

**TINFO News –
Theatre and
Ecology**



TINFO

THEATRE INFO FINLAND



Tuija Kokkonen: A Performance with an Ocean View and a Dog | Photo Kaisa Illukka

Finnish Theatre and Ecology

The 2000s have been characterised as the environmental millennium and the era of eco-criticism, and the performing arts in Finland mirror this shift in ecological awareness. The works of numerous Finnish artists reflect on the relationship between the arts and the environment. The non-human context and environmental awareness have emerged alongside human- and society-centredness. Nature sparks the interest of artists, and the environmental meanings of works and actions are present – not as the mainstream, of course, but as a critical attitude comparable to contemporary art: artists want to examine the terms of their own activities from an ecological viewpoint, and to make room for diverse encounters between the human and the non-human. Numerous works are negotiations of the boundaries between nature and culture and the relationships between the human and the non-human.

Issues that make the ecological perspective particularly timely include environmental problems at the Talvivaara mines, which recently began operations in Finland; the Fukushima nuclear power plant catastrophe; and climate change. The topicality of ecology in the theatres is demonstrated by the fact that, during the past year and a half, three different dramatisations of Risto Isomäki's ecological thriller *The Sands of Sarasvati* have been created. Practitioners of theatre have also come together to discuss the relationship between theatre and nature; de-growth and theatre is one theme. Artists find it important to discover ways of making the state of nature concrete through dramatic means and to transform our paralysing awareness of the destruction of nature not only into action but also into theatre and performance. Artists seek solutions to making visible the myths and discourses that sustain nature as a resource and unravelling our estranged relationship to nature. Particularly challenging questions include, what would performances that deepen people's relationship to nature be like, and how can we create art that speaks affirmatively of the state of nature?

Rights for the disenfranchised

Tuija Kokkonen is one of the earliest practitioners of ecological theatre, a trailblazer. In her performative research projects, she has studied the links between the body and power; the actor's expression and performing; corporality; and people's relationships to themselves, their own bodies, other people, and the environment. In *Valuma-alue* ("Catchment Area"), Kokkonen researched weak agency; the link to ecology was apparent. With its dramaturgy of silence, this performance series strove to access

the non-linguistic quietude of nature and encounter the other. In the series *Memos of Time*, Kokkonen examined man's relationship to animals and death. In the second part of "Memo", *A Performance with an Ocean View (and a Dog for a Dog)*, the foci of observation were the weather, time, potentiality, and non-human agents. In this production, the performers were actually the sun, the clouds, the wind, and the rain. The human performers stepped aside, as it were. Productions such as this include a powerful political aspect. They demand rights for the disenfranchised.

In his Manifesto for Generalized Anthropomorphism, Esa Kirkkopelto directs at theatre a demand to renounce "human-scale and human-originated conceptualisation and categorisation". Kirkkopelto's desire is to expand the phenomenon of mankind to "all that exists". He views "opening up to the infinite" as his goal, and sees this opening up as staged and drawing all creatures to it. For the group Toisissa tiloissa, this approach has taken performative forms. Those who participated in the journey *Porosafari* ("Reindeer Safari") sought the way of being of a reindeer herd.

In Leea Klemola's Arctic Trilogy (*Kokkola, Into the Cold, New Karleby*) and her most recent play, *Jessikan pentu* ("Jessica's Puppy"), the boundaries between human and non-human, between people and animals, have been consciously blurred and alternatives to anthropocentrism have been sought. "In the third part of the trilogy, we wanted to take animals as the equals of humans. As unfathomable, strange, different; not more primitive beings driven by urges and instincts, but as other species with another kind of culture.... In the play, animals always represent always something; after all, they are being played by people. None of us know what it feels like to be an animal, how an animal experiences the world." (Leea Klemola and Klaus Klemola: "New Karleby", a Finnish-language article on the creation of the play, in a supplement to *Teatteri* magazine, May 2011)

Another manifestation of ecological thinking is a stress on place and locality. The environmental dimension of contemporary theatre is seen in relation to landscape. Juha Hurme's volunteer-style Hailuoto Festival could be called a laboratory for ecological theatre; the unique natural world of Hailuoto island is an essential part of the work.

Evaluations of the ecological footprint of theatres and performances have begun to be conducted in the production machinery of the theatre; solutions that support recycling and rely more ecological materials are being sought. The goal is to lessen the environmental load of performances, reduce carbon footprints, and also make the audience aware of this. *Globen uupuneet* ("Globally exhausted"), a touring production about environmental anxiety targeted at youth, was executed in co-operation between Teatteri 2.0, the Finnish National Theatre, and environmental organisations. In conjunction with the Espoo City Theatre production of *The Sands of Sarasvati*, an evaluation of the environmental load of the production was carried out.

The complexity of our (Finns') relationship to nature comes to the theatre

Eco-criticism also involves considering the ways in which Finnish literature, drama, and theatre have represented nature. The Finnish national epic *The Kalevala* has been seen as proving that Finns have always been ecologically aware and existed in harmony with nature. Its values can be viewed as reflecting ecological wisdom. One researcher has characterised the work as "the most ecological" epic and "the Green epic of Finland's forest nation". The Finnish national landscape was a conscious 19th century construct in which nature was compared to humans. Nature and the landscape melded with the character of the nation and economic capacity. Depictions of a national landscape formed of lakes, wilderness, and forests did its part to give rise to patriotic sentiment and a desire to defend the country. Finland was a wilderness in which the Finns felt they were surrounded by the mythical forces of nature. But these wild lands were also territories to be conquered; they were to be inhabited and subjugated. Expansionist nationalism advanced in this manner, and for instance the Sami were shunted out of the Finns' way. Those questions related to the problems of indigenous nations, natural resources, and

people's relationship to nature and the environment dealt with in contemporary theatre are also centrally related to an ecological point of examination. Skolt Sami theatre practitioner Pauliina Feodoroff has raised these questions in her production *Amerikka* ("America"), and the relationship of Arctic peoples to the earth also emerges in the productions of the Ruska Ensemble. In the future, Ruska will be working with the Finnish National Theatre on a northern trilogy, of which the first piece is a ballad about Sami poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää.

If the wilderness embodied dangers and a potential enemy, the forest more than just "green gold," production and profits; it was a place of protection. It was a free space, a refuge. In Aleksis Kivi's novel *Seven Brothers* (which is one of the most-frequently dramatised works in Finland), the natural state of human contentment is compared to the peaceful existence of a squirrel sleeping serenely amid the swaying boughs. The brothers fled societal systems and control specifically into the forest, into freedom. By the time of Hella Wuolijoki's *Niskavuori* plays, nature is already a cultivated landscape. *Niskavuori* can be considered a topographic drama, so close is its relationship to the landscape: the fields of Niskavuori farm, or the forest that in skilful hands begins to generate profits for its owners and managers, or then the forest into whose embrace one can flee life's stresses. What interests Laura Ruohonen in the characters of her dramas is "their understanding of their own place in the landscape". An example of this is her play *Razorbill* ("Yksinen"), the events of which take place on a desert island in the Baltic Sea. There, two women representing different generations and worldviews take stock of each other and nature after technology fails them.

Numerous works express *topophilia*, an affective relationship between mankind and its environment. The early visuality of Finnish theatre also speaks of a close relationship to nature: in addition to facades depicting cottage interiors, forest backdrops were always necessary – a Finnish play could not make do without them. Our phenomenon of summer theatre and its paradox can also be considered the remnant of an informal folksiness: in places of natural beauty, stands of seats are erected in natural surroundings. Finns want to experience theatre outside, in nature's embrace – despite the rain, the wind, the cold, and the mosquitos. In summer theatres, nature acts as a living facade and backdrop. This exotic idyll should not, however, be allowed to hide the fact that in Finnish drama, considerations of landscape have been outsourced to the domains of set design and technology, as Laura Ruohonen has justifiably criticised.

