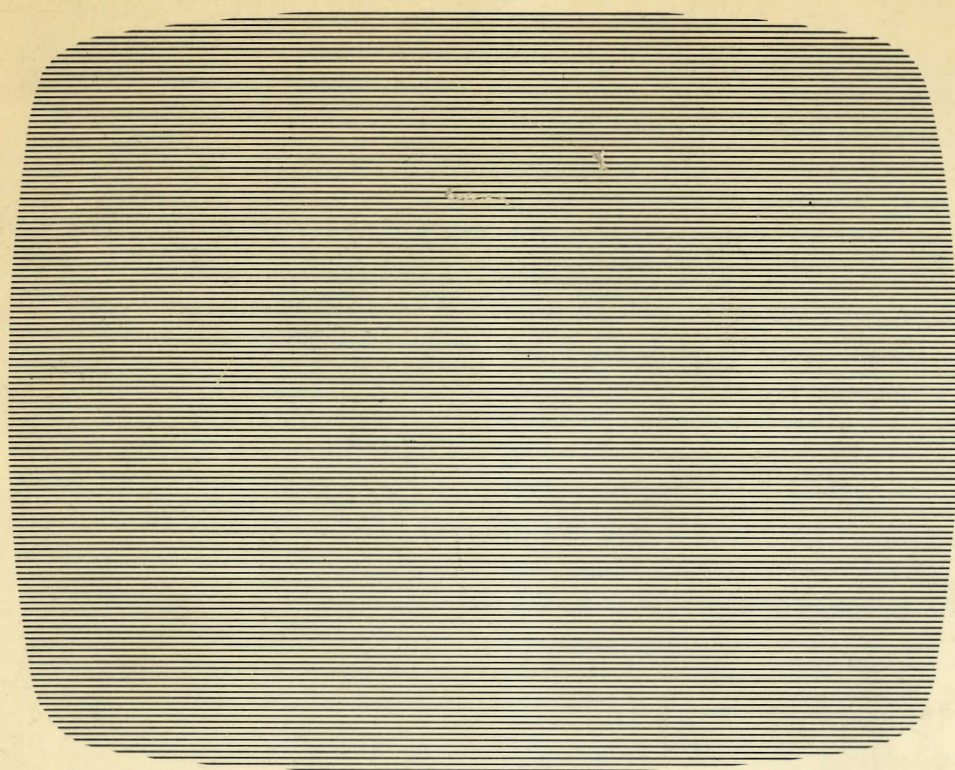
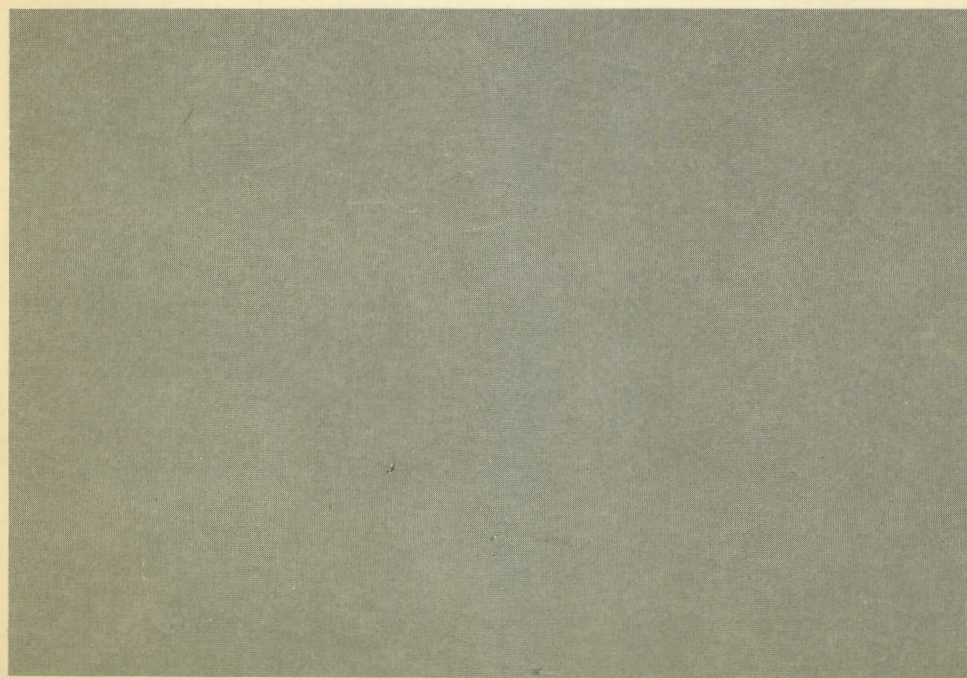


Borden, Lizzie. [Descriptions of videos by Joan Jonas.] *Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films* 1, no. 1 (November 1974): 75-77, 80; and *Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films*, 1976-77 Supplement, 1, no. 3 (February 1977): SS16-SS19.



