

Joan Jonas by Karin Schneider

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Karin Schneider: In your current exhibition at Location One,¹ there are six monitors showing your video. Pieces made in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s; one drawing from *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* [2004–06]; various photographs of performances and drawings made during other performances; one detail of the installation *Lines in the Sand* [2002]; and an excerpt from *Double Lunar Rabbits* [2010]. Why did you choose those particular pieces?

Joan Jonas: From the very beginning I have invented ways of making drawings in relation to performance, video, the monitor, the camera, and the space. In curating my own show, I chose examples of almost all of the drawings that I've made in performance or in relation to the camera. A physical drawing (representing a snake) from *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* is there, so is the video that shows me making that drawing. From the installation *Lines in the Sand* is a video of repeated chalk drawings of the sphinx and a pyramid drawn onto a blackboard. I also included drawings made when I performed the choreographed movement and video for Robert Ashley's *Celestial Excursions* [2003]. And new work from *Double Lunar Rabbits*—ink drawings on a curved screen that I designed in Japan last January.

KS: You were compulsively drawing in every single monitor.

JJ: The act of watching somebody draw is very intense. And when the motion or the gesture is repeated over and over again it becomes a kind of ritual.

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KS: We are watching you while you are deep inside yourself.

JJ: Well, that's true. I have to concentrate on the drawing or else I can't make it, but the fact is that in making a drawing in front of an audience or for the camera, I'm doing it in relation to a context, so it comes out differently. I'm not just focusing on the drawing, but on the moment of the performance. That's what interests me about making drawings in performance, either with an audience or with a camera.

KS: What's the difference?

JJ: With a camera, I'm making a drawing in relation to the frame. I'm concentrating on that space. With an audience, there is that as well, but I also perform for the audience. The drawing is altered because of this double focus.

KS: In your work, it's never just one action. There's this fragmented quality in which you see a lot of things at the same time. When you began making performances, that was not the norm. You introduced multiple, simultaneous actions.

JJ: There were hints of that, for instance, in [Claes] Oldenburg's happenings. You walked into the store-front and went from one room to another. In each room something was happening all at the same time, continuously. It was an experience you put together.

KS: You integrated all those moments into the same room. At Location One, after understanding your compulsion to produce these drawings, I left seeing this permanent network of traces and body movements around drawing. Drawings became the skeleton of the show. Then I saw these small drawings on black and white paper in various sizes from your performance in Robert Ashley's *Excursions*. Your hand hitting a stone

with chalk producing sounds and scribbles in *My New Theater III: In the Shadow a Shadow* [1999]. It's this uninterrupted world of drawing. Sometimes it's possible to identify some images—a dog's face or a Celtic motif. Yet many of these drawings are scribble drawings: they evoke in me this phenomenological, almost tactile experience.

JJ: It must have awakened some desire in you. There are some actual scribbles, but mostly basic forms. Sometimes I draw around projections of shadows trying to catch the figures, or I catch the form of a cone being held by a performer in the video feedback. I draw the movement of forms.

KS: It's the sense that they're not there. I felt it as physical.

JJ: Oh, the presence of the act?

KS: Yes, it's almost like a touch

JJ: That's what the drawing in performance is. It's there and then it's not there. That's why people love dance, because you identify with the body and the movement in the moment.

KS: Yes. We have then the original text, you, the act, and the drawing. This is particularly interesting because you work with language. There's a sense of disruption. Your drawings show us precise and minimal actions. You disintegrate a given language that we are familiar with to form another kind of language. There is a sense of innovation in working with these writers that you bring to us in your work—(Jorge Luis Borges, H. D., Aby Warburg—you fragment their narratives with multiple simultaneous actions. I see it as a political action wherein you present a play space for me to form new relationships with these texts within multiple-port language/objects/actions.

JJ: Maybe what you're talking about is that this language, which is visual, becomes woven into the total form or text of the piece so it's no longer separated. I'm putting oil the parts together continuously and they become a kind of unity. I'm aware of the relation and interconnectedness of the supposedly disparate media.

KS: Yes. I see your work as the formation of a new gestalt. There is a (non)self-organizing tendency to bring us a sense of a whole, the way we used to understand the relationship of a figure in a field in painting. This has happened in your work since the beginning. But I want to ask a fundamental question: What are the politics of performing a drawing as opposed to just presenting it? How does the negotiation between process and product affect meaning?