The environmentally oriented productions of contemporary theatre frame the location itself, the landscape, the environment, the forest, or rock, or sky. With this framing, the viewer or participant is positioned with a conscious physicality as part of the environment. These performances succeed in eliciting the theatre's essential experience of "being here", the sensation of one's being wholly present in a certain place, as has been noted by Annette Arlander, an artist who has created environmentally oriented productions and studied the spatial scale of performance.

Numerous performances can also be seen as utopic action challenging and transcending the present. The ecological orientation of theatre practitioners can be viewed in light of Hannah Arendt's characterisation of "political action" and political assessment, the ethics of personal accountability. Being political means equal companionship in which the relationship between humans and the environment is portrayed critically but also in an attitude of questioning and listening like that of Tuija Kokkonen, by turning at the brink of a non-performance and opening up towards "the community of the weak and non-human collaborators" and its "sensitive and delicate" terrain.

Hanna Helavuori

*Finns want to experience theatre outside,
in nature's embrace – despite the rain, the wind,
the cold, and the mosquitos.*

Tuija Kokkonen: Relationships Between Humans and Non-humans as a Space for Performance

A dog sits, staring into the horizon. The artist Tuija Kokkonen stands next to him. The venue is a Helsinki city centre department store roof. About to unfold is *A Performance with an Ocean View (for a Dog) – II Memo of Time*. Kokkonen has created the performance for a dog.

According to Kokkonen, the existence, or extinction, of animals is the most serious environmental crisis facing humankind. Tuija Kokkonen's ideas stem from equality between human and non-human beings. To her, dogs, birds, clouds or lichen are agents, active participants, as performers and spectators and, what particularly fascinates her is what meanings might unravel for the performance and for humans from this relationship and engagement with other assemblages and other forms of consciousness. What does the seagull chick see and what will it remember about *A Performance with an Ocean View (for a Dog)* as, perched in its nest, it watches on day after day?

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Tuija Kokkonen: *A Performance with an Ocean View for a Dog* |
Photos Kaisa Ilukka

Performance art – a foil for human-centred status anxiety

”We humans have a seemingly endless capacity for hubris. For me it has been essential to question our human-centric attitudes. The act of performance is a great tool for that,” Tuija Kokkonen explains. “I explore the actual and impotential relationships between humans and non-humans as a space in which the performance takes place.”

Performance art, and art in general, has come to be perceived as something for humans to do and to experience. However, the latest in environmental thinking makes no distinction between life forms. And why would it? Working with a non-human being, allows people access to new kinds of sensory information. When they first began work on *A Performance with an Ocean View (and a Dog)* at Kokkonen’s performance laboratory, they realised that the environment can be seen, felt and sniffed from the point of view of other animals, such as a dog.

In her performances, Kokkonen gives the viewer the greatest possible freedom to observe. The performance designer and the human performers are so-called weak actors, their role focusing to make suggestions and to direct the viewers’ attention to non-human actors, cloud spotting or stroking a pebble, for example.

When you prepare a performance for something non-human, in which the human performers take a non-active role, what you are left with is a misperformance. In fact, this seems to be precisely what Tuija Kokkonen aspires to; mixing the act of performance and the act of viewing, stripping the performance of its usual, expected impact as it is watched (or non-watched) by dogs, moss, tree bark and a rivulet of water running in a crevasse. Humans cannot pretend to control a performance like this. The performance changes. It becomes something other.

Paradoxically, Kokkonen uses the very act of performance as an escape from performance and the sense of dependence it entails. Our performative society has a tendency to feed the human sense of superiority over other life forms. This binary logic is also dismantled by Tuija Kokkonen’s very approach: in ”nature” it is simply not possible to draw a distinction between the human and the non-human as they are inextricably intertwined.



The slow unfolding and the dramaturgy of time

A key value for Tuija Kokkonen, both in terms of her artistic research and creative activity, is recognising sensory experiences. It takes a finely-tuned set of feelers to pick up on the subtle signals in our environment. In addition to the ability to tune in, it also takes time.

As human beings, we have a vague idea what impact our actions have on the natural environment. According to Tuija Kokkonen, our schools fail to teach us about the concept of time and viewing things in a longer perspective. It is no wonder, then, that we are so short-sighted. In Kokkonen's performances, the actors might include a star or some lichen, to whom the other participants read out loud. How does the act of reading change the lichen? It is not impossible to think that a dose of human CO₂ might just well prove the start of something. But the changes can only be perceived over a very long period of time. What matters more is that as a result of this event, both the performance and the human participants undergo change.

Tuija Kokkonen is in the process of developing her thinking and artistic expression on time and duration in relation to ecology and ecological crises. The focus of *A Performance with an Ocean View* was weather and changes in our climate. These are phenomena that continue to provoke continual debate

Global warming is merely one aspect of climate change. All of us can claim to have experienced a colder or warmer than usual season. Each cold and snowy winter is offered up as proof positive that the talk of climate change is pure hokum. And yet, for reliable arguments to be made one way or another, what is needed are long-term observations. That is not to say that some of the changes we are experiencing are not taking place relatively rapidly. For example, there is now evidence that the Antarctic ice sheet is getting thinner with every year that passes.

The politics of time practiced by Tuija Kokkonen is not only conceptual but also highly practical. *A Performance with an Ocean View* (and a Dog) took place on the shores of a post-Ice Age Yoldia Sea, the site of a current day Helsinki suburb. The department store roof, the setting of *A Performance with an Ocean View* (for a Dog), is the future shoreline, when ocean levels have once again risen.

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A question of non-action

The concept of a weak actor, devised by Tuija Kokkonen, is ingenious. It is used to describe the way in which the human performer relates to a non-human actor or the surrounding nature. Inspired by political philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Tuija Kokkonen explores this weak agency as impotentiality. In other words, she is asking how can I stop acting and consuming more even when I can.

Kokkonen and her ensemble have made every effort not to leave any trace of themselves on the site of the performance. Any rocks that may have been moved were returned to their original positions. Just a single lead's worth of electricity was needed to run a video on the roof. For practical reasons, the rehearsals, which fell on the Finnish winter months, were conducted in a heated indoor space.

Not all man-made changes are automatically an evil. After all, humans themselves are animals and a part of nature. We are engaged in a continuous interplay with other creatures. This relationship has an impact on all participants and gives rise to change, sometimes fast but mostly very slow. The options are to adapt to that change or to perish.

When mega storms and earthquakes happen, it may feel as though nature has assumed control over us. And yet, the most unsustainable outcomes are created through human dominance: our habit of constructing, damming, consuming, killing, buying, flying and heating, beyond what is necessary. As humans, we do these things, just because we can.

Memo Performances

Memos of Time (2006-)

2010- Chronopolitics – III Memo of Time, an endless performance

2008 A Performance with an Ocean View (and a Dog/for a Dog) – II Memo of Time

2006/ 2007 Mr Nilsson – I Memo of Time

Catchment Area – Memos of Freedom (1999-2003)

2003 Catchment Area – III Memo of Freedom

2001 Catchment Area – II Memo of Freedom

1999 Catchment Area – I Memo of Freedom

Maus and Orlovski – Memos of Love in the City
(serie of three performances in 1997-1998)

For more information on Tuija Kokkonen and her art, please visit her website at:
www.tuijakokkonen.fi (information also available in English)

In addition to an interview conducted with Tuija Kokkonen in December 2011, the article also draws on the following source:

Esityksen mahdollinen luonto, Tuija Kokkonen, in Ruuskanen (ed.): Nykyteatterikirja – 2000-luvun alun uusi skene, Like 2011.

Tuija Kokkonen's most recent articles have been published in the Journal for Artistic Research www.jar-online.net

Tuija Kokkonen

Tuija Kokkonen is a director, writer and researcher based in Helsinki, Finland. Since 1996 she has worked on a series of site-specific 'memo performances', as the director and the artistic director of Maus&Orlovski, an ever-changing performance collective of artists from various fields. The memos are explorations on relationships between performance, nature and time. They chart terrains between genres of art, between species; terrains where aesthetics, ethics and politics are inseparable. Since 1999 the memos have been performed in the program of Kiasma Theatre / Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki.