# CASTELLI-SONNABEND VIDEOTAPES AND FILMS



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# CASTELLI-SONNABEND VIDEOTAPES AND FILMS

## 1976-77 SUPPLEMENT

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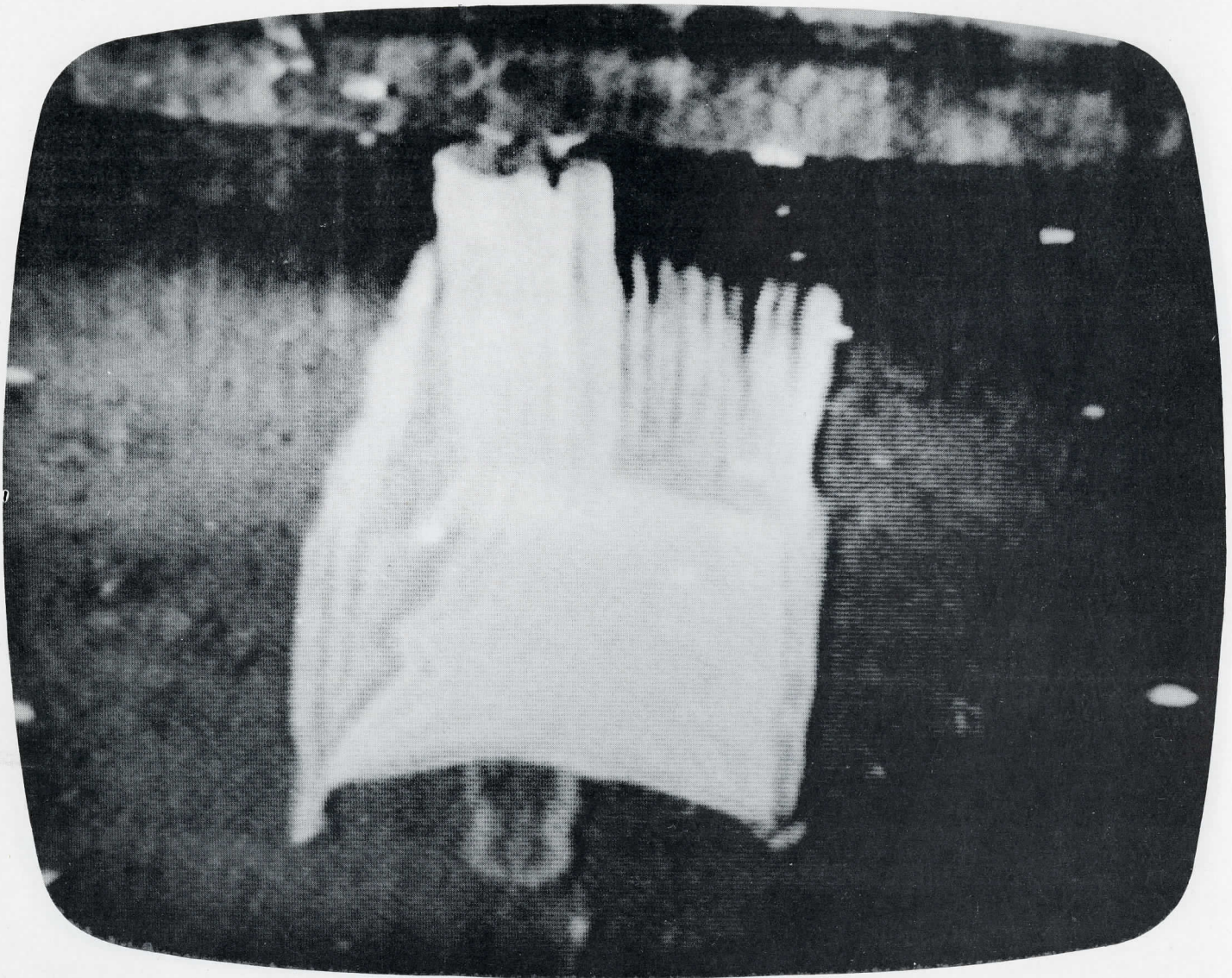
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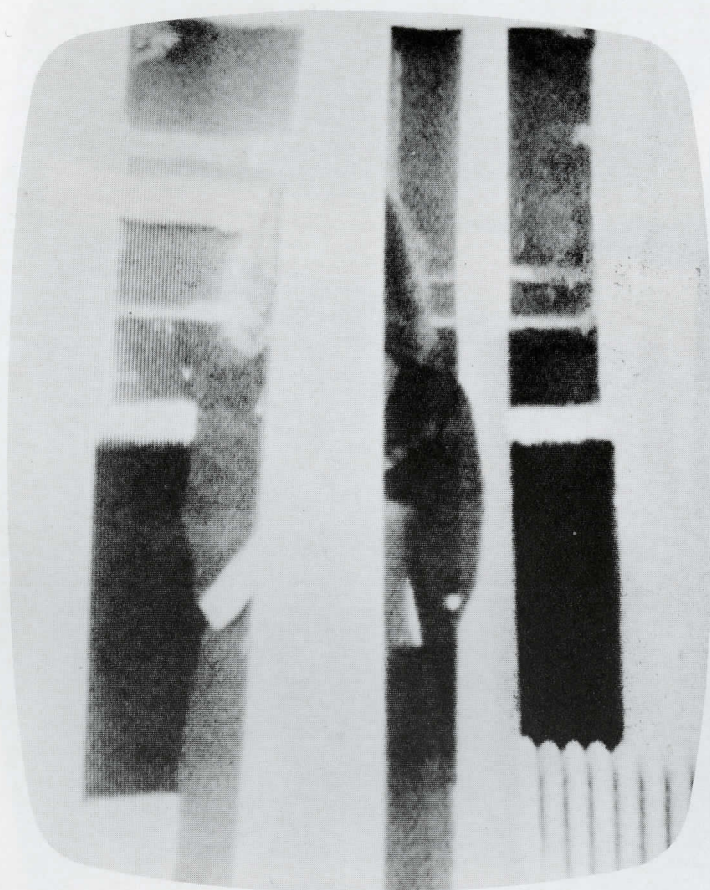


