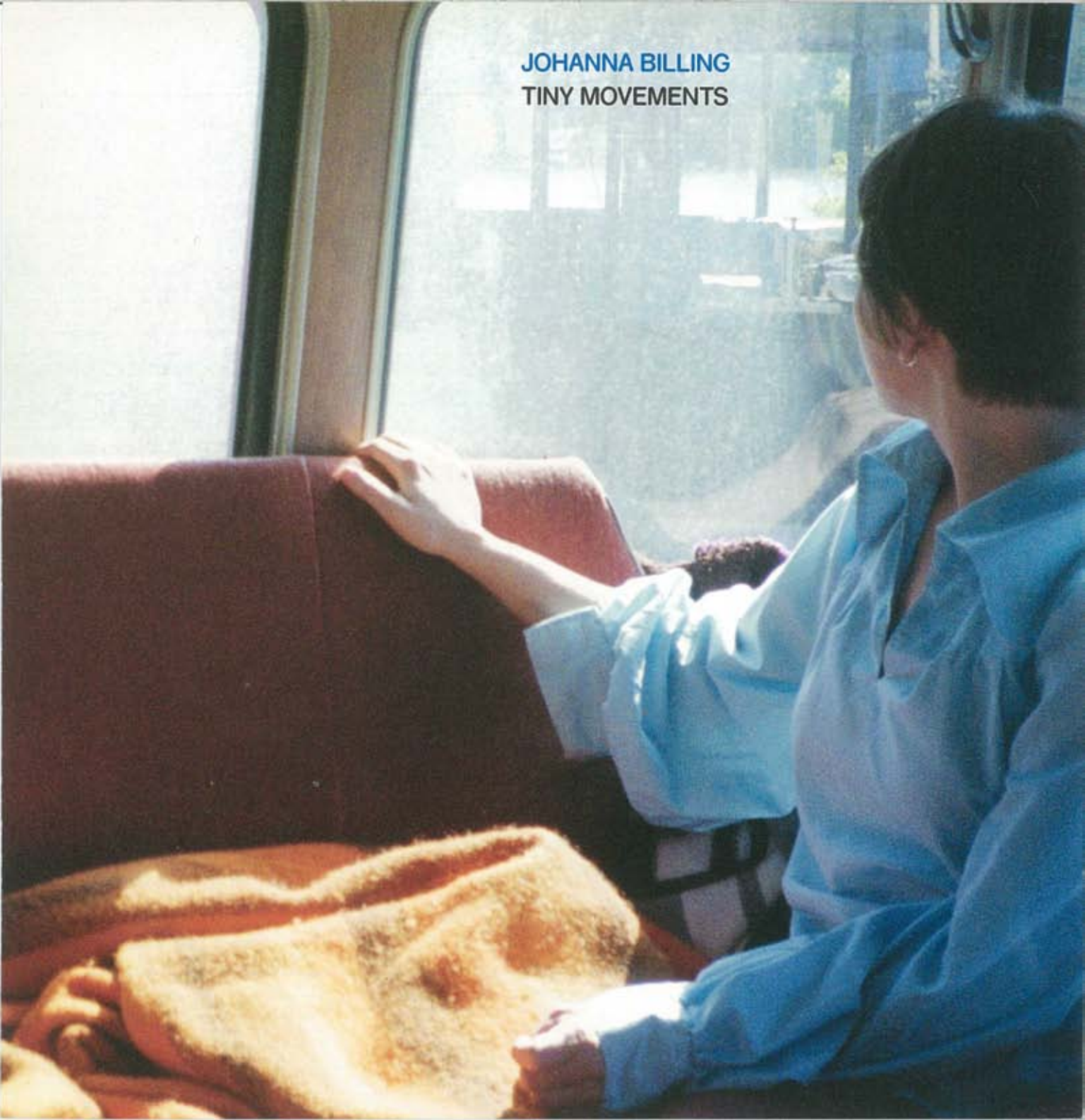


JOHANNA BILLING  
TINY MOVEMENTS





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15 August - 27 September 2009

Published 2009  
© Australian Centre for Contemporary Art  
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ISBN 978-0-9805778-6-0

Front and back cover image:  
*Make it happen on tour*,  
Moss, Norway, 2000

## INTRODUCTION JULIANA ENGBERG

My introduction to the work of Johanna Billing was her video situation, *Project for a revolution*. During the short film, young adults assemble in a room – like a university seminar space or meeting room. Marshaled to the call to rally by a poster, the participants collect and wait. And wait. And... Billing's film work settles on faces and body gestures. Attitudes of boredom, anxiety, confusion, frustration, impatience and resignation are logged. As the minutes tick by, no-one steps up to organise the situation. Therefore energy is displaced; anticipation climaxes then wanes.

It's a great study in group dynamics – this revolution without plot, cause and protagonist. Akin to business training methods that place participants in anxious unspoken meetings, or psychological control groups to see who will step up and who will hold back, Billing's film identifies inertia without leadership. The participants have volunteered their enthusiasm and energies to an unspecified cause, but without a motivator stepping up to identify the necessary action or target, this social potency can become dissolute and disaffected.

Obviously Billing's 'experiment' offers up numerous social, psychological and political metaphors. In particular Billing's focus is upon a very specific age group – the young 20-somethings; a demographic that might, but is yet to, nominate itself as a force for change. The lack of evident leadership can be read as a political and social commentary. The behavior between participants, in this instance distant and uncommunicative, might indicate a lack of social cohesion or team-based ability. An audience will no doubt bring their own interpretation based on their particular experiences. Billing leaves it open – up to both participants and audience. There is no obvious outcome, only the situation itself.

That is not to say everything is normal in Billing's work. She is interested in open observation, but equally she is crafting that delivery. Looking is something she doubles when constructing what the viewer will see. Editing is critical in this process. Billing's decisions make powerful use of gesture and faces to enhance intensity. Real time is compressed and isolated. Billing's works manufacture a plausible realism. Her material – video – and the transit of time, suggest a 'real time' encounter. Billing's meticulously edited work shrinks time and extracts an essence of realism out of her encounters.

Billing's works move between staged and found choreographies. At the centre of her practice is an investigation of the ways in which individuals and groups behave: singularly or as communities, and an observation that, in either instance, life is made up of encoded, tiny movements that glue things

together or dislocate our common expectations. Billing gives emphasis to these ritualised motivations by isolating the observation of action away from the normalising anchors of spoken narratives and ambient sounds.