Kokkonen's current (since 2006) doctoral research project at the Theatre Academy Helsinki is titled "The Potential Nature of Performance. The Relationship to the Non-Human in the Performance Event from the Perspective of Duration and Potentiality." The work incorporates a new series of performances called Memos of Time – performances with and for non-humans.

Tuija Kokkonen | Photo Riku Saastamoinen





The Sands of Sarasvati | Espoo City Theatre | Directed by Jani-Petteri Olkkonen |
Photos Stefan Bremer

The Frightening Power of Fiction

Risto Isomäki is a Finnish writer, scientific journalist, and activist whose warnings and predictions about the state of the climate are heeded. This has not always been the case. For years, Risto Isomäki wrote scientific articles and spoke about dangerous changes affecting our living environment, topics that fans of science fiction also became familiar with through Isomäki's early fiction works. However, it took longer to arouse the interest of the broader public, including politicians, in the threat of ecological catastrophe.

Then in 2005, *The Sands of Sarasvati* appeared. Based on myths of the deluge, the novel takes place in India's Gulf of Cambay, Greenland's continental ice, and Finland's Hanko Peninsula. The story develops into a thriller whose protagonists are oceanographers and climatologists. The researchers have found alarming signs that the earth's continental glaciers are melting more rapidly than anyone could have predicted. But does the world and its decision-makers, media, and citizens take the information conveyed by the scientists seriously? And in time?

"Threat scenarios don't become real for people in non-fiction books. A scientific work doesn't touch the everyday reality of average people and politicians the same way as, for instance, a novel can. Theatre clearly has similar potential," notes Risto Isomäki.

Three Sands of Sarasvati in theatres

During 2011-2012, three different stage adaptations of the novel *The Sands of Sarasvati* were seen in Finnish theatres. In Lapland, a poetic and playful production by the Rovaniemi Theatre took place on a flooded main stage, the northern Karelian group Rospuutto-ryhmä is touring the country like traveling evangelists, and in the sci-fi work at the Espoo City Theatre, the portrayal of ecological catastrophe takes on the form of antique tragedy [read more about these productions on pages 16-20 of this issue]

The Sands of Sarasvati: how is it that this text is showing up in theatres just now? From the artists' desire to do something, their own part. Climate negotiations between the world's governments are stalled; there is no real political will to turn developments in a better direction. Frustration. Disquieting information about the state of the world doesn't make the news threshold, or at least compared to the seriousness of the issue, very little column space is dedicated to it. "For every threatening message that receives publicity, there are thousands of pacifying messages," says Risto Isomäki.

THE SANDS OF SARASVATI

Good news

In his works of fiction, Risto Isomäki has predicted real chains of events with a frightening accuracy. Asia was faced with a tsunami smaller than yet reminiscent of the one in *The Sands of Sarasvati* in December 2004, as Isomäki was finalising the book.

His next novel, *Litium 6* (“Lithium 6”, 2007), tells of a world in which climate change is warded off on a massive scale by building increasing amounts of nuclear power. This book’s key scenario focuses on the danger resulting from power plants being built on coastlines, regions vulnerable to hurricanes and other forces of nature. To Risto Isomäki’s own shock, this imagined threat also came to pass in a horrendous way in Japan.

Still, our oracle Isomäki is now offering good news when it comes to energy production. A breakthrough has taken place: the price of solar energy has dropped rapidly, which makes solar panels the most economical source of energy in areas where no electricity grid exists. This is a globally significant development, as two billion people live in such off-grid areas. The next halving of the price of solar energy is expected to take place in 2015 at the latest. By then, solar panels will be a less expensive way of producing energy than coal power. The energy revolution is at hand, with solar beginning to be the most affordable form of energy even without any subsidies from society.

Another piece of positive news is that trees are being allowed to mature, meaning increases in their capacity to sequester carbon. Broad expanses of land previously used for grazing or fields have been transformed to multi-storey home gardens. As much as 7 per cent of the world’s total 2.5 billion hectares of fields have become pure multi-storey home gardens. In plots featuring multi-layered cultivation, the crowns of trees are allowed to grow, reflecting the energy from sunlight, which is an incomparable method of removing excess carbon and thus preventing global warming.

Isomäki also performs scientific experiments himself to study how the reflectivity of the forest can be increased. To this end, he has acquired forest plots around Finland. Growing deciduous trees, especially birches, is preferable to dark conifers in terms of slowing atmospheric warming. Isomäki also raises and maintains anthills on his plots of land: by carrying forest litter into their nests, the hard-working insects bind carbon within them. Isomäki has published a nonfiction work dealing with the topic: *66 Ways to Absorb Carbon and Improve the Earth’s Reflectivity – from Reasonable Options to Mad Scientist Solutions* (2009).

*Threat scenarios don’t become real
for people in non-fiction books.*

Risto Isomäki

Risto Isomäki has written eight novels and about ten works of nonfiction; his scientific articles and columns are published by several magazines. His multiple award-winning novel *The Sands of Sarasvati* has been translated into ten languages to date: English, German, Polish, Spanish, Hungarian, Turkish, Danish, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. In addition, a comic album based on the same work won the Comics Finlandia prize in 2009. A script for a Sands of Sarasvati movie is in the works as well

Isomäki is planning a novel that will continue the themes of *The Sands of Sarasvati*, and is also currently working on *Healing the Ocean*, a nonfiction work on oceanic iron fertilisation. He is actively involved in the Atmosmare Foundation, which he founded; it develops and tests methods and techniques to minimise the negative effects of climate change. He channels a portion of the profits from his artistic work into the foundation's activities.

Sari Havukainen



THE WARNINGS OF THE SANDS OF SARASVATI

Which ones hit the mark and which went wide?

The Sands of Sarasvati was written for all practical purposes during 2003 and 2004. A large number of the warnings I presented therein have since begun to be realised in a very unpleasant way.

In the book, I asked whether the exposing of the dead algae, dust, and ash from beneath the melting ice could darken the continental glacier to the extent that it would accelerate its melting. This has apparently already begun to happen. British researchers just reported that the reflectivity of Greenland's ice sheet has diminished an average of 20 per cent in broad swathes because the ice is growing darker.

In addition, the number of glacial lakes and moulins that have appeared on the surface of Greenland's continental ice has increased at an eye-popping rate. In the vicinity of Ilulissat, exactly 6 moulins were counted forty years ago, but in the most recent survey, 12,000 were found. In other words, the edges of the continental glaciers really are turning into a swiss cheese of sorts. The immense glacial lakes of The Sands of Sarasvati and the oversized moulin that appears in the story are, however, purely fictional.

For the meantime, the number of icebergs produced by Greenland has increased more slowly in the real world than in the imaginary universe of The Sands of Sarasvati, but on the other hand, the masses of ice actually floating in the Arctic Ocean have melted more rapidly than those in the book.

in reality, coastline nuclear power plants are much more vulnerable to tsunamis than presumed by the main characters of The Sands of Sarasvati.

*the warming of the climate sparks:
a huge, one-time sloughing of icebergs*

*increases the reflectivity of the North Atlantic
the climate cools in Europe*

*the reflectivity of
Greenland's ice sheet has
diminished*

because the ice is growing darker.

*the edges of the continental glaciers really are turning
into a swiss cheese*

The events in Fukushima demonstrate that in reality, coastline nuclear power plants are much more vulnerable to tsunamis than presumed by the main characters of *The Sands of Sarasvati*. The tsunami that hit Fukushima was only a little over ten metres, so no mega-tsunami, but even that was on the verge of causing an unfathomable catastrophe. The prime minister of Japan has admitted that if it hadn't been for good luck and the self-sacrificing bravery of the nuclear power plant employees, Japan would have faced "utter destruction". The greatest possible theoretical emission could have been thousands of times greater than that which was actually released.

At the end of *The Sands of Sarasvati*, the warming of the climate sparks a new Dansgaard-Oeschger or Heinrich event: a huge, one-time sloughing of icebergs from Greenland. The crushed ice that the icebergs create increases the reflectivity of the North Atlantic, and the climate cools in Europe as much as at the beginning of the so-called Younger Dryas period, prior to which it was approximately as warm as it is now. At that time, the climate suddenly cooled by ten degrees Celsius, possibly within a period of only three months. Climatologists currently speculate that human-induced climate warming could not cause the same sort of Dansgaard-Oeschger event as the natural warming of the climate that preceded the Younger Dryas period.

