

and ideological order.”<sup>8</sup> The children’s rehearsal is intercut with scenes of adults sitting around the edge of the classroom while jump cuts switch between the protected, quiet world inside and the outside world with its hustle and bustle, drowning out the children’s music at times. Billing’s camera also goes in and out of focus, following the rhythm of the song. “I want to make films that you feel with your body,” the artist has said. “Music is so physical.”<sup>9</sup> By harnessing the immediate power of music, combined with her use of historically and socially resonant locations, Billing creates extremely moving works, emphasized by an almost seamless loop, reflecting the open-ended optimism as well as melancholy in the little boy’s voice.



Patty Chang, *Fountain*, 1999

#### Patty Chang

Patty Chang’s blurring of the line between fiction and reality is of an altogether different kind. Influenced by early performance artists like Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconci, and Chris Burden, who used their own bodies to cross lines of acceptability, Chang is best known for her work in that area. For *Fountain* Chang poured water onto the surface of a round mirror lying flat on the floor of a public toilet stall. Kneeling over it, she strenuously slurped the water off. For the video the image was rotated ninety degrees so that her face is vertical, and she appears to be engaged in a prolonged kiss with her own mirror reflection. Filmed with a stationary video camera, *Fountain* is only one in a series of mesmerizing and sometimes disturbing performances, which have included Chang trying to sit still while live eels wiggle under her blouse, or shaving her own pubic hair while blindfolded, or attempting to walk with high heels on a waterbed sunk into a suburban lawn, or eating a raw onion with her parents. Originally a painter, Chang has produced videos based on performances that “cross into realms of comedic absurdity or hysterical torture.”<sup>10</sup> In a recent interview, the artist herself said that, “pushing against limits is primary. . . . It has to do with forcing myself to a certain point and beyond.”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, many of her performances are characterized by a transgressive quality that addresses questions of identity, gender, and sexuality with a biting sense of humor, while also causing physical reactions in the spectator.



Mircea Cantor, *Deeparture*, 2005

#### Mircea Cantor

A silent video installation may seem strangely out of place in an exhibition that pays particular attention to the triangulated relationship between sound, image, and viewer. On closer examination, however, Mircea Cantor’s *Deeparture* adds an important dimension to the idea of the medium’s ability to elicit a visceral experience in the viewer through music and sound. Cantor’s video installation shows a wolf and a deer pacing nervously in an empty white gallery space. Confined this way, in a completely artificial environment, the animals watch and circle each other apprehensively without ever falling into their instinctual behavior of attack and flight. Close-up shots and nearly motionless frames shift the viewers’ attention between predator and prey, adding up to a seamless, time-distorting loop. As their tension mounts in anticipation of something horrific, spectators lose track of repeating shots. They are not only emotionally engaged with the animals but also physically, as their heartbeat and breathing accelerate in a gallery that deliberately extends the space of the projected image. With the animals becoming blank screens for viewers to project their own emotions and anxieties on, Cantor’s piece takes on a decidedly allegorical quality. “Only in an allegory would the wolf be sharing the same vital space with the deer, while their dialogue would postpone or suspend the biological necessity of aggression.”<sup>12</sup> We seem to be watching some sort of temporary ceasefire in a winner-loser relationship. “Stillness temporarily camouflages antagonism: the work derives its uncanny strength precisely from this contrast between the delicacy of the performance and the agitated interrogation it engenders. This is but a moment of deferral in the history of violence.”<sup>13</sup> While *Deeparture* is not as overtly political as some of Cantor’s other work in photography and sculpture, it does make us think about social disparity and latent violence. But instead of offering moral guidelines, Cantor encourages us to delve deep inside ourselves, suggesting that “the action is not happening in the image but in ourselves,”<sup>14</sup> and hinting at violence being part of human nature. Like the other artists in the exhibition, Cantor takes full advantage of the visual, audio, and temporal aspects of video to make viewers aware of their own bodies, as they unwittingly become participants in the performance, as the seamless looping of *Deeparture* produces a sense of temporal disorientation.

