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# A Mode of Translation: Joan Jonas's Performance Installations

## Un modo de traducción: Las instalaciones-performance de Joan Jonas

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**Abstract**

This paper considers Joan Jonas's translations of her works from performance to installation through a focus on one specific but crucial work: her 1976 performance, turned multi-channel video installation, *Mirage*. Throughout her career Jonas has worked fluidly across media, cultivating transformations among motifs as they traverse two and three dimensions, still and moving images, and return in various works over time. As introduced within the context of Jonas's 1994 retrospective at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, installation forms a relatively new component in this matrix, but not a fundamentally different approach. This paper argues that to recognize that continuity is to appreciate Jonas's performances and installations not as dichotomous but rather as integrated within a cohesive practice that encompasses her multifaceted artistic concerns. At the same time, to recognize the new emphasis that Jonas placed on installation at a crucial historical juncture in the 1990s suggests an interpretation of her practice as historiographical, the artist's active shaping of her work's legacy in the future. With close attention, Jonas's actions demonstrate her conceptualization of her performances and their potential relationships to other art forms—information vital to broader histories of performance art and the integration of performance within museum collections.

**Key words:** Joan Jonas, *Mirage,* performance art, installation art, interdisciplinary art, collecting and conserving performance art.

**Resumen**

Este artículo revisa las traslaciones que Joan Jonas realiza en sus obras desde la performance a la instalación, mediante la focalización en un proyecto concreto que resulta crucial: *Mirage*, su performance de 1976 que fue convertida en una video-instalación multicanal. A lo largo de su carrera, Jonas desarrolló sus ideas a través de diferentes medios, cultivando transformaciones entre temáticas que atravesaban las dos y tres dimensiones, imágenes tanto estáticas como dinámicas, y obras sobre las que volvía pasado el tiempo. Tal y como se introdujeron en el contexto de la retrospectiva de Jonas en el Stedelijk Museum de Amsterdam en 1994, las instalaciones-performance constituyen un componente relativamente novedoso en su matriz artística, pero no plantean una aproximación fundamentalmente diferente. Este artículo argumenta que, para reconocer esa continuidad, hay que apreciar las performances e instalaciones de Jonas no como algo dicotómico, sino más bien como integradas en una práctica coherente que acompasa sus preocupaciones artísticas multifacéticas. Al mismo tiempo, reconocer el nuevo énfasis que Jonas puso en la instalación durante una coyuntura histórica crucial en los años 90, sugiere una interpretación de su práctica como historiográfica, la configuración activa del legado de su obra para el futuro. Una mirada atenta muestra que las acciones de Jonas proponen una conceptualización de sus performances y de su relación potencial con otras formas artísticas –información vital de cara a unas historias ampliadas de la performance y a la integración de esta en las colecciones de museos.

**Palabras clave:** Joan Jonas, Mirage, performance, instalación, práctica artística interdisciplinar, colección y conservación de la performance.

## 1. The Present Past

Imagine this. Parting a heavy curtain, you enter a vast space. Ceiling high and pitched, austere columns down two long sides—it's a kind of post-industrial basilica painted black. Sound is a resounding murmur. Light flickers across video monitors and projection screens. You pause for your senses to adjust. First scanning the room and then moving within it, your perception sharpens to your surroundings… Figures, mostly women: in landscapes, with animals, mirrors, and masks; cones of white paper or galvanized tin nearly twice your height; line drawings in sand or chalk, on paper or in video; sounds of wind, foghorns, whistling, footsteps; images in facets, shadows, reflections, prisms… You walk through the space, gathering perceptions. Eventually, your experiences of aural and visual echoes cohere to form an internal syntax, a meaningful order, in which no external references pertain. Like a dream or a foreign place, the environment is immersive and so impossible, later, to fully recall or describe. What remains with you is an impression, an image that dwells in your mind.

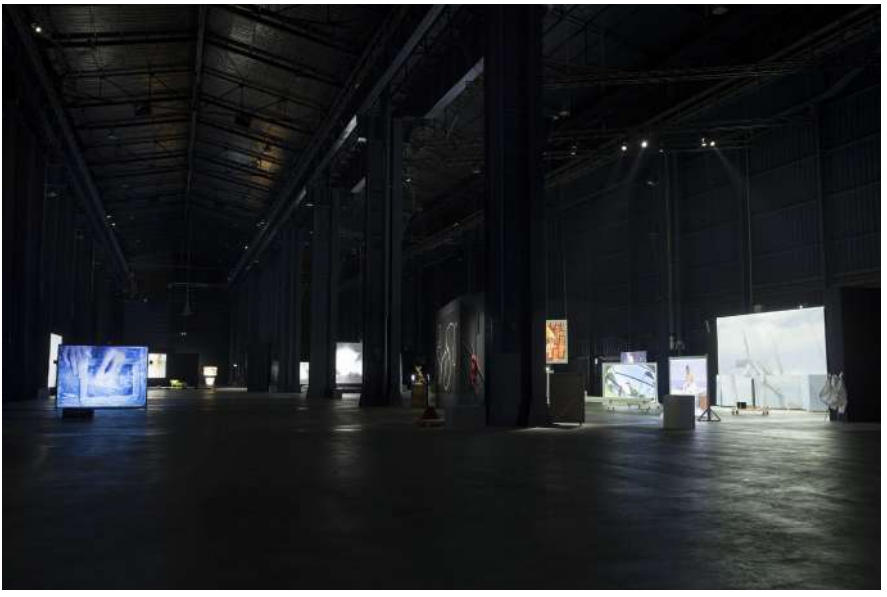

Image 1. Jonas, J. (2014). *Light Time Tales*, curated by Andrea Lissoni. HangarBicocca, Milan.

