

**Introduction:**

**An art of the precarious**

Aaron Levy

**Edited Transcript:**

**Master class with Carolee Schneemann**

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For many years, Carolee Schneemann's work has foregrounded the relationship between the artist's body and the social body. Her art, her relationships, and her institutional negotiations have all foregrounded the fundamental relationship between the individual and socio-cultural conditions. She has enabled us at Slought to think in similar terms, and to negotiate our position, identity, and practice in relation to the city and beyond.

The word precariousness is often understood in terms of vulnerability, and the condition of being dependent on unknown conditions and uncertain developments. Today, a wide range of artists and philosophers employ this word as a metaphor for our times, as a way to talk about our contingency and vulnerability as human beings in the face of the psychological challenges, socio-economic inequalities, and political tensions that define our communities. How is it that so many are vulnerable and precarious today? Why are some born into precariousness and others not? Why do certain lives count more than others? What agency do we have to mitigate the severity of these conditions? Schneemann has asked these questions of herself and others for many years.

The title of this publication, *Utterly Precarious*, builds upon Schneemann's 2009 installation about movement in captivity. Alarmed by the Tate Liverpool's request for a title for the installation, she consulted the Oxford English Dictionary and discovered the phrase "life after the Second World War in Liverpool was precarious." Schneemann's situation over the years has been a precarious one too. The life of an artist entails the constant negotiation of precarious circumstances and conditions in order to practice and survive. Schneemann is in the paradoxical position of being one of the great artistic pioneers of our time, an icon, yet one who over the course of 30 years has lived without fixed income, health insurance, institutional affiliation, etc. Having lived and practiced without the stability that some take for granted, her life and work has in this way always constituted an art of the precarious.

This publication features a filmed conversation between Schneemann and first-year undergraduate students in a History of Art course at the University of Pennsylvania that opens with a discussion about precariousness. In the months preceding the conversation, the students and I explored Schneemann's work and the question of how to write and conduct scholarship about contemporary art history in the present. We engaged her work, writing and correspondence, and learned why Lucy Lippard has referred to Schneemann's life and work as a "mythological revolution," one that has radically transformed the conditions of artistic practice by directly engaging the public in the production of the work. We hope that this publication is as enabling and transformative for you as our conversation with Carolee has been for us.

## **Edited Transcript: Master class with Carolee Schneemann**

Jordyn Feingold, Erica Levin, Aaron Levy, Emma Pfeiffer, Justin Reinsberg, Nicole Ripka, David Wilks, and Elliot Wolf

Jordyn Feingold: We have been talking about the theme of precariousness, and for us this space is very precarious. But we want to know what this space signifies to you, as you were here as a child and are here now.

Carolee Schneemann: Well, it is evolving in terms of all the potential forms and what I would call the morphologies of form. That is always a thematic for how I organize thinking about my work and bringing it into material realm. There is a charm for me to be back here with all the grotesque things that my dad thought I should know about when I was 8 or 9.

We didn't live in the city, we traveled in to visit this museum. I pretty much remember that wall of fetuses and deformed infant shapes in formaldehyde. I think that awareness of taboos and suppressed elements of the body were always available for me to think about. And I'm back and it is quite luxurious, all these decrepit bones.

Elliot Wolf: We were wondering when you felt that you had a practice or an identity as an artist. Was there a certain work that marked this emergence as an artist for you or was it more of a development?

CS: I had these childhood drawing books and in them there are the same issues about repetition, about movement, about depiction that run through all my work. I didn't know what an artist was, but I always knew I had to make some kind of imagery. And little kids are pretty obsessive with that, but mine never stopped. So there is no date, as such.

JF: Is looking back at those childhood works retrospective? Has it been a continuation for you, or have you always referred to those works?

CS: No, they were hidden in some basket. My parents did not want me to grow up to be an artist – whatever that was. I was hugely discouraged to the point of not being sent to college. I was very blessed to get all kinds of scholarships.

