

IN THE BOGS OF JOUKAHAINEN AND VÄINÄMÖINEN - THE ALCHEMIES OF PEAT FROM SACRED TO PROFANE AND BACK

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ABSTRACT

Peat bogs play a special role in Finnish cultural history, climate policy, economic life, and art. This article examines the performative meaning-making of peat and aims to rewrite with and through art and cultural heritage the human-centered endeavors of peatland and to create parallel ways of being with the materiality of peat. The article consists of three partly intertwined discourses: 1) the mythical pre-modern bog scene found, 2) this scene transformed in modern times into a site of control and profit, and 3) human-centered peat work is challenged by the demands of climate actions, the Anthropocene, and the post-human landscape.

KEYWORDS

peat, bog, swamp,
Anthropocene,
performativity, art,
postdigital art, art history,
rewriting, politics, cultural
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INTRODUCTION

Lauloi vanha Väinämöinen: järvet läikkyi, maa järisi, vuoret vaskiset vapisi, paaet vahvat paukahteli, kalliot kaheksi lenti, kivet rannoilla rakoili.

...

Itsen lauloi Joukahaisen: lauloi suohon suonivöistä,

niittyhyn nivuslihoista, kankahasen kainaloista.

(Kalevala, poem III, verses 295–329)

The old Väinämöinen sang:

the lakes rippled, the earth shook the copper mountains trembled the sturdy boulders rumbled

the cliffs flew in two

the rocks cracked upon the shores.

...

he sang him, Joukahainen in a swamp up to his waist in a meadow to his groin in the heath to his armpits.

(The Kalevala, poem III, verses 295–329)

We're not looking for aid. We want to rectify the status of peat, do profitable work, and get domestic peat into energy trading.

Markus Mantela,
entrepreneur in the peat sector
(Yle News, 2021)

Bog there, fen here, no dry place anywhere.

(Proverb from Somero, Finland.
Translation by authors.)

The first verses above are from the Finnish national epic, Kalevala, compiled in the first half of the 19th century by Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) with his assistants from poems that lived on in oral folklore. The cited verses are from a poem in which old and wise Väinämöinen and young Joukahainen take measure of each other in words. In the poem, Väinämöinen sings Joukahainen into a mire, from which the young man is narrowly saved by promising his sister to be Väinämöinen's wife. The compilation of the Kalevala by Lönnrot was a project that served many purposes in its time and thereafter. Lönnrot captured the living and situation-specific oral poetry tradition into a written language and thus prepared the scene of mastery and control for his part. In that scene, sisters are treated as objects that can be shared as appeasement gifts in disputes between men. Lönnrot's politically charged Kalevala project also cleared the way for more contemporary scenes of battle, where bogs are ditched, and peat is extracted.

Peat holds a special role in Finnish cultural history, art, climate policy, and economic life. During spring 2021, the meanings and values intertwined when peat became a politically heated issue. In the state budget negotiations, the funding model of the art and research field was set against peat trade and industry (Finland Today, 2021).

On the eve of May Day 2021, the main traffic routes of Helsinki's city center were blocked by a massive line of trucks approaching the Parliament House. The so-called Motor March was organized by the industrial peat producers, who expressed great concerns about the collapsed use of peat in energy production. They were worried that peat production bogs would be left futile, the source of livelihoods would vanish, and machinery and hardware, costing hundreds of thousands of euros, be disused. The performative Motor March of peat producers differed in scale from the demonstrations usually seen in front of the Parliament House. Instead of human bodies, strength and demands were manifested by the procession of more than one hundred trucks and full trailers.

From the time when Väinämöinen spelled Joukahainen into the bog, from the time when a 19th century settler struck his hoe into the marsh to mold the wet and slurry-like soil into a fertile field, the 21st century's narrations of the bog have progressed into the aesthetics of machinery and power. Yet the idolized settler mentality has

prevailed. If the previously dejected and harsh marshland was turned into fields and pastures by years of hard work, the peat producers, through their Motor March, claimed a discursive transformation of peat into a renewable source of energy.

Contemporary representations of peat in the news streams involve great gestures and maneuvers of control, as well as normative imagery of masculinity and technical progress. If one searches online for pictures using “peat production” as a search term, results present masses of similar representations of brown and flat peat in uniform quality, and where peat is lifted, moved, and handled by various large machines. We read the twenty-first-century visualizations of peat production as performative representations of force and machine-mediated power (see Figure 1). Material cultivation of peat is strongly associated with geological modifications made by humans within the era identified as Anthropocene.

We claim that machine-mediated peat performativity is a direct reflection of the 19th Century paradigm of the Modern (Berman, 1983; Giddens, 1991). The notion of Modernity, created along the processes of industrialization and urbanization, was based on the single-valued goodness of progress, expansion, and economic growth. This process led to a subordinate relationship between humans and nature, to colonialism and monoculture. Here, we enquire about other yielding meanings and roles of peat in mythology, history, and art. Peat and bogs have been unfamiliar topics in the history of art. Our reading demonstrates interdisciplinary connections between art, philosophy, history, natural sciences,



Figure 1: Machine-mediated peat production.
Photo source: [Wikimedia Commons](#).

economy, and industry in the light of posthumanism. Thinking with peat opens rhizomes to deep time (Woodward, 2016), cyclicity, simultaneity, and diversity.