Silence is a critical component of these studies of people and movement. Verbal interactions are absent, and ambient sounds are subsumed or co-orchestrated by the introduction of a music 'soundtrack'. It is as if we watch the world, slightly detached, with earphones on.

This makes Billing's work somewhat surreal; slightly hallucinogenic in its dislocation from common communications, and from the usual expectations of consensus outcome desired in psychological experiments. And because her protagonists tend to exist as a specific demographic, there is the added factor of inclusion and exclusion that seeps into the work. If, for example, these were mixed aged groups of people, I wonder, would an elder step forward and instruct or incite. Would the inclusion of younger people make such encounters more unruly or chaotic? What power plays and shifts are lost in this generational exclusion zone? Equally, what collective power is harnessed inside this generational cloister?

These are some of the questions provoked by Billing's works.





*Project for a revolution, 2000*  
DVD (still)



*Project for a revolution, 2000*  
DVD (stills)



WHILE DOING  
JOHANNA BILLING AND ROBERT COOK

This interview occurred in late July 2009, via email. Both of us faced water: Johanna was somewhere on Sweden's west coast, I was somewhere on Australia's west coast. The questions I asked (heavily edited here to honour Billing's restless, turning, searching voice) were about formal aspects of her work that were interestingly and intriguingly and compellingly unanswered when looking at, and reading about, her practice.

The very idea that I could have been surprised that something was 'missing' in the writing about such a young artist's work is interesting. Aside from it reflecting a common awareness of the bounteous body of secondary material about her work, it made me wonder whether my own need to seek clarity was not actually overdetermining things – going against the grain of work that is simultaneously, radically open and deliberately, (un-literally) pragmatically structured.

I figured maybe it's best to let it alone, let it speak on its own. And, at the same time – in a complication that is typically Billingish – I so loved the words that circle the work, and wanted more. This interview ends, inevitably, with a question about this and a beautiful response. Billing's words make me aware that the written-talking that unfolds below, and that unfolds elsewhere (in essays, catalogues, exhibitions, talk between viewers), is another performative voicing of her work with its own rhythms, repetitions, nuances. So, maybe, these answers are not answers, but, as she intimates, part of the work's looping, ongoing presence.

(RC) Your work sets up situations whereby others, who are not actors, explore in a free and un-directed fashion the nuances and problematics of specific activities, locations. Yet in each work there is something 'Billingish' that holds the work together as 'a work' – your directorial voice, which is present, but only at the point of its imminent erasure. What do you feel about this voice, its role?

(JB) This 'voice' moves back and forth. You feel there is a frame holding something together, but the next second the focus shifts. I really enjoy working this way, moving between genres. Sometimes it's dry and sometimes it's more cinematic. But also, many times, whole projects are made up in these 'in-between fields', in situations that you are not quite sure of – are they real or unreal, a rehearsed play or, instead, a recorded rehearsal? And there are, at the same time, different things going on, on different levels. I like the fact that you, as a viewer, while constantly looking, sometimes need to question yourself or redefine these things again and again. It is a deliberate confusion I want to get to, where you cannot



Photographs from the making of the  
film, *Project for a revolution*, 2000.  
Photograph: Johanna Löwenhamn

immediately locate or label what type of film you are seeing. This I think sometimes makes it easier for another type of understanding or communication to take place, things can pop up in these 'in-between' gaps.

When it comes to the actual filming process, my method might resemble a documentary filmmaker collecting hours and hours of footage. (Although the films are never documentaries, as such, as the set up is an unreal, almost fictive, event). And even though there is a lot of freedom and improvisation during the process for the people involved – a wish to explore something that has an open ending, or not knowing exactly where we are heading – and I try not to interfere and direct while things are happening, there is always something that I am hoping will come out. That something is what I spend months later on looking for in the filmed material. I probably can't exactly explain in words what this something is, but it is certainly about intensity, a kind of concentrated moment, about trying to capture, almost, what somebody is thinking while doing something.

The fact that the people taking part often are not actors and are doing things they normally wouldn't do, makes me also sometimes want to underline the 'unrealness' of the invented situation. By doing this I perhaps try to rescue the participants, even though they are in an uncertain situation somehow, looking like they could be part of any of these reality docu soaps where people might also be playing themselves in a – to them – new situation. For me it is very important to find a way to frame people so it does not become a portrait like that. So even though the editing process is sometimes about almost reconstructing the actual event, I feel it is not so much about manipulation, as it is about trying to get closer to what was actually going on. It is somehow about trying to capture the underlying atmosphere of the event.

Related to this is how you create specific characters in, and amongst, your situated ensemble casts. Is this procedure planned or does it happen during the filming?

There is often a focus on somebody, almost like a main character. This is something that just happens and is not always planned. It is often a mix of what is going on and what the different cameras (many times there are several people filming) are 'choosing' to focus on. Or sometimes it is what I bring forward in the editing. Sometimes I have focused on one person in a more classic, narrative way where you follow somebody that comes a bit later to the place where people have already gathered, and somehow you start looking at things through the eyes of this person. But sometimes it is just something very organic. Either way, there are never any created characters like with actors.



Photographs from the making of the film, *Project for a revolution*, 2000.  
Photographer: Johanna Löwenhamn



Perhaps it's because you don't work with actors that your films are imbued with a touching sincerity. There is no posturing, no smirking, no eye-rolling. Is this natural to your performers or is it something you encourage or bring about through your organisation of the event/scenarios?

I am glad to hear you feel this as this is what I am striving for. It is always a delicate balancing act though, as many of the situations – on the surface – have the look of something that you are not used to taking so seriously. Either it is about something very simple, a kind of everyday situation, or it is about something that you are used to taking in as entertainment – like *Graduate Show* (1999), which is basically a dance film. Or the *You Don't Love Me Yet* (2003) film that resembles a music video, or the more well-known collaborative efforts in music studios such as *Band Aid*, etc. I guess many of the projects are placed within these already loaded areas that we might not consider as 'serious' in terms of culture and what we expect it should 'deliver' or mean.

I am always drawn to these situations that you might already have preconceived ideas about, but in which there is always something else going on underneath the surface. The 'sincerity', as you call it, is never something I can script or tell people to have/do. But it is the constructed situation itself that is creating it, when you are focusing on people who are very focused or concentrated on making something. At the same time, there is no room for people to make a joke about it. I also strive to create a situation with a lot of freedom for people to make their own choices; decisions and movements in which trust plays a major role. But from the very beginning there is also probably something earnest in the proposal and in the reasons people have for taking part that altogether creates this.

