
7 *PERFORMING LANDSCAPE AND AGENCY – TREES TALK*

In the following chapter I describe a particular mode of performing landscape and the challenge in “giving voice” to those who cannot speak in terms of landscape. Some sound and video works made on Harakka Island and elsewhere will be referred to, though my main examples in this chapter are audio works from the series *Puut Puhuvat (Trees Talk)*. In these examples the question of agency is, to a large extent, a fictional one when I use my own voice to perform as elements in the landscape. However, I will touch upon the question of who is performing and what is a performer, as well as what or who is alive, the performer or the performance site.

To begin with, I discuss the changing roles of the artist researcher related to questions of private and public raised by Suzanne Lacy in her analysis of the artist position in new genre public art in section 7.1: From Private to Public or Directing Whom?⁸⁶ Then, in section 7.2: More Talking Trees⁸⁷, I mention some further experiments in Kuopio, Helsinki, Salo and Turku. Finally, in section 7.3: Exhausting Modernity – Liveness in the Shadow of the Hawthorn⁸⁸ I reference Teresa Brennan’s ideas concerning the nature of modernity and our relationship to the environment and relate them to Philip Auslander’s ideas on our changing understanding of what is live.

86 This text is based on two papers, “Yksityisestä julkiseen” [From Private to Public], at the colloquium Artist as Researcher – Researcher as Artist arranged by the Society of Aesthetics and Theatre Academy 21-22.11. 2003, and “Performing Landscape –Directing whom?” at the IFTR/ FIRT congress “The Director in the Theatre World” in St. Petersburg 22-27.5. 2004 (Arlander 2004 c), as well as my text “Yksityisestä julkiseen” [From Private to Public] published in Risto Pitkänen (ed.) *Taiteilija tutkijana, tutkija taiteilijana* [The artist as researcher – the researcher as artists], Nykykulttuurin tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 90, Jyväskylän yliopisto 2007, 131-158 (Arlander 2007 a).

87 Parts of this text was published in “How to turn a Landscape into a Performance, How to carry out a Place?” (Miten esityksellistää maisema, miten toimeenpanna paikka?), in Mirka Niskala (ed.) *ANTI Contemporary Art Festival 2002-2006, Time-Based and Site-Specific Contemporary Art in Kuopio*, Savonia 2007, 49-61 (Arlander 2007 b).

88 This text is based on a paper titled “Exhausting modernity - repetition and time in the year of the ox, liveness in the shadow of the hawthorn” presented at the IFTR/FIRT conference Cultures of modernity in Munich 25-31.7.2010. (Arlander 2010 e)

7.1 FROM PRIVATE TO PUBLIC OR DIRECTING WHOM?

Suzanne Lacy discusses changes in the role of the artist in new genre public art in her text “Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art” (1995). She suggests a scale ranging from private to public encompassing four different positions vis-à-vis interaction: the artist as experiencer, the artist as reporter, the artist as analyst and the artist as activist. I encountered the scale through Richard Schechner (2002), who presents it under the title “From private to public artist” in his introduction to performance studies. The original article is published in a collection edited by Lacy, *Mapping the terrain – New Genre Public Art* already in 1995. The scale Lacy presents of differing positions or roles for the artist might be of interest also in terms of the changing roles of the artist and researcher.

Lacy is interested in the public end of the scale. My eyes, used to the framework of theatre, fell first on the word private. I was fascinated by the thought of a private artist, which first seemed odd to me. Discussing private and public in terms of theatre is something of a paradox, since theatre is often considered public almost by definition. Nevertheless, many performances are private, at least in the sense that taking part is voluntary and that it requires the purchasing of a ticket and going to a special place to see the show. Different types of community theatre, applied drama, as well as street theatre on the one hand and commissioned celebration performances on the other challenge these conventional expectations, but they are not my concern here. My focus is on performing landscape – a concern which almost inevitably has led me away from theatre as I used to understand it through my training as drama director and into the field of performance and contemporary art.

7.1.1 BACKGROUND

Research is often an integral part of creating a piece of art or a performance, even if you do not necessarily think of it as research. A large part of writing and directing a radio play, a field I have some experience with, consists of researching background information, gathering source material and then pruning it, cutting it down – regardless of whether that source material is connected to a specific theme (like Irish fairy-tales in *Fairies*), a specific place (like Venice in *Via Marco Polo*) or a historical person (like Ramon Llull in an unfinished script). Creating a performance involves such things as explorations of the space or circumstances related to the site, investigations of technical and economic resources and possibilities for col-

laboration. One does not always think of those activities as research, but refer to them instead as mapping the possibilities or problem solving. The rehearsing process can be research in the sense of experimenting, trial and error and the testing of various solutions. Besides this type of research included in the making of art, one can of course also engage in writing research and participate in the discussions of a research community by presenting one's experiences in one's own or some related field. This dimension is often crucial in doctoral studies and for research taking place in art universities. Within that context, differentiating between art research and research into, through and for art can be useful; likewise, it can be useful to think in terms of both knowledge in action and knowledge in reflection.⁸⁹ In the following section, I will focus on research for art, that is, research within the process of making art, through reflecting upon it afterwards.⁹⁰

7.1.2 TWO EXAMPLES

I approach the issue of performing landscape with practical interests and discuss two small works, recorded monologues, which I wrote, performed and produced. *Istun kivellä* (*Sitting on a Rock*) and *Puut puhuvat* (*Trees Talk*) were both attempts at answering the question of how to perform landscape. I have chosen them as examples because they are relatively small and were produced and presented using the same simple technique in the same place. However, they differ in crucial ways regarding the private-public scale and with regard to 1) the position of the writer/director, 2) the interaction between performer and spectator/listener and 3) the relationship to the site.

Sitting on a Rock was a sound installation, a recorded monologue (4'40"), presented in June (3 to 16 June) 2003 on Harakka Island, off Helsinki, as part of the

89 Timothy Emlyn Jones presents in his text "A Method of Search for Reality" (which I encountered as a script) in the book by Lin Holdridge and Katy Macleod (ed.) *Thinking Through Art*, Taylor & Francis, 2004, Colin Painter's point: "if research is a process of enquiry that generates knowledge, then any process of enquiry in a subject that performs that task is eligible for consideration as research" as well as Christopher Frayling's differentiations into three types of research: research "into", "through" and "for" art. He problematizes "practice based research", "theory-based research", "history-based research" in relationship to other forms of research. He states for instance "We need to look further a field than the humanities for useful comparators, the natural sciences and their predisposal for experiment and Blue skies research offering many useful points of reference."

90 We could also distinguish between formal and informal artistic research, these cases being examples of the latter, since they were not planned to be a research project to begin with.

exhibition *Hevosen vuosi Harakassa* (*Year of the Horse on Harakka*) in the former telegraph, which was functioning as a summer gallery. The same story could be listened to with headphones in two places, indoors on a bench in the gallery and outdoors in the landscape, on a rock - on location, as it were. The text was actually a description of how the performances documented on the video shown in the gallery were made.

Trees Talk consisted of five monologues (5 x 4–6 min.), which were presented in the outdoor exhibition called *Reviiri – taidepolku* (*Territory – Art Path*).⁹¹ It was arranged by the artist's association Harakka ry on the same island in July–September (3 July to 14 September) 2003. The five stories could be listened to with headphones in five different places, from five different trees along the path.

For both works I compiled or wrote the texts, read, recorded and edited them and arranged the presentation. To enhance the sound quality, I had help from a specialist, Mikko Hynninen. This kind of procedure is fairly common within a contemporary art context, and, to some extent, also within choreographic practice. It sounds suspicious within a theatrical context – how could it be professional if a director actually does something herself? In terms of show business, it was not professional; no tickets were sold, no profit was made. The technique was simple and the production costs minimal. The stories were played nonstop on small CD players and were audible through headphones. They were presented within a contemporary art context, though during summer time (compare summer theatre). But they were not visual art, not really audio art (since they were mainly text) and not really performance art (since they were recorded). Perhaps you could call them site-specific audio plays.

What did I investigate while doing these works? While considering how I could best realize them, I examined the landscape, the environment and chose the sites. I explored the technical options and possibilities of presentation and chose, after a few experiments, the tools and the equipment to suite existing resources. For *Trees Talk*, I did some library research to find material for the monologues and used some material collected in preparation for a radio play. I explored alternative expressions while reading several versions of the text (using different acoustics with different microphones and different distances to the microphone, with variations in the reading, and so forth), although I did not think of these experiments as research, but rather as a search for proper nuances.

