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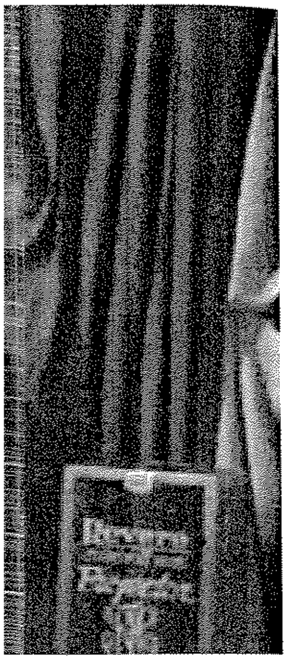

[2] Carolee Schneemann

Carolee Schneemann has been making transgressive art for more than thirty years. She uses her own body as her primary medium in her vast oeuvre of performance, photography, painting, film, and video. Ancient and contemporary Goddess-based feminist theory coupled with her intuition and dreams provide the moorings from which she hangs on ropes, pulls strands of text from her vagina, makes love, kisses her cat, and then records these outrageous acts as feminist art. In a brief written biographical statement, Schneemann describes her work as "characterized by research into archaic visual traditions, pleasures wrested from suppressive taboos, the body of the artist in dynamic relationship with the social body. [My] work . . . has transformed the very definition of art especially with regard to discourses concerning the body, sexuality, and gender."[1]

Whatever the decade in which it was originally produced—from the '60s to the '90s—Schneemann's art continues to break taboos because it is created from her insistence on being an autonomous person who is fully sexual, entirely an artist, and defiantly a woman. Even currently, depictions of a self-defined, transformative, female sexuality, especially those made by and about the woman so empowered, are virtually unheard of—and are beyond outrageous. If her work is still difficult for audiences, imagine when it was first viewed in the '60s and '70s, when there was no artistic or social context in which to place such work. B. Ruby Rich discusses the cultural scene in the early '70s when she first saw Schneemann's film Fuses *(1964–67):*

> Is there any way to convey the sense of risk and courage that accompanied those early screenings, back when scarcely any films by women had been seen, received, or apprehended as such? . . . The only models for open female sexuality in the early seventies were the boyfuck orgies of hippie culture, the Living

Theater gangbang model, [and] the porn movies to which all cool girls had to accompany their boyfriends.[2]

At that time, and for that matter currently, Schneemann makes this raucous work, and takes up this unseemly position, at great cost. For most of her career practically unfunded, Schneemann has only recently had her first major retrospective at an American museum: "Carolee Schneemann: Up to and Including Her Limits," at the New Museum of American Art (1996). Sadly, her enormously prolific, highly regarded, and almost fully unfunded career represents the most common pattern for women in the arts.

The making of feminist art and a feminist life has always been treacherous because there are so few models, so little support, and so many sacrifices. Schneemann and her American contemporaries, women who managed to make art in the early '60s and before, were what Schneemann calls "women on the edge." They were trying to make their mark as female artists in their own right, even as they were situated on the margins of the male avant-garde; they were trying to live outside the crushing confines of bourgeois-nuclear-family-white-picket-fence-suburban-monogamy even as they remained entrenched in a patriarchy. In her book on women, power, and politics in the New York avant-garde cinema, Points of Resistance, *Lauren Rabinovitz describes the contradictions experienced by the generation of women filmmakers who preceded Scheemann in the pre- and protofeminist '50s and '60s. Filmmakers like her subjects Maya Deren, Shirley Clarke, and Joyce Weiland "were the exceptional women who balked enough at conventions that they achieved a measure of success in artistic areas usually considered 'masculine.' . . . But they did so without entirely understanding how the cultural institutions, including the family, constructed and organized women's social subordination."*[3]

It would take the political activism of the 1970s to establish for these and other women an organized women's movement that espoused a systematic critique of sexism and patriarchy. Only then, according to Schneemann, was there the possibility for community among women, institutional support for women, and the beginnings of a shared vocabulary that could explain some of the contradictions that constrained women artists. In her interview, Schneemann discusses living through the unsettling change from this protofeminist art world of the '60s to the fully mobilized scene of the organized women's movement only ten years later. This shift from marginalization to communal exuberance, so fundamental to Schneemann's career, is hard for me to comprehend. I can only know this as her *memory, and this gap in perception marks a real obstacle between us: separating our ex-*

periences as feminist artists and potentially unsettling the history that connects us and of which I attempt to write.

