

THE MEN COOPERATED

SCOTT MACDONALD

Carolee Schneemann's movement from one kind of work to another and her combinations of media within individual works make her artwork difficult to classify. She's been painting since the early '50s, though as often as not her painting is combined with collage and assemblage and with moving machinery.¹ Throughout the '60s and '70s she was a leading figure in what's come to be called performance art, directing and performing in a range of work using just about every medium/material/process one can imagine.² Schneemann has also made the three noteworthy films she calls her "Autobiographical Trilogy": *Fuses* (1967, 16mm, a deeply personal, highly erotic record/interpretation of her sexual interaction with musician James Tenney, using imagery photographically recorded, as well as painted and scratched directly onto the celluloid); *Plumb Line* (1971, 16mm, another deeply personal film, about destructive male/female relational politics, involving multiple, optically-printed 8mm images, superimposition, and again painting and scratching on the celluloid); and *Kitch's Last Meal* (1978, a two-projector, super-8 domestic epic, with separate taped sound, begun in 1973 and filmed regularly until the death of her cat, Kitch, in 1976). Probably the least known of her most interesting works, however, fits into none of these categories. It's a text-image work entitled *ABC—We Print Anything—In the Cards* (an edition of 151 was printed in Beuningen, Holland, by Stichting Brummense Uitgeverij, in 1977).³ In my view, *ABC* provides the most accessible route into Schneemann's complex vision.

ABC is made up of 315 3x5 cards housed in a deep-blue, cloth-bound card box, fastened with two ribbons. When the ribbons are untied, the top of the box lifts up and the front opens forward to provide easy access to the cards. Except for three introductory cards and the three at the end which relate to the publishing of *ABC*, the cards are numbered in the lower right-hand corner. Half of them present texts, and half present photographic images. Each text card is followed by an image card, and each text-image pair has the same number (in three instances—pairs 28, 102, 120—no text cards are included). The image cards are a single color (a gray-blue printed with a flat purple). The text cards are color coded; the third introductory card explains: blue cards are "Quotes from A., B., C.," pink cards are "Quotes from friends," and yellow cards are "From dreams & diaries." In addition, a different color ink is used for the texts on the cards: on the blue cards the type (the texts were typed on an elite typewriter) is dark blue; on the pink cards the type is purplish-black; and on the yellow cards, the type is green. Though all three colors of text cards are used throughout *ABC*, they don't occur in a regular order. As a result, when one looks at the cards piled in the opened box, they create variegated strata.

The experience of reading *ABC* is narrative and, like the rest of Schneemann's work, intensely, openly personal. Although the three main characters signified by the title's letters are never identified in the work itself, they do represent specific people: "A" is filmmaker Anthony McCall (*Line Describing a Cone, Argument, Sigmund Freud's Dora*), with whom Schneeman lived from 1971 until 1976; "B" is independent publisher Bruce McPherson (he published *More Than Meat Joy* and the catalogue for the Max Hutchinson show); and "C" is Schneemann herself. The many other people identified by first name in the text were Schneemann's friends and acquaintances during the period from March to November 1976, when she was collecting the texts and images. Of course, any version of one's life, no matter how honest or personal, is only a version; as a result I must hasten to indicate that, during the discussion that follows, I will deal with A, B, and C as characters and restrict my observations to what seems evident or implicit on the cards and in the imagery. I hope the reader will excuse this qualification: it is necessitated by my friendship with Schneemann and McPherson and my current working relationship with McCall, whom I'm in the process of interviewing.

A further qualification is also in order. Though I may be dealing with A, B, and C as characters, Schneemann herself makes no pretense of the kind of critical detachment my qualification implies. Throughout her career (I don't know if this is true of every work she's done, but it is evident in every period of her work), Schneemann has taken a position in defiance of conventional critical detachment. *Fuses, Kitch's Last Meal,*

and *ABC* are personal, not only in the usual sense of being based on particular experiences of the author, but in a radically different sense as well: they are conceived as artistic accretions delivered to the reader or viewer by Schneemann from *inside* the emotional environment within which they develop. Wordsworth recollected in tranquility and then wrote; Hemingway sometimes wrote to release the pressure engendered over a period of time by particular past experiences. Schneemann's approach is different. She wants to use the making of a work to preserve, consider, and reorient the process of the emotion (and the illumination/confusion it brings) as she experiences it. In the first numbered text card (pink) a character named Gerry is quoted as saying, "The point is to get the basic spirit of the life out into the work. The point of the work is to renew the basic spirit in the life." Schneemann tries to do just that in *ABC*, but from a position of intimacy, not from a position of distance. The boxed form of *ABC* is an expression of Schneemann's intimate stance: as readers we must move into the "house" in which these events occur, and we must pick up the cards and examine them, one by one. The first image card provides a visual correlative: we are inside a room; the curtains are closed, but some light is flowing in.

There is a fundamentally feminist dimension to this intimate aspect of Schneemann's procedure. Though men and women inevitably shape their worlds on the basis of what they've come to feel (largely about themselves and each other), they are often quite willing to accept—to see as normal and correct—the idea that the artist does his work in some sense from a position outside his life (I'm using the grammatical masculine intentionally). In fact, this detachment is often assumed to be—I've often assumed it to be—a proof of the artist's seriousness. And yet, despite this "detachment," the resulting works inevitably become evidence of feelings/attitudes on the part of the artist. In a culture where men still tend to be trained to deny their emotions, the assumption that the making of "serious" art must involve a position of detachment mitigates in the direction of art produced by males. What I mean here can easily be misunderstood if one confuses detachment with thought or intelligence. Schneemann's work is not detached, but it is remarkably thoughtful and intelligent.

