

Joan Simon interviewed by Barbara Clausen, January 29, 2021

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Barbara Clausen: Hi everyone. This is Barbara Clausen. I'm the curatorial [research] director of The Joan Jonas Knowledge Base. This is an interview with Joan Simon. Today is the 29th of January, 2021. And we are very happy and honored that, Joan, you took the time, are taking the time to speak with us. Thank you so much. And we're going to jump right in and I'm going to ask you if you could tell us a bit about yourself, but also how did you get to know about Joan's work, and when?

Joan Simon: Right. In 1970, I moved to New York and was living downtown. And there were various pods of artists and various places that people gathered, whether it was Food Restaurant, or 112 Greene Street, or Paula Cooper, or 98 Greene Street, or The Kitchen. And it was—I hate to use this expression—but it's kind of appropriate. It was sort of like a floating crap game every night. You'd go someplace else. Something would be surprising. You didn't really know what you might see. And some of those groups intersected and some didn't, like you may have been involved with Anthology Film Archives, or you might've been involved with [the] St. Mark's poetry world, or Alanna [Heiss]'s floating real estate of things turning up, whether they were outside, or inside, before she had settled on the...and agreed to...what made it possible to have the Clocktower, but she had a lot of other things. So mostly it was by word of mouth. I know there were flyers, I remember having seen them, but I don't know how they got around or what...it was more hearing things. So, that's how I would have seen *Organic Honey*, [it would've] been one of many, many, many, many things.

Barbara Clausen: And did you meet Joan personally at that time, or was it really more of a--

Joan Simon: You know, I can't pinpoint when I actually met Joan. I think it was kind of...we were probably in the same rooms, and at the same parties, and at the same bars. I know by the time of *Juniper Tree*, she was a very good friend of Susan Rothenberg, who was a very good friend of mine, and I know Susan brought me to that performance. So, I can't...there are lots of memories, there're just too many. But, going to see *Organic Honey* would have been like going to see Trisha Brown, it would have been going to see Lucinda [Childs] or The Grand Union, or different

Bob Wilson performances, or a lot of different poetry readings at St. Marks. It was very intermingling.

Barbara Clausen: It's really great that you're talking to us a bit about the context of that time. We're also trying, on the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, to present some essays about that time and some maps and some information to give people a bit of the context. And I also--

Joan Simon: It would be important to talk to people who were regulars at Anthology. For example, I wasn't. I assume you've spoken to Richard Serra about Joan's work at that point.

Barbara Clausen: Mm-hmm.

Joan Simon: But I think, looking at it through that lens, through the film lens, will be very important.

Barbara Clausen: Yes. And especially, coming back to *Organic Honey*, do you remember a bit, which of the *Organic Honey* performances did you see? Did you see the one at LoGiudice Gallery or the one at [Leo] Castelli?

Joan Simon: Yeah, the one at LoGiudice.

Barbara Clausen: Okay. So, that was really--

Joan Simon: It was possible I saw the Castelli one, but I don't remember it. The one...I really think I only saw the LoGiudice.

Barbara Clausen: So you saw her performance once. Did you see them multiple times, or was it really once, *Organic Honey*?

Joan Simon: Just once, *Organic Honey*, but then there were the videos. So again, that's another level of access to it.

Barbara Clausen: Absolutely. Tell us, what do you remember from this performance?

Joan Simon: A lot of things, but they're sort of strange. I mean, the atmosphere was strange. The room was pretty much empty. It was someone performing, but it wasn't an actor. It wasn't a person revealing anything autobiographical and she was surrounded by stuff. And it was pretty disengaged, but at times engaged. She was somewhat nervous, but very nervy. It didn't come out of dance. The dancers, even if they were using everyday actions, they really were trained dancers that went in

another direction. It wasn't theater, like Bob Wilson since the late sixties, who was very involved in the dance scene with Byrd Hoffman and performances at BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music]. And some people we knew were also performing in that. It wasn't minimal, although a lot was going on, but very fragmentary. There wasn't a sense of composition. There wasn't a sense...not that we were looking for it, but she would light on certain things and certain gestures would become very important relative to everything else.