**Joan Jonas, *Disturbances*, 1974, b&w, 15 min., sound.**

In *Disturbances*, a parallel is made between the surface of water in a pool and that of the video screen: between the rippling of water and the television noise that Jonas has left between each scene rather than making clean cuts. The imagery of the tape exists on several physical levels—reflection on the water surfaces, bodies in the water, and the bottom of the pool.

The tape begins with two women dressed in white (as if in a Symbolist painting), seen only as reflections in the water. The soundtrack is of rocks being clicked together off-screen as well as the noises of dogs, crickets, and water. The women (Jonas and Ellen Draper) come together and separate, their reflections merging. One woman swims nude underneath

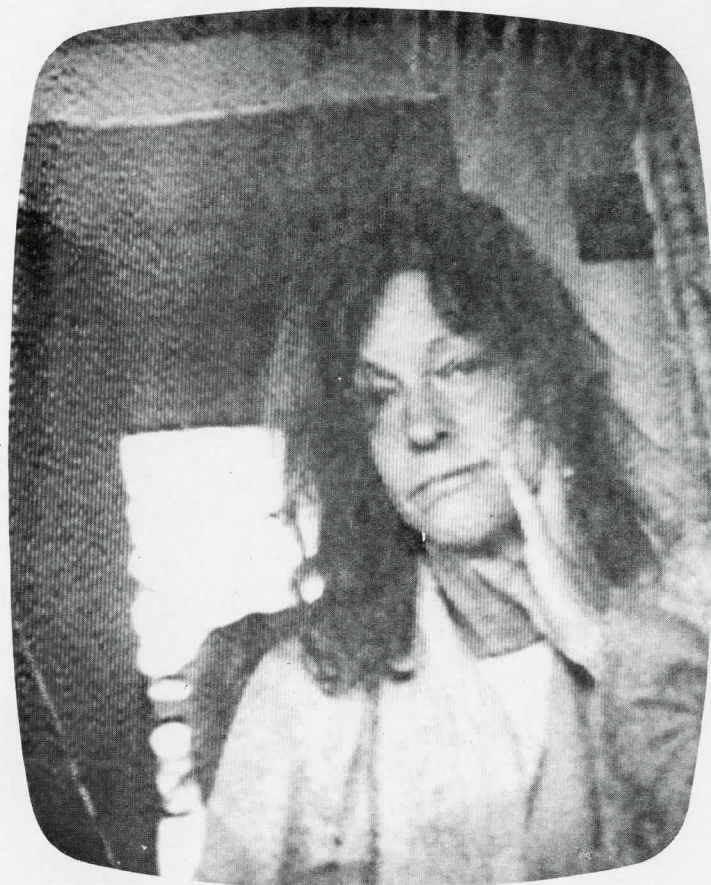
the other's reflections; in another part, the woman standing by the side of the pool is dangling a fringed shawl that looks like a jellyfish distorted by ripples in the water. When both women are in the water, they swim in and out of the frame, at different levels, moving over and under each other. In another section of the tape, there is the reflection of Draper jumping up and down on a diving board. Another set of images appears in front of the lens, huge in relation to the small figures reflected in the pool, making them seem like miniature people. Also as if in negative is a shot of Jonas climbing up the steps of the pool, which, overexposed, is mysterious, as if she is struggling against a great resistance. Throughout the tape, the rhythm and pacing of the movements are determined by the density of the water, which slows everything down.



**Joan Jonas, *May Windows*, 1976, b&w, 14 min., sound, with James Nares.**

*May Windows* is a tape about changes in light and sound in closed and open spaces, made for a vertical monitor—the tape was shot with the camera turned on its side, so the monitor must be turned on its side in order to view the tape upright. The image, of the large windows at the front of Jonas' loft, is very white, as if in negative, done by taking the automatic control off the light meter. The tape begins with the windows at night, as Jonas walks in the space between the camera and the windows, wearing a Chinese robe, her back to the camera. She opens the window: the sound changes as

street noises are heard; a dog barks in the street, then walks toward the camera, her face hidden by a tall paper cone in the path of the camera. She returns to the window and closes it, closing off the room, again changing the sound, and then opens it once more, leaning outside. Off-screen, there is the sound of Nares blowing through a tin cone like a megaphone—the sound is at different pitches, strange and distant, like a foghorn. Jonas closes the window and walks around, whistling “Fatal Flower Garden”, and then approaches the camera, putting the lens cap on. There is a cut to the window—the wind is coming in and her hair is blowing around. The final shot is of the window by itself—like a still life with no movement—just loud whispers off-screen, of Jonas and Nares, and the sound of the foghorn.