The narrative of *ABC* presents a period during which, to use Gertrude Steinesque phraseology, C and A were always living less and less as a couple, and C and B were always more and more together. But not all parts of *ABC* are narrative or relate to the narrative in the same sense, nor does the central narrative thread proceed uninterrupted from beginning to end. As the reader/viewer moves progressively through the numbered cards, periodic pauses are provided by 22 image cards on which there is no image other than an empty frame—actually a TV-screen-shaped, gray inner space, surrounded by a dark rectangle. These "empty" cards function as stanza or chapter indications which suggest the intermittent, one-step-at-a-time experience of any human development and help to define the patterns of this development. At no point do the occurrences of these "pause" cards become mathematically predictable—the first occurs as the final card of the first 20 pairs; the second, as the last of 5 subsequent pairs; the third only 5 cards later—but after a while one can feel when a pause is imminent. Each individual stanza has its own organization, though despite their variety, certain tendencies are apparent: none of the 23 stanzas begins with a yellow (dream) card, and in the majority of cases (15 out of the 23) yellow cards precede the pause. Most stanzas include all three kinds of textual information (the 3rd, 9th, and 12th include no yellow card; the 17th and 19th have no blue card; and the 2-card coda at the end has only a blue card).

The long opening stanza finds us in the middle of a male-female relationship with a considerable history. Even the fact that the first numbered card is a quote from a friend is suggestive: as we move through *ABC* we get a sense of how our intimate, sexual relationships develop in a "neighborhood" of friendships, many of which began earlier than the sexual connections. But even the central triad of A, B, and C has been developing by the time we enter. The first blue text card (2) tells us a good deal about A and C: "In order to create more space for himself apart from her, he took another lover; then he had two arenas instead of one."⁴ The "more" tells us that A has already created *some* space for himself apart from C. In fact, openly taking another lover might be expected to provide quite a good deal more space. The explanation may be straightforward, and one can almost hear A and C discussing the situation, but one can also sense the irony Schneemann may feel at the matter-of-factness of the statement, the pain



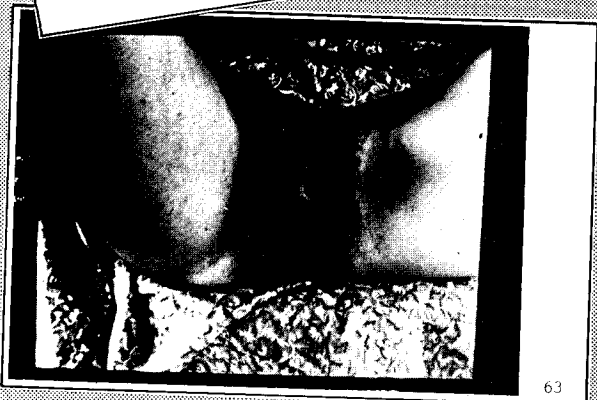
that even an event so rationally agreed upon is sure to cause (and of which we have evidence soon enough). This pain may account for the use of *arenas*, suggestive of performance or public combat (after all, even one "arena" might be more than one wants for a complex, loving relationship). In any case, by the end of a single blue text card—and only 23 words—we know that her lover has taken another lover and that she knows, a situation which could easily be the climactic event of a more conventional love story.

The implications of text card 2 are extended by the image card that follows: we are inside a car and our view is framed so that two distinct spaces ("arenas") are evident. Through the windshield we can see a well-travelled highway, several winter trees, and what looks to be an inspection sticker; the side window is misty—we can't get a clear view, just as A and C cannot know exactly how this new lover will redefine the relationship they've developed.⁵ But the situation changes quickly, as the very next text card (blue) shows: "C said to A: you can balance your two lives but I cannot balance your two lives. Two months later she said, now I have two lives, can you balance my two lives? A told C, yes. B said, yes. D told A, maybe." This card confirms at least two implications of the previous text card. First, it's obvious that whatever the nature of the relationship between A and C, they do not presume they own each other. Second, the passage makes clear that, as they proceed through what looks to be a traumatic change, they mean to proceed together—even though that seems likely to facilitate the end of their domestic intimacy. The fact that B is apparently involved in these discussions, at least by way of C, makes the unusualness of this tersely presented development all the more obvious. And the addition of D's apparently uneasy involvement not only provides a humorous coda to what has become a very complex interrelationship, but reveals just how thoroughly open and mutually supportive A, B, and C want to be.

