

*One loves only form
and form only comes
into existence when
the thing is born.*

—Charles Olson⁷

Schneemann's work is a literal hinging of painting to real places and real words. She intends to give birth to a new and radical form; a form that comes out swinging, refusing and subverting. When she says "painting," she also means an actualized form of struggle. Her kind of painting is done in *spite* of capitalism, not because of it, and hers is the kind of praxis that a Marxist might appreciate, one that is neither modeled on factory production nor outsourced to alienated laborers, but done entirely by her own hand and her own devising. Her paintings track how she got increasingly out of the studio and into the world, into the crux of things. Though keeping the logic of painting at their core, her works move outward from the hidden reserve of the studio into a world where they can confront the best and most precious things in life—eros, romance, care, continuity, curiosity, imagination, vision, nature, creatureliness, generosity—even as they are harnessed to the worst: brutality, war, police violence, sexism, cruelty, ownership, enslavement, murder, and fascism. Schneemann's paintings shirk neither the task of addressing this kind of coupling, nor the aggression or hostility of love.

Schneemann spent a lifetime working on fundamentally painterly questions of touch, time, pulse, color, sensation,

7. Charles Olson, "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You," in *The Maximus Poems* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 7.

rhythm, erasure, scale, figure/ground, the all-over, collage, line, negative space—but she also worked calculatedly against things. As a painter, she chose not to work on flatness, geometricism, reduction, minimalism, iconicity, objectivity, or the laws of perspective. Arguably she didn't work on composition or pictorial arrangement either. In fact, the text of *Interior Scroll* (1975) is a refusal of a refusal: in it, she caustically rejects the values of an unnamed antagonist, who complains about qualities that she holds dear as a painter: "The personal clutter—the persistence of feelings—the hand-touch sensibility—the diaristic indulgence—the painterly mess—the dense gestalt—the primitive techniques."⁸

All the things that the antagonist of the scroll text is proud to have gotten rid of—emotion, intuition, inspiration, those unclear tendencies—are aspects of painting that Schneemann flaunts. She upholds qualities that one might find championed in a kind of Romanticism: overwhelmingness, the sacred, nostalgia, circularity, inexhaustibility, pulsations of the spirit, the search for the blue flower.

To illustrate my points, here's a little game I came up with. If you take a short paragraph of Schneemann's writing about love, and in each case replace the word "man," "lover," or "love-object" with "painter"/"painting," it discloses exactly the principles with which she approaches painting: "What do women want of PAINTING? . . . They want to be surprised, taken unawares; they are moved by intensity. She does not want to tell a PAINTING she wants flowers . . . her fantasy is that,

8. Schneemann, "Interior Scroll," in *More Than Meat Joy. Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings*, ed. Bruce McPherson (New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1979), 238.

moved by PAINTING's feeling for her PAINTING will gather up flowers to give her . . . that she is, herself, the material for love expressions. Rather than say to her PAINTING "let's make love" she . . . expects action from the PAINTING . . . Her motion is constantly moving forward . . . For her the motion of PAINTING is enveloping inward. PAINTING reveals her to herself. PAINTING is excited by her; she is excited by what PAINTING does to her . . . her capacity for sensation seems infinite. She is not afraid to "go mad with desire"—to lose consciousness of Self, to flow outward, to become pure, dense energy exchange and encounter, to become sensation itself. Reason IS energy. Love is character." "Capacity for expressive love and for love are insolubly linked." "Sweet love, beautiful PAINTING, my joy."⁹ ♦

9. Schneemann, "Notations (1958–1966)" (1969), in *Uncollected Texts*, *op. cit.*, 86, 84, and 78.