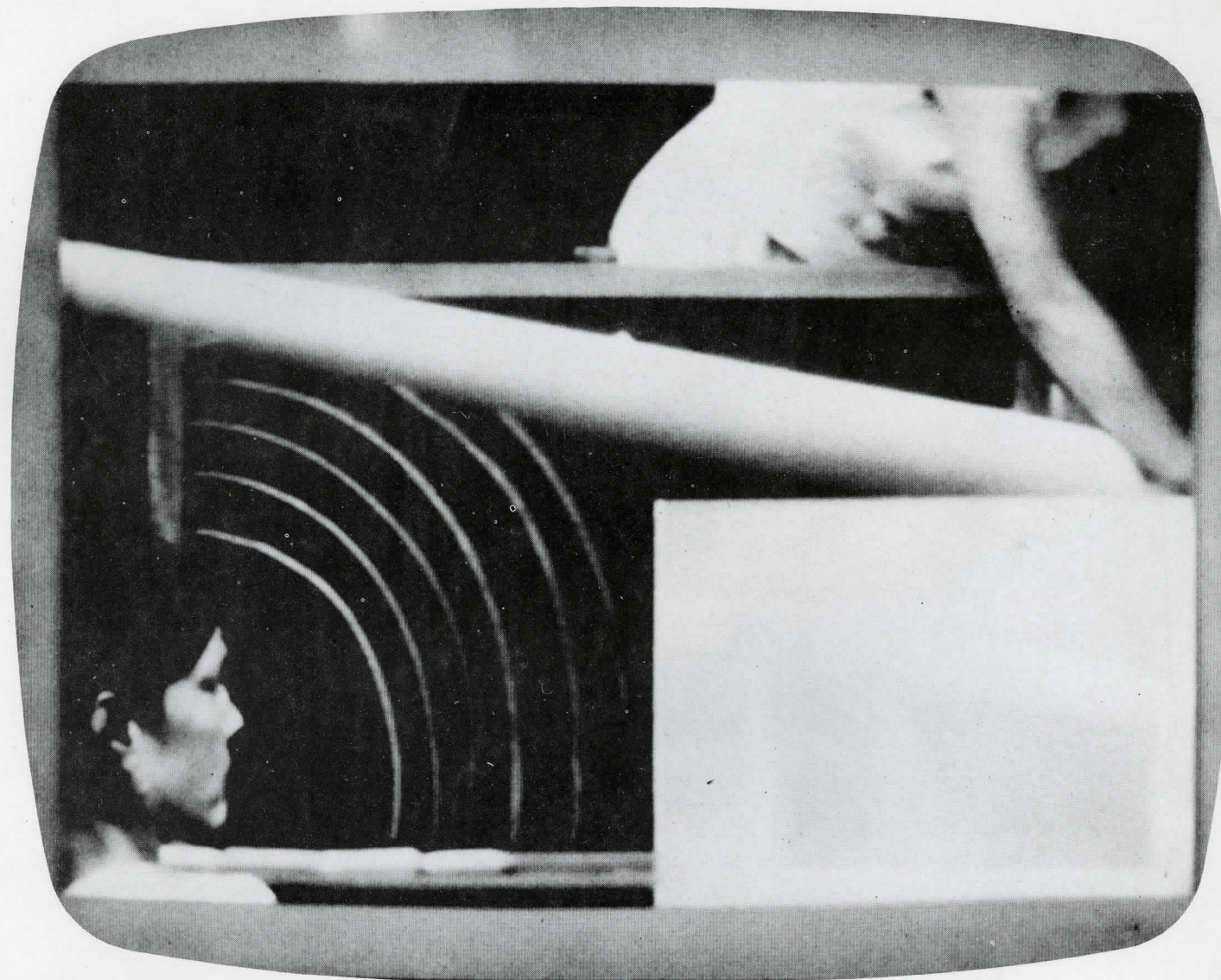


Joan Jonas, *Good Night, Good Morning*, 1976, b&w, 20 min., sound.

*Good Night, Good Morning*, like *May Windows*, is a tape made for the vertical monitor, shot with the camera on its side. It is composed of three sections, the first shot in May, 1976 in Jonas' loft. Every day for a week, upon waking up and going to bed, Jonas turned on the monitor and said either "Good Morning" or "Good Night", placing the camera beside the monitor so that she could look into the camera while checking her position in the monitor. In the first part, she experimented with positions of her body, styles of delivery, and camera angles. While the initial attempts were straight, she became more inventive as the week went on, placing her head

sideways on the floor, staring into the camera for a while before she said anything, speaking sexily, brusquely, etc. The second part, shot in August, 1976, in Nova Scotia, is more involved with light and the way light changed during a day: instead of varying the shots, she kept the same image morning and night. The third part of the tape, shot in October, was also done in her loft. While she was still working with light, not varying the shot during a single day, she experimented more with image and sound—by setting up scenes and using different kinds of music.

The tape was a way for Jonas to observe herself over periods of time: as the tape progressed, her behavior (her expressions, her dress, her tone) became more self-aware, consciously controlled. Within this structure, nothing could be rejected or retaped, like a journal.