And yet what motivates my feminist history project is the desire to understand differences while also pursuing the certain links between women. I set out to interview Schneemann because I had had two, highly memorable introductions to her. First, I had seen her most infamous film, Fuses, *when I taught a course on feminist film at Bryn Mawr College in 1995. The film had been made thirty years previously, and yet the class was held in the grips of its entirely relevant representation of female sexuality, female heterosexuality, female desire, female orgasm, female creativity. What was particularly overwhelming for my students and myself was how this film seemed to foretell our "current" fascination with the sexualized experiences of the female body. The feminist work that we had been more commonly exposed to (largely from the '80s) was different: dry, intellectualized, abstracted representations and interpretations of both feminist sex and bodies. Schneemann's film was so fresh, so new, so bold that it seemed hard to believe it was so "old."*

As I watched and taught Fuses *and other protofeminist films as research for this project, I began to recognize that women like Schneemann did not* foretell, *they* told, *and that telling had been nearly erased and forgotten. Why don't we get to hear—often enough, or loud enough, or honestly enough—the lives and words and stories of the women we dream of becoming? It's not as if Schneemann hadn't been getting her work out there. She has made twenty or more experimental, political, usually erotic films and videos (these are alongside her work in installation, performance, painting, and writing).* Plumb Line *(1968–71) marks the filmic dissolution of a relationship through freeze-frames and mirror printing.* Kitch's Last Meal *(1973–78) is Schneemann's diary of her daily life shared with her lover and also her cat, Kitch. In the '80s, Schneemann collaborated with video artist Victoria Vesna (interviewed here as well) on another piece about bestiality,* Vesper's Stampede to My Holy Mouth. *Many of Schneemann's films are artistic documents of her performance and kinetic, interactive sculptures such as* Interior Scroll *(1975), which displays Schneemann's "body as a source of knowledge" as she reads her semiotic text extracted from within, and* Known/Unknown-Plague Column *(1996), a video/installation that explores cancer treatment as a metaphor.*

Schneemann also writes and is written about.[4] *My second exposure to her, before I had the opportunity to interview her on video, was through her inclusion in the book* Angry Women, *a gift to me from a feminist boyfriend committed to subcultural excess.*[5] *Images of her body splattered with mud* *and writhing among a sea of similarly slimy bodies, or kissing cats, or pulling snakes (or so it seemed) from her vagina were etched into my memory. And then there she was in the flesh! My very first interview for my documentary, a major feminist influence—to be shot with a broken camera provided by a much-needed grant from Film/Video Arts—and she was wearing horns. The bumpy, irregular video image of Schneemann now seen in my documentary permanently marks my own project's place in the longer legacy of feminist art: underfunded, non–profit-reliant, but nevertheless realized.*

