

Bare Lives Pamela M. Lee

In the 1960s and 1970s, the image of the body crossed by violence was a brute fact of everyday life, and was the visual and phenomenal horizon of the world. A survey of the visual record of that moment— a moment that saw state authority clash aggressively with public interest— bears witness to the struggle between violence and enlightenment. The many forms of this damaged body— the lifeless shell of a fallen protestor, a man taking a bullet in the temple, a monk being consumed by fire— were endlessly pictured in magazines and newspapers, flashed night after night on the television screen, and presented as real-time spectacles through video transmission. This was, in short, a mediated body: abstracted, parsed, regulated, and controlled, submitted to the logic of a new multimedia technocracy. It was under the postwar reign of this logic that the corpus of political democracy would then give way to the corpse of degraded life, for the ubiquity of this body was coextensive with the violence of the world, be it in Birmingham, Chicago, My Lai, Kent State, or Hanoi.

At the same time as this proliferation of mediated bodies, many women artists— including Carolee Schneemann, VALIE EXPORT, and Joan Jonas— began making work in which bodies themselves took on the status of media. Male artists would make such work, too, but women had an especially important role to play in this scenario. By performing task-oriented movements, grand gestures, or intimate actions, they treated their bodies as agents, or "extensions," to use the McLuhanesque rhetoric of the day. Art historians and critics have used the term "body

art" to describe this work, which typically placed the body under conditions of great physical duress or vulnerability in both public and private performances. More often than not, these bodies were also stripped bare, naked and not nude. Critical here was that these "bare lives" found their material fallout in what were then considered the most experimental forms of new media. Jonas, for instance, found her naked alter ego in spirals of feedback loops and the techniques of de-synchronization;¹ EXPORT would deploy her own as both projection and screen; Schneemann's screened and screening presence incarnated the radical extremes of both life and death. Vibrant with the stirrings of sexual revolution, the appearance of this body likewise signaled the limit condition of a desperate and mediated life.

Although this body was placed in an intensely precarious position, for many it came to stand as an article of faith. Indeed, the conventional wisdom about this work argues that the body presented here was a unified and essential whole: the expression of a feminized core historically oppressed by the prejudices of culture. That Schneemann, EXPORT, and Jonas used advanced time-based media in these works— projections, feedback systems, video monitors, other such technologies— seemed to confirm the will to self-representation that is commonly understood as a benchmark of feminist art.²

But what are we to make of the radical convergence of a violently screened body on the one hand and the body's own proactive screening on the other? How can we square the opposition

between state-sponsored death and willful life, the emergencies in South East Asia (and elsewhere) and the mandates of feminist autonomy? Although we can hardly dismiss the notion of “body art” as a descriptive category, this category may prove a red herring for examining the practice of Schneemann, EXPORT, and Jonas as media artists: artists whose films, videos and projections are inseparable from their performances. The cruelty of women’s historical oppression brooks no contradiction; the ways in which the body has been considered in the art historical record demand revisiting. For the body organized by media— and in turn the body wrested from technology— is far from the flesh and blood, “organic” thing. While this body might well indeed be recalcitrant and material, these works of these artists, decidedly feminist in disposition, share little with the essentialized corpus of a particular feminist aesthetic.

The relationship between the body screened and the screening body instead revolves around a third term: the biopolitical. This concept, famously theorized by Michel Foucault, allows us to understand the radical premise posed by the work of Schneemann, EXPORT, and Jonas. In his 1978 work *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault gave this concept its first meaning, using it to indicate the ways in which the sphere of life (and implicitly sex) had become integrated into the mechanisms, and thus politics, of sovereign authority: “the right of death and power over life.” His formulation stemmed from his rejection of what he called the “repressive hypothesis,” the belief that modernity’s attitude towards sex, supposedly crystallized in the drawing room mores of Victorian culture, was organized around the virtual and literal censorship of sex. For Foucault, the situation was precisely the opposite: the generalized deployment of sex was in fact an essential aspect of modernity:

What occurred in the eighteenth century in some Western countries was an event bound up with the development of capitalism, was a different phenomenon having perhaps a wider impact than the new morality; this was nothing less than the entry of life into history, that is, the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques [...] In the space for movement thus conquered, and broadening and organizing that space, methods of power and knowledge assumed responsibility for the life processes and undertook to control and modify them.³

In the wake of Foucault’s profoundly influential interpretation, philosophers and critics have further embroidered upon this notion of the biopolitical, applying it to realms beyond the history of sexuality.⁴ Giorgio Agamben, for example, explores the biopolitical as the threshold of “bare life” in the long history of political theory from Aristotle to Carl Schmitt to Hannah Arendt.

The entry of zoe into the sphere of the polis, the politicization of bare life as such, constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought.⁵

For Agamben, the fate of biopolitics in the twentieth century has catastrophic consequences, finding its most corrupt paradigm in the concentration camp. “Only because politics in our age had been entirely transformed into biopolitics,” he argues, “was it possible for politics to be constituted as totalitarian politics to a degree hitherto unknown.”⁶ “The state of exception” that constitutes the field of sovereign power finds its modern incarnation in the realm

of biopolitics.

Both Foucault and Agamben describe how an array of social institutions—juridical, medical, and carceral—have internalized biopolitical production. These authors analyze the technologies of biopolitical production: Foucault treats the technologies of modern sexuality, Agamben the technologies of domination. This discussion, however, localizes biopolitical production to the media culture of the 1960s and early 1970s, a moment variously described as the era of “Television’s War,”⁷ and a time when the question of reproducibility for women’s bodies represented a historically acute facet of the right of death and power over life.⁸ That right, we shall see, had a medium-specific dimension: the reproduction of sexualized subjects was (and doubtlessly continues to be) coextensive with its reproducibility both in and as media.

The oeuvres of Schneemann, EXPORT, and Jonas are each distinct meditations on the emergent biopolitics attending 1960s media culture and the claims to transparency—the politics of illusionism—that culture would make. Their practices demonstrate the conflicted and parasitic relation between what Foucault calls the “deployment of alliance” and the “deployment of sexuality” constitutive of modern conceptions of sexuality. A “deployment of alliance” is “built around a system of rules defining the permitted and the forbidden, the licit and illicit,” whereas, “the deployment of sexuality operates according to mobile, polymorphous and contingent techniques of power.”⁹ For all three artists, the movement of the body between these systems—as something conscripted by a system of rules as well as that which interrupts its mechanisms—accords the body its contingent power.

