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The Strings of the Human Spirit: Joan Jonas's Asymmetrical Symbolic

If it seems surprising that Joan Jonas regularly points to magic shows and Broadway musicals as great influences on her practice, the artist's enthusiasm for such stagecraft becomes less unlikely when considered alongside an observation she once attributed to Gaston Bachelard: "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."¹ Jonas's use of these words is quite apt, since they underscore the way in which her own works are typically non-linear. Objects and events are rarely taken up one at a time by the artist. Instead, she creates an intricate layering system, never allowing a work's myriad elements to be immediately accessible to audiences, even while they are all in play—such that no viewer ever quite sees everything there is to see at any given moment. In this light, Jonas's evocation of magic and musicals becomes quite specific in its implications: as she says in an interview with Joan Simon, her attraction to these forms of entertainment issues from their ability to create "illusions, surprises," while her own work labors to "reveal the way the illusions were made."²

To this end Jonas has, over the past few decades, consistently set up tableaux with competing visuals: "live" single-channel images can appear on monitors beside live performances they double, or they might be paired with still more monitors featuring pre-recorded videos; all these elements are likely to be placed before wall-size slide or moving projections, or alongside large, shiny mirrors reflecting an audience's image back to itself. In such scenarios, then, every viewer necessarily has a different perception, a different experience, and, in turn, a different visual memory of a performance. Yet the audience's acute awareness of that very *partial seeing* implicates the viewers themselves into the action of the performance, which is—given such ever-incomplete viewing and the inevitable human desire to see as much as possible—both literally and figuratively contingent upon this precarious reception. In

this regard, Jonas's reference to the distinction between speech (as moving from one thing to the next with some degree of arbitrary assignment) and symbol (as contiguous layering) suggests that she desires for her own work to come around ultimately to speech *as* symbol—with audiences perhaps focusing attention on individual parts of a performance or video, but only while also aware of how, in the larger context of the artist's layering, these parts are never totally grasped even as they articulate a kind of singular, expressive hold. Each person present will necessarily see just *part* of a given work even while somehow *sensing* it as a whole.

This dimension of Jonas's work was established very early on in her career, and even in her most formal, ostensibly straightforward, task-oriented works. For instance, her 1970 performance *Mirror Check* featured the artist standing naked some twenty feet from her audience, holding a small hand mirror. Starting at her face and head, she laboriously scanned the length and width of her body with the domestic instrument. Throughout this performance, Jonas held the mirror at an angle, making it impossible for audiences to see the reflection. Rather, viewers were able only to consider Jonas in the process of contemplating her own image—an image necessarily in extreme proximity and constant flux—and were thus uncertain of what, if anything, she was discovering during the self-scrutinization. Put another way, viewers had first-hand knowledge of her search, but were still left in a position of indeterminacy; the tiny hand mirror did nothing so much as swallow those parts of the body it took in, rendering them invisible to all but the artist at the very moment of their illumination. Seeing Jonas seeing herself necessarily posited the artist as a fragmented figure, meticulously and impossibly piecing her own body together.³

The effect is also to be found—though produced by different means—in her 1972 performance *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, for which Jonas donned a super smooth, shiny doll's mask, along with a plumed headdress and sheer