When I met her, Schneemann spoke at length about one of her ongoing projects, work that had eerie similarities to my own. She explained that she had spent a great deal of her career searching, mostly unsuccessfully, for female teachers and role models, "historical precedence"—those women who could help her locate a "female genital and pronoun"—before having to invent a life, language, and genital on her own: "I was negotiating a universe that denied me authority as an authenticating voice and denied me the integrity of my own physicality. This declivity—no pronoun, no genital—became the tripod on which my own vision would be balanced." Only from this more stable feminist place could she later go on to mentor other female artists (like Vesna). Yet besides her relationship with Maya Deren,[6] Schneemann sees her early career as one largely aided and abetted by the male artists who made up her world. In this respect, Schneemann, a proud and vocal lover of men, touches on another important question for this study: what is the role of men in feminist film history, men who were women's lovers, teachers, fathers, artistic and political influences, and sometimes women's providers or muses?[7] Although Schneemann's work has been exhibited as part of the traditions of dada, neodada, Beat culture, performance art, video art, the Theater of Cruelty, happenings, and Fluxus, her career has not matched the fiscal and other artworld successes of the mostly male artists with whom her work is typically shown.

Thus, beyond her search for historical precedence, another of her legacies is that of struggle, underrecognition, anger, and frustration initiated by the very sexism that her career attempts to dismantle. But perhaps some of the questions that Schneemann and I raise about the loss of feminist legacy have also begun to be answered here and in the following interview: records of living artists are shot with broken cameras; films rot in garages; women's artistic accomplishments are lost in histories that reframe them within the traditions of men; women become too discouraged due to lack of money and support and drop out, their stories forgotten. Most women are not as resilient as Carolee Schneemann.

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An Obsession with Space, Images, Time, and Language

Please narrate your own personal history as one demonstrative history within the larger history of feminist film and video. I'm particularly interested in what allowed you to make your work, what was or wasn't there for you, how you could have and still can have a career.

I'm glad you said the word *career* because I've never considered that I had a career. I don't know what a career is. I imagine it's something one chooses to do and advance in certain ways, going through certain disciplines.

I was born a painter. There was never any choice for me. It's never been a "career," something that is so considered or planned. My work has rarely been supported except in the most minuscule of ways. So I dog it out by scrounging around on the edges of my culture. There are things I have to see, problems I have to consider. I'll work with whatever I can get my hands on: if it means typing on an old typewriter or doing black-and-white Xerox obsessively for months. What helped me was my attachment to and obsession with making images. From the time I was four years old, I couldn't survive if I wasn't examining what line could encapsulate on a page. My earliest drawings as a child were sequential, filmic. Any one idea would take about nineteen pages on a little tablet because I had this obsession with space containing time.

I'd also like to discuss my obsession with language because women have really forgotten that in the past twenty years we have repositioned ourselves as central to language. But when I was in the university, all the books said: "Man and *his* image," "The artist and *his* model." And the university's messages would be: "Each student will clean out *his* locker or have a penalty," "No student will park *his* car in front of the art building." That wasn't me! So I figured I would not clean out my locker, and I would park my car, if I had one, in front of the art building. I was fighting all the time. The men always said, "But it means you, too!" I said, "I don't want to be 'too'! Why am I the caboose? Why am I only included by your grace?"

Double Knowledge

Tell me more about art school. How did you get there?

I came from a working-class, rural, German, Lutheran, Mennonite, Amish, and Nazi town in Pennsylvania. It was one of the important farming villages for the German American Bund. So I had no idea what it was to be an artist.

Once I had a glimpse, it was intoxicating. And then they couldn't stop me—which they would subsequently try to do along the way.

But I was lucky. I kept finding people who, unexpectedly, would see that there was something special. For instance, at some point I discovered—probably when I was about eleven—a strange set of works by someone I thought might be female, Cez-Annie. That person became my secret mascot because Annie was a girl's name. I would subsequently grow up and find out that this great misogynist had been influencing my work—Cezanne! But Cez-Annie gave me the secret clue that *maybe* there was an important woman painter, and that is why the figures were so strange looking. I didn't ask anyone—I was afraid what they would tell me.

What I call "double knowledge" had started: the double knowledge of being a criminal instigator in your own culture, burrowing within to find out what had been denied and hidden. I wondered, "Had there ever been other women artists? If so, where were they? And why was I both encouraged and discouraged?" My father thought that girls didn't go to college. His compromise was to send me to a two-year, typing, finishing school, and I wouldn't go. I knew I couldn't do that.

