



**ANNETTE ARLANDER**

# REMEMBERING THE *YEAR OF THE TIGER*

Image, Memory, Site

## Tiivistelmä

Osana tutkimushanketta Miten tehdä asioita esityksellä (HTDTWP 2016-2020) eräs tehtävistäni on ollut uudelleenaktivoida kahdentoista vuoden projektini "Performing Landscape" (2002-2014) ja siihen liittyvä videoteosten sarja *Animal Years*. Tässä artikkelissa keskityn videokoosteeseen "Remembering the Year of the Tiger", jossa videot *Year of the Tiger 1-4* on upotettu videokuvaan paluusta samalle paikalle kesäkuussa 2019, missä nuo työt alun perin esitettiin 2010-2011 Harakan saarella Helsingissä. Rinnastan Teresa Brennanin inspiroiman aiemman käsitykseni vahvasta erosta elollisen ja elottoman välillä nykyiseen Karen Baradin toimijuusrealismin ja Stacy Alaimon ruumiidenvälisyyden (trans-corporeality) käsitteen innoittamaan ymmärrykseeni paikan materiaalisuudesta. Palaamalla esityspaikalle ja yhdistämällä silloisia ja nykyisiä kuvia ja ajatuksia, nostan keskusteltavaksi kysymykset muistista, kuvasta ja esityksestä.

## Abstract

As part of the research project How to do things with performance (HTDTWP 2016-2020) one of my tasks has been to re-activate the twelve-year project "Performing Landscape" (2002-2014) and the series of video works *Animal Years*. In this article, I focus on the video compilation "Remembering the Year of the Tiger", with the videos *Year of*

*the Tiger 1-4* inserted in the recording of a revisit, in June 2019, to the site where those works were performed in 2010–2011 on Harakka Island in Helsinki. A former emphasis on a strong distinction between animate and inanimate, influenced by Teresa Brennan, is juxtaposed with an understanding of the materiality of the site, influenced by Karen Barad’s agential realism and Stacy Alaimo’s notion trans-corporeality. By returning to the performance site and combining images and ideas from then and now, issues related to memory, image and performance are brought to the fore and discussed.

## Performing archives and dense video

In this article and video essay my starting point is my own “archival work”, returning to the sites where some previous performances for camera were made in the years 2002–2014 and editing old material into new compilations, thus, in some sense “performing my personal archive”. This endeavour can be placed within the realm of performance as research and artistic research in performance.<sup>1</sup> As an example of performing the archive in an expanded sense, it is hopefully useful for those interested in other types of archives as well.

Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade note in their introduction to *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance* (2013) how the two seemingly contrasting concepts, performance and archive, are increasingly blurred today. “New ways of understanding archives, history, and memory emerge”, and influence our “theories of enactment and intervention”, while the proliferating concepts of performance “enable a critical focus on archival residue.”<sup>2</sup> They summarize the familiar debate concerning the ontology of performance with regard to documentation, starting with Richard Schechner’s understanding of performances as actions, via Marvin Carlson’s remark that the increased use of performance as metaphor has helped focus attention from the

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1 For a brief presentation of these terms and a summary of their relationship see recent overviews, like Cull 2019; Arlander et al. 2018.

2 Borggreen and Gade 2013, 9–10.

“what” to the “how” of culture, to Jon McKenzie's claim that performance, besides an analytical tool, is also a disciplinary instrument (“perform, or else”). They note how various critical responses have complicated Peggy Phelan's famous claim regarding performance ontology - performance's only life is in the present, and performance's being becomes itself through disappearance. For example, Philip Auslander has deconstructed the opposition between live and mediated forms; Rebecca Schneider has maintained that archives disappear as well, while performances not only remain but also constitute bodily techniques of remembering, and Diana Taylor has politicised the idea of considering performances as ephemeral, in her influential discussion of the archive and the repertory.<sup>3</sup> Following Taylor, Borggreen and Gade note the need to “take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> To their summary, we could add the understanding of performance as repetition, as in Schechner's restored behaviour, Butler's performative reiterations of normative gender production, or Barad's posthumanist performativity.<sup>5</sup>

Another aspect they note, which has relevance for the following study, is the popularity of practice as a methodology: “Parts of performance studies known as PaR (Performance as Research) use creative practice as a methodological approach”, they write, “and thus emphasize a mutual response between doing and knowing in the scholarly process.”<sup>6</sup> Their observation that “[r]evisiting a performance is also relevant for artists who may wish to reflect on their own performance in order to evaluate and sharpen key issues, or consult other artists' works for consumption, inspiration, or collaboration”,<sup>7</sup> was one of the starting points for a text where I discussed my revisit to a former performance site on Harakka Island, “Repeat, Revisit, Recreate - Two

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3 Op. cit. 13-15.

4 Taylor, quoted in Borggreen and Gade 2013, 15.

5 Schechner 2006; Butler 1990; Barad 2003.

6 Borggreen and Gade 2013, 12.

7 Ibid.

Times Year of the Horse”<sup>8</sup> in relation to debates concerning re-enactments.<sup>9</sup> For Borggreen and Gade “there is not only a close relationship between research and performance - since many scholars are practising artists themselves, and many artists engage in critical theorising about the way in which they do or perform - but also because the distinct categories of artwork and research can no longer be upheld.”<sup>10</sup> This latter claim has become increasingly meaningful for my current explorations concerning the video essay as a format. A video essay can be made in order to be shown as an artwork at a screening or in an exhibition, and video essays are increasingly published as contributions in scholarly journals, too. In theory, the same video could serve in both academic and art contexts.