The density of *ABC* forbids a thorough card-by-card analysis in this context, but some comment on the way in which the narrative develops, and a review of a few of the textual and imagistic devices Schneemann uses to clarify/explore this development may be useful. Image cards 3 and 4 offer an implied comparison of the states of C's relationship with A and B. Both images are printed on the 3x5 cards vertically (the viewer must turn them so that the number is on the lower left). In the first, C is sitting on her bed, looking at A who is standing at the foot of the bed putting on his pants. Her expression, her body language, and her position in the image (she is small, in the background; his height spans most of the image) suggest the difficulty of this process for her, while A's form is slightly blurred as though he's in a hurry. Further, C's blouse blends with the flowered wallpaper, pillowcase, bedcover, and rug, while A's white outfit stands out. In image card 4 we see B, outdoors, at some distance from the camera, digging at the base of a tree. Though he is outside C's bedroom and more distant from the camera than A was in the previous card, he is "digging in," an implication confirmed by the text card (the first yellow "dream" card) that separates the two images: "In the dream the women agreed that the way to get the men out of our space was to reconstruct it and move it. We agreed that it was illusory to the men, but none of us could agree on what

Margaret said:
Men go into the vagina to find the womb, that
home again. But where can we women go? Did
you ever think about it? We go into ourselves.

63



63

Diane said:
He told me what I needed was a nice cat.

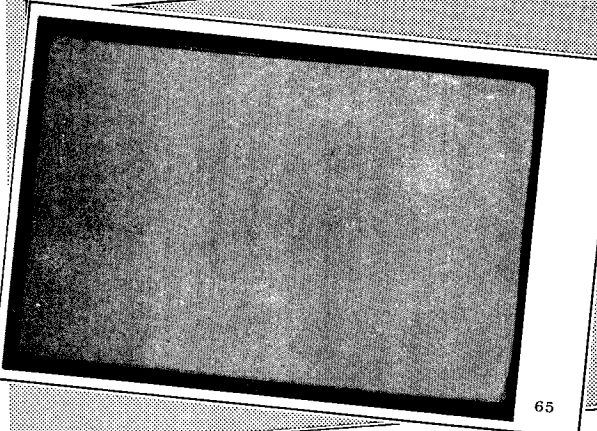
64



64

..... turns her on her side lifting hips
tipped up a vase to his lips tongue seeps
raised clitoris vagina spread petaled
tipped hips in your hands
clasped turned a vase jammed the flowers
stuffed slid split
crackling light we cling

65



65

Jane said:
I feel I have something to learn from you....
but I don't know what it is.

66

[Gaelic for "without"] a glove" (49). This image is followed by a second crest on which the knight's helmet is topped by a snarling cat, and the shield is emblazoned with a sailing ship, a torch, and a cross. (Since image 46 centers on two postage stamps of a bagpipe-playing Scotsman in a kilt, and given the Scottish names of the original male protagonists—I've assumed the crests are Scottish clan emblems.) The fact that C is an intermediary in this exchange deflects the gesture from being either a potentially hostile interface or a gesture of mutual ownership, and it becomes a witty acknowledgement of a three-way (or really, six-way) interrelational commitment.

Ironically, one of the most easily overlooked dimensions of the entire situation is the impact of the fact that, as the interrelationship of A, B, and C develops, C is making a work that will document/interpret their experience and that might be expected to create a concern on the part of A and B that they perform with a certain grace, intelligence, and dignity. "Perform" is a particularly appropriate word here because, though ABC itself is small, compact, and intimate, the process of collecting the imagery for it clearly required a surrender of intimacy and privacy during the experiences themselves, so that future readers/observers could look on. In three photographs we see A, B, and C together, photographed presumably by Bill Thompson (a credit at the end tells us: "Foto's: Bill Thompson, Carolee Schneemann, Bruce McPherson, Anthony McCall").¹⁰ And, I assume that in at least some instances when C and B are photographed together, or C and A, the photographer is the third member of the triad. This making of the work within and during the situation itself is Schneemann's means of making art function formatively and progressively within the process of life. I'm reminded of Schneemann's six-image silkscreen *The Men Cooperated*—where a handwritten text explains, "B helped A move all his things out. A helped B move all his things in. She suggested they split the U-Haul-It rental—." In ABC, as in *The Men Cooperated*—, A and B cooperate with each other, and with C, to keep the process of their interrelationship running as smoothly and equitably as possible and to "perform" during the production of a woman-made artwork about their activities: Schneemann is building from within the existing space.

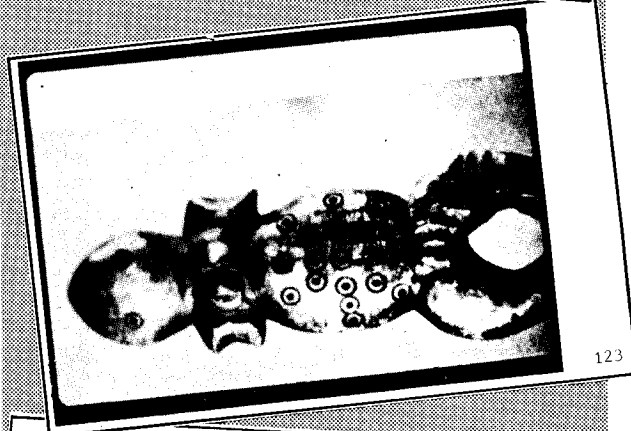
The central three-character interdevelopment of ABC is contextualized in several ways. First, there's the regular inclusion of comments by C's friends. Though these people are identified by first name only, we can deduce from their comments that they are, for the most part, intelligent, literate, experienced, and sophisticated. They've been in and out of relationships themselves and are able and willing to share those bits of wisdom about relational politics they feel they've grown to understand. Their comments are usually in the terse, no-bullshit manner of the "Downtown" art community: "Either hack it or haul your ass out" (Susie, text card 12); "He doesn't love you, I'm sorry. Tell him nice: Honey, I like you, come back forever or leave me alone" (Carmen, text card 18); "The world has never made any sense up to now. Why should it suddenly start making sense for you?" (Victor, text card 108). The very existence of this network of friends and C's willingness to regularly confer with it represents a deviation from conventional melodramas, especially those about love triangles, where the protagonist is isolated. Here, many friends are privy and, at least through their advice, productively involved.

