Exposing the Body, Exploring 'homo respondens', and Rethinking Human-Nature Relations as Matrix for New Social Visions: When Short Film Meets Happening in the Works by Carolee Shneemann and Yoko Ono

Exponer el cuerpo, explorar el "homo respondens" y repensar las relaciones entre el humano y la naturaleza como matriz de nuevas visiones sociales: Cuando el cortometraje se encuentra con el happening en las obras de Carolee Schneemann y Yoko Ono

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Abstract / The essay at hand looks at the ways in which the female body is revisited, redefined and connected to the world in selected experimental short films and happenings by two female artists, Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneemann. The analytical focus lies on the shifting relations between subject and object and human and non-human world within their artistic practice. Their presentation and representation of bodies in experimental short films and performances is strongly embedded in the happening culture of the 1960s. The two artists feel at home in both genres; hence, they move freely between film and performance art. Both select the undressing, naked as well as exposed body to express new visions of relationality beyond human subjectivity. Bakhtin's discourse on the grotesque body and its dialogic potential serves as a theoretical approach.

Keywords / Experimental Short Film, Body, Happening, Intersubjectivity, Non-Human World.

Resumen / El ensayo que nos ocupa se centra en las formas en que el cuerpo femenino se revisa, se redefine y se conecta con el mundo en cortometrajes y happenings experimentales seleccionados por dos artistas femeninas, Yoko Ono y Carolee Schneemann. El enfoque analítico se centra en las relaciones cambiantes entre el sujeto y el objeto y el mundo humano y no humano dentro de su práctica artística. Su representación y puesta en escena de cuerpos en cortometrajes experimentales y actuaciones está fuertemente arraigada en la cultura del happening de los años 60. Ambos artistas se sienten a gusto en ambos géneros, por lo que se mueven libremente entre el cine y las artes escénicas. Ambas seleccionan el cuerpo desnudo y expuesto para expresar nuevas visiones de la relacionalidad más allá de la subjetividad humana. El discurso de Bakhtin sobre el cuerpo grotesco y la imaginación dialógica sirve como enfoque teórico.

Palabras clave / Cortometraje experimental, cuerpo, happening, intersubjetividad, mundo no humano.

Meat Joy (Carolee Scheemann, 1964).

Introduction and Context

Utopian and dystopian visions clashed in the turbulent decade of the sixties. Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village as utopia, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist struggles in the U.S., Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the iron curtain separating communist and capitalist world orders expressed the spirit of conflicted times (McLuhan, 1962, p. 3, 1967, p. 8; Raussert, 2020, p. 117). At the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, new developments emerged in the field of performance art, which showed a socially critical, cross-border and anti-hegemonic orientation. It was also a time in which female artists increasingly came to the fore; as actors and directors in the performance arts they called for equal power relations and patriarchy-free societies. The performance arts in the Americas developed in the context of an urban tribalism that saw rituals and technology as congenial partners in the artistic remodeling of society. Women artists like Judith Malina, Yayoi Kusama, Marta Minujín, Yoko Ono, and Carolee Schneemann embraced new visual media to give their happenings and performances a postmodern touch and more access to public space and sphere. Many of their projects defined creativity as a group process

embracing everyday activities as well as visionary moves in which "technologies and human lives are mutually embedded" (Schatzki, 2003, p. 91).

Television in the U.S. introduced new forms of mediatizing politics and expanded the range of public spheres. Media images from the Cuban Revolution to the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. turned an extended and mediatized public space into an arena of political information and conflict. Against this background, art practices embraced the spectacular in public sites to make themselves seen and heard in this growing web of new media images. Television expanded the urban grid as public space and provided a new frame for information that reshaped public space and the public sphere on a national scale. From Vietnam protesters to heavily mediatized bodies of assassinated intellectual and political leaders, from the tribal presence of naked bodies in music festivals like Woodstock, to the exposure of naked bodies in happenings and films, the body exposed in public space became an instrument for redefining aesthetics as well as the importance of aesthetics for rethinking the social.

