

Reflective Spaces: Film and Video in the Work of Joan Jonas

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The work of Joan Jonas is connected by a complex structure of meaning, whose form parallels the labyrinthine, mirrored spaces of the Borgesian stories by which it is informed. Her performances, films, drawings, videotapes, objects and photographs are rooted in an encyclopaedic context stretching from land art on the one hand, to new dance, theatre, ancient ritual, body art, film and video on the other. This wide ranging framework describes the condition of postminimalism, in which Jonas was a key figure, and whose process-based character her work helped to define.

Central to an understanding of Jonas's work in general, and of her integration of film and video within it in particular, is the breakdown of the boundaries of the autonomous art object which occurred during the early 1960s, when Jonas completed her sculptural training. From the beginning, Jonas embraced the radical shift which was taking place in art from object to embodied subject, creating works which were performative, collectively executed, open-structured, and deeply involved with issues of both real and symbolic space. Film and video were essential tools for constructing her enquiry. Her use of time-based media, along with the body, sensuality, emotion and ritual, reflected the process-based, pluralistic approach of a new generation of women who emerged in the late sixties and early seventies, who extended the parameters of artmaking into a new, more expressive territory, and legitimised the role of female experience.

The trajectory of Jonas's work moves from a broad engagement with dance, film, land art and sculptural space in her early pieces to a more specifically internal, female space, described through the video camera's interaction with real space and time. Towards the end of

the seventies, this space became articulated through a more theatrical, narrative structure, in a series of performances in which drawing predominates. Her most recent work draws elements from each previous phase, combining video, objects, drawing and live performance to create spaces which are both more formal, more separate, and more contained. Throughout all these phases, the moving image has remained the thread by which her work in performance, drawing, dance and object-making has been united.

Several factors were critical to the early formation of Jonas's work, and for her incorporation of the moving image into a larger performative structure. From 1964 onwards, Jonas saw many of the radical dance pieces of Yvonne Rainer and the Judson Church group, in which film was sometimes combined with performance. In the late sixties, she also began to see the work of avant-garde filmmakers, which was gaining greater visibility. In 1965, she worked at the critically important Green Gallery, which exposed her to the experimental thinking of the artists who created projects there. From 1967–1969, she took workshops with Judson dancers Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay and Steve Paxton. Working with the key dancers of her generation had a deep impact on the form of Jonas's performance pieces, whose incorporation of new dance-based movement was, with the exception of Carolee Schneeman (another member of Judson), unique amongst the performances created by women during the late sixties and early seventies.

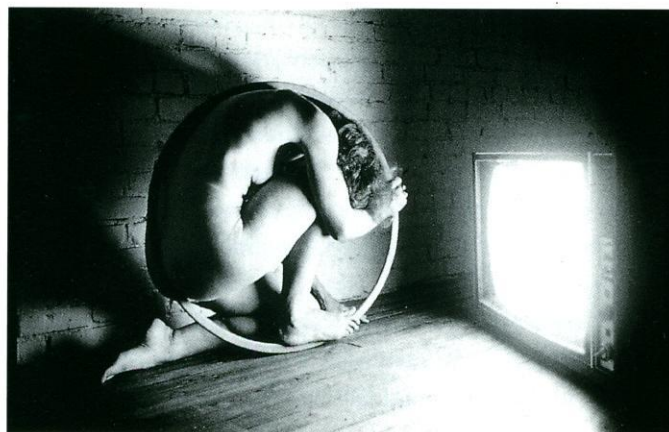
The development of Jonas's work was also informed by her relationship with Richard Serra, and her close friendships with Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Gordon Matta-Clark and Peter Campus, many of whom participated in the influential Whitney Museum exhibition "Anti-Illusion:

Procedures, Materials" in 1969. Jonas's use of film and video in relation to both physical and symbolic space was shaped by her interest in earth art and in the new, expanded definitions of sculpture taking place in the late sixties, which aligned her work with the central figures of post-minimalist art, and the group of artists whose video work was shown at the Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend galleries.

Within this context, out of which she moved to sustain a career which transcended the object-based philosophy of the 1980s to gain a new impact in the pluralistic, moving image-dominated art world of the new millennium, Jonas's unique contribution lies in the dialogue between the fusion of dance, ritual and process in her early film and performance works, and its transformation into the more internal, symbolic spaces of her later video performances. It is through this dialogue that pluralism, anti-form and female subjectivity were gradually articulated, as she moved away from the legacy of Minimalism, whilst retaining some of its traits. Hence in her films we find elemental forms and topological references, and in her video performances repetition, seriality, and a phenomenological shift of meaning from the discrete object to the viewer in space.