JJ: In performance, from the very beginning, although I was always working against it, there is a sense of loss. A drawing in a performance is there, but it's not on object. It's a gesture. An act. I save my drawings, by the way. It's not like I throw them away, but I don't treat them as precious objects. I'm very interested in the different ways you use your body in relation to drawing: your fingers, your arm, your whole body. Movement itself is part of the process of making the drawing. The chalk drawings, of course, are here, and then they're not here. The drawings exist in relation to that fleeting moment. In the very early works I used poles and sticks to extend my body. Not always for drawing, but to trace lines to delineate space or to move with. Circles and sticks. Circles and lines. The basic elements of drawing, actually. My work is accumulative, as you said. Over the years, I reuse old ideas. It's a building up.

KS: But in the pieces that I've seen most recently *Mirage* [1976] at MoMA and *Reading Dante III*

[2008/2010] at Yvon Lambert. it's a different group of ideas.

JJ: *Mirage* was a 1976 performance that I translated into an installation in 1994 for a show at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam- I translated five performance works into this form called "installation." Again, in 2000, I went back into *Mirage* and reedited some footage that I'd never used before. From the very beginning, I was influenced by rituals of other cultures, in mythology, in looking at early Chinese art. When I began to do performance, I thought: What am I doing in this context of the art world. of friends? Why am I getting up in front of people, moving around and doing tasks? Then I thought of how people in other cultures work in relation to one another. A ritual is for the community. I began to look at the way simple gestures, repeated. connect the onlooker to the performer. Sol started to work with my own rituals related to repeated. simple tasks or continuous movements with particular sounds, materials. and objects that I developed in relation to particular spaces.

KS: There's always this component of the absurd in these actions. In *LeftSideRightSide* [1972]. for example, you are facing a monitor next to a mirror with one camera at your back and one camera in front of you. As a result. we see you in two different sizes. The mirror on the right is bigger than the monitor on the left.

JJ: What interests me about a situation like *LeftSideRightSide* is directly related to video technology and the closed-circuit structure.

KS: Instant feedback.

JJ: Between the camera and the monitor, and then the mirror. I began performances with mirrors and then I switched to the video monitor, which I considered an ongoing mirror. *LeftSideRightSide* is about putting

those two things together in the ambiguity of the flat space of the monitor. When I'm saying, "This is my left eye. this is my right eye," looking at the monitor and the mirror, I really got confused about which was left and which was right because they're reversed.

KS: We get confused as well.

JJ: Behind me there is a blackboard on which I draw at one point. One camera behind the mirror and monitor frames my face and the blackboard, while the other camera behind me frames the monitor and the mirror. The camera facing me feeds into the monitor, so that I see my image both reflected in the mirror and in the monitor, as does the camera behind me. The video cuts between these two images and sometimes juxtaposes them. What interests me is to set up these situations where you can't really perceive the space: you have to piece it together, so, in the virtual space of the monitor. which, for me, is a box. But the idea of fragmentation has partly to do with the idea of cutting and pasting in film editing, which has now become part of our language in relation to the computer. The jump cut. for instance, can be literal in relation to a movement.

KS: You were dealing with this new gestalt years ago and now it's recurrent in our daily experience. In *Mirror Piece* (1969). we see a body with no upper part and no head, but with four legs and two arms. We have, in this image, the destruction of a given gestalt we take for granted. You break this image to construct to de-structure-the given gestalt of the body. You used a mirror to create new configurations out of familiar parts. It delivers a shock to the system. It is a body, but it's not the body I know. The composition of the parts of this new gestalt is made of the broken body parts of the old one.

JJ: Because the media I chose, like the mirror, naturally fragmented the space Borges had a big influence on me. His view of the universe as being this big, infinite structure, a library, is fascinating. The title of the short story "The Garden of Forking Paths" [1941] suggests a universe.

KS: Yes. And you can read it in multiple ways. I'm intrigued by the way you use the mirror as an object in your work, particularly in your first pieces. I prefer to think about it more as a "transitional object" than in Loconian terms. [Jacques) Lacon defines the mirror stage as the first identification we have with an image. It is at this stage that the baby separates himself/herself from the symbiotic unit with the mother. The mirror stage provides the child an image of her/his body as a whole; it's also the beginning of the libidinal relationship with our body image. But, according to [D W] Winnicott, a child first encounters what he calls a "transitional object." The transitional object comes after symbiosis and separation, but before forming any whole relationships. It is a stepping stone to get from a narcissistic self to relationships without losing connection to something, be it the mother's breast or the old traditional gestalt. At this time one is not ready to be a whole human being. A transitional object offers a contained space to play where the child learns to master his/her anxiety. It is a free space and a neutral area of experience.