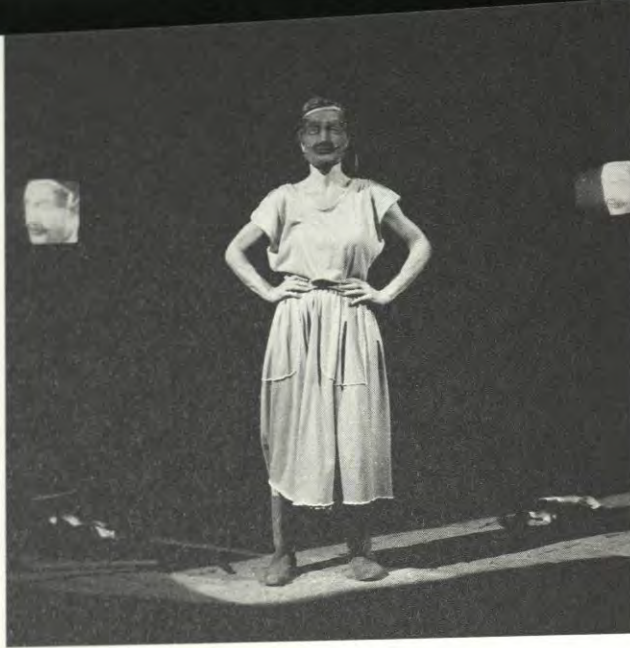
Poster featuring a photograph by Richard Serra for *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), LoGiudice Gallery, New York, 1972

celery-green dress. "Wearing the mask of a doll's face transformed me into an erotic electronic seductress," she has said. "I named this TV persona Organic Honey."⁴ One might be tempted (and perhaps rightly) to think that Jonas wore a mask in this instance to suggest there was nothing behind it, or to comment on the growing spectacularization of culture. But here again the artist was also pointing toward the peripheries of perception, proffering indirect, deferred vision, alluding to what is just around the corner and, therefore, not quite accessible. Jonas slipped the mask on and off from time to time, revealing her own features; and as Organic Honey howled and drew, danced, and stomped, she was doubled in a live closed-circuit video (shot by a videographer performing with her in this piece) on a nearby monitor. Notably, the image refused as well to resolve amiably for audiences' eyes, subject as it was to an intermittent "vertical roll"⁵: onscreen, Jonas's body was often split in the middle or otherwise misaligned, abruptly coming together and pulling apart in ways that frustrated narrative and, in fact, any "picturing" at all. Here was an upper torso slapped onto two sporadically jumping legs; there was her masked face conjoining with that of a drawn dog's. Yet somehow these fleeting images maintained structural significance. Things and bodies fitfully decoupled and rejoined, with Jonas reflected in mirrors, or with her hands moving to clap but not meeting; or, more abstractly, with the vertical roll bisecting an empty screen. Acute splits and sutures that were violent and violating both informed and disrupted any notion of a "real" or "unified" body in the persona of Organic Honey—and also in the person of Jonas herself. (After all, the audience was faced as well with those live events that immediately produced fragmented echoes in surrounding televisual imagery.) Rather than confirm any binary between a stable or primary "event" and its breakdown into parts via mediation, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* served instead to shore up the thread running through variable modes of image production. If the live feed seemed to offer up

partial and peculiar ratios of a larger whole, that ostensible whole only revealed itself to be just as layered and improbable to fully grasp. True, Jonas made transparent all her various tools (rendering drawings in real time; creating sound effects via simple objects such as a spoon hitting a mirror and blocks of wood being clapped together), but her mask—literally and figuratively—was nonetheless taken on and off in such a way that the relationship between "reality" and "illusion" was ultimately anything but clear.

Wherever (and however metaphorically) they are employed, masks are disconcerting prostheses, both positing the flexibility of role playing and revealing the deep need we have for secure recognition and naming. But considered amid Jonas's other props such as elaborate fans and costumes—all the components, in other words, of masquerade—the mask underscores the feminist character of her work. In this regard, consider Mary Ann Doane's 1982 text "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," where the scholar postulates masquerade as a potential mode of resistance to patriarchy because it destabilizes any notion of an "essential" or "natural" femininity.⁶ For Doane, the mask enacts a method of distancing—a mechanism that creates a gap between representations of femininity and the bodies they are meant to account for and naturalize. Accordingly, the mask in Jonas's work is, in and of itself, a distancing device, but it must be seen in tandem with, say, the artist's hand-held mirror—and, in fact, with her use of reflections and doublings more generally, as pictures appear simultaneously, for instance, onstage and onscreen.