We also find a clear attempt to define the problematic of the feminine subject. The newly emergent women's movement, which was playing an important role in the development of postmodern thought in the early seventies, formed a framework for the experiments of Jonas and many other female artists. Jonas took male-dominated sculptural issues of scale and materiality and transformed them into her own language. By re-defining sculpture and drawing through movement and time, Jonas extended the terms of process-based sculpture to create subjective, symbolic spaces.

In her first film, *Wind*, made in the winter of 1968, Jonas created her first symbolic space, bringing together her interest in earth art and ritual with her experience of the new dance of Judson Church. The vastness of a snowy beach on Long Island became the location for a group performance, choreographed by Jonas and filmed and co-edited by Peter Campus. The natural landscape, dealt with in formal sculptural terms by artists such as Smithson, Heizer and de Maria, is, in *Wind*, given a human



Joan Jonas *Twilight* (1975) Anthology Film Archives, New York 1975
Foto © Gwenn Thomas

aspect. It is delineated not by abstract markings made by mechanical means, but by human bodies placed at various points in the near and far distance. Their attempts to mark out the space are mediated by the considerable force of a blowing gale. As they battle to keep upright in the wind, linked to each other back to back, they attempt to take off and put on their coats, in simple actions which recall the tasklike movements of the Judson dancers.

In the far distance, an enigmatic couple in costumes made from small mirrors sewn onto cloth move stiffly sideways and forwards towards the sea. Their presence introduces several other elements which recur in all Jonas's performances, films and videotapes. Firstly the concept of the double, sometimes expressed by two performers, and at other times by Jonas and her mirror reflection or video image. Significantly, the archetypal male and female double in *Wind* becomes, in Jonas's *Organic Honey*-video performances and tapes, exclusively female, as she shifted her device for the exploration of the alter-ego to a specifically feminine symbolism.

Jonas had also developed a strong interest in ritual and archetypal symbols, sparked by her art history studies, mystical texts such as *The Golden Bough*, the heavily symbolic films of Kenneth Anger, the witnessing of Hopi tribal dances, including the rarely seen ritual Hopi Snake Dance, and a ceremony in Ancoma, in which costumed figures were seen from a great distance in the desert. This latter experience informed Jonas's choreography of the couple's distant, ritualistic movements in *Wind*, which function in stark contrast to the close-up movements of the rest of the group. The tension between distance and

closeness was to become a central element in Jonas's video performances. Subsequent trips to Japan and India infused her work with symbolic images and references to ancient ritual. In *Wind*, we see the first appearance of a shamanistic figure, mirrored literally and by its male/female double, and set apart from the struggling figures by its more controlled relationship to the forces of nature.]

[Perhaps the most powerful element of all, which encompasses all the other elements within it, is Jonas's use of the mirror. Like her transformation of the formal sculptural elements of earth art into a subjective, performative space, her incorporation of the mirror, and its technological equivalent, the video camera, into her work took the formal sculptural use of mirrored surfaces by Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Dan Graham and others into a psychologically-charged, subjective, feminine territory. During the early seventies, the mirror became the symbol of a widespread preoccupation with identity, social theory, psychological issues and self-exploration, epitomised in the video and performance work, of artists such as Vito Acconci, Dennis Oppenheim, Martha Rosler and Hannah Wilke. Yet Jonas's use of both the mirror and the video camera differs from their approaches in important ways.

T Although Jonas conformed to the widespread use of both mirror and video camera as a psychological tool during the late sixties and early seventies, creating visual and spatial reflections representing her alter-ego and dislocating the viewer's perception of the boundaries of pictorial space, she deepened the meaning of her use of reflection by incorporating the mirror's ~~ancient spiritual~~ and ~~symbolic~~ properties. Robert Heizer, archeologist and father of earth artist Michael Heizer, who researched the concave mirrors of the Olmecs found at La Venta in Tabasco state, described them as being "masterpieces...(made) to kindle ritual fire". One of Jonas's archetypal images in her video performances is a chalk drawing of rays reflecting in a concave mirror, made after a sketch by Leonardo da Vinci.]