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#### Notes

- 1 Roberta Smith, “Endgame Art? It’s Borrow, Sample and Multiply in an Exhibition at Bard College, The New York Times (July 7, 2006).
- 2 Ralph Rugoff, Irreducible: Contemporary Short Form Video (Oakland: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, California College of the Arts, 2005), 2.
- 3 Slater Bradley, “Speak Memory: Reflections on the Doppelgänger Trilogy,” PAJ 79, A Journal of Performance and Art, vol. 27, issue 1 (January 2005): 109.
- 4 Alison de Lima Greene, “Roz” (hand-out for the screening of Roz at Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, February 2007), unpaginated.
- 5 Ken Johnson, review of Roz at Brent Sikkema, The New York Times (July 9, 2004).
- 6 Anri Sala, as quoted in “Anri Sala: Long Sorrow and Other Stories,” Stefano Boeri, *Flash Art*, vol. 39, no. 4 (March-April 2006): 88.
- 7 Mark Godfrey, “Articulate Enigma: The Works of Anri Sala,” Anri Sala (London: Phaidon Press, 2006), 62.
- 8 Philipp Kaiser, “Magical Worlds: Johanna Billing’s Video Work,” Parkett, no. 76 (2006): 22.
- 9 Johanna Billing, “Interview with Johanna Billing by Angela Serino,” September 18, 2005 (<http://www.makeithappen.org/presistanbulinterview.htm>), 2.
- 10 Hitomi Iwasaki, as quoted in “Artists,” [http://www.freewaves.org/festival\\_2002/artists/chang\\_p.htm](http://www.freewaves.org/festival_2002/artists/chang_p.htm).
- 11 Patty Chang, as quoted in “Interview with Patty Chang,” Eve Oishi, *Camera Obscura*, vol. 18, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 124.
- 12 Mihnea Mircan, “The Noise of Contention: On Mircea Cantor’s Recent Work,” Mircea Cantor (Reims: Le Collège /Frac Champagne-Ardenne, 2007), 133.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 14 Mircea Cantor, e-mail to the author, September 25, 2007.

#### Exhibition Checklist

**Burt Barr** (b. 1938, Lewiston, ME)  
Lives and works in New York, NY

*Roz*, 2004  
Single-channel video installation, sound  
5 min. 42 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

**Janet Biggs** (b. 1959, Harrisburg, PA)  
Lives and works in New York, NY

*Predator and Prey*, 2006  
Two-channel video installation, shown on eight Plasma screens  
5 min. 19 sec., each channel, loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Claire Oliver Gallery, New York

**Johanna Billing** (b. 1973, Jönköping, Sweden)  
Lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden

*Magical World*, 2005  
Single-channel video, sound  
6 min. 12 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Kavi Gupta Gallery

**Slater Bradley** (b. 1975, San Francisco, CA)  
Lives and works in New York, NY

*Doppelgänger Trilogy*, 2001–04  
*Factory Archives*, 2001–02  
Single-channel video, sound  
3 min. 37 sec., loop

*Phantom Release*, 2003  
Single-channel video, sound  
2 min. 50 sec., loop

*Recorded Yesterday*, 2004  
Single-channel video, silent  
2 min. 3 sec., loop  
All works courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery

**Mircea Cantor** (b. 1977, Cluj-Napoca, Romania)  
Lives and works in Paris, France and Cluj-Napoca, Romania

*Deeparture*, 2005  
Single-channel video installation, silent  
2 min. 43 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Yvon Lambert, New York/Paris

**Patty Chang** (b. 1972, San Francisco, CA)  
Lives and works in New York, NY

*Fountain*, 1999  
Single-channel video, sound  
5 min. 29 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

**Amey Globus** (b. 1976, New York, NY)  
Lives and works in New York, NY

*Electric Sheep*, 2001–02  
Single-channel video, sound  
5 min. 30 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and D’Amelio Terras