In this article, performative meanings of peat and peat work function as our framework: Peat and fen as a historical center, a sacred place (Eliade, 2003), and a subject of various acts, processes, and gestures by human agencies inhabiting Finland. The fen has provided a scene for rituals and manifold spiritual lives. It lives rich in sayings and metaphors. The wet, soggy, boggy, menacingly undefined, and vague bog is a substance that enables many: It pits against and tests. It can be a field for soccer games and other play. It provides shelter (peat graves) and a place to stash (victims of crime and lost items) (Giles, 2020). As habitats of Arctic berries like cranberry and cloudberry, fens are the scenes of collector culture and recreation and, in recent years, sites of cultural collision (Huhmarniemi, 2016).

Our method is to write with art, theory, and cultural heritage (Phelan 1996, 1997; St. Pierre, 2018; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The wild and unruly bog has been a subject in Finnish art as well as a representation of mythical and primal Finnishness. The so-called Golden Age of Finnish art around the turn of the 20th century which served the nationalist ethos, regarded fens as too closed and miserable to be considered as a subject of art. One of the rare representations of wetland included in the canon of Finnish fine art is Pekka Halonen's *The Short-Cut* (1892, *Oijustie*, see Figure 2), in which the landscape opens up onto the marsh. Later, there have been more thematic presentations of the bog, for instance, in artworks of the digital age, such as Joonas Hyvönen's *Bog Body* (2019, see Figure 5) and in performance art (Teo Ala-Ruona's *My Flesh is in Tension, and I Eat it*, 2020, see Figure 6). In the frame of post-humanist discussion, the bog can be seen as an independent agent that invites human to act in strange, even self-destructive ways.

THE BOG AS A CRADLE OF PEAT

Marshland changes. During long periods of time, morasses come into being and disappear. Swamps become fens and bogs. As a counterforce to bog-becoming, people have been draining fens to form farmland and digging up peat for warming and energy source. A fen comes into being when common haircap moss and sphagnum spread into slack. They absorb and keep rain-

water; water-soaked sphagnum keeps the surface of the fen continually wet. Alternatively, a shallow pond starts to close up, and plants floating on the waterfront stretch their shoots further into the open water. From the sprouts grow sphagnum, forming peat between floating flora and the ground.

Peat is an organogenic soil formed by incompletely decomposed remnants of plants, layered on the spot. . . . Mouldering of peat is a process where dead plant cells decay and their organic compounds dissolve, partly forming so-called humus. Connected to the decaying process is mineralisation, where part of an organic substance turns into a simple inorganic compound (e. g. water, carbon dioxide, in anaerobic circumstances also methane). (Laine et al., 2018, pp. 144–147; translation by authors)

At the same time as plants and mosses grow shoots, their stems decompose. The decaying process is slow since there is not much oxygen under the surface. Bog water is acidic, preventing the work of saprotrophic bacteria. When the peat layer grows, the lower strata become dense. Plant roots no longer reach mineral ground through thick and dense peat, they depend on nutrients received from rain or leachate (Laine et al., 2018).

In Finland, as well as in other parts of Europe, people have had faith in gods and other forces of bog and peat. Aarni, a goblin, guards his treasure in a will o' the wisp of a bog deposit. As a borderland between water and earth, some bogs have been sacred. In these sacred groves, there have been human offerings in connection with springtime fertility rituals (Fredengren, 2018; Giles, 2020; Glob, 1968), and people have thought bog fairies and guardian spirits possess magical powers. The human relation to the bogland has been animistic and mutual.

The Western worldview before the Enlightenment saw everything as connected. The basic principle was *harmonia analogica*, an idea retained from older beliefs that there prevails an analogy and invisible connection between the physical universe and divinity—in Christianity, between the world and God's mind (Principe, 2013). In European Iron Age and Roman culture, incantations and magic spells were based on the idea that words are deeds and a sacrifice to demons or gods guarantees that the magic will become true (Watson, 2019). In Christian culture, there is a mythical and

a kind of animistic aspect as well. In the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, "Cleave the wood: I am there; lift the stone, and thou shalt find me there" (Koptilainen Tuomaan evankeliumi, 2020, p. 96).

The Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century introduced a science-based and individual-based worldview in which nature became fragmented into singular units to be explored. Technological mastery (science) aimed to reach for the nature behind representations (Vadén, 2011). The philosopher Tere Vadén (2011) wrote about "factual science" (p. 20) not recognising the inexplicable and experiential but only the colliding of matter and force. In the Age of Enlightenment, there was no more dialogue with gods or spirits of Nature. Rather a Western individual understood themselves as a part of nature, as one of the animals, but emphasizing and focusing on survival, control, utility, and enhancement. Science is harnessed to advocate for survival (Vadén, 2011), which affects our understanding of the human relation to nature. Marshland was biologized and made into the other.