Carolee Schneemann: Life against Death in the Multimedia Age

“For the TV Generation, Multimedia Techniques Bombard and Overload the Senses for Fun and Profit.”¹⁰ On September 9, 1967, *The New York Times* waxed hyperbolic about the latest, most fantastical forms of new visual media, all deployed, so the text argued, in the service of entertainment and capital. “A new method of communication is developing in our society,” Grace Glueck wrote,

the technique of multimedia. Its jarring combinations of stimuli—sounds, light, colors, smells and moving images—aim at reaching audiences by a supersaturated attack on all the senses, not just eye or ear.¹¹

Glueck threw the most diverse elements into this rather heady mix: presentations by the Scott Paper Company, which increased its profits by 11% due to its use of strobe lights, slide projections, and rock music in their sales pitches, “total environment” discotheques like the Cheetah and the Electric Circus, and innovative treatments in endocrinology. Of course, she also made mention of art, referring to various sculptural, cinematic, and musical practices, including the work of Otto Piene, Len Lye, USCO, and the twitchy, computer-generated compositions of Morton Subotnick. Carolee Schneemann is the only woman artist mentioned in the article; Glueck describes Schneemann’s kinetic theater piece *Snows* (1967), which featured a complex relay system and the projection of media images, as an unbridled affirmation of multimedia’s new experiential possibilities.

Nothing could be more misleading than this account. If Schneemann believed that film, video, television and the range of new media “bombarded” and “overloaded” its imagined audience, she used such media for something quite other than these journalistic imperatives of “fun and profit.” If *Snows*, as we shall see, in fact

provided unflinching political commentary, a later work, which ostensibly bore no relationship to media at all, delivered one of the most incisive verdicts on media's effects on the body. In her performance *Interior Scroll* (1975), where the artist's naked body took center stage, Schneemann reads the following text:

I met a happy man
 a structuralist filmmaker
 – but don't call me that
 it's something else I do—
 he said we are fond of you
 you are charming
 but don't ask us
 to look at your films
 we cannot look at the personal clutter
 the persistence of feelings
 the hand-touch sensibility
 the diaristic indulgence
 the painterly mess
 the dense gestalt
 the primitive techniques [...] ¹²

While reading, Schneemann pulls a strip of paper out of her vagina. Slowly unfurling the coiled text inch by inch, she reads part of a monologue from her film *Kitch's Last Meal* (1973-78). The documentary images of the performance are indelible, picturing the artist standing on a table, knees bent, and naked but for some smears of paint shadowing her breasts, lining her arms, circling her face. Little wonder, then, that the performance has accrued canonic status in the annals of body art. As a performative meditation on what Schneemann calls "vulvic space"—the architectural, sexual and symbolic space of the vagina—a sense of creative embodiment finds its material expression in a metaphorical birthing of language.

But the interior scroll that ushers forth from her body is not just any scroll, not just any text. Instead, this scroll serves as a metonym for the

vertical scroll that is film. Schneemann collapses the temporal structure of film, in which the flickering image rolls out frame after frame to produce an illusion of visual coherence, with the body, a body that has seemingly internalized and then projected that medium. *Interior Scroll*, after all, was inspired in part by two experimental films by women: Sharon Hennessey's *What I Want* and Anne Severson's *Near the Big Chakra*. In addition, the text archly refers to the largely exclusive boys-club of 1960s avant-garde cinema, the structuralist filmmakers who could little bear Schneemann's filmic "indulgences".¹³ "Structural film," as defined by P. Adam Sitney in 1969, "insists on its shape and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline."¹⁴ Whatever the usefulness of this definition today, *Interior Scroll* indicts this kind of filmic vocabulary by restoring the position of the body relative to it. On the occasion of its second performance in 1977, Schneemann penned the following stream-of-conscious reflections on the medium's relation to the body:

Live body action steps into area of discrepancy between film which even in most intensive physical conviction remains in the mind-eye permits the passive viewing separation projection an illusion step into the fissure between live action and filmic images the tension is there between the distancing of audience perception and fixity of projection an actual reality triggering filmic reality as coherent present.¹⁵

To "step into the fissure between live action and filmic images" was Schneemann's strategy for interrupting "passive viewing," for more often than not the "passive viewing" situation bound up with the communications media stemmed from the biopolitical imaging of the body, the power to command its representation

as either violence or Eros.

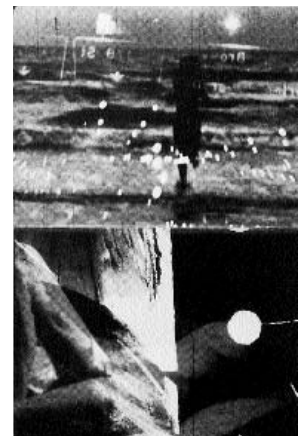
Schneemann, as it turned out, had been pre-occupied with this issue for well over a decade. She began her first sustained investigations into film with the works *Fuses* (1964–7) and *Viet Flakes* (1965); the subsequent performance *Snows* would make use of the latter film in a mixed-media performance. The radical contrast between the two films plots out two biopolitical trajectories: one presented an image of life through its graphic representation of loving sexuality, the other shores up the image of death in the atrocity images streaming endlessly out of South East Asia. These intersect at the point where Eros and Thanatos are subjected to the technocratic implications of new media in the 1960s, dramatizing the degree to which the body screened and abstracted in contemporary culture later would run up against its material double in everyday life.