**Jesper Just** (b. 1974, Copenhagen, Denmark)  
Lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark

*Bliss and Heaven*, 2004  
Single-channel video installation, sound  
7 min. 30 sec., loop  
Collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Acquired through the generosity of the Donors to the Contemporary Art Fund 2006.035

**Mads Lynnerup** (b. 1976, Copenhagen, Denmark)  
Lives and works in New York, NY

*Untying a Shoe with an Erection*, 2003  
Single-channel video, sound  
2 min. 2 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist

**Christian Marclay** (b. 1955, San Rafael, CA)  
Lives and works in New York, NY

*Telephones*, 1995  
Single-channel video, sound  
7 min. 30 sec., loop  
Collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Acquired through the David M. Solinger Fund, the Professor and Mrs. M. H. Abrams Purchase Fund, with additional support from Sean M. Ulmer and from Dr. Victor and Marina Whitman 2000.030.001

**Rodney McMillian** (b. 1969, Columbia, SC)  
Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

*Untitled (The Michael Jackson Project)*, 2004  
Single-channel video, sound  
3 min. 28 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

**Anri Sala** (b. 1974, Tirana, Albania)  
Lives and works in Paris, France

*Naturalmystic (Tomahawk #2)*  
Video on Plasma screen with headphones, mounted on tripod  
2 min. 8 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Hauser & Wirth, Zurich; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Johnen/Schottle, Berlin, Cologne, Munich

**Salla Tykkä** (b. 1973, Helsinki, Finland)  
Lives and works in Helsinki, Finland

*Cave Trilogy*, 2003  
(*Lasso*, 2000; *Thriller*, 2001; and *Cave*, 2003)  
Single-channel video installation, sound  
20 min. 49 sec., loop  
Courtesy of the artist and Yvon Lambert Gallery

The exhibition and catalogue were organized by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. They were realized in part with financial support from the Mondriaan Foundation, Amsterdam, the Fifth Floor Foundation, the Consulate General of the Netherlands in New York, and the Cornell Council for the Arts. The exhibition was funded in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency. Additional support for the exhibition was provided by Hermès. The catalogue was partially funded by Cornell’s Atkinson Forum in American Studies Program.

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cover:  
Salla Tykkä, *Cave Trilogy*, 2003

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**stop.look.listen.**  
an exhibition of video works

October 23, 2008 – February 22, 2009



### A Walk through the Exhibition, Making Frequent Stops

To emphasize the embodied and participatory nature of the viewer’s experience in *stop.look.listen.*, the following discussions of the featured works are organized along one of several paths through the exhibition. Already implied in the title of the exhibition, viewers move through spaces that immerse them in spectacles of narrative, vision, and sound. Three major themes will emerge in the exhibition: the artists’ relationship to mainstream cinema as they simultaneously quote and deconstruct both cinematic texts and the experience of cinema; their interest in the relationship between sound and image; and the emerging link between represented and viewing bodies. While each artist’s work is treated separately, correspondences between individual pieces will become apparent.



Janet Biggs, Predator and Prey, 2006

### Janet Biggs

With the two-channel piece *Predator and Prey* Janet Biggs has expanded her examination of gender roles in earlier pieces to relations of power in general. As we approach the Plasma screens and put on the head-phones, we are engulfed by the sound of hooves pounding the earth. Beautifully choreographed images of polar bears swimming up close to the window, of eagles with prey in their talons, of a swimmer freed from gravity, of a horse’s head with bulging veins, segue into each other to create ever-new narrative possibilities, encouraging the viewer’s direct participation in the production of meaning. At first struck by the beauty of their movement, we soon realize the repetitive behavior that lurks behind. The polar bears were filmed at Chicago’s Lincoln Park Zoo, where their concrete architectural enclosure leads to questions about captivity and free will, which are further emphasized by the images of the jesses around the eagle’s legs and the bridle on the horse in training. Thus teetering at the brink between dystopia and utopia, Biggs’s subjects—both animal and human—locate us, the viewers, somewhere between predator and prey, challenging spectatorship as a position of omnipotence.

