

Jonas, Joan. "Closing Statement." In *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982*, edited by Douglas Crimp, 137–139. Berkeley: University Art Museum, University of California; Eindhoven: Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, 1983.

## CLOSING STATEMENT

*The symbol plucks all the strings of the human spirit at once—speech is compelled to take up a single thought at a time. Only a symbol can combine disparate elements into a unitary expression.*

—Gaston Bachelard

I didn't see a major difference between a poem, a sculpture, a film, or a dance. A gesture has for me the same weight as a drawing: draw, erase, draw, erase—memory erased. While I was studying art history I looked carefully at the space of painting, films, and sculpture—how illusions are created within a framed space, and how to deal with a real physical space with depth and distance. When I switched from sculpture to performance I just went to a space and looked at it. I would imagine how it would look to an audience, what they would be looking at, how they would perceive the ambiguities and illusions of the space. An idea for a piece would come just from looking until my vision blurred. I also began with a prop such as a mirror, a cone, a TV, a story.

The objects I use are not literal adaptations of the elements in the story or concept, but are symbolic, archetypal. The cone was an instrument to channel sound to the audience. I could whisper in their ears, look through it, listen to it, yell through it, sing—always directing sound to a place. *Funnel* was based on the form of a cone.

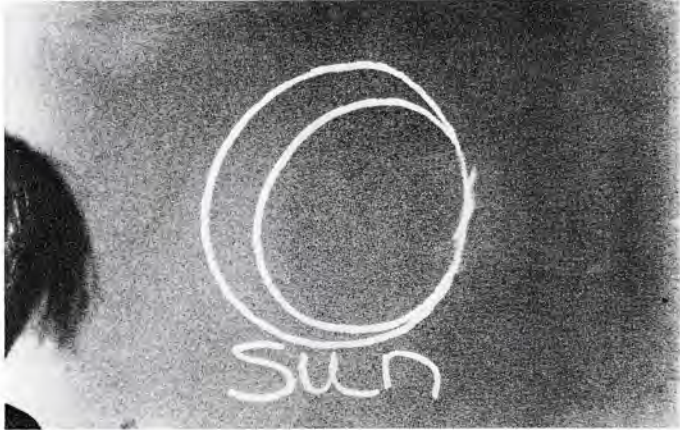
*Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* evolved as I found myself continually investigating my own image in the monitor of my video machine. I then bought a mask of a doll's face, which transformed me into an erotic seductress. I named this TV persona Organic Honey. I became increasingly obsessed with following the process of my own theatricality, as my images fluctuated between the narcissistic and a more abstract representation. The risk was to become too submerged in solipsistic gestures. In exploring the possibilities of female imagery, thinking always of a magic show, I attempted to fashion a dialogue between my different disguises and the fantasies they suggested. I always kept my eye on the small monitor in the performance area in order to control the image making.

Props determine the movements and animate the set. I use them over and over in different ways. One's body is moved by the props or moves the props. A costume also serves as a kind of prop in that it is chosen for how it looks on the monitor, in the set, or how it relates to the story, or simply because I like it. Sometimes props and costumes come as gifts from friends.

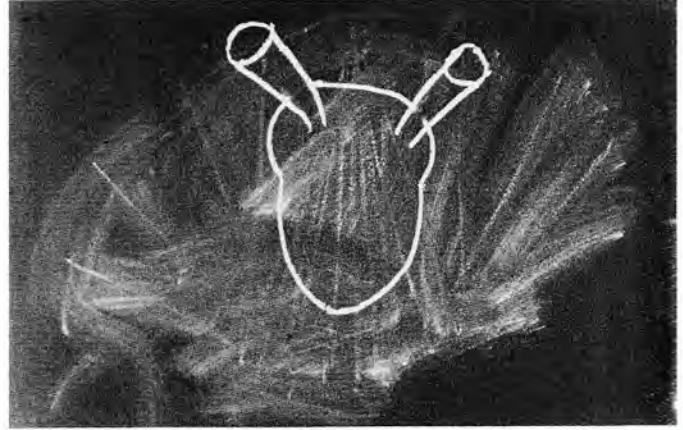


Drawings for *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, 1973.