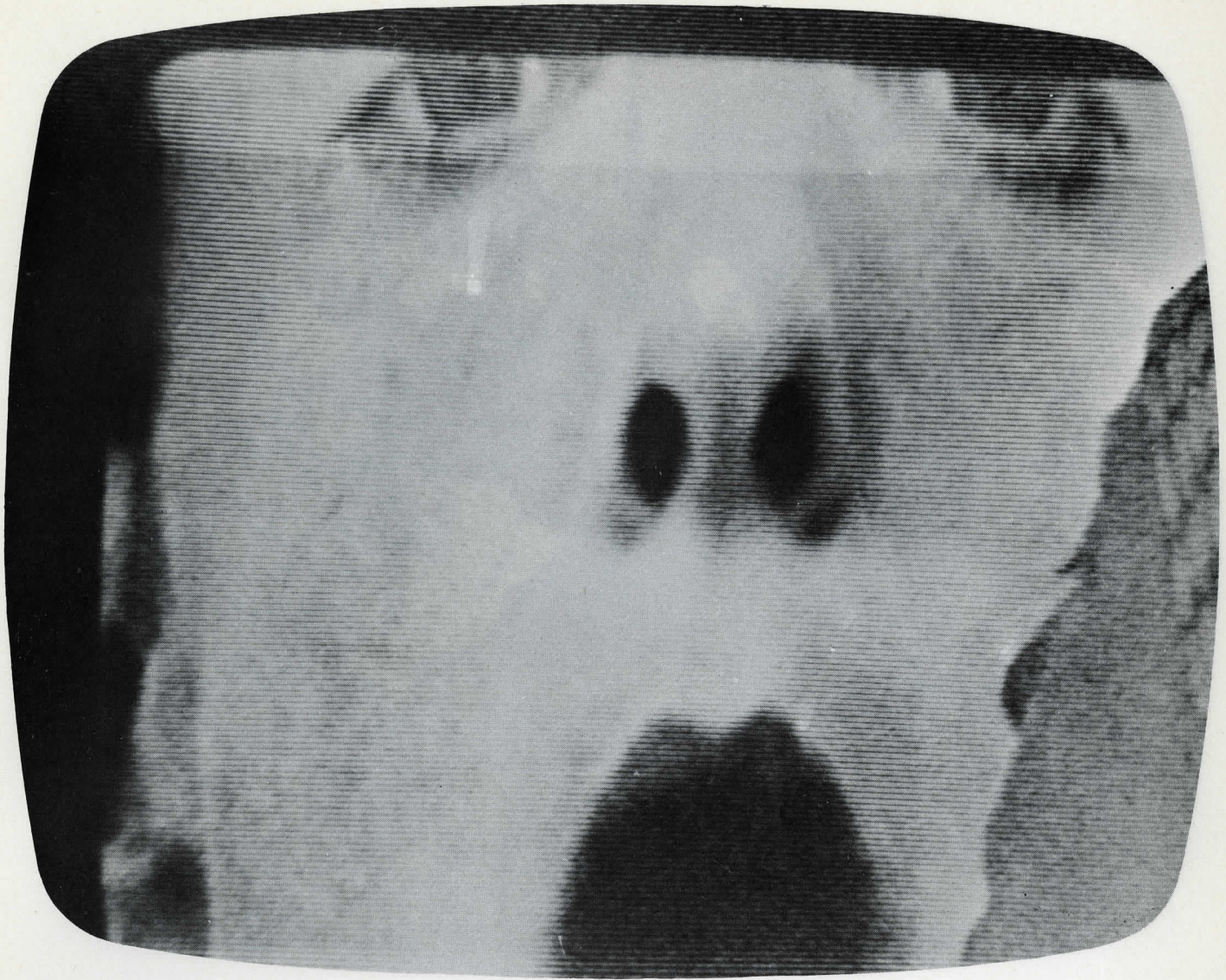


Joan Jonas, *I Want to Live in the Country (and Other Romances)* 1976, color, 30 min., sound, produced at WNET.

*I Want to Live in the Country (and other Romances)*, a tape in two parts made at WNET, uses the studio structure as a frame for Jonas' images: the entire screen is bordered by red, and the back of Jonas' head can be seen at the lower left, just inside the frame, looking at what is going on in the center of the screen—watching her own work. The first part uses the artificial indoor studio situation. Jonas brought props to WNET (objects such as a toy horse, a globe, a blackboard, two tall cones) and set up "still lifes" reminiscent of di Chirico's spaces. Two cameras, set at different angles, were directed at the set up, both feeding into a monitor which had a camera directed toward it. Therefore, one view of the situation was that of the black and white monitor image, showing the same scene as the other cameras but with the monitor blocking off part of it. The final image of the tape is the black and white

monitor in the lower right corner (keyed into the picture), "behind" which is punched in on the SEG. Jonas cuts back and forth frequently between views of the same scene—including a part where a woman, Ellen Hardy, performs simple activities such as getting onto a stool, putting on gloves, playing with objects. This spatial and temporal alternation is very Cubistic, and sometimes humorous—a mechanization of the human, like the woman climbing stairs in *Ballet Mechanique*. In one part, Jonas uses horizontal drift (or the horizontal roll), to displace the images in another way.