EW: Did your parents' discouragement affect your wanting to become an artist? Did that have an effect on you? Or did it not faze you?

CS: Oh, yes. I had resistance. I've been scratching my way through to be able to do what I felt that I needed to do. I was lucky to have rare, rare elements of support. The scholarship, room, board, tuition, to Bard was amazing. I had a godmother who was always a best friend and helped me when there were circumstances that I couldn't have shared with anyone else. And then I fell in

love with James Tenney. We were younger than you, but we recognized each other as a force field for some shared creative equity and influence, and it was fantastic.

AL: To keep on this question, so in a sense there is not one particular moment? There has just been this continuous, perpetual development?

CS: I never had to choose. Many people have to choose. Many of my students are in a quandary. What should they be? What should their commitment be? And I sympathize with that but I feel a little privileged that I never had to make those choices. But I really learned – I had to learn – how to be an artist. Because after initial childish gifts, I realized I didn't know what you had to do. In my first oil painting I took somebody's kit from somewhere and squeezed the colors on a board and I didn't know you needed turpentine so my landscape was this gooey, sticky, snow scene, all lumpish.

AL: So you taught yourself, in a way, how to be an artist?

CS: The real story is when I find the Philadelphia Museum of Art. When you are a kid you have babysitting money and you are looking for other weird people and you travel around. Every now and then I would take the train to Market Street Station. I would come and sit on the steps and there would always be some queer, odd kid with a guitar or a flute and they always knew things that I needed to know. They knew about the Putney School, they knew about hitchhiking, eating out of dumpsters – they were full of important information. But then I could just wander through that huge museum. It was like a castle. No one ever paid any attention to me whatsoever.

I was 11 or 12. I would look at all these paintings; paintings, paintings, everywhere. The museum in those days was not so hospital-like – it was not all white walls. It was full of nooks and crannies and places where you could just sort of stare at something and be invisible. And I went down these stairs and I smelled this intoxicating aroma. I thought I was going to just pass out it was so beautiful. I followed it around to a doorway and looked inside and there were all these grown-ups in front of little easels with paintbrushes and a table with some bottles and fruit that they were painting. And I thought, "Oh this must be where you learn how to do it! This must be what you have to figure out!"

I hung around and the teacher came to the door and he said, "Are you in school here or in a class?" And I said, "No." "Well," he said, "Do you want to come in?" And I said, "Yes!" So I came in and he said, "I can give you some drawing paper and some colored pencils. Would you like that?" "Yes." So I am at an easel watching what everyone is doing and they are just studying and really looking – that's all they really do, they spend time looking. He goes around and talks about how they are perceiving what they are looking at. And then the

professor, Morris Blackburn, says that I should come back.

The next time I go back I come down the hallway, smell the wonderful aroma, and follow it right down into the class where they are painting. At one point the teacher takes a little break and he picks up a brown paper bag from somebody's lunch and he says, "Okay everyone come around in a circle." And we do. He takes his little brown paper bag and he tears it all up, chops it all up into little pieces and takes those pieces and throws them down on the floor.

He asks, "What do you think of all these torn up papers now?" All the grown-ups are going, "Hmmp." And I said, "Um is it about all the rhythms between the pieces?" And the teacher goes, "Yes! Yes!" And I went on from there.

Emma Pfeiffer: How do you relate to your early work? Do your works mean different things to you now than when you produced them, and do you think the works have transformed over time for the viewer? Do you think we interpret your performance works differently now than when they were produced?