A 16mm film in both color and black and white, *Fuses* is a notorious, critical contribution to the 1960s movement known as “expanded cinema,” sometimes known more generically as “abstract film.”¹⁶ This eighteen-minute film, the first of what Schneemann called her “autobiographical trilogy,” is a benchmark of proto-feminist cinema, anticipating both the will to self-representation emblematic of Second Wave feminism and the imperatives of the sexual revolution more generally.¹⁷ *Fuses* witnesses Schneemann and the composer James Tenney engaged in a protracted session of intense lovemaking, a montage of flesh in which the layering and manipulation of multiple images conspire to produce a work of great visual density. Schneemann made the film in an implicit dialogue with Stan Brakhage, a good friend of the artist since the late fifties. (Schneemann and Tenney feature prominently in Brakhage’s *Cat’s Cradle* [1959].) Yet if

Brakhage’s aesthetic would prove formative to artists experimenting with film and projection in the 1960s, his film *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959) gave Schneemann pause. In it, Brakhage records his first wife Jane giving birth to their son. For Schneemann, the recording of the birth scene by Brakhage’s camera eye verged dangerously towards a gesture of masculine appropriation.

Fuses came as a kind of ambivalent response to that appropriation, but in Schneemann’s film, visual access to the body is granted equally to both partners. (Schneemann’s cat, Kitch, who surveys the goings-on with supreme feline indifference, stands in as a surrogate viewer for the audience.) In *Fuses*, everything is laid open to vision, everything is laid bare. Everything intimate is rendered explicit, laying waste to the border war between the private and spectacular: it is a filmic demonstration of what Lauren Berlant calls the “intimate public sphere.”¹⁸ “The fuck,” as Schneemann referred to the action, as if it were an actor in the third person, is presented without apology, spurning any kind of veiling soft-focus. Genital sexuality is granted total visibility: cunt, cock and balls move in and out of the frame as relentless formal devices. If conventional pornography treats the female body as a passive object of visual consumption— an inert heap of flesh submitted to phallocratic violence— in *Fuses*, the sexual intertwining of two intimates is a promise of parity. The ever-shifting terrain of those bodies and the multiple perspectives of them afforded by the film offers a non-monolithic vision of the sexual act. In *Fuses*, Eros takes on a phenomenological aspect.

At once celebrated and reviled for its unblinking sexuality, *Fuses* was also regarded as a demonstration piece of the new cinema, stressing “the material tendency of recent formal work.”¹⁹ Gene Youngblood was among the first critics to



Carolee Schneemann, Filmstills from *Fuses*, 1964–1967

review *Fuses*,²⁰ describing its aesthetic of “fragmentation” that “not only prevents narrative continuity, therefore focusing on individual image-events, but also closely approximates the actual experience of sex in which the body of one’s partner becomes fragmented into tactile zones and exaggerated mental images.”²¹

We might also turn the generalized notion of “abstract film” on its head to stress the abstracting tendencies of the media in general: their capacity to rationalize and thus manage the body as a function of biopolitical technocracy. As a work veering between the poles of experimental cinema and pornography, *Fuses* plays with that notion in revealing a body teetering between abstraction and figuration, at once shifting out of its recognizable materiality as a visual image and insisting upon the unabashed physicality of its performers. At numerous points in *Fuses*, the spectator finds him or herself struggling to identify the body. Then, just as quickly, the genital imagery becomes unavoidable— as Schneemann laughingly paraphrased *Youngblood*, the film brazenly featured “a ninety-foot penis in cinema-scope”²²— only to shift just as dramatically to its more explicitly formal aesthetic. “There were whole sections,” she recalled, “where the film is chopped up and laid out onto either black or transparent leader and taped down [...] I soaked it in all sorts of acids and dyes to see what would happen. I cut out details of imagery and repeated them.”²³ These gestures were matched in degree and kind by the movement of the film itself, which sees the coupling of the male and female body as a set of fluid, kinetic relations, variously spliced with scenes that are anything but erotically charged. Kitch will take in the scene by the window; curtains blow; a view of crashing surf suggests an oceanic force. In keeping with that marine metaphor— or rather

Freudian trope— the rhythm of the film has itself been described as “oceanic,” an almost tidal ambience in which distinctions between self and other, subject and object, abstraction and figuration are overcome.

At one point the film washes into an open blank expanse, a device not unfamiliar in the new cinema. It is, as Schneemann puts it, an “indecipherable whiteness,” suggesting “that orgasmic space where you are out beyond wherever you are.”²⁴ That white field, in other words, stood for pleasure beyond the sensate. Pleasure in excess of the limits of rational being. That the actual footage was a snowstorm with cows in it, does little to diminish Schneemann’s formal sensibility. This is a body unmoored from the traditional spatio-temporal coordinates of both narrative and pornographic film.

It is thus telling that the next “abstract” film Schneemann took on scenes of whiteness— a blanket of media— as a metaphorical snow. Here, though, the body was no longer a screen for orgasmic bliss, porous and open to the desire of another, but a body submitted to the flipside of the biopolitical coin: the right of death and power over life as witnessed in the accelerating violence of the late 1960s. In *Viet Flakes*, Schneemann confronted the media images coming daily out of Vietnam. The proliferation of these images as mass media produced for Schneemann their own form of “collective insanity,” sprawled as they were across newspapers, televisions, magazines, and both public and domestic space. As I have written elsewhere, that film would serve as the backdrop for *Snows* (1967), which was performed for eight nights at New York’s Martiniere Theatre.²⁵ Insofar as *Snows* was a performance about the “image” of Vietnam in the mass media, it also provided commentary on the technology of the media that produced that



VALIE EXPORT, *Cutting*, 1967/68

VALIE EXPORT's film action *Cutting* thematizes the film technique of cutting, or editing, and its importance in terms of the construction of filmic reality. The first part shows a house projected on a paper screen. EXPORT then cuts out the windows of the house with a scissors, in a sense actually opening it. Subsequently, Marshall McLuhan's statement, "The content of the writing is the speech," is cut out of the illuminated projection surface. But the last word is spoken by the filmmaker, thus realizing the meaning of the sentence in performance. The engagement with abstract linguistic signs leads to the image as well as to contact with the human body, when EXPORT uses the Bazooka T-shirt of an actor as a fabric screen by cutting out the chewing gum bubble. Subsequently, the now naked body serves as a living screen, the sign of which— the body hair— EXPORT shaves off. The final act of fellatio demonstrates the most direct form of physical communication that no longer needs any words or images.