And then, unexpectedly, a lanky man appeared in the infirmary of my high school from Bard College and offered me a full scholarship—tuition, room, board, everything! I had applied to Bard and Black Mountain and other strange places. My father refused to fill out a financial statement. Now, he's not a criminal in all of this. He's a very inspiring person. But he was in his own set of cultural conventions. He couldn't imagine what type of life I was drifting away to. And with the best will in the world he wanted to shape my life—not in an overtly aggressive way; he also gave me the courage to jump off the edge. My mother's position was to uphold the morality of the patriarchy because she knew of no other possibility.

So when did I find art? Well, certainly at Bard. One of the first paintings I did there was an open leg self-portrait with my knees up, holding a paintbrush: painting with exposed vulva. It was the first painting of mine that was stolen. I sure would like to see it again. It was very red. It was very angry. I was only seventeen years old. I'm sure it also was very mannered with too much encaustic on it. But I knew that I had to put inexplicable impression in view.

A lot of splendid things happened at Bard, but the contradictions were already in place. What I learned at Bard and what would obsess me by the time I had a fellowship at the University of Illinois in painting—always in painting—was that there was no feminine pronoun and no feminine genital. I was negotiating a universe that denied me authority as an authenticating

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Missing Precedence

You said you were looking for women artists as a young child. Do you have a memory of when you began that kind of historical research?
Yes, absolutely, it's so vivid. I was able to go to Putney School in Vermont for one year in 1959. There was a book bus that would come around. Each month we could look inside the back of this station wagon and pick books! I chose two. One had a beautiful, painterly, flowered cover, and it had a strange name, a woman's name, which had double letters like my name—Virginia Woolf—with two o's. The book was called *The Waves*. I took that book to the barn and I recognized then—I was fourteen—that this was how I had to work, that it was possible. I entered this surge of simultaneities. It was musical. It was structured. It was associative. It was metaphoric. It was colored and emotionally generative. And so *The Waves* became a talisman for me.

Also in 1959, I found Simone de Beauvoir. I felt all alone while my sense of gender politics was revealed by *The Second Sex*. Later I found out that there were thousands of other women *all* alone with de Beauvoir: de Beauvoir just lays it right open. It's crystal clear. Now I understand everything! From de Beauvoir, I can go to [Antonin] Artaud for other suppressed meanings of the body and its larger extensivity. At the same time, my lover, the composer James Tenney, and I were reading Freud and Wilhelm Reich. Reich, with de Beauvoir and Artaud, gives me permission to begin to introduce the body into a literal space.

But there weren't any other women. I want to make that absolutely crystal clear. The young women were in a kind of fog. I began to work with the Judson Dance Theater in 1961.[8] This was even before there is a Judson Dance Theater, but there's this coming together of young dancers, almost all women: Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Elaine Summers, Lucinda Childs, Ruth Emerson, Judith Dunn. . . . We knew that no one was going to take over the meaning of the body and new forms of motion except us. It was protofeminist. We were getting a lot of power from each other. We were very conscious of the meanings that women were going to discover and construct together, or in dissension together, because we soon began to have intense formal falling-outs.

Let's talk about the '60s and the women's movement.

Well, there was no women's movement in the '60s, of course. In the '60s we began to be consumed with women being able to work together as artists, but we had no sense yet of it as a movement. We were all like wild cats. At the same time, women at Judson and at Charlotte Moorman's avant-garde festival were beginning to put things together in cultural ways that hadn't existed to our knowledge before.

Meanwhile, the political configuration becomes consuming and really intense. Feminism is building from civil rights, from the Weather People, from the tremendous upheavals for justice against the destruction of Vietnam. There are only two positions in the '60s, and that begins to tear everything apart. Politics become ferocious. The country is polarized by the Vietnam War. It's enough to have a certain hairstyle to have rocks thrown at you, even on Sixth Avenue. People are running off to communes, to Canada evading the draft, to Europe, relationships split, people kill themselves.