Joan Simon:

Banging with [a] spoon. Hitting the mirror. I mean, violent, very startling, the sounds. Surprising that it would switch into Reggae music. Surprising that the people surrounding her were...they weren't collaborating. In a sense, they were prop masters. They were carrying mirrors, her holding a mirror, that kind of stuff. There were things on the wall, like the double dog picture, there was a Kimono, her changing costumes. You know that was very, very different than performance, and people performing in sweatpants and work clothes and barefoot or sneakers. And here she had this vintage dress. She had the feather headdress. She wore high heels, but, she wore a mask. And that...so she was there, and she wasn't there. And the sense of using vintage really didn't relate to...that, an earlier period. But, it did relate to...there was a store on West Broadway that sold vintage clothing, so that if ever you're going to get dressed up, you would probably wear vintage something then, not... But, it was very different to take on a role that wasn't a character, that wasn't...it wasn't body art, it wasn't theater, it wasn't film, really.

Joan Simon:

It seemed like an experiment. She would move from spot to spot experimenting with whatever she had set out there. Whether it was the video, whether it was a mirror, whether it was the jar of pennies, dropping that kind of magnification. He never engaged the audience. She was engaging with herself. She was looking at the mirror, you could see your drawing. She was making something. But what occurred to me, when I was thinking about it the other day, she was actually unmaking stuff. She was...I'll say something very funny. She was like a medium, right? In both senses of the word: as a material, but also as an, almost, spiritualist, like a nineteenth century medium, where information passed through. She was kind of present, but not present. She was revealing something, bits of her vocabulary, but not revealing a narrative, or... Her way of presenting herself was more like, if I can compare it to something, it was more the way Anne Waldman read her poetry, that it was a kind of shamanistic.

Joan Simon: It was invoking, rather than telling, or acting out. So it was more of an atmosphere than it was any particular thing. Although there were certain moments that were really kind of striking. The other thing it reminded me of is a poetry reading by Vito Acconci. Before he became, or maybe as he was becoming a performer. And I don't know if it was one of his last readings per se, but after he read at the lectern at St. Marks, he left the lectern, walked down the central aisle, and placed pages of the manuscript on the floor as he walked out. So it was that sense of something unfolding, undoing, taking apart so you can put things together. But I don't think it...as a performance, it was not as memorable as her later ones.

Barbara Clausen: You continue to see some of her works, perhaps also *Funnel* or *Mirage*. Was there something that you felt that was kind of, in between so to say [19]72 and [19]76, so basically between *Organic Honey* and *Mirage*, did you feel in this black and white series that there were certain elements from *Organic Honey* that kind of continued to move on, such as through *Glass Puzzle* or from *Funnel*.

Joan Simon: I never saw those two performed. Yeah. I never saw those performed live. So I know them through the installation versions. I know some of the elements through video.

Barbara Clausen: Yes.

Joan Simon: And--

Barbara Clausen: Did you see the videos of these other works at the time, or many years later? Were there projections of these videos?

Joan Simon: I'm not really sure. I knew I came to know them. I know I saw them reproduced in magazines and there were parts that were included like in *Organic Honey*. And I might've seen them in group shows, but I'm not sure. I can't say "I saw X at this place, or Y at this..." Again, a lot of the things are merged, and having photos, having researched it. So my memory at this time, I sort of don't want it to inflect or add on to what I might've seen then, because I'm really not sure.

Barbara Clausen: Joan, jumping to the present, and then to go back again, as somebody who has edited and produced the biggest monograph on Joan's work, basically you're the testament of her work that will exist forever. And the extreme knowledge that you have on her work, looking back now, how do you place *Organic Honey* and such work as *Mirage* of those early years to have them

merged into more narrative works or more clearly defined narrative works? What did you give these works in Joan's oeuvre?