I find it hard to put into words why, but the sense that we should always learn, in a humble, open fashion – something that is I believe implied and captured in your work – is incredibly moving to me. Is it something that hits you, as a maker, on an emotional level as well?

It probably does, yes. The films are all based around some kind of performance and achievement. In earlier works the idea of performance was more related to performance in a double-sided context of pressure, stress and anxiety, but this has shifted a bit away from that now. I am always drawn to situations that carry this type of potential for learning. It does not have to be about learning a new skill, it could be about seeing things in a new way, from other perspectives. For me, this learning is part of the project on many levels; something that goes on for the people taking part, for me as an artist and the people I collaborate with, and, finally, hopefully, for an outside spectator. I have many times referred to the projects



*Missing out, 2001*  
DVD (stills)

as catalysts, the way they are about a search, about finding out something on the way, while doing.

I'm interested in your attitude to 'the group'. I figure it's more complicated than people might assume. I mean, each group dynamic is totally different; each group is an individual. If it were the early 1990s I'd say you were deconstructing 'groupness'. What do you say about it in 2009?

Yes, the group is never as important as one might assume. And the group as such is never the actual focus for the work, more part of a set up somehow. But, of course, it carries a lot of references as well, and it was more specific in the works made in 2000 and 2001 for example, films like *Project for a revolution* and *Missing out*, that had almost the function of being portraits of a group or generation (even though that was never my original intent). But even in those films, which on the surface look like something that is socially connected – a certain group in the community – people are actually even more isolated from each other. So there is very seldom any social interaction between people.

That is why it is a bit odd that there is a tendency to talk about the work as being 'social' or participatory just because it involves a group seemingly doing something together, or actually, more 'at the same time' than 'together'. The work shows more what ideas we usually connect to the image of a group than what actually goes on in the films. I am not sure what I would say at the moment in 2009. More and more, the way I am working with people in the films is about creating a relation to what goes on around each individual, something that is the 'other'; society, other people, etc. Actually, more and more recently, every time I come up with a new idea for a film I feel, 'oh no, not a group again...' but it is a bit about how the projects have come together, as they are often being shaped around an activity that has 'required' a cast of more than one.

A question that is possibly dull, but possibly necessary: how do you personally trace the shifts and changes from work to work to date? Is there a 'developmental arc' of the 'broader project' that you can ascertain thus far?

I am not sure I can say, myself, if there is a broader project. To me, on one hand, the films are all very different from each other. Yet, at the same time, they are probably about the same thing, just from different angles and aspects. I think definitely each work is growing out of the previous one and that they are depending on one another. I work very slowly, with around one big project per year, or sometimes even less. Often, I am trying to develop my way of working in a way that might not be as visible for others as it is for me. My working methods have had a tendency to be a bit dogma-like; I have enjoyed having certain rules to structure the work. For example, for a while

I only worked with the sound/music from the actual event/recording. Another is that I have not wanted to use dialogues – or put the soundtracks on records, etc. These became rules for a while that later I started to try and break, as a reminder that I am free to do what I want. It is so easy to get stuck in methods that become rules, but not in a creative way. So for every work there is always something I want to break up, that I have so far not dared or wanted to do.

I think it is just a very practical way to keep yourself challenged. And sometimes it could just be about getting back to some place where you once started. For example, in the most recent film I just finished, *I'm lost without your rhythm*, I am collaborating again with a choreographer I worked with on another film ten years ago. And after having made a couple of more documentary type of projects, I felt the need to work a bit more abstractly. I have also always said that I never work with actors, but this time I worked with acting students – but in a situation where they are not really acting but instead involved in a choreography workshop. This led to a very different collaboration and expression that was new to both them and me. So somehow there has to be something new to explore both for me and for the other people involved, even if it is just about taking tiny steps each time.

I read, somewhere, about you 'doing research' for a particular work. But for some reason I found it hard to imagine the sort of research you might actually do. How does the process of inspiration, planning, research, doing, etc. go for you?

I can understand why you wonder about this. The last couple of years I have made quite site-specific work in other countries, so the research part often involves a lot of travelling and spending time in a specific place. Many times I bring some kind of idea or 'question' to these places, but then I need to anchor it; see if it can make sense in this specific place and, if so, I spend quite a lot of time meeting with people, looking around for locations, etc. finding out the history of the specific themes and buildings and societies, etc. These things might not be as evident in the final result, but for me it is important for the foundation of the work, that no matter how crazy an initiated art project can sometime appear, it is connected to something real somehow and can make sense for the people taking part and for the place where it is made. So even though I am into the field of art, I am driven by a functionalistic approach which means there has to be some kind of 'usefulness' involved.

How do you determine the length of your works? Is there a certain level of experience you want to deliver when you come up with an idea, a subject? Or is it something that is more organic, that develops out of the footage?

I never know the length of the film until towards the end of the editing process. This is one of the most difficult and sometimes





*Missing out*, 2001  
DVD (still)

most stressful parts of the whole process; not knowing what type of film I am making until quite late in the process. With *This is how we walk on the moon* (2007), a project that was filmed during two days, there were many possibilities and I did not know until after having reconstructed this journey into 'one' that it had to have the specific length in order to 'feel' it. The film I just finished editing a couple of weeks ago had forty hours of footage that I had to edit my way through during five months in order to understand how long it had to be. So this is determined by the footage. But that is also what I love about making these types of films, and to make them in the field of art, that it is possible to play around with formats this way; that the film itself decides if it should be 3 minutes long, 30 minutes or even 30 hours. The length of films in the film world, as well as the length of songs in the music world, is many times so extremely standardized and conventional. I find it quite amazing that it is so seldom broken up.

Connected to the idea of time is my feeling that there is a kind of languor in your work. Or maybe not languor exactly, maybe it's the sense that in your work activities take place in the time it requires for them to fully occur. What are your thoughts on pacing?