Jonas's sensibility is perhaps closest to Smithson's use of mirrors, in its connection of a transgressive disruption of space with myth and ancient ritual. Smithson described the effect of one of his Yucatan mirror displacements thus: "The double allure of the ground and the mirrors

brought forth apparitions. Out of green reflections came the networks of Coatlicue, known to the Mayans as the Serpent Lady: Mother Earth".¹ Yet, as Bruce Ferguson observes, Jonas used the mirror "not to reify the structuralist moment (where nature and culture and other semantic oppositions were interchanged in a systematic and masculinist manner (in the work of) Smithson... Heizer (and others)...and where indices were transferred but never transformed) but instead, to examine its transitional spaces."²]

This examination involved a specific kind of engagement with ancient symbolism. In Semitic and Japanese cultures, the mirror represents a feminine divinity, or sun goddess, and in Christianity, the Virgin Mary. Mexican culture attributes to it both solar and lunar properties, symbols of which occur repeatedly in Jonas's work, from the enigmatic male/female couple in mirrored costumes, to her chalk drawings on blackboards in her video performances, in which she half erases the sun to create a lunar shape. In this sense, although a single reading is never implied, she can be understood to be depicting, in drawing, the same symbolism of duality which appears in other aspects of her video performances, where black and white, light and dark, and positive and negative are continually juxtaposed.³]

In all cultures, the mirror traditionally signifies truth, self-realisation and, at its deepest level, the soul. Jonas's use of the mirror was inspired by the writings of the Argentine writer and poet Borges, whose many references to the mirror, both architectural, psychological and spiritual, she incorporated directly into her work. In Borges' short text *The Library of Babel*, the universe is described as a library, constructed from an infinite number of hexagonal galleries, in each of whose vast hallways a mirror infinitely duplicates space. Jonas's early mirror performances evoked a sense of spatial infinity, by reflecting the space of the performance and the viewer back to the audience in large vertical mirrors, held by fifteen male and female performers moving slowly around the performance space. As Jonas herself observed, the resulting fragmentation of the space, which she extended in her subsequent video performances, mixed the reflections of the performers and audience together, uniting the two groups, and suggesting the impossibility of a single, fixed spatial reality.

The transition from Jonas's early outdoor performances, films and mirror pieces to the fusion of psychological, ritual and spatial concerns which characterised her video performances is most clearly articulated by her performance *Choreomania* of 1971. The central feature of this indoor performance was a prop designed and built by Richard Serra, which took the form of a large rectangular wall of wood hung by chains from the ceiling of Jonas's Grand Street loft. One third of the wall was mirrored, and ropes and handles allowed the performers to climb the wall from behind or to tilt it, causing it to swing from side to side or be moved backwards and forwards. This floating mirrored panel shifted Jonas's marking and rupturing of Renaissance perspective from the body to architectural surface. The panel delineated the space of the performance, operating at once as stage, film screen, reflection, wall, and sculptural object. Its form reflected the transition which had taken place from painting to sculpture during the 1960s. The resulting hybrid objects, based on the format of the square or cube, suggested, as Benjamin Buchloh argues, both the opacity of painting, through a shift from canvas to fabric, wood or metal, and painting's transparency, represented here by the mirror.⁴

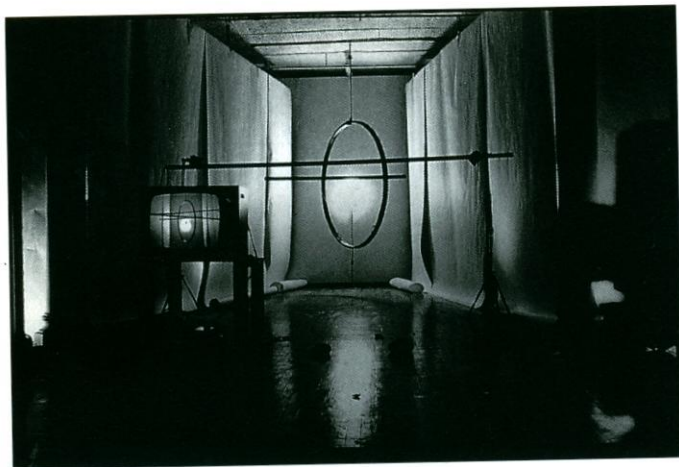
In Jonas's performance, these hybrid sculptural properties are fused with references to film. The performative sequences, often lit dramatically by coloured light bulbs which changed the mirror surface from transparent to opaque, or framed the panel from behind so that it became a negative space, both prefigure Jonas's use of the video camera, and mimic the language of film. At one point, as Douglas Crimp describes, "Two performers, each holding coloured light bulbs, stand at opposite sides of the wall, slightly behind it. As the slowly swinging wall hides one performer, it reveals the other, who makes a particular facial expression and flashes a coloured light on and off. As the wall swings in the other direction, the other performer is revealed...The wall functions like the 'wipe' in film editing."⁵

