

Jonas, Joan. Interview by Constance DeJong. In *The Early Show: Video from 1969–1979*, edited by Constance DeJong, 35–37. New York: The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, 2006.

I was working as a curator at The Kitchen and Nancy had this material that became *Revolve*. I was so taken with that material. She had shot footage of a filmmaker she knew, Dennis Wheeler, who had been very ill and was in a state of remission: three points of view, three cameras, three decks. She did that with the help of a Canadian arts group. They placed the cameras in a circle around Dennis. Her idea was to edit from the multiple points of view. Eventually the project was accepted for post-production by Carol Brandenburg of the TV Lab at WNET. But for building the piece, and making the rough-cut we were on our own. In that day and age we had no synchronization of any sort...can you imagine? We had so much fun. We set up a studio with cheap non-electric switches in the back of The Kitchen. We had three different decks and a separate fourth recording deck and four monitors. And she did her version of instant replay. Whenever Dennis said something that seemed like a highlight she would stop and play another take of that highlight from a different camera point of view, make the edit and slowly, gradually build up a rhythm. It was meant to be a circular meditation on a subject. The subject was mortality, the relationship between living and dying. We don't normally tune into that subject unless confronted with the circumstances like Dennis Wheeler was.

Interviewed on December 9, 2005 by Constance De Jong

JOAN JONAS

(b. 1936 in New York City)

Vertical Roll (1972), *Left Side Right Side* (1972),
and *Good Night Good Morning* (1976)

Jonas is one of the most important video/performance artists to emerge out of the late 1960s and 1970s. Her experimental productions were essential to the formulation of the genre of time-based art. Jonas combined video and performance using props, images, characters and choreography to explore issues such as female identity, representation and abstraction.

There had been a meeting at my loft on Grand Street in 1969 or 1970. Peter Campus wanted to show everyone the video camera. Richard Serra came, Michael Heizer was there and a bunch of people. I can't exactly remember all of them. So when I went to Japan in 1970 I bought my first video camera there.

I knew it was this new thing and that I wanted to make so-called films. This new medium allowed to me do that without knowledge of working with film. Video was a much more accessible medium.

The Everson Museum of Art at Syracuse University establishes the first video-art department, with David Ross as curator. The Everson organizes several important group shows of video throughout the decade.

Experimental video centers are established in three universities in the United States: The Rhode Island School of Design, Southern Methodist University and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

Ten Video Performances is organized by Elayne Varian for Finch College Museum of Contemporary Art, New York featuring performances by Vito Acconci, Peter Campus, Douglas Davis, Dan Graham, Alex Hay, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Nam June Paik, Robert Rauschenberg, Steve Reich, Eric Siegel, and Simone Whitman.

I set up my new camera in my loft and I sat in front of it. I think a lot of people did that: sat in front of video cameras in their lofts. You saw yourself simultaneously on the monitor. That was a very powerful experience at that time. That and the fact I could make images and see them immediately. It was inspiring. I started making pieces that I called films but were videos related to film. I started in 1970 working on *Organic Honey*, though I didn't know I was making the piece that became *Organic Honey*.

I made *Good Night Good Morning* a little later, 1975 or 1976. That tape was made in relation to *Mirage*, a video performance. I was starting to work with the monitor turned on its side in *Mirage*. And the tape, *Good Night Good Morning*, is supposed to be shown on a monitor on its side. *Organic Honey* had to do with female identity and *Mirage* was more abstract. It's about light and dark and transitions and transformations. I made *Good Night Good Morning* the way I worked in video at the time, which was to make tapes that came out of my performances. It came out of the process of building a performance.

People outside the art world made fun of what I was doing. Lily Tomlin apparently was doing a bit in one of her shows about some performance artist who just said "good morning, good night." She thought it was very funny. Why would anyone do that? I want to do that piece again now, soon.