CS: Yes, especially the most sensuous, volatile works that had very extreme reactions at the time. *Meat Joy* did, and certainly *Fuses*. My film was censored and dragged away. Maybe 6 or 7 years ago it was shown in El Paso, Texas and somebody called the police. And they came and arrested the poor guy, the projectionist, who was probably making 3 or 4 dollars an hour. They took him, the projector, and the film to prison. They didn't know exactly what was obscene and who to blame for the crime of this inappropriate classroom. The censorship has been constant. It still continues with my political work. My work on the destruction of Palestinian culture has been more censored than any of my erotic work. Certainly the issues have changed and you can all speak to that. But *Interior Scroll*, now we all call it *Interior Squirrel*, is in every textbook on 20<sup>th</sup> century art. That is astonishing! That action was considered obscene and vile, while some feminists said it was playing into the worst aspects of prurient male sexism. There was confusion over what it was about, but gradually my intentions became accepted and absorbed just through cultural shifts that were happening anyway. The energy that is really lost is in the political work, the Vietnam work, the sense of community and dynamic and fierce determination to change what was unjust in the political structure. That is limping along. That is pathetic.

Justin Reinsberg: What do the relationships that have enabled your work over the years mean to you, for instance with James Tenney and your cats? Is there a reason why this work is labeled as yours instead of as a collaboration?

CS: Tenney had a complex range of musical works that were central to developing many of our parallel ideas and plans. He participated in *Fuses*, *Snows*, and *Water Light/Water Needle*, as well as developing sound scores with

me. A double credit: Tenney and Schneemann. Some other works are listed as: "Works by Schneemann with Tenney."

The devotion, the care, the equity of a life with Jim was incredibly supporting and inspiring. We had no money whatsoever. It was the kind of life where if we had a pack of cigarettes we couldn't do the laundry. And if we did laundry we couldn't put gasoline in the car. For graduate school we both had fellowships and we lived way off campus, because even though Tenney came from Arizona and New Mexico, I grew up in rural Pennsylvania and Vermont and I was very scared of Illinois with that infinite, infinite horizon.

We lived way off campus where we had found a shelter of odd trees and a kind of little shack house. That choice made it extremely difficult to provide for things, even though I think that shack house was only maybe \$48 a month, I don't remember. But we had such a constant rich engagement sexually, erotically, and in terms of how we lived and what was around us.

The cat, the original cat Kitch, was remarkable because she was mimetic. Not only did she play the piano sitting up because she did it the way he did it, but when she was a kitten and we lived in a cabin in Colorado, Jim would go on the porch to pee and the kitten would watch and the next thing we knew she was peeing standing up on her back legs. "No kitty, no! You are supposed to go that way." Well, that was how he did it. She made a painting with a shoe polish brush. She was such a remarkable partner in everything we were doing and we learned so much from her. Tiny, very communicative, clear about justice and what was fair, devoted – we had such a spirit within us and it was all very remarkable and helped us to work.

The influence of living with someone who was pounding out five chords of Ives' *Concord Sonata* over and over again to find the rubato, the interior rhythm... And all those fractures and constancies helped me enormously as a painter. I was painting outside in the landscape and being told by my professors that everything I did was wrong. I'm used to that, always being wrong, wrong.

With Jim our few close friends included Stan Brakhage – although his feeling about my work as an artist was hugely conflicted and difficult – and through Jim's association, Malcolm Goldstein, the composer, and Phillip Corner. Then, when we get to New York City it takes about 10 minutes and I've joined the Judson church and am participating in Oldenburg's *Store Days*. It was fantastic!

There was a vibrant community, but it was small compared to now. It was huge in terms of its intentionality, because we all knew each other. You could call John Cage up and say, "Will you come to my concert?" And he's there.

JR: Do you ever consider these relationships part of your work?

CS: We all influence each other. It is a constant melding and interconnection.

Emma Pfeiffer: This is a little bit of a tangent, but we have learned a lot about your fruitful relationships with men. Have you had important women in your life who have affected your work as well?

CS: That is a good question. As a proto-feminist, along with other women artists when I was developing.. we were all constantly revolving around the men. The men had authority, the men's work was taken very seriously, and none of the women were taken seriously. It is stressful as a girl to be an exceptional student among your friends when all the other guys' girls are cooking and cleaning and emptying the ashtrays... And for us to communicate with each other this dilemma – seriously we had to do it on our own.