As part of the Academy of Finland funded research project How to do things with performance (HTDTWP) one of my tasks has been to look at the twelve-year project “Performing Landscape” (2002-2014) and the resulting series of video works *Animal Years*, asking what is the performative potential of those works from today’s perspective. My main way of engaging with them - besides creating two video compilations shown at a seminar in the research pavilion in Venice and later made available via AV-arkki<sup>11</sup> - has been to revisit the sites on Harakka Island in Helsinki, trying to remember and often also to repeat the actions I used to perform there.<sup>12</sup> I have also recorded those revisits on video and into this contemporary material I have then inserted the original video installations in miniature, creating a combination of two different times in the same place within one image. In the moment of writing this text I have recorded revisits to all of the twelve performance sites and created video compilations by inserting the original edited video works into those images, using them as a backdrop of sorts. Some of these revisits have been published as video essays or articles with a

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8 Arlander 2016.

9 For an overview, with a focus on performance and live art, see Jones & Heathfield 2011.

10 Borggreen and Gade 2013, 12.

11 *Animal Years I* <https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/animal-years-i/>,  
*Animal Years II* <https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/animal-years-ii/>.

12 For a description of the island and its history, see Arlander 2012 b.

video component, others have been shown as part of conference presentations. The first attempt was the above-mentioned text discussing the remake of the first *Year of the Horse* from 2002-2003 in 2015, *Year of the Horse - Calendar*, an ordinary text-based article.<sup>13</sup> The first article in the form of a video essay was based on a revisit to the site of the *Year of the Goat*<sup>14</sup>, inspired by the challenge presented by the newly founded JER (Journal for Embodied Research), which accepts only videos, with the text merely as a supporting transcript. After that, I published an article including a video compilation based on *Year of the Rooster*<sup>15</sup>, while video essays based on *Year of the Pig*<sup>16</sup>, *Year of the Rat*<sup>17</sup> and *Year of the Ox*<sup>18</sup> have been published in 2020. In these experiments, I have explored how to combine performative writing and video documentation as a form of material-discursive practice, and I suggest that these explorations have relevance for digital archiving as well as enhanced online publication.

In his introduction to the anthology *Documenting Performance* (2017), editor Toni Sant makes a distinction between a focus on documents and an interest in the process and practices of documenting. He also maintains that documentation is something more than simple documents (documentary residue), namely a process of turning a collection into an archive that provides long term access to documents.<sup>19</sup> In that sense, these experiments are less about documenting performances and more about creating archives of images, memories of places, even mementoes or souvenirs. Furthermore, they are about reusing and recycling materials.

For the concerns of this text, Ben Spatz's article in the above-mentioned collection "What do we document? Dense Video and the Epistemology of Practice" is the most interesting one. He argues for the

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13 Arlander 2016.

14 Arlander 2018.

15 Arlander 2019.

16 Arlander 2020c.

17 Arlander 2020a.

18 Arlander 2020b.

19 Sant 2017, 2.

video essay as a parallel form of sharing practice to the public performance, and also as a parallel form to the scholarly article. Although his main interest is in describing, developing, sharing and archiving various physical performance techniques - and video clearly is a useful tool for that - his notion 'dense video' has relevance for the use of video in these examples as well. In comparing 'dense video' with dense text he writes: "I take the density of a document to be the richness of information found in any given frame or excerpt" and explains how the "density of prose can be increased by the use of footnotes, parenthetical annotations, citations and references, specialized language" and other "textual complexities that tend to distinguish academic writing from popular non-fiction".<sup>20</sup> According to him, such techniques can be developed for video as well, starting with "a simple linear video... consisting of a single take, an uninterrupted recording that documents a moment of practice". In order to serve "as a citable document in the growing archive of our field" he suggests that at least two basic metadata are needed, "a title frame - identifying the author, practitioners, location, and date - and continuous time code (essential for stable referencing)." The possibilities to create 'dense video' do not end there, however, "there are myriad ways in which the density of a video document might be increased."<sup>21</sup>

Adding an explanatory voice-over text is one possibility, a traditional technique used in much anthropological and documentary film. Layering autobiographical video imagery has been explored extensively by Pekka Kantonen<sup>22</sup> and there is also a rich tradition of discussing essay films beyond the documentary tradition.<sup>23</sup> The technique used in the original videos in these examples is more basic, the simple time-lapse video, where an image with the same framing is recorded repeatedly, sometimes for long periods of time. Inserting one video into another is another technique of "densifying" a video,

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20 Spatz 2017, 246-247.

21 Op. cit. 247.

22 Kantonen 2017.

23 Corrigan 2011.

as is juxtaposing images “then” and “now”, both techniques I have explored in the more recent video compilations. My main device for increasing density has been to insert old video material into contemporary footage from the same site.