A second kind of contextualizing information is Schneemann's use of a variety of primitive artifacts as images, which function in most instances as motifs for dimensions of C's sexual experiences, thoughts, and fantasies during this period. In six instances the artifacts are juxtaposed with the texts presenting a story reminiscent of classical Greek and Roman tales. In this tale (yellow text cards 39, 77, 92, 107, 123, and 151 complete it), "she"—we assume it's C or one of C's dream personae—is so hounded by desire that she asks "the Goddess" for "a year off from desire to complete works in my mind" (39). Specifically, she requests a lover "who would make in her just one orgasm which could last for a year" (77), only to discover that the Goddess, who is subsequently unavailable for further consultation, grants her wish literally: the orgasm doesn't satisfy her for a year; it lasts all year. Images 77 and 151 represent the Goddess Herself, a primitive sculpture with arms upraised. Images 39 and 107 reveal a pre-historic owl-headed sculpture—a female figure holding her breasts; with the preceding texts the figure comes to suggest the orgasm-hounded woman. Image 123 is a phallic-shaped female figure, another image of the woman (and the man) now desperately pleading to the Goddess for relief. Three other cards present primitive sculptures which provide images of sexual activity: in image 5 a female sculptural figure is reaching behind her to the huge erect penis of a male figure; and in images 85 and 116 a male monster figure is fucking ("fucking" best captures the sense of the image) with a female figure who leans back over a rock. Both these last images are preceded by texts describing C's sexual responses: "a certain rhythm sets off a rambling purr in her throat. Another rhythm produces screams and repeated cries" (85); "He marks her, patterns her desire to his particularity" (116).¹² The bluntness, especially of these last three images, is a sort of visual correlative to the no-bullshit manner of C's friends. In fact, the two kinds of information are essentially quite similar; both reflect the struggles of heterosexual love. Further, while we may think of the artifacts as historical/ethnographic, as opposed to the more current quotations, the sculpted figures are evidently solidifications of the kinds of experiences that inform the conversational statements, in much the same way ABC functions to solidify/encapsulate the interrelational, and often highly erotic, experiences C, B, and A move through.

The developments in ABC are also contextualized more subtly by Schneemann's inclusion and repetition of imagery

In desperation they wrote a special delivery
letter to the Goddess. They put in a long
distance call on Sunday night. The letter was
returned "not at this address". The phone
was always engaged.

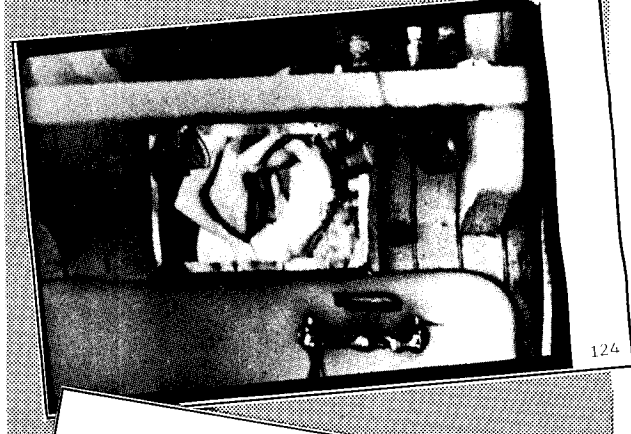
123



123

A. told C. he would tell her his dream
if she wouldn't hold it against him.

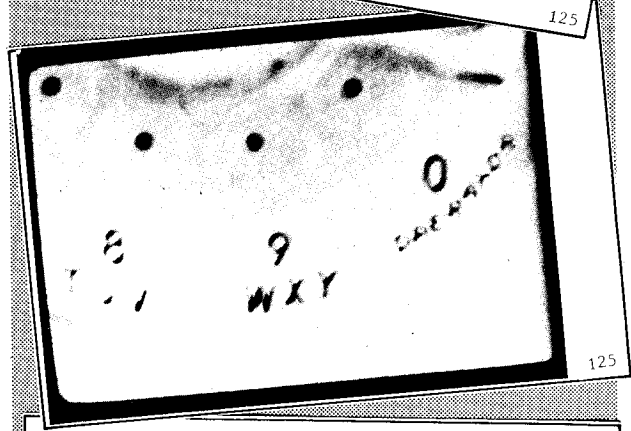
124



124

Gerry said:
My free life of coming & going to my woman
is a lie. I really want my own wife & children.
My wish for my own wife & children is a lie;
I really want my free life, coming & going.

125



125

Once they had become lovers they realized
they might fall in love. It was overwhelming
& frightening; it brought them even closer
together. No one else could help. When they
fell in love they felt they would always be
lovers. It was overwhelming & frightening;
it brought them even closer together. No one
else could help.