I go through a breakdown and leave. Everything cracks apart about 1968 or 1969. With that dispersal comes a sense of energy, of being absolutely sure one could make a better culture—a deeper sense of communality, a deeper sense of sensitivity to the issues of community. These issues are taken out of the centralized places and into the country: farming, self-sufficiency, in smaller cities and villages. I'm in London, in a kind of exile for four years. When I come back in 1976, feminist theory is in place. It's clarified itself. There's A.I.R. Gallery in New York City and Women's Space in L.A.: women-run, women-directed galleries. Soon, anthropology, archaeology, science, religion, law, medicine—intellectual territories—are penetrated with feminist analysis and feminist insight.

My early dream to tear it all apart and put it back together again is being taken up by a vast movement; it's thrilling. It's also full of dissension and contradiction and pain. I work on the *Heresies* magazine issue on the Goddess in which we also discovered that if there were knives and labryses, half of us would have killed the other half. Feminism is not always the idealized communication that we expect! There are painful dissensions and disillusionments. Also in the '70s, when I show *Plumb Line* at a film festival that's mostly for woman-identified women, the lesbian women in the audience see the man's image and they give it about five seconds. Then they began howling, "We don't need him!" It was the only time I had to leave a showing of mine—not because of the police or the men going crazy—but because of women going nuts. I had to crawl out of the showing on my hands and knees. I crawled down the aisle, trembling, and out into the hall, into the elevator, and left. By the '90s, I find myself having to defend heterosexuality as an ecstatic, sacred possibility.

Why is finding female role models and colleagues so important to you? Why, even now, in 1995, do we need both female contemporaries and memories of those women who came before us?

It's what I call "missing precedence," because if I don't have a realm of precedence, then I'm anomalous and my experience is constantly marginalized as being exceptional in that there is no tradition, there's no history, there's no language. But there *is* history, tradition, and language.

It's also part of being able to exist with increased paradox and complexity. Because we live within a culture that's constantly retreating from the variousness of human experiences and trying to recodify and police the variousness of what people actually can know and experience. It's absolutely essential that we don't lose the struggle of this history. The horrible thing is—especially for people of my generation—that it fucking never ends! You have to do it again and again. We already did that work. But, yes, again and again. And with as much risk, and certainly in 1995, without any kind of political focus or organization. It's a terrifying abyss.

Speed My Frame

When did film enter this for you?

Painting was too slow. At some point I was mounting paintings on wheels and spinning them. I needed the implicit energy of abstract expressionism to become more materialized, more dimensional. So in graduate school I was cutting through and slashing my paintings in great misery. It was an existential grief worked out on a beloved corpse.

All my work is about trying to find other ways to paint. Film became another way to paint in time—to speed my frames simultaneously. I was also dealing with the paradoxical fixity of photographs that carry image or energy or referent from a past moment. The photograph was the way in which I could be most subversive. That's where I could begin to tear up the image of a woman's body from *Playboy.* That's where I could situate a patriarchal scientist—Sir Henry Francis Taylor, shot by Julia Margaret Cameron, Virginia Woolf's great-aunt—embedded in my own universe in a set of associative painted objects. So film has to do with real time, and it's an incredible melancholy that I'm grasping. I want to encapsulate time, and it's always fleeing. And even when I can fix it, it's part of this momentive worry.

My beloved companion during these years was James Tenney, the composer and conductor, and we were sharing information. In graduate school he was reading [Erwin] Schrödinger and material about entropy, I was reading Proust, and we were reading everything to each other. So we were building an interconnective way to work with the implications of philosophy, space, time, technologies, and the poetry of language and image. Stan Brakhage is his early friend from high school, and he's one of the first friends of Tenney that I met.[9] They both went to South Central High School in Denver, and Brakhage was ahead of Tenney a couple of years. Brakhage introduced film and film process to us. I introduced the issues of painting and real time to Brakhage, who was making surrealistic drama-narrative films when we met. Tenney brought in all the information on sound and space. The three of us divided up the art of the future and how it had to be transformed and penetrated!