In his analysis of natures (in plural), Vadén crystallizes ideas behind our argument of the bog as manifold. Vadén (2011) criticized natural sciences for remaining a prisoner of survivalism, even though the biological quality of species and genes is that they strive at least as much to die as to survive—which is demonstrated in the formation of bogs. According to him, even ethically grounded postmodern science remains a prisoner of much-valued survivalism, not to mention technological thinking, as a consequence of which marshlands have been drained to form farmlands, and peat is seen as an important factor in the production of energy. However, Vadén (2011) stated that someone who thinks about non-technological nature should realize that human knowledgeability gives us varied possibilities to perceive and conceptualize natures. He wrote:

Nature is composed and therefore is also revealed in varied ways depending on how human and nature meet. . . . Depending on how humans encounter nature, there forms a different nature to meet humans; depending on which nature human meets, s/he/they compose themselves differently. (Vadén, 2011, p. 70; translation by authors)

However, the potentialities are incommensurate and even contradictory (Vadén, 2011).

In art—for instance, in performances—it is possible to become entangled with wetlands and scrutinize one's own as well as others' relation to basic elements of nature. This idea consists of a technoscientific view of materialities and easily renews the baseline of the separateness of Western humans and nature. The same separateness is seen in peat producers' distress about their future and source of livelihood, an indication of the displacement effect of climate change. The climate emergency concerns all humans as well as other species and the organic and mineral soil (Braidotti, 2019; Chiew, 2014). Human actions, and anthropogenic circumstances, have had irreversible and rapid effects on the geology and ecosystem of the Earth. Dystopia has become a reality, with tsunamis, earthquakes, blowing out ores from bedrock, ships perishing in storms, blasted roadways, and pandemics. These cataclysms remind us of a scene in the Kalevala when Väinämöinen gets on with his incantation cited above: *the lakes rippled, the earth shook // the copper mountains trembled // the sturdy boulders rumbled*. At this type of stage, there is a need for posthuman thinking and posthuman activity. Posthumanism puts forth a special challenge for human-centered art and science: they must find themselves anew (Braidotti, 2019). Peat producers, for whom maintaining their trade has become infeasible, face the same challenge. The logic of the continuity and perpetual growth of an industry—a kind of mono-economy—has to be replaced by another without knowledge and certainty of what the other new way will be. And we, as writers of these words, also face the same challenge.

PEAT AS A STAGE

A fen or a bog has represented a limbo of earth and water without being either one. In mythical divisions like in Kalevala, the earth appears as an order when a primeval sea, in turn, hides in its depth the remains of the original chaos of the world. The aboveground and otherworldly meet on a bogland; therefore, certain fens have been held as sacred places. From a puddle might lead the way to the hereafter. In the Kalevala poem of the genesis of Earth, a scap flying above the sea finds its first nesting-place on the knee of Ether's daughter (in Keith Bosley's translation "water-mother's"). The bird thought that the water-mother's knee was *a grass hummock // a clump of fresh sward* (*The Kalevala*, poem I, verses 205–206; see also Taivaannaula, 2014). Literally translated, this is "a clump of fresh peat."

In folklore and traditional beliefs, in Kalevala as well, a bog was also a scary place where diseases were cursed, offerings drowned, the fatherless and vicious lost, and Väinämöinen cast Joukahainen. People were drowned in the quagmire as well, and many thought a guardian spirit was involved. A goblin of spring might also be a spirit of a deceased person who could be raised from the bog by true words. If a body was drowned in a bog, it was often impaled with a thick wooden stake or nailed with poles and timber, lest it resurface, or a deceased person started to haunt others (Glob, 1968).

When fetching peat from the bog, a spade might hit bone, and a body be unearthed. Hundreds of these Iron Age bog bodies have been found, especially in north-western Europe and Scandinavia. Bodies have been amazingly well preserved, depending on the acidity of the water, the bones, skin, and often also brains and viscera have been mummified as such.

When preserved bog bodies have been unearthed and studied, there is a notion that some of them have been drowned, and some are victims of violent robbery (Giles, 2020). However, the most interesting are those Iron Age bog graves of pinkish sphagnum peat formed in an earlier Iron Age, called "dogmeat," since it does not burn well. The deceased in the north-western European and Scandinavian graves, who were mostly men, have been noted to have suffered violent deaths. Among other things, it has been concluded from the composition of their last meals that they are human sacrifices (Fredengren, 2018; Giles, 2020; Glob, 1968; Lesté-Lasserre, 2021).