126



Above: view of *ABC—We Print Anything—In the Cards* by Carolee Schneemann.

firms these implications:

C had always been attracted by B. She thought it was an intellectual regard & couldn't imagine them as lovers. They went to a country house to work. They slept in separate rooms. She felt uneasy & confused about something.

She dreamt they were in a huge hotel; she was following him down circuitous corridors. When he went ahead, sudden bursts of noisy tourists came between them. . . . When she caught up to him, he pulled her to him, held her. He said: Don't worry, it will be lovely. . . .⁹

Regularly during the remainder of *ABC* we see imagery of C and B together in the same shot (76, 103, 140, 142) and juxtaposed in successive images: in 90 we see a close-up of C's lips, then, immediately after blue text card 91 ("She was afraid to start a shared life with him; being younger he hadn't already tried it and failed."), we see a close-up of B's lips (he looks very young). Images 108 and 109 juxtapose shots of B, then C, lying naked in bed in traditional "maja" poses. In images 147 and 148 their achievement of domestic intimacy is confirmed: we see C, then B, bent over looking into a refrigerator. A parallel device occurs on those text cards where identical statements are made about, or by, B and C (e.g., 78—"She opened to him, as wide as possible. He opened to her, as wide as possible.") and where B "redesigns" one of C's statements (e.g., 149—"Love is only interesting when it is real. C. Interest is only real when love is. B."). Even when we see B alone, he's usually either looking at the camera (presumably C in these instances) or engaged in some intimate domestic act. The final image of *ABC* is B pondering what looks like a piece of fruit; he looks very beautiful.

Despite the detail with which Schneemann develops C's relationship with A and B, however, the focus of *ABC*—as the title indicates—is not one character or one relationship, but the interrelational process the three people are experiencing. The texts and images are presented in such a matter-of-fact manner that it's easy to overlook the remarkable nature of the relationship we're privy to and its considerable implications. A moment's thought about how a romantic/sexual interrelationship between two men and a woman would normally be presented—in Hollywood melodramas, in soaps, in music videos, in ads—reveals how unusual its development in *ABC* is. Instead of presenting a battle of two macho wills for possession of the woman's heart (and body) or a sappy, soft-focus triadic interlude, *ABC* focuses on the complexity of the situation and its difficulties. Though A, B, and C work to treat each other well, they must continually deal with jealousy. C's pain is revealed indirectly in statements to her by friends (text card 5—"You don't have to avoid him; just avoid the pain—we make it ourselves.") and in the ironic humor of text card 15, for example: "Why did she feel such detestation for his other lover? After all they now had so much in common." Text card 15 is followed by an image of three decayed skulls, which becomes one of several repeated emblems of jealousy and loss. Another is three slightly different images of a decaying animal skeleton (10, 95, 98), and a third is a series of images that refer to Schneemann's earlier relationship with James Tenney (and the cat Kitch). The first reference to this previous shared life is text 56—"Paul said: The danger is to live dreams a long time after you forget the reasons for them"—which is followed by an image of Schneemann, Tenney, and Kitch as a family. Images 81 and 127 reveal Kitch dead. The loss of a shared life with A is clearly one of a series of losses from which there is no total recovery.

The interrelational complexity of the situation also brings out predictable macho responses on the part of A and B, though these responses are mitigated, reoriented by the commitment of the woman and the two men to the avoidance of the "normal" process described by Lee (text card 115): "When men experience ego-loss, through a change in their work or age [or, I would add, when a loved one's loyalties expand to include another], they go into a Pig Cycle." Following this is a rather shocking image of a pissing pig (115). For the most part, the facing-off process between the men is presented, and seems to be experienced, with a sense of humor. On text card 37, A tells C—"that he'd insist on just one thing—B was not to wear his moccasins [sic]," which is followed by an image of the moccasins (on a flowered rug, reminiscent of the bedroom decor). Actually seeing the worn-out moccasins after hearing the sentimental demand strikes me as amusing (in a bittersweet, macho way); clearly the territoriality has to do with more than moccasins. On text card 45, A tells C to tell B, "don't tell a chicken how to lay eggs." Schneemann follows this with what looks to be an image of a family or fraternal crest, complete with knight in flaming helmet and shield emblazoned with a horned animal. Three pairs of cards later, B tells C to tell A: "touch not the cat bot

the men actually saw. We would have to build within the existing space. Because it had been distorted by the men the work would be prolonged and difficult." The fact that image card 4 immediately reveals a man (B) doing a job that looks potentially prolonged and difficult suggests that the reconstruction of the male-distorted space the women discuss is a process that will involve women (whose need for this new space is so fundamental as to have become dream material) and men. B seems to be starting a garden; he is working next to a tall, bare, old tree, a metaphor perhaps for the age and size of the patriarchal distortion of human relationships. Like the women, B will need to work through sizable roots.