The complex relationship between moving image, performer and static object in Jonas's work comes into focus most clearly in the final section of *Choreomania*, in which slides are projected onto the moving, partly mirrored wall. The wall shifts from sculptural performance prop to screen, onto which images of Indian miniature paintings, Renaissance portraits, Egyptian wall paintings, oriental

rugs and medieval landscapes are projected. As this sequence of art historical images gradually dissolves into the mirror, the performers reflect the projections onto the surrounding walls using a small mirror, or insert large sheets of paper in front of the projected beam to catch fragments of images before they reach the large mirror, creating a performative collage which undermines the projection's illusion of a "whole" image. The partially visible images evoke both Jonas's later fragmented video sequences, and the montage films of Vertov and other early Russian and European filmmakers, to whose work she was becoming exposed.

At one point during the sequence, a slide of a rug is projected onto a real rug thrown over the wall's mirrored section. The rug is then dropped to expose the mirror beneath, into which the projected image dissolves, leaving the viewers to confront their own reflection. The dissolution of the image into the physical reality of what it represents, which in turn disappears to reveal another, reflected reality, itself a form of representation, underlines the contingency of reality in Jonas's work. In her subsequent videotapes and video performances, this contingency is explored in increasingly complex ways, using the real-time, feedback properties of the video camera, combined with recorded film and video footage, and live performance. In her first video performance, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, performed at the Lo Guidice Gallery, New York in 1972, a video monitor and camera occupy the centre of the space. Along with a large video projection to the left, it relays, live, in close-up, the actions of four performers including Jonas, who, in turn, perform in relation to live and occasionally recorded images on a second monitor. A large mirror on wheels is rolled in front of the audience, echoing the video imagery's juxtaposition of real and mediated space, and suggesting a parallel between video and the mirror. Just as the performers witness their actions live on the video screen, the audience can see themselves in their reflection.

The real-time properties of video make this parallel possible. It is also for this reason that, unlike her earlier collaborative performances in which she appears as one of a group, in *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* Jonas assumes a central, solitary position, in which she explores the persona of her alter-ego, or Other, for which both the



Funnel The Kitchen, New York 1974

Foto © Babette Mangolte

video and the mirror act as symbol. As Carlos Basualdo has described, in relation to the mirrors of Borges: "Suddenly (s)he is there in front of us, the Other who pokes (her) head out when we attempt to recognise ourselves in the hesitant weight of an image...The mirror's mechanical compulsion to multiply things frightens us, perhaps because that Other in whom we scarcely recognise ourselves is also repeated, compulsively, everything of which we shall never be able to take possession. That is the mirror's lesson: "The world is Other, you are Other, you are neither able to take possession of yourself, nor of the world; your image decrees the borders of your will."⁶

Jonas's re-presentations of her own fragmented image explore the impossibility of uniting with this Other, within a symbolic space. Hillary Robinson argues that girls enter language in a fundamentally different way to boys, by "producing a space, path, a river, a dance or a song".⁷ Unlike boys, who are more object-fixated, girls tend to describe a space around themselves, using energetic movements, dance, spiraling and sounds, to protect themselves from abandonment, depression, the absence of the mother, and a loss of self. This childhood method of describing a space through gestures of the body echoes Jonas's use of repetitive performative movements and sounds, reflected in video monitors and mirrors, to describe the artist's own psychic space.

In *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, this space is mapped out by the co-ordinates of the video equipment, and a number of objects including a table, an old doll, a silver purse, a silver spoon, a glass jar of water and shot glass, decorated mirrors, an elaborate, jewelled feather

headdress, and several female masks. Jonas occupies this space, assuming the identity of Organic Honey by donning one of the masks, a gauzy 1920s dress, and the headdress. In ritual, clothes reflect the persona, rendering inner transformation visible. Organic Honey's persona is unmistakably erotic. The silky material and style of the tunic, worn in public, evokes the image of a courtesan, whilst the headdress and provocative expression of the mask recall the stylised images of Indian goddesses. Organic Honey's very name evokes not only the therapeutic associations of honey with healing, but its symbolism as an aphrodisiac, imparting virility, fertility and sustenance.