The act of sacrificing has a long history: It is a collective activity that benefits a community. It has been thought that something valuable can be given up for a higher good (Fredengren, 2018). The most valuable offering was human life. According to research, men buried in sacred groves had been executed and deposited in bogs in early spring during annual rituals of the farming community to raise new growth (Fredengren, 2018; Giles, 2020; Glob, 1968). Peter Glob (1968) proposed that the sacrificed were offerings to the fertility goddess, the Mother of Earth, Nerthus, as her bridegrooms. This would explain why majority of the violently executed bodies were men.

It is a paradox that bodies deposited in bogs are preserved. They are not decomposing, melting, or

turning into the soil but remain wavering between the border of living and dead, organic and mineral. The Swedish scholar Christina Fredengren (2018) wrote that in the cradle of peat, the ontological status of bodies changes as the bog objectifies them, and alters them into something else, comparable to weapons or valuables hidden in bogs. Bog bodies have lost their humanness; they are sort of relics but, at the same time materia combined with vulnerability and other social meanings. If bodies deposited in peat are material-semiotic phenomena, as Fredengren (2018) states, one's thoughts return to the ancient worldview, *harmonia analogica*, which can be bewitchingly connected to the agential realism theory of Karen Barad (2007) or Rosi Braidotti's view of posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013; 2019). The entanglement of nature and the human sacrifice in bog peat reveals the agency of peat when human bodies remain uncomposted. On the other hand, a ritual-practicing community might have understood that the sacrifices actively appeal to the goddess of fertility; then, a bog appears merely as a stage.

Tere Vadén (2011) stated that various possibilities to perceive and conceptualize nature are often incommensurate and contradictory. The same conflict exists between survival and death and concerns meanings and experiences as well: those who live and die too (Vadén, 2011). After the bog bodies have been dug up, the virile bridegroom turns into mere material. A dead body starts to oxidize and it is a challenge for scientists to try to conserve the bodies. In a certain way, peat as an agent concealed, conserved organic material to be immutable, distilled eternity from the transient and fleeting, in the similar way Charles Baudelaire has stated that art does (cf. Baudelaire, 2001), and transformed material composition. We can play with a mythical idea that the goddess Nerthus and peat are equal actors who make spells come true. Nerthus would have kept all of her bridegrooms if the bog had held and preserved what it regarded as its own.

The fascination of sacrificed bridegrooms dug up from peat graves lies in their potential to show us one more diverse part of the manifold nature. Iron Age people could see death as a means of redeeming survival, fertility, and growth. Maybe life and death were more balanced then than in our technoscientific and anthropocentric era. Could we compare the "slaying" of peat production as a prerequisite of survival (of species) to the balancing of Iron Age people? At least, the peat

producers feel themselves to be sacrificed. On the other hand, bog bodies have never been found unless people have dug peat for burning.

PEAT WORK AND AGENCIES IN THE PEAT

In addition to bodies and objects, endless amounts of dead wood of various forms emerge from peat bogs when trying to transform it into a more fertile land. Kustaa Vilkuna (1978) described the process of molding farmland from the fen: "Fen and peat bogs are, almost entirely, former swampy forests. Therefore, deep inside the marshland, there are huge quantities of roots, stumps, and trunks which are rotten on the surface, but hard and resinous from the inside. Already on the first hoe, they rise a lot" (p. 168; translation by authors). Taming the fen has meant heavy, manual (male) work: it is a story of a hero and conqueror. Peat, in the political debates of recent times, has emerged as a resource and an object of manual labor, which aims to safeguard human food and economic growth. The current peat discourse with motor marche demonstrations in 2021 is centered on human and linear productivity.

Even the Finnish National Romantic landscape painting trained the eye of the viewer to look at the landscape, with the guidance of Zacharias Topelius (1818–1898), as a promise of survival and, even more: as a source of wealth. The landscape was not seen as a present and free-growing autonomous power but above all, as a platform for a more abundant and rich future (Lukkarinen & Waenerberg, 2004). Ville Lukkarinen (2004) wrote about how the idolization of the representations of the Finnish forest was connected to the birth of the forest industry. The prevailing line of thinking was that the almost inexhaustible green gold provided by the forests would elevate Finnish society to the European level.

Scientific and ethnographic narrations of fen and peat in the 20th century emphasize the resistance and trial of people trying to manage fen. A fen posed a threat to prosperity, as "the peat mattress is like a rising batter" (Kalliola, 1949, p. 236; translation by authors), which only expands and thickens year by year, burying the lichen covers, smothering plants and drying forests into stunted dead trees. These emotional depictions of hardness, proposing a kind of fen negativity, can be understood as a continuum of modern settler and

colonialist logic: the fen represents a force that may threaten the conquest of wilderness and the expansion of human culture. In addition, Kustaa Vilkuna, in his tribute to the Finnish survival spirit and manual labor described the resistance of the miserable bog indefinitely: “There was much need for initiative, courage, and guts [Finnish *sisu*] before the riverside farmers ventured into the watery bog” (Vilkuna, 1978, p. 167; translation by authors).