Theoretical frame: Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic body and Suvin's happening as theatre spectacle

The essay at hand looks at the ways in which the female body is revisited, redefined and connected to the world in selected experimental short films and happenings by two female artists, Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneemann. While research has so far dealt with the work of both artists mainly in the context of gender, feminist, and avant-garde studies, I would like to focus the analysis on the shifting relations between subject and object and human and non-human world within their artistic practice. Their presentation and representation of bodies in experimental short films and performances is strongly embedded in the happening culture of the sixties. The two artists feel at home in both genres and they move freely between short film and performance art. As scholar emphasize, both genres bear great potential for vanguard and innovative artistic expression (Suvin, 1995, p. 294; Meier, 2013, pp. 8-9). The selected female artists use these artistic expressions to explore the undressing, naked as well as exposed body. In so doing, I argue, they express new visions of relationality beyond human subjectivity.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body serves well for theorizing the body's dialogic potential as cultural expression. In the Russian philosopher's thinking, the representation of the physical is closely linked to the idea of social change and cultural renewal. The body points beyond the individual limitation to the strange, thus suggesting a connection between the individual and an exterior world. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque forms of the body dominate the artistic discourse of the non-European people as well as the folklore in Europe, emphasizing in both cases the fundamental processual nature. For him, "[t]he grotesque body is a growing body. It is always in the process of being built, in creation" (Bakhtin, 1990, p.16, transl. mine). Since the body for Bakhtin is not only genesis but also of interaction with the world, he emphasizes those parts of the body that characterize it as open and connected to the world as well as other subjects: abdomen, phallus, mouth and anus (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 16). Obviously, communicative aspects are important in Bakhtin's selection of the physical: "All of these prominent body parts are determined by overcoming the boundaries between body and body as well as body and world in the course of an exchange and a mutual orientation" (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 17, transl. mine).

In the arts in the sixties, bodies, dressed and undressed, became protagonists especially in the performing performance arts. In dance, happenings, and experimental film female artists in particular drew upon the body as metaphor and materiality. Turning the body's potential of dialogical exchange into action and thus endowing their performances

and films with a Bakhtinian dialogic imagination, they demanded social change and new social relationships along the lines of class, ethnicity, race, and gender. As Alan W. Moore notes, "[t]he radical politics of the New Left […] was theater, a spectacle of change, conceived and enacted in the loud, dynamic terms of conflict that the medium of television, a cousin of theater, required (Moore, 2011, pp. 27-28). The performance arts embraced intermedia art projects that integrated theater, music, dance, film, and television in a non-hierarchical way. As mix-media events, happenings in the 1960s became a global articulation of new social visions. Happenings, according to Darko Suvin, served as "a genre of theatre spectacle, using various types of signs and media organized around the action of human performers in a homogenous and thematically unified way, and a non-diegetic structuring of time and space" (Suvin, 1995, pp. 294–295).

Important to Suvin's definition from above is his reference to "theatre" on the one hand and "spectacle" on the other. The fact that he fuses both terms suggest a fundamentally heterogeneous composition of this medium. Even if Suvin's choice of the term "spectacle" does not appear to be true of all happenings and could be replaced by "ritual" or "everyday practices" in some instances, his approach illustrates the difficulties of placing happenings within art history and artistic cate- gories. Happenings were fundamentally art in action and equipped with an eclectic openness. The integration of happenings into the new media culture, such as television and film, enabled the artists to achieve a higher level of public visibility so that their artistically expressed social commitment went hand in hand with growing public recognition.[1]

[1]In order to find more precise criteria to artistically describe the "happenings," one does well to go back to Michael Kirby's research. In his introduction to the illustrated anthology Happenings, he draws on various sources that have contributed to the development of "happenings" in the Americas, particularly in New York. Starting from a classification of the "happenings" as a form of theater, clear influences from the visual arts can be recognized. Thus, it is striking that numerous "happenings-artists" of the 1950s and 1960s were initially active in the field of painting and sculpture. The Reuben Gallery in New York was the primary venue for these transitions. Artists like Robert Whitman, Claes Oldenburg, A. Kaprow, and Jim Dine exhibited their works in galleries before devoting themselves to performance art (Kirby, 1965, pp. 10-11).