Joan Simon:

I think, while it's pretty direct to say she went from...or, the experiment, I would say, of *Organic Honey*, and finding her vocabulary there, and a kind of voice, but not a narrative, more of a ritual, and then to jump to *Juniper Tree*. There's no video in it. And she also, early on, spoke of having studied frameworks and the illusion—how within a painting, or within a sculpture, or within a space, a defined framework—you could make an illusion. So she took it out of a very tight framework, two-dimensional, I would say most of all. In terms of painting, which she did study, and sculpture, which had a different kind of physicality, let's say than painting. So she was both framing a visual and three-dimensional space, and she was also framing what you would have known from imagist poetry. And knowing as much as I know over the years of her work, when narrative came into it, who she talked about, how she collaborated, became crucial in the changing nature of her work.

Joan Simon:

But I will say, there are two things that are often not mentioned. When she was in a Trisha Brown workshop, she did two pieces that included fragmented language. One of them, she also used space in the same way. One piece divided the room, and there was one set of actions and activity on one side, and another set on the other side. But for that piece, as it was performed, she stated out loud words about plants. She named plants. So that's one huge thing that comes up as her work gets bigger and bigger and more complex, her relationship to nature. And secondly, in another Trisha Brown performance, she recited all the mirror passages from [Jorge Luis] Borges.

Barbara Clausen:

Incredible.

Joan Simon:

So, over the years, when I was researching her work and reading what people had written, I was surprised that her use of language was not in there from the beginning. Her use of fragmentary language and the sense of a doubled space, or self, or layers of a narrative. So I think those things, those two performances, are really crucial.

Barbara Clausen:

Partly in the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base, we found quite a bit of very interesting pages in her notebooks that the artist generously allows us to reproduce, of lists of that time...of really, word lists, of lists. Just continuously, some practical, some clearly artistic, some laying out a kind of script. So for me, this is

just so interesting to hear. And I think for our listeners as well, this idea that she would recite plans and like how early, from the beginning on, her interest in nature is so clearly manifested.

Joan Simon:

Yeah. Sorry. What were you saying?

Barbara Clausen:

It's also interesting because I feel like there's such a, really, a red line with the outdoor beach performances, *Wind*, and then of course your a great interview around *Variations on a Scene*. These are all by the way, texts, dear listeners, that you can read on the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base. But then also of course, the later work, right now, where nature plays such an...environment plays such an important role in her work.

Joan Simon:

Also her relationship with Susan Howe is extremely important. Going back to their days as MFA students. But I don't think I knew very early on how, what that relationship was, or how influenced Jonas was by imagist poetry, although she did describe herself as an imagist. And that beginning of collaborating, really, with other people where input to her, she took and outputted it in a brand new way... It was Susan Howe who suggested the Grimm fairytale for *Juniper Tree*. I knew Susan Howe from a different spot of the world, through St. Mark's because my then-husband ran a workshop that she was part of. So, I knew her as a poet. I didn't really know how their stories came together till much later. I do think, following, one, her interest in literature and poetry, not just myth. Because again, I didn't know until later that she was involved in the...listening to the wedding in Crete, and having been present at the secret Hopi dances, I didn't know about that. But you could feel that underneath. I had no way of knowing, but as soon as she started to choose texts, the work got a backbone that she could then flesh out.

Joan Simon:

She could imagine entering that character. She could paint it, she could build it. She could bring all of her talents for drawing, for painting, for building, for deconstructing things. Again, she takes it apart. That added to force and to presence and a kind of inclusion of the audience. I mean, in the beginning, the audience is only included through the mirroring. So, that's okay. It's a little bit tricky, a little, whatever, not that uninteresting, but her putting some of the performers in danger. When Susan would describe it as being at Alan Saret's loft, being under the huge pane of glass, having water spilled on her. And that for me, the ones, and again, I didn't see this in person, but you can feel it in the photographs where she and Susan are leaning on each other with a pane of glass between them, that is an incredible sense of

condensing the energy, attentive to each other, really a moment held more than intention, scary, but perfectly executed.