Video was a medium I was always comparing to film. So with *Vertical Roll* I was trying to work consciously with the peculiarities of video as opposed to film. *Vertical Roll* comes out of that thinking. *Left Side Right Side* comes out of thinking about video being a mirror and not a mirror. All of this work is about putting video into the context of film or perception.

Carlota Schoolman was the first person to show my work—*Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*—as part of her series on Public Access Television. Maybe that was 1973. There were just a few venues for showing video. I think Russell Connor also showed artists' video on Channel 13. There was also Castelli-Sonnabend Gallery and they showed my work. Immediately my single channel works were shown at the Whitney and, really, everywhere. I was in the 1973 Whitney biennial curated by John Hanhardt. It was an important moment and the medium was recognized as a significant step.

(Interviewer shows Jonas the book *The New Television: A Public/Private Art* from a 1974 conference at MoMA.) I remember that moment because Richard Serra, John Baldessari and I rode up in a taxi to the Museum of Modern Art. I remember John said, "Video is a pencil." That was his big statement. It's true. It's just another tool. No big deal.

When I got involved with video I was looking at it from a distance. It was a medium I had to explore. I was studying film, by that I mean I was looking at a lot of film at Anthology Film

Archives. I was intensely involved with doing that. I was very conscious of sound. I was looking at early films and, of course, I knew the transition from silent film to sound. But it wasn't just the fact of "talkies," it was *sound*. Also, I was a member of the downtown scene. Our world was not just visual arts, it included musicians and composers. You were listening as well as looking. Sound was an integral part of one's consciousness. So, of course, I was aware of sound and the part it played. In the beginning I used sound sparingly and then more and more elaborately. But it was always part of my vocabulary.

Vertical Roll at the beginning of the tape uses a spoon banging on a mirror. It's a sound element from an activity in the *Organic Honey* performance. After the tape was made I sat in front of the TV monitor and hit blocks of wood together in time with the vertical roll. In other words, part of the sound was added afterward. You can hear when the sound changes. As I said, sound was just integral to my work, always.

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BERYL KOROT

(b. 1945 in Queens, New York)

Lost Lascaux Bull (1973)

Korot is an early video art pioneer who took part in the video collective Raindance. With Phyllis Gersbuny, she produced Radical Software, a periodical that dealt mainly with video art and ideas. Her video installations explore the relationship between programming tools as diverse as the traditional loom (the first tool to program patterns according to numerical structures) and the contemporary electronics of multiple-channel video. Korot has produced video for many live performances with composer Steve Reich.

My very first contact with video was through Ira Schneider. We had been friends at the University of Wisconsin where he was getting a doctorate and I was an undergraduate. I think he left just after my freshman year. Five or six years later, I met him on the street in New York. He was a filmmaker who was getting interested in video from the point of view of instant replay, sync sound, live feedback, the whole processing and immediacy of the image. He and Frank Gillette did *Wipe Cycle* (1969), an installation piece with the live time delays.

That was really the beginning, for me—1967 or 1968, around then. So I began to hang out with Ira and this was at the beginning of Raindance (a video collective) with Frank Gillette, and I think Paul Ryan. Ira and I began to talk about getting information

1972
Sony releases a standard portable half-inch color videotape recorder and a standard system for three-quarter inch videotape cassettes.

Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films is founded by art dealers Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend. Directors include Joyce Nereaux and Patricia Brundage.

Keith Sonnier presents an exhibition of videotapes at Leo Castelli Gallery.

Peter Campus shows videos in his first solo exhibition at the Bykert Gallery in New York.

Carlota Schoolman founds Fifi Corday Productions to produce artists' video.

The Kitchen presents the Women's Video Festival, organized by Susan Milano, as well as *White, Black, Red, and Yellow*, an exhibition of works by Mary Lucier, Shigeo Kubota, Cecilia Sandovar, and Charlotte Warren.

Documenta V, in Kassel, Germany exhibits videotapes by international artists.