I have tried to determine on what researcher certainty in this regard hinges on, and based on the discussions I've had to date, I strongly suspect that we don't really know how things stand. We don't know yet whether this threat from *The Sands of Sarasvati* is real or not. The matter would deserve serious attention, as the stakes are enormous.

As a matter of fact, a troublingly large number of the book's warnings appear to have been pretty much on the money. It would have been nice if a lot more of my lobs had gone seriously astray.

A YEARNING FOR SONGS OF ORIGIN

A group of activists is on the stage. They have run to the performance venue. A synchronised breathing holds the group together. Sweaters steaming, they begin to sing. They sing a story; they sing for their lives. For future generations. So that humankind would learn, and never again be drowned in a deluge. They are performing a play adapted from the novel *The Sands of Sarasvati* by Risto Isomäki.

This production of *The Sands of Sarasvati* by the Rospuutto Theatre Company, which I direct, has toured Finland since October 2011. In it, a kind of apocalyptic gang of activists criss-cross the country, performing Risto Isomäki's ecological thriller. The goal of the tour is to convey information on climate change to different audiences, from moose-hunting parties to international summits.

Isomäki's original work delves into the exponential effects of global warming on our planet; scientific fact and mythical reality join hands in a rescue operation to save our shared world. In the book, humankind is threatened anew with the fate of Atlantis, after an enormous block of ice collapses from the Arctic ice sheet, causing a mega-tsunami headed for Europe and North America. The work asks how, in light of climate change, should we react to the myth of the deluge, which is repeated in so many different cultures throughout human history? Could the information communicated by myth touch those of us numbed by information overload more effectively than those repetitive shots of catastrophes (such as Fukushima), shown day in, day out on the news?

In my dramatic interpretation of *The Sands of Sarasvati*, then, one of the themes is communication – with my frustration with the fact that, although all the scientific knowledge in the world is available in a 24/7/365 space-time continuum, when it comes to climate change prevention, humankind has been paralysed by indecision as to whether or not it believes the calculations of climate sceptics or those of realists. The performance asks, Can the information in the stories passed around campfires or saunas achieve changes in human behaviour more effectively than reports, proclamations, doctrines, or scientific texts?

A Finnish philosopher by the name of Tere Vadén delves into the cultural history of communication in his work *Kaksijalkainen ympäristövallankumous* ("The Two-Legged Environmental Revolution", 2010): "There are different genres of knowledge: fact-based knowledge, know-how, social knowledge. There is also a genre of knowledge that can be termed original knowledge. And this is something else, it is supra-generational and suprapersonal, it tells, for instance, how people should behave so that humans in general can exist." Vadén cites the singing competition between Väinämöinen and Joukahainen in the Finnish national epic *The Kalevala* as an example. Joukahainen challenges the old man and sings something like "the world is round" or " $e=mc^2$ " or "the sun is a star" or "water is wet". Joukahainen's knowledge is literal, fact-based knowledge that he, in his youthful bluster, believes makes him superior. But as Väinämöinen begins to sing "of deep origins, of eternal things", "the lakes

The audience experience has to be jolting in a way that we couldn't achieve by proclaiming fact-based knowledge.



rippled, the earth shook". Väinämöinen's songs of origin sink Joukahainen into the mire. Our performance reaches towards this method of signing original knowledge. The audience experience has to be jolting in a way that we couldn't achieve by proclaiming fact-based knowledge.

When Europe sinks under a tidal wave in Isomäki's dystopia, the protagonists are left with nothing but their noble efforts to save their heritage for future generations. Rospuutto-ryhmä feels a kinship with this charge of message-bearer in our time, in which the task of the artist is not only to reflect existing reality in the light of climate change, but also to redefine it. This is why our group burns with a strong spirit of activism. Our production of *The Sands of Sarasvati* has been offered to festivals in countries that have not yet ratified the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Countries that have delayed the creation of the climate change agreement, pulled out of it, or not yet ratified it include at least Canada, China, India, Russia, Croatia, Monaco, Zambia and the United States.

Hanna Kirjavainen

The Kalevala excerpt is from the 1989 translation by Keith Bosley.

THE SANDS OF SARASVATI

Ice Crystal Song

Kari and Anna-Leena grow enthusiastic. The animal kingdom also joins in the revelry.

"It's working.

I would say that.

It's working.

The atomizer is the right size...

It's working.

Ice crystals.

It's working.

It has time, it has time to turn into ice crystals.

It's working.

It's working.

It's making snow.

It's making snow.

It's really working.

Water returns to snow and ice, to snow and ice.

Water to ice, water to snow and ice, snow and ice,

Ice to snow, to snow, to ice, to water, water to ice.

Water to ice. To ice. Ice remains ice. Ice remains ice.

Of snow thou art, and unto ice shalt thou return.

Water returns to snow and ice, to snow and ice.

Amen."

Scientist Kari Alanen is testing his new invention, a windmill that produces snow, on the Baltic ice:

Sergei: You were talking about those windmills that could be erected on ice floes...

Kari: Has something happened?

Sergei: Would they really work? Have you tested them in winter conditions?

Kari: Yes. They'd work. Look, can we talk about this later...?

Sergei: Listen... A huge chunk of the Greenland ice sheet has become unstable. It's melting fast, and this has already been going on for a while.

Kari: And the meltwater...?

Sergei: Vanished into the depths of the glacier, under the ice...

Kari: Goddammit, you've got to be kidding me... that means...No, goddammit! Do you understand what that means?

Sergei: It means that the world as we know it could stop existing at any moment... or perhaps it already has. But we thought we'd still try out your windmill theory in practice. We need all your expertise for Operation Icewind... We need thousands of windmills, tens and tens of thousands of windmills to slow the melting of the glaciers... Or else we've got a new Atlantis ahead of us.

Kari: Worse, Sergei, much worse. Do you realise that the melting process might no longer be stoppable? And the glacier melting isn't even the biggest problem. Do you understand that most nuclear power plants have been built on the coast? If the continental glacier collapses, it's going to cause a mega-tsunami that...

Sergei: God help us all.

The song, dialogue and photo are from the Rovaniemi Theatre production of The Sands of Sarasvati. The production was adapted for the stage by Timo Heinonen and Vihtori Rämä.

...AND THE GODS DROWNED THE EARTH

*Knowing thy doom,
why walkst thou with clear eyes,
Like some god-blinded beast, to sacrifice?*
Aeschylus, Agamemnon

In Risto Isomäki's novel *The Sands of Sarasvati*, the survivors of a deluge scour a submerged Europe for something serviceable to rebuild that which is worth rebuilding. The stage interpretation dramatised for Espoo City Theatre by Maria Kilpi and directed by myself ends otherwise: with an empty stage drowned in sea of light, a epitaph sung in ancient Greek, and mirages of distant human forms.

My interpretation of *The Sands of Sarasvati* was based on the question of whether it is any longer possible to stage tragedy in its classic sense. Only fragments remain of those associations that we would need to understand the mythic drama that ritualistically stylised cosmic conflict. During the golden age of Athenian theatre in the 5th century BCE, participating in the festival of the Dionysia also meant participating in active democratic citizenship. The rituals that preceded the plays emphasised the militaristic values typical to the urban culture of ancient Greece, which were in turn then witnessed systematically imploding on the stage.

These days, the sphere of social activity of the *polis*, into the positioning of which the theatre of antiquity was concerned, is global. The scale of the consequences of action has increased and to become worldwide. If human-induced climate change is shaped into an aesthetic story, it follows the key concepts of classical tragedy: being blinded by a sense of omnipotence (*hubris*), the tragic miscalculation arising from this blindness (*hamartia*), the natural consequences of the action (*nemesis*), *peripeteia* or the turning of activity in on itself, after which there is no going back, *anagnorisis* or recognition, the revealing of the truth, and in the end *pathos*, suffering the consequences.