The performers' actions are also partly erotic. Towards the beginning of the performance, a second performer, wearing the same mask, lies on the floor under the table with Jonas, alias Organic Honey. As the two embrace and roll around, the adjacent monitor shows live video images of two female bodies kissing and caressing each other. At one point, the live video footage also reveals an unfolding fan, on which is printed a nineteenth century miniature painting of pale Turkish women reclining on a satin couch. This relationship between performers and the photographic image would be developed further in Jonas's later enigmatic videotape *Glass Puzzle* (1974), in which Jonas and another performer, scantily clad, execute an eroticised set of formal actions and poses, based on Bellocq's photographs of prostitutes in New Orleans.

Later on in *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, the four female performers including Jonas intertwine, swaying, whilst intently watching the monitor on which large-scale close-up images of one of the performer's bodies and women's faces both conceal and reveal each other. This shared female intimacy, like that of *Glass Puzzle* and another videotape, *Disturbances*, emerges from a strong feminist concern with self-discovery, the expression of female desire, and an exploration of the body and 'forbidden' roles. Jonas's juxtaposition of video with live action was, by its very nature, similarly liberatory, extending Walter Benjamin's observation that film, through editing, "bursts open the restriction of being in one place and time, and thereby extends our perception of life, space and time". At the same time, it creates an anxiety about the separation of the reflected or recorded image from its origin.

Jonas expands this paradox between liberation and anxiety further, through the additional element of live video feedback, which allows an even more complex layering of space and time. In the private, feminine world which video enabled her to construct, female identity is expressed through a rapid switching between distance and closeness, revealing and concealing, using the mirror, the camera lens and the mask. The video image could be understood as another form of mask, mediating a direct experience of the performer in real time. Traditionally, masks, a mainstay of ritual, denote concealment, protection, transformation, or "non-being". As Kathy O'Dell has observed, Jonas continually keeps herself at a distance from the viewer, allowing access to her body in close-up only through the video image. O'Dell cites Mary Ann Doane's argument that "'Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic.' By wearing the mask, Jonas sets femininity apart from the body and situates it appropriately in the area of production."⁸

At one point in the performance, Jonas puts on all the masks worn by the other performers, as though attempting to integrate their various personae within a single mask, or self. Simultaneously, the video monitor shows live imagery of her removing each one, slowly revealing the masks' different identities, until her own face is revealed, bare of any adornment. The impossibility of wholeness, expressed in this double, contradictory, action, is repeated throughout the performance.

The work of Jack Smith and Kenneth Anger, and Anger's *Puce Moment* of 1949 in particular is a subtle but important influence on the performances and videotapes *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* and *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, in which the archetype of the Hollywood siren is transformed into a female alchemical figure. In Anger's film, rhinestone-beaded dresses appear one after the other, occupying the screen in a manner similar to the close-up video images of Organic Honey's exotic dresses and beaded belly-dancer's outfit. Marquis's body and face, in heavy eye-make-up and large earrings, fill the screen, as she looks at herself in the mirror. Elements from *Puce Moment* recur in Anger's film *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954, re-edited 1966), in which each

character takes off a mask, in one case two masks one after the other, and laughs, recalling the behaviour of the Sorceress in *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*.

Deleuze argues that repetition, a central element in Jonas's work, is associated with displacement and disguising, and that its originating principle is the death instinct, which is, in turn, expressed through masks, which represent the rigidity of the body in death, and costumes, which evoke the other-worldliness of gods and goddesses. This argument is evoked in an early section of *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, in which Jonas, in mask and headdress, drops thirty six pennies one by one into a flask of water, attempting to place them in a shot glass at the bottom of the flask (a symbol of alchemical transformation). An adjacent videotape shows Organic Honey peering into the reflective surface of the water as the pennies fall into and around the shot glass. Thirty six represents Jonas's age when the performance was made, and each penny corresponds to a year of her life. As she watches the pennies fall into the water, she regards her masked self in the water's reflection, as though contemplating her own mortality. The sequence evokes the mirrors of Borges which, as Carlos Basualdo writes, "are those machines of repetition that conspire to repeat for us our very own own image as a sign of absence and mortality ... By signifying death, the empty mirrors bring us back to life; by signifying life, our image in the mirror gives us, as if carelessly, an inevitable foreshadowing of death".⁹

Both *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* and Jonas's next performance, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, are intensely introspective. More than in any other video or film work by Jonas, these two performances and their related videotapes address the social and personal anxiety of the self in relation to others, for which the mask functions as a metaphor. This anxiety was widespread during the early seventies, not only in work of women artists, but also in the work of male artists such as Bruce Nauman, who, as early as 1967, had made a series of film projections in which he covered his face with coloured make-up, then wiped it off. Nauman was particularly concerned with the issue of the individual's interactions in social space, and, in his text *The Consummate Mask of Rock*, makes a list of words and a corresponding list of statements, thus:

- "1. mask.
2. fidelity.
3. truth.
4. life.
5. cover.
6. pain.
7. desire.

