

Performing Time Through Place

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Performances that take place in public spaces are mostly presented for an art audience as video documentations; performances based on live interaction end up as video clips on the web. The trend of a double audience, one for the event, another for the document, has characterized performance art from early on.¹ Live Art practices or site-specific performances have participants on location simultaneously with viewers on the web.² In site-based projects within contemporary art the site of intervention and site of effect are pulled apart.³ This development has implications for all kinds of performance practices. One possible consequence of performances created increasingly for the camera is the opportunity to take a renewed interest in place, in the materiality of the site. Some projects created on an island off Helsinki in 2009, titled *Year of the Ox*, will serve as examples of private performances created in a public space and documented as video works, thus aimed for several audiences. They focus on place as a process, as an event, as a crossroads of influences⁴ providing material to discuss contrasting aspects of place and its relationship to landscape.⁵

By private performances I mean performances for an audience of one (the performer herself) or for the camera – except for occasional passers-by and some birds in this case – and repeated as a private practice or diary, not personal in a confessional or autobiographical sense or intimate as in so called one-on-one performances.⁶ By public space I mean areas accessible to the general public, including urban nature, like a small island close to the centre of Helsinki in this case, part nature preservation area, part recreational area, part historical remains. Public space is often understood as a mainly urban phenomenon, with nature excluded from the idea. In countries like Finland nature or park-like areas form a large part of cities and are clearly publicly owned and used.

The works titled *Year of the Ox*, which I use as my examples, consist of a sequence of performances, in which I return to the same place once a week for a year, and perform a simple action with the aim of producing a video to foreground the changes in the landscape. These performances took place from January 2008 to January 2009, during the Chinese year of the ox. They were presented as video works for the first time in the Muu gallery in Helsinki in September 2010,⁷ and are distributed for screening or installation use by the Distribution Centre for Finnish Media Art.⁸

¹ Auslander 2006

² Hill & Paris (eds.) 2006

³ Kwon 2002

⁴ Massey 1994, 2005; Ingold 2010, 33

⁵ Wylie 2007; Ingold 2000

⁶ One-on-one performances are increasingly popular within Live Art. See e.g. Zerihan (ed., n.d.).

⁷ The website of Muu gallery has been renovated, but some information remains [here](#).

⁸ See [presentations](#) by The Distribution Centre for Finnish Media Art and the [performance art bank](#).

This paper consists of several parts.⁹ To begin with I describe briefly the possibilities afforded by performing for camera, then I discuss Doreen Massey's idea of place as meeting place and what that could mean in my examples; then I describe the context for this project and discuss the different uses of repetition in it. In the end I explore various approaches to place in my examples by bringing in Tim Ingold's notions of taskscape and wayfaring.

Performing for the camera as a means of production

The focus on recorded or mediated performances enables a renewed interest in place. Since most performances end up as video clips on the web in the last instance,¹⁰ it is possible to focus on the specificity of place, not only on a specific audience. This interest is somewhat paradoxical, because one of the main ideas with documenting and recording is to be able to enjoy something in a different place (and time) than the one in which the recorded event took place. When live performance is the main distribution technology, the performance has to be presented in a place suitable for the target audience. If not, one can choose a place that is important or special, and invite only a few people there, or rely on chance encounters for the primary audience, or then trust the camera as the sole witness and build one's work, "the final result", on what remains, on documentations, which will hopefully find a secondary audience and a posterior life.

Performing mainly or even entirely for the camera creates new possibilities for the production itself. In my examples these include:

1) The choice of a special or marginal place, not easily available to many people or with a fragile nature that must be protected from too many visitors; not everybody needs to come to the site.

2) The choice of unconventional duration and process, like repeating an action once a week for a year; it would be cumbersome to ask people to come and witness a performance every week.

3) The choice of an insignificant activity, like walking in circles or sitting in a niche in a wall, which would not hold the attention of an audience alone; the performance is produced by repetition and by editing, not by a single event.¹¹

4) The choice of addressing a secondary audience who would not bother to visit the place or be interested in this type of activity in situ; they could nevertheless enjoy it on video or on the web.

5) The choice of a practice with an impact on the performer, regardless of the effect possibly aimed for with regard to the viewer of the documentation.

⁹ This text is based on the paper "Private performances in public spaces" at the Performance Studies International conference *Performing Publics* in Toronto, 9-12 June 2010, and on the presentation "Exhausting modernity – Repetition and time in the year of the ox, liveness in the shadow of the hawthorn" at the IFRT/FIRT World Congress *Cultures of Modernity* in Munich, 25-31 July 2010.