59, 62 VALIE EXPORT, *Cutting*, 1967/68
Photos: Peter Hassmann

60, 61 VALIE EXPORT, *Cutting*, 1967/68
Photos: VALIE EXPORT

image. The living room war brought those images into constant circulation, and for Schneemann, as for so many others, they called up the dilemmas of the reality of the mass media, understood not just as mere representation— a passive mirroring of events and things outside it— but as a spatio-temporal projection of material consequence in its own right.²⁶

In keeping with the complexities of the situation, enormous technical input was demanded in the production of *Snows*.²⁷ Participants of the group *Experiments in Art and Technology* facilitated the construction of an interactive relay system between performers and audience. It was important for Schneemann that the images, however horrific, did not immediately register as pictures from the war; she was also bent on keeping the roles of the performers flexible, open to cues established by the audience.

The imagery of *Snows* is ambiguous, shifting metaphors in which the performers are merely themselves, as well as victim, torturer and tortured aggressor, love and beloved. A dozen audience seats were wired with contact microphones; when people in these seats shifted about, the contact microphones amplified the sound which in turn was channeled into a scr converter and changed the moving light machines.²⁸

Schneemann further justified the use of a complex relay system in the following terms: I wanted to have these systems of interference, so that even after I could make the most complex, determined sequences of projections [...] there could be some system to interrupt them so that the performers or participants would also be constantly off-guard [...] we were always sort of lost in the process of the piece and on edge because we were being retriggered.

What we were responding to was complex.²⁹

Schneemann's work provided a means to interfere in the system of images but that interference itself underscored the body's mediation through the visual environment. The notion that one was "retriggered" or "reconditioned" by visual cues produced, for Schneemann, something of the phenomenal confusion one confronted in the barrage of images streaming rapid fire out of Vietnam. How to respond? How to locate oneself in relation to a conflict deeply mystified by both distance and the media? *Snows*, Schneemann recalls, "had to do with the toughening of the materiality of the media [...] they're here now, they're entering [...] and they're changing my body."³⁰

VALIE EXPORT: Inside, Outside, and Throughout the Apparatus

Technology as the sum of all tools serves thus not only the cultural transformation of nature, but also the tendency to transform and dissolve the body itself precisely inasmuch as technology is cultural activity [...] Technologies of reproduction pose the question about the body, and above all, the female body, most radically.³¹

Schneemann's work plays at the extremes of the biopolitics within the technoculture of the 1960s, the point at which Eros and death are submitted to media representation but inverted by the artist through tactics of bodily interference. In Vienna at roughly the same moment, VALIE EXPORT was embarking on her own investigation of the intersection between the body and media, in which the technologies of reproducing subjects played an especially crucial role in female subjectivity. Vienna's experimental cinema and art scene had already become legendary by 1968, ranging from the avant-garde

film of Peter Kubelka and Kurt Kren (an older generation of filmmakers than what concerns me here) to the dramaturgical excesses of Vienna Actionists Günther Brus, Hermann Nitsch, and Otto Mühl.³² Where a woman artist could position herself in relation to this milieu—one with an aggressively masculinist reputation—proved a foundational question to EXPORT’s practice. In 1968, for instance, EXPORT was one of the founding members of the Austrian Filmmakers Cooperative; and more often than not, she would locate that question at the point where the body and the media converged to produce a set of psychosexual, cultural and political identifications. That body would take on the character of a sign, becoming a kind of code. EXPORT’s very persona as an artist participates in this thinking: in 1966, she famously adopted the name VALIE EXPORT as her pseudonym, borrowing from the realm of commodity culture and the circulation of its advertising logo. (“Smart Export” was the one of the most popular brands of cigarettes in Austria at the time.) EXPORT’s presentation as an artist self-consciously appropriated both the verbal and visual rhetoric of that culture to comment upon the reproduction of women’s bare lives.

EXPORT’s work in the late 1960s and early 1970s examines the reproduction of sexual difference in the projection of sexual behaviors in the media.³³ She does so by stressing the publicness of representations of sexual difference: how the formation of feminine sexuality in particular is always subjected to the mechanisms of representational power, forces coextensive with what is assumed to be private and internalized. Foucault is at pains to point out in *The History of Sexuality* that the alleged repression of sexuality within modernity was, in actuality, that which generated sexuality as “a discursive fact”; insti-

tutional apparatuses produced a public language—a public representation—around sex with its own rules and distinct genealogy.³⁴ EXPORT’s practice converges with this sensibility by treating the body as part and parcel to the technological apparatus of media.

EXPORT’s collaborations with Peter Weibel subscribed broadly to a shared conception of expanded movie or cinema. In contrast to the distinctly psychedelic, even “West Coast” iteration of expanded cinema advocated by Gene Youngblood, Weibel and EXPORT’s reading of the term in part focused on the scene of projection—the particularities attending the screening of the work itself. As EXPORT herself put it:

In 1967, Peter Weibel and I developed our “Expanded Cinema” in Vienna. We examined the relationship between reality and the apparatus that registered it. [...] The expansion of our film work proceeded initially from the material concept; thus the “illusion” film was transformed into the material film, and in this way the foundations of the film medium were reflected. [...] The formal arrangement of the elements of film, whereby elements are exchanged or replaced by others [...] had an effect which was artistically liberating and yielded a wealth of new possibilities, such as film installations and the film-environment.³⁵

According to this definition, expanded cinema is a serious engagement with the “formal arrangement of film,” of which projection represents the ultimate part. The projection itself, as so many of EXPORT’s and Weibel’s works imply, is a kind of phantasm: a cone of hot air, a beam of light, clouds of dust. The projection is thus both the literal and metaphorical analogue for the illusions of film. Yet however transient and ephemeral, however bound to the province of

shadows, projection's effects are no less material or concrete, no less part of "reality." It is in this sense that the projection is the cinematic scene of ideology; and it is in exploring the apparatus that EXPORT will come to locate the biopolitics of sexual difference.