1. This is my mask of fidelity to truth and life.
2. This is to cover the mask of pain and desire.
3. This is to mask the cover of need for human companionship.
4. This is to mask the cover.
5. This is to cover the mask.
6. This is the need of cover.
7. This is the need of the mask."¹⁰

Nauman continues, until the last statement, in capitals, declares "PEOPLE DIE OF EXPOSURE". Jonas's video performances revolve around this same anxiety of exposure and death, using clothing, 'magical' objects, drawings, symbols, alter-egos, dance, actions and video recordings to disguise the self, energise the space, and construct a multi-dimensional persona. At one point in both *Organic Honey* performances, Organic Honey repeatedly hits a mirror with a silver spoon, as though angrily trying to break through her protective, artificial surface. In all her video performances, the cover, or surface, in the form of the reflection, the costume and the plastic mask (influenced by the filmmaker Georges Franju's use of black masks), is alternately taken up and cast off.

In *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, the alter-ego of Organic Honey mutates into specific archetypal personae, the Sorceress and the High Priestess, both important female symbols in Tarot, a system of esoteric knowledge. The Sorceress and High Priestess, identified by changes in costume, laugh hysterically at their video image, howl like a dog, sing, and whisper to the viewers. In *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* Jonas's identification with a dog – like the mirror, both a solar and lunar symbol, and an intermediary between this world and the next – is made explicit visually. Organic Honey's head is juxtaposed with a drawn head of a dog, in two half video frames, divided by the monitor's vertical roll. In Jonas's work the woman is cast as a shamanistic figure who, with

her dog, or animal helper, embodies a positive primitive force. The female shaman draws symbols in chalk on a blackboard using automatic gestures, in an attempt to release archetypal symbols from her unconscious. A sun (symbol of the father) is half-erased to become a moon (symbol of the mother goddess, the dark, irrational side of nature, rebirth, and immortality).

Jonas's use of drawing as meditative ritual, and her erasure of one image to form another, were inspired by Maya Deren's documentary film of the Voudon religion, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*¹¹, in which sand drawings are made to conjure spirits, then erased. For Jonas, drawing is equivalent to a performative action, a ritual statement, or a sculptural form. As Pamela Lee has observed, the 1970s witnessed a widespread rejection of the traditional tools, methods and hierarchies of drawing, sculpture and painting.¹² Just as artists such as Richard Serra, Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Smithson and others were redefining the parameters of sculpture in temporal terms, using gestures such as splashing, scattering, rolling, dropping and hanging, as well as video and film, Jonas was inscribing sculptural space through video, performance and drawing.

For Jonas, space was also described through sound, and she thought of her pieces not as performance, but as music. She was working in the same artistic environment as La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Philip Glass and Steve Reich, and the mathematical, notational structure of their sound pieces is paralleled in the movements of groups of performers in *Mirror Piece II*, and, particularly, *Delay Delay* and the related film *Songdelay*, in which the performers move according to numbered grids and a carefully constructed score. The clapping together of wooden blocks to delineate distances in space is also influenced by Noh and Japanese Kabuki theatre, as was her use of the mask. In *Vertical Roll*, the sound of a silver spoon rhythmically striking a mirror, in apparent tandem with the moving of the video's vertical roll, resembles the measuring tones of a metronome. Its pace appears to dictate the rhythm of both the moving images and Jonas's performative actions. In *Delay Delay*, *Songdelay* and *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, performers clap blocks of wood together, both to describe the surrounding space, and to measure the relative distance of each performer to the audience and to each other.

From the beginning, Jonas's process-based approach meant that her performances, and the video and film images within her larger performative structures, also became, or were already formed as, independent single screen works. Her first performance, *Oad Lau*, made in 1968, led directly to *Wind*, made later the same year. The performances *Delay Delay*, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* and *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, all made in 1972, similarly led directly to the film *Songdelay*, and the videotapes *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* and *Vertical Roll* also made in the same year.¹³ Jonas also screened independently completed videotapes during performances, including *Left Side Right Side* (1972), *Disturbances* (1974) and *Good Night, Good Morning* (1976), as well as tapes made more specifically in relation to the performances, including *Mirror Check*, *Duet* (1972), *Barking* (1973), *Merlo* (1974), *May Windows* and *Night Windows* (1976). She also performed alongside the videotape *Anxious Automation* by Richard Serra (1971), a didactic exercise in spatial distance and rhythm using camera zooms and relative speeds, in which Jonas performs a series of simple actions for the camera. These juxtapositions of performance and videotape dismantled the hierarchy of the single, totalised artwork, blurring the boundaries between the ending of one work and the beginning of another.