¹⁰ On Youtube, Vimeo, private websites, and so on.

¹¹ Working with documentation of a performance as material provides the option of a new kind of semi-fictional performance taking place in the picture space or the film space – what Auslander discusses as theatrical documentation, using Yves Klein's constructed photo *Leap into the Void* as a classic example (Auslander 2006, 1-2).

Different approaches to almost the same place exemplify these options. All variations of *Year of the Ox* are part of an on-going process in which I return to the same place once a week for a year, and perform a simple action for a fairly short duration each time. In one variation, *Year of the Ox – Walking in Circles*,¹² I locked myself with a chain to an iron ring attached to the cliff and walked around it six or seven times once a week for a year. In another variation, *Year of the Ox – Riding a Buoy*,¹³ I rode on a rusty buoy on the hill, clothed in a rust coloured scarf that combined us into one shape, again once a week. In a third variation, *Year of the Ox – Sitting in the Wall*,¹⁴ I sat in a niche in the fortification wall and in a fourth one, *Year of the Ox – in a Yoke*,¹⁵ I sat on the shore with a piece of wood on my back. In addition to these variations repeated for a year I walked in circles around the iron ring for a day and a night on the first of May, *Day and Night of the Ox*.¹⁶ No audience was present, besides birds, or occasional passers-by. The camera on a tripod was the witness, documenting on video these actions and changes in the surrounding landscape.

The video works created from the documentation of these performances combine a documentary quality produced by rough camerawork (camera on tripod, with automatic focus) resembling “live recording,” and a semi-fictional effect, since editing out the beginning and end of each action or my entering or exiting a pose produces an illusion of continuity.¹⁷ In comparison with these works based on repetition and editing, one part of the same project, a performance called *Annual Rings* around another iron ring on the same cliffs, can serve as an example of a traditional approach to performance. The first version was performed in summertime for a live audience present at the site,¹⁸ the second version, in winter, was performed for the camera, and once only.¹⁹

After making the first editing experiments I decided to combine the works in pairs when presenting them for the first time. The first pair consisted of walking around the iron ring on Harakka, *Year of the Ox – Walking in Circles* (once a week for a year) and *Day and Night of the Ox* (for a day and a night with two-hour intervals), accentuating the doubled circular movement and the cycles of time. The second pair consisted of sitting figures: *Year of the Ox – Riding a Buoy* (sitting on the buoy once a week for a year, on Harakka) was combined and synchronized with riding on cliffs and tree stumps in various places, a work called *Year of the Ox – On Rock and Wood* (recorded on the island of Gomera and elsewhere with the same scarf but with various distances to the camera), thus contrasting a static and a constantly changing image

¹² Two versions exist of this work: [one longer](#), 90 minutes, for installation use and [one shorter](#), 20 minutes, for screening.

¹³ See [here](#) – [another work](#) using riding was created in various places like the island of Gomera.

¹⁴ See [here](#)

¹⁵ See [here](#), with preview

¹⁶ See [here](#), including a preview

¹⁷ This topic I have discussed in a paper at the NSU meeting *Documentation, Performance and Research*, Tampere University 31 Jan 2009, published in abbreviated form in Arlander 2009b.

¹⁸ The summer performance “Vuosirenkaat” [Annual Rings] took place as part of the Harakan muisti [Memory of Harakka] event with two photos remaining on the [Finnish website](#).

¹⁹ The winter version can be [viewed in preview](#) on the website of The Distribution Centre for Finnish Media Art.

composition. A different approach was used for the rest of the works. *Sitting in the Wall* is a single channel work, for installation use, while *In a Yoke* is a short piece for screening, almost a joke.

The place was in focus in all versions; the site was chosen with the visual impact and meaning of the place rather than public accessibility in mind. (Of course the fact that I have my studio on the island was relevant as well.) Unlike the actual performances, which practically nobody saw, the video works can be shown almost anywhere; though a two channel video installation with projections is site-specific to some extent and creates a completely different experience for a viewer than a single channel work for screening. And of course the publics these works are addressing are different. For video works it is easy to imagine a potentially unlimited audience, although it is actually clearly limited by the technology used and the technology available for the viewers. Inevitably video documentation can show only some aspects of a place. Places, like landscapes, are mostly experienced in a multisensory way through active engagement, as environmental aestheticians have long insisted.²⁰ In these cases the focus on specific details, locations and objects served to emphasize the temporality of landscape,²¹ the event of place²².