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The imitation of action proposed by Aristotle can be thought of as targeting that process through which each living being fulfils the purpose inherent to it, its *telos*. If we consider climate change as a dramatic narrative, ecological catastrophe is the inevitable and foreordained *telos* of human action based on the utopia of limitless growth. Fulfilling of this fate (*moira*) is revealed to us through our choices. Every decision is guided by an arc of longitudinally limited and fully completed action indicating the impending destruction.

In *The Sands of Sarasvati*, I compared the chorus of antiquity to the technology of contemporary society, which, in the theatre, similarly creates the Apollonian illusion of the performance into the space of the black box. The destruction of a civilisation built on a complex and delicate technology can be understood as a Stoic tragedy: the characters of the play are too human and limited to understand the action of the suprapersonal theatre machine, which is in complete consistency with itself and hence rigidly inexorable. Despite this, they cannot escape the demands it sets them.

The performance ends with the aesthetic contemplation of the utter destruction of the human race. From the perspective of Stoic tragedy, the image presented on the stage, the *phantasia*, of the greatest possible ruination, contains the possibility of a horizon opening up and even of understanding, *katalepsis*, awareness of the tragic position of a human race governed by fate. Whether an experience of this sort within the spectator leads to a Stoic solution, the desire to do good, is in my opinion beyond the domain of the artist.

Jani-Petteri Olkkonen

Nature and Society as Seen Through the Transparent Theatre of Juha Hurme

Juha Hurme | Photo Ilona Laaksonen, Nälkäteatteri



"The earth is a pretty small plot of land, and the way we're tending it now is unsustainable."

So delineates theatre practitioner Juha Hurme his personal ecological vision. Preserving natural resources is inseparably incorporated into his aesthetics of the theatre.

Hurme is a multifaceted theatre practitioner, writer, and intellectual whose theatre work is marked by transparency and lightness of structure – regardless of whether he picks up a classic, a text of his own, or a prisoner's autobiographical account of prison life, and regardless of whether that encounter leads to an opera, a production at a city theatre, or a highbrow hayseed farce.

Hurme, who has been stirring things up in Finnish theatre since the 1980s, wants not so much to interpret as to clarify his message in a honed modernist spirit that also taps the "anyone can do theatre" traditions of the best amateur productions.

"I always want it to be possible to see the world through my theatre. I'm not interested in creating works that are compact and wholly interpreted. In this transparency, Brechtianism and ecological values come together; Brecht's idea of a transparent society is realised. Watching the environment is at least as important as watching the performance."

Hurme's approach to theatre is best crystallised in the theatre festival he and provincial artist laureate Jouni Rissanen founded in 2008 on the island of Hailuoto, off the coast of the northern Finnish city of Oulu. Hurme calls this festival a sort of ecological theatre laboratory.

The unique and diverse nature of the island provides not only a set for the performances of the mini-festival but also spectators with an experiential journey into the natural world of the island: its bogs, sandbanks, and over a hundred species of birds. The actors perch in bird-watching towers, act in pine heaths, and compete with the booming of the waves as they perform.

"Every year we seek out new performance venues. The festival brings together camping and art."

The island's nature is beautiful and fragile; the festival is ecological, political, and northern. And nature isn't the only attraction, as the island's old-fashioned farm- and courtyards and cultural landscapes function equally well as performance venues. A leap into the past is part of the festival's charm.

An ecological perspective does not, however, dominate the plays' themes, nor does Hurme calculate the carbon footprint or conduct environmental reviews of his theatre.

"We don't change or move anything, and when we leave, we clean up behind us. We don't want to disturb the island's fragile ecosystem. I get a deep satisfaction out of theatre not wasting natural resources."

At Hailuoto, nature works not only as the set and one of the performers, but also as a distancing effect. A performance about drought might be hit by a downpour.

A non-commercial theatre festival

The Hailuoto Festival is a *gesamtkunstwerk*, and most of the audience watches all of the performances. This audience is quite heterogeneous: the residents of the island are joined by culture enthusiasts from around Finland, and often local children participate as well.

Hurme says he's tired of the fact that only twisted intellectuals come to watch his works. This is why the Hailuoto audience, which consists of normal people, thrills him.

Hurme is known for productions being taken to unusual places. Theatre performed on ferries, huts, forests, and yards is not, however, unique to Finland. As far back as the Romantic era, the history of European theatre offers examples of intellectuals seeking artistic freedom beyond the bounds of cities.

"I've never been interested in theatre that's transported by the truckload. Theatre is at its best when it's local and done on a small budget. The Hailuoto Festival isn't advertised in any way, and it's a completely non-commercial event. If someone from off the island wants to come and watch the performances, we don't facilitate their stay in any way."

It is seven kilometres to Hailuoto from the mainland, a distance that must be travelled by ferry. The performance venues may be located tens of kilometres away from each other, and transportation isn't arranged. Hurme believes that only an inferior work needs to be advertised. Generally just as many people as would fit show up for each performance.

The first time Hurme had the opportunity to combine the summer theatre hijinks integral to Finnish culture with interpretations of the classics was in the Nälkäteatteri productions at Kustavi in south-western Finland, which were focused on presenting the works of Kustavi writer Volter Kilpi.

Kustavi began, however, to balloon into too large of an event. Hurme's work is also characterised by the notion that things are done as long as they are meaningful, so people don't have time to grow indifferent to them.

On the other hand, the majority of Nälkäteatteri productions remain in the ensemble's repertoire and are continuously revived. Their lifespans are thus both long and short. Hurme's theatre work is built on paradoxes that challenge the usual conventions of performance.

In addition to Nälkäteatteri, other groups perform at Hailuoto as well, the most important being the Koskenniska ensemble led by Jouni Rissanen, which specialises in the oeuvre of Oulu-area writer Pentti Haanpää.

Hailuoto Theatre Festival | Photo Tapio Maikkola, Kaleva



Hailuoto Theatre Festival | Photo Hanna Hautala



"For the actors from these ensembles, working together as a group is a way of life, a volunteer-type mix of vacation and work that they don't get paid for."

This approach harkens back to Brecht, who harshly chastised theatre practitioners who had lost a zeal for their work. According to him, good theatre is fun because it exudes a joy of doing, not a lust for money.

The festival programme also includes visiting performers who know how to make the most of the Hailutoto milieu. Hurme has no established policy when it comes to the Hailuoto programme.

"I do all kinds of off-the-wall stuff there. There's an audience there that wouldn't necessarily go on a week-night to see Soviet avant-garde, but they might run across it at the festival and enjoy it."

The visiting productions in 2012 will include a northern dimension: the performances of the Taiga trilogy have all been created in the northern boreal zone. The easternmost is a Komi performance from the edge of the Urals, the westernmost comes from the shores of the Baltic, the most polluted sea in the world, and the third hails from the shadow of Ounasvaara fell in Finnish Lapland. These performances have been born along hiking trails and watercourses, which, seeing as he's an avid hiker, means they are close to Hurme's heart.

In 2012, the festival programme includes the 53-year-old Hurme's own 100-year anniversary, Christmas in summer, and lowbrow theatre performed in the sticks – all inspirations featuring the theatre practitioner's typical humour, which pokes gentle fun at the sober-sides world of adults. The imagination knows no bounds – and this is exactly why there's no need to test the bounds of natural resources.

For Hurme, the idea behind the festival will disappear when Hailutoto becomes a suburb of Oulu, thanks to a planned bridge. Construction will begin within the next few years, and the milieu will be irreversibly transformed.

"Our festival will end once the bridge is built."

*The island's nature is beautiful and fragile;
the festival is ecological, political, and northern.*

The Island of Hailuoto

Hailuoto is one of the 27 national landscapes of Finland – the only municipality as a whole on the list.

The largest island of the Northern Gulf of Bothnia was created by the Ice Age. Hailuoto has risen from the sea during the past 2000 years, and one day Hailuoto will be part of the mainland. Sand, water and wind have created beautiful sandy beaches and dunes. Water of the sea is clean, pine forests are typical fauna for Hailuoto, which also is an important area for vast variety of birds.