To follow the implications of Doane's analyses through to their impact in the makeup of subjectivity, such distancing devices in Jonas's oeuvre, steeped as they are in the tactical uses of media in performance (and vice versa), should be seen as part of a larger project of producing and plumbing psychological operations. In the 1981 video performance *He Saw Her Burning*, for instance, the artist used a constellation of live action and pre-recorded film and video footage, but,



Jonas performing in *He Saw Her Burning* (1982),
Progetto Genazzano, La Zattera di Babele,
 Genazzano, Italy, 1982. Photo: © Nanda Lanfranco.

significantly, her script revolved around questions of memory. Onstage, Jonas performed as a kind of live moderator, or analyst, for footage appearing on two video monitors, one presenting the oral testimony of a woman, the other of a man. Each tale was based on a different news story Jonas had read in newspapers during a then-recent stay in Berlin, but here she created a sense of contingency between them—a contingency based on sight and, more precisely, on the moment when a brief turning away might precipitate (unseen) disaster. Jonas, standing between the monitors and slipping the mask of a man's face on and off, began the piece by relating the bare-bones details of the news stories, as if reporting them publicly. She relayed, deadpan, the following information:

An American soldier stole a sixty-ton tank and drove it down the main street throwing traffic and pedestrians into a state of panic. There was no explanation for his behavior.

A woman walking down the street burst into flames for no apparent reason. There was no evidence of any accelerant at the scene.

The rest of the performance enacted a kind of unraveling of these two incidents even while a rhythm was built between them, until the stories somehow seemed to pertain to one moment—or a sequence, as if one event were the cause of the second, though the audience likely could never exactly say how. In other words, the piece suggested a temporal and spatial congruency, but it was one whose logic viewers never felt sure of—simply because none of the testimony ever amounted to a full explanation or even suggested why the two events might, in fact, be connected at all. As each of the brief news accounts spoken by Jonas themselves vehemently stressed, there was “no explanation,” “no apparent reason,” and “no evidence.” In the end, and yet again in the artist's work, audiences are left with a whole that makes an uncanny kind of sense—but in this case perhaps only because the tales in question make no sense at all and viewers subsequently seek to compensate for such unreality. And indeed, to

underscore and amplify the dynamics arising from such growing uncertainty, Jonas posed questions about the recorded images and her viewers' relationship to them, asking, “What does this remind you of?” and “Do you remember?” Casting her compositional approach into the sphere of psychology, these queries served only to remind that even when we “remember,” we do so incompletely and, further, that those things reminding us of other things are always necessarily beset by affective baggage. In short, to be reminded by something is to move into the realm of association; taking one thing for another (a kind of metonymic slide of signification) means any notion of an “original” or “correct” perception becomes impossible to sustain. In this way, it is useful to consider *He Saw Her Burning* and its presentation of “coincidences” in relation to Jacques Lacan's *tuché*—what the psychoanalyst named the “always already missed encounter with the real.” In bumping up against one another, two seemingly unrelated instants point to a peripheral glimmer of a shared and constitutive, though inaccessible, moment, or puncture, located in the past and directing the future.⁷

To better grasp the formal elements that make such postulations possible, however, one might turn to a small volume, *Sense and Sensibilia*, compiled from notes written by J. L. Austin between the years 1947 and 1959. Here the philosopher of language takes up the question of perception, ruminating on the prospect that perhaps we never perceive or sense directly, and then speculating on the implications of this possibility.⁸ Significantly for the present discussion, Austin turns to the mirror as a cipher to explain his theory, suggesting that our inability to perceive absolutely might be akin to the “kink” one encounters when engaging the looking glass. His premise is perhaps best understood by recalling our own attempts as children to bend the line of sight, trying with all our might to extend the arc of a hand-held mirror to see around corners, or pulling two mirrors close together to create an infinite regress of space (a mirrored hall we only wished we could leap into and follow through, like the magically tilting-