Place as event, as a meeting place

Twenty years ago, in “A Global Sense of Place”,²³ geographer Doreen Massey discussed the effects of our living in a world defined by the so called “time-space compression” and the difficulties of thinking about the specificity of the local in such circumstances. She noted that there is an increasing uncertainty to what we mean by places and sometimes an idealized notion of places supposedly inhabited by coherent and homogenous communities is contrasted with the current situation. However, place and community have only rarely been coterminous. The romantic or even nationalistic longing for places and seeking the sense of place is seen by many as inevitably reactionary, like searching for comfort in the past or in some imaginary rootedness, and evading the challenges of contemporary life.

Massey wanted to challenge this view and tried to create an understanding of place not as self-enclosing and defensive but as opening outwards, as a meeting place for various influences rather than defined through its borders. She presented an alternative interpretation of place, one that allows for a sense of place which is extroverted, which integrates the global and the local:

[W]hat gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations ... movements and communications ... [T]hen each place can be seen as a particular, unique point of their intersection. It is indeed a meeting place. Instead of

²⁰ For example Berleant 1997, 12-13. I have referred to his ideas in Arlander 2003.

²¹ Ingold 2000, 201

²² Massey 2005, 130

²³ Massey 1994

thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings... constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself.²⁴

She highlighted a number of ways in which to develop a dynamic and more progressive concept of place. First of all places are processes, like the social interactions that are tied together by them are processes. Secondly, places do not have boundaries that would be necessary for their definition; they can be understood not in opposition to an outside but through their particular links with that outside. Thirdly, places do not have single “identities” but are full of internal conflicts (about their past as well as their future). Fourthly, the specificity of a place is continually reproduced, by the globalisation of social relations (and uneven development) and from layers of different sets of linkages. The character of a place can only be constructed by linking that place to places beyond. We need a global sense of the local, she concludes, a global sense of place.²⁵

In a more recent summary of her ideas, *For Space*, Massey defines space as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far” and places as “collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space,”²⁶ as products of disconnections and exclusions as well as intersections and inclusions. “Places not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; *as spatio-temporal events*.”²⁷ Place as a temporary constellation includes differing temporalities, not only of social encounters but geological processes, like tectonic movements of seemingly timeless rock formations. There is no ground in the sense of stable position, she insists, and no way of going back to nature, of trying to hold nature still.²⁸ But where is here, she asks, if there are no fixed points. Referring to Bruno Latour’s observation that essences become events she coins the term *event of place* and maintains that “here” is necessarily here and now. “It won’t be the same here when it is no longer now.” Now is as problematic as here, however, since spatial narratives and trajectories all have their own temporalities; for those who meet in a place some there and then is implicated in the here and now.²⁹ “[W]hat is special about place is ... that throwntogetherness, the ... challenge of negotiating a here-and-now ... which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman.”³⁰ The event of place in the most basic sense refers to a constellation of processes rather than a thing, to place as internally multiple, a coming together of trajectories.³¹

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8

²⁶ Massey 2005, 130

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 137

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 139

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 140

³¹ *Ibid.*, 141

Harakka island as a meeting place

Following Massey's idea of place as an event and a meeting place, we can analyse Harakka Island, the site of my examples, as the meeting place of numerous groups of creatures with different interests and needs. To name just a few:

1) The Environment Centre of the City of Helsinki governs the nature preservation areas on the island, protected either because of rare vegetation or as nesting areas for birds, and maintains the nature house as well as aquariums and exhibition spaces in the old ammunition cellars.³²

2) The Cultural Centre of the City of Helsinki governs the main building, rents studios for artists and the auditorium for organizers of seminars.³³

3) The National Board of Antiquities guards the preservation of the fortifications and the old military structures and the restrictions in the use of the main building.

4) The caretakers' families living on the island negotiate their gardening, maintenance duties etc.

5) A regularly visiting scientist couple gathers data of butterflies with lamps placed in different places in the terrain year after year.

6) Bird watchers visit the small hut on the southeastern shore of the island to observe the migration of seabirds while remaining unobserved.

7) School children taking part in excursions organized on the island often prefer to roam freely disregarding the protected areas.

8) Visitors coming for picnics or to walk the so-called nature path around the island appreciate the stairs with rails and ask for a cafeteria.

9) Artists who rent studios in the main building would like to renovate their spaces freely and work in peace and isolation on the island.

10) Organizers of events who rent the auditorium would prefer catering and easy access by boat all year.