Esa Kirkkopelto

– Artist and Researcher

Everything is intertwined with everything. Working at the Theatre Academy as professor for artistic research and leading the performance art group Other Spaces, Esa Kirkkopelto unites in himself two areas that feed into each other. In the rehearsals with Other Spaces (also known under its Finnish name Toisissa tiloissa) it is possible to create a laboratory environment where thoughts and methods based on artistic research can be tried out. And then again it is the exercises developed by the group which spark off new pedagogical ideas for actors' training.

This new form of acting is to be based on a psychophysical tradition but should now be freed from possible directions from the outside and become auto-directed. Already in 2007 when Esa Kirkkopelto became professor he had a draft for an artistic research plan which he soon started to implement. His research project is now known under the name Actor's Art in Modern Times (Näyttelijäntyö ja nykyaika).

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Self-Directed Performer / Actor

At the beginning of the new century and after having worked as a theatre director in the eighties and nineties, Esa Kirkkopelto felt that the time was ripe to let go of the kind of directing that builds rehearsal situations around the position and viewpoint of an outside viewer. The artistic research project Kirkkopelto was conceiving of at the time was not the only thing that benefited from him turning away from directing. His decision also influenced the work of the collective Other Spaces. In both cases Kirkkopelto refers to himself as a convener rather than as a director.

Acting and The Present (2007–2011) is a unique, practice-driven project, also from an international point of view. Its uniqueness is based on the fact that art and science are combined in research. The researcher-actors who were asked to join the group all studied at the Theatre Academy in the eighties under Jouko Turkka, who was the head of the school at the time and teaching acting. Turkka (born 1942) is a controversial character in Finnish theatre. His acting and performance body syntax based on extremely physical exercise and expression was ahead of its time and somewhat waiting to be articulated. The descendants of this teacher-father wanted to revisit his acting method and select aspects of it for further development.

With the ideal of the auto-directing actor in mind, and indeed the auto-directed group of makers, the project set off to create a system which was to be based on an independent dramaturgy of the actor. The result was a toolbox which each actor can make use of and adapt according to his or her needs.

Esa Kirkkopelto, leader of the research project, explains: With the means of the acting dramaturgy which we propose, the body of the actor can be re-organised. This deconstruction and re-arrangement is needed so that the actor's skills are again in relation to the demands of contemporary theatre.

"The idea is that, for example, a theatre can commission a training package for its actors which is intertwined with the rehearsal process of a given performance", says Esa Kirkkopelto.

This means, that the new acting pedagogy isn't applied in detached workshops for the creators but offers itself as a continuous working method for the rehearsal room, there where the actors create their work. Now there are tools with which the actors can analyse their own work. The first trials in Finnish theatres have already produced a lot of support and feedback. Practices can be rehearsed and discussed in a very meaningful and direct way once actors themselves are teaching actors.

Reindeer Safari and Other Performance Events

The experimental group Other Spaces was founded in 2003 following a workshop Esa Kirkkopelto held at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts. Kirkkopelto became aware that rehearsal situations are often more interesting than the actual performances because what happens in rehearsals is more immediate and memorable. This was the starting point for developing exercises that can be performed to an audience.

Collective exercising, therefore, is one approach of Kirkkopelto and his group. They have developed non-textual exercises that go back to physical imagination and formal changes and which carry names like the Human Mountains, Mushrooms, Clouds, Germination and Rays of Light. There are already tens of exercises ready to be applied and new forms of experiences are constantly being developed. In their *Secret Retraining Camps* Other Spaces also gives an opportunity to audiences to try out these exercises in a safe and supervised environment.

In the past years, Other Spaces has produced several performances, the last was Golem Variations. It is a piece about creating: about the materials and mechanics of creation and about the experience of being created. In 2011, Esa Kirkkopelto and his collective have reached a new phase where the group puts aside the creation of actual performances and focuses solely on workshops, free exercising, demonstrations of exercises and collective physical exercise events. Reindeer Safari which has already been carried out twice, serves as an example of such a collective physical exercise event. During the safari, the audience experiences what it is like to be a reindeer, a semi-wild herd animal in an urban environment. For the Reindeer Safari the audience is not only armed with dry food typical for the species but also with a portion of reindeer knowledge. The creators of the safari act as reindeer dogs and take care of practical issues so that the audience has the chance to concentrate fully on the experience of being a reindeer. Reindeer Safari got a Certificate of Honour for Environmental Art 2011 awarded by The Foundation of Environmental Art in Finland.

Dreams that Come True: a Base for Performance Art in Helsinki

Autumn 2011 Other Spaces got a permanent base in Helsinki where it settled down in the Performance Centre, a structure it has founded together with other performance art companies. The centre is becoming an interactive space for makers and audiences to meet, a truly supportive base where also international workshops and residencies has taken place.

Esa Kirkkopelto looks into a bright future for the centre: “The Performance Centre is becoming a place where live art makers can meet and where we have the chance to support each other, get inspired by each others’ work. This will also help to reduce competitive feelings.”

One of Esa Kirkkopelto’s dreams is to create more collective physical exercise events, for example on sports fields. Another dream of Doctor of Philosophy Kirkkopelto is to take his publication *A Manifesto for Generalized Anthropomorphism* from 2004 to a next stage.

”I can’t let go of anthropomorphism. You just can’t put the body of a living actor into brackets.”

A Manifesto for Generalized Anthropomorphism, the next moves of the reindeer dogs and other information:
www.toisissatiloissa.net

Essays and interviews as well as a project description of *Acting and The Present* (Näyttelijäntyö ja nykyaika) can be found in the publication *Nykynäyttelijän taide - Horjutuksia ja siirtymiä* (Theatre Academy / Maahenki Oy, 2011)

Sari Havukainen



Esa Kirkkopelto with the ensemble rehearsing a research performance *Birth of the Green Movement* | Photo Miska Reimaluoto, Theatre Academy Helsinki

Animalis – The Metamorphosis of Our Relationship to Nature

Animalis. The word is Latin; it means "living, breathing". It's also the title of a Third Space/3T Production that premiered in 2011, the third from our multicultural, multidisciplinary group. As a group, the basis of our work is dialogue between practitioners of art and practitioners of science, establishing genuine interaction between them and viewers. Our approach is research-based, and our goal is to find and raise timely philosophical and societal topics.

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The stimulus for the play was my interest in the common history, the cultural history, of animals and man. How could one, through this history, approach questions such as: What makes humans different from other animals? What story would animals tell about humans? What has been thought about this difference during different eras? What would humans be without other animals?

I considered it crucial that the work deal with this shared history from several perspectives: myth (or fairy tale, or religion), livelihood, technology, and science – at least. It felt impossible to limit the topic to any one period or perspective, for instance to an individual person's activities as a naturalist or a single aspect of our relationship to nature. Before long, I found myself specifically dealing with the history of subjugated creatures.

I began to grow increasingly interested in the change in our understanding of animals and animate nature. What have humans thought about their place in the world and their relationship to the rest of nature? How has that knowledge changed? Why? And what do we think about these matters now?

The dramaturgic framework of *Animalis* is formed of three animals that journey through time. The animals die and are reborn; the species lives on. I wanted to include a domestic animal, an animal that has lived in proximity to people for a long time. In the end I picked the dog, which is considered one of the first animals domesticated by man. I wanted to include a draft animal, a beast of burden, and decided on an ass; the third animal turned out to be a bird, a raven. All three creatures share a lengthy history with man, and thus feature prominently in myths and stories. These animals do not tell any unified tale. I made each in turn a centre-point around which time and characters revolve and change. The structure is episodic.

The time period covered in the play, about a couple of hundred years, encompasses breakthroughs in ways of thinking, chaos, long wars, extremist movements, fundamentalism, economic crises, enormous uncertainty, and traumatic experiences in the lives of individuals as well as entire human populations – the whole world is undergoing a kind of metamorphosis.



Metamorphosis

I limited the primary time and place of the play to Europe and the New World, 1546—1735 CE. But in addition, I wanted to preserve two distinct chronological elements: mythical time, which is narrative, archaic, and, for instance, related to the origins of the world; and the perspective of so-called “deep history”, the Palaeolithic world.