Since Schneemann isn't detached from the situation that we discover as we read, we always know that our image of each man is a function of hers. It's evident throughout *ABC* that she loves and feels positively about both men; but at the same time, our understanding of each man is always subtly changing, both because the three characters are undergoing various personal changes in themselves and with each other and because, as the situation develops and is recorded/interpreted by the making of *ABC*, we see evidence accumulate. A's personality remains relatively static. As often as not, we see A in the process of leaving; in one instance (the only one in *ABC*) identical text cards—"A went away again" (24, 40)—are followed by identical image cards: a smiling A, about to board a bus.⁶ And in a number of instances we see A in the company of others. But even when we see C and A together, the strain in their intimacy is obvious. In image cards 68 and 131 we see them sitting together on the bed we saw in image card 3, physically next to each other but rather intense, even uncomfortable. Image card 94 shows C sitting on A's lap. It's a loving image, except that A is playfully grabbing C's neck in one of those gestures intimates make which simultaneously suggest affection and a bit of hostility. It follows this text: "If you love someone that much make sure you don't share everything—it will cloud something essential. C." The final image in which we see A and C together (145) appears to have been taken at the same time as image 94; here C looks at A who looks toward the camera; he seems to pull away from C, ever so slightly.⁷

The imagery of B is considerably more extensive and more various—not surprisingly. C is adjusting to A's movement away from her, but her movement toward B is a process of continual discovery. At first, B tends to be seen in long shot (images 4, 12) or at the edge of the frame (9, 23); but as early as image 21 (B is photographed, apparently by C, from inside a bus; he looks through the window at C as a man standing to his right seems to be laughing at something he's said) and image 27 (B is inside a building, standing to the right of a sign which says, "Our job is to serve you"), we begin to sense the giving, supportive dimensions of B's personality which presumably lead C to be more deeply involved with him.⁸ In image 29 we see B and C alone together for the first time; and by the end of stanza 4 the balance of C's reservations are being overcome. In image 33, B—naked and with a partial erection—takes a muscleman-macho pose for the camera. It's an amusing image because he's not built like a weight lifter, and yet his attractiveness is more evident than in the earlier imagery. The final text card (34, yellow) of the stanza con-

Before she knew him she had insisted that she always have her own separate space. She believed domestic intricacies and work processes should not automatically be shared. She believed the couple should constantly choose each other. He made domestic intimacy & dailiness vital & equitable. She was flexible & broke her own rules. They lived & worked in the same spaces. Five years later she was shocked when he told her that shared work & domestic life had clouded his love for her.

11



11

Susie Said:
Either hack it or haul your ass out.

12



12

B. told C., sometimes one person is not enough.
C. said, I always want one person to be enough.
C. told A., I don't want you to feel I'm the only person for you.
A. told C. their bond was indissoluble.

13



13

When he came back to be with her, she wanted him to feel less guilty for having left her. She borrowed ten dollars, bought long stemmed roses & placed them conspicuously. When he asked, she said they were from a new lover.

14

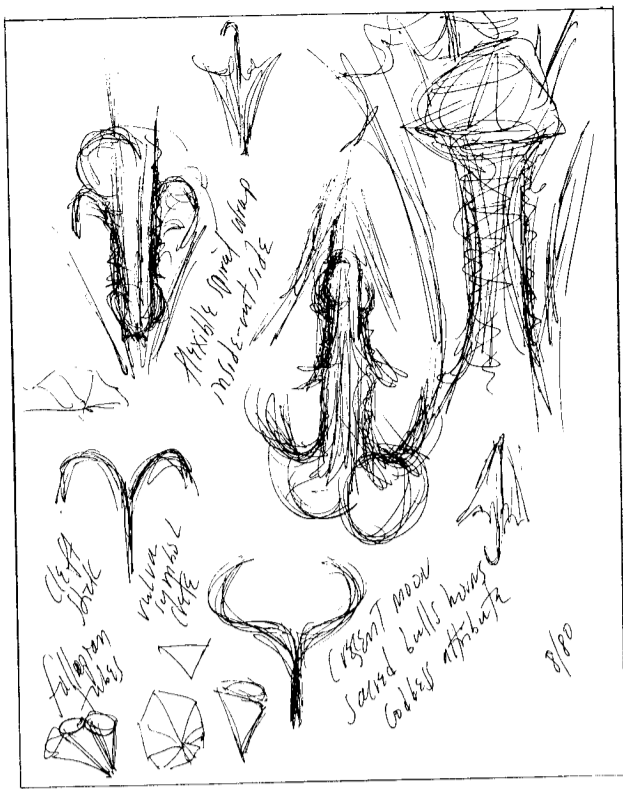
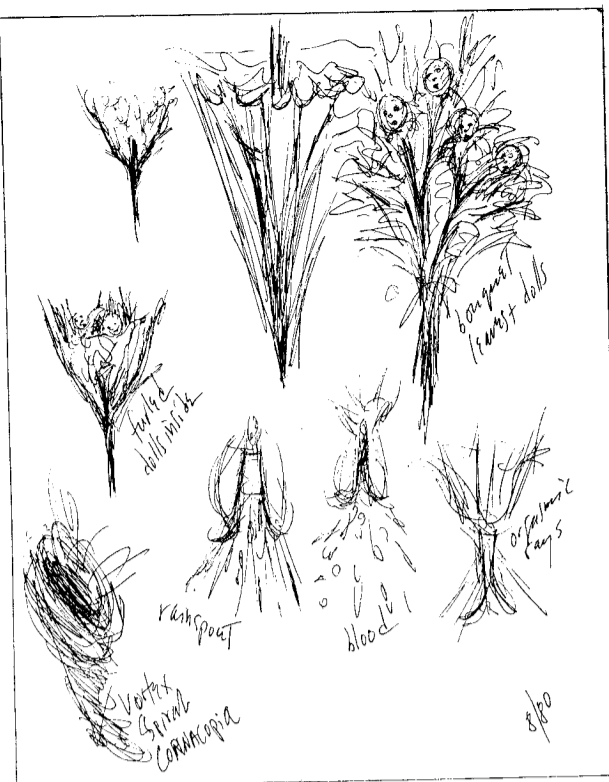
Pages from *ABC—We Print Anything—In the Cards* (1977), by Carolee Schneemann.