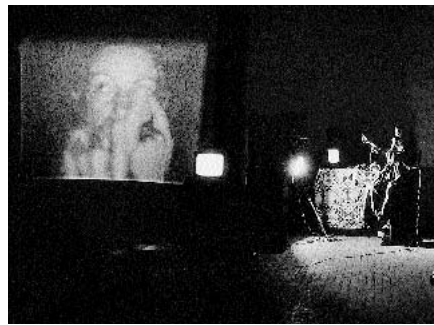
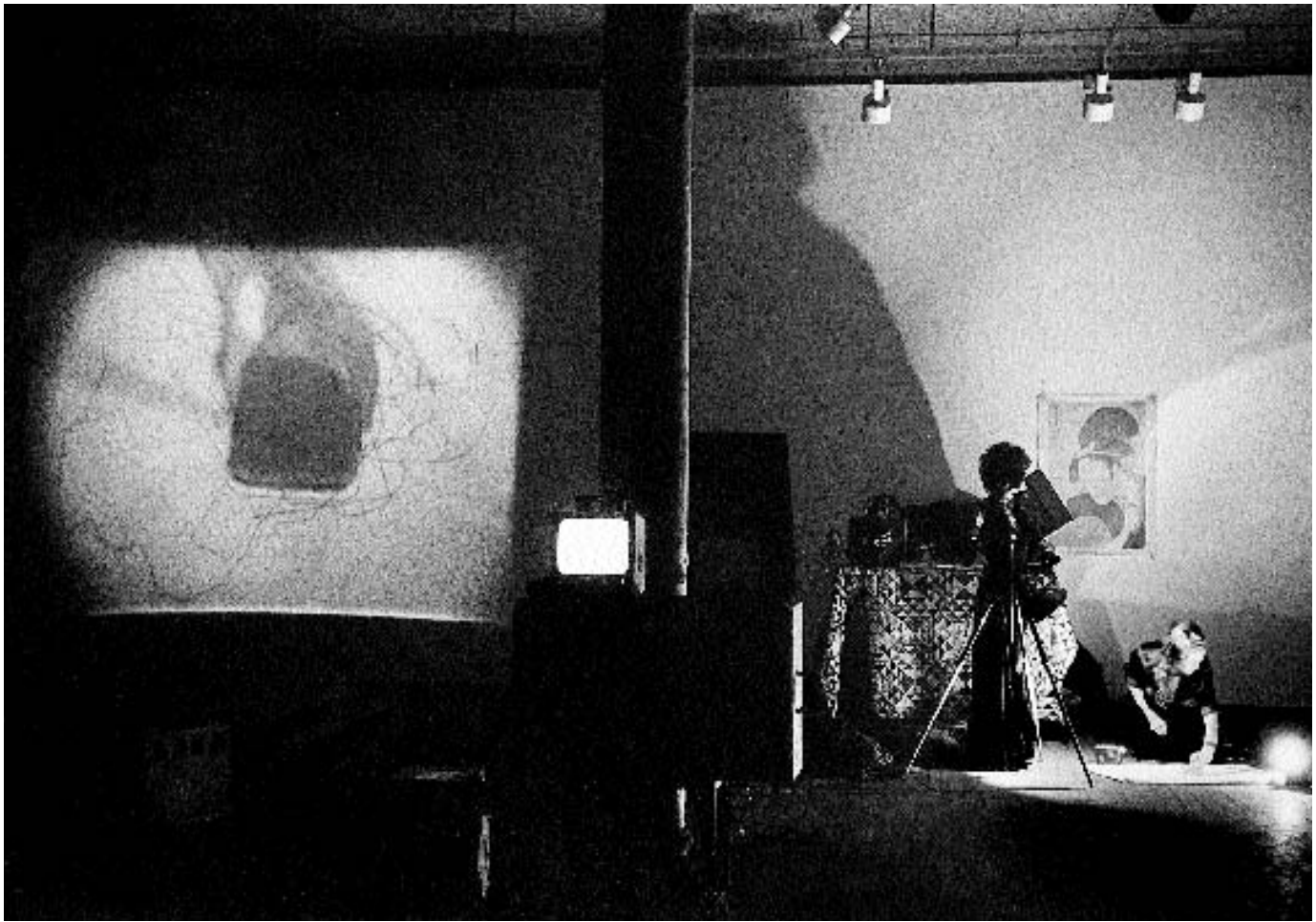
It hardly needs saying that questions of the apparatus, the ensemble of discrete technical and psychic operations that combine to produce cinematic meaning and its "reality," is a central category of film theory, evoking a range of debates in the work of Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Comolli, and Jacqueline Rose.³⁶ EXPORT herself has made clear reference to these accounts, which provide a theoretical armature for her conviction that expanded cinema challenged "the structures and conditions of visual and emotional communication, so as to render our amputated sense of perception capable of perception again."³⁷ In "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," his canonical discussion of the cinematic apparatus of 1970, Baudry draws upon the language of Louis Althusser (who in turn was drawing in part on Jacques Lacan) to argue that "the meaning effect produced does not depend only on the content of the images but also on the material procedures by which an image of continuity, dependent on the persistence of vision, is restored from discontinuous elements."³⁸ "The cinematographic apparatus and the "hallucinatory reality it creates" demanded a particular kind of critical parsing generally understood as a function of ideology. As apparatus theory was subsequently elaborated by Baudry and Metz, the production of ideology was increasingly located in the specific relation between camera and viewing subject. As if anticipating the mandates of apparatus theory (which would subsequently find among its most

cogent articulations in feminist film theory³⁹) EXPORT (sometimes with Weibel) would engage the structural terms of multimedia by embedding her own material presence within it.⁴⁰ Like so many artists of the sixties and early seventies— like Peter Campus, Anthony McCall, Mary Lucier, or Malcolm Le Grice— these investigations took form at the site of the work's projection.⁴¹

In Address Redress of 1968, EXPORT and Weibel engaged projection more literally to demonstrate the way media reproduces its audience through an attendant set of regulations and socialized behaviors— a virtual deployment of alliance, to borrow Foucault's terms. Although superficially about the autonomy of the live performer engaged in its projection, Address Redress (1968) takes on the thematics of mass psychology by way of an image recalling the visual archive of fascism. The projection features the scene of a crowd: hundreds of spectators are pressed up against a protective railing, creating a visual field unerring in its regularity and completeness. A performer (EXPORT or Weibel or any actor) was invited to stand before the film and make declarations, tell a joke, air complaints or discourse on whatever topic she chose. Periodically (and regularly) the crowd erupts into rounds of applause, as if to affirm the statements just made by the performer. Here EXPORT and Weibel enact a curious inversion. As audience members, we are generally expected to voice approval or dissent through ritualized displays of opinion— cheering or booing. In Address Redress, however, the tables are turned, bringing about a paradoxical effect: the projected image seems to answer whatever we may be saying, but its response is already determined in advance, a function of the looping and repetition of the projection mechanism. Address



Valie EXPORT, Address Redress, 1968



Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, 1972

In an enigmatic ritual of self-exploration, Joan Jonas opposes the "working woman" in a gender-neutral uniform to her alter-ego, the richly jeweled, luxuriously dressed, and masked seductress Organic Honey. Using numerous props, she thus stages common constructions of female identity. *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* is the first performance in which Jonas uses video, in the form of both recorded material as well as in a closed-circuit technique. As part of the live performance, she also acts for the camera— a dialogue that is simultaneously transferred to a monitor and a projection surface within the set, thus extending the performance space into the virtual space of the electronic image.

