

L'univers de Carolee Schneemann

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L'UNIVERS DE CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

Carolee SCHNEEMANN *Water Light/Water Needle*, 1966.

Dans le contexte où s'inscrit l'art de la performance, au cours des deux dernières décennies, un nom s'affirme, celui de Carolee Schneemann, une artiste qui, par ses réalisations novatrices, se révèle comme le symbole même du plein épanouissement de cette forme d'art née récemment. Il est d'ailleurs révélateur qu'une femme ait enfin autant d'importance que des artistes masculins dans une sphère donnée. La transformation du discours artistique intégré dans son œuvre consiste dans le passage d'une expression régie par l'homme à une expression tournée vers la femme, d'un art statique à un art dynamique qui réclame un engagement personnel.

Les performances que Schneemann exécutait au début des années soixante illustrent une vision du monde énoncée au moyen d'un vocabulaire nouveau qui répondait parfaitement à son ambition, comme elle le rapportait très explicitement en ces mots: «Dans mon œuvre, le rythme est polyphonique; il fait correspondre, à une intensification physique – où interviennent le sang, les nerfs, la respiration, les muscles –, une perception physiologique interdépendante d'espaces remplis de mouvement, de lumière réfléchie, de barrières rompues, de plans mouvants, de couleurs qui s'harmonisent ou s'opposent. Des matériaux qui

s'affaissent, se fracturent, se déchirent, se répandent ou s'engorgent, introduisant des formes aléatoires assujetties au rythme et redéfinissant mes conjectures sur la structure physique.»

Cet extrait d'une interview de Ted Castle, publiée dans *Artforum*, en novembre 1980, témoigne qu'un art féminin s'était institué, un art qui établissait un rapport étroit entre la vie de l'artiste et sa perception féministe sensuelle de la réalité. Après ses collages et ses assemblages originels, et sa participation à divers événements aux côtés d'artistes tels Claes Oldenburg et Robert Morris, et à la suite d'un premier ouvrage environnemental indépendant, en l'occurrence *Eye-Body*, de 1963, son œuvre trouva sa pleine maturité dans *Meat Joy*, de 1964. De fait, dans *Eye-Body*, des éléments antérieurs se combinaient encore aux éléments nouveaux, incluant des formes d'assemblage, des créations environnementales et des *happenings*; dans *Meat Joy*, c'est une captivante interaction qui s'opérait, articulée autour de corps humains, dans une ingénieuse séquence de mouvements, partiellement onirique, au contenu intrinsèque précis. Le corps humain y était mis en contact avec une quantité d'aliments et d'objets composant une chorégraphie physique conçue et exécutée avec minutie, et où se

manifestaient des corrélations érotiques et psychologiques. L'ensemble de toutes les motivations spontanées au sein d'un groupe de participants engendrait ainsi une nouvelle organisation de l'environnement.

Dans cette œuvre, Schneemann synthétisait des éléments appartenant à d'autres formes d'art de l'époque: environnements et théâtre environnemental d'Oldenburg, films avant-gardistes de Brakhage, expérimentations empruntant à la danse et au théâtre de participation. L'acte, en soi, constituait une célébration du charnel, représenté par les corps nus auxquels étaient associés des aliments, des sons et des mouvements; le propos, lui, visait essentiellement l'identification de la forme et du contenu par un moyen d'expression nouvellement établi, et à travers un point de vue de femme.

Considéré dans une perspective historique, le succès international que connut *Meat Joy*, en 1964, vint consolider la position de Carolee Schneemann dans le rang des principaux performeurs. Une série d'autres réalisations connexes, et poussées plus avant, allait suivre, parmi lesquelles le film *Fuses*, de la même année, montrant une scène d'amour authentique, et les performances intitulées *Water Light/Water Needle*, de 1966, et *Thames Crawling*, de 1970, et dont un grand nombre furent présentées d'abord en Europe.

L'œuvre de Carolee Schneemann entra ensuite dans une nouvelle phase de son évolution, avec *Up To And Including Her Limits*, de 1973, prestation dans laquelle, cette fois encore, l'artiste sondait l'énergie corporelle et la transformait en une forme artistique. Sa vie et son corps demeuraient au centre de l'événement: suspendue à une corde pendant une durée prolongée, elle se balançait dans les différentes directions d'un espace circonscrit, prenant note des zones qu'elle était en mesure d'atteindre en marquant le plancher et les murs à la craie. Plusieurs autres performeuses allaient s'inspirer ultérieurement de cette action pour l'orchestration de leurs propres œuvres. La nature et les limites de l'énergie féminine servaient donc de thème à cette performance, où les facteurs physiques et psychologiques devenaient un tout.