## Remembering things done with performance

In this article, I focus on two video compilations “Remembering the Year of the Tiger” and “Remembering the Round of the Tiger”, which are based on a revisit, in June 2019, to the site where I performed during 2010, an old stone base of a building on Harakka Island in Helsinki. The video was presented at Performance Studies international #25 in Calgary (2019) as part of the HTDTWP long table session. There I held a small projector in my hand while taking part in the discussion, showing the video compilation projected on the adjacent wall in a deliberately haphazard manner.

The video compilation “Remembering the Year of the Tiger” (32 min 36 sec.) consists of the videos *Year of the Tiger 1-4* (à 28 min 19 sec.) inserted in the recording of a revisit, on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019, to the site where those videos were performed weekly between 14<sup>th</sup> February 2010 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011 on Harakka Island in Helsinki, Finland. In part 1 I lie in the north-eastern corner of the remains of the stone base of a building, in part 2 in the south-eastern corner, in part 3 in the south-western corner and part 4 in the north-western corner, with the camera on a tripod in the east, south, west and north respectively. The framing of the image during the revisit approximates the image in the first part with the camera facing west but is not exactly the same due to changes in vegetation.

The video compilation “Remembering the Round of the Tiger” (10 min 5 sec.) consists of the video *Round of the Tiger* (23 min 11 sec) cut into four parts<sup>24</sup> and inserted in the same recording of the revisit to the site. In the original video, the four actions and perspectives comprising one session are combined one after the other to show the

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24 I had to cut up the edited video because the original material is no longer accessible.

full performance during one visit, that is, how the work was done, which cannot be seen from the video installation. There I am not only lying down in the corners (the parts used in the main installation) but walking around the stone base until the corner with a mat, lying down on the mat, getting up and walking another round, taking up the mat and carrying it to the next corner, changing the place of the camera, walking once more around the stone base until the corner with the mat, lying down on the mat and so on.<sup>25</sup> At the time of performing these rounds, I planned to edit several videos, consisting of several parts of the action, like walking repeatedly past the camera on the stone base, recorded from four directions. In reality, I edited only the four versions of the human figure lying down in the corner of the stone base and forgot about most of the material. Both videos, the four-channel installation and “the making of” video were shown in Gallery Jangva in 2012.<sup>26</sup>

In “Remembering the Year of the Tiger” the four-channel video installation is inserted as a row of images, while the human figure is lying on the stone base, emerging as some kind of memories, and covering the figure completely. The contemporary background image is visible and rather dominating. When the installation ends and the inserted images disappear, the figure is still lying on the stone base behind them, gets up and leaves; a time-lapse trick of sorts is thus used also in the compilation. In “Remembering the Round of the Tiger” the relationship with the recording of the revisit and the original footage is straightforward, first the revisit, then the four video clips shown simultaneously covering the whole image space, of slightly varying duration and thus ending one after the other.

Considering how we do things with performance it seems obvious that my way of doing things with performance is first of all by repetition and variation, by repeating an action in the same place once a week for a year, with the changing seasons providing the variation, and

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25 For Tutke Spring Days in 2011 (organized by Performing Arts Research Centre at the Theatre Academy) I made a recorded presentation using the material for *Round of the Tiger* as a basis and added a voice-over in Finnish, where I present the footage as raw material.

26 The exhibition was called *Year of the Tiger* in Gallery Jangva 11.-29.1.2012.



then returning to that site several years later, trying to repeat the same framing (not really possible, because the shrubs had grown) and the same action (not really possible because the shrubs on the other sides had grown, too). Unlike during some other revisits, like revisiting the site of the year of the goat, or the year of the rooster, I did not repeat the whole action, nor did I repeat all the four camera positions. Rather, I chose an approximation of the first camera position and performed only lying down in the corner of the stone base. This was partly due to laziness - the stone base was so overgrown that walking the full round was unpleasant (I tried it once) - and partly because I planned to use only the main installation with lying down in the compilation. For this year it could have been interesting to try out whether I really remembered the sequence of actions, which seems rather complicated when described and really was more complicated than the sequence of actions or non-actions during other years. I guess I would have remembered it, though, because the actions follow logically from the previous ones. In a similar manner to actors and performers, who can remember fairly complicated sequences by remembering only the following action in each moment these actions were quite straightforward when executed one after the other.

My understanding of performance is obviously fairly elastic here, a performance could mean a series of actions or a process and does not necessarily involve a specific accomplishment or even an audience, although the camera on a tripod serves as a witness of sorts. The act of lying on the ground could be seen as a minimum of a performance, even a non-performance, but of course, there is a series of performances surrounding it, as is evident in the other video. "Remembering the Round of the Tiger" records the actions involved in one session, on one particular day, almost in real-time, unlike the main video installation, which consists of four series of brief fragments of my lying on the ground during a year. A broad understanding of performance makes it possible for all kinds of entities to perform, to appear, and for humans to perform with them, like I do with the old stone base and the surrounding vegetation in this case.