11) People with boats who do not have access officially sometimes land on the pier in any case.

12) Local politicians would like to create more profitable uses for the island.

13) Dogs, who are not allowed on the island (because of the birds) are sometimes brought there (especially in winter), regardless of all warning signs.

14) Global visitors like the Barnacle geese occupy the island for parts of the year.

And so on. Listing all the species of birds that nest on the island would be impossible here. And what about the fish on display in the aquariums, or those living in the surrounding sea? The island is jointly inhabited by a plethora of creatures.

The identity of an island is to some extent based on its borders. Harakka Island, however, is historically related to the nearby islands of the Suomenlinna Sea Fortress,³⁴ a Unesco world heritage site, and the rest of the archipelago around Helsinki,

³² For information about the Harakka Nature Centre, see [here](#).

³³ The [Cultural Centre](#) rents spaces for artists in the main building on [Harakka](#).

³⁴ For a presentation of the fortress island, a major tourist attraction in Helsinki, see [here](#).

which is slowly rising from the sea since the ice age. The island is still expanding and geologically interesting as well, since various rock formations and traces of the ice are visible on the (relatively) bare cliffs.

The recent history of the island is an example of a crossroads of influences, too, as the few buildings on the island testify. Queen Kristina donated the island to the city of Helsinki in 1643 and the first fortifications were commenced during the time of Swedish rule in the 18th century. The state bought the island from the city in 1869 and the fortifications and ammunition cellars in their current form were built between 1878 and 1894 by the Russian military. The wooden buildings, like the old telegraph, which is used as a summer gallery today, date from the time of Russian rule as well. Since independence in 1918 and the Treaty of Tartu in 1920 the Finnish state governed the island, with the large stone building designed by Oiva Kallio and built in 1928 to be used as the chemical research laboratory of the Finnish Armed Forces. And on top of these historical layers, there is a bunker built after the Second World War in the southern part of the island. Since 1989 the island is again owned by the city of Helsinki, mainly occupied by environmentalists and artists, and transformed from a closed military area into an educational park for ecological recreation.³⁵

Military history and maritime nature have co-created the environment, which is continually changing. Some rare vegetation dates back to Russian times, from seeds coming with the building materials and workers from the east. The plants were preserved on the island as a result of the years of restricted access to the public. Other plants remain from the chemical researchers' hobbies, like the old garden with cultivated spring flowers gone wild, below the only spruce tree in the centre of the island. The southern tip is closed for visitors in summertime during the sea birds' nesting season. Some of the birds are relatively new arrivals, like the Barnacle geese, which have begun to nest there during the last ten years.

In this case the materiality of the site means on one hand the economic and social conditions that have created the environment, and the various forms of material historical remains, like the traces of the navy, the old rusty buoy and the iron ring on the cliff, which I now use in my performances. On the other hand its materiality includes the living occupants, who produce and constantly recreate the place. A good example is the effect of the geese. They have completely transformed the former sand yards of the island by their excrements, which function as a strong fertilizer. Today the sand yards are overgrown with grass and shrubs.

A small island is easily conceived as a meeting place. The occasional fishermen of earlier times, when the island was only an islet far out at sea, the Swedes beginning the fortifications, the Russian soldiers and officers creating the fortifications and the wooden buildings, the Finnish soldier-chemists and researchers experimenting with gasmasks and explosives in the laboratories, the materials washed ashore from ships passing by and later the various inhabitants of Helsinki and the visiting tourists finding an easy place to experience "wild nature" close to the city centre, not to forget the artists and the environmentalists who work there today; all these and many more meet

³⁵ See [information](#) about the island; a [map](#) and a [brief history of the island in Finnish](#) are also available.

on that small rocky piece of land and contribute to its specific sense of place. In this case it is easy to understand that there is no single identity and that place and community do not coincide. Over the years various communities have used the island, and today several different groups share the place. Most of the inhabitants come and go like the migrating birds.

Practical context for *Year of the Ox*

Year of the Ox was the 8th year in a series of attempts at performing landscape. It is based on the Chinese calendar, which consists of twelve-year cycles where each year is named after an animal. I have developed a mode of working where I document the landscape by video recording myself in the same place, dressed in the same scarf once a week for one year. Each year I have recorded a day and a night as well. So far all the years have been performed on Harakka Island. However, every year I have videoed small studies in various landscapes somewhere around the world as well.