### Christian Marclay

Operating in the space between what we hear and what we see, Christian Marclay’s work is informed by his interest in the relationship between the audible and the visible. In today’s culture, however, the visual routinely tops the audible, having penetrated to the culture’s core through cinema, television, and the Internet. While paying homage to some of the greatest movies in film history in his typical cut-and-paste technique, Marclay’s video *Telephones* also manages to break down long-established barriers between the realms of sound and image. The video consists of a long sequence of movie clips, in which famous actors like Cary Grant, Tippi Hedren, and Sean Connery are talking on the telephone. Similar to Marclay’s well-known album cover pieces, the video is woven together like a collage. Spanning several decades and cinematic genres, it combines countless

segments from classic Hollywood films such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *Dial M for Murder* and *Psycho* with scenes from contemporary blockbusters. The collaged clips add up to one long, extended phone call with its own distinctive rhythm and narrative. A repetitive string of hellos, that remain unanswered, segues into a series of absurd “I see” remarks to end in an accelerated almost staccato frenzy of hang-ups. The short rapid cuts in *Telephones* not only encourage a viewing of the piece as video art but also as a musical composition, breaking down barriers between the realms of the audible and the visible. Activating the intersection of image and sound in this way, Marclay’s short video not only initiates one of the themes in *stop.look.listen.*, *Telephones* also introduces contemporary video art’s complex relationship to mainstream narrative cinema.



Rodney McMillian, Untitled (The Michael Jackson Project), 2004

### Rodney McMillian

Much like Marclay’s video, Rodney McMillian’s piece engages the various layers of meaning that the overlaying of sound and image produces. For McMillian, video is just one of many mediums contemporary artists have at their disposal. Working in painting, sculpture, photography, performance, and video, he uses whichever is most effective to get his message across. In the performance-based video *Untitled (The Michael Jackson Project)*, he wears a white T-shirt and cursory clown make-up that leave parts of his head and neck exposed. Interested in the performative aspects of being an artist, McMillian invokes, not only in the title of his piece, one of the most popular performers of recent memory. The artist lip-synchs with passionate abandon, using brilliantly restrained physical gestures, to Gladys Knight’s 1975 version of the song “Try to Remember,” which she combined into a medley with a cover of Barbra Streisand’s “The Way We Were.” Suggesting both racial and gender ambiguities in this way, McMillian leads us on a slippery slope of identification. Everything is filled with uncertainty: “He is a black man looking whiter than most white people. . . . He is not in drag; in fact, his syncing to Ms. Knight’s husky voice is so accurate that we begin to doubt her gender, not his.”<sup>1</sup> Like in Burt Barr’s piece *Roz*, the intersection between image and sound in McMillian’s video underscores the constructedness of his images, as we try to distinguish between copy and original, fiction and reality.

### Mads Lynnerup

Performed in front of a stationary camera, like Patty Chang’s and McMillian’s pieces, Mads Lynnerup’s short video *Untying a Shoe with an Erection* depends almost entirely on the function of the frame. Lynnerup’s piece belongs to an increasingly significant group of video works that are structured around a particular situation, event, or performance. “These short-form videos are distinguished not simply by their relatively brief running times, but above all by their formal and conceptual concision.”<sup>2</sup> Many of these short videos are shot in documentary-style fashion, employing long takes and minimal editing. Usually Lynnerup derives the subject matter for his work from his immediate surroundings, making us aware of the absurdity of daily rituals and gestures. All we see in Lynnerup’s exhibited piece

is a two-minute close-up of the artist’s lower legs and feet, dressed in shabby black socks and gray sneakers. The laces on one shoe are looped into a sloppy bow that gradually gets pulled out of place as the white string tied to one end of the lace bounces higher into the air and then slowly sinks. Only the title implies that the other end of the string is tied to the artist’s penis as he is (perhaps?) masturbating off-camera. Influenced by performance and film work of Andy Warhol and Vito Acconci from the 1960s, Lynnerup’s video becomes an exercise in the suspension of disbelief, involving viewers in his visual gag, as we imagine more than we actually see.