The notion of marshland, with its impregnable wilderness reflects in these writings the colonial ethos of the Modern and modern logic: to conquer, expand, utilize and control. Peat has been discursively produced as the watery substance of death, which resists this very same modern logic of conquering and domesticating. In addition, this discursive realm maintains and enables physical and ethical distance from peat bogs. When a peat bog is confined directly to economics, the peat bog is simultaneously made singular and other. Because the bog does not offer a promise of easy living and secured food, Modernity constructed it as a threat; it was disconnected from ethical, or sacred, agency. The human relation to bog and peat became profane and utilitarian. What was once a sacred and magical stage in the chain of life became other and excluded, something that is permitted to mold and destroy to safeguard the people’s food, wealth, and warmth. The necessity to survive and consume justifies human dominance over the fen—even to destroy its diversity and multi-species environment.

LABOR AND THE FEN IN ART

There are not many representations of the fen in the traditional canon of Finnish landscape art, even though the boggy terrain increased its acreage in Finland until the mid-20th century. In the Finnish National Romantic imagery, fens were almost ignored and may have appeared as something of lesser value. Instead, the depictions of “green gold,” the representations of forests as a promise for economic prosperity, were normalized. In the urbanizing and industrializing society, the connection to the magical qualities of the fen was refused (see also Weber, 2005/1930), and ways to depict and contemplate nature from high and afar became homogeneous (Lukkarinen & Waenerberg, 2004). Simultaneously, modern people’s relationship to the landscape has become touristic (see, for instance, I. K. Inha’s landscape photographs from Koli and their exemplarity to

looking at nature, Lintonen, 2011). Artists and other cultural influencers set out to find the “original” fen and landscape from mythical Karelia, the land of Kalevala. The relationship with Karelia was hence othering and nostalgic. For artists, Karelia represented something that had already been lost in the processes of Modernity.

Pekka Halonen, a skilled player of the traditional Finnish instrument, kantele, which was also Väinämöinen’s instrument, was called in his artistic circles Väinämöinen’s substitute (Kettunen, 2001). Still, Väinämöinen-Halonen’s well-known depiction of marshland, *the Short-Cut*, painted in Myllykylä, Karelia, in 1892, is quite clearly and profanely human-centered. The wet materiality of the sacred marsh, which was moved by the power of the original Väinämöinen’s chanting, is calm and tamed.

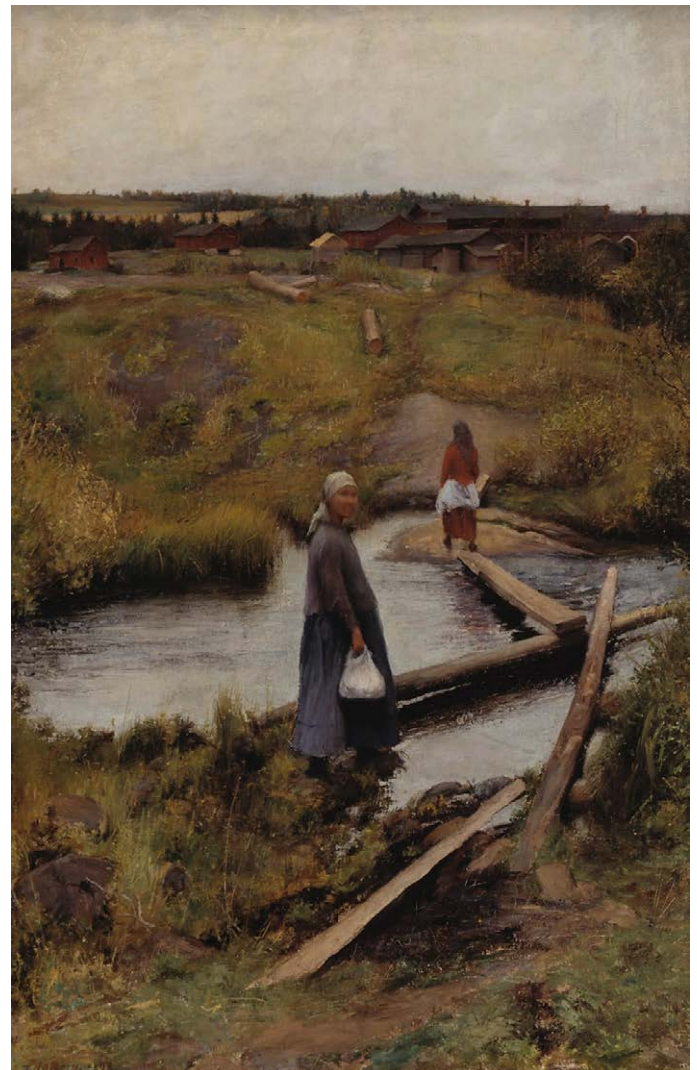


Figure 2: Pekka Halonen: *The Short-Cut*, 1892. Finnish National Gallery. Picture: Finnish National Gallery / Matti Janas.