In the second part of the tape, Jonas, still in the lower left of the screen, watches landscapes of the country that she shot in Nova Scotia. While the still lifes in the first part of the tape were static, and compositional, this part is expressionistic and romantic, contrasting the outdoor space with the indoor studio space. The soundtrack of the tape includes music and excerpts from a journal Jonas kept in Nova Scotia, which deals with obsession, fantasy, and being in the country.



**Joan Jonas, *Duet*, 1972, b&w, 4 min., sound.**

In *Duet*, Jonas' face is seen on a large monitor from very close up as she barks and howls like a dog. She stands in front of the screen, facing her image on the monitor, barking along with it, sometimes in sync, sometimes as if dubbing in the sound, and sometimes in harmony. When

the inside monitor image stops howling, Jonas continues as she begins to take on the persona of a dog barking to an unreachable image. The camera zooms in closer on the face in the monitor until it becomes blurry. Then the image changes, as if the television is switched to a "program" of herself in another context, taking off a mask. Jonas, outside the monitor, gets up and leaves.



**Joan Jonas, *Left Side, Right Side*, 1972, b&w, 7 min., sound.**

In *Left Side, Right Side*, (produced by Carlota Schoolman), Jonas works directly with the experience of video space as a response to the monitor image which is not, as one might expect, a mirror reversal, but a recapitulation of the actual space. She uses as a structure the identification of her right and left sides, her real (first generation) and monitor (second generation) images shown simultaneously on the screen through the use of two cameras and a split screen with a special effects generator. "This is my right eye. This is my left eye", she states, pointing to her eyes. The split screen set-up is reversed, and she repeats the identifications with a slight hesitation. Then Jonas points to the left eye on the monitor with her right hand, and to the right eye not on the monitor with her left hand, both images still simultaneously visible. She holds up a mirror, looking into it from side to side, naming her left and her right. The mirror is then centered down her nose, dividing her face into two parts. She moves her head slightly so that a reflection of each half can be seen, making two

symmetrical faces. She crosses her eyes: "This is my right side". She turns so that the other half is visible and smiles: "This is my left side". These expressions are distorted and slightly inhuman. There is a vertical wipe to show a close-up of her neck, which she also names.

Having set up the spatial ambiguity of the piece, Jonas begins to work within it. Humming, she draws a complex, serpentine drawing on a board that is shot both directly and off the monitor so that it is oriented in two directions. She traces the pattern until it is very thick. Then she puts a piece of paper in front of her face and writes the words "sun" and "moon"—writing one in mirror reversal so that it can be read correctly in the monitor, and the other correctly as videoed straight on. This begins to draw into question the viewer's ability to distinguish between the "real" image and the image shot off the monitor. Jonas begins to mumble unintelligibly as she draws a line down the center of her face and neck, then drawing a cross on one cheek to represent the sun and an encircled crescent moon on the other. Alternate cheeks are presented to the camera as a light off-screen is turned on and off, each time revealing another theatrical pose with strange exaggerated shadows.



Joan Jonas, *Three Returns*, 1973, b&w, 12 min., sound.

*Three Returns* is concerned with the perception of sound and images as the distance from the viewer changes. A boy playing bagpipes enters the frame and walks away from the video camera until he almost disappears, the sound of the bagpipes becoming less and less audible as he gets smaller. Then he turns around and walks back (although the exact point of transition is not visible), the sound

gradually building up as he approaches the camera again. His walking has also revealed the topology of the land, difficult to read in a static panorama. The boy walks away and back in two more landscapes, playing different tunes and marching with a different rhythm in each. In the first two, the camera is static. In the third, the boy turns to the left and the camera follows him past sheep and groves of trees. He moves back toward the camera, finally walking out of range, while the camera pans the landscape.



Joan Jonas, *Vertical Roll*, 1972, b&w, 20 min., sound.

*Vertical Roll* uses one of the technical features of video and television, the vertical roll that results from two out of sync frequencies, the first that of the frequency signal being sent to the monitor, the second the frequency by which it is interpreted. If both are the same, the image is stable. Jonas uses the rolling picture structurally and rhythmically, allowing it to create perceptual illusions altering the sense of the room where the tape is played. The roll also seems to jump slightly, "sticking" to the bottom frame and bouncing back up.