So I came to film through Brakhage, and through him I met Maya Deren. That was a horrible lesson. I saw a beautiful, fierce woman praised for important work who was also trying to raise money to pay lab bills and having all these guys live off her! She was not just an inspirational artist—she was simultaneously a mother figure. The young men would go to her and expect her to inspire them, confirm their work, show them what she was doing and thinking, and cook! I decided that whatever this is about, I was not going to cook. I ended up cooking, of course, but heterosexuals usually have to cook—that's part of the deal for your pleasure.

Some lesbians have to cook, too.
[Laughter.] I think so! Someone has to cook! There's a Kate Millett story from the farm.[10] Kate has established her ideal feminist arts farm community. We're good friends, and I go over there for a harvest festival in the fall. Some years it's completely stressful to organize a meal for seventy women, or even twenty women. But other years, it's completely harmonious and smooth. Those are the years when Kate finds the woman whom they call "Mother" who agrees just to be the cook with associates who will agree just to clean up. So Mother takes the role. There's no conflict. There's no sharing. That's what she does: she feeds us.

Fuses

Fuses, my first film, develops after my first performative works. My sense of time is now pushing the frames of painting through the exigencies and energies of my body into a lived circumstance that is going to tear apart the projected superimpositions of male mythologies that have been deforming everything I know. And the crazy thing about *Fuses* is that the men lend me their cameras. The underlying film structure is already montaged because all the cameras for *Fuses* are borrowed (from Stan Brakhage, Stan VanderBeek, Robert Breer, Ken Jacobs, and Elaine Summers).[11] First, Brakhage gives me a lesson in how to hold the Bolex. Now the 1964 Bolex has a thirty-second windup motor with a parallax viewfinder! So what you're seeing through the camera lens is only kind of what you're seeing. You have to make all these subtle adjustments.

The way they taught me to operate the camera was the way men teach you, so that you know you are doomed, almost as if you were going to menstruate on it. Oh, they were so reluctant to lend me their cameras. And then it took a special courage because every time they explained it to me, I went into my blanking-out mode, like it was second grade and I was learning multiplication. I had to take those borrowed Bolexes and put them so close to my body and do a mystical thing with them that would somehow transcend everything I had been taught. The first 100 feet that I ever shot, with Brakhage's borrowed Bolex, was impeccable. It's an early sequence in *Fuses,* of the green leaves in the window, bright light behind, cat in front, perfect focus and exposure. Once I got that 100 feet back, I knew that I didn't have to worry anymore. I was going to be able to do what I felt like with it.

The Missing $400

When did you take control over the technology by owning it yourself?
After thirty years I still don't have anything. I work with Super 8. I have a little box, a Bell & Howell. At some point, I believe it was in 1976, I lectured about how I didn't have any equipment. And a man in the audience says, "I was really impressed by your films. Meet me at my hotel. I'd like to give you a camera that I don't use anymore." I was suspicious of the man in the hotel, but I'd do anything. I had a vision of a Beaulieu. I knew that this is going to be the camera I really deserved. I go to the man's hotel. He's very nice. He comes down to the lobby, and he's carrying something that looks like a cigar box. No Beaulieu could be in there unless it was in pieces. And he hands me this pitiful little thing, it's a Super 8 camera. It's got a hole here and a hole there. And that's about it—you push a button. I say, "Thank you very much" and go away with it. And that's how *Kitch's Last Meal,* my three-year, twenty-hour diary film is made—it begins with this little box. And I still reach for it, that Bell & Howell, it's alive and responsive.