The space is Joan Jonas's 2014 exhibition, *Light Time Tales,* installed in a 4,500 square meter gallery at HangarBicocca in Milan, Italy (1). The largest and most comprehensive museum survey of her career to date, it presented nineteen works: three 16mm films (transferred to video), six single-channel videos, and ten multimedia installations, plus a live performance. Apart from one separated gallery, which displayed Jonas's installation *Reanimation* (2010/2012/2013), the exhibition occupied one continuous space—the first ever retrospective of her work without internal walls. This unique venue thus offered Jonas a chance to show not only the range of her works since 1968, but also the cohesiveness among them. Using scale models and computer imaging, Jonas designed the layout together with the exhibition's curator, Andrea Lissoni. Careful to distribute silent or quiet works amid noisier ones, Jonas and Lissoni nonetheless cultivated sound bleed, instead of neutralizing it. Likewise, they organized sightlines among the works, considering the visual alignments and repetitions of themes and images for visitors moving through the space (1). Projection screens served to delineate individual installations, yet their double-sided imagery guided visitors both in and out, in indeterminate directions, together with the sightlines. The design thus created a unified exhibition that reflected a multiplicity of interconnections among Jonas's works, perceptually as well as thematically.

By enabling viewers to experience those interconnections within the exhibition space, *Light Time Tales* conveyed a fundamental characteristic of Jonas's art. Throughout her career, Jonas has developed ideas across mediums, cultivating transformations among motifs as they traverse two and three dimensions, still and moving images, and return in various works over time. Her process is best described as interdisciplinary, not only multimedia, because her integrated work in various modalities—including performance, film, video, drawing, sculpture, narrative, and installation—produces *new* forms, which urge her audiences to open new synapses and alter ideas of what the component forms can do. In addition, because Jonas continuously refashions various works in different forms and for different contexts—performances may become single-channel videos or multimedia installations, or vice versa—her work resists art historical tendencies to understand individual artworks as bound to a singular form or moment in time. Instead, it asks us to adapt our methodological frameworks so as to understand her work holistically. Jonas's 2014 retrospective modeled such generous perspectives. Eschewing divisions by medium or chronology, it facilitated a fluid exchange of information across Jonas's works, both within historical moments and over the course of time.

Of the ten installations in *Light Time Tales,* seven evolved through complex relationships with certain of Jonas's performances (2). All of her major works

since the mid-1990s have encompassed installation and performance as two aspects of larger, holistic projects. In some cases, Jonas will create installations first and then develop performances from the same imagery and ideas, whereas in other cases, she will create performances first and then distill the same content through installation. Typical of her process, she will work back and forth between performance and installation, over the course of numerous performances and exhibitions, developing a work's content and its complementary forms in tandem with one another. Through this continual process of drafting and revising, the works evolve, in both of their forms, and become more complex over time. Eventually, however, Jonas retires performances and moves on to new work. When she does, the installations remain as archival, collectable artworks—although even in this stage she will continue to revise the installations or, at minimum, adjust them to suit specific exhibition spaces when they go on loan. Thus, even the installations that Jonas developed prior to, or together with, her performances ultimately merge with another variety of her installations, those that she developed as later iterations of long-retired performances.

Image 2. Jonas, J. (2014). *The Shape, The Scent, The Feel of Things* 2002/2007. HangarBicocca, Milan.

Image 3. Jonas, J. (2014). *Mirage* 1976/1994/2005 installation view showing *Revolted by the Thought of Known Places…Sweeney Astray* (1992/1994) in the distance. HangarBicocca, Milan.

Jonas first created installation versions of her performances for her mid-career survey at the Stedelijk Museum in 1994. For this show, the museum commissioned five new installations based on Jonas's past performances—beginning with her earliest works from the late 1960s—and one new work for both installation and performance (3). The exhibition occasioned a turning point in Jonas's career, as her focus then shifted from performance and single-channel video to also encompass installation as an integral aspect of her ongoing artistic practice. Yet, when the museum first approached her about organizing the exhibition in the early 1990s, the question of *how,* exactly, to show her performance works remained open-ended. Jonas ultimately developed the idea of creating installations in relation to selected performances through conversations with the exhibition's curator, Dorine Mignot. One factor influencing this approach was Jonas's age. In her late fifties at the time, Jonas felt unable or unwilling to perform some of the physical actions crucial to her earlier performances. Hence, a restaging of historical works, as she had done for her first retrospective in 1980, appeared to her unrealistic and unsustainable by 1994 (4). Still another, related, factor was Jonas's desire to discover new forms and contexts for her artwork that would not necessarily require her physical presence as a performer. This had to do not only with age but,

crucially, reflected her deliberate choice to diversify her art beyond performance and thereby to broaden its potential audiences (5).

Although some artists and critics have tended to valorize the relative obscurity of performance art and to uphold ephemerality as its greatest virtue, these conditions were sources of some frustration to Jonas, as they imposed limitations on who could access her work, when, and how. In a video profile produced for her 2014 retrospective in Milan, Jonas noted that she continuously refashions her performance works into different forms precisely because she is "interested in the public experiencing them [and does not want] to hide or remain distant"(6). Mignot's introduction to Jonas's 1994 retrospective expressed the same frustrations and desire to make Jonas's work more widely accessible, as did curator Valerie Smith's introduction to Jonas's s exhibition at the Queens Museum of Art a decade later, in 2003. The shared opinion among these curators and the artist was that the relative invisibility of Jonas's work—both within art history and a broader public consciousness—was something to regret, and to change.

At the same historical moment, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the art world was beginning to engage in contentious debates surrounding the increasing entry of "performance art" into museum collections and exhibition programs. To many, including *New York Times* critic John Rockwell, the very premise of preserving performance seemed absurd. In a 2004 article covering a symposium entitled *Not for Sale: Curating, Conserving, and Collecting Ephemeral Art*, Rockwell espoused a doctrinaire position on performance's ephemerality in that: "being neither conservable nor collectable [performance] can be described and notated and recorded and videoed. But just like a night in a jazz club or a theater or even at marmoreal Carnegie Hall, the true experience is being there, in that exact time and place, never to be repeated" (Rockwell, 2004).