As Douglas Crimp has observed, this was also demonstrated in the mutation of the disruptions and measurements of space in Jonas's outdoor performances into the more abstract spatial inquiries of her intimate video performances.¹⁴ The dematerialisation of the discrete artwork caused Jonas's films and videotapes to occupy an ambiguous role in terms of document versus independent artwork. This ambiguity was widespread during the seventies, in the proliferation of works which used the mechanical recording apparatus of film, video and photography in relation to conceptual or performative actions. Jonas's films and videotapes make this ambiguity concrete, existing simultaneously as independent artwork, as one element in a larger performance, and as a quasi-document of a performance.

In three video performances made in the mid 1970s, *Funnel* (1974), *Twilight* (1975) and *Mirage* (1976), Jonas moved into a different mode, in which this ambiguity lessened. Her use of symbols also became more didactic,

and space became mediated by curtained sections and screens more than by the video camera, as theatrical narrative became increasingly dominant. The form of *Funnel* is constructed through Jonas's engagement with a collection of physical objects – paper cones, bars, a metal hoop and ball hanging from the ceiling, a child's desk, wooden tops, an antique butterfly, coloured discs, a live white rabbit (another, Japanese, lunar symbol), a bell, a leather belt – but no mirrors. The objects, bars and hoop suggest not so much the psychic space of the Organic Honey performances, but the theatrical stage of a magic show.

At one point Jonas pulls a white rabbit from her sleeve, and holds up silk squares, on which a cone has been drawn or a blue rabbit painted, all of which appear in live feedback close-up, on a single monitor nearby. At another, she appears from behind a curtain in crouched position, wearing a red silk shadri, which she manipulates into an image of an Egyptian hawk (symbol of the soul, and the mother Goddess). The erotic persona of Organic Honey engaging with other female performers has been replaced by Jonas as a solo performer in clothing which actively suppresses female sexuality, animating the space with objects, spinning the discs and tops and making the large hoop, bars and ball move, in a series of actions which suggest a more extrovert, energetic articulation of a psychological space.

In *Twilight* and *Mirage*, both performed at Anthology Film Archives, Jonas's layering of space through objects is replaced by a large freestanding film screen, around which all action and spatial experimentation revolves. Both pieces directly address the special environment of the Anthology screening room, in a re-alignment of the cinematic viewing space. In both performances, the large screen recalls the sculptural prop from *Choreomania*, and the area behind it is similarly incorporated into the performance area. Instead of a mirrored surface, the screen's unity is disrupted by a constant change in scale, as its form shifts between a large horizontal surface, a large vertical oblong, a small white square and a long horizontal rectangle. At times, the screen is front or back lit, rendering it transparent. Its shifting form could be read as a continuation of the topological enquiry of Jonas's earlier spatial experiments with the mirror, in filmic terms. As film is projected onto the screen, actions take place in the surrounding space in front of, around and behind it – in

that subliminal area which Carlos Basualdo has described as 'the mirror's edge'. "The image that (the mirror's) last- ing surface returns to us forces us to take refuge on its edges in order to escape its enclosed power. On the blunt edges of the mirror, only there is it possible to breathe."¹⁵

In *Mirage*, a single monitor is turned on its side, relaying pre-recorded material, including television footage, whilst the film screen shows a black and white film of Jonas making large, abstract drawings on a blackboard, whilst she performs in front of it in real time. At one point, she reads a news story out loud through a long silver cone. Film footage of an erupting volcano appears. The multi-layered fragmentation of the body explored through video and mirrors in earlier performances is replaced by a simpler, more filmic structure, in which the single large screen once more predominates.

In a group of performances made between 1976 and 1980, including *The Juniper Tree* (1976), *Upside Down and Backwards* (1979) and *Double Lunar Dogs* (1980), Jonas moved away from video, towards a more painterly, text-based structure, built around drawing, and the narratives of Nordic fairy tales. The traditional purpose of fairy tales, which were initially created by and for adults, was to conquer fear, through the presentation of archetypal figures mirroring different aspects of the social structure. In Jonas's late seventies performances, the dark shadows of fairy tales replaced the persona of Organic Honey, or the Sorceress, as a collective symbol by which the alter-ego, or repressed aspects of the personality, are made visible. The personal is shifted back into the group psyche.