I am trying to get a computer. I still work with a typewriter. My friends are always saying, "You *have* to get a fax. You *have* to do this. You *have* to do that." But I do it out of bare bones because the culture does not support my work. I don't even have a gallery now. So it's a case of "the Missing $400."

It's all a struggle with time or acquiescence; most of my important painting constructions are in a shed with mice living in them. If you want to dissolve epoxy resin, mice urine works like a charm. But everything is on video now.

Just be careful because video itself has a shelf life. In preparation for this documentary, I've been watching early '70s video. I was at the Long Beach Museum of Art Video Annex, and a lot of the videotapes in their archive have deteriorated. You can't watch them now. As my generation is getting excited about reclaiming this history, the history itself is dissolving. So, then, I have to ask: Were these made as permanent documents in the first place, since they were shot on video?

We hoped that they would at least have the permanence of a human life. We didn't have information about how the material itself would disintegrate. And we had the illusion that all these early technologies would be communal and that we would have constant access to shared cameras and editing decks. Of course, it's been a huge disillusionment for all of us that we don't all have access.

In order to preserve any one artist's body of material, you would need a little staff that would—every year—retransfer all these videotapes. And the films get mold. Every time I open a can of work from the '60s or '70s, there are potential unpleasant surprises. Now the NEA has just cut all the funds for preservation, completely cut.

Mortal Coils

Could you talk about your more recent work?

The most recent work is an installation on death called *Mortal Coils.* In 1993 and 1994, first thirteen and then fifteen close friends died. They died of various things, unknown causes. It wasn't just AIDS or heart attack. I wanted to commemorate the friends and to stay with their images. It was very confusing work. I finally had a dream instruction. And in the dream I ask my dear friends for guidance. I didn't want to advance my position in the art world by absorbing their loss, but I had to stay with them. It was a lot of asking them what to do and waking every morning and going first to their photographs. I'd have them out on the table, and I was Xeroxing, going into them further, enlarging, examining details. Then I had a dream that showed me ¾" manila rope suspended from the ceiling with a coil on the bottom and the rope was moving in the dream, very, very slowly like a snake. And the dream said, "6 rpm." I called my friend Jim, we rigged up a length of ¾" manila rope, and a 6 rpm motor. And it was just beautiful when the rope turned! That was the first key to the energy of this piece.

And that's the installation that I just did two months ago in Vienna in a museum space with 30-foot-high ceilings. It was one of the rare times when I could build what I had envisioned: images 25 feet high, both dissolving and moving through mirrored systems so that they're projected, they're in dissolution, and they're moving. The walls are covered with huge blown-up in memoriam statements—which is how our culture is superstitious, printed in the *New York Times,* under the obits, where the living talk to their dead.

How was it funded?
The Kunstraum in Vienna brought me there. I've only sold two works in my life in the United States, only two. I've only had one commission, and that was for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. And that is it. I've never shown in a Whitney Biennial or Documenta or . . .

Would you like to?
Oh, yes. Yes. The work needs it; it's not even me. I now have this huge trust of all this material, and maybe it doesn't mean anything. That's why my position seems very schizophrenic. I'm always surprised if anyone's interested in the work at all; the discrepancies have been so huge.

You Owe Me the Vulva

I would like you to talk about the legacy of your work. I want to know what we owe you.
You owe me the vulva. You owe me the concept of vulvic space. You owe me bestiality. You owe me the love of the presence of the cat as a powerful companion and energy. You owe me heterosexual pleasure and the depiction of that pleasure. And you owe me thirty years of lost work that's never been seen. That's what you all owe me. I guess what I'm also owed is a living, an income. I'm owed the chance to produce the work that I've envisioned that I've never been able to do. I'm owed the chance to preserve the works that already exist. And I'm glad you've asked. Nobody has ever asked me. And you can see, I'm fuming underneath.