Yoko ono's films: the undressing and undressed body and a vision beyond subject-object dichotomy

Yoko Ono's first encounters with film as a medium can be traced back to her musical contribution to Japanese vanguard films like ***Aos*** (1964) and ***Ai*** (1964). With these films, she worked with filmmakers like Teshigahara Hiroshi, Youji Kuri, and Takahito Iimura in Tokyo and New York. Further influences on her experiments with film resulted from her friendship and collaboration with the filmmaker Jonas Mekas and George Maciunas, with the latter being one of the central figures of Fluxus in the U.S. It is mainly the idea of performance that dominates Ono's short films and their cinematic content and progression.

In her conceptual approach to art, a preconceived central idea forms the matrix for artistic expression that can be aesthetically implemented in various media. *Lightning: Light a match and watch till it goes out* (1963) serves as a concept for the happening of the same name as well as for the later film version. For Ono, the artistic idea always offers the possibility to be changed contextually and also culturally. While the basic concept signals continuity, the variety of media in which Ono explores it open access to aesthetic diversity and difference. Technology for Ono is a welcome means of implementing ideas in different contexts and making them travel. At the same time, her art is all about transparency. She promotes an interactive understanding of performance and film always guided by the full experience of the here-and-now. In her short films she translates the here-and-now aesthetics of happenings into slow film sequences, thus turning film into a thematically highly focused and meditative visual experience.

FIGURE 1. *Cut Piece a* (from1965) copyright Yoko Ono.

FIGURE 2. *Cut Piece b* (from1965) copyright Yoko Ono.

Since Ono understands art practice as social practice she fosters a participatory approach to art. The latter can take place both on the level of action and on the level of thought. The audience may get directly involved in the action; at the same time the ideas of the audience may become part of the progression and enactment. The perception process of the recipients is to be directed toward the aesthetic practices of film itself; in particular with the help of time-lapse, picture-framing, close-ups, and focusing on the details, Ono deliberately makes the audience aware of the experience of minimal actions. With her love for details and small things, Ono ensures that the short films can function as meditative contemplation and gateway for further reflection.

For her first film productions as director in 1966, ***No. 1 (Match)*** and ***Eyeblink***, Ono used a special camera technology: "Both films were made using a high-speed fixed frame scientific analysis film camera, to which Maciunas had gained access with the help of photographer and filmmaker Peter Moore."[2] As the filmstrip from ***No. 1 (Match)*** shows, this recording technology allows a focus on the smallest movement sequences and presents these in a serial sequence as a slow-running process. In this way, common everyday practice and ritual function are emphasized with regard to their aesthetic dimensions. Within this approach, Ono particularly emphasizes the variability of the object. In the film ***Eyeblink***, this is directed at the mobility of the body, for example the change of the eye, and in the film ***No. 1 (Match)*** at the slow striking of a match. As both film examples document, objects experience different levels of change in Ono's perception of the artistic process. In the case of the match, the selected object changes both contour and color as it passes through three main stages: the lighting, the burning, and the extinguishing of the flame. ***Eyeblink*** presents a physical movement and reaction as a natural act and as an interaction with the world. It captures a moment of seeing and been seen and a moment of withdrawal for further reflection. Giving examples from the human and the material world in ***Eyeblink*** and ***No. 1 (Match)***, Ono explores a connectedness between these worlds beyond subjectivity.

The technique in ***No.1 (Match)*** and ***Eyeblink*** is a synthesis of cinematic processes and photographic statics, since the processes that are fast in nature are slowed down to almost a still image so that viewing and analyzing individual film excerpts becomes possible. The encounter between object and recipient becomes more intimate. However, Ono goes beyond the process of convergence. Both in ***Eyeblink*** and in her performance *Cut Piece*, the boundaries are dissolved between subject and object in the artistic work. On the one hand, it is Ono's artistic design which declares it as a subject in ***Eyeblink***. On the other hand, her eye is the item/point of contemplation of the film that makes her the object. Ono consciously keeps the presence as subject and the presence as object in a shifting process, at the same time, exposing that these levels of presence have to be seen as part of a connected entity.