Film stills from *Mirage*, 1976



To start with an object and to play with it is very childlike in a certain sense, and it enhances intimacy. In this respect I remember especially the experience of watching Maya Deren's film footage shot in Haiti in which somebody makes a sand drawing. It was like watching a person do something very private. The footage interested me a great deal because it was not edited and in the series of takes the drawing was repeated again and again. Drawing is a ritual used in my performances.

In *Organic Honey* I called the drawings "drawings for the monitor." I drew while looking at the monitor instead of at what I was drawing. The audience also saw the result on the monitor. From then on, I used drawings in all my pieces. They derived from an interaction with the technology, the content of the work, and the rhythm and gesture of the performance.

Drawing is a visual language. The fact that an image can represent different things at the same time enriches my vocabulary—for instance, in *Organic Honey*, the sun that turns into a new moon with the addition of one line and the erasure of another, or, in *Mirage* and *The Juniper Tree*, the heart that looks like a bug, or turns into a woman's face or the devil.

If I'm concentrating on the performance, I can't worry about what the drawing is going to look like. I just make the drawing. A lot of strange things have come out, the release of partly unconscious, archetypal images. These have surprised me, and I could never duplicate them. I think they appeared because I was in performance.

For *Mirage* I made a film of drawing, again and again, images on a blackboard, and then erasing them. Reading the essays collected in *Spiritual Disciplines*, I got another idea to use drawings, also in *Mirage*, which I called "Endless Drawings" after those described in the *Melukean Book*

*of the Dead*, the tribal ritual book of New Guinea. There it says that in order to go from one world to the next you must finish a drawing in sand which an old lady, the devouring witch, begins at the boundary between life and death.

The early dog drawings were all portraits of the same dog. I graphically incorporated parts of my life that represented mythic abstract forces into the work. In this case, the animal helper, the power of instinct.

I first used double drawings in "Stage Sets" in 1976. They were on the walls as the spectators entered the room, and they functioned as a sort of key to the show. They work both optically and in relation to the theme of doubling—the mirror, the opposite, the pair (Alice through the looking glass).

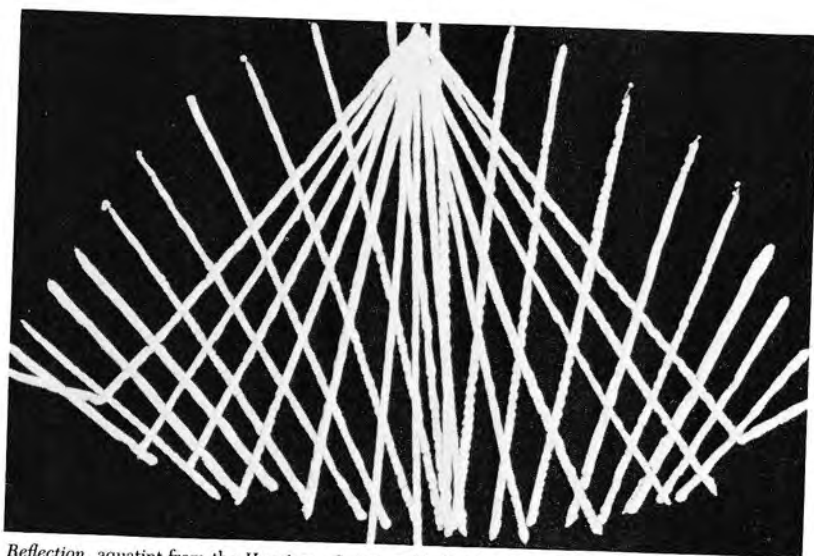
All of my performances are concerned in part with the image as metaphor. There is an emotion in the image that cannot be translated. The image contains it.

The performer sees herself as a medium: information passes through.

JOAN JONAS



*Upside Down and Backwards*, 1979.



*Reflection*, aquatint from the *Hurricane Series*, published by Crown Point Press, 1979.