Halonen, alongside many other Finnish artists, had made his way to Myllykylä in search of original Finnish material for his paintings. However, the marshland in *Short-Cut* only has a role as a pictorial background. Laid over the marshland are duckboards to support people passing through the landscape. The duckboards also guide the gaze of the viewer going through the landscape – from humans to human habitats. The viewer’s gaze is captured directly by a woman looking back, from whom, along the conventions of looking at paintings, the duckboards carry the gaze through the Poussin-like ideal landscape towards the residential and other buildings. The wetness of the marsh and the life of the peat beneath it are secondary. *The Short-Cut* may be seen as a representation of human and human-built culture, in which one is in the grateful twilight, moving towards rest at the end of a heavy day of labor. The wild resistance of the marshland is set to a mature and domesticated relationship with humans. In Halonen’s painting, the duckboards are laid so that the shoes of a person passing along them are not mixed with the wetness of the marsh. The objective is to stay on top of the marshland, to remain dry, out of reach of the fen.

As mentioned earlier, there are very few actual marsh or fen landscapes in Finnish artistic imagery of the late 19th century. Still, in one often-interpreted Kalevala scene, the singing battle of Väinämöinen and Joukahainen, the fen plays a major role. For example, in a pencil sketch of the scene by R.W. Ekman (Figure 3), Joukahainen

appears as if sinking into ice rather than peat or through a flat floor: Ekman’s representations of the Kalevala is a placid loan from the depictions of ancient goddesses, where the tradition for presenting a fen landscape did not exist.

Some decades later, Akseli Gallen-Kallela sketched a version of the same topic (Figure 4). Gallen-Kallela’s version is easily associated with the National Romantic and Nationalist picture program. It is not just men of a different generation that compete in the painting, but also different ethnic backgrounds and the ideals of different world orders. Gallen-Kallela has split the picture area into two. Joukahainen, “a skinny boy from Lapland” (*The Kalevala*, poem III, verse 21) is depicted on the left as a pejoratively stereotypical Sámi person, down to his dark facial features and Sámi clothing, as other. The background landscape of Joukahainen is green-brown, churning wilderness; disarray, and chaos. The picture side of Väinämöinen is lighter and clearer; Väinämöinen himself, depicted from behind, stands steady and powerful. The image constructed with contrasts shows the performativity of power, force, and ethical “good,” in which the marshland draws the weaker, the Sámi, into deep trouble. Thus, the artwork propagates rather blatantly in favor of Finnish colonialism and Indigenous subjugation. One interesting observation is that Gallen-Kallela’s



Figure 3. R.W. Ekman: Väinämöinen Sings Joukahainen into a Fen, 1861. Finnish National Gallery. Picture: Finnish National Gallery / Nina Pätilä.



Figure 4: Akseli Gallen-Kallela: *The Complete Kalevala*, sketch. Väinämöinen singing, 1925. Gallen-Kallela Museum.

depictions of the strongly racialized Joukahainen's sister, Aino, are very different (see, for instance, Gallen-Kallela's *Aino Myth, Triptych*, 1891). Desired and harassed by Väinämöinen, Aino is very much a representation of the iconic Finnish maiden, blonde, soft, and innocent. Just appropriate for the object of a male sexualizing gaze.

One might ask, did artists in the late 19th century appropriate the role of the seers or shamans when searching for the nationalist connections between the mythical past and a modern era of benefit, progress, machine aesthetics, economic growth, and the Anthropocene? Following a nationalist flow of thought, the artists of the so-called Golden Age took part in the construction of the nation-state. The works of Halonen and Gallen-Kallela can be seen as Väinämöinen-like visual chants, from the power of which emerged a nation-state. The works presented here were not part of this dynamic alone but participated in a major project in which the land and all its living or organic substances were taken over and placed into a hierarchy of value and power. When this power structure falters or is destabilized, it is time for counter-chants.

Does Väinämöinen's singing of Joukahainen into the bog compare to the burying of bog bodies in northwest Europe? For example, Vadén (2011) thought this scene depicts confronting concepts of knowledge. Joukahainen tells us how to know and remember all sorts of fragments of natural knowledge, but Väinämöinen's knowledge makes the earth quake and the mountains tremble. His generic knowledge represents meaningful knowledge that has accumulated over the course of time. The battle of Joukahainen and Väinämöinen is a fundamental battle of knowledges. According to Vadén's interpretation, it is also about the transformation of oral history of the hunter-gatherer culture—origins—represented by Väinämöinen, into agriculture where only Joukahainen's information-based knowledge is needed (Vadén, 2011).