The procedure in the happening and film, ***Cut Piece*** (1964), is even more radical because here Ono herself transforms into the space of artistic performance as a subject and an object. The film version of ***Cut Piece*** (1965), directed by Albert and David Maysles, presents multiple perspectives to watch Ono's shift between subject and object positioning. Her exterior –clothing and hair– is continually changed by the actions of participants from the audience. On the one hand, the process emphasizes the interaction between the female artist and the world. On the other hand, it demonstrates the aesthetic and political signaling of art through the alteration and display of her body created by the audience allowing Ono to criticize forms of voyeurism as well as the reduction of the female body to that of an object of pleasure in art and advertising. [FIGURES 1 AND 2].

For Ono, the body as an object of art is not to be separated from the receptive body and mind of the observer. Rather,

[2]Read more in Iles (2000, pp. 201).

a form of interaction arises that illustrates the interdependence of art and the audience in a lasting way. The transitions between the subject and the object are also shown in the actions on and with the body and the example of the physical encounter. Returning to *Cut Piece*, in this performance, Yoko Ono first enters the stage as a creative artist and subject, and explains the course of action. She falls from this active role into her seemingly passive counterpart. She declares herself the object by continuously asking spectators to change her appearance with the aid of a pair of scissors. Important to note is, Ono takes on a second subject role in this performance because she is the one observing and reflecting all the actions. In the course of the performance, she shifts between subject and object positioning of the artistic act, whose part is largely disputed by the audience. In addition, her hair and clothes are removed piece by piece. Through the active participation of the audience, the process crosses boundaries which can be described physically, aesthetically, and socially because, on all three levels, the audience and artist interact. The concept of the happening draws on a close relationship between artist and the participatory audience. The involved actor(s) is (are) understood as *homo respondens* (Waldenfels, 2015, p. 16) meaning that the human is perceived as "interbeing" creating relations as well as bridges and responding to the world around be it simply different or oppositional. The public display of Ono's body demonstrates to the attentive observer that the subject remains always associated with the female body as object. Thus the body acts as a mobile site for the meeting of private and public spheres;[3] that is, in the context of performance, body and event form a spatial-temporal unity within which the private is negotiated with the public.

Ono views artistic practice embedded in the everyday and the political. Her most widely known film as director ***No. 4 (Bottoms)*** from 1966 and co-produced with Anthony Cox pursues an aesthetically and politically equal treatment of male and female bodies. In close-up, the naked and moving bodies of various artists, artist friends, and Ono's daughter, Kyoko, are recorded cinematically and in series. The pictured backsides shown in a series and in slow motion seem erotic, comic, and at the same time, rebellious. As direct protest against the Vietnam War, Ono also connected ***No. 4 (Bottoms)*** with a political message: "String bottoms together in places of signatures for petition and peace" (Iles, 2000, p. 210). The film underscores Ono's vision of the human body beyond female-male and culture-nature dichotomies as an intersubjective agent moving toward an arguably utopian vision of a transhuman world order.

Her political engagement continues in the feminist-oriented films ***Fly*** (1970) and ***Freedom*** (1970) that Ono directed and coproduced with John Lennon. In both films, the female body moves into the center of aesthetic and political interest. The essential differences between the two films can be seen in the representation of the female body. While in ***Fly*** the filmed female body appears completely passive, which is emphasized by the closing of her eyes, Yoko Ono presents herself as an acting woman in ***Freedom***. In contrast to *Cut Piece*, she is here in complete control of the display of her own body. In ***Freedom***, she shows herself in her theatrically staged efforts to free herself from her brassiere; In addition, her movements are slow and emphasize the unruliness of the garment in her attempt to undress.[4] Using the physicality and the process of disrobing, Ono conveys the vision of a struggle for freedom. Her body functions as a liberating subject and as an object to be liberated. Again the levels of subject and object positioning overlap. Here as well, Ono places the aesthetic focus on the process highlighting the shifts back and forth between

[3]This also has a cultural dimension. See Stiles (2000, pp.145-149). Stiles discusses Rilke's concept of world space as a description of the interior in strange cultural contexts and refers to Ono's work as a negotiation between the western and eastern worlds.

[4]For a description of Ono's films see also the brochure produced in connection with the exhibition of Ono's films at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art and the American Federation of Arts, John G. Hanhardt, *The Films of Yoko Ono* (1991). For the role of Ono within the American Avant-Garde scene, see also Chin (1989, pp.19-23).