So it was years before I knew what Eva Hesse was making in her studio or what Lucy Lippard was writing. My very close friends participated in my work – Dorothea Rockburne, Anina Noseai, Deborah Hay – and we had a kind of tight Judson Dance Theater team. But the sense around us was that we were somewhat anomalous and that we could have limited aesthetic authority.

AL: We have been spending many months thinking and reading about your work. Last week we made our way to the end of *Correspondence Course* and we got stuck on the last letter addressed to the MacArthur Foundation. I want to ask you to reflect on that and if you think there has been a shift in the cultural landscape. In the coming days your archive is going to make its way to Stanford, and I wonder if that means things have changed –

CS: Everything has changed! There is a tremendous interest in women's work, women's history, women's art, when you look at the reviews in *The New York Times* at least half of them or even more are women. I am beginning to wonder where are the guys now! So out of early feminist research and studies in the 70s there has been an immense reintegration of women's contributions that were lost or forgotten. Do you all see that now?

I never had a woman teacher. So the influences for me as a woman were the dead and historical. Virginia Woolf transformed my whole sense of structure very early. When I was 17, I read *The Waves* in the back of a little station wagon that came through Vermont as a library. You could crawl in the back and pick something. It is tremendous. When I am teaching and there are engaged young men paying attention, I think, "Wow! How did this happen?"

AL: Including that letter at the end of *Correspondence Course* clearly wasn't an accident. Looking back, what does it mean for that to be the last letter?

CS: I didn't know it would be the last letter. All those sequences are edited by

Kristine Stiles – it was not a book I ever wanted to do. I thought that you should be dead before you have all your personal material organized. But that letter – that was a telling letter! I was furious! The MacArthur Foundation wanted me to recommend younger artists. I had never received such a grant. None of my friends in my age group who were struggling and influential had ever had such an acknowledgment. I wrote that I would be happy to recommend artists who had already achieved a great deal but whom had not had sufficient support.

AL: You also said that the grants you had received were more than symbolic gestures of support. They enabled you to live, survive, and make work. You spoke passionately about what the stakes were for how funding is distributed.

CS: Yes, that is still – always – a huge issue.

Nicole Ripka: Is it hard to work against the limits of institutions?

CS: Well, the institutions are also the only way we get jobs. I am working within structures, and culture, and specific institutions – until they fire me for overstimulating the students or not turning the lights off on time or smoking pot off on a holiday with some of the graduate students for the weekend. Before they fire me, the institutions are solid and wonderful and completely supportive. Until the faculty that were so gracious and interesting start tearing each other apart and want to take the course away and make the competitor have an 8am for non-art majors so they can't ever travel home...

The first institution to support my work was the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art due to the interference of my cat Vesper with the curator in charge of acquisitions, Bob Reilly. That is another long, wonderful story where the cat influences the outcome of the work, which was the first major work of mine to be acquired by a museum. *Infinity Kisses* is composed of 142 photos in a grid; the kissing series with the cats Vesper and Cluny that evolved for over 8 years.

That institution was the only one until a few weeks ago. You'll be thrilled to know that the Museum of Modern Art in New York is going to purchase *Up to and including her limits* – that's the big double drawing including the rope, projector, and 6 monitors in which you see the drawing process accumulate as I am suspended from the rope, drawing for 8 hours.

But it is interesting to know that though they are going to buy it, they don't have any money, yet. They commit themselves to a purchase and then they have to go out and find the money. I am told that it could take quite a while.

AL: Hasn't it taken too long for them to get to this point?

CS: It has taken very long for the culture that has power, the institutional



powers have many people that are upset and obsessed with controversial work that I did 25 years ago. They think it is taboo and narcissistic and they don't want anything to do with it. That happens over and over again.