Afterwards, I could continue my research by comparing the works with the views of those writers on environmental aesthetics or art theory whose ideas have influ-

91 For a description in Finnish, see <http://www.harakka.fi/2003/reviiri/index01.shtml> (11.10.2012)

enced my understanding of landscape. For example, I could consider their relationship to the environment in light of the ideas presented by Arnold Berleant in his book *Living in the Landscape* (mentioned in Chapter 4). Or, I could problematize their relationship to the tradition of landscape painting described by Malcolm Andrews in *Landscape in Western Art* (mentioned in Chapter 5). I could reflect upon them in light of the history of installation art with the help of the notions of environment, situation, space and installation used by Julia H. Reiss (2001) or think about the shifting emphasis on representation versus presentation in these works, referring to the seminal text on video installations by Margaret Morse (1990) "Video installation art: The Body, the Image, the Space-in-between". Or, I could discuss whether these works have a relationship to the multi-layered past of the site, Harakka Island, with the help of Mike Pearson's and Michael Shank's (2001) archaeological examples. And, of course, I could reflect upon their relationship to their sites in a more general sense, using the genealogy of site-specificity presented by Miwon Kwon in *One Place after Another* and her three paradigms for understanding the notion of site – phenomenological, social-institutional and discursive (described in Chapter 6). An interesting possibility could be to think about their relationship to documentation using the examples discussed by Nick Kay in *Site-specific art – performance, place, documentation* (2001) and consider to what extent performances created for an audience not present at the moment of performing, like *Sitting on a Rock*, are considered works or become works mainly through documentation, through recordings.

Here, I have chosen to use Lacy's scale and to discuss works that differ from the ones that she intended the scale to be used for; as a consequence, perhaps I do not do justice to Lacy's intentions. Her scale deals with the interaction between an artist and the community, and, as such, it could be transformed to theatre as well, for instance to the relationship between a director and the community she is working with (the group or ensemble) or working for (the audience). The scale is not so easily adapted to interactions with the environment, however. Nevertheless, I will try to use it to understand the differences between my two examples, *Sitting on a Rock* and *Trees Talk*.

7.1.3 PUBLIC ART AND INTERACTION

According to Lacy, many art controversies are in part products of the modernist model of the artist. The artist creates alone as an individual, struggling against nature, culture, society, or the art world itself. This heroic tradition might serve the

integrity of a private studio practice and help to maintain an “individualist expression that enables artists to serve society from a vantage point of outside observer.” (Lacy 1995, 173) However, Lacy finds that in a “culture of visibility, such conventions of artistic practice are challenged.” (Lacy 1995, 173) According to her, the works of the last three decades of the 20th century serve to illustrate that this model is no longer viable in a multicultural and globally interconnected world. Many artists are struggling to find new roles more appropriate to our time. (Lacy 1995, 184-85)

Lacy emphasises the question of interaction as a crucial difference between old public art (mainly sculpture in public places) and new genre public art and presents her scale when discussing the latter. New genre public art demands a more subtle and challenging critique, which observes the presumptions of artists and critics alike and grounds them within the discourses of art and social life. According to her, many attempts to deal critically with new forms of public art assume a vaguely constituted idea of interactivity. However, “interaction cannot be measured exclusively by either the artist’s methodology or media, or by other commonly used criteria, such as audience size.” (Lacy 1995, 173) In looking at the interactive quality that, by definition, is characteristic to new genre public art, a more comprehensive scheme should include the artist’s intention and the work’s meaning to its constituencies.

Lacy presents her continuum of positions not as fixed roles, but as a basis for discussion and a more careful investigation of aesthetic strategies. An artist may operate at different points or move between them. (Lacy 1995, 173) According to Lacy, we could use this scale as a starting point for critical evaluation and then *add* discussions about audience size, the use of media and the artist’s methodology and contextualize them within a more specific analysis of the work’s interactivity. Her scale, which ranges from private to public, contains four positions or roles: the artist as experiencer, the artist as reporter, the artist as analyst and the artist as activist.

Before turning to my examples, I will present these positions briefly. I should perhaps add that I encountered this scale after finishing *Sitting on a Rock* and was fascinated by the private end of the scale. Lacy’s articulation seemed, paradoxically, to offer a point of contact with my experience.

7.1.4 SUBJECTIVITY AND EMPATHY: ARTIST AS EXPERIENCER

Traditionally, the artist’s experience is seen as represented in the visual object and subjectivity is understood as fundamental to art. Performance and conceptual art

can substitute the object by the process, but in most cases one of the basic elements of art is the experiencing human being. Lacy recounts her own experiences:

In August 1991, I sat for seven days in an abandoned hospital room at Roswell Park Cancer Centre in upstate New York, charting the private conversations I had with patients, nurses, doctors, scientists, and administrators. The artwork was located in the interaction between myself as artist and the members of the community, framed by the hospital room and fuelled by the human need to reflect on the meaning of one's life and work. (Lacy 1995, 174)

Here the artist enters the territory of the other and presents observations like a subjective anthropologist, through a report of her own interiority. The artist becomes a conduit for the experience of others, and the work a metaphor for relationships. Although subjectivity is often considered non-political, individual experiences have social implications, as feminist thought has demonstrated. Private experience, manipulated by advertising and politics, has lost its authenticity, which art could at least symbolically return to us. Lacy notes that, “[t]o make oneself a conduit for expression of a whole social group can be an act of profound empathy. /--/ This empathy is a service that artists offer the world.” (Lacy 1995, 174)

Reading this, my first thought was one of recognition. But, while sitting on a rock once a week for a year, I did not think in terms of empathy. Empathy was a result of the work, perhaps.

7.1.5 INFORMATION REVEALED: ARTIST AS REPORTER

When choosing the role of reporter, the artist focuses on recounting the situation and gathers information to make it available to others. The artist calls our attention to something. According to Lacy, reporting might be compared to aesthetic framing. For her, reporting involves a conscious selection, though not necessarily an analysis, of information. Some artists claim they “reflect”, others “report”, and some engage with the audience not only to inform but to persuade. When artists first enter the socio-political arena, they often adopt this position, Lacy notes. After experiencing, revealing information is the next compassionate step. She mentions, as an example, the performance *Amazonia* by Rachel Rosenthal, a theatrically choreographed incantation of the names of native peoples, trees and animal species of the disintegrating rainforest, an expression of rage at what takes place. (Lacy 1995, 175)

Compared to such dramatic gestures, my story or report – a short monologue about sitting on a rock – was low-key indeed, but a report nonetheless.

7.1.6 SITUATIONS AND SOLUTIONS: ARTIST AS ANALYST

According to Lacy, the first two modes of working, the artist as experiencer or reporter, emphasize intuitive, receptive and observational skills. The step from reporting or presenting information to analysis is short, but the implied shift in the artist's role is enormous, she notes. As artists begin to analyse social situations through their art, they need skills and knowledge associated with social scientists, investigative journalists, and philosophers. Moreover, the form of the work might change. Lacy suggests that

when an artist adopts the position of analyst, the visual appeal of imagery is often superseded by the textual properties of the work, thus challenging conventions of beauty. Their analysis may assume its aesthetic character from the coherence of the ideas or from their relationship to visual images rather than through the images themselves. (Lacy 1995, 176)

Thus, the art of analysis draws upon the history of conceptual art in the sixties. In *Sitting on a Rock* the link to the legacy of conceptual art was there. Neither *Sitting on a Rock* nor *Trees Talk* contained any analysis worth mentioning, however.

7.1.7 BUILDING CONSENSUS: ARTIST AS ACTIVIST

The step from analysis to activism is the last step; art making is contextualized within local or global situations and the audience becomes an active participant. In seeking to become catalysts for change, artists reposition themselves as citizen-activists. Lacy mentions as an example Martha Rosler and her project *If You lived here... The City in Art, Theory and Social Actions*, which deals with homelessness in New York and which produced models for activism by linking proposed and actual interventions to exhibitions and publications. According to Lacy, consensus building, which is diametrically opposed to the aesthetic practices of the isolated artist, inevitably entails developing a set of skills not commonly associated with art making; artists need to learn "how to collaborate, how to develop multi-layered and specific audiences, how to cross over with other disciplines, how to choose sites that resonate with public meaning, and how to clarify visual and process symbolism for people who are not educated in art." (Lacy 1995, 177)

This discussion is relevant for my second example, *Trees Talk*, though on a modest scale, since no explicit activism or even openly critical commentaries were involved. Within an environmental context, you would probably associate activism with heroic

acts of protest or actions à la Greenpeace, rather than with consensus building, though alternative approaches do abound.

7.1.8 ATTEMPT AT APPLICATION

So why would Lacy's scale be interesting with regard to my miniature audio plays? Did they involve any real interaction, and, if so, with whom or what? Could interaction with the environment be considered interaction?