FIGURE 3. ***Fly***
(Yoko Ono,1970).

FIGURE 4. ***Meat Joy***
(Carolee Schneemann,1964).

FIGURE 5. *Eye Body 36 Transformative Actions* (1963)
Courtesy Brian Wallace.

subject and object positioning with slow movement and slow-motion sequences. As Chrissie Iles highlights: "In her self-assertion, reinforced by Lennon's brisk soundtrack, Ono used the bra, an iconic symbol of the burgeoning women's movement, to stress the importance of freeing women from socially determined, restrictive roles through a liberation of the body" (Iles, 2000, p. 220).

As an event in short film, Ono's twist on the everyday practice for many women turns into a public statement in which the private body signals a larger intersubjective connectedness. Cherishing the natural body unconfined by social restraints she breaks with a culture-nature dichotomy.

She develops this strategy of breaking down culture-nature dichotomy further in ***Fly***, a more multilayered film than ***Freedom,*** which gains its dynamism from a dialectical negotiation of human versus non-human nature. As the film sequences illustrate, the fly and/or the flies represent the acting protagonist of the film, while the woman as a lying body represents the object of curiosity. First, the camera guide focuses on one fly at a time, and visually tracks their arbitrarily chosen directions of movement on the woman's body. The fly appears as explorer investigating a strange world. The attention of the viewer is divided between the motion of the respective filmed fly and the parts of the female body which are enlarged in the image. At the same time, the camera direction focuses on body positions that, in classic artistic representations, hold a particular voyeuristic interest: mouth, ear, nipples, pubic hair. Through the optical enlargement of the fly and parts of the body, a detailed representation of the anatomy of the body is made. The encounter of fly and female body suggests an intersubjective connection between the human and non-human realm. While details such as painted finger and toenails and heavily applied make-up suggest a 'cultured' body, Ono breaks with a separation between human and non-human world by lending her voice to the fly. In the filmic arrangement the fly's inspection of the woman's body itself is accompanied by Ono's expressive vocal techniques, full of sound, free of language, and thus associated with human and non-human attributes alike. Images and the music increase in intensity as several more flies are made visible by the camera. These image-sound scapes create a dialogical vision suggesting interconnectedness between moving fly and lying body and between living and dead body. Ono's filmic arrangement presents the female body as 'cultured' and natural body being embedded and entangled in both realms. As Ono's feminist stance reflects the 'cultured' female body, it is burdened with social expectations, regulations, and taboos. Nature, as the multiplication of the flies imply, can take on a threatening and abusive stance, too. ***Fly*** ends on a visionary note, though, because the camera turns away from the body and towards the sky, which becomes visible through a window in the room. Intersubjectivity, in Ono's film, comprises the human and non-human world and, as the sky as transcendent space suggests, closes a body-mind split by turning to the natural and the spiritual. The natural fly becomes a metaphor for flying. [FIGURE 3].

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN'S REFLECTIONS ON EROTIC INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONS

Carolee Schneemann's filmic work draws strongly on her earlier experiences with intermedia art, painting, and collaborative dance projects. Her performance work *Lateral Splay* (1963) developed in collaboration with Judson Dance Theater. As a collective of dancers, composers, visual and media artists they performed at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, New York City from 1962 until 1964. Schneemann entered Judson Dance Theater as a painter and visual artist and staged multidisciplinary performance events. The collective was a creative space for collaboration between artists in the fields of dance, writing, film, music, and multi-media. Overall, Judson Dance Theater merged

body movement, group constellation, and human-technological fusion as a way out of classical modern dance toward postmodern expression. The break in traditional dance, with its representations of physicality and the hierarchical relationships that it symbolized in society, challenged social norms and expressed the pursuit of new relationalities and forms of bonding.

In Schneemann's *Lateral Splay* (1963) the dancers perform diagonal and circular movements in the room without any musical guidelines. They use a wide range of gaits, is characterized by a change of dynamics and relaxation/pauses. There are different encounters between dancing actors, who briefly enter in physical connections, are not reduced to a constellation of men and women as an image of heterosexual social norms. On the contrary, men and women also meet with each other in these dynamic body images. Dance, thus, becomes a direct presence of new body constellations and expresses a liberation from standardized relationship behaviors such as the male dancer guiding the female partner. At the same time, idealized and preformed social conceptions and representations of the body are largely negated. Intersubjectivity and the act of relating gets redefined beyond heterosexual norms.