Culture can be defined as the predominating attitude that characterizes the functioning of a group or organization. The mirror is a clichéd image of narcissism in our culture. For me, you use the mirror as a transitional object. That is the reason I connect your work more to the realm of subculture - a group of

people with a culture, whether distinct or hidden, which differentiates them from the larger culture to which they belong. Within this generated neutral space, as Winnicott explains, is how I perceive your relationship with the mirror. It's much more than a libidinal space; I see it as a suspension of narcissism. It's really an object to play with to form this new gestalt I am discussing with you.

JJ: I'm not just using it as a narcissistic reflection, but I was thinking of that too. You can't *not* think of it. The mirror was the first device I used to alter the perception of an audience in relation to the performance space. Later, I worked in a deep landscape one quarter of a mile away in *Jones Beach Piece* [1970]. I was interested in how distance alters the image and sound. Then, in the closed-circuit system of the video monitor, camera, and projection, the audience saw *details* of a live performance simultaneously with the live event. Finally, in *The Juniper Tree* [1976], a literary text became a medium and was combined with ideas from these earlier devices. In a way, these were oil spaces for play in which I distanced myself from the viewer in and behind the object. It was my way of developing a language of the *moving image*.

In my first indoor performance, *Mirror Piece II* [1970], I wore the mirror costume you see in *Wind* [1968] and I recited lines from Borges's short stories in *Labyrinth* [1962] as I moved slowly and stiffly in place, causing the small mirrors sewn on my costume to jingle or chime. In *Mirror Piece I*, about seventeen performers holding heavy gloss mirrors and pieces of transparent gloss slowly moved in different patterns facing the audience in a large gymnasium. The mirrors fragmented the space, the audience, and the performers. On another

level, I was interested in how an audience might feel uneasy as they were caught looking at themselves in the performance. In one way, narcissism is the nature of the medium.

KS: I am haunted by that video image of your three heads in *Left Side Right Side*. I want to go back to this image of you.

JJ: I never thought of three. I think of two.

KS: You have one double identity as the witness and as a writer, right? But you're also acting.

JJ: Okay, I understand. For instance, in *The Shoppe, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, there is one voiceover of me speaking the words of the art historian Aby Warburg. I play his part in my identity within: I always merge with the subject I'm trying to understand and represent. Then, I'm playing the part of the nurse in the hospital - Dio: Beacon could be thought of as the sonotoneum. And I'm also one distant character in the hospital. So yes, I'm playing multiple parts. It has to do with the medium I chose; it fragments the body but also reproduces it, repeats it.

The first time I became another was when I created the persona of the erotic seductress Organic Honey, through which I followed the process of my own theatricality. Then I entered into various fairy tales and played the female characters. I really *entered* into those characters. Now it's a different character transference. H. D. wrote *Helen in Egypt* [1961] about Helen of Troy. But I entered into H. D.'s character - she was an eccentric poet who wrote in the late 1930s, so I also entered into that historical period. [Sigmund] Freud analyzed her not long after Warburg's turn in the sanatorium. And with Warburg I have a very personal relationship. I had seen the Snake Dance at the Hopi reservation in the 1960s, before it was closed to outsiders. I never referred to it in my work out of respect for the Hopi culture, but I could

return to that experience through Warburg's writings on the Hopi rituals that he witnessed.

KS: In *Reading Dante III* you are the reader, the choreographer, and the artist. Three characters there as well.

JJ: Yeah, that's one reason it is called "performance." I think of it as cooking. Early in my life I focused on cooking, so it became one metaphor. You work deliberately and then the chemical reactions take place. It's the way all these things are put together: the writing, the pictures, the sound. The process takes time.

KS: Although your work refers to literature and language, it has a melancholic quality that perforates this solid block of culture. This melancholic quality brings the beholder into one neutral space, one space where I suspend my perception to experience your (un) threading of drawings with yourself with Dante, with Warburg, with H. D., and others as one gesture of cooking, eating, and expelling scrawls of this defunct "culture." That's the way I see your work. How long does it take you to do one piece?

JJ: Well, I worked on the Donte series for almost three years. There's a slow development; I continuously re-edit the material. Each period of work has one certain kind of continuity. In the 1970s, all my pieces were variations on one technical/spatial problem: the relation of the camera to the monitor or projection, to the space, to the performer.