At the beginning of the tape, Jonas' head emerges from the top of the frame into the space of the monitor and she bangs a spoon against a glass through which the image is shot, hitting at the moment that the roll strikes the bottom of the frame, making the vertical roll sound solid and material. The camera zooms in on the spoon, leaving white traces of the Vidicon tube's reaction to light. A blank screen rolls a few times, serving as a natural cut, marked by clapping a block of wood instead of the spoon. Then an

abstract pattern appears, moving and contorting until it can be identified as Jonas' pants. Her arm enters the frame and she rolls in, wearing an erotic smiling mask. The camera is tilted so that the floor is vertical and her face upside down. She changes position and "walks" with her feet to the camera as if marching on air. After a still of a nude woman, Jonas marches into the picture with only her feet showing, stepping in time with the roll, stopping, moving slightly, and then jumping up and down, sometimes in sync with the vertical roll as it hits bottom, sometimes giving the illusion of jumping "over" the roll as if jumping rope. She drops to the ground, putting her hands on the floor with her left hand down and her right palm up. She pats upward with her right palm until the vertical roll makes it appear as if she is clapping her right to her left hand. Then the camera focuses on Jonas' torso in a two-piece jewel-studded costume as she slowly turns around, and zooms in to her arm and its shadow on the wall, the spoon in her hand. The final image is of Jonas' head in *front* of the screen, taking up the whole frame, as the vertical roll in the monitor behind her seems to push her head downward until she sinks out of the picture.





**Joan Jonas, *Glass Puzzle*, 1974, b&w, 26 min., sound.**

*Glass Puzzle* is a tape of four related parts in which Jonas performs with Lois Lane, camerawork by Babette Mangolte. The first segment begins with Lane dancing, her arms dangling loosely, one black knee sock down. Both Lane and Jonas are wearing white slips as they move in and out of the camera frame in a clean space with a white screen used as a device behind which they can disappear. A bar swings horizontally, casting a shadow back and forth over their faces. Lane copies Jonas' subtly erotic and narcissistic gestures, which are more like poses than they are provocative. The women become alter-egos for each other when Lane steps in front of Jonas and their shadowed silhouettes merge. Then they separate and stand shoulder to shoulder as the bar continues to swing, giving this segment the rhythm of its swaying. The second segment uses the superimpositions of two camera images, one flat and one of the deep space of a light-filled loft. The soundtrack, which begins here, is of pebbles being clicked together. One camera is closely zoomed in on Lane's theatrically tilted head, over which passes the shadow of the swinging bar. In the other camera, Jonas walks across the loft. There is a cut to two superimposed views of Jonas crossing the space, and a single image of Lane and Jonas passing each other. Lane comes very close to the camera, which shoots through the space between her upper thighs to reveal Jonas reclining on a divan. There is a shot through

a round stereoscopic viewer and a pan down Jonas' kimono. The superimposition of images is integrated structurally here, as Jonas rotates slowly, one camera on her torso and the other on the monitor which is turned on and off, making her poses shrink and disappear, returning as different frames almost like still photographs. Another cut is to a scarf, which is raised to show Jonas grinning exaggeratedly, her hands holding up her hair. She suddenly stops smiling, lets her hair fall, and walks away. The final sequence is of a toy butterfly's wings being opened and closed as it enters from the top of the frame. The third segment, silent again, involves the illusory possibilities of the white backdrop and the camera superimpositions. Lane is on her back making crawling movements with her arms and legs, seen in two views. Jonas appears from an ambiguous space, slithering across the floor on her stomach. In another shot, she rotates a cone, leaving a white trail caused by the Vidicon tube's reaction to light.

The fourth part begins with a static shot of Jonas leaning on a child's desk and Lane holding a cloth with a white triangle. The camera cuts to Jonas and Reggae music comes on as she begins to move her hands over her body. The camera zooms back out and Lane takes a sitting pose derived from a photograph by Belloque. Eventually, Jonas and Lane trade positions, Jonas in the chair and Lane at the desk, feeling her body as Jonas had done. The camera moves in on her and the music stops. In the final shot, Jonas' hand rests on Lane's head, holding a postcard over her eyes.