This time aspect I do not always think too much about, but it is probably a key thing somehow – the working pace I have; making work very slowly, focusing on one project per year or even less, letting it take a long time. But I know I have also, in the beginning, had a desire to create a place where you can freeze time for a moment, to press pause for a bit and focus on the things in the everyday that you normally don't pay too much attention to. And I think art is also the place in which you can focus on this kind of reflection which requires time. More and more I have been interested in working with these rhythms within the work, and so there is a mix of different speeds happening at the same time, and a kind of dynamic in between them. Some works are rhythmically cut up, in a quick rhythm, while at the same time showing something going on slowly during a longer time. It is probably a feeling of how the inner pulse meets the pace. In the most recent work it is actually all about rhythm and the increasing of speed. There's a lot of running which was linked to the phenomena of how we, as human beings, start to run in a situation of crisis. And how we, in this ongoing increasing of speed in society, can find ourselves in a constant 'crisis' reaction, 'running' around.

In an interview once you talked in a really beautiful way about your art school beginnings; the sense of trying to make something, trying to be, to figure stuff out. And now your work is about the activity of learning, and the space and time of learning. It's like you are both making and extending your own ideal art school.



*Missing out*, 2001  
DVD (stills)

That is a wonderful way of looking at it. To me, when I started making art and listening to teachers and looking into the universes of other artists, it was not only about art and artists, but also *konstnärsskap* which I think could be translated from Swedish to mean artistry. It's a word that embraces process somehow – both the art, the making of it, and your self. Suddenly it gave another perspective of how to look at these things and that it was possible to think about your own so-called artistry in a very long perspective and to look at it as a continuing, ongoing process. This way you are never finished and the idea of going to an art academy for a couple of years is not about getting the education and then starting, it is very floating. I was also lucky to have a couple of teachers who were very non-hierarchical in this way, always reminding us students that we were all in the same boat. They were never above us students, it was all about still finding out what and how to do things, about redefining, twisting and turning, and learning.

On this idea of constant twisting and turning, your work loops seamlessly and our knowledge of what we have seen (already a memory, unreliable) shapes how we see the present loop. How important is this specific kind of looping for you?

I really have a need to see things over and over again; to see the variations and the nuances. The making of loops started in a way with the film *Project for a revolution*, and the idea of the word revolution and its circular meaning; also the way history is repeating. It became also a form I could use in a physical sense to, in the film, show people getting stuck in this form, not being able to break out. Then, for each film, I have enjoyed finding out other ways of using the loop and/or the repetition in a way that creates a different meaning for the specific film. In *Magical World* (2005), the loop shows a constant, ongoing rehearsal for something: an ongoing adjustment, something that might never be finished. Or in *Where she is at* (2001), where after having jumped finally, the woman on the diving board starts to climb up again and there is never any ending or climax, just the way it should be, fulfilling a norm. The loop has also been a way to stay in this present-tense, the here and now, the frozen moment. In *You Don't Love Me Yet* the repetition becomes like a mantra, each version is repeating but slightly altering, changing something, taking small steps towards a goal that is not also predefined, like in Arthur Russell's 'This is how we walk on the moon' lyrics: 'Each step is moving, moving me up, one tiny, tiny, tiny move, it's all I need, and I jump over'.

This last question is about the reading of the accumulation of tiny moves that compose your work. You're a young artist, yet there are a lot of interviews, and your voice and words are very present when one comes to the work. Do you have any thoughts about this presence, and more broadly how the work is interpreted and written about, and indeed how it is/should be experienced by the viewer?

I have been so lucky to have the possibility to produce work in the time I have needed, very slowly. And I have also had the opportunity to show the films a lot – even the work I made ten years ago I show again now, alongside more recent work. The possibility for myself to then see the films again and again in different contexts and places, is (for myself) creating a kind of never-ending and growing reflection on what I do. It really is a luxury situation, a way to keep the slow rhythm of the making of the film alive and also afterwards in the meeting with an audience. But when the work is also project-based with a conceptual background (even though I feel I have also one foot at the same time within a more intuitive way of working), there is a tendency to read the work very conceptually – from A to B, etc. I always try, though, to work with many layers and references, and these can all be active at the same time; I am not after one type of understanding. And I am really interested in the possibility for people to enter it from different directions and levels.

On another level, it is interesting that many of my art experiences do not even come from having seen a work, but reading, hearing about it. There is something about this potential of 'talking about art', the vision and ideas floating around, that I think is so beautiful and inspiring. A work is not just a work in a gallery, it can have a history around it and it can live and exist in talks, discussions and interviews. This goes back to the idea of works being catalysts, to raise discussions, which for me is what it is all about.





*Where she is at*, 2001  
DVD (still)





opposite page:  
 Photograph from the making  
 of the film, *Where she is at*, 2001.  
 Photographer: Jan B Christensen

this page:  
*Where she is at*, 2001  
 DVD (stills)



opposite page:  
*You Don't Love Me Yet* tour poster  
Designer: ÅBÅKE

this page:  
*You Don't Love Me Yet*, 2003  
Photographer: Emanuel Almborg



# You don't Love me yet Tour 2002 – 2009

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You don't Love me yet, A Film by Johanna Billing

Atlantistudion, Stockholm 3 June 2003



Photographs from the  
making of the film,  
*You Don't Love Me Yet*, 2003.  
Photographer: Emanuel Almborg







opposite page:  
Francis Plagne, *You Don't  
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this page:  
Melbourne Ukulele Kollektive,  
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Olympic Doughnuts, *You Don't Love Me Yet* live at  
The Toff, Melbourne, 2009.

*You Don't Love Me Yet*  
live at The Toff tour poster  
Designer: Warren Taylor





Photograph from the  
making of the film,  
*Magic & Loss*, 2005.



## A SONG BETWEEN US HANNAH MATHEWS

Johanna Billing likes music. It's a trait she shares with many contemporary visual artists, some of whom even make music themselves. But what sets Billing apart, and what draws me into her work, is the way music functions across levels of action and reflection, expression and identification, metaphor and form. Music can be found in the title of her films, their accompanying soundtracks and the activity of her subjects. Its composition imparts context and can anchor her work to a period or mood. Titles and lyrics provide layers of narrative, reinforcing meaning and intent. Music even offers an entry into works that may otherwise appear silent or impenetrable. Through these means, Billing employs music for its social function; its ability to connect and communicate with the wider world. And, more specifically, by locating her conceptual-filmmic practice within the tradition of popular music as a socially expressive form, Billing places her works in an unusual interstice between the very categories of art and music themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given its centrality, music has played a role in Billing's practice from the start. In 1998, while studying at art school in Stockholm, Billing founded the record label, *Make it happen*, with her brother, Anders. In its eleven-year history, the label has undertaken tours with unestablished groups and artists working with music, and released eighteen records on CD and vinyl. Significantly, many of these acts have grown out of Scandinavia's demo-scene and the label operates in such a way that artists retain the rights to their work.<sup>2</sup> As its title suggests, *Make it happen* is grown from a DIY tradition and has an intent that is at once active, creative and political.