63–66 Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, 1972
 Photos: Peter Moore, Lo Guidice Gallery, New York, February 19, 1972,
 © Estate of Peter Moore / VBK, Wien/VAGA, NY

Redress, in other words, does not so much react to the subject's behavior; instead, it reproduces that behavior through the appearance of affirmation.

These issues found an acutely feminist reading in works where EXPORT's body is conflated with the projection event to become the locus of expanded cinema. They include EXPORT's two most notorious performances *Tapp- und Tastkino* [Tap and Touch Cinema] (1968) and *Genital Panic* (1969). Read together, they articulate the metaphorical penetration of the body by media and explore how the female body in turn confronts its own visual representation as the phenomenal horizon of its world, its physical environment. In *Tapp- und Tastkino* for instance, EXPORT stood on a busy street in Munich with a box strapped to her chest. The box, made to resemble a stage, was open on both ends; passersby solicited by Weibel were entreated to feel EXPORT's bare breasts hidden behind the box's makeshift curtains. *Genital Panic* saw EXPORT enter into the space of a darkened theater known for screening erotic films.⁴² With her hair wildly teased and the crotch cut out of her pants, EXPORT roamed up and down the aisles of the theater inveighing against the cinematic reproduction of women's bodies as sexualized objects of visual consumption.

Both *Tapp- und Tastkino* and *Genital Panic* speak to the filmic mediation of the female body relative to its spatial—specifically architectural—dimensions. Both blur the line between what is typically regarded as private or internal to female sexuality and what is deemed exposed and public in its pornographic representation: in the realm of biopolitics, where the licit and illicit is legislated by very public forms of discourse, such distinctions are themselves illusory. *Tapp- und Tastkino*, on the one hand, enlists the artist's body as the architectural locus for the

theatrical projection of female sexuality. The “theater,” the domain of phantasms and images, is a cavity coextensive with the artist's material body, here made open and available. Calling the work *Tapp- und Tastkino* [Tap and Touch Cinema], EXPORT stresses the haptic implications or physical consequences of the filmic medium, however much pornography is claimed as the realm of fantasy. She does so by situating that body in the harsh light of the public sphere, as if the clandestine world of pornographic cinema and its accoutrements—the upturned collar, the trench coats that disguise, the gestures that take place in theaters of darkness—was itself exposed in its nakedly public aspect. In contrast, *Genital Panic* takes the figure of the naked woman off the screen and into the aisles of the theater itself, thereby confusing the terms of the visual object with the subject of spectatorship.

No work addresses this conceit more completely than EXPORT's *Adjungierte Dislokationen* [Adjoined Dislocations] (1973 and 1975) in which the artist strapped two 8mm cameras to her front and back, at once filming the body's relationship to its surround and becoming the implied object of the two recordings. Her body is quite literally armored by—if not sutured into—the technologies of the apparatus. The films represent an experience of the body divided between recto and verso, but the panoramic sweep provided by the imagery of both does less to consolidate an image of bodily coherence than to produce a sense of dislocation, registering the temporal split between the movements of a simultaneous coming and going. This gesture is crucial to the reproduction of bare lives—the reproduction of the female body through its virtual dissection in media.

Joan Jonas: Bare Lives as Interrupted Signals

I like to reveal the mechanics of illusion.

Joan Jonas⁴³

Jonas, a New York-based artist, began working a short time after Schneemann and EXPORT. While she also made films, many of her performances were primarily organized around the medium of video. Influenced by the radical dance innovations of the Judson Memorial Church— she participated in workshops led by Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, and Trisha Brown— Jonas' understanding of task-oriented and minimalist dance was critical to the spare, repetitious work she would later produce. Just as EXPORT considered the dimensionality of the female body in expanded cinema, Jonas treated the body's spatial abstraction in video. This thinking, however, ran contrary to the conventional artistic politics of video in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which centered on both the rhetoric of its immediacy and the conviction that video, as opposed to television, was a democratizing medium. Video, in other words, was championed largely for its real-time properties: it was seen as a mode of representation that shored up the transparency of communication and those it represented.

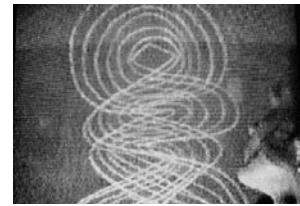
But Jonas would invert the use of video and its associated technologies in the service of disarticulating the body: both the body's imagined integrity and its seeming capacity to communicate in an unmediated fashion. While this was a moment in which the stakes of art and politics were set especially high, Jonas' implicit approach to video's representational imperatives was not in keeping with traditional activist aesthetics. For Jonas, the devices of the mirror, first and the feedback signal, second, act as metonyms for video's presentation of the body imagined as coherent, spatially and temporally immanent. Far from subscribing to the visual recuperation of

the body, a gesture advanced in certain feminist artistic circles, Jonas's work challenged the irreducibility of that body in terms of the mediated space it would occupy.⁴⁴ As Douglas Crimp has argued, the sense of dislocation so critical to her practice often took the form of de-synchronization: the disjunctive temporality between the body's action and its subsequent representation, a kind of endless (and fruitless) attempt to mesh the lived presence of the body with its mediated double its surroundings.⁴⁵ Crucially, this kind of doubling within her art, whether produced through mirrors or feedback loops, thematizes the technological reproduction of the female body not in terms of maternal plenitude— not in terms of psychic identification— but as a type of loss.⁴⁶