back wall of C. S. Lewis's wardrobe). In this light, Austin's notion of the "kink" in perception is particularly helpful for considering the ways in which the artist intervenes in space in order to fragment it, to point to the edges as most illuminating, to induce a kind of intimate alienation as a necessary element of viewing, hearing, and perceiving. Indeed, when it comes to the feminist dimension of her work, one might well say that Jonas posits the body itself as a kind of mirror—as a fracturing and fractured device, and as a medium through which we test the limits of our own impulse to piece together unlikely fragments, taking "coincidence" for natural pairing. And so, by extension, Jonas's loosely hinged narratives may be considered inherently linked to representations of women and, more specifically, to how the artist sees them working in the world and asks them to operate differently—as interruptions, escaping and confusing any binary of presence and absence, interfering and pointing toward the possibilities inherent in a more obtuse kind of vision.

The destabilizing force of representation as it ties to our encounters with the world—or, put another way, the strong ties between form and psychology—is hardly under-recognized in critical literature of recent decades, but the notion likely warrants more nuanced consideration when it comes to the historical context and continuing critical value of Jonas's use of image in her performances. Doane herself, for that matter, argues in her 1980 essay "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space" that the cinema has steadily incorporated new technologies to produce what she calls a *phantasmatic* body, a representational body that is constructed at all costs to come across as unified and "present-to-itself."⁹ In particular, stresses Doane, the public is conditioned to seek synchronization between the voice and its supposed speaker's body; to see the voice emanate from the lips of a body provides a kind of inauthentic ontological proof, bestowing "life" upon image and, importantly, "presence" upon representation.¹⁰

If Jonas's alternative experiments with performance and low-cost videotape seem to have little in common with the history of a slick Hollywood cinema marketed to the masses, they do, however, offer a fruitful comparison. After all, part of video's appeal, in particular to the artists who took it up in the late 1960s and early 70s, had much to do with reacting to the reign of the Hollywood image and a desire to reveal and undermine its power. To this end, Doane's article takes up synchronization and its enforced relationship to "presence," by exploring cinema as a site necessarily reliant upon (and even structured by) duration, which is to say striated temporality. Of course, many feminist theorists have a charged relationship to cinema, since it can be read as embodying and perpetuating persistent dichotomies such as active/passive, male/female, and presence/absence.¹¹ Yet Doane is particularly compelling as she alludes to the positive potential for rupture when de-synchronization occurs. "Sound," she writes, "carries with it the potential risk of exposing the material heterogeneity of the medium; attempts to contain that risk surface in the language of the ideology of organic unity."¹²

When Doane speaks here of the disruptive potential of sound, she is primarily talking about speech; and when she speaks of the material heterogeneity of the medium, she means film, with its discrete visual and material properties, as well as its technological specificities. But her analysis is nonetheless useful for considering Jonas, particularly as the scholar describes sound as a kind of tenuous anchoring device—one that, when visibly tethered to a body, serves to *logically* anchor that body into space and time. In the performance *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (as I discussed earlier in this essay), Jonas refused to present a cohesive body even while she stood live, in front of an audience. In addition to presenting multiple layers of the visual (at once fragmenting and multiplying the resulting images), *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* unfurled a rich tapestry of sound comprising both extant compositions (reggae music, for instance) and new, more

incidental material created by the performer and her assistants (wood blocks clapping in time to the live-feed video's "vertical roll," as well as hands slapping, chalkboard scratching, spoon banging). The latter—seemingly transparent, repetitive, sound-producing acts—called into question, in "real" time and "actual" space, the relation between the seen and the heard, as well as that of cause and effect.¹³