In the first video, "Remembering the Year of the Tiger" there is only one action, the basic pattern is repetition. When repeated in the four corners and recorded from four sides of the old stone base, the

gesture of lying down on a mat does change. It is no longer a repetition in the sense of a copy, a reflection, but a reverberating variation that resembles waves of interference or diffraction. The repetitions over time, once a week, approximately, create some form of ripples of the first action, and showed together they mix, and then entwine with the more contemporary visit to the site. Such revisiting could be understood as a form of reflection or self-reflection as well, although something changes with the multiple reverberations, which resembles diffraction, a notion proposed by Karen Barad, following Donna Haraway, to replace reflection.<sup>27</sup>

What does “doing things” entail in this context? We can perhaps understand context as a form of apparatus, which does things; “given a particular measuring apparatus, certain properties become determinate, while others are specifically excluded”.<sup>28</sup> The shift of context between the performances on site and the performances of showing the video could be thought of in terms of representation (what does it suggest or depict) and in terms of effects, or performativity (what does it lead to or produce). The contexts on Harakka Island in 2010 and 2019 allowed different actions and produced different effects. While revisiting the site in June 2019 the main problem of doing things was how to negotiate the vegetation and the birds. When I showed the video as part of the long table in Calgary the negotiation took place with the other participants and the light conditions, and perhaps also with other approaches to doing things with performance present in the room. Why look at a video in that moment? And why show it in that way with a handheld projector, as a distorted image on the wall? In that context, I was interested in whether there would be a point in doing less, and what happens when that “less” is multiplied and distorted? In the context of this text, the question of memory in relation to image and site is more relevant.

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27 Barad 2007, 88-89.

28 Barad 2007, 19.

## Documenting the liveness of site

At the time of creating the original work, in 2010-2011, I was interested in other questions. In a paper presented at the Performance Studies international #17 conference in Utrecht in 2011, called “Mementos of a Landscape”, I discussed issues of documentation in relation to the live and the non-live, the animate and the inanimate. At the time I was focused on the issue of “liveness”. In discussions on performance documentation and on the changing notions of the live and the mediated, questions of the organically alive, the animate and the inanimate are rarely in focus. Nor is the importance of a living environment emphasized when the live encounter between performer and spectator is stressed. According to Teresa Brennan (2000), however, we should take seriously the indissolubility of individual and environment. The tendency to assume that humans are the subjects in a world of objects is intensified in a manmade environment. For Brennan commodities function like 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.

The theme of the conference - Camillo 2.0: Technology, Memory, Experience - did fit my practice exceptionally well. Performing for camera, or “direct to documentation”, is a way of using technology to create objects out of experiences. “Performing landscape” is a technique for documenting and remembering performances and for producing artworks or “souvenirs” of changes taking place in the environment, thus combining technology (the camera) and experience (the site, the repetition) with an attempt at producing artworks that remain, memorabilia of sorts. Moreover, the site of the repeated performance, the old deteriorating and overgrown stone base of a building, more or less visible in some of the images, brought associations to the past, to potential memories of what once was there and is now detectable only as enigmatic remains, as desolate-looking ruins.

By returning repeatedly to the same place for one year, using the same action, camera position and framing of the video image and then editing the takes, the slow processes in nature can be condensed and speeded up. In this case, the vegetal growth in spring is almost exaggeratedly suggesting that nature is recovering after a human intrusion, covering the traces of what remains of a house. However,

this way of creating mementoes of moments in a landscape also means producing more inanimate objects, turning experiences of the living environment into one kind of commodities, video works. Like any form of recording, this mode of working not only preserves specific moments but also actively excludes others, and everything outside the frame, like the actual experience of the performer of this peculiar type of meditative practice. What the performer senses and what the camera on tripod records do not have much in common. In terms of vision only, a camera on a meter-high tripod and a human lying on the ground have divergent perspectives, where the camera sticks to the framing of the image, unlike human peripheral vision which is sensitive to any movement occurring in the vicinity. Add the focusing capacity of the human ear compared to the microphone of the camera which records every sound with equal precision, not to mention touch, temperature, smell and the whole selective human sensorium.

In the old explanation from 2011 I can read what my memory has discarded as insignificant, such as the fact that during 2010 I used the yellowish woollen blanket of a Berber woman (the rough prickly texture I can remember) and a whitish rag rug to lie on, while I walked on the old stone base of a building, the remains of a small house or shed in the south-eastern part of the island, resembling the memory of a home. In wintertime, it is hardly visible due to the snow, in summertime due to vegetation, but in spring and fall, the square on the ground is sometimes clearly distinguishable in the images. I was interested in showing the same site from four different viewpoints, in producing four different views of the same landscape and chose the place of the camera and the framing of the images to have the stone base follow the baseline of the image. To the east and the south of the stone base, this was easy since the land was open. In the west, a swamp with shrubs formed an obstacle. In the north, a group of alder bushes blocked the view. In wintertime, you could see through them but in summertime, the bushes grew surprisingly fast and finally filled the image completely. At some point, I stopped walking the fourth round and thought I could just as well video film only the shrubs, but soon realised that there was no point in that. Either I performed my action or then not. If I only wanted to create an impression for the viewer I could equally well do it in Photoshop or by drawing, for

instance. Thus, I continued my walking, literally in the bushes. In terms of documentation, to show my action I should have changed the camera position. But then the whole project with four repeated views would be ruined. The absurdity of documenting an action you cannot see, creating evidence of something in a manner that does not function as evidence - except for the camera being there, was soon obvious. In terms of liveness, this case exemplifies the unforeseen occurrences that have to be counted in when you work with the literally live. In this case, I received what I wanted, more literally than I expected, that is, mementoes of a landscape, of moments in it.