Two centuries, then, and a major turning point. The breakthrough of rational thinking and the modern, scientific study of nature made possible thereby were personified in Rene Descartes and Maria Merian.

At the beginning of the play, the animals emerge in a world where man does not yet exist (prologue, mythic time) and at the end (epilogue) fall back tens of thousands of years, into Palaeolithic time, where a human is creating images on a cave wall and the boundary between animal and man disappears... This fall takes place when Charles Darwin makes his appearance – in the form of photograph, a thought. The cave poses a question: What traces of “deep time” continue to exist in us? Are we a still-developing species...?

Silk has its own dramaturgy in the play. It enters the story through an Armenian silk-weaver and visual tokens of it, strands and colours, are present throughout the story’s various phases, weaving the episodes together: Descartes’ servant Helena Jans dresses her dead daughter in a silk shroud; Leonore, confined in the hospital of Salpêtrière, has spun silk thread with other women and children at a silk factory; Maria Merian studies the metamorphosis of the silk moth and eventually reveals its secrets. The silk moth thus became the play’s fourth animal, alongside the raven, the dog, and the ass.

The notion of metamorphosis is a central one. It also involves the transformation in thinking and knowledge we are currently undergoing. I wanted the work to act as a reflective surface for this discussion: How and from what premises should we re-evaluate our relationship to nature?

Maria Merian’s expedition to the rainforests of the Amazonas region at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries was one of my key documentary starting points. We know for a fact that she had several slaves in Suriname, one of who acted as her guide in the forest. We do not know this woman’s name. Through Merian and this Indian woman, the play contrasts two different forms of knowledge: the local, mythical knowledge of indigenous peoples and the scientific knowledge represented by Merian and Carl von Linné (who was familiar with Merian’s research).

Mythical, local knowledge is knowledge of the names of plants and animals and life in the jungle. From a scientific perspective, Maria Merian’s pivotal insight was understanding nature as a living, organic entity, how different species are interdependent and jointly create an integrated whole, in this case the ecosystem of the rainforest.

Metamorphosis – the transformation of the actor from human to animal or animal to human — acts a dramaturgical landmark for and contract with the spectator. The basis of the metamorphosis is the actor’s body, the human body, not some visual form or anything like that. The entire body. Movement.

The performance of *Animalis* and counter-thinking

Animalis premiered in October 2011 as part of the Turku European Capital of Culture programme and the Vastakertomus – Counter History 2011 event organised by our group. This weeklong event, which included international guests such as philosopher Michel Onfray and film director Trinh T. Minh-ha, examined counter-histories from various perspectives and in this time. In this context, the play’s plunge into the history of species and the transformation of knowledge as well as its considering of the relationship between man and nature were positioned within the investigative framework of Western counter-thinking.

Jarkko Lahti: Nature is the History of the Lost

“Now would be the time to listen very attentively,” says actor Jarkko Lahti. He is speaking of the malignant, ultimately disastrous incomprehension prevailing everywhere, including Finland. Ignorance is fertile soil for all manner of abuses, as well as fascist ideas and deeds.

Together with his cousin, writer Ari-Pekka Lahti, Jarkko Lahti is one of the co-founders of the Ruska Ensemble. The idea for Ruska sprang from *The Last Morning Star* (Viimeinen aamutähti, 2011), a work based on a ritualistic song from the Finno-Ugric people known as the Khanty, who traditionally lived in close interaction with nature. This shamanistic performance, created to a text by Yeremey Aypin, was a turning point for the artistic careers of the Lahti cousins. Jarkko says he became aware of who he is as an artist through Aypin. And so the duo did not accept a continuation of their posts at the Kokkola Municipal Theatre, which they had co-directed since 2009, deciding instead to journey down the path indicated by “The Last Morning Star”.

“We artists have a deep purpose to understand ourselves and thereby also find harmony with our environment,” notes Jarkko Lahti.

“The most important thing is to disappear without leaving a trace”

Viimeinen aamutähti sparked a shudder reminiscent of a spiritual experience in Jarkko Lahti. Through theatrical means, Ruska Ensemble will make visible the culture and thinking of the Sami, the indigenous peoples of arctic Fennoscandia. A performance or series of performances are planned as co-productions with the Finnish National Theatre and the Sami national theatre Beaivváš Sámi Teáhter; the first of which will be about the Sami artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (to premiere in 2014).

Jarkko Lahti says the artistic group is very aware that a production originating in the majority culture could well smack of cultural imperialism. However, the upcoming production will feature Sami actors and sensitively interpreted costumes by Berit Marit Hætta, herself a Sami. The same attitude of discretion informs a visit the Finnish artists will make this autumn to Mordva, on a tour of *The Last Morning Star*.

“With our visiting production, we want to reinforce the identity of the locals by showing that we consider their stories valuable world literature,” says Lahti.

The reality is grim, however. Both the peoples and cultures of the Khanty of Siberia and the Sami of northernmost Fennoscandia face dire straits, from the appropriation of lands for oil drilling to mining activities. As traditional livelihoods, such as reindeer herding, become unviable for these indigenous peoples, they have been forced to try and adapt to the majority culture, which has resulted in the gradual rejection of their own identity and language – more or less under duress.

”It’s mind-boggling to think that nature is considered nothing more than a resource, let’s tap it for all its worth, rip out everything we can. Instead, we ought to be remembering this: we are visitors here, nature just is.”

The Khanty people have a belief that that when death calls, the most important thing is to disappear without leaving a trace. Lahti believes that in terms of their relationship to the environment, Westerners, on the other hand, are like a cancer cell – the kind that devours everything and leaves a wasting corpse behind.

Relationship to self, relationship to nature

The future does not look particularly bright in terms of nature, but nevertheless theatre practitioner Lahti says he sustains hope – if for no other reason, then for his children. Although at times it looks as if the economic liberalism that is currently steamrolling across the world will be the only determining factor in the history of humanity, this is not the case: the economy will also benefit if the environment is not utterly depleted.



The indigenous peoples of the north, who are accustomed to living harmoniously with nature, have by and large been forced to give up their lifestyles. Still, Lahti believes they have retained something that we consider sustainable development-type thinking. For the Khanty, for instance, the relationship to one's self and thereby to the environment is formed by remembering.

"The ancestors are allowed to speak at hunting ceremonies, which is a celebration of remembering. At one Khanty celebration, all of history might be sung in two thousand songs. The songs also function to awaken the community's relationship to nature," explains Lahti.

"Nature is nature; it does not distinguish good from evil, or values; all of this comes from humans. A person can also call something sacred if they want. For the Finno-Ugric Khanty, the hands are important, and that which has been made with the hands. The knife of a person who has died can be a sacred object, because that person's hands continue to be present in the object, even after death."

Sari Havukainen

In addition to touring Finland, the Kokkola City Theatre production of Viimeinen aamutähti has visited Sweden and is headed to Mordva. It is possible to book the show.

In photo Jarkko Lahti



Sami Theatre Practitioner Pauliina Feodoroff: Before Long, the Land Will Cease to Sustain Us

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America | Takomo Theatre | Directed and photo by Pauliina Feodoroff

his familial homeland, Sevettijärvi. “During my grandparents’ lifetime, there was a leap from the Stone Age to the Atomic Age, from a subsistence economy to hyper-capitalism, from the absolute power of the village meeting and Skolt law to the European Union.”

At the time, bilingualism was even perceived as detrimental to a child’s language development, but the real reason for changing languages continues to live on below the surface: “The Skolts have been seen, and the Skolts themselves have experienced themselves, as a people on the verge of extinction, a vanishing nation.”

”The largest shift in our identity over the past hundred years has been the loss of stories and understanding shaped by our own culture. It’s as if our collective memory of what a person is was erased. Now we are learning it through the concepts of another culture, another world.”

Pauliina approaches the question of identity through her mother tongue, because language is the structure of thought. “I think of myself as someone without a mother tongue. This is the foundation and premise of all of my artistic work. Home and breaking.”