Barbara Clausen:

Because you just mentioned audience. I think it's also interesting to think about how Joan then later—from the eighties onwards—translated her works into space and installation. Partly starting with the show in Berkeley, but then for sure, in the early nineties when she came up with the installations for the exhibition at the Stedelijk, when she kind of translated the spatial... Her very specific use of space in her performances and that constant measuring out, I feel *Volcano Saga* actually is really a key piece on that.

Joan Simon:

That's also one of the first times she uses professional actors including herself, but I mean, Tilda Swinton was incredible in that piece.

Barbara Clausen:

Yes.

Joan Simon:

So she was both the director of herself and others. And that was a change. But the *Volcano Saga* story is so compelling. I remember studying Icelandic sagas and other sagas when I was an undergraduate. I love these stories, but they really connected with her inner psychic world and nature and a lot. And also making, there's a funny scene in there where they're talking about a fishermen's nets and the woman said, "well, was it probably a woman who made it." So her address of a female character or language is very witty. Sometimes her sense of humor falls out of people writing about it, but she does have a very funny sense of...dry.

Barbara Clausen:

Yeah. Dry sense of humor. But if I recall correctly, you did see her exhibition at the Stedelijk.

Joan Simon:

I did.

Barbara Clausen:

That she worked on with Dorine Mignot, who was, she says for herself, is so important for her.

Joan Simon:

I think it's absolutely the changing point in a very long and productive career. Partly because, again, she collaborated with Dorine. Dorine could see how it might be presented from the outside. Joan was receptive. Joan had played with the ideas of the stage sets earlier. There had been an exhibition in Philadelphia in the seventies, but I think there are three things very important about the Stedelijk show. One, obviously, are the individual rooms of artifacts that live on after the performance.

What that selection should be, how they should be staged, how the sequencing rooms should be staged for a person coming through and learning. Secondly, for the incredible performance, first real big theatrical performance with professional actors, I mean, *Sweeney [Revolted by the thought of known places...Sweeney Astray]* is just so... And it was the first performance, I think, I'm pretty sure, she was planning not to be in.

Joan Simon:

Yes, it was the first time she transferred...had others embody the characters as she might've, had she been in there. But she also had an incredible budget. And for a lot of artists, having a big budget, they do nothing, it could be worked counter to what their goals are. But the staging of that was unbelievable. The sound, the structures that she built for *Sweeney* to be on, the objects that they had, lenses. But I remember especially the end, with that huge dramatic movement of the curtain and the really thunderous sound, and...I'm using the word thunder. Well, it was, in terms of the crashing and the... But I always think of Donald Judd's first review of Mark di Suvero and he said it was thunderous, the experience of being in that space. The funny thing about that performance is Jonas jumped in at the end. She was sitting in the audience, but she had finally, and I think she had a camera in her hand, because she couldn't resist getting in. And so when all this wild stuff is happening, she jumps forward and joins the performers. And the other thing about...yeah, and actually that's really a good point. That reminds me of my own experience of theater from when I was a little kid and being stunned. When an actor in *Robin Hood* jumped off the stage and went up the aisle, I know--

Barbara Clausen:

That actually brings me...do you think she developed some of her work with installation also because of her work with The Wooster Group? Do you think that had an influence on how she worked on stage or how she dealt with space for her installations, that are so theatrical, that really allow the viewer to move through?

Joan Simon:

I'm not sure. I really... The Wooster Group had such a different approach. Because at the time she... Collaboration with other professional—even if they're downtown—professional actors. So that, that interchange between her and someone else. That could be very possible. The other very curious thing about the Stedelijk show is that for every other installation, the objects selected were from a performance and not after. For Stedelijk, she made the *Sweeney* installation before. And it was installed in the museum and, and other versions of the same props and

staging were used in the performance. So you might find out where both of those sets, I mean--

Barbara Clausen:

Well, *Sweeney Astray* was shown again I think Stuttgart, but I think it was really also shown at the Pirelli HangarBicocca, because I remember Andrea Lissoni really took great care to present that piece in the show in Milan. But I want to still stick with the Stedelijk for a moment, because Joan's reception in Holland was also very, she was very...she showed her work in Holland at the De Appel and at different, especially the Stedelijk over the years. And she had a really good reception there. Do you remember more about the show that was significant for you, as you were maybe, remembering walking through it? Did something strike you, how she would mix certain works or have it...was there like one work each room, or did they kind of blend over?