This decision and dilemma I discuss in the only published text using *Year of the Tiger* as an example, "Performing Landscape: Live and Alive".<sup>29</sup> There I take up the question of impact, in response to Barbara Bolt, and focus on the various understandings of liveness, the animate and the inanimate, referencing the ideas of Teresa Brennan and Philip Auslander. Those topics I did discuss in other texts at the time, too, including my contribution, in Finnish, to the fifth yearbook of the Finnish Society for Theatre Research focusing on theatre and the media (2014), titled "Elävä esitys" [Live Performance],<sup>30</sup> although related to site-specific sound installations.

In the former article from 2012, I describe the making of *Year of the Tiger* in quite some detail. According to the text, I explored how changing the point of view can influence how a landscape is perceived, by video recording the same site from four different directions for a year and thus producing four different views of the same landscape. The work edited from all these recordings is a four-channel video installation which shows four versions of the landscape with me lying on the ground while the seasons change around me.<sup>31</sup> In spring and autumn, the old stone base is sometimes clearly distinguishable in the images, while lying down in the open on the ruins of a house may suggest homelessness or human helplessness in nature. The work tries to bring attention to the changes taking place in the landscape due

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29 Arlander 2012a.

30 Arlander 2015; 2014.

31 *Year of the Tiger* installation (28 min. 19 sec.) <http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/year-of-the-tiger/>.

to the shifting seasons, weather and climate, and in that way show the passing of time. And it also indicates how a change in perspective may change the meaning of a landscape.

The single-channel video work called *Round of the Tiger* documents only one session, in wintertime<sup>32</sup>, and reveals how the work was made. It consists of four images and shows a human being walking in a square, wrapped in an off-white scarf, moving a whitish rag rug from one corner to the next, lying down and getting up again, struggling in the snow.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned above, the following actions formed one round: I picked up the blanket or shawl and wrapped it around me, walked in a square on the remains of the stone base until I came to the rug or mat in one corner, lay down on the rug for a while, then continued walking one more round, picked up the rug and moved it to the next corner, left the blanket in the following corner and thus finished the round. Then, after moving the camera and tripod to the next side of the stone base, I repeated the actions. In this manner, I recorded the same sequence of actions four times, from four different directions with the camera on the tripod; first with the camera in the east facing west, then in the south facing north, then in the west facing east, and finally in the north facing south. Each session thus consisted of repeating the same series of actions four times in order to create four images. These sessions were repeated approximately once a week for a year. The video shows only one of them.

A third variation, called *Day and Night of the Tiger - in the Year of the Rabbit*, was performed at midsummer 2011 for 24 hours with three-hour intervals, on the ruins of a smaller building near the original stone base.<sup>34</sup> This time I repeated the action only once each time and video recorded it from one side only - all in all, only twelve times. The changes in light provide the main action; during midsummer in Helsinki, it is dark only for a few hours. In the single-channel version, I walk, wrapped in a white shawl, on the remains of the stone base of

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32 The actual date is somewhat unclear but based on my notes and the look of the image, it was probably recorded on 27 March 2010.

33 *Round of the Tiger* documentary (23 min. 11 sec.) <https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/round-of-the-tiger/>.

34 *Day and Night of the Tiger* (9 min. 44 sec.) <https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/day-and-night-of-the-tiger/>.

a small shed on Harakka Island for a day and night with three-hour intervals between 24th June 2011 at 5 pm and 25th June 2011 at 5 pm. The installation version *Day and Night of the Tiger 1-2*<sup>35</sup> consists of two parts. In the first part, I lie, wrapped in a white shawl, on the remains of the stone base, as mentioned above. And in the second part, I describe the weather conditions with a few words in Finnish and English, behind the camera on the same occasions.

These mementoes, or souvenirs comprised of digital material, turned my experiences of being immersed in or struggling with, a living environment into objects that can be endlessly copied but are not easily biodegradable or able to participate in the reproduction of life. The ethical dilemma of making dead objects of something that is alive, of trying to inspire people to enjoy the endless changeability of the living environment with the help of inert objects, prompted me to reconsider the ideas of Teresa Brennan regarding our relationship to the environment.

## Theorizing the indissolubility of individual and environment

In her work *Exhausting Modernity: Grounds for a New Economy* (2000) Teresa Brennan analyses what she sees as the exhaustion that pervades modern capitalism in psychic, social and environmental terms. Brennan shows how capitalism turns biodegradable life into dead objects and disturbs an ecological balance by “binding more and more life in a form in which it cannot reproduce life.”<sup>36</sup> The production of commodities binds nature to forms, “incapable of re-entering the lifecycles via the reproduction of their own kind or their organic decay.”<sup>37</sup> She draws on Marx but criticizes him for a subject-centred perspective, which made him unaware of the fact that “nature as well as labour is a source of value, and of the energy drawn on in turning living na-

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35 *Day and Night of the Tiger 1-2* (7 min. 43 sec.) <https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/day-and-night-of-the-tiger-1-2/>.