As if to see how far this dynamic can be pushed or tested, Jonas's slightly later video *Vertical Roll* (also 1972)—which utilized some elements from the performance *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* but is itself an autonomous work—would seem, at first, to proceed with a somewhat inverted logic, forcefully occupying as it does the site of mediated representation. During the course of the nearly twenty-minute tape, Jonas coaxes the (then) commonplace glitch called a "vertical roll" into determining the structure of her piece. As the black, bifurcating line bounces from bottom to top of the screen, so too do the images that straddle and traverse it. Jonas marches and jumps in and out of frames, her body's movements miming the mode of the vertical roll, which seems to seek balance but ultimately never rights itself (or the images it interrupts). *Vertical Roll* is accompanied by a strident soundtrack whose logic seems fully aligned with—perhaps even governed by—the structuring vertical roll. Indeed, watching the work, one finds that the rhythmic scrolling and bouncing of the eponymous black line is doubled sonically by a brisk, repeating clap. It is as though the spooling line is embodied or fully material, and that its traversal of the screen is actually *dense*, weighty enough to evince the sound of having made contact each time it drops. Yet viewers eventually see that the coincidence between sound and image is imperfect, barely off-kilter, but in the end all the more unsettled for its close approximation. Not a direct effect of the image at all, the soundtrack was, rather, recorded after the fact: Jonas clapped blocks of wood together in sync with the movement of the vertical roll, hanging the sound on the images she had already made.

In a sense, then, *Vertical Roll's* soundtrack—with implications for the functioning of Jonas's oeuvre more generally—works in exactly the *opposite* direction from what Doane describes with regard to the function of Hollywood cinema: Jonas unmoors sound from the body and, via the vertical roll, unmoors that body from space. In part, this effect arises because the sound accompanying the (always fractured) image mimics fracture itself, never attempting to burrow into or help legitimize any diegetic space. There is no story here, no narrative, no language even. Instead, we are left with the kind of noises that one might typically associate with dissonance, disjuncture, and, significantly, displeasure—even while Jonas's soundtrack, as a purposeful construct and isolation of noise that is usually supplemental, unwanted, and residual, approximates that which we normally attempt to *screen* and reduce with help or by will. As Doane writes, "The formal perfection of sound recording in the cinema consists in reducing not only the noise of the apparatus but any 'grating' noise which is not 'pleasing to the ear.'"¹⁴ If the same holds true for video, then one might speculate that Jonas's choice in this early work to reduce anything *but* those grating noises assumed to be unpleasant to the ear was made with quite particular critical effects in mind. Ironically, the very difficulty of describing such sounds—and their impact on an audience—might have given rise to a dearth of critical attention paid over the years to that element of Jonas's work.¹⁵

But, as we seek to give such attention to the work today, risks arise. It is tempting to think of Jonas's soundtrack for *Vertical Roll* as being similarly asynchronous to that work's perpetually unstable images: the soundtrack manages to give incongruous *voice* to the gap in the medium (video) that is so often read as the work's subject. Yet, as Doane reminds us, "even when asynchronous or 'wild' sound is utilized, the phantasmatic body's attribute of unity is not lost. It is simply displaced—the body *in* the film becomes the body *of* the film. Its senses work in tandem, for the combination of sound and image is described in terms of 'totality' and the 'organic.'"¹⁶

Doane's corrective underlines the idea that it is not, after all, so easy to disrupt the forceful—and even necessary—fantasy of “wholeness” that buoys up cinematic images (and, perhaps to some degree, representation overall). Indeed, if need be, she points out, the “attribute” of presence is a sliding, slippery one, and if “the body *in* the film” is nowhere to be securely found, the “body” of film itself shoulders the burden. But, I would contend, in Jonas's work *that* body too—found in her work not *as* film but rather *as* video and live performance using all manner of mediation, from masks to mirrors—shimmies out of any pretense to holistic totality, offering up a kind of asymmetry that operates in and offers entry to the realm of the symbolic. (It's striking, for instance, that the final seconds of *Vertical Roll* shatter the visual space that has been established once more, as Jonas's face moves in *front* of the screen on which the vertical roll still plays—revealing its status as just another kind of image, however ostensibly unstable.¹⁷)