Amy Globus, Electric Sheep, 2001–02

### Amy Globus

Amy Globus’s video *Electric Sheep* plunges us into the murky and dark underwater world of octopuses, showing them from different angles as they ooze their way around several tanks and through narrow glass tubes. The video consists of original footage of Globus’s pet octopuses as well as found sequences taken from television. Set to an electronically altered version of Emmlyou Harris’s 1995 ballad “Wrecking Ball,” images and music meld perfectly to create a darkly imaginative atmosphere of sensuality and longing, reflecting the fascination with gothic, horror, and science fiction subjects in contemporary art. In fact, Globus derived the title for her video from Philip K. Dick’s 1968 science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, which was adapted into the 1982 movie *Blade Runner*. In contrast to the neo-noir cult film, however, Globus offers a hauntingly sensuous vision of the future, in which the octopus’s primordial physicality and Harris’s lyrics form a mesmerizing expression that is at once beautiful and disturbing. Moved by such tenderness and romanticism, we find ourselves in a panic gasping for air.

### Slater Bradley

Like so many other pieces in the exhibition, Slater Bradley’s *Doppelgänger Trilogy* makes effective use of emotive musical scores to elicit gut reactions in the audience. Seemingly retrieved from the collective unconscious of our mass-mediated culture, Bradley conjures up iconic performances by three pop stars who were his childhood idols: Ian Curtis, lead singer of the British post-punk band Joy Division; Kurt Cobain, of the American grunge band Nirvana; and Michael Jackson. While emulating the look of authentic contemporary concert footage, the three videos are actually recordings of fake concert performances. *Factory Archives* imitates the grainy look of aging pre-MTV video stock, while *Phantom Release* looks like a bootleg video downloaded from one of the many Nirvana fan websites. The silent footage of Michael Jackson’s signature dance moves in *Recorded Yesterday* appears to be disintegrating in front of our eyes—much like Jackson’s career itself. Himself part of a generation that was defined by MTV, Bradley has incorporated autobiographical elements into the trilogy referencing specific moments in his own life, including the vivid memories of when he was nine years old and Jackson became enormously famous. “He was my first introduction into the realm of the rock star,” noted the artist, “and with it, the worship factor.”<sup>3</sup> Swept up in the cult of celebrity and the mythology of these images, we assume Bradley himself to be performing as Curtis, Cobain, and Jackson. It turns out, however,

that Bradley’s own double, Benjamin Brock, plays the roles of the pop singers, complicating the dynamics of the fan-idol relationship. By putting his double into these staged reenactments, Bradley performs the dissolution of identity that can be triggered by celebrity worship. His trilogy not only questions notions of authenticity but also creates an alienating chain of reflections, in which the doppelgänger blurs the boundaries between truth and fiction.