Joan Simon:

No. There was one work in each room. I think, when I think back on it, I think it was the year before that I'd seen the Vassivière [Centre d'art Contemporain de Vassivière-en-Limousin] performance, *Variations on a Scene*. And it's where you saw the variations, and one of the things...of course, the Stedelijk show fixed them. It's interesting, in the introduction to that catalog, Rudi Fuchs talks about that her works are never finished, and they're fluid, and that's not true. As we know, in retrospect, they may look...the performances may look improvisatory, but she refines them and they're very specific and fixed at the end. But it's the first time at the Stedelijk, I believe, that these objects that had a life elsewhere are fixed. I don't think they're changed after they're established, maybe to adapt to the size of a room. I mean, there are things like that, but not...she doesn't take out a cone and put in whatever.

Barbara Clausen:

No, she's very set.

Joan Simon:

Yeah. So what were these things? What were these installations? Were they sculptures, were they environments, were they leftovers preserved from their earlier use? So I think in that sense...

Barbara Clausen:

Another thing I think that's really important for Joan's installations is that...the simple fact that she never performs in an installation. She will not perform in the exhibition space. She will not...so you could say that the installation is not a residue, or what's left after the performance. That is absolutely not the case with Joan Jonas's work. I think that is important, because she

already had that kind of thinking and rigor from very early on, that she would really differentiate these types of spaces.

Joan Simon: Yeah, I think that's true, but I really think probably, and I think Joan, would say this too...her conversation with Dorine really brought forth something that she hadn't recognized before, or hadn't recognized in the full dimension before. But again, it allowed her to release her sense of space as a sculptor as an object maker, as an object finder, and the relationships between them. And did they speak to the performance in some way?

Barbara Clausen: Yes.

Joan Simon: The other strange thing was compared...if you thought about the different sequence of rooms in which were the most effective installations, *Organic Honey* was the thinnest.

Barbara Clausen: Yeah. Interesting.

Joan Simon: And I think...maybe because they were things that didn't really speak beyond her reason, or obsession, or necessity to have them, and as you go forward, you see the things she's made.

Barbara Clausen: I think that's such a vital question and I think there's one point to make here, is that I think the exhibition *Stage Sets* in [19]76--

Joan Simon: Yeah. Philadelphia.

Barbara Clausen: Yeah. Philadelphia. It was incredibly important because it really materialized, or kind of brought together a very focused approach to the different types of plateaus, or levels, or even the level of how you see Joan's work. The raised plinth, or the raised level, the platform on which the screen is placed. I feel that, I think that's kind of...I think one can really see the ICA exhibition as something of a before and after that has definitely influenced her, that you could really read through time. And then how she developed in the end installations in the early nineties.

Joan Simon: I think that is a very important show because...remember, is that [19]76 somewhere around the mid-seventies, by that point, there really... The question, it wasn't even a question. Performance was ephemeral. You're not going to catch lightning in a bottle. What are you going to do? How—if you wanted to respect the form—how could you present it? I mean, Joan's weren't the street works of Adrian Piper and they weren't Scott Burton and they weren't...I mean, they weren't that, they

weren't body art. They, except for beginning with *Juniper Tree*, they did have a dramatic thread, but what do you do? How, if you believe this work is important and it's adding something new to what artists do, when they present--

Barbara Clausen:

Absolutely. And there's not just a show at the ICA, but there was also the installation at Documenta 6, which was in [19]77, which was incredibly important. Wulf Herzogenrath worked with her and there she did a performance of *Mirage*, but she actually had an installation with cones coming from the top and the bottom of the space and a video monitor. There was a kind of installation that she developed for Documenta at that time. So there were already, before, there were certain moments where that had happened. But it really came fully together, also with an overview of many different works, at the Stedelijk.