Music has also come to manifest itself in Billing's visual practice. The exhibition, *Tiny Movements* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, introduces a selection of Billing's video works from the last nine years that reference the influence of music, along with other conceptual concerns. One of the earlier videos, *Magic & Loss* (2005), depicts a group of people silently packing up the contents of an apartment in Amsterdam. The owner remains *in absentia* as box after box is filled with books, photographs, clothes and plants, and furniture is disassembled and lowered to the street. Through her use of a generic inventory of domestic items and the silent activity of each subject, Billing draws our attention to the fundamental anonymity of the individual in society. The impact of the work is expanded, however, through the borrowing of its title from Lou Reed's 1992 album, recorded as the musician grieved the death of two friends. With this in mind, the intimacy and ephemerality of life is emphasised as these objects and personal keepsakes, familiar to the home, are methodically removed. In his rock song, Reed sings,

'There's a bit of magic in everything, and then some loss to even things'. In Billing's work, we watch as evidence of a life lived systematically disappears in front of us.

I was introduced to Billing's practice through a more recent video, *This is how we walk on the moon* (2007).<sup>3</sup> The work was recorded while the artist was on residency with Collective Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland. It centres on Billing's observation of the apparent disconnection of the city's population to the North Sea, and captures a group of local musicians embarking on their first sailing trip on these waters. The day-long adventure is documented from start to finish, beginning with preparations on land at the Port Edgar Marina and culminating in the students' voyage out to the Firth of Forth Rail Bridge. Their journey is punctuated with instructional diagrams and directions, and changing weather conditions that echo the students' first awkward steps into unknown territory. The work is titled after a 1984 song written by musician Arthur Russell, and is accompanied by an improvised version of this song performed by Billing and friends. In a literal sense, the song references the human desire to conquer the elements; from vast seas to the voids of space. However, the original lyrics also evoke the feeling of excitement and adventure: 'One tiny, tiny, tiny move, it's all I need and I jump over'. Together, the work's audio and visual elements combine to function like a good music video, with the accompanying song remembered as the soundtrack to one of life's significant moments.

*Magical World* (2005) further illustrates Billing's understanding of music's ability to mark time and exist as an allegory of larger complexities. Shot in Croatia during a summer's day in 2005, the work documents a group of children obediently rehearsing *Magical World*; a song about transition, which was originally recorded in 1968 by one of America's first racially mixed bands, *Rotary Connection*. In the film, the song's lyrics are determinedly sung by the children in their second language of English, and speak of transformation and uncertainty about new futures. Throughout the work, scenes of the children rehearsing alternate with shots of the quiet suburb outside; images of construction and advertising are juxtaposed with a small boy who sings, 'Why do you want to wake me from such a beautiful dream? ... Can't you see that I am sleeping?'. Billing's editing style draws an overt association between the children and the place: like these children, Croatia is now tentatively and cautiously taking steps towards defining a new national identity and assimilating with the West. In a 2006 interview Billing spoke of the relationship between the song and her film: 'I was interested in the possibility of being able to express something personal with a voice of one's own in the midst of a rapid course of events'.<sup>4</sup> Billing's appropriation of this song recognises its power and ongoing ability to express the impact of change across generations and culture.



*Magic & Loss*, 2005  
16mm film transferred to  
DVD (stills)







Photographs from the making of the film, *Magic & Loss*, 2005.



The exhibition *Tiny Movements* is also accompanied by a live music event titled, *You Don't Love Me Yet*. Essentially a music gig involving local musicians, each performing a cover version of a 1984 song by the same name, this event has been presented in twenty cities across the world since 2002. The song performed at these gigs was originally written and sung by American singer/songwriter, Roky Erickson, a founding member of the *13th Floor Elevators* and pioneer of the psychedelic rock genre.<sup>6</sup> The song's lyrics, 'I just won't forget because you don't love me yet', offer a lovelorn yet hopeful lament to unrequited love. In attending one of Billing's gigs the audience hears numerous versions of Erickson's song played one after another.

Billing has commented in the past that she was drawn to the song through its ambiguous meaning and uncanny ability to stick in her mind. At the time, she felt the song harboured great potential and this point is significant as it motivated the project's conception. It was also behind Billing's decision to use the format of the 'cover'<sup>7</sup> as a catalyst to explore ways of maintaining originality and uniqueness of personal, as well as artistic integrity, both on a individual and collective level. On one hand, this framework locates the project alongside recent practices of remixing, in which producers or musicians rework famous songs that are then released on a remix album. On another, the experience of listening to cover after cover creates a sense of repetition, which in a formal way ties into the looping device employed by Billing in her videos. This device slowly creates a sense of being caught in a pattern, of being fixed in a re-occurring cycle. Billing has likened this gesture to a desire to 'be in the moment'.

For Melbourne audiences, the *You Don't Love Me Yet* project sits within a local landscape shaped by a long and thriving music history and a recent resurgence of interest in artists working with music.<sup>8</sup> For this chapter of Billing's ongoing event, ACCA has partnered with Marco Fusinato to present the gig as part of his occasional series, *You Don't Have to Call it Music: music by visuals artists* at The Toff. This city-based music venue, with an established audience and program of gigs, is important to Billing's project as it firmly locates the event outside the gallery and in a music context. Billing also seeks to work with musicians: people with an established musical practice who perform publicly. These performers are invited to take part in the gig with full knowledge of Billing's motivation and awareness that *You Don't Love Me Yet* is by no means a typical covers night.

The line-up for Melbourne's *You Don't Love Me Yet* event was developed locally by Marco and myself, and represents a snapshot of Melbourne's independent music scene – without becoming a spectacle of diversity. The final programme comprises both established and emerging musicians whose collective sounds traverse the genres of rock, pop, folk,



Photographs from the  
making of the film, *Magic  
& Loss*, 2005.



