followed Cézanne through line, as though they were connected by the very thing she loved most about his work. She understood and absorbed from what she felt necessary at all stages of her life and allowed the first French influence to guide her through her artistic practice. This helped her in turn grow and adapt her theories to her styles of living and the changing times of the 20th century. The feminists discourses that began to be recognized through books such as Simone De Beauvoir’s texts and her deviances to the society crafted the language that Schneemann would become so fond of. Both had their base in the concept of women being able to create and break-away from the narrow cage they were constantly put into. This relationship, even though it was never a literal one, changed Schneemann’s path into the world as a woman artist. On this path she encountered the newness of performance and the boundaries of traditional art being broken through theorists. These boundaries began breaking as Antonin Artaud started his search to find the true soul of modern theater in his time. His recluse ways and his separation from several art communities were similar to Schneemann who was controversial and on the edge of society. As her theories came from such a diverse grouping, when I began this endeavor, I never imagined the impact these persons had on Schneemann and it is through my thesis that I fully
understood. There is no biography of Schneemann in a traditional sense though her own words are propelled often. It is difficult to build her timeline and fully comprehend her entire lifetime but understanding French impacts on her art is the beginning step to continuing her feminist legacy through words.
Mont Saint Victoire
Paul Cézanne
Figure 1
1887
MEDIUM
Quarry Transposed (Central Park in the Dark)
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 2
1960
nails, paint, wire
Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 3
1962-63
Gelatin silver print, printed 2005
Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 4
1962-3
Gelatin silver print, printed 2005
Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 5
1962-3
Gelatin silver print, printed 2005
Meat Joy
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 6
1964
dancers, Schneemann, paint, paper, rope, raw chicken, raw sausage links, raw fish
Meat Joy
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 7
1964
dancers, Schneemann, paint, paper, rope, raw chicken, raw sausage links, raw fish
Fuses
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 8
1964-67
16mm film transferred to video (color, silent) (sounds added post-filming)
Fuses
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 9
1964-67
16mm film transferred to video (color, silent) (sounds added post-filming)
Fuses
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 10
1964-67
16mm film transferred to video (color, silent) (sounds added post-filming)
Interior Scroll
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 11
1975
book, paint, paper, cloth sheets
Interior Scroll
Carolee Schneemann
Figure 12
1975
book, paint, paper, cloth sheets
Bibliography


