

Vertical Loops and Propassion in Salla Tykkä's *Lasso*

“Another of these small loops can be controlled vertically and brought up and over into a wedding ring around the roper’s arm and then lifted off into a flat loop. -- This is the way you will find all the next loops acting. They are variations of the great Texas skip and in this trick the roper spins the loop clockwise on one side and counterclockwise on the other as he jumps through the loop.”

(“Will Rogers Rope Tricks” by Frank Dean, *The Western Horseman*, 1969.)

Salla Tykkä’s video installation *Lasso* (2000) seizes on the sensation of wonder. It is like a spiral movement or emotion lasting for a few minutes; it starts from a relaxed concentration, lifts off at the centre point and moves towards a conclusion which is open to interpretation. The events of *Lasso* are, in brief: a girl who is out jogging takes a detour into the yard of a house and rings the doorbell, but nobody answers the door. She goes round the back of the house and peeps in a window. She can see a boy who is practising an amazing lasso trick. The girl looks on and a tear rolls down her cheek. She then turns away to look out across a calm sea.

Lasso airs the eternal question about the connection between art and emotion. It confronts us with the religious ecstasy we know so well from art history, for instance the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary or the sacred rapture of St. Teresa. After all, one of the key arguments of the emotionalists has always been that the purpose of a work of art is to inspire emotion in the viewer.

“Admiration is a sudden surprise of the soul, which causes in her an inclination to consider with attention the objects which seem rare and extraordinary to her.”

(René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, 70th Article.)

Emotion, a sensation of beauty, aesthetic pleasure. In *Lasso*, Tykkä builds up emotional impulses very skilfully using a variety of means: plot, music, careful direction of the camera work and the reactions of the work’s inner narrator. On the level of definitions, emotion is seen as a spontaneous, non-calculated reaction to a concrete situation. The fundamental emotions are the same in any culture, even if linguistic background and creed may influence the finer nuances. In *Lasso*, attention focuses on a clearly recognizably emotional response.

The music selected for *Lasso* was originally composed by Ennio Morricone for Sergio Leone’s western *Once Upon a Time in the West*. The music directs the viewer’s attention and heightens the work’s intensity. In her childhood, Tykkä used to watch westerns on TV while her parents went about their daily chores

around her. In that secure and drowsy milieu, gender roles were unobtrusively perpetuated, roles that were as clear-cut as those of the western.

The background or theme of Tykkä's work is often the role of emotional values as a background or determining factor for individual views of the world. Tykkä has also pursued a critical exploration of contemporary women's expectations of gender roles. To begin with, she played the main part in her work herself. The work became structured as a redefinition of self-image, female identity and physical presence. For instance, in her video *Bitch – Portrait of the Happy One* (1997), Tykkä deconstructs and reworks the methods for promoting a 'star cult' inherent in music videos.

In *Lasso*, the role of the work's inner narrator becomes a parallel for the situation where the work is viewed. What do I feel as a viewer in front of this work, and do other viewers feel the same? What if the work is not about the sensation of beauty, but about feelings of exclusion or about a sense of finality? Ought we as viewers to know more about the relationship of the film's characters to each other or to their surroundings?

Another essential feature of *Lasso* is movement. The work expresses the traditional concept of the significance of motion for emotion — motion can generate an emotion, while emotion may activate motion. The being of the main characters is tied to the way in which they are physically present. The work also draws attention to the gaze of the characters and the relationship between men and women. The gender roles follow the traditional roles of the western: the man is shown as a strong and independent loner, while the woman is an emotional onlooker on the sidelines. The introduction to the work generates a sense of expectation, a 'first movement'. After that, *Lasso* goes through the entire gamut of emotions: the experience of pleasure, desire and its denial — the quelling of passion, and suffering.

Does *Lasso* in fact show the wound between 'the being in the world' of man and woman, the cut which prevents them from revolving as a mutually entwined totality, a cyclical creation of the universe? Does the boy and the lasso reveal to the girl the dynamic of human relationships (specifically theirs), the beauty and terror of their ins and outs, their wheeling and dealing, accompanied by music which evokes westerns and the to and fro motion of the 'Texas skip'?

The sense of wonder presents the girl with the opportunity not just of approaching the boy, but also herself. His performance returns the formation of meaning to the articulation of gender differences. Unawares, the man and his lasso represents what the woman is not capable of expressing, the feminine principle and the origin. In the reaching, expanding and contracting movement of the lasso, the girl discovers herself as a site for reoccurrence, a place of reproduction — a symmetrical, vertical loop, constantly seeking a shape, an opportunity for the boy to come and go.

Tykkä later said about her script that the girl in the main role is at the intersection of the role models she has acquired through her upbringing and the articulation of her own identity. The story is about siblings. The brother is an auxiliary character. The northern dimension of the narrative is revealed in *Lasso* by the solid narrative structure combined with a straightforward perspective and the ability to tell a visual story with densely structured elements. *Lasso* poses the question of the boundary between personal feelings and a reaction pattern typical of any community. This applies more generally to Tykkä's work, too, where an individual perspective tends to expand in the work towards a more general observation. In the final scene of *Lasso*, the viewer appears almost to adopt the perspective of the camera. This requires the viewer to pause and reflect upon himself. A slightly melancholic sense of wonder swirls through the air like a lasso.

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