The first reason for finding the scale interesting has to do with working publicly (as opposed to working with publicity really), which I previously had not considered, not even when doing such extremely public work as radio plays, which can be listened to by thousands of people and by anybody who happens to turn the radio on at a certain moment. However, with *Trees Talk*, the public quality seemed more important, not only because I was using public space – that I have done before – or due to the prolonged duration of the work (headphones were hanging from the trees for more than two months), but because I was concerned with “who was speaking”, who was put into or given the position of speaker or performer. Compared to community projects, where the artist functions as a facilitator or a coordinator of the work of amateurs, this step towards public work was here modest and symbolic.

The second reason has to do with my private experience – I cannot remember any former work where I would have focused so entirely on my own experience as in *Sitting on a Rock*. The work did not contain information about anything else, not even about the site (as in *Wind Rail*), no specific task (as in *Murmuring Valley*), and no story line (as in my radio plays). My focus was on an experiential exchange with the environment without any fictional dimensions.

7.1.9 SITTING ON A ROCK

Sitting on a Rock was originally meant as a voice-over text for the video documentation and then developed into a separate sound work. The same monologue could be listened to with headphones in two places.⁹² You could listen to it in the Telegraph

92 The text I spoke was the following (here in translation): “Sitting on a rock is different than sitting on a chair. A rock is hard and cold, though certainly stable. I sat on this rock for a year, once a week, approximately, and watched the world around me changing. During Easter I sat

of Harakka sitting on a bench while watching the video projection *Year of the Horse* (not synchronized, though), where I sit on a rock repeatedly for a year. The text is a description or explanation of how that video documentation, as well as the other video presented in the space, *Day and Night of the Goat – Easter*, was made. Or, you could listen to the recorded monologue a few hundred metres away on that same rock, the authentic location, so to speak, looking at the same landscape in reality. The text was not recorded on location, however, but in my studio so as to get a good sound quality, which would make the text sound more like thoughts. In the exhibition I presented visually some notes made during *Day and Night of the Goat – Easter* while sitting on that rock. Instead of reading and recording them as well, they were shown as writing.

The headphones were lying outside on the rock for two weeks during the exhibition, six hours a day, without any sign. Information about their location was available only in the exhibition space, which all visitors to the island did not necessarily enter, and I expected the equipment to be stolen. Instead, a worried couple once asked what they should do with the CD player and headphones they had found, since somebody obviously had left them lying on the cliffs by accident. After that incident, I added a small text to the basket covering the player hidden behind the rock: “Please do not remove – this is meant to be listened to here.”

for a day and a night, with two-hour intervals. Only then did I realise how large part of time it is night. While sleeping you forget that. For a rock the night is probably as real as the day. A rock knows what it means to stay in one place. For a human being it is quite difficult, for me in any case. I do not wish I were a rock, certainly not. But sometimes I wish I knew how to be still, to sit and wonder. Sitting is a strange condition for a human being. Like any animal humans roam and search, collect and gather, go where they are going or keep erring, walking, longing and reaching. A rock waits for the ways of the world to unhinge it from its site. I sat on this rock because it lies in a beautiful spot, and on a permitted route. It is a strange rock. If you knock on it, it sounds hollow. I suppose it is granite, but I do not know for sure, and I have not asked anybody. It does not matter what it is; it is a rock.

In the game of Mah Jong (in Finnish) you say, “I am sitting on a rock”, when you have only one piece left. Thus you warn your fellow players that the game might soon be ending, and that you have good changes to be the winner. When I sit on the rock I do not feel like a winner. I feel at one with those who wait. Around me everything is waiting, for the spring to arrive, the autumn to arrive, the sunrise, the sunset, for rain, for sunshine, for the wind to calm down, the storm to rise, good weather to return, for almost anything. I am always waiting for something as well, for a change or a miracle, at least. Most people fear changes and so do I, probably, at heart, but my conscious self desires change. Any kind of change. Many people speak of conserving, protecting, and caring. They wish for the world to remain unaltered. Officially they only wish those things they value to stay the same, of course, but the idea easily expands to concern everything. I, too, wish the rock would remain a rock and not turn into plastic, no ugly signs to appear on the cliffs, the water around me to remain water without oil. Still I do wait for a change, a miracle - at least for myself, within myself.”

A special feature of a text supposed to run nonstop in an installation is that the listener can come in at any moment. The dramaturgy cannot be built on a development or suspense running from beginning to end. In order to mark the beginning and the end of the text, I added a sound effect recorded on the spot (ships in fog) as a short accent or interval. Another special feature had to do with the use of headphones for listening. They enable a low volume, create an intimate, private atmosphere, and they can produce an impression of thought sounds or an interior voice. Ideally, the text can “feel like your own thoughts”, as one listener remarked.

In terms of Lacy’s scale, my role in this work was clearly positioned at the private end, that of “the artist as experiencer”. *Sitting on a Rock* was a description of an experience, of one kind of interaction with the environment. What you could hear was the recounting of a process of a repeated performance. The text was written, read and recorded afterwards, and thus it was also a form of report, which took me one step forward on the scale towards the artist as reporter. There was some modest analysis involved, though not necessarily requiring skills of the kind Lacy envisions.

My experience of the work was private mainly because I did it alone, unlike previous working processes when creating radio plays, and because there was no protection or filtering provided by the mask of a fictional character or story. I narrated my own experience about an interaction with a particular place, a certain landscape for one year (and a day and night) and nothing else. The relationship to Lacy’s continuum seems unproblematic. The emphasis was on the artist as experiencer and perhaps on the artist as reporter to some extent.

7.1.10 TREES TALK

Trees Talk was produced using the same technique and presented as recorded speech audible with headphones from CD players running nonstop at the summer exhibition *Reviiri - Taidepolku (Territory – Art Path)* organised on the same island between 3 July and 14 September 2003. The exhibition was planned for those visiting the Nature Centre of Helsinki Environmental Centre, which is also stationed on the island, and for occasional visitors rather than for an art audience. In the text on the poster the whole island with its cultural remains and its protected nature areas was framed as a work of environmental art. The art path followed the existing nature path created to protect the areas with fragile vegetation on the cliffs. *Trees Talk* was one of the works placed along the path.

There were five trees and their talks could be heard with headphones hanging from the branches. The CD players were hidden at the roots or in the foliage and they played their monologues nonstop for two and a half months. I chose five specimens of trees situated near enough to the buildings in order to get electricity by cable instead of using rechargeable batteries that would have needed to be changed daily, as in *Sitting on a Rock*. Information was provided on small cards hanging from the trees next to the headphones. The text was the same as on the poster: “Today we say ABC, once the alphabet was birch, rowan, ash (beth, luis, nion) and alder... The talk of trees and talk about trees.” Sources for the texts were listed as well, since the monologues were compiled from fragments of existing literature, translated into Finnish and transformed into first-person narration. In addition to some botanical facts, the texts contained historical and cultural information (Graves 1948), advices on the spiritual path addressed to the listener (Carroll 1997) and popularized psychological characterizations (Heinonen-Rivasto 1997).

According to my primary source, *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, the fourth letter of the tree alphabet of the ancient Celts, the beth-luis-nion (birch-rowan-ash) alphabet was alder and the fifth letter was oak. (Graves 1948, 165–188) I included the sycamore – though it does not belong to the beth-luis-nion alphabet – because there is one beautifully situated sycamore growing on the island, whereas the two oaks are tiny and insignificantly placed. Rowans and birches abound, while the only ash trees grow at the corner of the so-called nature house, and most of the alders – exceptionally old and beautiful, the pride of the island – are concentrated in the southern parts of the island, far from potential electricity. In the end the talking trees were as follows (following the path and not the alphabet): The Ash by the nature house, The Alder on the eastern shore, the Rowan in the North West, the Birch in the North and the Sycamore on the hill in the centre between the houses.

The monologues were short – Birch (5.24 min.), Rowan (4.49 min.), Ash (5.39 min.), Alder (5.18 min.) and Sycamore (3.47 min.). The structure of all of them was roughly the same. To use the Birch as an example: first, a short presentation: “My name is Betula, though around here they call me Birch...” Then, some advice addressed to the listener: “I will help you when you are about to start something new...” Then, some history: “In ancient times evil spirits were expelled by beating oneself with birch twigs...” And, in the end, some personal psychological talk: “According to my friends, I am graceful, sophisticated and reserved...” I compiled the texts in a hurry and was not really happy with them. However, more important than *what* the trees were saying was the fact *that* they spoke. Although the work was shallow, as information and as a gesture it was surprisingly well received.

In this work my starting point was not my own experience, but, rather, play and fantasy: What could a birch (or a rowan, ash, alder or sycamore) say if it could speak? My own experience of the trees or of the environment was totally downplayed. As an author, I positioned myself as an interpreter, a medium, though I did so in terms of a constructed fiction. Basically, I could have given actors the task of reading the monologues without significantly altering the meaning of the work. Probably that would have increased the amount of characterization in the interpretation.