Intersubjectivity as social relation is further explored by Carolee Schneemann's transgressive performance and radical taboo breaks with public display of nudity and sexuality can be found in her performance and later film version, ***Meat Joy*** (1964). The first performances of *Meat Joy* in 1964 occurred at the Festival de la Libre Expression, Paris, Dennison Hall, London, and Judson Church, New York City. Subsequently, Schneemann edited footage from films of the original performances, adding layers of sound, music, painterly expression, and a poetic voice-over to create ***Meat Joy***; a collage that "amplifies aspects of the performances while also linking back to the sensory impressions on which they were based" (Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2017).

Physical ecstasy and pleasures of all kinds intermingle in an interdisciplinary/inter-media dance performance, which not only breaks the boundaries between high and low art, but also between the individual privacy of the body and that of public provocation. As Schneemann calls it "an erotic rite –excessive, indulgent, a celebration of flesh as material: raw fish, chicken, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, ropes, brushes, paper scrap. Its propulsion is towards the ecstatic– shifting and turning among tenderness, wildness, precision, abandon…" (Schneemann, 2007). Actors roll repeatedly directly into the audience. The boundaries between actors and spectators are porous; contact zones are henceforth multiplied. Human as well as animal bodies in the form of dead fish and chickens, which are frolicking on stage and/or are distributed there, convey in a Bakhtinian sense the conception of open grotesque bodies which interact in the course of the performance [FIGURE 4].

The synthesis of human and animal subverts a purely human subjectivity. In performance art and photography, Schneemann flirts with the transgression of the boundaries between human and animal form. She thus embraces a new relationality that unites the human and the animal world in the eroticized staging of human and animal shape, as done in the photographic collage, titled, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963) [FIGURE 5].

In so doing, she dissolves a purely human-centered understanding of the world and uses the changing and merging body as the impetus for a tribal understanding of art and society. With that, bodily action, animism, and transgression make new forms of relationships conceivable.

The artistic transcendence of the socially confined body is at the core of Schneemann's ***Meat Joy***. The protagonists Central Man and Central Woman paint themselves mutually and negotiate both the creative and the tension-laden interactions of bodies, which are sexually and socially visible:

FIGURE 6. ***Fuses*** (Carolee Scneemann, 1967).

FIGURE 7. Schneemann on the beach. ***Fuses*** (Carolee Schneemann, 1967).

> As the Central Woman comes around the table painting his legs, the Central Man sits up, reaches for the paintbrush in her hand. He drops his legs over the side of the table and gently begins painting her face; then, slowly standing, painting her body (…) She takes another brush and bowl to exchange body painting (…) Gathering speed across the floor (where the Lateral Men still run), they drop brushes and bowls, mix wet paint on their bodies directly, surface against surface, twisting, turning, faster and faster (Schneemann, 1995, p. 259).

Art and sexuality are intermingled here and they both emerge from a sphere that is neither privatized nor isolated in certain institutions. In Schneemann's concept, the adjacent walls of bedrooms and museums are equally inviting. Art and sexuality are made public and are integrated into a community discourse.[5]

In her experimental film ***Fuses*** (1964-1967), filmed over several years with a 16mm Bolex camera, and directed by herself, Schneemann shows herself and her partner at the time, James Tenney, having sexual intercourse in various time sequences. She altered the original film material through a mixture of painting and collage, drawing directly on the celluloid, applying paint, stains, and burn marks to add artistic effects. [FIGURE 6]