My touring exhibit, which includes paintings, photographs, video – material that is not sexual or explicit – has nevertheless had resistance from institutions. All it takes is one or two trustees who say, “Oh she does obscene work.”

David Wilks: Going back to previous questions about your relationships with women, we wanted to know how you dealt with there not being a sense of community among feminist artists, or having people to support you in that way. To us it seemed like there was a very stifling sense of community and we wanted to know how you dealt with that?

CS: Standing here with all these skeletons and bones reminds me I began accumulating a journal called “Missing Precedence.” Even when I was finally at the University of Illinois, I still had never had a woman teacher after junior high. We weren't permitted to have that kind of influence or authority. I was told that I was pretty gifted, but not to take it seriously – it's really not an okay gift for some reason, even though I received scholarships.

I did research and found precedents in libraries, odd things. Some of you might have read that I would go with my hands up, waiting for a charge within a row of books, and I found the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff – amazing, remarkable! And so I had cultural examples that guided me.

I had a few teachers that were supportive of what I was doing. A wonderful drawing teacher named Andre Racz at Columbia; also an important painting teacher at Bard who smoked cigars and taught me how to really grind up garlic in a salad bowl. But he was also the teacher who said, “You're really gifted kid, but don't set your heart on art. You are only a girl.”

It is a really good question. It is such a deep question. And also because of all the sexual terrors of getting pregnant which was a big deal for us because abortions were illegal. One of the important things for me at Bard College was a red coat with toggles, a red flannel coat with big pockets. In the pocket was a little container and when you opened it up there was this round rubber thing in it. And the girls said, “This is the dormitory diaphragm and it goes to the girl who is having sex before she knows she has to be safe about it. So we are giving it to you – you are the freshman who is getting the coat right now.”

That saved my life – until I got pregnant and had to wander off to some illegal, terrifying, far away place. But it was very difficult – you had to pass the coat on. And boy, I loved that coat. I could go to Planned Parenthood and get my own

diaphragm by then, but you couldn't just find another flannel coat with toggles. You know we had secret societies of girls helping each other figure things out.

DW: We read about how your teachers were influences and what not. We also read about thinkers such as [Herbert] Marcuse and [Wilhelm] Reich. And we want to know how they influenced you as well.

CS: Well, they opened my realm of thinking. They concretized issues that Tenney and I were thinking about and needing to put into some formal context. We were reading things all the time – from science, to anthropology, to archaeology—but it was all male culture, which was the only culture there really was until the mid-70s when women began to reconsider what we had inherited.

It is hard to describe how everything can influence you. You know, lying out on a field stoned and watching a bird wander around – that could be huge, right?

NR: We have discussed your poem “In Springtime.” And we read the Emily Caigan interview. We wanted to know about your relationship with your house in Springtown, New York and how this influences your work?

CS: I have lived other places but I have always gone back to that house. And it is wonderful having Emily Caigan as a historian, an artist, a friend helping me with things that I can't resolve myself. The house belonged to relatives as a failed farm. It was going to be auctioned off and Tenney and I were sort of camping out there. I had a very assertive, aggressive, overwhelming need to tell them not to auction the house, that I would do anything to keep it. And then these dreams began.

Well, this is probably that same kind of crazy male voice that keeps turning up. A male voice that is very fierce and instructive and it says with no ambivalence, “When you wake up, get a crow bar and go stand in front of the front door and pry up the linoleum and you will see a beautiful chestnut board.”

So Jim and I said, “We can do that, that won't hurt the house so much, we'll pry up the linoleum.” And there was a wide, incredibly beautiful intact board that had been covered up. We were reading the *I Ching* like crazy to figure out what kind of destiny we could have with this monumental space. Then the second dream said, “Take a hammer, walk outside the front door, take a right, and smash the wall right there. You will see a golden stone.” It sounds like a fairytale, but we did it. The house was covered in cement and it fell down and there was this beautiful stone. It is a stone house, that is why the windowsills are like this. We hadn't been told the history. And then the third dream said, “Take the hammer, walk into the middle of the dark, dank, sad living room and smash the ceiling right there.” And that is a problem – we can't fix the ceiling. I thought, “We can't do that, that is going to be a mess.” But Jim said we better

do it. The dream said, “You will see a big chestnut beam.” And we did and there it was.