If this last conclusion requires some elaboration, it is because—while drawing a red thread through Jonas's oeuvre—I find that in her latest works, the quote with which I began this text comes full circle in its implications: “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.” For if, as I've argued, Jonas's rigorous modes of temporal and spatial incongruities deliver to audiences a perpetual de-synchronization, they also resolve dialectically into a very particular kind of “unitary expression”: that of the symbolic. Consider some of the artist's more recent projects. In two performance works executed over the last decade¹⁸—*The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* (2004–2006) and *Reading Dante II* (2008/2009)¹⁹—this kind of movement toward delivering an “expression” at once *full* and potentially *outside* language has reached a full, lush precision.

In *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* Jonas turned, appropriately enough, to Aby Warburg, the German art

historian best known for three things: his experimental mode of coaxing images from different cultures into strange, compelling relations; his long and intense depression and schizophrenia; and his journey to the American Southwest in 1895 and 1896, resulting in his 1923 lectures titled “Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America.”²⁰ Controversial as Warburg might be for what has been seen by some as his ethnographic fetishism, Jonas's Warburg was, in a sense, a wholly different man—and, indeed, it was his description of a ritual snake dance that he never saw that first drew her to his account.²¹ Using Warburg's writings as her inspiration (as she would do with Dante's just a few years later), Jonas's piece comprised an unfurling of words, images, songs, and actions that—dreamlike—gave over a *shape*, a *scent*, a *feel* but never quite the *thing* itself.²² There was Jonas pulling a taxidermied coyote in front of multiple, shifting video images playing prismatically on multiple, shifting walls; a singing Warburg, this version of himself young and Venezuelan (portrayed as he was by curator José Luis Blondet²³); and a large video projection of a young woman (performance artist Ragani Haas) and a dog, playing in grass. These are just three memory pictures I hold of the piece. Together they amount to something, or at the very least I hold them primary for a reason I still do not fully grasp.

But in seeking to articulate their relationships and their effects, I find myself wishing to revisit a passage from Warburg's *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, in which he writes: “The synchrony [*Nebeneinander*] of logical civilization and fantastic, magical causation shows the Pueblo Indians' peculiar condition of hybridity and transition.... They stand on middle ground between magic and logos, and their instrument of orientation is the symbol. Between a culture of touch and culture of thought is the culture of symbolic connection.”²⁴ It strikes me that what Warburg postulates—the “synchrony” he finds to be evident in the Pueblos' turn to the symbolic—perhaps better describes his own way of understanding and taking up that



Stills from video component of *Reading Dante II* (2008/2009), *Making Worlds*, Arsenale, 53rd Venice Biennale, Italy, 2009

culture than it describes the culture itself. So too, perhaps, with Jonas's own "asymmetrical symbolic," as I've called it here, which operates not only on the level of representation but also on the level of reception. Her works, which deposit so many *pieces*, so many fragments, in the minds they affect, are processes; the very ways in which they *come to mean* (rather than what we assume they mean) gesture toward that which Warburg named the symbolic. Symbols are exchanged, filled (to the brim), retooled, handed down. Thus, to fully analyze Jonas's works, one has to consider something about their afterlife as after-images and after-sounds—qualities making these elements into objects that no audience member could ever see for the first time. Rather, viewers have the uncanny sense of returning to them again and again. That my reading here insists on prioritizing the psychological dimension and processing of images could be problematic for some. But I'll stick by it: etymologically, *psychology* derives from the Greek, *psyche* (breath, spirit, soul) and *logia* (study of), which again underscores the relationship of analysis and affect that is ever-present in Jonas's work.

Indeed, sitting and watching *Reading Dante II*, hearing familiar words (Dante's) made strange while watching strange acts (Jonas and Haas sitting side by side, wearing rodent masks and bouncing gleefully, for instance) that feel strangely recognizable, I sensed a collective effort at work, as each audience member did what they could to hold onto what they couldn't yet process (to no avail, of course—what *sticks* is never what you would expect). Somewhere near what I remember as the end of the piece (but which Jonas assures me is closer to its beginning), a video played of children in a small room, deconstructing and reconstructing a village of tiny houses over and over again, each neat reconfiguration of geometrical forms completely different, yet nearly indiscernibly so, from the last.