Each year I have chosen a specific approach to the landscape and tried to focus attention on a particular aspect of the environment, with a different relationship between my body and the surroundings. The position of the human figure in the landscape and in the picture space have varied from a domineering position covering part of the view to a tiny figure forming the focal point in the scenery, with references to classical and romantic landscape painting.³⁶ I have played with the tradition of performance art, too, in which performances based on endurance use one year as their time span, like the durational works of Tching Hsieh³⁷ and Linda Montano.³⁸ My main aim has been to emphasize the passing of time by showing the shifts in the landscape according to changing seasons, weather conditions and the climate.

This practice combines approaches in performance art, video art, and environmental art. As a working method it is rather traditional, even “old fashioned” compared to more filmic and narrative approaches used by many contemporary video artists.³⁹ Due to the use of simple technology this way of working can be related to current issues as well, like the relationship between art and the everyday. The videos, the final artworks, do not offer the viewer a chance to participate or interact as many relational works do today. Rather I hope they could function as an inspiration for the viewers to “try it at home,” as an encouragement to undertake something similar on their own.

During the year 2009 I was using a rust coloured woollen scarf for the performances on the island and in different parts of the world. That year the places I returned to were related to the military and naval past of the island, with rust as the starting point. I was sitting on a rusty buoy on the hill and walking around a rusty ring fastened in the rock on the cliff, but I was also sitting in a niche in the fortification wall or at the shore with a piece of wood on my back. (That year was also the first one I

³⁶ Andrews 1999

³⁷ Heathfield & Hsieh 2009

³⁸ See Linda Montano's [website](#)

³⁹ Iles 2000

video recorded with the new high definition technique, and used the film format 16:9 instead of the former TV format 4:3.) I played with some ideas of the past of the place and also with the thought of riding an ox, of walking chained like an ox, of wearing a yoke like an ox.

The main purpose of these works was not to tell a story of the military and maritime past of that specific place, but to bring attention to the changes in the landscape following the changing seasons, weather conditions and the climate and thus to demonstrate time, to show the passing of time. Of course one can also connect them to traditional Buddhist ox herding pictures, which have been used as an aid in self-realization,⁴⁰ though the emphasis in these works was not on a spiritual practice but on the performer's physical-material experience of the environment.

If we compare the approaches to place in these works, they seem to imply different relationships to site despite their common mode of production through repeated returning. Walking in circles tied with a rusty chain to the iron ring on the cliff suggests one kind of sense of place, being tied to the spot literally, like a prisoner or some of the forced laborers working on the island repairing the Russian barques in historical times. Riding a rusty buoy means being equally tied to the spot, even more static, immobile, but could also refer to a statue of some military hero, or then a fantasy figure travelling in the imagination only, a baron Munchausen riding on his canon ball. Perhaps the image could be seen as an ironic commentary on Po Chang's paradox of riding an ox in search of an ox.⁴¹

As mentioned before, these works were produced by documenting a series of repeated performances and by editing the material into a continuous action or pose, a fiction of sorts. We could assume that the works gain part of their effect from their documentary feel, from being recorded live, as a real action, not constructed for the camera in the studio or created by photo-shopping the background. All of them use repeated images of a single place to create an experience or illusion of the passing of time. The place becomes the protagonist through repetition. But the place is not narrating its own story; the place presents itself as a process and tells the story of time passing.

Repetition and time in *Year of the Ox*

Doreen Massey's on-going critique concerns the understanding of space and time as opposites, where time is equated with movement and progress and space is understood as stasis and reaction. In *For Space* she convincingly argues that in reality space and time cannot be separated.⁴²

Time is a central theme of the twelve-year project, focusing on seasonal changes due to the cyclical nature of our planetary time, based on the movement of the earth around the sun and around its own axis. The project is documenting the changes in the landscape in one particular place (actually several locations within one place) during

⁴⁰ Daido Looi 2002

⁴¹ Kershaw 2007, 52

⁴² Massey 2005, 9-19

one year as well as during a day and a night of that year. Time is important also in the sense of experienced time or duration, since this practice aims at producing time on a personal level, something I have discussed elsewhere.⁴³

If formulated as a score of actions, an instruction or recipe, this project seems to consist of sheer repetition: Take the same scarf and go to the same place, put the camera on tripod in the same spot and choose the same framing, perform the same action in the same spot in front of the camera etc. Repeat this procedure once a week for a year. Repeat the same procedure the following year, but choose a new place, a new scarf, a new spot for the camera, a new action to perform and so on. Of course the “new” is relative, and could be considered a variation of the preceding choices and is thus a kind of repetition again.