How would *Trees Talk* be positioned on Lacy's scale? We could ask whether I interacted with the environment at all. I did not function as an experiencer; more likely I acted as a reporter – if you regard transforming the source material into monologues, choosing and naming the trees and focusing attention on them as reporting. I certainly did not work as an analyst or as an activist in a traditional sense. Nevertheless, I felt the work to be public. Why?

The work turned out to be more public than what I had planned, and not only because it was aimed for the general public rather than for an art audience. In this case, what was important was not who was spoken to, but who was given the chance to speak (though fictively). The fact that trees were talking and had a personality, feelings, character traits, cultural history, and so forth, in short, that human needs, values and qualities were extended to concern trees, could be regarded as a statement and, indeed, was regarded as such. Due to the fictional dimension, the work was quite theatrical, relying as it did upon anthropomorphism, and was perhaps regarded as an "entertaining statement", like many performances. The trees did not speak about environmental politics; they did not demand the right to vote or the like.

Compared to recording the murmur of trees or registering their movements in the wind, the trees in this instance had no real agency but functioned like some kind of puppets. Their talk was based on facts and conveyed cultural information, but did not describe my experience of the trees or the trees' experiences of me or of their environment. They were confessions addressed to the listener, explicitly "as if" trees would talk. Thus, *Trees Talk* is more difficult to place on Lacy's scale. In terms of my own intentions, I probably took the position of a reporter.

7.1.11 COMPARISONS

Sitting on a Rock was an artist's recount of her experience and invited the listener to identify with my experience while I told about it, either by watching video material that presented the whole process or then by sitting on the rock described in the text

and depicted on the video, experiencing the same landscape directly. *Trees Talk* was a fiction, almost a fairy tale, a sequence of stories that involved characterisation, even acting. Thus, the author's position was different in these two works – describing personal experiences (*Sitting on a Rock*) and transmitting cultural stories and fictional narratives (*Trees Talk*). The position offered to the listener was different as well – experiencing the landscape or the passage of time (in *Sitting on a Rock*) or sharing a fantasy (in *Trees Talk*) – regardless of many similarities in technique: the same type of material (my voice), the same technology (CD players, headphones) and the same superficial interactivity (you had to find the headphones and so forth).

The mode of presentation was the same for both works: a small monologue (or several monologues) presented nonstop as a sound installation to be listened to with headphones. You had to find the works and decide to listen to them; you had to take the headphones and put them on; you had to understand the Finnish language. The monologues had to be listened to individually, one at a time; *Sitting on a Rock* had to be listened to either by sitting in the gallery space or outside on the rock (without additional information) and *Trees Talk* by standing below the trees, with small notes of supporting information provided.

The relationship to the site and environment was different for both works. *Sitting on a Rock* was literally a site-specific, place-specific and site-bound description. When listened to outside on the rock, the dimensions of presentation and representation were combined into an experience of “here at that time”. In the gallery space the level of representation was stronger, “there at that time”, though “there” was comparatively close to the place. *Trees Talk* functioned mainly on the level of presentation “here now” through the form of a theatrical play, as if trees had a voice, playing with “the magic if”. What if trees could talk? Rather than calling it site-specific or place-specific, we could call the work performer-specific, or perhaps species-specific, and, as such, it would be possible to move it to another site with similar types of trees. These trees, however, stood and remained standing where they were growing, on site.

The relationship to the listener/ the audience was different as well, despite the technique. *Sitting on a Rock* was a process description addressed to an art audience. It consisted of private observations, inviting the listener to take the position of the speaker, to identify with her and to experience “the same”, that is, the environment and the minuscule changes in the landscape, while sitting on the rock, or to experience the passage of time through the changing seasons and transformations in the landscape condensed on video while sitting in the gallery. *Trees Talk* was storytelling directed at a broader audience (albeit one at a time) via a narrator speaking in first

person singular. It included information, characterization and advice addressed to you the listener. The monologues invited the listener to participate in the fantasy and also to focus his or her attention on the tree and its characteristics.

The question of agency and authorship – who performs, who speaks – was formulated differently in these two instances. In *Sitting on a Rock* I spoke as a private person or as an artist/ performer, in subjective form, mostly in the past tense. Nobody else could have spoken the text without changing the meaning or nature of the work in a substantial way. In *Trees Talk*, on the contrary, I explicitly enacted a role: I spoke as a tree and not only on behalf of it; I described myself as the tree and personified the trees to be like humans, in an anthropomorphic way; and, I addressed the listener in the present tense. Somebody else could have spoken these monologues (perhaps even live, though preferably while being invisible) without the meaning or nature of the work being significantly altered. This is relevant in terms of the author's position: Whose experience is at stake and who is telling about it?

To describe interaction with the environment in Lacy's terms – her scale is created to analyse an artist's relationship to the public – we could say that both works involved subjectivity and empathy, though my position as experiencer of the environment was relevant mainly in *Sitting on the Rock*. Revealing information was emphasized in *Trees Talk*, even though I functioned as a reporter indirectly, through fiction, and it is not very clear what I really did report in the end. Neither of these cases involved analysing situations nor providing solutions. Nor was there any activism in the sense Lacy envisions, in terms of creating consensus, though the talking trees did produce something like that as a by-product, for instance with the people at the nature centre on the island.

To illustrate and concretize the paradoxical in the situation, my interaction with the environment could be compared to a similar attitude towards people. What if, instead of sitting on a rock, I would have visited a sleeping place for the homeless once a week for a year (and with two-hour intervals during Easter), video recorded myself sitting among them, written a small text describing my experiences in the end, and then placed the text in a gallery as well as on the spot where I had been sitting? Or, if instead of trees, what if I had chosen individuals from different ethnic groups, gathered some legends once attached to them by others, transformed those into monologues and demanded that these individuals present those monologues in a language unknown to them, or if I had asked them to "sway gently" in the background while I performed them myself?

To position oneself as a mouthpiece for others is problematic. Often there is every reason to consider with suspicion anybody who, while meaning well, claims

to be speaking on behalf of somebody else. Nevertheless, I would like to return to the question "directing whom?" included in the title of this section and confess that I at some point did think of *Trees Talk* as a kind of activism after all. Why? Perhaps because I imagined that I could take up the challenge presented by Italo Calvino (at the end of his essay on multiplicity in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*) and understand it in a literal way:

Think what it would be to have a work conceived from outside the self, a work that would let us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language, to the bird perching on the edge of the gutter, to the tree in spring and the tree in fall, to stone, to cement, to plastic... (Calvino 1993, 124)

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Lacy presented her scale as an aid for critics to increase their understanding of a new kind of interactive public art. I have here used the scale to reflect upon my interaction with the environment, with landscape. And I have applied the scale, which ranges from private to public, with a slightly reverse emphasis, focusing on the private end. This is partly due to my background in theatre, which has led me to make art with a somewhat reverse emphasis as well. That is, I began by stressing the general, the common, the public, and finally learned how to value the private and my own experiences only when older. Lacy's scale or continuum can function as an example of the changing roles of artists and researchers in various combinations. Though the emphasis here is on the environment, Lacy's text can be recommended to anybody interested in the changing roles of artists and researchers today.

7.2 MORE TALKING TREES

The approach used in *Trees Talk* turned out to be an interesting mode of performing landscape and worth exploring further. The various versions of the tree alphabet (beth-luis-nion) and popular adaptations like the tree horoscope differ from one another. This creates some possibilities for play as well as the chance to take into consideration the trees found at each specific location. Perhaps the whole beth-luis-nion alphabet will be completed as talking trees at some point, since I have continued creating monologues for trees and experimented with the same technique in various contexts. I describe some of these developments in the following section and refer briefly to the various problems encountered as well.

7.2.1 TREES TALK IN KUOPIO

I had my most challenging experience so far in Kuopio, during the ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival 2004. There I learned that it takes time to get to know a place, which may have a dark side not obvious to the visitor.⁹³ *Trees Talk*, presented in Minna’s Park, consisted of the monologues of an Oak, a Sycamore (maple), a Linden (lime tree), a Pine (Siberian pine) and a Black Fir (black spruce) played non-stop on small CD players. One could listen to them with headphones hanging from the branches. The technique was similar to the talking trees on Harakka Island the previous summer. There, five trees were constantly talking for a period of two months, as described in the previous section (7.1). In Minna’s Park the trees were supposed to talk for four days, the duration of the festival. However, the first set of headphones was chopped off half an hour after setting them up in the trees. I felt puzzled, shocked, offended. What did I do wrong? I wrote on the plate in the park by hand: *Trees Talk – Silent Version*. Later on, I saw the small boys who had found the headphones and probably thought they were nice toys to play with. Probably they did not know that you cannot hear anything from the headphones if you chop off the cord. And, as the first foul deed had been committed, it sends a message to the others – nobody cares about these, so please come and take one for yourself.