Joan Simon:

Also, for a curator to make the effort, to develop a show, to talk to an artist, to have the artist agree to do something that hadn't been that formal before.

Barbara Clausen:

Incredible.

Joan Simon:

Yeah. There's a poster of that show. Could you find more material?

Barbara Clausen:

From the Stedelijk exhibition?

Joan Simon:

No. Back to Philadelphia?

Barbara Clausen:

Well, we have some photographs, but there's a poster and a folder, but it was not one of our main case studies. But we have some material on the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base. Absolutely. We also have some drawings from her, from the notebooks, about those installations that are on the Knowledge Base. Yeah.

Joan Simon:

The third thing about the Stedelijk [show] is the catalog. I mean, the Stedelijk [19]94 show was the catalog.

Barbara Clausen:

Yeah. With the floor plans in the back. And it's just really incredible. I also want to...I kind of need to move, let's move a bit forward. I was wondering if you can...did you see any other exhibitions, retrospective exhibitions, of Joan's afterwards?

Joan Simon:

Oh yeah. I saw quite a few. I saw Stuttgart. I was in Barcelona. At the time, going back to something you said before, I mean, Jonas was teaching in Amsterdam. So she was embedded in that world of artists and curators and writers. So she had a life there, and

for a lot of the time, jumps, traveling all the time to teach, to do performances. So, because I moved to Paris in 1990, I saw her more in Europe than even in the later eighties, because by then I had little kids and I really wasn't the young person running around to see everything that was going on. And, but yeah, I did see.

Barbara Clausen:

Well, how do you feel, just looking back...do you feel there's a kind of evolvment that you saw in her multimedia installations? Do you feel like there was something that changed over the...is there something that strikes you that has changed over the years? Thinking of that show at the Stedelijk up to the show in Milan, or later?

Joan Simon:

Oh, the crucial change was *The Shape, the Scent, [the Feel of Things]* and *Lines in the Sand* before that. But her collaborations with Jason Moran took it to a whole other level and also gave her confidence in herself as a music maker, as a percussionist. And again, I think that conversation with him and developing it together...again blew it out of the water. And she used space differently. She used the garage doors at Dia. She used...there was a performance in, I think it was Stuttgart, under this glass domed space and she was carrying a plastic purse with lights in it. And so, she started to make objects that had light in addition to the drawings. And then later ones, like in the Venice installation early on with those incredibly beautiful lights, she got more involved with design. She actually had very specific costumes from...what's the name of the place downtown. It's two syllables. They have incredible textiles.

Barbara Clausen:

We can look it up.

Joan Simon:

I'll remember in a minute. Dosa. D-O-S-A. A California designer, but had this shop in Soho that...[they] were incredibly beautiful, simple, but perfectly made and structured and unbelievable textiles. And later, that's what Joan wore. She-

Barbara Clausen:

Did you see the show in Milan?

Joan Simon:

I did. I was working so hard on some other stuff at that point, as you say over the years you support the projects. You become the biggest philanthropists of anything. I just had to keep earning a living and being...I had...I couldn't be in two places at the same.

Barbara Clausen:

Yeah. Maybe to end the interview, I wanted to ask you about your advice. And that is, the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base is really there for future researchers, artists, curators, historians,

conservators, to kind of familiarize themselves with Joan's work, but also to really find resources specifically to the works that we've investigated. Is there any advice you have for future curators and historians working on Joan's work?