The use of origins or generic knowledge and chanting is a performative act. Performativity can be understood as (even ritual or shamanistic) ways to produce one's own or communal specificity through language, body, and materia: it discursively creates a sense of togetherness and continuity, even through destruction and disturbance. Performativity is more holistic than performance, the form of which is more closed

in time and space and which therefore has a certain duration and aim, such as the peat producers' Motor March in 2021. Performativity may be understood as a presentational activity, which includes trials. In the same manner, as Joukahainen put Väinämöinen to the test—but was confronted with a force much more powerful and ancient—general knowledge transferred for millennia and from generation to generation. Joukahainen himself could only list and name things based on empiricism and natural sciences, a science of ready-made facts (Vadén 2011):

*Mätäs on märkä maita vanhin, paju puita
ensimmäinen,*

hongan juuri huonehia, paatonen patarania.

(Kalevala, poem III, verses 207–210)

*A wet hummock is the oldest land, a willow the
first of trees,*

*a fir root first of dwellings, and a stone the first
crude pot.*

(*The Kalevala*, poem III, verses 207–210)

This song by Joukahainen is thin and shallow, based on one's experience and learned knowledge. In contrast, Väinämöinen's song has power; his "words received before" conjure up nature and other forces. The fen is an agent, which demonstrates Väinämöinen's superior knowledge. In the singing battle, the land under Joukahainen becomes boggy, dragging him deeper and deeper into the watery soil.



Figure 5: Joonas Hyvönen: *Bog Body*, 2019 (still from animation).

Contemporary art in Finland has been reconnected with bogs, swamps, and fens. In Finnish folklore, the fen is often described as a gateway to the afterlife, which might be an interpretation of Joonas Hyvönen's *Bog Body* digital animation (2019), where sinking into the bog is like attaining deep time (Woodward, 2016). The story of the artwork, which lasts just under 17 minutes, can be understood through a geological time scale to last for billions of years. The *Bog Body* character (Figure 5) comes to life, and the boundary between living cells and mineral-based technology tools blurs. In the 3D animation, one of the characters is a tardigrade, which can rightly be considered a symbol of deep time. The place where one might likely meet tardigrades is the swamp. It is the most enduring human-known organism on earth, both in time and in extreme conditions. In the *Bog Body* animation, the tardigrade tells jokes and onomatopoeic refrains while sinking deeper and deeper. Väinämöinen sang in the swamp of Joukahainen in the Kalevala epic, one can say when the tardigrade would sing in the swamp of Väinämöinen and all of humankind with his superiority. It can develop a vitreous surface and thus be somewhere between an organic and a mineral mode. With this glassy cover, it can sink into a deep sleep when conditions are too extreme and wait even 100 years for better conditions. The frost may become more than 200 degrees below zero, the radiation a thousand times as much as a human or epic superhero can withstand, the pressure, the vacuum—the tardigrade will withstand!

The *Bog Body* takes the viewer to the depths and to meet everlasting or slowly moldering objects left by humans' fossil lifestyle: Plastic bags,



Figure 6: Teo Ala-Ruona:
My Flesh is in Tension and I Eat it, 2020.
Photo: Nova Kaspia.

washing machines, and cars. In the scale of deep time, they all represent the short period humans have appeared on Earth, considered only their own interests, and messed up everything.

The *Bog Body* is the journey of the organic material into minerals, which is the process of peat and challenges the artificial and dichotomous boundary between living and dead, organic and mineral. Rather, it is a matter of fluidity and lengthy processes that goes beyond the quarterly conception of time created by modern humans. Deep time represents an opposite conception of time. The artwork also asks about humans' place in relation to both nature and the digital. It inevitably drifts us into the posthumanist, and post-Internet (Kolb et al., 2021) thought and nonlinear time.

While artwork by Hyvönen offers a bog for viewing, Teo Ala-Ruona offers his body to the marsh. Ala-Ruona was not physically in the marsh or on the marsh, but the marsh was metaphorically present in the place where the artwork was performed, in a human-made environment. Ala-Ruona's *My Flesh is in Tension, and I Eat it* (Figure 6) was performed in 2020 at the SIC Gallery in Helsinki and in June 2021 at the contemporary art space Kutomo in Turku. The genre of the performance was defined as euphoric body horror. Ala-Ruona himself states that the performance deals with his bodily desire to transform as a part of the soil's slimy decay processes and offer his body as a carbon sink: "A bog grounds and preserves bodies. A bog is a place where an ecosystem changes into another and where bodies intertwine and transform through the influence of each other. The bog is slimy, exciting and disruptive" (Ehkä, n.d., para. 11). The text does not necessarily follow the scientific definitions of the bog, but the description combines the diverse and queer nature of the bog. The authors think that marshland is a constant place of becoming where definitions escape, and boundaries dissolve. Plurality, coexistence and death, birth and decay, is a central feature of the bog.

However, we state that in Ala-Ruona's performance, the bog is, in a sense instrumental, there is not a question of bog as such, but matter and body secretions on the performance are an example of something else, lost or rejected. The carnality in his performance and the bodily knowledge, or ignorance, differs from representations of artists in the Finnish National Romantic art around the turn of the 20th century. Ala-Ruona presents

one version of the masculine battle between Väinämöinen and Joukahainen. These battles create a stage where a gendered act connects humans with nature. One can think that in his performance, Ala-Ruona is not only Väinämöinen and Joukahainen but also Aino. In addition, he blends ecstatically with the swamp, he *is* the swamp. Ala-Ruona's performance restores the bog to a fen and gives its agency (Latour, 2014).