An urban environment is not just any landscape. A park with a grill open late at night near the railway station is not just any park. Following the genealogy of site-specificity by Kwon, discussed previously, I may be site-specific in a phenomenological or institutional sense and still forget about the cultural dimension of the site.

In Kuopio the oak was an old tree standing in the southeastern corner of the park. Three maples, which I called sycamores, were growing in a row at the southern end of the park, next to a Kindergarten. I chose the middle one to be the speaking one. The text for the Sycamore was the same as on Harakka. The other texts were new, since the trees were new. The park was lined with lime trees or linden trees, and I chose one with low-hanging branches next to the path in the southwest. Most of the Siberian pines and the black spruces (here called black fir) were growing in the northwestern part of the Park, and I chose two that were growing relatively close to each other. All of the trees were readily approachable.

93 I have described my experience in “How to turn a Landscape into a Performance, How to carry out a Place?” In Mirka Niskala (ed.). *ANTI Contemporary Art Festival 2002-2006, Time-Based and Site-Specific Contemporary Art in Kuopio*. Kuopio: Savonia University of Applied Sciences, 49-61. (Arlander 2007 b)

What did the trees say? Surprisingly, they spoke Finnish again and had a human voice. Instead of recording or amplifying the biological life processes of the trees, I wrote short stories, compiled from various sources, the same as before. Some fragments of the texts were translated into English, due to the context of an international festival, and placed next to the headphones as information for visitors.

All of the talks followed the same pattern as on Harakka (described in section 7.1). To use the linden tree as example, her talk began in the following way (translated from Finnish):

My name is Tilia, though around here they call me linden or lime tree. Actually, my name is Tilia vulgaris, the common one. I belong to the noble deciduous trees and I like good soil and a nice climate, but I am quick to grow and beautiful, and my wood is strong and dogged. I can become 15-30 meters tall and live up to 800 years. When young, my stem was smooth, though it gets rougher as I grow older. My leaves are round, shaped like a heart. My greenish flowers are full of nectar, with a lovely smell. Honey of linden is exceptionally good.

Besides the beginning of the monologue, a fragment quoting Roisin Carroll's Ogham wisdom was translated on the plates, too. In the case of the linden, it went as follows:

I am a tree of the groves at heart, and my lesson is the same. I teach acceptance. To get to the point of acceptance, to accept yourself and your life, you need to be very balanced within yourself. If you concentrate too narrowly on one aspect of your life, you might be excluding so much knowledge and wisdom that is available to you if only you would accept it. If life feels one-sided, you may need to find a grove and try to gather together the wisdom and knowledge of the trees. And if confusion fills your heart, and clarity is hard to find, you can remind yourself: "I am indestructible. Come what may, I am loved." (Carroll 1997, 127)

The linden tree can be associated with Minna Canth, a famous Finnish woman playwright who lived in Kuopio and has given the park its name, Minna's Park. According to the tree horoscope, her birth date (19.3.1844) made linden her tree. (Heinonen-Rivasto 1997, 26-27) This was mentioned at the end of the text⁹⁴:

I was already known in the classical period. However, I'm still not part of the beth-luis-nion of the Celts, the birch-rowan-ash alphabet, and I don't have a month dedicated to me in their calendar. They say that heather replaced me, even if it is only a twig. The reason for this was that a tree related to heather and growing on the Mediterranean mountains was dedicated to Venus, the goddess of love of the Sicilians and Romans. And that is how heather, growing as a

94 Here modified from the translation by Heli Nurmesniemi-Kickken for the publication Mirka Niskala (ed.) *Anti - Contemporary Art Festival 2002-2006*, Savonia 2007. (Arlander 2007 b)

bush in the highlands of the Celts, is included in the alphabet. Elsewhere, in the lowlands linden flowers replaced the heather, loved by the bees. The old love songs in Germany and Northern France all talk about lindens. Some still insist that those born in mid-March or September resemble me in many respects. In that case, Minna Canth, whose park I'm now living in, is one of my tribe. And that is very nice, of course.

Though my experiences in Kuopio were not so pleasant, the few moments the headphones were working in the park nevertheless showed that this kind of playfulness can be appreciated within an urban context as well. So I decided to continue creating talking trees.

7.2.2 WILLOWTALK

Another example in the series of *Trees Talk* was *Pajun puhetta* (*Willow Talk*) in Hesperia Park in Töölö, Helsinki. This work was a small exercise included in a pedagogical project created together with MA students in Performance Art and Theory at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki and some students from the Fine Arts Academy led by artist Erkki Soininen, former head of the ANTI-festival and an expert on site-specific practices. This time his project *Unknown City* was created in a collaborative manner in the area of Helsinki called Töölö, and especially Hesperia Park, with a small gallery (Galleria Väli vuosi) run by the Fine Arts Academy situated nearby. *Willow Talk* was a miniature audio play created as part of *Tuntematon Töölö – paikasta paikkaan*, (*Unknown Töölö – One Place after Another*) in Helsinki between 25 and 29 April 2006.

Since my main task was to guide the students in their projects, I wanted to do something very small and easy. I chose a willow tree due to the time of the year, April, since there might be some catkins at that time. There was a nice willow growing at the western end of the park, which we had chosen as the site for our project. The name *Pajun puhetta* (*Willow Talk*) includes alliteration (pp) in Finnish in the same way as *Trees Talk* (tt) does in English. The Finnish title might be associated with the expression for nonsense, "pajunköyttä" (literally, willow rope). Perhaps willow talk in English reminds you of pillow talk, which is a relevant association, since a lullaby was included in the monologue of the willow.

Besides the routine way of starting, "My name is Salix though around here they call me Willow", the text included a poem by Katri Vala, which was composed into a political song in the 1970s and was thus known to many of the older generation. The poem was recited using the rhythm of the song to create the association. I hummed

the lullaby “Sov du lilla videung” (Sleep little catkin) in a soft voice in Swedish to end the speech.

The same recording of the text was played in two different places. One set of headphones was hanging from the willow near the sea at the western end of the park. This time I took the equipment away each night and placed it in the willow tree for only a few hours each day. You could listen to the work in the gallery space as well, next to a willow branch in a bowl of water at the window, where flowers brought by visitors for openings are mostly placed. This indoor version probably had more listeners, but the real willow in the park was presented to visitors on the guided tours around the exhibition. Besides art audiences, also visitors of the small dog park nearby were fascinated by the talking willow.

In this version, the text was more sophisticated and the experiment with the contrast of site and non-site, to use Robert Smithson’s terminology (Smithson in Flam 1996, xvii–xviii), added an extra dimension to the work.

7.2.3 THE APPLE TREE

Another collaboration with the Fine Arts Academy and Erkki Soinen took place two years later within the context of *Hiidentie (The Gnome’s Road)*, an environmental exhibition organised by Tarja Ervasti and Johanna Hammarberg in the Salo region in southwestern Finland in 2008. An ancient road following the Uskela River served as the site for artworks and projects by MA students from both Academies. Again, I wanted to participate and this time I chose two apple trees along the road, hoping that they would be in bloom at the time of the opening in the beginning of June. However, the most beautiful blossoming was already past at that time. Moreover, one of the apple trees by the roadside turned out to be a rowan. A new apple tree I found near the old mill, which marked the end of the exhibition.

The text for *Omenapu (Apple Tree)* was much longer this time, approximately 30 minutes, since the apple has so many myths and symbolic properties in our culture, starting from the Bible and Celtic folklore. Both trees spoke essentially the same text; only a few sentences, which referred directly to the site, were different in the two versions.

For both trees I had electricity from neighbouring buildings; I managed to borrow 200 metres of cable from a local electrical business. This was important since the project lasted for the whole summer. One of the apple trees was nicely situated by the road, standing alone against the fields and easy to recognise while walking

or driving past. It was also the one nearer to Salo, only a few kilometres from the beginning of the road. Luckily, there was a barn only two hundred metres away. However, a mishap occurred again. During midsummer, some criminals managed to steal the cable leading from the apple tree to the barn, even though it had been hidden in vegetation and buried in the dirt. These thieves were not children playing, but people who knew what they were doing: they needed a car to transport the heavy cable. Disillusioned, I decided to focus my efforts on the maintenance of the other apple tree by the old mill. The local owner of the place took an interest in the work and promised to inform me when there was some problem with the electricity. A temporary interruption in the power supply stopped the player and it had to be started again manually. In the end, one apple tree did talk for the whole summer.