Framing this collective symbolism, as a unifying factor in all Jonas's video performances, tapes, films and outdoor actions, from her earliest performance to her recent structures, is her formal construction of space in relation to live or performed movement. If the studio became the symbolic interior of the video monitor's box in the video performances of the 1970s, in a recent wooden structure titled *My New Theater* (1997), the interior of the monitor, or studio, has been transformed into a tiny stage, in a pastiche of both theatrical and cinematic space. On the stage are placed, dollhouse-like, several small props, including a divan, a rabbit, chairs, and bound sticks. On the screen at the back of the stage, a video image shows

Jonas and a series of performers from Nova Scotia, the site of one of her earliest performances, dancing an Irish jig to animated fiddle playing. The video image appears gigantic in relation to the scale of the tiny objects.

Jonas's miniature theatre evokes proto-cinematic spatial models of vision, such as the camera obscura, or the magic lantern, as well as the voyeuristic structures of peep shows. Its interior also contains much of the symbolism of Jonas's earlier performances, in highly condensed form. Taking the place of the mirror, the miniature disrupts the viewer's spatial relationship to the everyday world and opens up a parallel world of fantasy, setting up a tension between interiority and exteriority.

The miniature also evokes the sensual, being measured, as Susan Stewart has observed, by the hand and the eye.¹⁶ Most significantly, it echoes the contradictory element of closeness and distance in Jonas's early video performances, at once drawing the viewer in, close up (like the mirror, which is often compared to a microscope) and distancing them by the improbability of its artifice, and by perpetually pointing outside of itself, back to the normal-sized reality of the exterior world. If, as Jonas observed in 1972, the very notion of interior space is female, then the interiority of the miniature theatre re-confirms the power of the de-centred, symbolic spaces of Jonas's early video performances, in which she both conjures and banishes the shadows of loss, absence and mortality.

- 1 Robert Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan", 1969, in: Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings*, University of California Press 1996, pp. 125–126
- 2 Bruce Ferguson, "AmerifierycontemplationonthesagaofJoanJonas", in: Dorine Mignot (ed.), *Joan Jonas* (exh. cat., Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam) 1993, p. 18
- 3 Examples of this occur most strikingly in the videotape *Glass Puzzle* (1974), in which Jonas and Lois Lane perform together, evoking Bellocq's photographs of prostitutes in New Orleans, often shadowing Jonas's movements, and in *Disturbances* (also made in 1974), in which two women dressed in white are seen both in the reflection of a pool, and swimming across each other underwater.
- 4 Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October*, No. 55, Winter 1990, pp. 130–133
- 5 Douglas Crimp (ed.), *Joan Jonas, Scripts and Descriptions 1968 – 1982* (exh. cat., University Art Museum, Berkeley and the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven) 1983, pp. 22–24
- 6 Carlos Basualdo, "Life on the Mirrors Edge", in: *Mirror's Edge*, (exh. cat., Bildmuseet, Umeå) 1999, p. 33
- 7 Hillary Robinson, "Louise Bourgeois's 'Cells': Gesturing Towards the Mother", in: *Louise Bourgeois*, Museum of Modern Art Papers, Vol. 1, Museum of Modern Art Oxford 1997, p. 26
- 8 Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator", *Screen*, Vol. 23, no. 3–4, September–October 1982, pp. 81–82, quoted in Kathy O'Dell, "Performance, Video and Trouble in the Home", Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (eds.), *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, Metuchen, N.J. 1990, pp. 148–149
- 9 Basualdo 1999, p. 33
- 10 Bruce Nauman, "The Consummate Mask of Rock", in: Brian Wallis (ed.), *Blasted Allegories, An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York 1987, pp. 94–95
- 11 Produced by Teiji Ito and Chere Ito in 1977, from footage shot by Deren in Haiti from 1947–1951. The film deals with the Voudou religion of Haiti, and includes footage of sand drawing, ritual dancing, music, and 'possession'.
- 12 Pamela Lee, "Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art", *Afterimage: Drawing Through Process* (exh. cat., Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) 1999, p. 25
- 13 The videotapes *Upside Down and Backwards* (1980) and *Double Lunar Dogs* (1984) also relate directly to the performances of the same title, but were made later, and retain a more independent structure than the earlier performative videotapes.
- 14 Crimp 1983, p. 41
- 15 Basualdo 1999, p. 33
- 16 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Baltimore 1984, p. 46