*Magical World, 2005*  
DVD (stills)



electro, country, jazz and noise. These include *Henry Wagons*, *Beaches*, *Melbourne Ukulele Collective*, *Sophie Brous*, *Super Wild Horses*, *ZOND*, *Fabulous Diamonds*, *German Shepherd*, *The Broadside Push*, *Olympic Doughnuts*, *Tic Toc Tokyo*, *Francis Plagne*, *David Franzke* and *Teeth & Tongue*. Supported by Billing, these musicians have been invited to take part in the gig, held a few days after *Tiny Movements* opens at ACCA.<sup>8</sup>

The performance is accompanied in the exhibition by a *You Don't Love Me Yet* archival installation. This consists of a film made in 2003 that depicts a group of musicians recording a cover version of the song in Stockholm's Atlantis Studio. Video documentation of those gigs held over the last seven years is also presented. Visitors to the exhibition can sit down and work their way through more than 200 cover versions of Erickson's song, which demonstrate the possibilities inherent in the cover; a rich mixture of genres, generations and geographies.

The *You Don't Love Me Yet* project, in particular, expands upon the distinctive location of Billing's practice between art and music. But what is also relevant, and most interesting, is that it opens up a space for her work to be considered in light of tradition. In essence, the *You Don't Love Me Yet* gig gathers people together to perform their own interpretation of a popular song written over two decades ago by another author. There is an emphasis on participation and revival. Similarly, within the folk tradition, oral history is passed down through generations by way of stories that become nuanced in their repetition, yet remain authentic expressions of times now past.

As an extension of this, folk music encompasses songs that have originated with an individual composer and have become absorbed into the unwritten, living tradition of a community. Each time the song is performed its existence is continued, yet it is also located anew; attached to a new being and a new moment in history. As a result, folk music functions as a physical reification of time and significance moves away from the song's lyrics to the actual act of revival through performance. Billing's ongoing *You Don't Love Me Yet* project works in a similar manner, recognising the potential of such traditions and the ability of each performance to be unique. In this way, music continues its social function within Billing's practice, and like folk music, works to 'reset the moment'<sup>9</sup>.

Billing's work is not often discussed in light of its location at the intersections between disciplines, genres or traditions. However, it is its ability to conflate and exist within these fields that make her practice one of the most interesting and elusive. Within her works, Billing's embrace of the folk tradition is apparent in her emphasis on the handing down of skills, stories and songs across generations and cultures. Yet her relationship with music also introduces an element of 'present-





Photograph from the  
making of the film,  
*Magical World*, 2005.

ness'. Music works in partnership with folk to tie time together; when we listen to music we associate it with our experience of the here and now, or relate it back to past feelings and situations. Music doesn't tend to position us in the future. The looping commonly found in Billing's videos, and the repeated performance of an original song in her *You Don't Love Me Yet* project, works to reinforce this sense of the 'now'.

Billing's clever use of music from various genres – rock, country, psychedelia – not only demonstrates her considerable music knowledge but also her understanding of music's social function within popular traditions and popular culture. In this way, she opens up her work to various trajectories of music and uses their ability to communicate and connect with different audiences. Billing's practice of recording, both in her video work and performance projects, must also be noted, as it creates a tension with the tradition of folk and its oral rather than written custom. In this way, Billing further emphasises the 'present-ness' of her works which, although drawing on long traditions of sharing and community, continue to be located in the here of today.

With reflection, it seems that music is a subject matter that provides a shared, communal language that might, arguably, be missing from the visual arts. Music is something that can reliably connect and tie audiences together, and that, in fact even creates audiences. Seen in this light, Billing's video works move beyond the time-based happenings of previous generations<sup>10</sup> and reach out and between cultural layerings and cultural affiliations. In this way they become personal, and in the company of Billing's honest and knowing relationship with music, we become connected by these songs between us.

<sup>1</sup> In this way, Billing's relationship with music sits outside the minimalist exploration of sound as field (eg. John Cage, La Monte Young, Bruce Nauman) and the more recent work of artists who marry the formal qualities of sound with visual outcomes (eg. Christian Marclay, Mike Kelley, Gary Hill). Her interests also exist in parallel to sound art and its long history of experimentation with technology and composition. Closer comparisons can be made with the 1960s 'happenings' of Allan Kaprow, et al and a recent project by UK-artist, Phil Collins, whose 2005-07 video trilogy documents fans of 1980s band, *The Smiths*, performing karaoke to their album, *the world won't listen*, in Bogota, Istanbul and Indonesia. None of these examples, however, capture the distinct layering of Billing's work.

<sup>2</sup> The demo-scene was comprised of musicians who remained unsigned by record labels. Today this scene has essentially been usurped by Myspace and other social networking sites where bands can now actively promote and distribute their own music.

<sup>3</sup> *Documenta 12*, devised by artistic director Roger M. Buergel and curator Ruth Noack, was held in Kassel in 2007 and featured the work of 109 artists from 43 countries. *This is how we walk on the moon* was presented at the Aue-Pavillon, accompanied by custom-made seating that referenced the outlines of the boat's sails and the functionality of the common folding chair. These seats have been recreated for the *Tiny Movements* exhibition at ACCA.

<sup>4</sup> H Seider, 'More films about songs, cities and circles', *Look behind us, a blue sky*, Hatje Cantz, 2007, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> In music history, Erickson has come to stand as an interesting figure of institutional resistance and comeback. In 1965, after refusing to cut his hair, Erickson dropped out of high school and formed a number of bands before being hospitalised for paranoid schizophrenia and involuntarily receiving electroconvulsive therapy. Released in the mid-70s, Erickson formed a series of new bands before going unmedicated and developing an obsession with mail: he was subsequently arrested for mail theft. In 2001 Erickson's brother was awarded legal custody of the musician and secured medical treatment that has enabled Erickson to stage a comeback with recent performances at California's Coachella Festival and the South by Southwest music festival in Texas.

<sup>6</sup> In popular music, a 'cover version', or simply 'cover', is a new rendition (performance or recording) of a previously recorded, commercially released song.

<sup>7</sup> Recent projects facilitated by visual arts organisations that involve artists working with music include the Linden Centre for Contemporary Art's *United Artists* concert held at the Palace Theatre in 2008; Fremantle Arts Centre's *Bon Scott Project* of the same year; and the Ian Potter Museum of Art's upcoming *The Shloh Project* which invites artists to complete the cover art of Neil Diamond's 1970 album. In 2008 Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces also presented *21:100:100*, a major survey of 100 works by 100 sound artists produced in the 21st century.

