

## Apart from the Crowd: Pilvi Takala as the instigator of a dialogue

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*Published in Pilvi Takala: "Between Sharing and Caring"- catalogue by Frac des Pays de la Loire, 2007*

Pilvi Takala, one of the new generation of artists from Finland, is interested in several different communities and each of her works invites us to witness an experiment. She infiltrates into communities slyly. I say slyly because she does it as an "individual" not as an artist. We see in her works an "individual", who ponders how she could be included in a community. This unknown "individual" orients the audience to the uncontrollable sense of curiosity. We come across an "individual", who in "Wallflower" is waiting for an invitation to dance in her shining clothes, who in "Bag Lady" is a customer, shopping with a transparent bag full of money in her hand, or who in "Easy Rider" is in dialogue with a stranger on a tram. She refers to provocation, but this is not a provocation that we are familiar with. This is mostly an inoffensive, cold-blooded gesture. But an extraordinary and outstanding gesture. A gesture that provokes us to wonder and even to intervene. A gesture that penetrates us to the marrow, invites and triggers us to dialogue.

Today, at a time when the meaning of private and public, the politics of art and particularly how art can get in touch with real life, are being discussed, Pilvi Takala invites us in her works to become interested in the most important area: *semi-public space*. Well then, what kind of place is this semi-public space? A space you can enter, provided you spend money and buy, (cafés, lunchrooms, restaurants), a space you can enter after security checks, (shopping centres, airports), a space you can be in as long as you have a ticket, (bus, train, theatre, cinema, baths), a space you can enter if you have permission or you are a member, (public housing, consulates, military), a space you can be in as long as you reside in the neighbouring area, (local cafés) or a space that is open to the public (hospital, school, library). If we look at the works of Pilvi Takala one by one, we can see that she chooses spaces that are inhabited by particular communities. We see two hotel restaurants in Estonia that are visited by Finnish tourists in "Wallflower", a big shopping centre in Berlin in "Bag Lady", a tram in Amsterdam in "Easy Rider", two coffeehouses on both sides of Istanbul that are only visited by men living in the same district in "The Switch" and finally the studio of a morning programme on a Turkish TV channel in "The Shining Shining". At first Pilvi Takala goes on an expedition through the space and observes the symptoms of the community inhabiting that space. Then she builds an extraordinary "individual" who will strain the norms of the space, provoke, hassle and bring the people into dialogue with each other. Usually Takala uses herself as protagonist and sometimes she works with actors. The choice is made according to the space and conditions.

Basically Takala asks the question: Is it possible for us to build a dynamic and questioning dialogue within crowds where we exist as strangers? Takala's actions encourage the individuals inhabiting the chosen space, who are strangers to each other, to discuss, to start a dialogue and to interfere with each other. The works of Takala that test communities give us hope in the possibility of the "agonistic" public space that Chantal Mouffe has mentioned and talked about the urgency of (2006). Takala drags an ordinary crowd into her collective experiment and makes us ask the questions: Who is this stranger? How much information do we have about the other individuals that we share common spaces with? There is an interesting anecdote in "Inner Experience", a book by Bataille, concerning this subject. Bataille says: "Knowledge which the male neighbour has of his female neighbour is no less removed from an encounter of strangers than is life from death." (Bataille, 1943) Yes, our information about the other individuals who we share social life with, is not something beyond just sharing living

space accidentally, or because of our similar features. Therefore we need a dynamic public space that can go beyond this situation.

In Takala's "The Shining Shining" video, we face the absurdity of a TV show. The space that Takala chose is a studio, a TV building, which is not easy to enter. This is a morning show that lasts for three hours and is mostly watched by unemployed housewives. The host of the show is the famous singer Seda Sayan, the owner of the "Seda Magazine" which has her photograph on the cover of every issue. Well then, who is this artificial heroine "Seda Sayan"? What is the might of her mission, talent, power and decision? So we sort: tenderness, help, judgement, sadness, cure, gladness, awarding etc. Seda Sayan almost transforms into a "state" that has all these features. She propounds new incorrigible aphorisms constantly experimenting with the other, using empathy and yet really declaring her inner experiences to the public. We come upon a heroine who thinks that she is everything. This absurd experimenting in between the artificiality of this heroine and the heartbreaking reality of the audience attracts Takala's attention. After her pre-investigations Takala contacts the person gathering and transporting housewives who are guests in the studio and finds a way to enter the studio among the ordinary audience. And in contradistinction with what is seen on TV, she shoots the audience instead of the stage. She exposes us to the invisible face of this virtual state that is playing with real tragedies. We come up against Seda Sayan who names herself everything as she flirts with real life. As we begin to watch the video, Georges Bataille whispers into our ears: "We have in fact only two certainties in this world – that we are not everything and that we will die. To be conscious of not being everything, as one is of being mortal, is nothing." (Bataille, 1943) Exactly against Bataille's advice, Seda Sayan names herself as "everything". I call this passion of Seda Sayan a state. Well then what is the source that allows Seda Sayan to be everything? Of course the insufficiency of others. Meanwhile Georges Bataille whispers something again: "There exists at the basis of human life a principle of insufficiency. On his own, each man imagines others to be incapable or unworthy of "being". (Bataille, 1943) Yes, in her programme Seda Sayan is a remedy for the insufficiency of others but it is for hiding the traumas of her own inner experience. She helps all the people who are legless, obese, coarse-boned, poor, midget, weak etc. Thus Seda Sayan can be sure of her self-sufficiency. To the end of the programme Georges Bataille whispers once more: "The sufficiency of each being is challenged unceasingly by those who surround him.[...] A burst of laughter, an expression of repugnance greet gestures, sentences, shortcomings in which my deep insufficiency is betrayed." (Bataille: 1943)

Takala makes us see the programme from a different point of view. She evidences the crowd of the audience, who are not seen on screen at all. She infiltrates into the audience and exhibits them together with the material from TV. As we watch the video we realise that the studio shining on the TV screen, is actually a strange space, wrapped with patchy curtains holding a group of people, who come from the outskirts and sit packed like sardines. We continue to watch. At the beginning of the video we witness how the people are placed in the studio. This is not enough for Takala and she brings in a different group of people, who do not normally watch this kind of programme and belong to another social class. She makes them directly experience the space for this experiment.

As we watch the works of Takala we witness again how our bodies, that are made political, are manipulated by the social system. Therefore Takala persists in her invitation: She invites us to use empathy, to barge, to share, to feel, to find odd, to shrug off, to help, to ignore, to prioritise, to tolerate, to wonder, to discuss, to look forward to something, to talk, to listen, to consult, to understand, to appreciate and to respect. As a result, her works attempt the realisation of a utopian public space.

Notes:

1. Chantal Mouffe, "Hope, Passion, Politics: A conversation with Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau", by Mary Zournazi, *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World*, Published by Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2005.

2. Georges Bataille 'Inner Experience'

Translated by Leslie Anne Boldt

State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988

originally published as 'L'Experience Interieure', Editions Gallimard, 1943 and 1954