36 Brennan 2000, 2.

37 Brennan 2000, 5.

ture into commodities and money.”<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

According to Brennan, pre-modern people conceived of themselves as energetically and psychically connected with their environment and to others in it, whereas modern subject/object thinking automatically separates the subject from the environment. The pre-eminence of the subject is threatened by the idea of an energetic connection between the subject, others and the environment. Brennan suggests we are influenced by our surroundings, by the “subjective if not subliminal sensing of what is animate or inanimate in the surrounding environment.”<sup>40</sup> According to her, the less animate the environment is, the greater the ego’s need to speed things up, “its need for control, its ‘cutting up’ in its urge to know, its spoiling of living nature, and its general aggression towards the other.”<sup>41</sup> Living in a predominantly man-made world distorts our relationship to our surroundings and other living beings. Our physical environment alters our sense of connection with the world. Commodities function like fantasies, Brennan claims, closing the subject off from the movement of life. They create a phantasmatic world which makes the subject more aware of what it has made, rather than connected with, or part of, what has made it.<sup>42</sup> According to Brennan, we respond energetically to our environment, consciously or not. And the energetic connection between individuals and the environment has consequences both ways; psychical and contemplative resistance will also have effects. If we take seriously the indissolubility of the individual and the environment, then every action and every thought necessarily will have an effect, she claims.<sup>43</sup>

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38 Brennan 2000, 11.

39 Guattari 2000.

40 Brennan 2000, 174.

41 Ibid.

42 Brennan 2000, 175–176.

43 Brennan 2000, 187.



Although Brennan's ideas make sense on an experiential level and in terms of perception, her strong distinction between animate and inanimate on an ontological level, based on the capacity to reproduce or decay, could be criticized from a new materialist perspective influenced by Karen Barad's agential realism. Barad's post-humanist account in *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007) "does not fix the boundary between 'human' and 'nonhuman' before the analysis ever gets off the ground but rather enables (indeed demands) a genealogical analysis of the discursive emergence of the 'human.'"<sup>44</sup> In a similar manner, we cannot suppose a fixed boundary between what is animate and what is inanimate; rather we should look at how the distinction is produced in each instance. Barad explicitly states: "Matter, like meaning, is not an individually articulated or static entity. Matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification"<sup>45</sup>, matter is not inanimate in the way we usually assume. "It does not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity".<sup>46</sup> Barad further explains how boundary-making practices are "implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity through which phenomena come to matter", how "material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production" and how "matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries."<sup>47</sup> And this is, of course, true for boundaries between the animate and inanimate as well.

For Barad, the split into subject and object, rather than being something given, is enacted in each case, through various *intra-actions*, a neologism she has created as an alternative to interaction, which "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies", that is, "distinct agencies do not precede but rather emerge through, their intra-action."<sup>48</sup> Both subjects and objects are constituted through

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44 Barad 2003, 821.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Op. cit. 822.

48 Ibid.

specific intra-actions.<sup>49</sup> And this concerns our usual understanding of the environment as something given, as well as the relationship of subject and environment. Referencing studies on colonies of slime mould, Barad exclaims: “How can we expect the notion of an organism understood as an individual that is situated in a container we call the environment to begin to speak to the complexity of the intra-active reconfiguring of bodily boundaries that defines the slime mould’s astonishing material existence?”<sup>50</sup> And presumably such complexity characterises human existence as well. Brennan’s “indissolubility of individual and environment” could be understood also in Baradian terms.

A contemporary understanding of our interconnectedness with the environment that is congenial with Barad’s agential realism is provided by feminist and environmental scholar Stacy Alaimo (2010) through her notion trans-corporeality. She understands “human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” and stresses the fact that “the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’.”<sup>51</sup> Trans-corporeality emphasizes “movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature”, and the need for “complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual.”<sup>52</sup> Trans-corporeality focuses on “movement across bodies”, “reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures” and takes into account “the often unpredictable or unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors.”<sup>53</sup> Stressing “the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world” enables “ethical and political positions that can contend with ... [contemporary] realities in which ‘human’ and ‘environment’ can by no means be considered as

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49 Barad 2007, 339.

50 Barad 2012, 77.

51 Alaimo 2010, 2.

52 Alaimo 2010, 3.

53 Ibid.

separate”.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, “to cultivate a tangible sense of connection to the material world” is a way to counteract “the pervasive sense of disconnection that casts ‘environmental issues’ as containable, eccentric, dismissible topics.”<sup>55</sup>

When thinking in terms of trans-corporeality we do not need to assume an absolute division between the animate and the inanimate. Our bodies are constantly exchanging various forms of chemicals, microbes, molecules, radiation, and what not, with everything around us, whether animate, inanimate or something in-between. The microplastics accumulating in human and animal tissues is only one example. Thus, the slowly deteriorating concrete of the old stone base of a house, the vegetal and synthetic fibres of the rag rug, the animal wool of the shawl and the microbes on my skin, all the minuscule particles in the air from surrounding vegetation as well as everything else carried by the wind from the sea and the city, are exchanged trans-corporeally while I am lying on the ground performing for the camera. And if I really would be lying there for a year, over the seasons in snow and rain (rather than visiting weekly), this exchange would become visible for the human eye and the camera as mould and rot, moss and fungi, dead leaves and bird droppings, insects and more.

### Temporalizing or trivializing?

The issue of time or temporality, although evident in all the *Animal Years*, emerges as a central topic especially clearly in the *Year of the Tiger*, perhaps partly due to the barely visible ruin of a house, and partly as a result of the human figure lying down as if sleeping or dead. Besides the construction of four very different images of the same landscape based on the placement and direction of the camera, discussed previously, two very different corporeal and trans-corporeal relationships to the site and to time emerge in the version where I lie seemingly motionless on the stone base for a year with the help

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54 Ibid.

