

## **Tuija Kokkonen: Non-humans and Performance.**

### **Introduction**

An impossibility: these weaves float before you like Stratocumulus clouds, the spaces between pictures become filled; the screen opens up, it's windy, and for a moment we can wander in those places, those climates.

My artistic research project *The potential nature of performance. The relationship to the non-human in the performance event from the perspective of duration and potentiality* began in 2006 at the Theatre Academy Helsinki. The research incorporates a series of performances called *Memos of Time*. This exposition for JAR is built around the second part of the series, *A Performance with an Ocean View (and a Dog/for a Dog) – II Memo of Time* (2008). These two interlinked performances focused on weather, time, potentiality and non-human co-actors. *A Performance with an Ocean View (and a Dog)* was performed on the ancient shore of the post Ice-Age Yoldia Sea, located in a suburb of Helsinki, while *A Performance with an Ocean View (for a Dog)* took place on a potential future seashore on the roof of a city-centre department store.<sup>1</sup> This exposition, comprising words, photographs and video material, can be seen as forming a reflective, 'third shore' on the screens of each viewer.<sup>2</sup>

The underlying question in my research, as well as in the exposition for JAR, is the role of art and artistic research in an age of ecological crisis. I want to explore what it means if we begin to perceive 'nature', its beings, creatures and phenomena, as agents or actors – and the ways in which that perspective can potentially change our understanding of performance, of the human and the question of duration. To date I have concentrated primarily on developing the practice and theory of non-human agents in performance – non-human actor (text I) and non-human spectator (text II) – and what I have termed 'weak (human) action', which is a prerequisite for the perception and participation of non-human agents. I explore the actual and (im)potential relations between the human and the non-human as a space in which the performance takes place. I approach these relationships from the perspective of time and duration and seek to widen the perspective of time within the performance and to

heighten human agents' ability to perceive duration. Through performances in which agency is no longer based on spectatorship or even humanity I ask whether there is a realm outside performance and spectatorship in our performative societies.

I understand the performance and the world – and also their respective subjectivities – as producing one another. Artistic research in and with a performance seems to offer the opportunity to explore both the performance and the world as well as their processes of subjectivity. This seems particularly possible when we bear in mind that our age has been called 'the age of global performance', that the dominant paradigm of our times has been posited as a performance paradigm, and that it has been claimed that our subjectivity is based on spectatorship (McKenzie 2001). Even within the field of artistic research it has been claimed that a performative turn has occurred (Haseman 2006, Bolt 2008). Artistic research takes forms other than those associated with knowledge; indeed the very term 'knowledge' may be too narrow a concept for it – though not necessarily. But there are also differences in the idiosyncratic qualities and smells of knowledge. From the perspective of this research, it seems possible to produce in and with performance three different kinds of knowledge: firstly it can produce the sensual, potential knowledge of the participants of the performance, knowledge which can be sensed but not understood immediately, which only opens up over time. (This knowledge, however, has the potential – perhaps for this very reason – to change a human's actions and relationship to the world / performance.) Secondly it can produce the experimental knowledge of the artist(s) about how to produce that potential knowledge. Thirdly it can produce theoretical knowledge: as the theory of performance studies, art research and other disciplines is improved and extended through artistic research practice, or theories begin to develop trans-disciplinarily. In Text II, I consider the possibilities that artistic research and the knowledge this produces appear to offer: the possibility of creating a reflexive and future/potentiality-oriented relationship with weak action, "the non-power at the heart of the power" (Derrida 2008: 28) and the almost non-knowledge born from it, at the animal heart of reason.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The other performances in the series are *Mr Nilsson – I Memo of Time* (2006, 2. version 2007) and *Chronopolitics – III Memo of Time* (an endless performance begun in 2010). Other performances in the Memo series are *Maus&Orlovski – Memos of Love in the City* (1997) and *Catchment Area – Memos of Freedom* (1999-2003). Since 1999 all these series have been included in the programme of Kiasma Theatre/ Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki.

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<sup>2</sup> In presenting the performance or live event in other media, one must take into account the fact that documentation of the event can only ever be partial. Particularly in the documentation of these large, almost endless outdoor performances we simply have to accept that the documentation will be fragmentary and random. In addition, photographs and video material inevitably change performances, making them more of like representations, a state that, as they were taking place, these performances almost avoided. That being said, I believe that photographs and video material are essential tools in opening up performance and research to others.

<sup>3</sup> The two interlinked texts in this exposition, 'I Non-human co-actors: Acting with Weather' and 'II Non-human spectators: Misperformance for a Dog' are based on two conference presentations at the Performance Studies international conferences 2008 and 2009. I have also presented versions of these papers at the Art and Technoscience Conference, Academy of Fine Arts in Finland, Helsinki 2010, at a Cloud Committee session at the Colloquium on Artistic Research in Performing Arts, Theatre Academy, Helsinki 2009, and at the Winter Seminar of the Nordic Summer University, Tampere 2009.