Dans *Interior Scroll*, de 1975, cette orientation prend son tour le plus radical. Le corps même de la créatrice devient une source de connaissances, le physique et le livresque s'interpénètrent véritablement: debout sur une estrade, l'artiste lisait un texte sur un ruban qu'elle sortait lentement de son vagin en le déroulant. Utérus et vagin n'apparaissaient plus uniquement comme des attributs sexuels symboliques, mais comme des zones d'information, de «savoir intérieur». Dans son livre intitulé *More Than Meat Joy*, de 1979, Schneemann donne une interprétation de cet événement: «Je voyais le vagin comme une chambre diaphane dont le serpent était une image externe concrète; stimulé par son passage du visible à l'invisible, un serpent montait en spirale, évoquant le désir et les mystères générateurs, et figurant des forces sexuelles tant féminines que masculines.»

L'œuvre de Carolee Schneemann dans son intégralité nous livre l'une des manifestations artistiques les plus fertiles de notre temps. En transcendant les moyens d'expression traditionnels que sont la peinture et la sculpture, l'artiste explore, à travers un univers thématique fécond, les possibilités qui s'offrent au-delà des frontières établies de l'art. Dans ses réalisations, se matérialise l'expression caractéristique d'une sensibilité féminine qui, bien qu'indépendante de toute emprise mâle, intègre cependant maintes des valeurs masculines. Entraînant le corps de l'artiste dans une nouvelle forme d'engagement personnel, Schneemann a su communiquer précisément et énigmatiquement sa vision du monde. Par le biais de son art, elle ouvre au public contemporain un territoire auparavant inconnu, où le regardeur découvre un monde d'une fascination prometteuse et néanmoins indéfinissable.

(Traduction de Laure Muszynski)

Original English Text, p. 79

Then he gave them the confidence to do so.

Few know of his legacy. Never one to promote his own reputation, the changes Binning brought about now seem inevitable. He was like the referee in a sports event whom no one notices. When that happens, you know they are doing a good job. The people who do know how much Vancouver owes him are those who knew him personally. That is the reason why, if U.B.C. ever builds that art gallery, there is little doubt whom it will be named after.

1. "B.C. Binning: A Classical Spirit", B.C. Binning (1909-1976) Retrospective Itinerary: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Nov. 28/85-Feb. 2/86; McMichael Canadian Collection, Kleinburg, Ont., Mar. 1/86-April 30/86; Winnipeg Art Gallery, July 1/86-Aug. 15/86; Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Sept. 1/86-Oct. 15/86; Vancouver Art Gallery, Oct. 31/86-Jan. 4/87.

THE WORLD OF CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

By Udo KULTERMANN

In the context of Performance Art of the last two decades the name Carolee Schneemann stands out as one of the artists, who, by means of her pioneering achievements, symbolizes the total development of this newly created art form. It is significant that finally a woman is as important as male artists in a given medium. The transformation of art expression incorporated in her work is one from a male-dominated to a female-oriented, from static art to a dynamic art which requires personal involvement.

Schneemann's performances in the early sixties are demonstrations of a view of the world by means of a new art form, which appropriately fulfilled the ambition of the artist, as she articulated it candidly: "Rhythm in my work is polyphonic, corresponding to physical intensification - blood, nerves, breath, muscle - an interdependent physiological perception of spaces filled with movement, reflected light, broken edges, shifting planes, colours in balance and tension. Dropping, breaking, tearing, spilling, glutting materials introduce forms of randomization grounded by rhythm which re-define my expectations of physical structure."

These words from an interview with Ted Castle in "Artforum" of November 1980 give evidence that a female art was established, one that closely related the life of the artist and her sensual feminist perception of reality. After early collages and assemblages, and after her participation in events with artists such as Claes Oldenburg and Robert Morris, and following her first independent environment "Eye-Body" of 1963, her work came to full maturity in "Meat Joy" of 1964. In "Eye-Body" elements of the old and the new were still combined, including forms of assemblage, environments and happenings. In "Meat Joy" of 1964 an exciting interaction took place with human bodies in an imaginative, partly dream-like sequence of movements with specific inherent meaning. The human body and a multitude of food and objects were brought together in a carefully planned and executed physical choreography which included psychological and erotic relationships. The totality of all the immediate motivations within a group of participants created a new encompassing form.

In this work Schneemann synthesized elements of other art forms of the times: Oldenburg's environments and environmental theatre, Brakhage's pioneering films, dance experiments and participatory theatre. The action was a celebration of the carnal, constituted by nude bodies in combination with food, noise and movement. The goal was the identification of form and content in a newly established medium from a female perspective.

The international success that was established by "Meat Joy" in 1964 reinforced from a historical perspective Carolee Schneemann's position as one of the leading performance artists. A sequence of several other related and expanding works was to follow: among them the film "Fuses" in the same year producing an authentic documentation of love-making, the performances "Water Light/Water Needle" in 1966 and "Thames Crawling" in 1970, many of them first performed in Europe.