55 Alaimo 2010, 16.

of time-lapse video and the version where I walk around the stone base in deep snow more or less in real-time.

In the introduction to the anthology *Performance and Temporalisation. Time Happens* (2015) the editors Stuart Grant, Jodie McNeilly and Maeva Veerapen note how “questions of durational performance, narrative structures, historicity, seriality, tradition, perception, repetition, timing and iteration”<sup>56</sup> are central to performance. While time is a fundamental question of philosophy, it remains riddled with paradox, irresolvable, regardless of the philosophical tradition exploring it - the analytic, the phenomenological, the poststructuralist and the messianic.<sup>57</sup> The editors do not take time as a given, but rather understand it as “the product of processes of temporalization”, such as “perception, measure, experience and worlding”.<sup>58</sup> In these examples all four aspects - the perception of time passing, the measured time of the video clips, the experience of changes in the environment and the memories, fantasies and stories evoked - come into play on some level; often in one manner for the performer and in another manner for the viewer or spectator of the video works, due to differences in preparatory actions, duration, temperature and framing, to name only a few aspects.

The main process of temporalization in the original videos is the use of the time-lapse technique which involves repetition and seriality (repeating the same images again and again), and also an artificially produced impression of duration, through editing (omitting the movements of the human entering into and exiting the image). Another important aspect is the use of planetary cycles like a year and a day and a night, as a response to the loop structure of common video presentation techniques. In the compilations where the old video works are inserted into the recording of a contemporary revisit, another process of temporalization comes into play, a kind of narrativity or historicity of sorts. Juxtaposing two separate times in the same place, “then at that time” (2010-2011) and “now at this time” (2019)

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56 Grant et al. 2015, 3.

57 Grant et al. 2015, 6.

58 Grant et al. 2015, 3.

stresses temporality in another way. Rather than the action or process of time passing, as in the time-lapse videos, inserting images of “then” into images of “now” shows time that has passed, time as miniaturized and turned into a story.

In terms of Barad’s agential realism, time is only one aspect of space-time-mattering that is rethought in her “lively new ontology” where “the world’s radical aliveness comes to light” in a manner that “reworks the nature of both relationality and aliveness (vitality, dynamism, agency)”, and “entails a reconceptualization of other core concepts such as space, time, matter” and more.<sup>59</sup> For Barad, “[t]emporality is constituted through the world’s iterative intra-activity”, it is “produced through the iterative enfolding of phenomena marking the sedimenting historicity of differential patterns of mattering”.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, “time is an operator, not a parameter”.<sup>61</sup> She uses the metaphor of tree rings while warning that it is a simplification because “time has a history”, but it is not “a succession of evenly spaced moments” or “an external parameter that tracks the motion of matter”.<sup>62</sup> According to Barad, the temporality of intra-action does not mean that “the values of particular properties change in time; rather, which property comes to matter is re(con)figured in the very making/marking of time.”<sup>63</sup>

The seemingly orderly space-time-mattering that is performed in these video compilations based on combining and inserting time-lapse videos into a real-time recording actually hides most of the messy entanglements involved and makes the temporalization and spatialization of this personal archival material look fairly straightforward. Probably many forms of material-discursive practices dealing with archives necessarily do that on some level, that is, reduce complexity, at least from the point of view of the embodied memories involved. As the time-lapse videos are the results of specific intra-actions, record-

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59 Barad 2007, 33.

60 Barad 2007, 180.

61 Barad 2007, 438.

62 Barad 2007, 180.

63 Ibid.

ing only a few moments based on an approximate schedule, and excluding all the rest of the time, the edited videos are the result of further intra-actions, and involve discarding most of the recorded material. The compilations discussed here are based only on those edited videos; the recorded material is no longer accessible. There is a reduction of complexity at each stage of the process. Moreover, when miniaturizing the original videos, inserting them into one frame, they are not only literally made smaller but also in some sense belittled, trivialized.

Do images, memories and sites necessary become smaller, or more trivial when made to fit into more or less preformatted narratives? In what other ways could this material have been reorganized and reactivated? Is there a way I could retrieve the recorded material despite the obsolete technology? Should I go back to that material and re-edit a video work based on walking rather than lying down? Or should I perhaps look at other material created during that year?<sup>64</sup> One experiment of further “densifying” the video material at hand, re-introducing some complexity, is “Remembering the Round of the Tiger (with text)”, a version of the video compilation with an added voice-over text and some subtitles (see attached link and text in appendix). I invite the reader to explore whether listening to and viewing that video will change your understanding of what has been described and argued so far.

To summarize: with the hope that they could have some relevance for current concerns, I have tried in this article and the project it describes - physically returning to the site of a performance for camera almost ten years later and literally combining video images from two different times with texts and ideas relevant to the work then and now - to bring these experiences related to memory, image and site into the discussion on working with archives.

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64 For example the videos made on Harakka Island shown in the same exhibition in gallery Jangva are *On the Bird's Rock* 2011 (8 min. 20 sec.) HD 16:9 <http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/on-the-birds-rock/> and *On the Birds' Shore* 2011 (4 min. 58 sec.) HD 16:9 <http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/on-the-birds-shore/>.