Rockwell attributed efforts in performance preservation to a reactionary conservatism of the time and to artists' supposedly egotistic desires to "leave some sort of mark on posterity." Jonas was the sole artist representative on this panel, and Rockwell characterized her descriptions of her installation practice as sounding "unself-consciously frank about wanting to preserve her work, and to be paid for it" (2004). In fact, as Jonas's exhibition history and evolving statements about her art demonstrate, she was the opposite of "unself-conscious", if that meant "unaware" or "unreflective." Rockwell's patronizing tone betrayed his own limited understanding of the history and complexity of Jonas's work, as well as his adherence to certain assumed principles of medium-specific art. In this, Rockwell was, of course, not alone. On the contrary, his statements reflect a broader discursive context surrounding, or expounding, the supposed "ontology" of performance and the "epistemology" of its various representations (7). But

perhaps because of this context and not in spite of it, Rockwell missed the point of what Jonas was actually *doing,* or striving to do, through her installations, which constitute a radical alternative to a presumed duality of mere "documentation" and merely "being there".

Jonas describes her works' migrations among forms as "translations"(8). With explicit regard for the specific qualities of each medium and its contexts, she transfers content from one form to another, creating dynamic correspondences among different aspects of her art. The performance installations are examples of this practice that allow her to render ephemeral works in more stable forms. Yet the installations neither document performances nor simply represent them, as if referring wholly outside of themselves to ephemeral events that happened elsewhere. Instead, Jonas deliberately reconfigures performance elements—including moving images, sets, props, and other imagery—so as to shape unique experiences for contemporary museum audiences. The installations thus correspond to performances through a functional equivalency in the presentations of their images and themes, as Jonas accounts for the particular spatial, temporal, and historical conditions in which audiences encounter one form as opposed to the other. As a result, the installations not only provide critical insight into past works no longer viable *as* performance, but also afford those same works new lives within the present.

Far from a drastically revised approach, similar translations had been central to Jonas's work from the start. Her first public performance, *Oad Lao* (1968), became the 16mm film *Wind* (1968), and her 16mm film *Songdelay* (1973) culminated a series of outdoor performances that included *Jones Beach Piece* (1970), *Nova Scotia Beach Dance* (1971), and *Delay Delay* (1972)(9). The films do not document the performances but rather translate their ideas into specifically filmic terms. In *Songdelay,* for instance, Jonas used wide-angle and telephoto lenses to exaggerate and compress the apparent depth of the image, thus exploring illusions of spatial attenuation and de-synchronizations among sound and image, as she had done via the medium of vast distances in her outdoor performances. As these films attest, pure ephemerality was never the central objective of Jonas's art but simply inherent to her work in certain forms. Moreover, Jonas has always developed her performances through comparisons with other media, in this case film. Explaining *Songdelay*, Jonas has said: "I wanted to save my performances in a form that interested me, and since I consciously used film as a reference at times during the performances, film was appropriate to the task" (2003, p. 121). Hence, while Jonas's performances and films are crucially distinct, as both forms offer different possibilities and limitations, they reflect the inter-media nature of her art in general and stand as a clear parallels to her subsequent installations.

Throughout her career, Jonas has demonstrated acute sensitivity to the specific qualities of individual artistic mediums and yet fostered interconnections among them by testing their similarities, as well as their differences, and putting diverse media into concert with one another. Such correspondences form the core of her art, which in turn defies conventional classifications of video, performance, and installation as discrete genres. As introduced within the context of the Stedelijk retrospective, the performance installations form a relatively new component in this matrix, but not a fundamentally different approach. To recognize that continuity is to appreciate Jonas's performances and installations not as dichotomous, but rather as integrated within a cohesive practice that encompasses her multifaceted artistic concerns. At the same time, to recognize the new emphasis that Jonas placed on installation at a crucial historical juncture in the 1990s suggests an interpretation of her practice as historiographical—the artist's active shaping of her work's archival presence and thus its reception in the future.

For this reason, an effort to articulate the relationships among Jonas's performances and installations is of central importance to understanding how she conceives of her work and has chosen to develop it within the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. What aspects of her performances do the installations translate, and how? What kinds of experiences do they offer to audiences in the present, and to what extent do those experiences contain a historical dimension that reflects upon a work's past? (10)

## *2. Mirage,* 1976/1994/2005

Walking down the central path in Jonas's exhibition at HangarBicocca, you approach an old, rectangular television set standing upright on its side. On its screen you see Jonas, apparently caught in an endless cycle of mornings and nights, who looks out and speaks to you: "Good morning," she says, and then, "Good Night." "Good Morning!" "Good night." "Good morning." "Good night." This goes on and on. Sometimes she's playful and sometimes annoyed. Typically she's matter-of-fact, performing this ritual again and again—for you or for herself, for someone or something else, it's hard to say. She's at home inside this situation; you see the things of her daily life, which change, like her moods, like the light, with each salutation. You begin to think of time: a passing of days, nights, weeks, seasons, years. Without beginning or end, her quotidian cycle merges with the eternal. Still, you know, the image is of the past. Black-and-white and noticeably grainy, it inhabits your time, fills your mind, and yet remains distant.

Image 4. Jonas, J. (1976). *Good Night Good Morning* [video stills].

Withdrawing your attention from this video, your perspective shifts to encompass, again, the surrounding space. The video, you realize, forms a passageway to a larger installation behind it, and, drawn toward an open center, you enter. Moving images surround you, their sounds a disquieting hum. Somewhat dizzied, you turn a slow circle around yourself to survey the space and its contents. To your left, a film of a volcano eruption hangs beside a cluster of tall metal cones; on a black platform below the film is a grid with numbers, in unapparent order, drawn in chalk. You remember similar cones from another installation near the exhibition's entrance and also from Jonas's home in the video you just watched. The volcano is a kind of cone; the trees along its sloping sides resemble cones. Your gaze wanders.