The later development of Carolee Schneemann went into a new phase with "Up To And Including Her Limits" of 1973, in which, again, bodily energy was examined and transformed into an artistic form. The life and the body of the artist remained in the center of the event: hanging from a rope for extended durations, the artist swung in various limited directions, noting the area she was able to reach by marking the floor and walls with chalk. Several other female performance artists later used this action as a model for their own works. The character and limitation of female energy was the theme, and physical and psychological elements became a unity.

In "Interior Scroll" of 1975 this line of development was taken to its most radical consequence. The body of the artist herself became a source of information, the physical and the literary were literally merged: standing on a stage the artist read from a scroll which she slowly pulled out of her vagina. Vagina and womb no longer were only symbolical sexual attributes, but zones of information, "interior knowledge". In her book "More Than Meat Joy" of 1979 Schneemann interpreted this event: "I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model; enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributed of both female and male sexual powers."

The work of Carolee Schneemann in its totality has constituted one of the most fertile art manifestations of our time. By transcending the traditional media of painting and sculpture, she explores, according to an imaginative thematic realm, the possibilities beyond established borderlines of art. The result of her achievements is the distinctive expression of a female sensibility, that, while independent from male domination, still incorporates many of their values. Using the body of the artist in a new form of personal involvement Schneemann has been able to communicate precisely and mysteriously her view of the world. By means of her art the contemporary public has been led into previously unknown territory, discovering a world of promising and yet undefined fascination.

VIRTU 2

by Gloria LESSER

"Virtu", as the catch-all leitmotif, expressive of "objects of beauty and quality, collectively", a phrase and concept cleverly chosen to embrace a broad spectrum of objects and ideas, ventures unsuccessfully to communicate and associate with any interests on any grounds, confusedly accosting the collector, the manufacturer and the befuddled consumer.

The current international vogue of design delirium, inspired and generated by Postmodernist experimenters, has stimulated a spate of design exhibitions in American and European museums, commercial and school galleries, department stores and cultural centres. Innovative communication/marketing approaches in the

promotion of household and office products are another by-product of public interest in design.

In 1986, the Centre International de Design opened as part of Le Cours le Royer in Old Montreal, to assemble design professionals, manufacturers and distributors. Plans call for a resource centre, library and hall to provide for symposiums, etc. Simultaneously, Le Centre Infodesign Bonaventure has re-opened in its new incarnation as a reference centre. Activities focus on the cultural/educational/promotional aspects of design, and represent both profit and non-profit factions. This enterprise is aided by Canadian government Regional Industrial Expansion grants, under their "Think Canadian" program to inspire consumers to buy Canadian goods¹.

At the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, in postwar 1947, the National Industrial Design Committee was inaugurated to promote the improved design of Canadian merchandise to stimulate sales. While a history of the organization is too complex to summarize here, Design Canada, later named, installed Design Centre branches, first in Toronto in 1964 and at Place Bonaventure in Montreal in 1967. Both dismantled in 1970 soon after they had opened, due to the difficulty of affecting the general public to appreciate design. Tenants in showrooms on Place Bonaventure's D Mart have been relocating steadily since the 80's period. Now, can two new Montreal Design Centres, duplicating services, succeed, where their predecessors had failed?

Nonetheless, it is within these precise precincts and contexts, as in Toronto's recently opened Design Centre Gallery, where *Virtu 2* works were on view through November 1986, that experimental decorative art can theoretically function appropriately, rather than in a museum setting. When *Virtu '85* was held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Montréal, a greater status was automatically conferred to the mediocre works on view. It should be established, however, that the *Virtu '85* and *Virtu 2* competitions of residential design, circulating in the guise of exhibitions, function primarily in contextual relationship to Canadian industry and the consumer, rather than the artistic or design milieu, to whom they are ostensibly addressed.

Virtu 2 showcases 21 works, winnowed from 190 entries, selected by a more stringent jury than the prior *Virtu '85* show, but the submissions themselves once more broadcast the notion that Canadian judges, still soft on the philosophical pursuit of Canadian design, are resolved to encourage efforts to keep that community alive, motivated and functioning, despite the general low level of quality of the works.

That this is a worthy goal cannot be disputed. However, the objects of "Virtu" do not even exemplify the competition categories planned, to include lighting, seating, tables, cabinets, floor/wall coverings and accessories. With such uneven representation in scope and variety, analysis of designers' works, or yearly design trends, is problematic. Actually, whether any real kind of "forum" for the interchange of ideas can flourish under circumstances surrounding competitions, rather than, for instance, on a corpus of scholarly work in the Canadian design field, remains to be seen.

Since many of the designers had previously exhibited in the *Virtu '85* show, an impression which lingered was that of a tight little network of Ontario craftsmen at the helm of contemporary Canadian design, an ambiguity constituted precisely by the contest format itself, coupled with the fact that some Ontario works had been exhibited elsewhere. Here, I refer to Gord Peteran's poorly-proportioned, top-heavy *Secretary*, and Michael Fortune's *dining Chair*². In addi-