Well, it's a history of anger and frustration. It's also a history of loss.
Tremendous loss. Personal loss. Partnership loss: the underlying secret conflict in my lovers between the pleasure and excitement and equity of being

with an artist and their final decision always to become a father and have a traditional marriage. That's a big layer of loss. Of course, we lose everything sooner or later, but one would prefer later.

And anger . . .
Well, anger always has to go with humor and pleasure. Anger has to be honed; with your biggest iron mallet you take the anger and you go at it long enough so that you can tune it. It has to become funny and outrageous and made back into something aesthetic. It's not good enough on its own. But it's good.

Would you want young women to be artists? To be filmmakers?
Oh yes. As many as possible. We should flood the place. To some extent, proportionally, there's now a flourishing of women working to the point where it's also a morass. The mixture of qualities is totally confusing to everyone.

Would you warn them of anything? Or tell them about things to cherish?
I would admonish them to really consider structure and form, to realize that the history of perception and making is volatile and vital. And that they need as much rigorous information as they can get. It's not enough to have a good idea, or a problem to display and relate. We've got too much "stuff" going on. Almost no one has heard of the works in film that I think about all the time.

Can you tell me what those films are?
Oh, I can try, but I'm very forgetful. Luther Price's *Warm Broth*—that's an astonishing, sinister, creepy, unforgettable, feminist, gay male film. Dark and luminous, very simple. The Canadian Jack Chambers, who was a painter in the '70s, began to photograph time durations in his house and the roads near his house and then a visual history of building a city circled into a slaughterhouse, *Hart of London*. Very extraordinary and completely neglected. There's as much by men as by women.

Why are you wearing horns?
I'm wearing horns because I want to show everybody that the phallic principle originally belongs to the feminine. When Mapplethorpe and the boys wear horns, they're usurping the original symbology of the bull that was an attribute of the Goddess. The horns always belonged to the Goddess, and all of us can now have horns equally.

Selected Films and Vi

1964	*Meat Joy,*
1964–67	*Fuses,* 16
1967	*Body Col*
1968–71	*Plumb Li*
1973–78	*Kitch's La*
1975	*Interior S*
1974–77	*Up to and*
1980–91	*Infinity K*
1982	*Vesper's S* video
1990–91	*Scroll Pai* compleme
1992–97	*Instructio*
1993	*Imaging I* video, 10
1995	*Interior S* Beatty, 12
1996	*Known/U*
1999	*Vespers P*

Distribution and Con

Films available from F NY 10016; (212) 889

Videos available from Manitoba R3B 1H3, C

Or from the artist, Car

Selected Films and Videos

1964	*Meat Joy,* 16mm, 12 min., documentation of performance
1964–67	*Fuses,* 16mm, 22 min.
1967	*Body Collage,* 16mm, 6 min.
1968–71	*Plumb Line,* 16mm, 18 min.
1973–78	*Kitch's Last Meal,* Super 8, from 20 min. to 4 hr.
1975	*Interior Scroll,* ¾" video, 40 min.
1974–77	*Up to and Including Her Limits,* ¾" videotape, 1 hr.
1980–91	*Infinity Kisses,* documentation of performance
1982	*Vesper's Stampede to My Holy Mouth,* with Victoria Vesna, video
1990–91	*Scroll Painting with Exploded TV,* installation with video complement
1992–97	*Instructions per Second,* with Mirek Rogula
1993	*Imaging Her Erotics: Carolee Schneemann,* with Maria Beatty, video, 10 min.
1995	*Interior Scroll—The Cave (1993–95),* video, with Maria Beatty, 12 min.
1996	*Known/Unknown–Plague Column,* installation documentation
1999	*Vespers Pool,* installation documentation

Distribution and Contact Information

Films available from Filmmakers Coop, 175 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016; (212) 889-3820

Videos available from Video Pool, #300–100 Arthur Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 1H3, CANADA; (204) 949-9134; vpdist@videopool.mb.ca

Or from the artist, Carolee Schneemann, http://209.100.59.3/artists/index.html