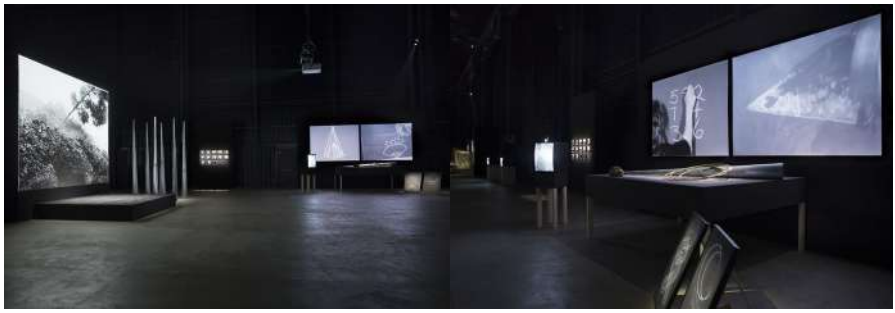

Image 5. Jonas, J. (2014). *Mirage* (1976/1994/2005). HangarBicocca, Milan.

In front of you now is a dual projection hanging over a black table on which you find a mask of a man's face, another metal cone, and two wooden hoops. For a while, both projections show Jonas drawing in white chalk on a blackboard. She draws images that could be signs, but of what, you don't know: another sort-of cone, suns that become moons, labyrinthine patterns made deliberately with one continuous line… You notice similar drawings on chalkboards alongside the table on the floor. The screen on the right changes to show vintage television footage—newsreels featuring Richard Nixon, and commercials—and the image on the left shows Jonas stepping repeatedly through a large wooden hoop, like the ones on the table. On a plinth to the left of the table stands another vertical television monitor, this one showing an unspectacular, rural landscape rushing past the windshield of a car. A black bar runs vertically down the screen and scrolls, rhythmically to the right. This hypnotic scroll punctuates the endlessly rushing landscape and, like Jonas's cycle of mornings and nights, marks time without keeping count.

Turning around behind you and crossing the open space, you approach a final video, again displayed on a vertical monitor. Black-and-white and in heightened contrast, the image appears at first as a flat patterning of vertical and horizontal lines. Then, Jonas, wearing a black kimono, enters the space with steady, deliberate steps and slips between what you now recognize as two tall, white cones. Her ability to do so comes as a surprise, recalling an actual depth of space here rendered as flat, as do her continued steps toward what she reveals to be a tall, white-framed window when she opens it. Standing still against the window, her black robe camouflages her body against the night's sky, and she appears to disappear. At the same time, sounds of barking dogs enter through the opened window, and when she closes it, they stop. Jonas's footsteps and occasional whistling mark her passage through the distorted space of the image, while from an unseen area behind the camera, you hear voices from a radio and the blowing of a foghorn.

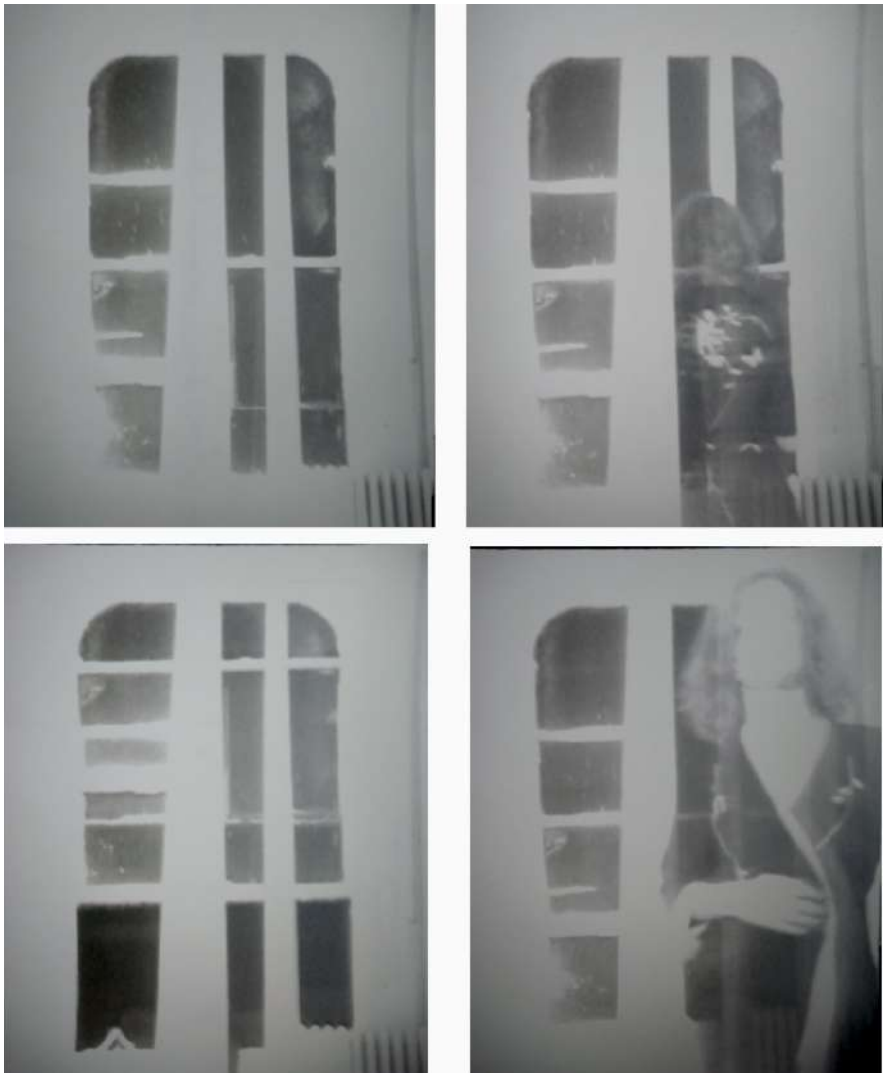

Image 6. Jonas, J. (1976). *May Windows* [video stills].