of apparently non-sexual details of the environment in which the events are taking place. One of these is the rowboat we see in images 26, 66, and 106. In her recent work Schneemann has explored the morphology of the image of the umbrella. In a dream she calls "Fresh Blood," she discovers that the umbrella image is simultaneously "both cunt and cock unfurling it expands and contracts covers the body the head is a hollow shaft a tissue thin fabric rigid supports umbrella is ridged ribbed tactile ridges of cunt cock is wet covered with rain pours down..."¹³ Like the umbrella the rowboat is both container/protector-from-water and phallic-shaped vehicle for moving through water; and its ribbing, like the umbrella's, supports a thin "fabric." While the preceding text cards reveal only a marginal relationship to the boat images, implicit connections are provided by text card 78 ("She opened to him, as wide as possible. He opened to her, as wide as possible"), which is followed by a view of a wide river taken presumably from the front of a boat. Such connections are also made in the six-card dream (or diary) during which Woon Ping reads and Duncan drives, while B and C make love in the back seat: "she scratched the evidence across his back they whispered flowed water rising from the Schuylkill [sic] from the Walkill [the Walkill runs near Schneemann's home outside New Paltz, N.Y.; McPherson was living in Philadelphia, where the Schuylkill empties into the Delaware.] they eddy she swirls against him stretched swirled deep in muddy waters streaming hair..." (yellow card 135; cards 25, 52, 65, 86, and 111 complete this dream).

All in all, *ABC* is as much an ethnographic work as a fiction. The cards do tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end, with character development and insight—with all the elements of a classic fiction. But they also catalogue those observations, memories, and thoughts that a participant/observer in the story came to feel were most crucial, most fundamental, most fully illuminating and useful. As is evident in the web of connections one begins to construct as one reads *ABC* (and that is confirmed when *ABC* is presented as a wall piece), Schneemann edited the images and texts as a means of encapsulating the essential patterns enacted in the experience. Each card, each juxtaposition encodes information, some of it verbally, some of it through our recognition of the shapes and compositions Schneemann came to choose and what her choice of them might mean. It's always quite clear that the images are not chosen on the basis of their "perfection" as photographic art or even because they're "good" snapshots. We must examine the images as though they are evidence, not only of some of the ways the original experience looked, but of what Schneemann presumably came to perceive in the images. As soon as one looks at the essential shapes defined by the composition and chiaroscuro of the images, phallic and/or vaginal configurations become obvious; in fact, such compositions become much more the rule than the exception. Images 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7, for example, all include such possibilities. Even the process of reading *ABC* confirms the pattern: we move forward, number by number, into the box and through the cards (the ribbing, the folds in the narrative).

The intimacy and erotic openness of Schneemann's work has troubled, and often alienated, a considerable portion of her audience (judging from my experience at screenings of *Fuses*, I'd say that males have the hardest time with this). Yet the commitment to heterosexuality so obvious in *ABC* (and in *Fuses* and in Schneemann's other work) has tended to trouble another segment of the audience (this one, I'd guess, mostly female): those whose commitment to a rethinking of sexual politics has led them either to regard the heterosexual option with suspicion or to turn away from heterosexuality altogether. For this portion of the audience, text and image cards 47 seem sure to cause concern. The text (yellow card) reads: "Among others, there are two sure signs that she has fallen in love: reverence & fascination for his genital, and for his handwriting," and is followed by an image of an erect penis framed, lovingly, by a hand. But it is Schneemann's faith that women and men can have mutually positive/productive erotic relationships that provides the fundamental modus operandi of *ABC*. I would guess that from her point of view, the fact that the overwhelming majority of heterosexual relationships tend to render desire into property and maintain the politically/economically disadvantaged status of women does not mean that leaving heterosexuality behind is a positive alternative for most people. In fact, it might subvert the one force (desire/love) strong enough to revitalize the structure of male/female relations.

As I flip through the cards, I'm sometimes reminded of library catalogue drawers and of the 3 x 5 card files students are supposed to keep when they do research for a term paper. However, while the encoded information on Schneemann's cards is basic, its relationship with reality differs considerably from the usual relationship between systems of classification and the experiences they attempt to classify. Schneemann provides us with a tour through specimens collected from within a complex human experience, but instead of eliminating its experientiality (its emotional patterns/resonances) in the process of classification—the way dictionary and encyclopedia alphabetization does, for example—she encodes something of the experientiality itself, and in a most useful form. Like many women and men, I've struggled to be a feminist, and one of the crucial problems for me has been to discover not simply how men should *not* act with women, but how they *should* act—with women and with each other—to begin to shift the often destructive nature of conventional relationships. To date, *ABC* has been as valuable to me in this regard as any book or film I know of. Through her title, Schneemann suggests not only that A, B, and C had to begin over when their lives became entwined (and so decided to begin over in a more basic sense), but also that the "ethnographic" science of coming to know more about how



Drawings for "Fresh Blood: A Dream Morphology" (1980), by Carolee Schneemann.

our emotions work and how they can evolve progressively is only at its start. We have a long way to go.