NOTES

My title is obviously indebted to Douglas Crimp's notion of "De-Synchronization in Joan Jonas's Performances," which is also the title for his essay in *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982*, ed. Crimp (Berkeley, CA: University Art Museum; in association with Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1983), 8–10. That important early text is reproduced in this volume. It's compelling to consider how Crimp's de-synchronization might operate in the symbolic realm. I would argue: as asymmetry.

¹ Jonas's "closing statement" for *Joan Jonas* (Berkeley, 1983; pages 137–39) uses this quote as its epigraph, and it is attributed there to Bachelard. Though, given aspects of his work, Bachelard is a good candidate for such a quote, I recently discovered that it was in fact penned by the nineteenth-century Swiss scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen. Bachofen's quote appears in his *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, an examination of the historical conditions of matriarchies, written in the late nineteenth century but only appearing in German in 1926 (notably referred to by Siegfried Kracauer in his foundational text "Photography," published in 1927) and in English in 1967. A sizeable excerpt of Bachofen's text (including the passage cited by Jonas) appears in Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods, and Theories of Research, Introduction and Anthology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 117–25.

² See Joan Simon's "Scenes and Variations: An Interview with Joan Jonas," *Art in America* 83, no. 7 (July 1995): 72–79, 100–101, reprinted in *Joan Jonas: Performance, Video, Installation 1968–2000* (Stuttgart, Germany: Galerie der Stadt; and Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 28.

³ Such fragmentation assumes a temporal dimension as well, since the work only takes place through a kind of unfolding. This aspect was even further complicated when a new iteration of the piece was performed. On March 16, 2008 (in conjunction with the exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, then on view at PS1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City, New York), Jonas "restaged" *Mirror Check*, opting, however, not to perform the work herself but rather to have a young woman with a body type similar to her own go through the series of motions.

⁴ From Jonas's description of *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* in *Joan Jonas* (Stuttgart, 2001), 106. *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* was performed the same year as *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (1972) and also took up the intersection of "live" performance and mediated images, which were produced simultaneously. *Organic Honey* featured prominently in the two works and provided yet another way of thinking through layers of representation. Indeed, as Jonas put it with regard to *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, "I could inhabit, simultaneously, different fields of view, different channels." (See *Joan Jonas* [Stuttgart, 2001], 108.)

⁵ A "vertical roll" is literally an instance of two out of sync frequencies, causing the picture on the monitor to be constantly bifurcated by a thick black line (of the kind analog viewers might have rushed to the tracking button to fix). For a detailed discussion of the vertical roll, see Crimp's "De-Synchronization in Joan Jonas's Performances." It must also be noted that the performance I am discussing here, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, should not be confused with the video work *Vertical Roll*, also made in 1972 (and to which I will turn later in this essay). Using some of the tactics and props

from the performance, the video is an autonomous work, a single-channel tape related to but not included in the performance.

6 Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23, nos. 3-4 (September/October 1982): 74-87.

7 See the section "Tuché and Automaton" in Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 53-64. It is worth mentioning, apropos the title of Jonas's work under discussion, that a main focus of Lacan's discussion of the *tuché* is his revisitation of Freud's famous analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) of the so-called "Dream of the Burning Child."

8 J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, reconstructed from the manuscript notes by C. J. Warnock (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

9 Mary Anne Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," *Yale French Studies*, no. 60 (1980), reprinted in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 162-76.

10 *Ibid.*, 163.

11 The feminist literature on cinema is, of course, quite dense and very rich. The essay I am directly alluding to is perhaps the most well known of them all, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

12 Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema," 163.