Consider Jonas' use of mirrors in her performances, which then pointedly undermine the expectations of bodily identification experienced on approaching this kind of reflective surface.⁴⁷ *Left Side Right Side* (1972) for instance, plays with the distortions produced by and within the culture of media as allegorized by the mirror. As Jonas writes:

What interested me in the piece was the construction of a self-reflective loop through which I regarded myself simultaneously in a mirror and a video monitor, both of which faced me while a video camera recorded the paired images through which I watched my two selves, the one in the mirror, which was reversed left and right, and the one in the monitor, which was a displacement of my own subjective orientation out into the space in front of me.⁴⁸

In short, Jonas would use both mirrors and video monitors to expose the delay between movement and representation; they served in her hands as devices of fragmentation or even



Joan Jonas, *Left Side Right Side*, 1972



Joan Jonas, *Funnel*, 1974

disidentification. Rather than consolidating the image of the body as reproduced in video transmission, Jonas' performance was a critical parsing of that body, dividing it into left and right, corresponding to the breakdown of binocular vision. The resulting video documents the confusion generated in her attempt to distinguish left from right during her performance. "The formal tensions," she observed, "remained tied to the kind of psychic tension that was behind the work as a whole."⁴⁹

The temporal delay between self and its mirror image found a more technologically mediated analogue in works that followed, particularly the performance *Funnel* (1974), which implicated the audience in its complex representation of space. Performed in both New York and Rome, *Funnel* involved a spatially ambiguous stage set that changed continuously throughout the work's duration: it was comprised of live performance, video images and sound. Two cloth curtain walls were hung from the ceiling perpendicular to the stage, breaking up the area into three sections. They appeared to recede dramatically into the background—like the funnel that is a visual cone—producing an illusion of radical depth for the audience facing them. As the performance wore on, the curtains were progressively stripped back so that the space was flattened over the course of Jonas's action. Other props were revealed in the process: cones and horizontal bars and a large hoop, but also video monitors and cameras. As Jonas explains the action:

A monitor placed in the left foreground reflected what was beside it, before it, and behind it, depending on the camera angle. One stationary camera was placed in front of the audience about twenty feet from the set, transferring an image to the monitor, a detail of the performance seen simultaneously with my activity [...] A

second portable camera was used for alternate angles of vision.⁵⁰

Jonas's description attests to the complexity of the space—the disjunction between the illusionistic depth of the stage and the elusive realms of the video monitor. Her activities within both registers of space, at once altering the physical coordinates of the stage and captured by the television screen, would set into motion a virtual hall of mirrors. "The intent," she suggested, "was to play with the illusion of the flat video image and to relate the space of the monitor and its image to that of the real space. The actual space is sometimes as ambiguous as that of the TV."⁵¹

Like many of her works from the period, *Funnel* takes place at the ambiguous nexus between "real" space and media space. As Crimp has suggested, "Presenting real space as an impenetrable illusion, Jonas has made the experience of performance equivalent [...] to film and videotape."⁵² When Jonas' alters the image on the television through feedback, she reveals how the representational integrity of the female body in media is, in fact, the product of a set of interrupted signals. The body itself takes on the status of information. Like information, not only does it become something to regulate and manage, but something to be analyzed and dispersed.

Vertical Roll (1972), Jonas's best-known video, demonstrates how bare lives function like interrupted signals, feedback loops endlessly filtered through the temporality of the video monitor. In *Vertical Roll*, there are no props, no costumes, just the stripped down mechanisms of a video camera, a monitor, and the body staged before it. The video is organized around an encounter of sorts: a performance of the body and "the vertical roll that results from two out-of-sync frequencies, the frequency signal sent to the monitor

and the frequency by which it is interrupted.”⁵³ Jonas instrumentalizes the temporal delay between signals for both representational and structural effect; she does so to the point where the video’s “narrative” founders on the non-contemporaneity of its technology. As the video stutters along, its picture broken at regular intervals, body parts appear in frame: an arm, a hand, a leg, a midriff. No image remains still, however, no image is stable enough to produce anything close to a coherent body. Jonas used sound as well to emphasize the non-synchronous quality of the image: a spoon striking a mirror, for example, or two blocks of wood struck together function as a primitive soundtrack that underscores the halting movement of the medium.

Yet the body dispersed and parsed by the signal is at the same time a body that interrupts and constructs its illusion. In several frames, Jonas holds her hand face down parallel to the ground, while the movement of the roll produces the appearance of the artist clapping. It is by virtue of such forced illusions that *Vertical Roll* exposes the seams behind the flow of visual information that would otherwise appear seamless. When Jonas directly faces the camera at the end of the video, breaking out of the circuit between video and monitor, we sense the self-conscious movement of her body as a form of information in its own right, its own signal, with all the implications for the mobilization of other “signals” contiguous with that body’s representation.

It is this sense that Jonas, *EXPORT*, and Schneemann understand bare lives not only in terms of their limit conditions— of the sovereign power of life and death wielded over them— but in the possibilities of performing the mechanics of biopolitical production. Each sees those

Notes

1 On Jonas and “de-synchronization,” see Douglas Crimp, “De-Synchronization in Joan Jonas’s Performances,” *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983.

2 This is to leave aside the issue of the existence of a “feminine aesthetic.” The topic is too long to consider in this essay, but suffice it to say that among the most sophisticated accounts of the problematic derive from feminist film theory. Among many other texts, see Teresa de Lauretis, “Rethinking Women’s Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory,” *Technologies of Gender*, Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

3 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Vintage, 1990, p. 142.

4 In addition to Agamben’s reading, discussed below, the notion of the biopolitical is explicit to recent accounts of globalization, most notably Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000.

5 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 4.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

7 Michael J. Arlan, *Living Room War*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1997.

8 Indeed, this is the historical moment of the birth control pill and its sweeping implications for the regulation of female sexuality and its liberation. On the wide-ranging debates on this topic, see Lara V. Marks, *Sexual*

Chemistry, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001.

9 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 106.

10 Grace Glueck, “For the TV Generation, Multimedia Techniques Bombard and Overload the Senses for Fun and Profit,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 1967.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

12 Carolee Schneemann, “Interior Scroll,” in *More than Meat Joy*, New York, Documentext, 1997, p. 238.

13 Schneemann recalls that her monologue was as much directed to the critics of her films as it was the artists themselves and it was by no means limited to men.