In this video, *May Windows* (1976), Jonas investigates a set of perceptual contrasts: horizontal and vertical, black and white, light and darkness, flatness and depth, inside and outside, visible and invisible, silence and noise. Noticing this, one may make connections to other aspects of the installation: contrasts of day and night, light and dark, and Jonas's changing moods in *Good Night Good Morning* (1976), and contrasts of energy between the violent volcanic explosion and methodical drawing videos. A notion of correspondences best describes these contrasts, however, since always present is a tension among the polarities that

enables transmutations between one and the other extreme. The cyclical turning days and nights in *Good Night Good Morning* meets other transformations, like those among Jonas's drawings of suns and moons and her rhythmical movements, stepping repeatedly through the wooden hoop, in the films. One may intuit these relationships upon entering the space from the constant interactions among sounds and images within the perceptual field. Yet to grasp the themes intellectually requires a slower process of encountering and comparing the individual components, whether deliberately or not. In this way, the larger themes of *Mirage* emerge in an abstract image of ritual and transformation, which takes hold, but always differently, in viewers' minds.

In *Mirage,* as in the majority of Jonas's multimedia works, the form is a montage of disparate elements, which all treat specific aspects of a central theme (11). The work's substance lies in the chemistry among these parts that manifests through viewers' experiences and interpretations of them over time. The same held true in the performance, and the installation thus preserves this experiential quality of the content without clinging to an original context of presentation. At the same time, the installation provides reference points to anchor audiences within the coordinates of history, or a present that reflects upon the work's past. Jonas's choice to display the videos on historical monitors from the 1970s is one example, and the vintage television footage in the video projection is another, as it recalls the time of the performance, circa 1976, through historically locatable content. This footage never appeared in any performance, and neither did any of the same video. Entitled *Mirage II* (1976/2000), the video consists of previously unused footage dating to around 1976 that Jonas edited for the installation's second iteration, at Galerie der Stadt, Stuttgart (2000), to provide what she called "a feeling, or atmosphere of a time" (2011, p. 121). Most directly, however, the installation refers to the work's history as performance through fourteen photographs that hang just beyond the central space where the videos converge. These show the stage set and props in context and, significantly, Jonas as the central agent of the action.

No video documentation of *Mirage* exists, as Jonas did not normally record her performances during the 1970s. All memories of the performance thus inhere in archival fragments—the script, photographs, reviews, and interviews with Jonas—as well as the films and videos that formed a part of it. Some of these sources figure as materials in the installation, which, in this sense, forms an experiential archive that affords a unique perspective on the work's images and content. Yet the installation also differs from the performance in crucial ways, due not only to the inevitable particularities of historical context but also to Jonas's intentional modifications of the work's materials and syntax. The differential between the work's two iterations thus activates a set of questions regarding the ways in which Jonas manipulates space, time, and media to shape

unique experiences for audiences in both contexts. Analysis of the performance script alongside other archival representations enables an interpretation of the work's structure in performance and thus provides a basis for evaluating a state of connection between the two objects (12).

### *3. Mirage,* 1976

Jonas premiered *Mirage* in May of 1976, upon returning from a three-month stay in India, where she had practiced yoga and meditational techniques in an *ashram*. The experience had been transformative for her personally and artistically, and the performance takes as its subject both perceptual and spiritual transformations. At the same time, she created it specifically for the screening room at Anthology Film Archives in New York City, and because film had provided a crucial reference for her own work, in *Mirage,* Jonas paid homage to the cinema (13). The performance enacted a thorough integration of actual and mediated spaces and times through the resonances that occurred among film, video, and live performance. The effect was cinematic: an illusion of a present, cohesive reality composed of actually disparate spaces and times.

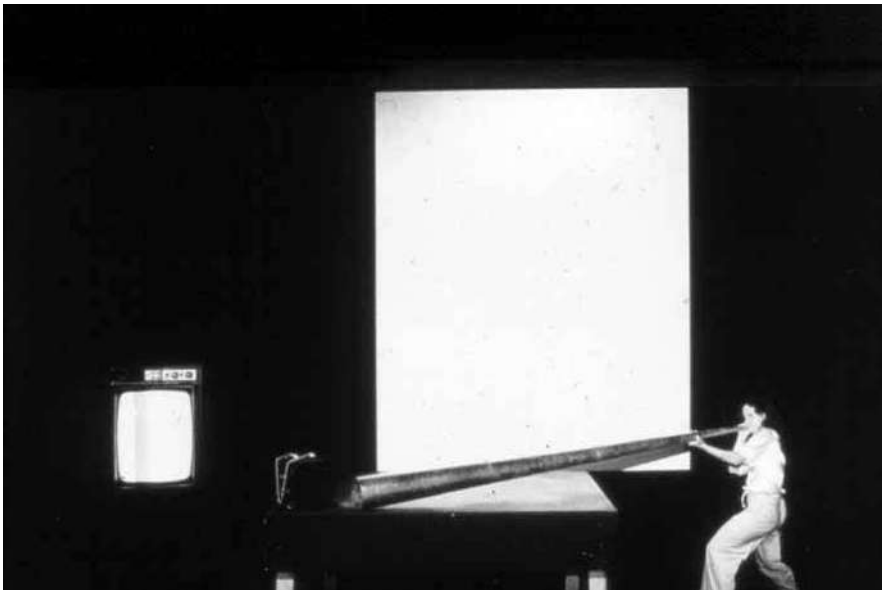

Image 7. Jonas, J. (1976). *Mirage*, Anthology Film Archives. Photograph by Babette Mangolte.

The stark contrast of Anthology's white cinema screen against black walls provided a backdrop for the black-and-white films, videos, and Jonas's live drawings in white chalk on blackboards. For a stage she constructed a black wooden table, approximately three feet high by five feet square, and placed it in front of the film screen. On the table in one front corner stood a small monitor facing upstage that emanated blue television light throughout the performance, and on a black plinth beside the stage stood a larger monitor, which Jonas turned on its side to display videos made to be viewed in a vertical orientation. She organized the performance area in three registers: the space between first-row chairs and elevated stage, stage surface to vertical film screen, and the area behind the screen in which shadowy figures appeared when backlit.