### Burt Barr

Known for mostly silent black-and-white works that focus on one or two simple aspects of film, Burt Barr’s video *Roz* initially gives quite a different impression. Shot in color and set to music, the piece seems to be an exercise in quiet restraint, unlike countless music videos that include rapid editing to illustrate the lyrics of the song. Barr’s camera is instead tightly focused on the head of a young woman (Roz LeBlanc) standing in the shower, water pouring over her head and shoulders. As she steadily returns the gaze of the camera, the woman opens her mouth and begins to sing. Completely mesmerized by the sensual image, we are somewhat taken aback by the hoarse voice that comes out of the woman’s mouth. Without the spell of the image ever totally broken, we eventually realize that the woman is lip-synching to soul singer Otis Clay’s recording of the tragic ballad “The Banks of the Ohio,” which tells the tale of a man who murdered the only woman he ever loved: “I held my knife against her breast as gently in my arms she pressed, crying ‘Sweet Willie! Don’t murder me for I am not prepared for eternity.’” Classic film and art historical references, such as Alfred Hitchcock’s famous shower scene from *Psycho* or Andy Warhol’s “Screen Tests,” come to mind. But these allusions become more spooky as LeBlanc’s coy and flirtatious performance blurs the boundaries between murderer and victim, turning the usual effect lip-synching has on its head: Once we realize a performer is just pretending to sing, the believability of the image should suffer; here, it seems to underscore the erotic violence of the scene. “When the soundtrack kicks in LeBlanc doesn’t seem to be lip-synching so much as possessed.”<sup>4</sup> The beginning of the video features a silent prologue shot in slow motion with smoke coming out of Roz’s mouth. This indicates the main thrust of Barr’s work, which meditates on the temporal aspects of video installations, retarding time to focus on the moment. While this kind of conceptual approach may often only speak to our intellectual capabilities, Barr’s video “gives you something to feel as well as think about,”<sup>5</sup> at once arousing thoughts and emotions, breaking down the split between mind and body.

### Salla Tykkä

While Bradley’s approach to video reflects his fascination with the fictional strategies of documentary media and the immersive power of music, Salla Tykkä’s practice engages the narrative structures of cinema. Her *Cave Trilogy* consists of three short films, *Lasso*, *Thriller*, and *Cave*. Created over four years, the trilogy seems to move backward and forward in time, with each piece narrating a fictitious scene from the life of a young woman. Although Tykkä uses a different actress in each film, the complete work suggests that the stories follow the development of one person, examining the transition from puberty to adulthood as well as the psychological relation between the sexes. One of the most striking aspects of Tykkä’s films is their focus on the dynamics of looking, and especially of women looking, which is stressed by the absence of any kind of verbal communication. Instead of language, music operates as a key interpretive element in her work, much like in Just’s work. Weaving image and sound together, she triggers memories and associations in the viewer that go far beyond what is actually depicted. The music in *Cave Trilogy* is highly recognizable, and, even if we can’t name the exact source, it sounds like something we have heard before. Each of Tykkä’s films mines a different cinematic genre. *Lasso* pays homage to the tradition of Westerns through its use of Ennio Morricone’s score from Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West*. *Thriller*

draws upon the tradition of the horror film, using the film scores from John Carpenter’s *Halloween* and Brian De Palma’s *Carrie*, while *Cave* is rooted in the sci-fi tradition with its soundtrack based on David Lynch’s *Dune*. By referencing cinematic history, Tykkä creates multilayered narratives that strike intense emotional chords, as she taps into contradictory feelings of desiring both independence from, and intimacy with, other people, reproducing precisely the spectator’s predicament.



Jesper Just, Bliss and Heaven, 2004

### Jesper Just

Tapping the universal power of music in *Bliss and Heaven*, Jesper Just casts his characters in worlds without words. There, they communicate through song and dance. Challenging the conventions of gender construction from such Hollywood genres as film noir, musicals, and melodrama, Just focuses on emotionally charged encounters between older and younger men. Until recently, women were completely absent from Just’s films, centering mostly on the attractive young Danish actor Johannes Lilleore or one of the older men. This insistence on male-exclusive interrelations reflects Just’s reappraisal of stereotypical ideas about masculinity, which often masquerades as physical virility, sexual aggressiveness, and emotional stoicism in mainstream movies. As viewers get psychologically involved with Just’s characters, they are at first lulled into a false sense of security through the artist’s careful direction. Setting up certain expectations in the audience, Just’s choice of costumes and settings ends up in complete opposition to the type proposed by his characters’ actions, which, in *Bliss and Heaven*, take place in a vast wheat field, an electrical substation, and a freight container transformed into an ornate theater. There, Lilleore, and by extension the individual viewer, becomes the sole spectator witnessing a middle-aged man’s transformation from truck driver to singer, performing a decidedly unorthodox rendition of Olivia Newton-John’s 1978 hit “Please Don’t Keep Me Waiting.” Dressed in a grimy T-shirt, long blond wig, and flowing chiffon scarf, the older man sings the song in a deep voice, awkwardly performing his cabaret-style act, as the camera moves back and forth between him and the young man watching. As he finishes his performance, the camera pans over to Lilleore who, totally enraptured throughout, breaks into a solitary applause. The resulting incongruence between image and narrative promotes a less stable vision of masculinity that challenges stereotypical gender definitions. Capturing the subtleties of sadness, melancholy, and grief, Just is able to weave poetic sensibilities around a transgressive core. By inverting cliché and convention Just persuasively involves the viewer in an intensely human reconsideration of masculinity and the mechanics of spectatorship and identification themselves.