AL: Is the house a work?

CS: The house is a collaboration of history, spirit, and my response to it all. There are three stone houses from the 1750s built with permission of the Native Americans, the Lenape. The second of the old stone houses was getting ruined and abandoned. Two guys just bought it and are fixing it up and I went to meet them, I was so happy. And they said, “Oh we know who you are. The other neighbors said you were in that stone house. We have a dilemma for you. A woman who lived there had thirteen children. She killed 2 of them and sent the others away and then killed herself.” I thought, “Well that sounds like my kind of mothering.” They said, “We don’t know if it was at your house or our house.” They have written to the Library of Congress to get records and it is still not clear. So I have another exciting house mystery! My house feels very benign and graceful, but so does theirs. But that would be comfortable for me... I wouldn’t be scared of a woman who had to do her own thing.

Erica Levin: Your performance last night was incredible and we all really appreciate the risks you took in presenting a narrative that is so incredibly personal. A few days ago I encountered something that you wrote in *Meat Joy* about your experience at a Jim Dine happening where he was performing in a way that was incredibly personal. And I don’t know if you remember this particular experience or not, but I would love to hear more about that.

CS: It was about vulnerability. Jim Dine was distinguished and collected. He was a rather famed painter who had done performative things, as had Oldenburg and Whitman and Red Grooms. He had the vulnerability and fragility to expose part of a diary from a time when he was in therapy. That was in such an anti-masculist realm.

The men in the audience, who were friends of mine, were absolutely outraged. And this was before *Interior Scrolls* or other kinds of outrage. This was particularly male: “What the fuck is he doing! This is so wrong and improper and he shouldn’t be using material like that.” So I was a witness and I thought they were so wrong and so suppressive, and part of the convention according to which male artists had to maintain authority by not exposing their own intimacy in any way. That would be pornography or something inappropriate. They direct other people or make monumental significant works in which any of their uncertainties or failures or weaknesses would not be part of the subject. Brakhage was able to do that early on in film, to inhabit his vulnerability.

In this sort of hyper-masculine art world, Dine was trashed. He never performed anything else, he just stuck with his sculpture and painting. I remember sitting

there and I thought it was a wonderful work. I was very moved.

AL: Can we talk about Vietnam and what the political developments of that time meant for you? We have watched *Snows*, read about your relations with Julian Beck, and discussed your organizing activities. Can you tell us about that period and what it meant to you, as you radicalized as an artist, as a citizen?

CS: Well, I was to some extent always radicalized, even as a kid. We had a *National Geographic* in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and it had naked African women in it. I remember the boys hooting and scratching and snarling over the page. I thought this was – I didn't know the word obscene – so wrong and so awful and part of something in the culture that I was always going to struggle with.

So Vietnam was a grotesque, enlarged, racist obscenity and it was so relentless. The war machinery and the propaganda was impenetrable and unending and self-righteous. And one 17-year-old guy after another was just thrown in as fodder for the killing machine, whereas the whole Vietnamese culture was subject to destruction and not ever presented truly or described properly. So Jim and I started to research it and find examples of their poetry, of their music. As you know, this all started at the University of Illinois with an exchange student from this place we had never heard of: Vietnam [pronounced with a midwestern accent]. She told us she was an English major and there were troops in her country setting villages on fire, arresting people, blowing up the social structures of Vietnam. And we didn't know why. What was the point?