Subsequently parts of the film, edited for different screening speeds, were recomposed. To create a dialogic pattern, Schneemann partially overlaid her and her partner's body and erotic activities with filmed nature photographs. While ***Fuses*** is generally regarded as a "proto-feminist" film, I argue that the film's vision goes beyond this level of social and political consciousness. It is the artistically created erotic dimension of the film that introduces a new level of intersubjectivity. Hence, the sexual reunion with her partner is only part of the story. The bodies of both are placed in a larger human-nature constellation and the film progresses without the fetishization and objectification of the female body frequently noticeable in male-oriented art, literature, and pornography. As Shana McDonald describes the erotic dimension in ***Fuses***, "all evoking the sensuous but not the sexually objectified" (MacDonald, 2007, p. 2). The film embeds the act of love-making into a larger picture of human-nature relations. The window plays a central role as a gateway to the outside world. It opens up a view of the leaves of a tree dancing in the wind and permits a view of the beach and the sea. Among other nature images, the observer can catch a glimpse of Schneemann's naked body as she approaches the sea at a fast pace. The cat in the house appears as a natural companion for the artistically blurred love scenes. Her view of the event appears neither voyeuristic nor judgmental. [FIGURE 7]

Further natural elements are suggestively evoked by Schneemann's changes of the original film material. The color and light sequences created by painting and art effects act as simulacra of body fluids. Painterly dots and spray on the film sequences suggest among others the flow of sperm and blood.

The interpersonal encounter of two lovers is enhanced by the formal and structural arrangement of the picture sequences. Aesthetically, the film creates a new level of the relationality of human existence. Man/Woman is part of nature and in her eroticized physicality merges with an expanded nature of plant, animal, earth, and sea. It is important to note, though, that the eroticized staging of human relations is still done in the realm heteronormativity and based on a heteronormative understanding of sexuality. While Schneemann places erotics beyond consumability, she still situates Man/Woman in an unquestioned dichotomy of gender.

Undoubtedly, Schneemann's vision leaves behind the traditional opposition of human culture and nature, which conceives nature as the mere opposite of culture and society and fails to account for the complex 'assemblages' of human actors and non-human natural environments

[5]Regarding aspects of gender in Carlee Scneeman's performance art, see Case (1988, pp. 57-58). Regarding theoretical specifications of gender in the context of performance, see Butler (1993, pp. 15-16).

(Latour, 2011; Descola, 2013) that produce manifold "nexuses of practices and material arrangements" (Schatzki, 2003) intimately linked to human relations. In Schneemann's filmic vision, an "anthropology of culture" is accompanied by an "anthropology of nature" (Descola, 2013, p. xx). Relational and structural patterns from animism, totemism, naturalism, and perspectivism fuel an "ecology of relations" (Descola, 2013, p. 307) in which the social can no longer be viewed from an individualistic human stance. Seen through the eye of the camera, eroticism functions as a door opener not only for a new way of looking at the body, intimacy and relationality, but also as an impulse for social relationships beyond the purely cultural, political and economic realm.

The new intimacy that the film evokes is, at the same time, an appeal to a turn towards a holistic view of planetary existence, which, like the eyes of a cat, offers a view free of judgement and bias towards people and their environment. The personal intimacy is, at the same time, a call for a holistic coexistence of man and nature. The camera as well as the artistic methods of painterly film creation serve as technological means to realize a new vision of social relationality. Schneemann's film shows female agency, demonstrates in a sensual way a dissolution of the subject-object constellation by showing her as a director and lover and loved one and locates art in a larger continuum of culture and nature. As Hanna Bonner describes Schneemann's art:

> The point was to coalesce experience itself into work that was sensorial, haptic, experiential, and articulated by *her*, and her alone. It's work that is not static, in form or feeling, but endlessly regenerative, eliding classificatory systems like Structuralism in favor of embodiment and the personalized theory embodiment propagates (Bonner, 2020).

Conclusion

The exposed body in Ono's and Schneemann's work creates what I call a 'culture of intersubjectivity' that consists in considering humans, the human other, animals, plants as subjects to be respected in all ways of relational thinking. For Ono and Schneemann, creative action like social development and change is "intersubjective and communal" (Buber, 1992, p. 99). And community includes dialogic relations between the human and non-human world. The artistically staged body in Ono's and Schneemann's films and performances dismantles subject-object dichotomies and invites new ways of thinking social and natural relations. Decolonizing the female body from classical representations in art and pornography and embedding the human body in a larger physical universe, these artists have created new levels of intersubjectivity which foster a self-reflexive and dialogic embrace of human existence, environment as well as coexistence between them.

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