KS: It has been said that melancholia is related to a sense of doubt. Maybe that is the reason I connect your work with both the center and the periphery. It is always on the stage of waiting to be defined.

JJ: I see myself as a bit primitive in the way that I approach things, not as a classical artist. That's why I was at first interested in the beginnings of cultures, in

early Greek art, but not the classical period, in the early Renaissance, and in early Chinese culture. In the video *The Big Mirror* at Location One, I'm drawing in relation to a prose poem by William Carlos Williams. "The Descent of Winter" [1928]:

It was a big mirror. First he painted in a river coming in over from the door and curving down greenywhite nearly the whole length of it and very wide to fall in a falls into the edge of another river that ran all along the bottom all the way across. Only a little of the water to be seen.

Did you hear it? I'm drawing a picture of his description of the painting on the big mirror. It's a way of drawing in relation to something else, to make a picture of what you're hearing as you're listening to it. Do you remember the chalk drawing on the canvas?

KS: Yes. That's the piece with the sounds that I adore.

JJ: I am cutting back and forth from drawing on one surface, a canvas, to another, a small slate. Back to *Left Side Right Side*: using video in my performances gave me a way to make a kind of double space.

There are not just two physical things always going on, but two actual time experiences, the live one and the space in the video—a detail of the live action that is discontinuous with the live action. It reflects the way that we live in the world, and our brains. We're always experiencing different things at the same time.

KS: But somehow some images we absorb and others we don't.

JJ: You have to pay attention. I have the freedom to put two seemingly unrelated things together. It's also a surrealistic device.

KS: Yes, it is. For me, this piece also relates to the way we use language in relationship to images. You play with your/our (un)conscious. You are also playing a *fort/do* game with your own image in front of the mirror and the monitor. Freud's *fort/do* game comes from his observation of his grandson's need to control the disappearance and reappearance of his toy. When the toy was pulled out of sight, the child said "fort," meaning "gone." When the child reeled the toy back he said "do," meaning "there." The repetition of the verbal signs with the repetition of the action produced a substitute for the object. This negative act is our first step into language. But in this piece, the act of negativity, the use of language as a substitute for the image, is disrupted. You sometimes *move* your arms in a way that is opposite to your verbal description of their *movement*. There is a (dis)trust of language. Language acquires multiple meanings. Just as in making your drawings that appear and disappear in the monitors. I think you are doing the opposite of Freud's *fort/da*. Your drawings exist and then they are erased, and while this could be construed as an act of forgetting, this act of erasing also makes us say "there." That is the difference between the act of drawing and the drawing itself.

JJ: Well, also in Surrealism is this idea of hiding and revealing things. In covering or hiding something, the viewer is momentarily left with a blank space—as when a word is erased and when the space outside the frame, while not visible, is referenced. One invents or fills in. I was very influenced by Noh theater when I first went to Japan in 1970. In Noh, a visual theater, you see an object simply covered with a cloth. When something is covered, it's mysterious.

In my video performances the audience sees part of an image as it is framed by the camera. They also see what's outside the frame, often from a different point of view. In *Unes in the Sand* I began to make big chalk drawings on large pieces of black paper that I then crumpled up, using my entire body, and threw away. This was a small shock for the audience; they were startled, and as the breath draws in, a blank space occurs which is then filled with a reaction of some sort.

KS: To a child, when you cover an object you make it disappear.

JJ: It's the same for adults. In a way, in a magic show, something is covered and then revealed and something that wasn't there before emerges. My stepfather was an amateur magician. This was another one of my models for making performances creating illusions of magical appearances. But I reveal the way they're done, I'm not interested in hiding the method.

KS: You're also dealing with the absurd; perhaps that's the Surrealist component.

JJ: In *Mirage*, James Nares is blowing through my metal cones, making sustained, hollow sounds. That long sound of the horn really permeates and relates to the projected film of chalk drawings. On the parallel projection is re-edited footage of a performance and chalk images from the 1970s. I also inserted images shot off television because I wanted to reflect the world at that time. Here we were in our studios, very esoteric spaces, and outside in the world something else is going on. We felt marginal. The Vietnam War, [Richard] Nixon, Watergate - I wanted to juxtapose those two realities to alter one's sense of the time.

KS: It creates a very precise context for the work.

Another unorthodox aspect of your oeuvre is the hypnotic character of your performances.