"Remembering the Year of the Tiger" video still.

## APPENDIX

### Transcription of the voice-over text

On 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019 I returned to the old stone base on the eastern shore of Harakka Island, in order to see what I could remember of a performance for camera I did there during the year 2010, the year of the tiger in the Chinese calendar, visiting the site approximately once a week between February 2010 and January 2011. Unlike the white outfit and the off-white woollen blanket that I used to wear during my repeated visits to the site, I was now dressed in a pale, yellow outfit. And instead of a white rag rug to lie down on, I had an orange brown small mat with me. And this time I carried a bow rake to ward off geese, seagulls and other birds - it was still nesting season - to bend off the grass and to help me keep my balance if needed, in the part where the fall from the stone base was steeper. I had a camera on a tripod with me this time as well, albeit a completely different one than the camera I used ten years ago. Partly due to the change in camera objective, partly because of the changes in vegetation, I was not able to repeat exactly the same framing of the image as in the first of the four images that I used to repeat in 2010. I tried to fit



the length of the side of the stone base into the image, parallel to the base of the image frame, but could not find the same angle due to some shrubs that had grown on the spot where the tripod used to stand. All other trees had grown as well, and perhaps therefore the new image shows no trace of the huge spruce in the background, which dominates the first image of the original work, and which still grows there, as much a landmark as before.

Rather than repeat the whole sequence of actions I did during my weekly visits in 2010, which you will see soon - taking the blanket, walking around the base to the mat, lying on the mat, walking around the base back to the mat, picking it up and placing it in the following corner, leaving the blanket in the following corner, walking around the base and then exiting the image in order to move the camera to the next place - I now walked only once around the stone base, without blanket and with the bow rake (it was difficult enough due to the shrubs and grasses) and then lay down on the mat for a while. After getting up and exiting the image I recorded enough material of the "empty" view (which is actually full of life) to use as a background for a compilation of the 28-minute four-channel video installation *Year of the Tiger*. The video you are watching "Remembering the Round of the Tiger" uses the same recording of this revisit as its base. The video contains the *Round of the Tiger*, a kind of "the making of" story, which shows the repeated action behind the time-lapse videos of the installation *Year of the Tiger*, where I lie immobile on the ground. Here the four images of the *Round of the Tiger*, originally shown one after the other, are condensed into four parts shown together in the same frame. I could not access the original recordings but had to cut the edited version into four parts. The four sequences of action shown here simultaneously were recorded from four different directions and where repeated each time, that is, approximately once a week between 14 February 2010 and 31 January 2011. The session used in the *Round of the Tiger*, which was shown in the same exhibition as the main work, in Gallery Jangva in 2012, was (probably) recorded in March 2010. Probably, based on the look of the image, the fog, the order of the images in the installation and my diary notes. The brief note I wrote about the session on 27 March 2010, in all likelihood the one inserted here as four images, reads as follows, translated into English:



Fog, temperature around zero, packing snow - they have promised rain for tonight. The ice is still strong enough to walk on, and on the island the snowbanks are deep, although the streets in the city centre are mostly bare. It is no longer cold, the weather is soft and mild, but the crust of the snow is unpredictable, and the snow is wet...

I cannot remember why I chose exactly that session for making *The Round of the Tiger*, and also for the still images describing the installation. Usually I have taken the still images from the first session of the year. Perhaps the blandness of the grey fog and the wet snow made the image more uniform and more graphic, compared with the sunny winter landscape in the first images. If the idea was to make me blend in with the environment, the effect is almost the opposite. The warm off-white yellowish colour of the woollen blanket I am wearing really stands out in contrast to the cool grey landscape of wet snow. Or perhaps I chose this session to emphasize the struggle in the making of the seemingly peaceful work, where I am only "sleeping in the snow", because in this session you can see me repeatedly missing the stone base or sinking deep through the crust of the snow. Unfortunately, we cannot compare, because this is the only session available - the rest of the material is inaccessible due to obsolete technology, and the installation shows only the immobile part.

Finding the diary notes from 2010 I realized, it might be interesting to translate them all, and add them to the video compilation with the "sleeping" images, either as a spoken voice-over text in Finnish, with the English translation as subtitles, or as subtitles only. I chose to experiment with adding a voice over and some subtitles on this video, rather than the main installation, however, mainly because it is briefer, and its purpose is to explain and expose. On the one hand the contrast between the contemporary image and the old video is here amplified by the difference in season, grey images of snow and fog covering lush summer vegetation. On the other hand, inserting the four images as a square, which covers the whole image space, prevents the juxtaposition of two images of the same place with a distance in time. To put it simply, this compilation is perhaps less aesthetically interesting or pleasing and more informative - and thus suitable

for experiments of further “densification” with added explanations and subtitles.

The context for these revisits, their aim and some related thoughts are discussed in a separate text, an article called “Remembering the Year of the Tiger - Image, Memory, Site”, which this video is supposed to support, and which includes links to the other videos as well. And regardless of these images and memories, the site, the old stone base on the eastern shore of Harakka island, is still there, open for the public to visit, depending on the season by ferry boat or walking across the ice.

#### LINKS TO VIDEOS

Remembering the Year of the Tiger

<https://vimeo.com/390190537>

Remembering the Round of the Tiger

<https://vimeo.com/390261984>

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