This discussion only begins to suggest the density of *ABC* and cannot adequately describe this reader/viewer's pleasure in exploring it. In the intelligence and experience of its perception and awareness, in its straightforward, unpretentious subtlety and density, it reminds me of *The Sun Also Rises*, a book that, like much of Schneemann's work, continues to suffer from preconceptions about its author's sexual politics. *ABC* is a work of remarkable courage and honesty, and it is formally inventive and sophisticated. It exists in the interstices of other forms—fiction, diary, photography, film—but it is utterly complete in itself. Its only limitation, in fact, is a practical one: only 151 copies exist, they cost \$100 and are available at present only from Documentext (P.O. Box 638, New Paltz, N.Y. 12561). One can hope that a more accessible printing of *ABC* will become available—I believe it's a work which could attract legions of readers.

NOTES

1. See *Carolee Schneemann, Early Work 1960/1970* (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, 1982), a catalogue for a show at the Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York City.
2. *More Than Meat Joy* (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, 1979) is a personal review/scrapbook of this work.
3. Schneemann's performance chronology indicates that *ABC* was presented as a performance four times in 1976-77. It also exists as an unedited super-8 color sound film (filmed by Paul Sharits and Tony Morgan), and in three video versions, recorded at three of the performances. I am familiar only with the version on 3 x 5 cards.
4. Normally when the text on a blue card is a quote from A or B, or when more than one of the three central characters are quoted, the speaker is identified; when there's no identification, we come to assume Schneemann is the narrator.
5. The implications of the inspection sticker are confirmed by text card 11: "Before she knew him she had insisted that she always have her own separate space. She believed domestic intricacies and work processes should not automatically be shared. She believed the couple should constantly choose each other. He made domestic intimacy & dalliness vital and equitable. She was flexible & broke her own rules. They lived and worked in the same spaces. Five years later she was shocked when he told her that shared work & domestic life had clouded his love for her." However, the use of "clouded" may suggest that the original two-window image can be read in very different ways.
6. There are slight differences in the light and shade in my copy of the two cards (I'm using 22/151 of *ABC*). But it is also possible that two exposures were taken, one right after the other.
7. Though apparently recorded at the same time, these two images are quite different compositionally: 94 is a vertical card; at the bottom of the image we see a portion of a table with a coffee cup, a sugar or jam bowl, and an open phone book. 145 is a horizontal card: the table is no longer visible, but we can see more of the space to the right of A and C, enough to reveal a mirror image of the couple in the background.
8. Image 23 foreshadows the "our job is to serve you" implications; though B is not in the center of the image, he's reaching in from the right to help someone—C?—put on a delicate watch or bracelet. This image follows a blue text card: "That polarity could mean a split in his nature, or a chance to create integrations usually devalued by men. C."
9. This dream echoes an earlier card (20, yellow), which describes a somewhat similar situation involving A. The earlier card, however, ends very differently: "C. dreamt they were traveling. In a small, flowered, musty hotel they were to confer on their relationship. She was passionately & joyfully in love with him. They sat on the bed. A. said, 'Now that I know my other lover better I have many complaints about you.' C. thought he was crazy & turned icy cold. She suddenly threw off all her clothes—ran naked down the hall yelling, 'You can't catch me.' He was very annoyed but pursued her. He brought her back into the room & berated her for excessive behavior & for not valuing his other lover. She said, 'Don't drag this dead horse around any further'. She dressed in a pink woolen suit, packed a bag & told him, 'Good-bye, I'll send you a card from Russia.'"
10. These three images (all seem to have been taken at the same time) can serve as a gauge of the developing relationship. The particulars of the configurations in which we see A, B, and C vary in suggestive ways. In image 6, C is on the left, A on the right. Though B is between A and C, his centrality is mitigated by his standing behind the other two and by the fact that C and A seem to be touching hands. A is in a relaxed, confident pose, and he is very aware of the camera (he is pointing at it with his right hand), while B is looking at C with a quizzical expression; his attention does not seem diverted by the camera. C is slightly blurred. In image 13, C stands between B on the left and A; she and B look at each other, while A looks at the camera. And in 57, all three look at the camera, but C leans slightly toward B (A's dark jacket creates a compositional separation between him and B and C).
11. All of the images of the pre-historic artifacts used in *ABC* are taken from Philip Rawson, ed., *Primitive Erotic Art* (New York: Putnam, 1973), pp. 84-5, 126, 222, 293.
12. A related pair of images (59, 97) reveal slightly different portions of a page of a book apparently giving a variety of examples of phallic symbols. The images on these pages evoke many other images from *ABC*: the pillar coming up from a mound of dirt looks like an upside down version of the goblet in 104; two women in one image wear phallic hats reminiscent of the helmets in the Scottish crests; three arrow-like objects echo the three oars coming out of the boat on the McPherson crest, and so on.
13. See "Fresh Blood: A Dream Morphology," *Dreamworks*, Vol. 2 (Fall 1981): p. 73.

The Men Cooperated (1979), by Carolee Schneemann.