<sup>8</sup> Video documentation of these performances will be viewable at ACCA's website after the event. See [www.accaonline.org.au](http://www.accaonline.org.au)

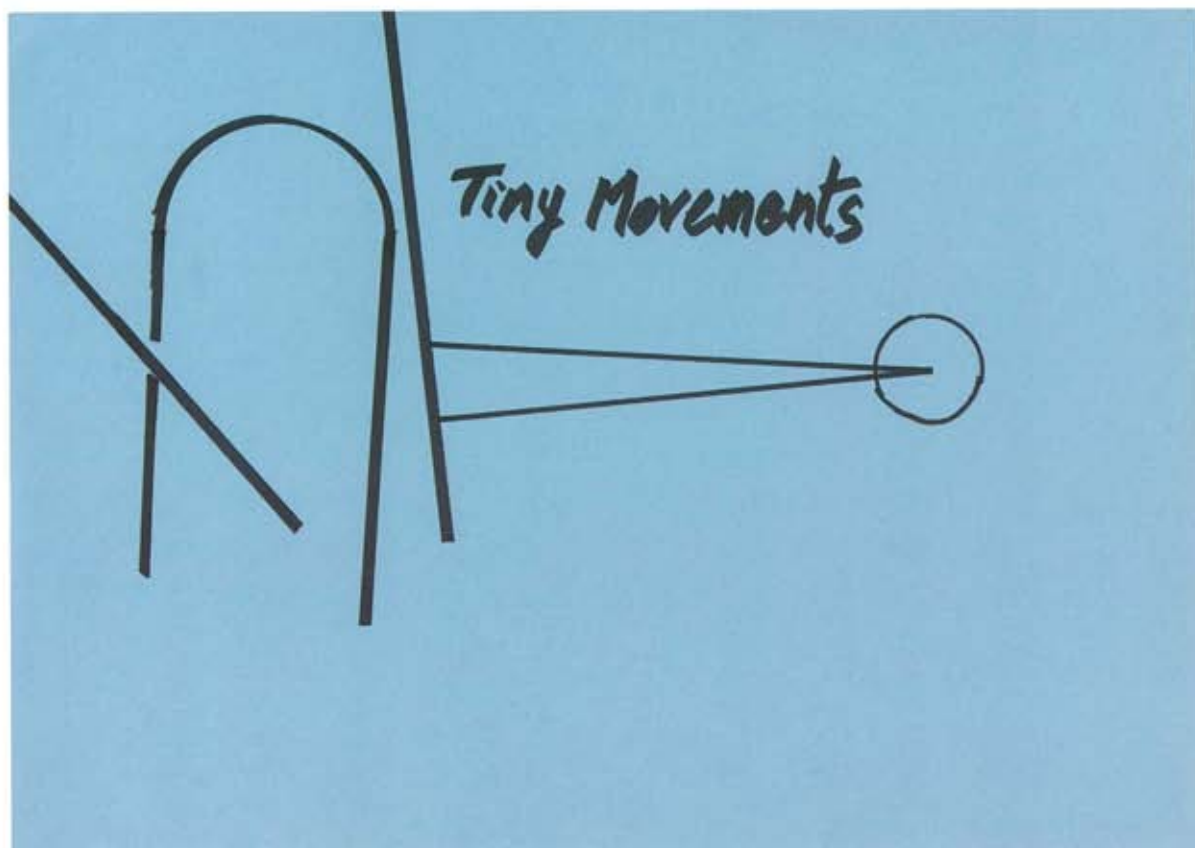
<sup>9</sup> D. Kennan, 'Let me see where I am and let me kick out the jams: an appreciation of 21<sup>st</sup> century sound art', *21:100:100*, exhibition catalogue, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, 2008, p. 350.

<sup>10</sup> According to Wikipedia, Allan Kaprow first coined the term 'happening' in the spring of 1957 at an art picnic at George Segal's farm. In an art historical context, the term is generally used to describe a performance, event or situation that is often multi-disciplinary and seeks to involve the audience in some capacity. Key contributors to the form included Carolee Schneemann, Robert Whitman, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Delford Brown, Lucas Samaras and Robert Rauschenberg.



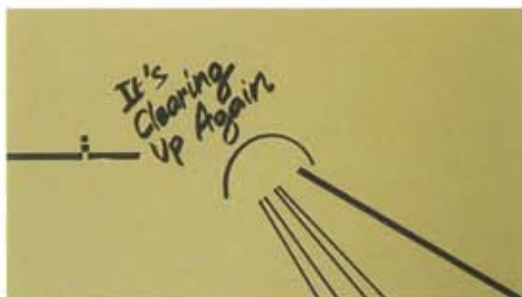
Photograph from the  
making of the film,  
*This is how we walk  
on the moon*, 2007.





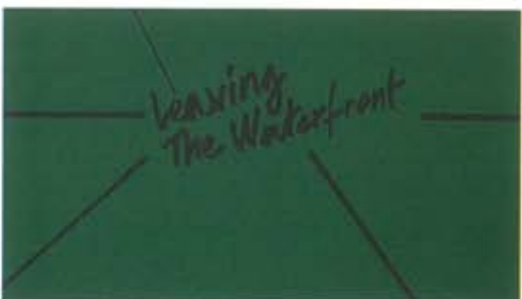
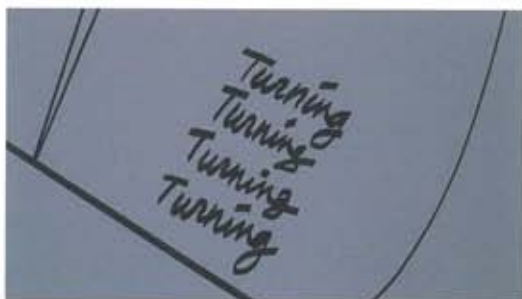
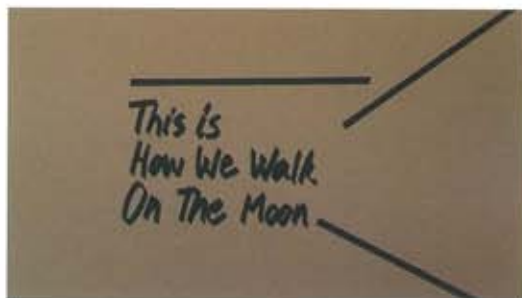
*This is how we walk  
on the moon title cards*  
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*Taking Turns*



This is how we walk  
on the moon, 2007  
DVD (stills)





## BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1973, Johanna Billing is a Swedish artist who currently resides in Stockholm. Billing graduated from the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm, in 1999 and has exhibited her work extensively throughout Europe, America and the United Kingdom since the mid-1990s. Billing works mainly with video and music through her label *Make it happen*.