So we anticipated what became a huge movement of resistance with constant sources of forbidden information and photographs that would come from Europe or through a highly organized underground – we were called “underground.” I did training – I don't know if you found that. I trained a young guy's friends so that they wouldn't be inducted. It involved putting them on the edge of some kind of psychic breakdown and turmoil. I could do it. It was very scary and uncertain and it worked. Once I got my paws on them none of them ever got inducted. It was a sub-history, very fascinating. And the hat, he couldn't take the hat off – we worked on that for a week, what the hat meant. And so finally he could not remove it and he was removed.

You could make some small concentrated effort and then join a vast activist community. We were of course very influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and how they had insisted on their principles and gone forward to fight for them at great risk. It was a time when we talked about drugs and rich experience and happiness and great music and incredible sex, but it was also a time of a morbid, dark, miserable ground. People were assassinated every week. The president, the vice-president, the Black Panthers were attacked. MOVE, a whole block in Philadelphia of black activists, were set on fire. Set on fire! Everybody died – the children, the grandparents – just near here. Every week

something horrendous and how could you work against it? You would organize and give out information and put yourself at risk – marching, appearing, and bringing information back about what was going on.

We know even less today. One of the things America does with such cleverness is when we are fighting another culture we turn them into messy peasants – they don't have a civilization, they don't have a history, they don't have hotels, they don't have libraries, they don't have significant buildings. We are going to destroy them all but you won't know anything about them. You are just going to see them with packs on their backs and a donkey, and you won't really know who they have been and what they have meant... the cradle of civilization is obliterated.

And the question is always, "Who benefits?" And who benefits are the armaments and militants. I think we are very entrenched in invisible forms of structure that we don't really see. We live on a kind of beneficence on the outskirts around it. We still have enough privilege.

AL: During your time in Philadelphia this week, you spoke about your precariousness, your struggles with cancer, but also the art that you made throughout. And it reminded me of something that you said during a conversation we had months ago. You said you don't choose to make work, you need to make work to live and survive. Could you talk more about that?

CS: Yes. Well, I don't have an exacting procedure and I can't and I won't. So I can't even give a good outline. As I mentioned last night, I saw a shape in my mind and I wondered what it was. Then I thought, "I want to cast it, for it to be a sculptural form that could move." For a couple of weeks I went around asking friends, "Have you seen any kind of sculpture that is doing this, and has several units that are moving around, and going like that? I don't know if I dreamt it, saw it, or if it is mine." And they said, "It is probably yours."

So I was very lucky, I had two graduate students at the time. One is a big kind of country guy with rings in his nose and a lot of beard and hair and he does foundry work. And he said, "I can help you cast that form!" And then my other student is from SVU, and he is a very elegant, Austrian guy who winds himself up and does wild and kinetic things where he will go into a carwash and figure out how all those mechanics can be attached to his body. And he does these amazing events. And I thought, "I need the kinetics and I need the foundry." And it all came together. I just finished 12 more units. The country guy, Joe, is up in Buffalo casting right now at the foundry, casting them in huge flames with tons of sand poured around the shape. They will come back to me this weekend and I will call Janosch, the mechanical guy, in New York and somehow we will get them down to him for mechanization.

Well, who knows where that all came from – nobody wants to see it, nobody knows about it, nobody cares about it. Oh, but the beautiful thing is that we are filming – we filmed the fire in the foundry that melts the original form. And it is like these huge bloody blossoms. That video is projected on the sculpture and also on the floor, so as a viewer you are standing in the center of these beautiful, bloody blossoms of fire.

AL: Is your process an intuitive one? Is that the way you would explain it?

CS: The intuitive is everything. You know intuitive is analytic, it is cultural, it is intellectual. It is everything that you know that you can make available. Intuition is everything that is going to save your soul and forward your sensibility.

JF: After spending a semester studying your works, watching your films, and reading *Correspondence Course* and other texts, it is a special experience to be here to listen to your anecdotes and stories. What does it mean to you that we have spent an entire semester studying you?