With no characters and no story, the performance nonetheless possessed structure. Jonas used Anthology's film screen's four possible configurations to organize four movements, which rose in crescendo and spiraled to a cyclical end. Each movement marked a stark change in the prevailing mood, or energy, of the performance, with the first functioning to establish the performance themes. The video component of this and the following section, *May Windows,* developed the performance's theme of opposites and also integrated the audiovisual and physical spaces of the performance. The video begins with a transformation of the image as Jonas, unseen behind the camera, adjusts the exposure until all shadows disappear and the image, briefly recognized as spatial, becomes a flat patterning of black and white upon the surface. Although flattened, Jonas organized the video space in three registers—a heard but unseen area behind the camera, the visible space between camera and window wall, and the heard but unseen area outside the window—thus harmonizing video and performance space.

As *May Windows* played in the performance, Jonas sat on stage beside the small monitor, whose blue light cast her shadow against the film screen. Occasionally shifting her position and so changing its shape, Jonas contrasted her image as shadow, video, and physical body, even as the monitor's light physically integrated all three. At the same time, the video sounds entered the performance space and echoed similar sounds that Jonas and her co-performers made live—blowing through the metal cones, for instance, or whistling Jonas's favorite tune. In the performance, the monitor mirrored the window's function of regulating the entry of sounds from other spaces into the one immediately present, and its vertical orientation doubled the physical dimensions of the window's frame, creating ambiguity between image and object and lending the image a physical presence on stage. The integration of video and performance space was thus substantial, as live interactions among these elements weaved an integrated perceptual reality.

A similar effect occurred through various repetitions of images and gestures across film, video, and performed actions. Several times throughout the performance, for example, Jonas drew and erased images on a blackboard—

enigmatic symbols, including labyrinthine patterns that she calls "endless drawings," since she made them with one continuous line. The performance also included 16 mm. film footage of Jonas drawing and erasing the same images, and a broader context for this activity appears in another performance video, *Good Night Good Morning,* which shows the blackboard and its images among Jonas's living space. In this video, viewers glimpse aspects of Jonas's daily life and artistic process—as she wakes up beside the blackboard one morning, or confronts it aggressively another night before bed—and we also see the images in different states of preparation for filming and performance.

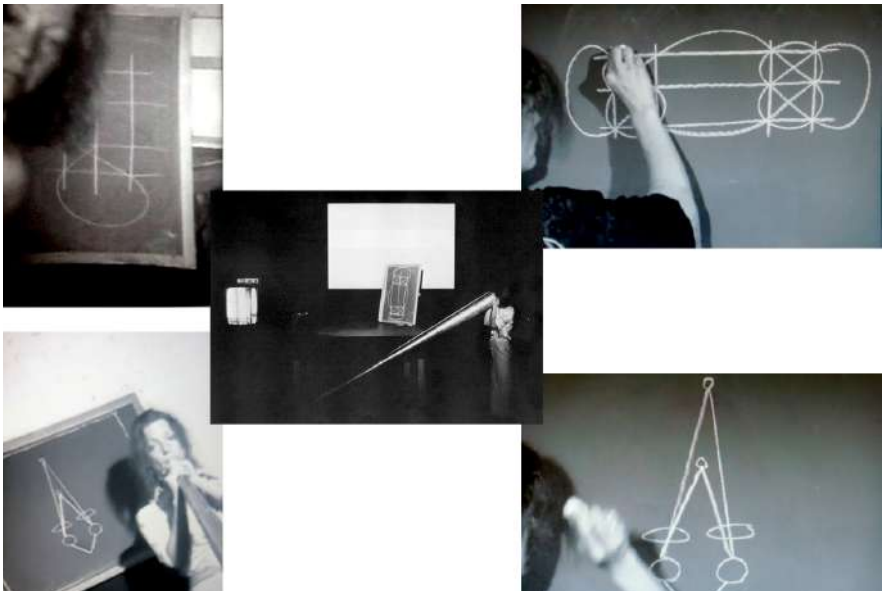

Image 8. Left: Jonas, J. (1976). *Good Night Good Morning* [video stills]. Center: Jonas, J. (1976). *Mirage*. Anthology Film Archives. Photograph by Babette Mangolte. Right: Jonas, J. (1976). *Drawing Film* (*Mirage*) [video stills].

The performance's sequencing evoked not only a theme of contrasts but also an image of transformation, and *Good Night Good Morning* played a pivotal role in developing this arc. The performance's fourth and final movement began with Jonas playing a private game of hopscotch, beating the numbers vigorously with a stick, and then running in place, shaking her entire body as hard as possible in a form of dynamic meditation meant to "release the knots" in body and mind. She performed this frenetic movement for around five minutes in front of documentary film footage of a volcano eruption—the performance's energetic climax. When the film ended, Jonas moved to the area behind the screen, and backstage lights

faded in and out to reveal her and other performers amid a forest of cones. At this point, *Good Night Good Morning* began to play on the vertical monitor, initiating a turning-over event that connected themes of contrasts characterizing the performance up to that point with a series of cycles that structured the ending.

After *Good Night Good Morning*, the drawing film resumed to show Jonas drawing long curves that resemble a rainbow while a man's voice sang the nursery rhyme "Ba Ba Black Sheep," and together these actions suggest renewal, a return to childlike innocence. Next in the film, Jonas drew a circle and labeled it "Sun," then erased the caption and part of the circle to leave a crescent shape, referring to correspondences of sun and moon—alchemical symbols for change, transmutation. The final sequence began with Jonas performing a series of cyclical movements, repeatedly stepping through a large wooden hoop alongside film footage in which she performed the same movements. To create this footage, cinematographer Babette Mangolte filmed Jonas performing in video, the monitor turned on its side and desynchronized to create a horizontal scroll across the screen. The film reproduces the video image, and the screen's independent movement due to the scroll causes a syncopation that enhances the rhythm of Jonas's cyclical action. Eventually, onstage and onscreen, Jonas crouched in a fetal position inside the hoop and rocked back and forth. Finally, the image changed to show Jonas bent at the waist, like a cone, looking at the camera, and as the image changes in value between light and dark, Jonas performs a disappearing act behind the horizontal roll. By assuming the performance's central and yet always ambiguous form (the cone), Jonas's disappearance effectively dissolved the image of the performance itself, and as this occurred, circus music cycled in rounds through the speakers.

