

From Indira Sylvia (I.S.) Belissop, *Journal Entries from a Philosopher in a Time of Revolt, 1968-1980*, ed.

by Avi Alpert

(This entry is republished with permission from Belissop, for the recent occasion of a lecture by Carolee Schneemann at the Slought Foundation in Philadelphia, March 2010.)

February, 1978

On Tuesday we¹ went to a private screening of *Fuses*.² I have heard of Schneemann, and heard described *Internal Scroll*.³ I never know what to do as I approach works like this. The audience I viewed as my own internal ambivalence. Some laughed; some looked away, or shook their heads. We were not conservatives, not reactionaries. We wanted to stand up and say, Yes! We wanted to believe that this was progressive – that this was progress. That there was a relation to sexuality which the film could capture and which could re awaken our own bodies. But this was what our generation had been taught not to do. Martin and Maurice asked what art *did*, not what it did for us. The work did not allow me this. It did not reveal the truth about sexuality; it seemed only to beckon me to have better sex. (Though, perhaps, this is the failure of my own imagination, seized as it is by the pangs of our revolutions.) Still, the film stayed with me, unnerved me, and I could not say why, only that it had something to do with sex. Or so I thought, and I thought this must be so because I had been so lonely, this decade of traveling, of hiding, of living under false names. I waited that night; I waited till everyone left, till it was just Hans and I.⁴ We stared at each other like children. That is to say, we did not make love, we did not touch, we just stared, we just... looked. It was a remarkable feeling, to sit there and look at him, not thinking about desire, not thinking about sex. Really, more than the sex, I realized that what had got me thinking about Carolee's film was the cat, was the banal presence of the cat, who did not care at all about the lovers. One year ago this month I wrote of my loss and

confusion. I took to pen to condemn thinking in the face of the brutality I saw after I met *mi tocayo*.⁵ In a world that had broken her soul I could only think to laugh and cry like a madwoman. To embrace and hug, to feel so... so goddamned *maternal*. *Fuses* taught me better. What is great about is the cat, the non-effrontery of the cat, the re-fusal of the cat. If one year ago all I wanted was to fuse, to feel the flesh of my flesh, to fold into the flesh of the world, what I want now is to let all that recede. Rather, now, to sit here and write, as I sat there and stared at Hans, as he sat there and stared at me.

¹ Belissop does not usually write with the royal we, and the entries from this time do not indicate who her companion may have been. She was likely to have been in Amsterdam at the time, but this may also have been written in New York.

² *Fuses* is short film by Carolee Schneemann (1965), noted for its editing and film technique as much as for its graphic depiction of sex, and the "shameless" presence of her cat throughout the scenes.

³ A 1975 performance piece where Schneemann, among other things during a multi-faceted performance, pulled a scroll out from her vagina.

⁴ Presumably a friend of Belissop's, though his identity remains unknown.

⁵ See entry from February, 1977 on Belissop's meeting with an activist known only as "Silvia."