This way of working with landscape could be called a generative process in a broad sense, since repetition is utilized to generate material with variations, which can then be put together more or less automatically and chronologically, that is, using all the versions in the order they have been created. The interesting changes are caused by the changing seasons and weather conditions as well as various accidental occurrences, around the basic structure of a few initial choices.

Repetition is the main compositional strategy. To put it roughly, I make one artistic choice a year and then repeat it again and again. But in a traditional theatrical sense I never repeat, nor do I rehearse. Considering repetition in performance we can first of all distinguish between the use of repetition in the creation of work and the use of repetition in its distribution, though this is a simplification of course. In standard stage performance, repetition is used in rehearsal to develop and “fix” the performance. And repetition is used for distribution, when the performance is repeated for new audiences. A third dimension of repetition is brought into play when repetition is used as a compositional tool, as in much modern and even contemporary performance and dance.

In *Year of the Ox* the two first types of repetition are missing. Firstly, I do not use repetition in the creation process in order to develop and fix a performance; I do not repeat the actions in order to find the right version. I use repetition to generate material, but instead of discarding previous versions, as in rehearsal, I repeat an action in order to have many versions of it. Every variation is more or less similar to the previous ones, and they are all used in the final work. Secondly, I am not repeating the performance for new audiences. Only the edited video work is shown to the public, and can be repeated, rearranged or adapted to various circumstances. Nevertheless repetition is an important aesthetic principle; it is what the audience sees.

When using repetition as an aesthetic principle or a compositional strategy, we can ask what is repeated and what changes? What stays almost the same every time, and what is constantly shifting? By repeating something you can focus the attention of the viewer on the repeated action and the small variations in it. Or, by repeating an action or pose you can focus the viewer’s attention on that which is not repeated

⁴³ Arlander 2009a

around the action, but changes, like the surrounding landscape. However, for a spectator very much tuned to watching people only, the latter might be hard to accomplish.

Year of the Ox is one instance of repetition in a series of twelve years. I repeat a similar one-year project on the same island twelve times, although in different places. There is variation in the repetition however, from year to year. So repetition and variation function on the macro level, too. There are variations within each one-year project as well. Most years I have chosen two or more actions or positions and used several places. We can distinguish several levels of repetition during the year:

Within the cycle of twelve years, what is repeated, what is changing? What is new for this particular year? During the year of the ox (2009) I used a brown scarf (compared to a lilac scarf the previous year), rusty iron elements like a buoy and a metal ring, related to the military past of the island (rather than changes in the water level on the shore the previous year), and sites in the south-eastern part of the island, mainly (compared to north-east the previous year).

Within the cycle of one year, what is repeated, what is changing? During the year of the ox (2009) four actions were repeated in four places on the island: walking in circles, riding a buoy, sitting in a niche in the wall, sitting on the shore with a piece of wood on my back (compared to sitting on the shore or dripping water in the sea the previous year.)

Within one place, like walking around the iron ring, one version consists of repetition once a week for a year and another version of one day and a night with two-hour intervals. Within one action, like one session of walking in circles, I repeated the circle six times (no more was possible without the chain starting to twist into a knot). Walking in itself involves repetition; left foot front, right foot front, left foot front and so on. Life consists of repetitions, breathing in and breathing out.⁴⁴ And of course there were other repetitions involved, like locking the chain to the iron ring and unlocking it again after the performance, placing the tripod in the same place as exactly as possible and adjusting the framing of the image to be repeated as exactly as possible, and so on.

All these repetitions produce small variations, the main variation nevertheless being the shifting landscape, changing seasons, weather conditions, time of year and time of day. There are also chance occurrences like a bird building its nest on my path or occasional passers-by entering the image. Some changes are more like developments, as when I found a pair of brown trousers to go with the scarf rather than the blue jeans that I started the year with. The rhythm of my walking is shifting each time, since that is something I do not try to control. The camera position, too, tends to shift, though that I do my best to control. *Year of the Ox* is all about repetition, and time. Perhaps we could even call it a refrain.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Howell 1999

⁴⁵ See Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 342-86 ("1837: Of the Refrain")

Simultaneity and process

By emphasizing the cyclical nature of time, do I unwillingly strengthen a static conception of space? An image of the world where the planet turns around its own axis day after day, and circles around the sun year after year in an eternal return, a static worldview? How to perform landscape in a way that is not nostalgic or conservative, keeping in mind the long tradition of landscape painting commemorating the possessions of the wealthy? If one is interested in the materiality of place, of specific places, how to avoid a protectionist and even reactionary approach to place?