14 P. Adams Sitney, “Structural Film,” *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader*, eds. Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 226.

15 Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, p. 236.

16 The term “expanded cinema” needs to be defined relative to its North American and European contexts. As Malcolm Le Grice writes, Peter Weibel used it as early as 1967 to describe specifically formal developments within cinema, particularly those concerning “the reality of the projection situation itself.” As formulated by Gene Youngblood (whose book of the same title was published in 1970), expanded cinema refers more broadly to the cinematic exploration of “expanding consciousness” in a peculiar marriage of the psychedelic and technological. Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1977, p. 121.

17 Schneemann’s autobiographical trilogy includes *Fuses*, *Plumb Line* (1971), and *Kitch’s Last Meal*

(1973–1978).

18 Lauren Berlant, “Introduction: The Intimate Public Sphere,” in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997.

19 Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, p. 121.

20 Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, New York, Dutton, 1970, p. 41.

21 Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, p. 119.

22 Kate Haug, “An Interview with Carolee Schneemann,” in Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, eds., *Experimental Cinema*, p. 176.

23 Carolee Schneemann quoted in Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, p. 119.

24 Kate Haug, “An Interview with Carolee Schneemann,” p. 181.

25 For an expanded discussion of *Snows*, see my “Bridget Riley’s Eye/Body Problem,” *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2004.

26 I borrow the expression “the reality of the mass media” from a book of the same name by Niklas Luhmann, whose systems-based accounts of social organization find their counterpart in the logic of mass media. See Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. Kathleen Cross, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000.

27 From a statement (typed) on technical aspects of *Snows* and *E.A.T.*: (in *E.A.T.* journal) see Carolee Schneemann papers, The Getty Research Institute, Accession no. 940003. As Schneemann observed: “My problems with technology are concrete, personal; my

difficulties with using technicians are mechanical. I want to work with the gestures of machines: to expose their mechanical action as part of the total environment to which it contributes its particular effect. I would like technicians to be interchangeable with performers whenever possible." (Ibid.)

28 Carolee Schneemann papers, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA. Accession no, 95001, folder 2.1 b. box 2/1967-71.

29 Schneeman interview with the author, October 12, 2000, New York, NY.

30 Schneeman interview with the author, October 12, 2000, New York, NY.

31 VALIE EXPORT, "The Real and its Double: The Body," Discourse 11 (Fall/Winter 1988-89), pp. 5 and 7.

32 Peter Weibel, "Avant-Garde Film in Austria: Current Activities," Studio International. 190.978 (Nov/Dec 1975), p. 214.

33 Chrissie Iles, "VALIE EXPORT: Body/ Space/Splitting/Projection," Ob/De+ Con(Struction) (exhibition catalogue), Philadelphia, Moore College of Art and Design, 2001, p.35. As Iles puts it, EXPORT's was a "determination to challenge the mediation of the female body by technology."

34 Foucault, History of Sexuality, p. 11.

35 VALIE EXPORT, "Expanded Cinema as Expanded Reality," (an edited version of a lecture delivered by VALIE EXPORT at "The Essential Frame—Austrian Independent Film 1995-2003," a two-day program of screenings and talks on Austrian independent filmmaking curated by Mark Webber and held in London, May 31—June 1 2003. Posted online <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/con->

[tents/03/28/expanded_cinema.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/con-tents/03/28/expanded_cinema.html).

36 In addition to Baudry, the canonical essays include Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," Screen, 16.2 (Summer 1975); Jean-Louis Comolli, "Techniques and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field," Movies and Methods Vol II, ed. Bill Nichols, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985; and the feminist critique of apparatus theory in Jacqueline Rose, "The Cinematic Apparatus—Problems in Current Theory," Sexuality in the Field of Vision, London, Verso, 1986. Also see Stephen Heath and Teresa de Lauretis, eds., The Cinematic Apparatus, London, Macmillan, 1980.

37 VALIE EXPORT, "Expanded Cinema as Expanded Reality."

38 Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader, ed. Phillip Rosen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 306–307.

39 See, for example, Jacqueline Rose, "The Cinematic Apparatus—Problems in Current Theory."

40 Silvia Eiblmayr, for instance, notes that EXPORT turns her body into a "movie screen" or takes on the "status of a picture." See Silvia Eiblmayr, "'Split Reality': The Structure of Representation in VALIE EXPORT's Work," in VALIE EXPORT (Exhibition Catalogue), Linz, Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, 1992, p. 117.

41 On the American history of this phenomena, see Chrissie Iles, Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art (exhibition catalogue), New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2002.

42 There is some controversy as to what kind of theater this actually was, although it is now widely accepted

that this was not a pornographic movie theater as it has been suggested in some accounts. Nor was EXPORT holding a gun during her performance, as it has also been claimed. On this history, see Kristin Stiles, "Corpora Vilia," Ob/De+Con(Struction), p. 32, footnote 7.

43 Quoted in Andrea Jahn, "The Encounter with the Gaze behind the Mask," in Joan Jonas: Performance, Video, Installation 1968-2000, (Exhibition Catalogue), Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart, Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz Verlag, p. 57, footnote 14.

44 Joan Jonas (with Rosalind Krauss), "Seven Years," Drama Review, 19.1 (March 1975), p. 13.

45 See Crimp, "De-Synchronization in Joan Jonas's Performances," pp. 8–10.

46 Or, as Rosalind Krauss would argue, it is a kind of narcissism. Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," in Video Culture: A Critical Investigation, ed. John Hanhardt, Rochester, NY, Video Studies Workshop Press, 1986.

47 This is why, one imagines, references to Lacan's canonical account of the mirror stage are so prevalent in the literature on Jonas. See, e.g. Andrea Jahn, "The Encounter with the Gaze behind the Mask," in Joan Jonas: Performance, Video, Installation 1968–2000, p. 64.

48 Jonas, "Seven Years," p. 14.

49 Ibid., p. 15.

50 Ibid., p. 17.

51 Ibid., p. 18.

52 Douglas Crimp, "Joan Jonas's Performance Works," Studio International, 192.982 (July/August 1976), p. 10.

53 Joan Jonas, Scripts and Descrip-