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Pilvi Takala, *The Stroker*, 2018, two-channel HD video projection, color, sound, 15 minutes 16 seconds.

Pilvi Takala

GOLDSMITHS CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Pilvi Takala seeks honesty in Marc Augé's *non-lieux*: those purposive spaces we visit but in which we never dwell. While a "place" serves as a conscious refuge—a mold for collective identity—a "non-place" buzzes with transience and anonymity. She shares the French anthropologist's fascination with shopping malls, though she eschews his airports and train lines for the quiet of office blocks. In particular, she investigates how such spaces are organized, ruled by unspoken codes of behavior, policed by silent power. Her thesis: that a single nonconformist can break the carapace—to which end, in "On Discomfort," this survey of six of her video works, she introduces behavioral eddies into such spaces and their flow.

Takala often disguises herself and films her pieces covertly; in other cases, she reenacts her observations after the fact. Casting herself as the protagonist, she draws (according to the show's curators, Sarah McCrory and Natasha Hoare) "unanticipated reactions from people with different stakes in controlling or using the space." For *Close Watch*, 2022, which premiered at the Finnish Pavilion in Venice that year, she spent six months undercover as a Securitas guard in one of Helsinki's largest malls. Unable to film on the job, she later got back in touch with her ex-colleagues and asked them to join her in workshops where they role-played their experiences, ranging from incidents of racial profiling to confrontations with grumpy drunks. Patiently probing and nodding, she wins the guards' admission, on film, that they rarely rat on each other

and some have a "power fantasy." Though these words might hardly seem revelatory, they cut to the heart of the personae the guards inhabit each day. Takala's approach is like a therapist's: You wouldn't have seen the shame flitting over her subjects' faces had she directly challenged their power, rather than staging a master class.

Elsewhere, the artist pursues a slightly goofier comedy. In *Real Snow White*, 2009, she arrives at Disneyland Paris—geographically near the French capital but aesthetically global—costumed as the innocent princess. Yet on reaching the entrance gates, she's accosted and told to leave: "Maybe you are going to do bad things. . . . There is a real Snow White in the park." Takala smiles and wanders away, but parents and kids encircle her, asking for Snow White's autograph; as she tries to comply, she's hustled off by a guard, who's smiling just like her. The only expressionless subjects, by the looks of it, are the children who've come here to live a dream. Takala's joke becomes rueful, its target no longer clear.

At times, Takala's actions can seem downright sinister. In *The Stroker*, 2018, another reenactment, Takala plays a "wellness consultant" at a London coworking space. With the same painted smile as everyone else, she wanders through the corridors, touching people on their arms and murmuring, "You OK?" To judge by the whispers—"It's just so weird. . . . It makes no sense"—she soon has the place on edge. Some begin to avoid Takala; a few physically recoil. More than just making a joke about office culture, in stroking people against their will she's plausibly verging on the criminal.

The most promising piece is the one in which Takala acts unobtrusively. In *The Trainee*, 2008, she joins the accounting firm Deloitte but doesn't pick up any tasks. Instead, she rides the elevator all day ("train style," she says), or gazes into space ("doing brain work"). And though the usual complaints begin—"What on earth is this?" barks one email, claiming that her behavior is "scary" to "people at Tax"—many of her coworkers are, in person, quietly appreciative. Not staring at a PC, one murmurs, is "quite good probably." For how long, and why, have you been sitting at your desk?

— *Cal Revely-Calder*