If we understand space like Massey, as a dimension of relations, of simultaneity, of parallel existences, this quality does not come to the fore in the individual video works, since each work concentrates on one viewpoint on one place. The idea of the simultaneous existence of various viewpoints and temporalities becomes apparent in an installation, however, when several versions or interpretations of the year are juxtaposed, when riding on a buoy and riding on rocks, or walking in circles for a year and for a day and night are presented next to each other.

Nor do these works stress the place as a meeting place in any obvious sense, since only one human figure is involved. Attention is focused on aspects that usually tend to form the ground and background of meetings, while those who meet, whether humans or animals, take centre stage. Inevitably that happens in these works as well; probably the most exciting moments consist of negotiations concerning territorial rights when a goose or seagull couple have built their nest close to a spot on my path.

What these works do focus on is the place as a process. They accentuate the transformations of the place over time and actually depict time as much as they depict the place. Unlike works that try to catch the characteristic aspects of a landscape within one image, like some traditional landscape representations, these works attempt to demonstrate the incessantly shifting character of each place. They are based on a repeated returning, and take advantage of the fact, observed by Massey, that one can never return to the same place; since the place is a process, it has already moved on. Besides providing a counterpoint to fixed, static and reifying landscape imagery they try, by showing a place as constantly changing, to participate in creating an understanding of the world as something that is alive and transforming.

The focus on place as process, or on the event of place more generally, could probably be accomplished in many ways. In these cases it is by performing primarily for the camera, and by repeating a performance in the same place, thus generating material that can be condensed by editing, that an emphasis on time, on time passing in a place and thus on place as process, is possible. To be able to focus on the temporal dimension of a place in a way that would include more of the various temporalities of its elements, however, would require much longer periods than a year, or even twelve years.

Space, place, and taskscape

Describing the temporality of landscape in terms of dwelling, anthropologist Tim Ingold has coined the term taskscape, in order to overcome the dichotomy between a naturalistic view of landscape as a backdrop to human activity and the culturalistic view of landscape as a symbolic ordering of space.⁴⁶ He notes how “a place in the landscape is not ‘cut out’ from the whole either on the plane of ideas or on that of material substance,”⁴⁷ and defines landscape as “the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them.”⁴⁸ For him the concepts landscape and body are complementary terms like organism and environment, they imply each other.⁴⁹ As tasks are the constitutive acts of dwelling, a taskscape is “the entire ensemble of tasks, in their mutual interlocking.”⁵⁰ And “as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities.”⁵¹ Ingold compares landscape to a painting, which is the result of a process of painting, and argues that if landscape must be understood as a living process and if every object can be regarded as a collapsed act, then “*the landscape as a whole must likewise be understood as the taskscape in its embodied form: a pattern of activities ‘collapsed’ into an array of features.*”⁵² For him “landscape is the congealed form of the taskscape.”⁵³ Interestingly he insists that the resonances of activities that comprise the taskscape embrace all rhythmic phenomena, animate and inanimate. He sees the world as a total movement of becoming: “Our actions do not transform the world, they are part and parcel of the world’s transforming itself”⁵⁴ and asks us to imagine a film of the landscape shot over years, centuries, millennia, and speeded up until the solid rocks seem to bend and the world seems to breathe.⁵⁵

It is easy to see the connection of his example with my modest attempts in *Year of the Ox*, but what about the taskscape? Could Harakka Island be analysed as a taskscape formed of the activities of all the different dwellers, or groups of creatures meeting there? Could we understand the landscape of the island as the congealed resonances of layers upon layers of activities of all the creatures participating in its life over the centuries since the ice age, or even before, the remaining cliffs having actually survived the pressure of the ice?

In these specific video works we could perhaps imagine an attempt at revitalising a historical taskscape by using its material remains, like the rusty buoy on the hill or the iron ring fastened in the cliff. Was the iron ring in the cliff utilized to tie the ropes of boats or ships when it was closer to the shore, before the land rose from the sea to its current level? Who brought the buoy, probably used by ships as well, up

⁴⁶ Ingold 2000, 189

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 192

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 193

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 195

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 198

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 199

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 200

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 201

from the sea and placed it on display on the hill? Were these rusty objects used by the Russian military in the 19th century or were they part of the equipment of the chemical research laboratory in the 20th century? What was the niche in the fortification wall used for? The video works address none of these questions. Rather than re-creating a past taskscape they re-invent and adjust the contemporary taskscape by playing with the detritus from the past. And of course this playing has consequences for the landscape, too, like disturbed birds or temporary paths in the grass.