13 The fragile link between image and sound has been beautifully explored by Jonas over her decades-long practice. Of particular note in this context is the artist's performance work *Jones Beach Piece*, made in 1970. In this early work, performers—a quarter of a mile away from the audience, who stood watching on a small hill—enacted a number of "signals" for their spectators, including acoustic ones; clapping blocks of wood together, they demonstrated how distance could be measured and marked by sound. *Delay Delay* from 1972 (performed first in New York City, then in Rome) and the related film *Songdelay*, produced in 1973, took this idea up as well. Dispersed over wide areas of urban landscape, performers demonstrated, among other things, the way their actions (the clapping of wood blocks here again, for instance) failed to coincide immediately with their expected results (an audience hearing the resulting sound) as they moved further and further away—the simple truth that sound needs time to travel dismantles illusions of simultaneity.

14 Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema," 171.

15 It is interesting to note how little critical attention Jonas's soundtracks have received. It is particularly of note to see that very few of the texts written about *Vertical Roll* discuss its loud aural component, instead focusing on its visuals and technological effects.

16 *Ibid.*, 163. Doane footnotes the terms "totality" and the "organic" and refers her readers to another of her articles, "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing" (also included in Weis and Belton, *Film Sound*), for further discussion of the "hierarchy" of sounds.

17 In Rosalind Krauss's famous 1976 essay "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," the critic argues that the medium of video, at its worst,

approximates a mirror that simply reflects back and magnifies the overly invested bodily image. Jonas is discussed as evading the "feedback loop" of narcissism qua video by visibly assaulting—and thus deconstructing—video's modes of representation. Yet, it seems to me that Jonas both deconstructs the medium and allows it function as a mirror: thus retooling narcissism itself and rendering it potentially critical (reflexive rather than merely reflective). See Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October*, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 50-64.

18 The notion of the "symbolic" I sketch out here should not be restricted to these two pieces, but they are two that I was fortunate enough to see in person and so I speak to them from that perspective rather pragmatically—though not to reinscribe potentially clichéd notions of the "ephemeral" or the "authentic" when it comes to "being there."

19 *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* was performed in October 2005 and October 2006 at Dia:Beacon. *Reading Dante II* was part of Performa 09 and executed at the Performing Garage in New York City over five nights in November 2009. It was a manifestation of a project focusing on *Dante* that Jonas began to develop as a workshop performance at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona in 2007 and made its debut as a performance at the Sydney Biennale in 2008.

20 The lectures were published much later as a book under the same title. See *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, trans. by Michael P. Steinberg (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995).

21 See the (unpaginated) Dia:Beacon brochure accompanying *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*. There, Jonas writes: "This project...goes back to a journey I made forty years ago to the Southwest, where I had the opportunity to see several Hopi rituals, including a performance of the Hopi Snake Dance. Although I have never used it in performance, this very special experience has inspired my work ever since. About ten years ago, I came across a reference to the dance in an essay by the German art historian Aby Warburg." She goes on to note that Warburg never saw the dance himself but his description of it, nonetheless, was deeply affecting to her.

22 The title for Jonas's piece—*The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*—is borrowed not from Warburg but from Hilda Doolittle (H.D.)'s 1944 *Tribute to Freud*. Jonas has used these words by the early feminist writer before: in her *Lines in the Sand*, a multi-media installation and performance work created in 1992 and based loosely on H.D.'s 1955 *Helen in Egypt*. Jonas's work, following H.D.'s, mediates on and overthrows, among other things, the typical roles assigned to women in classical myth. Interestingly, H.D.'s quote implies that there is a relationship between the physical properties of things and the manner in which they persist across time. She writes, "Length, breadth, thickness, the shape, the scent, the feel of things. The actuality of the present, its bearing on the past, their bearing on the future."

23 At the time of the Dia performances, Blondet was the administrator of education programs at Dia:Beacon; he became curator at the Boston Center for the Arts in 2007 and now serves as curator of special initiatives at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

24 Warburg, *Images from the Region*, 17.