Image 9. Jonas, J. (1976). *Mirage* [video stills].

### *4. The Future Present*

Translation is an essentially historiographical process, as it involves interpretations of a work's relevance in terms of the historical and cultural present. In *The Task of the Translator*, Walter Benjamin reminds us that literature—and by extension all art—takes part in living, evolving histories, and thus as part of a work's afterlife, in translation, the original necessarily undergoes change. According to his text, "Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own" (1968, p. 73). Jonas's embrace of installation during the 1990s reflects this process of guiding her work's maturation and change. If the installations initially stemmed, in part, from her acute historical consciousness circa 1994 and anticipation of her work's future, they also reflect changing publics for art and different opportunities for her work's presentation not available to her before.

Jonas's conceptualization of her work as "translation" and her ability to make the installations truly effective as such likewise constitute a historical formation that has developed over time. The first installation version of *Mirage,* which Jonas created for her Stedelijk retrospective in 1994, assembled the work's major elements for the first time since its last performance in 1980. But compared with the six-channel version that Jonas exhibits today, this two-channel version appears as a necessary first step that indicates how her approach has since evolved. In 1994, Jonas did not yet describe her installations as translations. Instead, she conceptualized the practice as an extension of her sculptural activities and described the resulting installations as "stage sets." Neither the terminology nor the practice was unprecedented in her career. In 1976, Jonas presented her first museum exhibition, which was also one of her first gallery-based installations, under the title *Stage Sets* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia (14). The eponymous stage set resembled her performance sets and incorporated elements from recent works—including *Funnel* (1974) and *Mirage*—but did not represent any work in particular. In 1994, Jonas returned to this model and developed it, reconstructing the stage set and reconfiguring performance elements so as to evoke the specific look and mood of *Mirage.*

Image 10. Jonas, J. (1976). *Stage Sets* [installation view]. Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania.

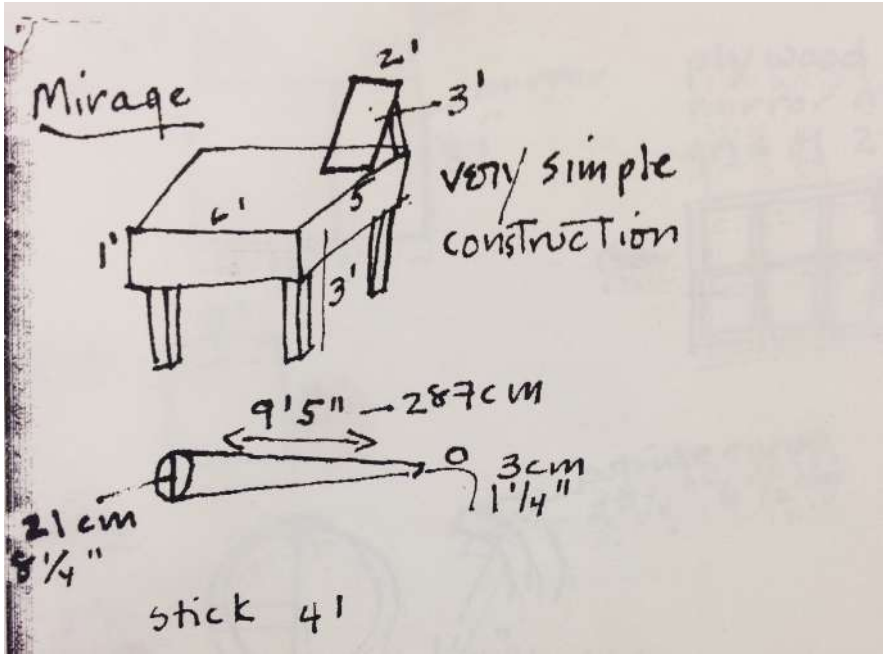


Image 11. Jonas, J. (circa 1994). Diagram for *Mirage*. Stedelijk Museum archives, Amsterdam.

For the Stedelijk, Jonas created a new video, *Mirage V* (1994), that compiled selections from the performance's 16mm drawing film intercut with parts of the volcano film, followed by *May Windows.* She projected this video over the reconstructed table—a "very simple construction," according to an early diagram—on which she placed the performance props. *Good Night Good Morning* played on a vertical monitor beside the table, and two sets of documentary performance photographs hung on adjacent walls—one representing *Mirage* and the other her prior but related performance, *Funnel.* Jonas further revised the installation over several subsequent exhibitions in the next decade. In later versions, she dropped the photographs of *Funnel* and separated the videos as distinct channels that surround viewers and play simultaneously. In 2000, for her retrospective at Galerie der Stadt, she added the video *Mirage II* (1976/2000) and another newly edited video, also entitled *Mirage* (1976), which compiles every take from the film footage that Jonas had excerpted within the performance. With such additions the installation began to assume greater autonomy from the performance, and yet, by approximating a qualitative sense of mood and content, it began to mirror the performance as a complimentary object.

Around this time, in the early 2000s, Jonas began to describe her installations as translations and also to emphasize their temporal dimensions, in addition to the spatial (15). In her artist's statements from this time, Jonas writes:

> In all of my recent work I have experimented with duration and time as they are perceived and experienced differently in performance and installation—by an audience which moves through a space, as opposed to another that sits in a fixed position witnessing a theatrical event (2001, p. 121) (16).

At this point in her career, then, Jonas began to investigate the specific differential between performance and installation just as she had done among numerous other media throughout her career. This focus has directed the subsequent course of her art and enabled recent projects, such as her ambitious five-room installation and related performance, *They Come to us Without a Word,* commissioned for the pavilion of the United States at the 2015 Venice Biennale. The same focus on the quality one's experiences within the installation spaces also informed the immersive, exploratory environment of *Light Time Tales.* In the sense that this exhibition constituted an integrated network among disparate elements—that is, the individual artworks—it mirrored the very forms of Jonas's art. Thus, at this point, twenty years after the pivotal Stedelijk show that inaugurated her installation practice in earnest, Jonas has achieved a translation of her artwork into the form of the exhibition itself.