Joan Simon:

I do. Conservation. Conservation. Conservation. Make sure all of the films, all the videos are preserved. All of her documents, all of her own photographs, all of the slides, all the objects in her house that she lives with that may or may not have been in performances, all the masks. Preserve, conserve all of it. The other advice would be to go outside of the art world to take a different lens into it. Look at circus, look at films, look at the films that she didn't look at. Look at Fellini, look at Giulietta Masina in terms of character, in terms of another world. But also for how she did the cuts and edits in her own films and what she saw on video. I think you need to know more about film. And ask her to tell you stories. Not just have her recall what she did at this time. That's okay, that's been done a lot. Sometimes the memory works sometimes it doesn't. But have her tell you a story of what she's thinking about now. What is she reading, what is she looking at? What music is she listening to? Who does she want to work with in the future?

Barbara Clausen:

That's fantastic advice. Yes. That's a great, great question. Great advice.

Joan Simon:

And really, somewhere, find the money to go into...more deeply into the archives around the world. You know, things have changed. Twenty years ago, they weren't digitized. Many are now, but I think historians, curators, conservators need to work together and share their information. But also, especially—I don't want to say younger—but different perspectives are coming in. Now you've got video on your phone. I mean, all of these are so available that it's hard for younger people or not even such younger people...anybody who...it's up to the nineties. We didn't walk around with portable computers. We didn't have computers. So, to look at it from the lens of what they know, but also what they couldn't have known. And to put each of these things in context. It was very unusual for an artist, a single artist, to own a Sony Portapak in 1970. It cost around \$1,500 to buy it.

Joan Simon:

It was beyond the means of most artists in the Castelli table. Castelli bought one camera that they shared. So I think really to look back in terms of the actual context of what's...that was very unusual to have your own video camera. As far as I know, I could be wrong. It had come out of broadcast television and it had

come out of local, political, alternate content. We would call them, what, content providers now. I think there's a whole political aspect that was just known, how the economic crisis in New York, when Joan began to first perform these things. The fact that people were living in lofts at all had to do with Robert Moses going to put his lower Manhattan expressway. I think there are lots of ways.

Joan Simon:

And also when you look back, and I remember talking to Douglas Crimp about it. And he talked about it, which was, he was looking at it. His writing was in the lens, through the lens of painting. That was the language he had. It wasn't coming from theater. It didn't address the theatricality of her work, because it was. It didn't address how unusual it was within the larger experimentation that was going on. So to really look back at that moment, the economics of the time, the politics of the time, reemerging feminism that isn't really direct in Jonas's work was another performers. I think to take all the obvious answers and look at them, anew.

Barbara Clausen:

I think this is the best advice we've gotten.

Joan Simon:

Really?

Barbara Clausen:

Well. No, we've gotten great advice. I shouldn't say that. But it's very interesting, because you really beautifully bring the listener back to the basics that are always the most complicated. There's, there's a real sense of, so, what was the role of feminism at that time and how did it affect Jonas's work? And maybe it came through the question of accessibility of having video equipment, or having access to different places, what...the collaborations, the community, the real estate. All these different kinds of factors around Joan's work. And of course, what movies did she see? What was she interested in at the time? I mean, I think, so these... And I think curators and projects that are happening and will happen in the next years, will definitely address that very, very directly.

Joan Simon:

Oh, I just thought of something else, which is also bringing literary scholars, because if you look at the text whether it's the Icelandic saga, Irish poetry, Dante...well, all of them are stories of journeys, outsiders, troubled psyches, getting to Warburg, getting to H.D. [Hilda Doolittle]. I don't know, maybe I'm not up on all of the scholarship at this moment, but I don't know anyone except for Marina Warner, possibly, who would be able to go through it from fairytale all the way up and back. And I would definitely talk to Susan Howe if you haven't already.

Joan Jonas Knowledge Base

Barbara Clausen: We're planning to. So, with many more conversations to come and many thanks. I really want to thank you on behalf of the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base and the team.

Joan Simon: Well, I hope it's helpful.

Barbara Clausen: I think it's going to be very helpful, and thank you so much.

This transcript is intended to provide an accessible form of interview audio content. It has been edited for factual accuracy and clarity. Any alterations are noted with brackets.