Billing participated in her first exhibition in 1996 and since then has held solo exhibitions at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2001); Index, Stockholm (2003); Knoxville Museum of Art (2006); P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2006); and Collective Gallery, Edinburgh (2007). The monograph *Johanna Billing: Look Behind Us, a Blue Sky* was published on the occasion of two major solo exhibitions held at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel and Dundee Contemporary Arts in 2007.

Billing's works have been included in a number of curated projects presented at leading contemporary art institutions, including the Tate Modern (*Here we dance*, 2008); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (*Amateurs*, 2008); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (*Playback*, 2007); Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent (*Black Is Black*, 2007); Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (*Don Quijote*, 2006); De Appel, Amsterdam (*Gravity in Art*, 2005); and the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö (*Baltic Babel*, 2002). Billing's work was also featured in Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack's *Documenta 12* (2007); the 9th International Istanbul Biennial (2005); the inaugural Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2005); and *Delays and Revolutions* curated by Francesco Bonami and Daniel Bimbaum for the 50th Venice Biennale (2003).

Billing's film pieces have been included in numerous festivals and screening programs, including *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2006) and *UNCLASSIFIABLE*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2006). Her works are also held in a range of international collections, including Malmö Konstmuseum, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, SMAK, Van Abbemuseum and the Moderna Museet.

## LIST OF WORKS

### *Project for a revolution*, 2000

DVD 03.14/loop

Cinematography by Johan Phillips and Henry Moore Selder

Sound by Mario Adamsson

### *Missing out*, 2001

DVD 03.14/loop

Cinematography by Manne Lindwall

Co-produced by Rooseum

### *Where she is at*, 2001

DVD 07.35/loop

Cinematography by Henry Moore Selder

Produced by Moderna Museet Projekt and Oslo Kunsthall

### *You Don't Love Me Yet*, 2002-09

Installation of archival and DVD documentation from ongoing live tour

### *You Don't Love Me Yet*, 2003

DVD 07.43

Cinematography by Manne Lindwall

Original song by Roky Erickson (published by R Erickson, 1984)

Musical arrangements by Ida Lundén

Recorded and mixed by Pontus Olsson in Atlantis Studio, Stockholm, June 2003

Produced by Index - The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation in collaboration with NIFCA, Helsinki

Co-producers and collaborative partners for the film and tour include Eskilstuna's Konstmuseum/ Balsta Musikslott, Norrköpings Konstmuseum/ Allmän Kultur, Norrköping, Konstkonsulenten in Jämtlandslän/ Mångkulturkonsulenten and UKM, Konstkonsulenten in Västra Götalandsregionen/ Vara Kommun, Gävle Konstcentrum/ Musikhuset and Kultur och Fritid and Ystad Konstmuseum.

The Dutch part of the tour was produced in collaboration with the performance tour festival 'If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to be Part of Your Revolution'. The Madrid event was produced in collaboration with Madrid Abierto.

### *Magic & Loss*, 2005

16mm film transferred to DVD 16.52/loop

Cinematography by Nina da Costa

Camera assistant: Bas Tiele

Sound by Marjo Postma

Music by Karl-Jonas Winqvist

Featuring: Pia Sandström, Audrey Weeren, Seon-Ja Seo, Jan Mech,

Remco Kwik, Chris van Zyl, Par Strömberg, Magnus Montfeldt,

Liesbeth Sijzing and Karina Bakker

Co-produced by Smart Project Space (production assistants: Astrid Schumacher and Mutalemi Nadimi-Mbumba) with support from the Arts Grants Committee, Sweden.

### *Magical World*, 2005

DVD 06.12/loop

Cinematography by Manne Lindwall

Musical arrangements by Petra Jezutkovic

Original song by Sidney Barnes, 1968 (Chevis Music Publishing Corp, BMI)

Participants: Petra Jezutkovic, Sonja Boric, Tadej Horwatic-Cajko, Mara

Matic-Soldan, Ena & Sara Aricic, Lenka, Martin & Josip Mestric, Klara &

Lucija Petrac, Ivana Leksic, Nikolina Penic, Zvonimir Retkovic, Mane

Galoviae & Tomislav Djurinec

Production assistant: Sonja Bori

Co-produced by WHW/Rooseum

### *This is how we walk on the moon*, 2007

DVD 27.00/loop

Cinematography by Manne Lindwall and Johanna Billing

Sound by Pia Patté

Featuring: Johnny Lynch, Emily Roff, Joe Collier, Jenny Gordon and

Guthrie Stewart

Musical soundtrack arranged by Johanna Billing and performed by Johnny

Lynch (vocals), Karl-Jonas Winqvist (vocals), Sara Wilson (vocals), Andreas

Söderström (guitar and melodic), Christian Hörgren (cello), Henry Moore

Selder (guitar and bass), Tuomas Hakava (guitar and organ)

Recorded by Tuomas Hakava in Up and Running Studio, 2007 except for the opening song 'The Western', written and performed by Woo (Independent Project Records, 1989)

Original version of 'This is how we walk on the moon' written by Arthur Russell (Point Music/Orange Mountain Music, 1984)

Soundtrack mixed and mastered by Joachim Ekermann, Make Wave

Title cards designed by Åbåke

Recorded on the Firth of Forth and at Port Edgar Marina, South Queensferry, Edinburgh

Co-produced by the Collective Gallery's One Mile programme (lead artist Kate Gray; co-ordinators Kate Stancliffe and Siobhan Carroll; production assistant Jill Brown), with support from the Scottish Arts Council Lottery Fund, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Documenta 12 with support from IASPS (International Artist Studio Program, Sweden).

### *You Don't Love Me Yet*, 2009

live music event

Sunday 16 August, The Toff, Melbourne

All works courtesy the artist

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACCA is delighted to present the first Australian exhibition of Johanna Billing's work. We would like to thank Johanna for her generous input and time spent on developing the exhibition for a new audience.

Thanks also to Dr Robert Cook, Associate Curator of Modern & Contemporary Photography & Design, Art Gallery of Western Australia for his insightful interview with Johanna, published on the occasion of the exhibition.

ACCA would also like to acknowledge Marco Fusinato and The Toff for partnering in the presentation of the Melbourne chapter of Johanna's ongoing live music event, *You Don't Love Me Yet*. Generous thanks also go to those musicians who performed on the night, Warren Taylor for designing the gig poster and to all those who provided advice on Melbourne's best bands.

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