JJ: It comes from thinking, What is ritual? The repetition that brings an audience into the time of the piece so that a sense of time is shared. I bring the audience into each piece in different ways to quiet them down. It's a series of actions, setting a mood with sound or music, text, and movement. I don't think of it as hypnotic at all. Perhaps this perception of the hypnotic comes from a sense of the dream structure or nonlinear narrative.

When I'm making my pieces I constantly step in and out of them, looking to see what the audience will see. I make an action and step back so I can see what it looks like and to check the timing. This way I can let go in the performance. The whole performance should be a continuous movement with variations in tempo, intensity, etcetera. It takes a long time to develop that. It is partly linking of the parts thematically and in relation to movement, and also solving simple problems like: how do I pick up the mask, and put down the newspaper? What do I do in between?

KS: Did you see Allan Kaprow's works?

JJ: No. I didn't. But the idea of the happening was in the air. Did you ever see *Wind* [1968]? David Antin said it looked shamanistic, whatever. I didn't mean it to be shamanistic, though my research at the time was into forms of shamanism. It was very ritualistic though, with these strange figures in mirror costumes moving stiffly across the landscape.

KS: I never saw it as a shamanistic film. I come from Latin America, and I always connected it with [Heli Oiticica and his *Parangoles*]. These were costumes made from layers of colored cloth that transform

the spectator into "participator." Oiticica used the word "structure-action" to define them. He called the attention to the "act" and the phenomenon of dance. For him, the *Porongole* reveals its fundamental character as an "environment-structure" in which the person wearing the colored cape has a non-fragmented experience, freeing him or herself for an inventive ploy. It was a period in which Oiticica was very active as a member of the Mangueira samba school; he was very in tune with marginal culture. In Portuguese, the word "marginal" has special connotations: it refers to underground cultural activity as much as to marginalized groups of people and outlaws. At that time, blacks were not allowed in the Museum of Modern Art in Rio. In 1965, Oiticica brought some members of the Mangueira school to attend an opening at the museum, wear the *Porongotes*, and dance. But when the *sombistas* arrived at the museum, they were not allowed to enter. Samba, at that time, had not yet been incorporated by the upper class.

JJ: That's amazing. I didn't know that. The costumes in *Wind*—the capes and black masks—come from seeing the *Fontemosa* films by George Fronzoni. They evoked a detective mystery. I also considered how the costume altered the movement of performers. They moved differently, such as when they also had pieces of wood tied to their feet for a piece in *Jones Beach Piece*. I was marginal in a different way: I didn't move to the margin, I simply began there and, in no sense, remained.

KS: When I saw *Wind*, the multiple mirrors sewn to the costumes became the focus of my attention. I was seeing what was outside of the frame; my gaze was decentralized.

JJ: I thought about magic shows and witches, those women who were outside of the culture and who were knowledgeable.

KS: I saw this piece as land art.

JJ: That's interesting, because I made that film in 1968, and later Richard Serra and I went to visit Michael Heizer's site and then (Robert) Smithson in Salt Lake City, before he made *Spiral Jetty* [1970]. But Borges was the reason I started using mirrors. I recited his descriptions of mirrors in an indoor version of *Wind*.

KS: Yes, you're walking in this land and constantly reflecting the universe. It's a poetical way to understand land art. Your most recent piece, *Reading Dante III* at Yvon Lambert Gallery— I was trying to find in this work what cannot be articulated as metalanguage. I got stuck first with your lamps and the way they illuminated your drawings. Then on one of the screens I saw glimpses of the footage you produced at 11 Sessions at Orchard in 2007 where we John Miller, Matt Keegan, and I— invited eleven artists to produce a piece at Orchard in one session per day. You recorded individual audience members reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* [c.1308-21] while sitting in the window at Orchard. I was there when you were filming them. The images of that session gave me the sense again of having a tactile experience of visuality. The wooden walls at Orchard related to the bench I was sitting on at the gallery. It was the same wood as the tables in the show at Yvon Lambert. This sensation, combined with the texture of the chalk on the gray wall, the texture of the suspended lamps, and the semicircle of light on the floor, made me think of *Reading Dante III* as a carnal experience. And the image of the window at Orchard in perspective, the multiple reflections of the gloss, made me perceive

myself inside a visual cone. For a split second, I become the vanishing point of Orchard's window in the video.

I had this sense of perspective. I wonder how much you planned the experience of what I am describing to you. Or did this happen by chance? That was the moment I felt that I was in a room rather than an exhibition space.