In this version, my main mistake was not only related to the safety of the site but in neglecting to consider the duration of the text. To stand by the roadside for half an hour is not an easy task, even for a devoted listener. A bench or chair should have been provided, or then the text should have been much shorter. And, for being an almost full length audio play, some sort of dramatic development and perhaps also sound effects or music could have been included. Two stumps to sit on under the apple tree by the mill did help to some extent.

7.2.4 *IN THE SHADOW OF A HAWTHORN*

The next attempt in the series *Trees Talk* was *Orapihlajan varjossa (In the Shadow of a Hawthorn)* at the urban art festival *Olohuone 306,4 km² (Living room 306,4 km²)* 2-5 June 2010 in Turku. Four small hawthorns spoke their monologues, alternating between three languages. And again, the time was supposed to be the month of the hawthorn (the sixth month and letter of the beth-luis-nion calendar and alphabet), the time when the small trees or bushes would be in bloom with heavily scented white blossoms. This time, white benches were provided beneath the trees. The festival took place during a few days only; it did not involve such challenges as having to maintain a work for months. Instead of CD players, I used MP3 players, and instead of electricity by cable the players used batteries that had to be recharged during the night. Regardless of these superficial alterations in technology, the technique was basically the same. The use of three alternating languages (Finnish, Swedish and English) was a new development, as well as having separate versions of the text for each tree and site. One hawthorn grows next to the old castle near the harbour; another grows in Barker Park along the river that flows through the city; a third one

grows on Vartiovuori hill, with a beautiful view over the city; and a fourth one grows near the city centre in a residential area next to an old house. Each of them belonged to a different species of hawthorns and had their own story to tell.

The hawthorns' speeches were written in the first person singular and, as usual, all of them began with the phrase "My name is Crataegus, though around here they call me hawthorn". The rest of the monologue was different for each tree, taking into account the characteristics of that species as well as the peculiarities of that particular place. The following extract from the monologue of the hedge hawthorn, *Crataegus Grayana*, growing in Barker Park refers to the actual site:

Sometimes I am called American hawthorn since I was brought to this country from Ontario, Canada in the 18th century. Because I can survive the hard winter as far North as Lapland I am very popular here. Usually, they cut me to form hedges, but if not, I will grow into a small and elegant tree, as you see. - I really enjoy living near the river, close to people passing by, so I can watch the traffic on the river. I do like being an independent tree rather than a bush. What a horror to grow into a hedge that is regularly cut and never have the chance to blossom. But I would not like to grow alone. We have grown up like this, close to each other, all eight of us. Everybody thinks her place is the best, but I would not change mine. I like to watch the water. Here everyone can see that I am an elegant tree and not a bush, though most people think of us as thorny hedges.

The hawthorn, *Crataegus Submollis*, in Puolala Park focused on the medicinal powers of hawthorns and referred to the site only in passing:

The family of hawthorns is very old. In North America they have found traces of us that date from between 140 and 170 million years ago. There you can find hundreds of species of hawthorns even today. I am Crataegus submollis, or Quebec hawthorn. I can grow up to ten metres high and I produce a large crop of red fruits. - I am planted here on purpose, though my roots do not really have enough space here. The sun shines nicely, though, and the traffic is not bad. I like to spread out my branches freely in all directions. It might look like there are two of us growing here together, but in fact it is only my branches and me.

The Common Hawthorn, *Crataegus Monogyna*, an endangered species in Finland, growing in the park of the old castle, referred briefly to the historical site:

To be honest, I did not appreciate this place when younger. I felt we were stuck here in the backyard and did not know what took place within the walls of the castle. We could not even see who came in or went out through the main gate. However, I have forgotten most of what I did see, I guess. History is interesting, but you never notice history when it seems like everyday life. - In ancient times we had an important role in the Celtic tree alphabet or the beth-luis-nion (or birch, rowan, ash) alphabet. I stood for the sixth letter, h, huath or hawthorn. Their calendar was based on the moon and my month extended from the

thirteenth of May to the ninth of June. According to the old-style Julian calendar, which was used in Britain before 1752, the hawthorn month would start around the 1st of May, which is also Beltane, the spring Fire Festival of renewed growth and strength. In those days it was the blossoming of the May tree, not the date alone, which announced the true arrival of spring and summer.

The fourth hawthorn, *Crataegus Rhipidophylla*, next to the observatory on Vartiovuori hill, explained her relationship to the site in the following way:

Open vistas I really adore. I have adapted to life here between lilacs, pea shrubs and honeysuckle because I love the view of the city. Sometimes I wonder what life would be like among those of my own kind. With the lilacs I have to work hard to bloom. When they start spreading their scent, nobody else has much of a chance. I have nothing against lilacs. But I sometimes feel lonely among them, when their perfume is all over and the honeysuckle joins in, too. Luckily, my red haws can be seen in the fall. - In Ireland I am revered as a fairy tree. They say that if you sit under a hawthorn growing on a fairy hill on the night of the 1st of May you will be whisked away to the fairy world. I am guarding many wells and springs, and I am often treated as a wish tree, covered with rags. Lone hawthorns grow in the fields, and on burial mounds, and they say that cutting one will result in bad misfortune, the loss of cattle, money, even your children. Perhaps it is due to the custom of cleaning the dead in old times. The body was washed with water and hay and the hay and the water, which had been used, were put under the hawthorn bush. I would sometimes be planted near the place where an accident happened. Thus, both the soul and the place could be cleansed of the negative vibrations caused by the accident or that caused the accident in the first place. - Though I am considered an unlucky tree, my main power is cleansing.

Besides my accustomed sources, Graves and Carroll, I also found information on Internet sites. The work was audible for four days between noon and 5 p.m.; I tied the players and earphones to the trees in the morning and took them away in the evening. Nevertheless, some of them were stolen during the day. I was prepared for that and replaced them with new ones the following day. The main difference compared with previous versions was the use of three languages and the use of benches. They functioned to mark the sites and invite visitors to sit under the small trees and experience their fragrance.

The series *Trees Talk* represents one of the two principal strategies for performing landscape I have explored (the other being performing for video repeatedly in the same place). Various attempts at developing this type of small site-specific audio plays have convinced me of the usefulness of the technique. The combination of a living being, a tree, and a machine with recorded speech is a strange twist to the traditional arrangement of a living performer on an inanimate stage. In the fol-

lowing section, I will discuss liveness and the impact of a living environment using this work with hawthorns as an example of this issue.

7.3 EXHAUSTING MODERNITY - LIVENESS IN THE SHADOW OF THE HAWTHORN

The title “Exhausting Modernity” refers to Teresa Brennan’s work *Exhausting Modernity - Grounds for a new economy* (2000), which analyses the exhaustion pervading modern capitalism in psychic, social and environmental terms. Within performance studies, it is perhaps best known through André Lepecki’s influential study *Exhausting dance - performance and the politics of movement* (2006). Brennan claims that a phenomenon she calls the foundational fantasy - assuming ourselves as subjects in a world of objects - is intensified in modernity. Commodities function after the manner of fantasies, making the subject more likely to see what it has made, rather than feel itself to be connected with, or part of, what has made it. (Brennan 2000, 176) Commodities make living substances inert relative to the energetic movement of life. It is this “slower movement” which is the key to the exhausting nature of modernity. (Brennan 2000, 68-69) The less animate the environment is and the slower time becomes in natural reality, the greater the ego’s need to speed things up. (Brennan 2000, 174) However, we are not doomed to repeat; we can judge modernity as that process which needs to be reversed here and now, Brennan provocatively states. (Brennan 2000, 177) If the indissolubility of individual and environment is taken seriously, every action, every thought has an effect. (Brennan 2000, 191)

Personally, I would perhaps not try to reverse modernity, but I find Brennan’s arguments challenging for my artistic practice. Some of Brennan’s ideas have implications for the discourse on documentation, including the well-rehearsed notion of performance art as resistance to commoditization (Phelan 1993). I was alerted to the problems involved in performances for camera, which are trying to help the performer (and hopefully the viewer) reconnect with the living environment but which actually end up producing more dead objects, like video tapes and DVDs. In attempting to create a mode of working that would be a meditative alternative to the commercial corruption of collaborative performance production, one might be succumbing to a fantasy of omnipotent independence. Brennan’s stress on the distinction between animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, introduces a new angle into the so-called liveness debate. I will discuss a current contribution by Philip Auslander (2008) in connection with the sound work *In the*

Shadow of a Hawthorn, described above, where technology was used in a slightly different way.

The work was presented in June 2010 at the urban art festival called “Living room 306, 4 km²” in Turku (as described in section 7.2). Four different species of hawthorn trees in four different parks had MP3 players tied to them, with earphones hanging from their branches and a white park bench placed beneath them. Four short monologues (3–5 min.) were playing nonstop, alternating between Finnish, Swedish and English, between noon and 5 p.m. during the four days of the festival. The information given to the public was shamelessly anthropocentric and anthropomorphic, as the title of the series suggests, *Trees Talk*.⁹⁵ However, the protagonists were living beings “assisted” by my recorded voice and a machine, forming an assemblage as it were. The recordings served as material for a live installation. My aim was to help the spectator or listener reconnect with the living environment, an aim that is understandable but also problematic, if looked at with Brennan’s ideas in mind.