Although experiences of attending Jonas's performances provide unique perspectives on her work not attainable by other means, her performances are always about more than simply, in Rockwell's terms, having been there "in that

exact time and place, never to be repeated." What transcends one's experience in that moment is a work's *content,* which possesses a degree of independence, or "translatability," that enables Jonas to adapt her works in different ways and within different historical contexts. Because her art is highly visual and suggestive, meaning inheres in the images themselves and thus requires them, and audience interpretations of them, as mediums of transmission. This interpretive encounter is essential to the work, and the greatest advantage of translation over documentation lies precisely in its preservation.

Museums have functioned as partners in Jonas's effort to make her works accessible to present and future audiences while also preserving their integrity as multifaceted artworks that have evolved over time. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which acquired the *Mirage* installation in 2007, keeps extensive records, including interviews with Jonas, that detail the artist's wishes for its presentation (17). The Stedelijk Museum does the same for the two installations in their care, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy / Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (1972/1994) and *Revolted by the Thought of Known Places…Sweeney Astray* (1992/1994). The development of Jonas's performance installations thus foregrounds the function of museums as stewards of these works and so, in part, of Jonas's artistic legacy. Jonas has been actively involved in every instance of her works' exhibitions thus far, and although an installation like *Mirage* is, at this point, relatively stable, Jonas always fine-tunes its arrangement within specific exhibition spaces, according to her artistic judgment. This slight variability in the works' forms places responsibility on the museums to make decisions on the artist's behalf when she is no longer able to make them herself. The Stedelijk is conscientious of this fact and thus maintains detailed records of the works' exhibitions to build a history of how they have evolved through each of their iterations (18). This information augments the basic installation instructions to help the museum find solutions to unforeseen questions that may arise in the future. By maintaining this memory of the works' evolutions these institutional archives also modify notions of the calcified museum object to accommodate the multidimensionality of Jonas's art.

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**Notes**

(1) Joan Jonas, *Light Time Tales,* curated by Andrea Lissoni, HangarBicocca, Milan, October 2, 2014–February 1, 2015; Malmö Sweden, September 26, 2015–January 10, 2016.
(2) Jonas discusses her process of designing the exhibition layout in a video produced by HangarBicocca and distributed on the museum's website: http://www.hangarbicocca.org/exhibitions/what-s-on/Joan-Jonas. Andrea Lissoni provided further details of this process in a talk entitled "Walk Around Time," presented at the symposium "Experience in and Beyond the White Cube" at UT Austin.
(3) Jonas developed the other three works as installations independent of any performances. My use of the term "performance installation" in this paper is merely pragmatic, as I intend simply to isolate those of Jonas's installations that bear direct connections to certain performances from those without such relationships.
(4) The five retrospective works were: *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy/ Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (1972/1994); *Mirage* (1976/1994); *Juniper Tree* (1976/1994); *Volcano Saga* (1985/1994); and one installation based on a series of early performances collectively titled *Mirror Pieces and Outdoor Pieces* (1968/1994). The new work was *Revolted by the thought of known places… Sweeney Astray* (1994). The installations *Organic Honey* and *Sweeney Astray* now form part of the Stedelijk's collection.
(5) Berkeley Art Museum, University of California Berkeley, 1980; Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1983.
(6) Video interview with Joan Jonas (2003), from the artist's own archives.
(7) See http://www.hangarbicocca.org/exhibitions/what-s-on/Joan-Jonas
(8) For key sources, see: Phelan, P. (1993). *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London and New York: Routledge; Auslander, P. (2006). The Performativity of Performance Documentation, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 28*(3); Jones, A. (1997). Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation. *Art Journal 56*(4), 11–18; Jones, A. (Ed.). (2012). *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History.* Bristol and Chicago: Intellect.
(9) Jonas has referred repeatedly to her installations and other works as

"translations". See, for example, Jonas, J. (2007). Space, Movement, Time. *Joan Jonas*. Milan: Charta, 48.

(10) Ann Reynolds discusses relationships between Jonas's, *Oad Lao*, and *Wind*, in "The Box That Contains Us" (p. 21). Reynolds (2015). The Box That Contains Us. *Joan Jonas: They Come to Us Without a Word*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT List Visual Arts Center.

(11) Here I am thinking of my work in conversation with Dorothea von Hantelmann in "The Experiential Turn", in *On Performativity*. Elizabeth Carpenter (Ed.). (2014). *Living Collections Catalogue* 1. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center. Retrieved from http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn.

(12) Jonas herself conceives of her work as montage and compares its form to cinema and poetry, including Imagism and Haiku. Among numerous possible citations, see Robert Ayers, 'That's What We Do—We Retell Stories.' Listening to Joan Jonas, in *Joan Jonas* (2004, p. 15), exhibition catalogue, London: John Hansard Gallery/Wilkinson Gallery.

(13) The script appears in Douglas Crimp (Ed.). (1983). *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982*. Berkeley and Eindhoven: University Art Museum, University of California Berkeley, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum.

(14) From 1974 to 1977, Anthology hosted a series of video programs curated by Shigeko Kubota, and *Mirage* premiered as part of that series, as did Jonas's prior performance, *Twilight* (1975).

(15) See Jonas, J. (1977). *Stage Sets.* Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania. 3 December 1976 – 5 January 1977.

(16) Jonas's first published reference to her installations as "translations" that I have found appears in Jonas, J. (2001, p. 121). *Joan Jonas: performance video installation, 1968–2000*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag.

(17) Roughly the same sentence appeared in her artist's statements for *documenta 11* (2002) and her solo exhibition at the Queens Museum of Art (2003).

(18) My thanks to Athena Christa Holbrook, Collections Specialist, and Erica Papernik-Shimizu, Assistant Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art, for sharing information about MoMA's collection records and preservation procedures for *Mirage* with me.

(19) My thanks to the Stedelijk Museum's Head of Collections, Bart Rutten, for sharing information about and his reflections on these procedures with me during a conversation on August 25, 2015.

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