JJ: Oh, that's nice. I did think of this installation as a room in a house, not as a gallery. The gray walls, but particularly the metal and paper lamps I designed to illuminate the space, and drawing directly onto the walls, diminished the formality of a gallery. I like that everybody has a different way of seeing it. While I wasn't thinking of perspective, I did consider linear proximity of projections, furniture, and drawings. What was interesting to me about making the piece was Dante's narrative, and how it becomes inherent to the installation. I called it *Reading Dante* because it gave me freedom to work with the text on an everyday level. I wanted normal people rather than professional actors to read the *Divine Comedy* out loud, to take it away from its unattainable elevation as iconic literature. Then I featured my recorded voice—disembodied, intercut—reading also, often repeating what others had read.

I shot things portly while traveling to invited situations and portly in my studios or surroundings. I drew upon footage gathered from four locations: Orchard in the Lower East Side; a wooded spot I summ er at in Canada where I shot with children; a church in Como, Italy, where I did a shadow play; and various locales in Mexico City I shot in the main plaza, the Zócalo, and also this fantastic location that the artist Carlos Amorales took me to the Lava Circle, with the monoliths around it at the Notional University [UNAM]. Since I was a child I've been

drawn to Mexican art and culture. I wanted to read Dante in Mexico to shift from a European medieval reference to the Aztec sense of hell. It interests me always that the meanings of words shift depending on the context. The work is an amalgam of locations and spaces.

KS: That's the first time that I understood this new gesture in your work. I also felt I was entering in the sky in your Dante's world.

JJ: Dante, as it exists now, is about the interrelationship of all the different parts. All the drawings on the walls are fragments of drawings I made in the live performances of *Reading Dante* in Sydney, Yokohama, New York, and in rehearsals and while thinking of Dante. I took them and collaged them in different configurations. Some drawings are made in relation to the movements of the figures on the screen or in the live space. It's not explicitly spelled out. Then there's a projection where I'm drawing and erasing over the video footage of *The Night Street Improv, salon*. One night in 1976, while I was working on my performance *Mirage*, I organized an improvisation near Woll Street, which was deserted at night. Andy Monn was the cameraman. Pat Steir and I played with several of my props—nine-foot metal cones and a six-foot metal hoop—while singing "Row Row Row Your Boat" and running about. An unidentified man joined us. I loved [Federico] Fellini and this was as close as I got to that particular poet of film. Anyway, this portion naturally became *Purgatory*. You know, suspended time where you're not going and you're not coming. The ghostliness of the figures in the night, the endless tracings of chalk over them.

KS: Joan Jonas has this ability to show us her world behaving inside the structure of Dante's poem with

drawings, text, action, video, light, sound, and objects. This complex expanded structure is organized very subtly in the Yvon Lambert space. As you walk around the room, there are some chance encounters with the text, either in the form of sound, images, or voiceover. Visually, they're somehow disconnected from Dante's poem as we normally understand it- you choose a polymorphous aesthetic to use minimal visual forms as words and sounds.

JJ: All of the material is equally important. I describe my work in terms of poetry I have thought of the structure of poetry from the very beginning. By coincidence I studied modernist poetry: H.D., [W.B.] Yeats, Pound, and [Ernest] Fenollosa. They were very interested in looking at Japanese forms, such as the haiku. It's a telegraphic form in which you're saying something in very few words; you're not using whole sentences. And poetry exists visually on a page- I use the structure of poetry very consciously.

KS: Yes, and modern poetry has this intention to murder formal language. You create a visual and sound text on top of the classical text that maintains the original text as a counter phantom-limb experience with a mirror. The text is not there to bring relief to our brains as we look at the work trying to mirror with the text. The text is there in fragments as a

space to create a distant proximity between me, you, and the text.

JJ: I think you have to sit through it several times to get the poetry. It took me a long time to understand even the fragments I used. But I find certain sections really moving every time I hear them, like when Adorn Pendleton reads from *Purgatory*. There's this terribly painful story of the children in the tower, but I felt that it was a story we could read now in the newspapers, so I included it.

KS: When the women were singing, I welled up.

JJ: It's the voice, the beautiful sopranos. I love when the women sing together. "It seems that you can see our future lot." I kept reading these verses over and over again. The translation, of course, I don't know what it's like in Middle Italian. It's amazing how the text can live now. There's that very powerful image in *Purgatory* when Dante hugs someone and there's nothing there. I've heard it so many times, but it still gets me.

The exhibition is located in New York at the Jonas Meisner Foundation from March 20 to May 8, 2010.
http://www.locotion.com/jonasmeisnerfoundation