### Anri Sala

Anri Sala has long been interested in the construction of light, sound, and space and their effects on the viewer, not only in the process of making a video but also in his decisions about its installation. “I start by creating a reality that I’ll be shooting,” Sala noted in a recent interview, “[but] I also need to create a strong physical reality at the end with the projection.”<sup>6</sup> This desire for a close relationship

between the creation and the presentation of his pieces is expressed in precise installation requirements for *Naturalmystic (Tomahawk #2)*. Not only did the artist request that the video be shown on a Plasma screen of a specific size with specifically designed television and headset stands, he also suggested a certain shade of gray for the walls of the gallery. The headset stand is positioned in front of the screen in such a way that the actor’s microphone appears to be connected by wires to the viewer’s headphones. The footage was shot in Paris with a professional actor from Belgrade. It takes place in a sound studio, where the actor is sitting between a drum kit and a microphone. Holding his hand to his right ear, the actor makes a sound imitating the falling of a bomb. He does this three times before the video repeats. Each attempt sounds more convincing, reminding us of countless CNN reports from Baghdad and the war in the Balkans in the 1990s, which clearly impacted the artist, who grew up in Albania before leaving for France to study art. Although the political edge is more obvious in Sala’s earliest works, it is rarely overt. “The man’s repeated evocations of the sounds of bombing make us think not only about the memory of destruction but of the traumatizing effects of memory in the present.”<sup>7</sup> While Sala complicates our temporal relationship to video, collapsing time with the audio element in *Naturalmystic (Tomahawk #2)*, he also creates disconnection through the images, with the pair of hands clapping in place of a clapperboard and the actor never returning the viewer’s gaze. Slipping between sound and image, voice and vision, the abstract and the political, Sala’s work is informed by his ongoing interest in interstitial spaces that he also perceives between different parts of the world.



Johanna Billing, Magical World, 2005

### Johanna Billing

Johanna Billing is similarly interested in formal and social fissures. Her video *Magical World* is a collaboration with a group of children from an after-school program at a cultural center in the suburbs of Zagreb in Croatia. The children rehearse the song “Magical World,” originally written by the African-American singer Sidney Barnes in 1968 and especially chosen by Billing for its melancholic harmonies of transformation and hope. The video is a mix of real life and fiction. It has the look of a documentary but is in reality staged by the artist. People play themselves in Billing’s pieces, with little direction from the artist. Emphasizing the contrast between individual and community, much of her work has been interpreted in relation to Sweden, where Billing was born and still lives and works. The political and economic stability in her home country is in stark contrast to rapid changes in countries such as Croatia and Serbia, where Billing has shot several of her recent pieces. Part of the former Yugoslavia, Croatia is being considered for membership in the European Union and NATO in the next couple of years. At the same time, the country is in the midst of trying to acquire a national identity. *Magical World* captures this moment of insecurity and potential within the development of a young country by focusing on images of youth. The children sing the sweetly romantic song in English, struggling with a language that is not their own, “unlikely understanding their role within the specific historical context of an old and a new economic