First, I present Brennan’s ideas about the foundational fantasy influencing our relationship to the environment; then, Auslander’s discussion of the changes in our understanding of liveness.

7.3.1 EXHAUSTING MODERNITY

Brennan shows how capitalism is turning biodegradable life into a form in which it can generate nothing and how, through “binding more and more life in a form in which it cannot reproduce life, capitalism, and a complicit modernity, disturbs an ecological balance.” (Brennan 2000, 2) By reworking Marx, she shows how the production of commodities binds nature in forms “incapable of re-entering the lifecycles via the reproduction of their own kind or their organic decay.” (Brennan 2000, 5) She draws upon Marx, though

without the subject-centred perspective that ... prevented him from perceiving that nature as well as labour is a source of value, and of the energy drawn on in turning living nature into commodities and money. (Brennan 2000, 11)

95 “The scent of a tree in bloom is magic if the tree whispers its thoughts into your ear while you sit in its shade. But what if the tree is small and full of thorns, little more than a bush and speaks strange things in three languages? - *Trees Talk* is a series of voice installations about trees that talk, and talk about trees. Today we say ABC, the ancient Celts said beth, luis, nion (birch, rowan, ash). The hawthorn, uath, is the sixth letter of the Tree Alphabet; early summer is the time of the hawthorn. This spring in Turku, four hawthorns will have a chance to speak.” (*In the Shadow of the Hawthorn*, press release, Arlander 2010 g)

Brennan analyses the contemporary situation first at the level of the psyche, then at the level of economics and, lastly, of politics. Interesting in Brennan's work is precisely the way in which she combines the psychological, social and economic-environmental, somewhat reminiscent of the three ecologies proposed by Félix Guattari (2000). In the first part she discusses how the subject is constructed as separate from the mother and the environment more generally. She describes how conceiving of human beings as self-contained individuals is a modern idea. In the second part she argues that the ever-expanding scope of capital is as necessary to capital's profit as is its exploitation of nature, and that opposition to this exploitation should go hand in hand with opposing the large scope of its operations. In the third part she explores the connection between the time of economics and the time of physics, as this is a key aspect of the inertia that has to be overcome in daily survival; inertia is not a personal problem, but an effect of the speeding up of the world. (Brennan 2000, 13)

Thus, she describes the prevailing exhaustion and energy crises at the personal as well as the macro-structural level. For the purposes of this text, her ideas about a psychic foundational fantasy of autonomy and its consequences for our relationship to the environment are especially interesting.

7.3.2. FOUNDATIONAL FANTASY

Drawing upon Freud, and especially Melanie Klein, Brennan discusses a fantasy that seems to be inborn in the human psyche:

The foundational fantasy is the means whereby the human being comes to conceive of itself as the source of all intelligence and all agency. It conceives of the other (other people, the world around it) as objects that are there to serve it, to wait upon its needs without making it wait, to gratify it instantly! /- / This assumption, that an intelligent subject is counter posed to a world of objects, is critical in how the foundational fantasy is globally enacted... the process whereby the fantasy is made real in the social order, rather than the psyche. (Brennan 2000, 7-8)

Thus, a process that is studied on microcosmic level by psychoanalysis is shown by Brennan to be a process at work in the macrocosmic world of commodities. For her, psychoanalytic insights are actually less pertinent to individual processes than they are to social processes. (Brennan 2000, 7-8)

Brennan refers to the studies by Melanie Klein where the mother becomes an obliging object in the infantile fantasy, all matter rather than mind, which will none-

theless obey the infant's will. If we keep in mind the correlation between mother, God and nature (although Christian theology has made all divine agency masculine), it is easy to see how this process runs parallel to that found in the macrocosmic world of commodities, she notes. While the fantasy pre-exists modernity, its force in the social order is intensified by modernity. (Brennan 2000, 9)

Her critique goes further than traditional philosophical critiques of hubris and subject-centeredness because she takes energy into account. According to her, pre-modern people conceived of themselves as energetically and psychically connected with their environment and to others in it, whereas subject/object thinking automatically separates the subject from the environment. The uniform denial of the transmission of affect from the seventeenth century onwards (rather than the birth of interior consciousness) is, according to her, a clear mark of modernity. Subject/object thinking is contrary to thinking in terms of the transmission of affect. It seems that the transmission of affect, while once conscious, is now an unconscious process in the West. And, consequently, the influence of the environment and context on the subject is denied or downplayed:

The idea of an energetic connection between the subject, others and the environment dims the subject's pre-eminence. The subject is palpably not the source of all agency if it is energetically connected to, and hence affected by, its context. The hubris of the modern subject finds this notion unpalatable; this subject clings to the notion that humans are energetically separate; that they are born this way, within a kind of shell that protects them and separates them from this world. In fact they have to acquire this shell, which is also called the ego.
(Brennan 2000, 10-11)

For Brennan, there is no better name for modernity than "the paranoid egos' era", a term originally used by Jacques Lacan. For him, the ego's era is built upon a destructive objectification of the other, together with a destructive objectification in knowledge.⁹⁶ According to Brennan, the process of objectification is constituted by the desires to poison, fragment and destroy the mother's body: "After all, the best way to turn someone or something into an object is to kill it." (Brennan 2000, 35) She describes various symptoms of the foundational fantasy:

the desire for instant gratification, the preference for visual and 'object'-oriented thinking this entails, the desire to be waited upon, the envious desire

96 "The need to control is what makes the ego's era paranoid: it results from the subject's belief that the object, the objectified one, is out to get it, but this paranoia originates in the subject's own projected aggressive desires toward the other. None the less its paranoia makes the subject anxious, and its anxiety makes it want to control. The objectification of knowledge is also paranoid; it is knowledge based on a need for control." (Brennan 2000, 34-35)

to imitate the original, the desire to control the mother, and to devour, poison and dismember her, and to obtain knowledge by this process, constitute a foundational psychic fantasy. /- -/ In this fantasy the subject must also deny its history, in so far that history reveals its dependence on a maternal origin. (Brennan 2000, 36)

The foundational fantasy is a paranoid fantasy about autonomous beginning.⁹⁷

There is no sense of self-containment in that beneficent and destructive energies and affects flow between the nascent subject, its surrounding environment, and those in it. These affective energies pre-exist us; we are born into them. They bequeath to us the illusion that the subject founds the world, that the subject has dominion over it, together with the drive and desire to do away with any evidence to the contrary, chief amongst it the living, thinking other. (Brennan 2000, 189)

The subject postulates itself as such, severs connections with those around it and believes that its fantasies and affects are its own affair. What is interesting for performance as research, she maintains that the fantasy “relies on a divorce between mental design and bodily action to sustain its omnipotent denial.” (Brennan 2000, 36)

7.3.3 AN INCREASINGLY INANIMATE ENVIRONMENT

Brennan suggests that we are influenced by an increasingly inanimate environment, which produces a sense of a slowing down of time, which we then feel the need to try to speed up:

[J]ust as its own fantasies weigh heavily upon the ego, so does the subjective if not subliminal sensing of what is animate or inanimate in the surrounding environment. The less animate that environment is and the slower time becomes in natural reality, the greater the ego's need to speed things up, its anxiety, its splitting, its need for control, its 'cutting up' in its urge to know, its spoiling of living nature, and its general aggression towards the other. (Brennan 2000, 174)

Living in a predominantly man-made world distorts our relationship to our surroundings and to other living beings; we start to see ourselves as creators of the world rather than understanding ourselves as being a part of it:

97 “There is no sense of self-containment in that beneficent and destructive energies and affects flow between the nascent subject, its surrounding environment, and those in it. These affective energies pre-exist us; we are born into them. They bequeath to us the illusion that the subject founds the world, that the subject has dominion over it, together with the drive and desire to do away with any evidence to the contrary, chief amongst it the living, thinking other.” (Brennan 2000, 189)

[T]he subject's sense of connection with the world is physically altered by its physical environment. And if the physical points of resistance embodied in commodities function after the manner of fantasies, closing the subject off from the movement of life, they are also visual tangible evidence of a different physical world which, however fantasmatic in origin, makes the subject more likely to see what it has made, rather than feel itself be connected with, or part of, what has made it. (Brennan 2000, 175-76)

An environment, which materializes our fantasies, is costly; the price we pay for our temporary excitements and our increasingly technological environment not only results in the depletion of our shared natural resources but also influences our understanding of energy:

[T]he consequence of living in a high-tech built environment is that one almost has to be a subject to repel its deadening effects.... [and] these deadening effects are deceptive: the world from which they emanate appears to be a world of more rapid motion, with a rapid pulse that can for a time be taken as energy itself, as it speeds up one's conscious tempo. But the price of this temporary excitement will be paid somewhere. Even if it is not paid by the subject who benefits, the deadening effects of this environment more and more make each and everyone an object. (Brennan 2000, 187)

However, Brennan is not a prophet of doom. She insists instead on the possibility for change. She discusses alternative strategies and focuses on the economic role of woman-as-mother. Processes of economic reversal from large scale to a smaller scale as well as attempts at retracing the steps that led to the present situation can only be effective if they acknowledge the maternal forces they are drawing on. (Brennan 2000, 194-95) Brennan argues:

Binding more and more energy upsets the balance of nature, unless we unbind, which means retracing our economic (though not our patriarchal) steps. We are not doomed to repeat. We can judge modernity as that process which needs to be reversed here and now. Critical in this reversal is the acknowledgement of the mother, whose denial begins a socio-historical process, which binds energy past the point where existing life in all its species can be sustained. (Brennan 2000, 177)

So what can we do? One area is to resist the acting out of the foundational fantasy on ever-larger scales; another involves dealing with the fantasy in our personal psychic life. (Brennan 2000, 189) The energetic connection between individuals and the environment has consequences both ways; psychical and contemplative resistance will also have effects. The subjective and social spheres influence one another. If we take seriously the indissolubility of the individual and the environment, then every action and every thought necessarily will have an effect. (Brennan 2000, 191)

Brennan repeatedly emphasises the importance of acknowledging our indebtedness to and dependence upon the extraordinary creativity of *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature), the significance of symbolizing divinity in maternal terms and the value of opposition to power over others in any form. (Brennan 2000, 198–99) Her economic suggestions are interesting, but for the purposes of this text her statement about the indissolubility of the individual and the environment, and the idea that every action and every thought has an effect, is sufficiently alarming – and potentially reassuring. Our ways of making art and research do make a difference. What we repeat and how we repeat it, has an impact.

7.3.4 MEDIATED LIVENESS

Is live performance necessarily performed by living beings? The so-called liveness debate (Phelan 1993; Auslander 1999; Schneider 2001; Taylor 2003) can be approached from several angles. One dimension is the discussion of the status of documentation related to practice as research in the UK, summarized by Piccini and Rye (2008). Philip Auslander (2006) makes an interesting contribution to this debate by discussing the performativity of performance documentation. He claims that documentation is, in itself, a performative act; documenting a performance as performance art constitutes it as performance art. This idea of performativity could have implications for performance as research, too. We could assume that documenting a performance as research could constitute it as research. And then, the interesting question is: What does it mean to document a performance as research? (I will return to this question in Chapter 10.)

There is another dimension to the liveness debate related to Brennan's ideas, that is, the relationship between the live and the mediated in performance. Philip Auslander (2008) claims that there can be no unmediated performances, since performances are actually techniques of mediation in a broader sense. He describes the concept of liveness as a moving target, though the word live is traditionally used to refer to "a performance heard or watched at the time of its occurrence, as distinguished from one recorded on film, tape etc." (Auslander 2008, 109) Today, a great many performances blend elements of both live and recorded events.

Auslander discusses Steve Wurzler's schema, which distinguishes between three different types of liveness, based on the spatial or temporal co-presence between performers and audience. The first mode, the so-called classical live, is based on temporal and spatial co-presence. The second form of live is based on temporal sim-

ultaneity, like in the use of telephone, "live" radio, "live" television, and so forth. The audience witnesses the performance as it happens, but they are not spatially co-present. The third form of live is based on temporal anteriority and spatial co-presence, as in lip synching or stadium replays, where the audience is spatially co-present but hear what has been recorded previously. The fourth category, the recorded (or the non-live), is based on temporal anteriority and spatial absence, as in motion pictures or film, recorded radio and television.⁹⁸ The audience shares neither the temporal frame nor the physical location with the performers and experiences the performance later. (Auslander 2008, 110)

Auslander refers as well to media theorist Margaret Morse, who insists that our understanding of liveness is more and more produced by temporal rather than spatial co-presence and through an entity's ability to interact with us and respond to us. According to him, Nick Couldry proposes online liveness and group liveness as new forms of liveness and maintains that the experience of liveness is not limited to specific performer-audience interactions, but to "the feeling of always being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated co-presence with others known and unknown." (Couldry, 2004 quoted in Auslander 2008, 111) He further claims that the word "live" increasingly refers to connections and interactions between human and nonhuman agents. (Auslander 2008, 111)

The example of violinist and composer Mari Kimura performing together with a robot, Guitarbot, is discussed by Auslander, who maintains (referring to Morse) that our experience of liveness is related to the sense of interaction, of immediate response, that a machine can provide for us. This mode of interaction with a robotic co-performer, who provides impulses like an interacting partner, is a good example of developments taking place in current technologically mediated performances. Most live art practices on the web rely on temporal co-presence, which has become the core meaning of liveness. However, for my examples with the hawthorns it is the spatial co-presence that is of more interest.

Creating *In the Shadow of the Hawthorn* awoke my interest in the performance GuitarBotana. Who was the robot in this case? You could say my recorded voice was playing the part of the robot. The relationship between the recording and the tree is curious, since an experience of interactive liveness is lacking, despite the very real liveness of the co-performer, the hawthorn. The combination of a pre-recorded

98 Somewhat related ideas – comparing here now / there at that time and here at that time / there now - I tried to develop in a paper called "Performing landscape - here at that time / there now" at the Site/sight – Source/resource symposium, University of Exeter, 11–12.9. 2004. (Arlander 2004 d)

performance, of a voice speaking the text, and the live presence of a tree, with the scent of its flowers, its movement in the wind, could perhaps technically be understood as a form of dubbing (rather than lip synching), and, if analysed according to Wurzel's schema, it could be understood as a combination of pre-recorded material and spatial co-presence, the third form of liveness.

The special mixture of protagonist and place, where it is hard to say to what extent the tree actually functions as the performance site rather than a co-performer, nevertheless has an impact on the availability of the performance. In the same way as in a classically live performance, you have to be there in that specific place at that specific moment in time to experience the work. The work as such is live in the sense of being ephemeral, which is a temporal concept. However, simultaneity, which is at the heart of the spatial, as Doreen Massey (2005) has insisted, is also important for these works. The hawthorns were all speaking simultaneously in different parts of the city. The liveness produced by the hawthorns was in some way antithetical to the mediated liveness discussed by Auslander. No real interaction between the human and the "robotic co-performer", which in this case was a living being, a tree, took place. The "site" was a performer, the living part or the "living room", though not in terms of immediate interchange, while the human performer participated only as a recording.

7.3.5 DISCUSSION

If the experience of liveness is understood more and more as a function of interaction, of receiving a response from a machine that simulates the reactions of a living entity, how does this alter our understanding of agency and our relationship to living beings that do not respond to us in an instant? A robot will surpass a tree in terms of its immediate interactivity, for sure. If we expect the world to constantly interact with us in the sense of responding to us, in order for it to feel alive to us, this will change our relationship to the environment. How can we appreciate creatures that are not mammals or machines, which are somehow recognisable as potential co-performers interacting with us (or even waiting upon us), if we do not feel them to be alive? A tree is very much alive, though it cannot provide us with the experience of liveness as interaction. Some kind of interaction is actually taking place, in an exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide, for instance, but on a different temporal scale and mostly imperceptibly.

It is this literal dimension of the liveness issue that I find personally interesting. And it is this dimension which resonates with the question of agency and with the ideas of Teresa Brennan concerning our relationship to the living or not-so-living environment. The quality she finds important is the ability to reproduce or participate in the cycle of producing new entities through the disintegration that characterises organic life, unlike most commodities, which cannot reproduce themselves nor degenerate into biodegradable waste. Even though the distinction between animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic might dissolve on a microscopic level, on the level of human experience they are often quite clear. Even though we can crave machines that respond to our commands and react to our actions and feel them to be more alive than trees or plants that do not listen to our every whim, our body can probably sense how organically alive our surroundings are. According to Brennan, we respond energetically to our environment, whether consciously or not.

So what should we repeat? What kind of practices should we develop? It seems to me that the greatest challenge in our artistic and research practices is to focus on our relationship to the environment as a living totality and not to limit ourselves to the social only, nor to relationships between the human and the non-human in a technological sense. And for this challenge, Teresa Brennan's insights can be of help. As artists and researchers, we have the capacity to try to understand and experience the world as alive, as a living environment that we are a part of and participate in through our every thought, not only as a collection of objects or interactive entities created to sustain and entertain us.