CS: Oh, it is outrageous! It's huge! I can't imagine! How did this happen? I think I am still all alone and anonymous in this same old house, shifting out the kitty litter and wondering why there is nothing to eat in the refrigerator, and hurrying to get the bus to New York to teach or edit. Then all this is happening. There is something ghostly about it. It's like a strange museum is going on around me and it is enormously gratifying. But I am also rather separate from this great experience you are engaged with, which is amazing.

AL and JF: Do you have questions for us? How did we do in this master class? Anything you wish we would have asked you?

CS: I'm interested in what was taken from my performance last night here at The College of Physicians of Philadelphia. For instance, *Mysteries of the Pussies* is a very complex, issue-layered work and I don't know if it's coming through or if it's one of those works that's going to take a bunch of years and suddenly everyone's going to say, "Oh yea, we know what that's doing." It's also very funny - it's angry and it's very funny. And I'm the only person who laughs at the funny parts. When my cat Furrow comes with the bunch of red beets there's some sort of sexual statement and he appears on the sink with this huge bunch of beets in his mouth like a vegetarian cat. And there's just been some sort of diabolical reference to something horrible in history where some aspect of female sexuality is considered witchcraft. It's all edited in terms of these juxtapositions of something potentially horrible in history and something domestic. The image where the cat is chewing on a squirrel and my text comes from Robert Darton's *History of Witchcraft*, where the way to destroy the malevolent feline powers is to break their limbs and tear them apart. And that's juxtaposed with my cat chewing on something he just caught. So

there's always these sort of tensions, of reference, but it's a very succinct little essay concerning the violence that has always been historically embedded against cats and women, the demonization of them both in early history and how that has its residual aspects still.

EL: I've been wondering about the repetition that happens in *Mysteries of the Pussies*, with the Finnish echo of what you say in English. Of course that probably has something to do with the context in which it was made, but for an English audience there's also something that I found really moving about how it takes these terrible accounts and turns them into something unrecognizable if you don't speak the language. There's something really interesting about how that works in the piece that I found myself thinking about a lot afterwards.

CS: That's one of the layers. Also, the Finnish audience didn't know what was happening, they had never seen anything like that. We had no rehearsal. And the sound is edited from completely separate sources. I told Teija Lammi that we would be glancing at these images of the cats projected behind us and to physically find some way to incorporate what we saw. She was the librarian of the Porin Taidemuseo, which is a place like this place, a library in a museum. She was wearing black glasses, with her hair all rolled up. I said, "I need help with translation and then if we could do some improvised movement together..." She said yes, she would try. And then, "What should I wear?" I said, "Oh, just something black." I open the door at six o'clock and there's Brigitte Bardot in this little black slinky thing, this beautiful blonde hair, and the glasses are gone, and huge blue eyes. Wow! There are many gifts in uncertainty. Uncertainty is really important to me.

One of the things from the cancer sequence that I couldn't possibly go into last night is that I refused traditional treatment because I came to the loft one day and there were two postcards pressed together, one on top of the other. They were both from dear friends that I had introduced and were traveling. One had stalactites coming down and making these double mounds. And the other card pressed against it was of two mountains in the Alps. I looked at these peaks and these pinnacles and they're saying, "Keep it! Don't do that treatment!" They were absolute guidance against every medical story that I was being told. So I'm walking with my boyfriend in the woods in the back of the house and I've already told him, "I'm not doing it — A radical mastectomy, long term radiation, six weeks of chemo." And they've told me that I'm committing suicide if I don't do it and I'll die. And we're walking in the woods and he says, "You're deviating, the path is up here. Where are you going? You're deviating." I love that he said "deviating." I walked forward and there was this huge owl feather that was right in front of my feet. I said, "Okay, okay, deviate, deviate, deviate." That's what I needed. You can't teach anybody else that and think they'll be okay, and go out and pray for feathers... What do they say on television, "It works for me?" There's some motto, somebody says that, right, some ad? "Works for me."