Skolt Sami Pauliina Feodoroff grew up in Keväjärvi, in the Inari Sami heartland, near Saariselkä and Kiilopää, a traditionally Skolt area. Now, after years in Helsinki, Pauliina is returning to the lands of her youth.

Born in the late 1970s, it was self-evident that Finnish would become Pauliina’s mother tongue. Her mother was Finnish and, through his marriage, her father renounced his traditional lifestyle of reindeer herding to ensure a better financial future for his child; his language, to ensure that his child would not be teased; and in the end

As an adult, she has rectified her lack of language skills by studying Northern Sami, which is easier for Finns to pick up; this has gradually opened up Skolt Sami to her as well. “I can’t speak Skolt to my kids, because my language skills are still too weak. In other words, my inability to speak is being passed down to my children in a second generation.”

“We Finnish Skolts continue to live in our traditional territories, and as long as we don’t completely abandon our homeland, our culture will live on. The language may die out, the livelihoods and manner of dress change, but the deep bond to where we are and who we are will endure.”

In her play *Amerikka – kuvitelmaa vallasta* (“America – Images of Power”), which premiered at Teatteri Takomo in 2010, Pauliina deals with global power relationships and ideologies. The goal was to tell her own story and that of Finland from the Ice Age to the present day, and to portray the current situation as it is. The process was difficult, and it underscored the depth of the chasm between south and north, even within one country and among closest friends.

American politics involves an ecological perspective and the concept of land ownership. What is the Sami relationship to land or nature, and how is it seen in the play?

“The right to one’s own land is above all the right to one’s own law. The leap that has taken place over the past 60 years, from absolute village meeting, in other words utter self-governance, to the Settlement Act in those areas managed by the [Finnish state-owned forest company] Metsähallitus is huge.” Finland has nursed a similar wound for several hundred years already, and the other Sami peoples longer than the Skolts. “We Skolts live in a state of double lawlessness: our system of common law, in other words the old Skolt law, has broken down, it no longer mediates conflicts or offers guidance for how one should live, and Finnish law doesn’t reach us yet, nor does it suffice.”

“Sometimes I feel like I can’t do anything until a land agreement between Sápmi and Finland has been reached. Reality is the greatest barrier to my writing.”

Pauliina indicates that she has never experienced good Sami leadership. Superficially important issues are dealt with in the village meetings, but the real decisions are made elsewhere. “Even today, we aren’t building our own future, we are reacting to threats or opportunities coming from the outside. When it comes down to it, it’s a matter of us as a nation still not having actively chosen to survive.”

What sort of ecological accountability would you hope for from the dominant culture?

“The so-called dominant culture is a culture built on generalities, and it consumes nature at an astounding pace. In nature, however, everything is always unique. The bonds of a culture to the land has to be unique and specific, because only in this way can you know how to live with a certain place.”

According to Pauliina, there needs to be a dismantling of mass culture and a shift back to the uniqueness of each locality. “Uniqueness means that we have commitments for which we’re responsible, and we’re the party that has left its part undone. Before long, the land will cease to sustain us, because we aren’t sticking to what was agreed. Everything is living, and as thinking, experiencing, and feeling as we are. Denying this will lead to mass destruction.”

Pauliina Feodoroff spoke with Eeva Kemppi

One Should Approach Writing Like a Ancient Bear Hunter - An Interview with Laura Ruohonen

Laura Ruohonen | Photo Jaana Simula, Theatre Academy Helsinki

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Laura Ruohonen, playwright and professor at the Theater Academy Helsinki, believes one should approach nature and writing the way in which ancient bear hunters closed in on their prey.

“When hunting a bear, you cannot attack it head-on. You have to advance on it from different directions, slowly and humbly. There can be no short cuts. There are things you cannot have at will; they are granted to you as a gift or a task – like understanding the spirit of a place, or the themes and reasons for a play.”

Ruohonen has written essays about the relationship between the inner and outer landscapes in drama. Nature and weather produce inescapable circumstances, and this provides fascinating tensions, as modern humans are accustomed to being able to control the world.

“We tend to be blind to the effects of geography and weather on us.”

Landscapes are a self-evident element of the analysis of novels or movies, even radio dramas.

“With plays, the impact of landscape as a dramaturgical and structural element is still almost entirely undiscovered territory. I strongly feel that the core of new writing lies therein. We went through a period when the landscape of a contemporary drama was a sofa. That was extremely limiting. I’m obviously not saying that setting a story on Mount Everest makes it more intriguing. But in the best plays, the inner and outer landscapes are indistinguishable – so organically interwoven that the drama couldn’t exist anywhere else.”

Living the mysteries of the land, sea and skies

Prior to her theatre studies, Ruohonen studied biology, because she felt a responsibility to save the world by writing about the environment in a different way than the evening papers did. Issues concerning the environment and human interference in it remain intrinsic to her writing.

Her plays often take place in landscapes of manifold historical and geographical significance. The meaning of the landscapes comes across in a powerful and ambiguous combination of intuitively felt and rationally grasped symbolism.

Apart from these expressive physical landscapes, birds and fish constitute a recurring theme in her work.

“There is much we don’t understand about birds and fish. They are so ordinary and concrete, and yet unfathomable. They have the most unconventional ways of living together and breeding. The variation is immensely refreshing, never dull. I think studying animals gives me hope for humankind.”

Studying animals also leads to revelations concerning her characters. For her play *Queen C* (2003), an enigma surrounding the eel became the central metaphor for the legendary life of Queen Christina of Sweden.

“There was the apparent question of the indeterminable sex of both eels and Christina, but there was also the fact that even after thorough studies on both eels and the queen, both remain mysteries.”

Ruohonen is attracted to such unsolved questions and sees art as the only remaining unconquered continent still rich with potential, like the uncolored regions of a map.

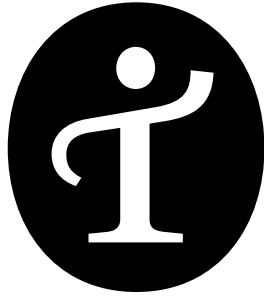
The human species

Ruohonen admits that her interest in biology makes her view humankind as a species among others. On this large scale, it becomes easier to see what humans have shared with all living organisms through the ages, and what is unique to our time. What is important in the context of a thousand or a million years? This perspective enables one to see burning political or economical issues from a new angle.

“We all have a map of the world in our minds. I’m very interested in studying these inner landscapes people have, how they move in them, how they position themselves in relation to them. I often find these secret, very private maps more original and intriguing than the basic relationships and feelings between people – and the characters of plays.”

In her play *Razorbill* (2006), Ruohonen examined the various ideals people have with regard to nature: are we here to leave a lasting mark on the world, or are we merely visitors? One of the main characters, a respected ophthalmologist, wants to build an ostentatious summer home in Finland’s austere outer archipelago. An idealistic young architect refuses to draw the plans for a house she feels will ruin the landscape. They are stranded on a stormy island and have to survive without the aid of modern technology, and are thus forced to encounter their conflicting views of the world.

“I understand them both. It’s deep in our culture to value building something eternal, like the pyramids. On the other hand, we are living in a material culture where goods have an extremely short life-span. I have always marveled at the Aborigines of Australia. All of their culture exists in words. Something that floats in the wind.”



TINFO

THEATRE INFO FINLAND

TINFO co-operates with performing arts professionals: artists, theatre producers and festival directors.

TINFO facilitates artistic networks by organizing events, seminars, workshops, drama readings and showcases in co-operation with different partners.

TINFO produces theatre information and statistics on Finnish theatre.

TINFO provides material and advice on mobility, international networks, artist exchanges and Finnish theatres and artists.



TINFO co-operates with other performing art information centres: Dance Info Finland (www.danceinfo.fi) and the Finnish Circus Information Centre (www.sirkusinfo.fi).

TINFO also takes part in various international networks, including IETM – International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts and ITI – International Theatre Institute. TINFO is the Finnish centre of the ITI.

TINFO admits annually 10–12 translation grants for new translations of Finnish plays which have a production plan of staging.



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