In seeming disagreement with Massey, but actually emphasizing many of the same issues, Ingold argues in a more recent text “Against Space: Place, Movement and Knowledge” that the ancient concept of room as clearing has by an inversion in contemporary thinking turned into space and place, transforming “the affordances of dwelling opened up along a path of movement into an enclosed capsule for life suspended in the void.”⁵⁶ For him the idea of places situated in space is the result of this inversion. He demonstrates this by drawing, by showing how a line, a circular pathway, can be transformed into a circle, an enclosure against a backdrop.⁵⁷ Ingold stresses movement, the way through (rather than meetings or multiplicity, like Massey) as key to understanding place. “Places ... are delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement.”⁵⁸ When he writes about places as knots, they seem to be speaking congenially:

Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that life-lines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot.⁵⁹

For Ingold these knots are tied from the threads of lines of wayfaring⁶⁰ almost like the nodes in smooth space.⁶¹ He analyses the contrast between wayfaring (travelling along a route) and transport (being transported from one point to another), and illustrates it with the difference between a continuous line and a series of dots, a dotted line.⁶² This distinction is interesting for *Year of the Ox*, if applied to time or duration as well as movement in space.

Instead of recording a performance of continuous duration in one place these works consisted of short visits to the place, interrupted by breaks of one week, and were thus recording temporally disconnected slices of time. If we compare a performance in real time with a continuous line, like travelling along a route, these repeated performances for camera are like the dots on a dotted line. Like the traveller on an airplane, who knows only the place he leaves and the place he arrives at, and has no

⁵⁶ Ingold 2010, 32

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-33

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 34

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 33

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between the smooth space of the nomads, with paths and their meeting points, as opposed to the striated space of farmlands or cities, which is divided into areas. See Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 523-51 (“1440: The Smooth and the Striated”).

⁶² Ingold 2010, 36

idea of what exists in between, I cannot know what happens in the place between my visits, I return to the place as if from the air. By combining the recorded slices of time in the place through editing, a new artificial continuity is created, not exactly an illusion of real time, but a re-constructed development, a story. This working method actually resembles the scientific process of collecting data to be analysed (in this case to be recombined) in order to form an overview, a synthesis.

Ingold describes a related dichotomy with regard to knowledge: “The same logical operation that bifurcates room into place and space also bifurcates knowledge into culture and science.”⁶³ Cultures appear to be in place, with traditional knowledge in the heads of local people, while science seems to be in space, to be global and universal, based on exported facts from those self-enclosed sites. But inhabitants’ knowledge is forged through histories of wayfaring, not by fitting the data of observation into the compartments of a received traditional classification, he notes.⁶⁴ Perhaps we could imagine an artist’s experiential, embodied and practice-based knowledge as wayfarers’ stories in opposition to objectified, depersonalized and generalized research findings. Ingold is quick to add, however, that scientific knowledge, too, is generated within the practices of wayfaring; scientists are inhabitants of the same world as the rest of us.⁶⁵ And thus telling stories like artists, environmentalists or Barnacle geese do, I suppose. Perhaps the reverse could apply as well; “the rest of us” make generalisations, too, and even occasional claims to universality with their observations.

The question of inhabiting is of relevance here. Would I consider myself an inhabitant of Harakka Island, a local? Could my activities there, like performing for the camera weekly, be characterized as dwelling? Yes and no. I do not sleep on the island, nor do I work there daily; I visited the island for the first time in 1993 only. I have had my studio there since 1997, so in some sense I consider myself local, especially in relation to people who come there for the first time. Perhaps I am dwelling in many places.

Wayfaring is also an interesting notion in this case, since movements to and from the island by boat, a type of commuting, form an important part of the specificity of the place for everybody working there. Perhaps wayfaring could be used to distinguish between the video works in which the human figure walks in a circle, tied with a chain to an iron ring in the cliff, producing a path in the landscape, and the works in which the figure is immobile, sitting on the shore, in a niche in the wall, or on a rusty buoy. A repeated circular movement is very different from a static pose, both as experienced embodied practice and as an effect produced by the completed video work, although both performances use an almost equally limited area as their site of action. The circular movement, restricted by the chain, is an artificial, symbolic action, a meaningless task, and so is riding a buoy; they take one nowhere. In this case wayfaring could best describe the activities of the digital video works, which are able to mul-

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 42

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 42-43

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 43

tiply and move far and wide from their production site on a rocky island in the Baltic Sea.

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