Lönnrot demarcated and controlled oral tradition by capturing it in a written and a printed mode to Kalevala, but Ala-Ruona is part of a continuum that restores knowledge beyond words: It unfolds and makes questions. The performance is based on disappearance and representation. It is a moment loaded with holistic sensual overflow. As was stated in the earlier part of this article, Lönnrot harnessed Finnish oral poetry into writing, and it became a widely shared tradition. Unfortunately, at the same time, he took control and dominion of this oral tradition, thus catching a vivid tradition into a petrified fossil.

The connection between the peat work and the artworks by Halonen (1892), Gallen-Kallela (1925), Hyvönen (2019), and Ala-Ruona (2020) is peat and bogs. According to Bataille (see Arppe, 2018; Bataille, 1993), the work of artists appears to be an unproductive waste when compared to rational work. The lightly ironic expression unproductive waste calls out the uneasy materialistic perspective of art. Paintings, video art, and performance leave behind "waste" in various ways, but peat is still there. One might think that peat producers are serving utilitarian purposes and that humans digging the bog with huge machines is rational. Rational peat work leaves emptiness where bogs used to be. The fuel of the digging machines and peat turn into "productive" waste when burned. The concept of waste is contextual. In some cases, unproductive waste is better than rationality.

THE MANY LAYERS OF BOG

To sum up, in the past, the fen has been experienced as frightening, but in some places was sacred and responded to the many needs of the community. When scientific-technological worldview took up more room, the marshland became a threat that had to be tamed. The clearing of fens and the production of peat partake in ever-increasing control, while the bog sacrifices of the Iron Age tell of a mutual communication between

humans and nature, in which each party appears to the other as transforming, diverse.

Peat bog appears today, at least in the Internet's peat production images, as a wilderness squeezed to dryness, from which hard and resinous roots, stumps and trunks are no longer pulled up. One may ask, therefore, if a similar transformation of cultures is going on as Tere Vadén saw described in Kalevala. Is the pioneering mentality of agricultural culture dying, squeezed by representations of the post-Internet and post-humanism? Agricultural culture has also meant the collapse of quality of life: epidemics, wars, hierarchies, and division of labor (Vadén, 2011). But there is hardly a return to being hunter-gatherers, even though we occasionally enjoy cranberries.

Perhaps we could also give a little more room to incomprehensibility beyond technoscientific thinking and be more perceptive of plurality and contradictions of nature. Only in this way can we challenge identical and single-valued representations and venture into the fen without the necessity of duckboards to keep your feet dry and secure (like in Halonen's *Short-Cut*); where Gallen-Kallela's Joukahainen would not need to be left in the colonialistic and racialized chaos, and the fen would be seen as ever-changing, constantly new, immersive and new without huge motor performances trying to maintain the singularity of the peat. There, in strange and uncertain terrains, we may agree to recognize the face reflected from the bog pond, which is alternately Väinämöinen, alternately Joukahainen. In all of us, there are elements of preservation and change, as well as the eternal aim of the wrestling of good and evil that manifests in those two mythical characters.

While we enquired about the roles of peat in tradition and art, we faced a shift from sacred to profane. The Modern ethos appeared as a willingness to define, separate, rule, and control in a profane manner. Sights to the mythical past as well to contemporary art gave options beyond those ethos. Defining opened up plurality and eternal becoming. Separation turned to entanglements. Understanding the deep time of the peat means understanding the processes that cannot be ruled or artificially shifted to a higher speed by human actors. Would experiences of the locality and diversity of diverse natures (Vadén, 2011) change the worldview from a scientific to a more pluralistic one? Could this

mean a shift from profane back to sacred or make more room for various layers and worldviews?

Somehow, Lönnrot's project to collect oral poetry to create the epic *Kalevala* was freezing the living tradition into a printed mode. It follows the same pattern when contemporary machinery peat work digs peat out of the bog—a long-changing process is cut down. Since the ontology of the bog is in constant change and border state, we wish to see the bog more than through current catalogs of peat production and peat work. So far, the general discussion which has contrasted art and peat production has been invigorating.

Nevertheless, in the peat bog narrations and performances we are pondering, anthropocentrism is highlighted. In what ways can we shift thoughts of peat as an object of activity closer to peat as an independent agent? According to Kayla Anderson (2015), the planet does not need us to be saved, but instead, we must save us from ourselves. Like Anderson, we are concerned that art does not solve ecological problems and save the planet. However, art could influence us and make us think and act in a more sustainable manner.

The meanings of the bog strain in many directions. It has economic dimensions, a scientific nature, and a cultural-historical and folklore character. The most familiar terrains for us authors are art, art history, and art education. While we wrote about bogs, we found ourselves in wet terrains with swallowing puddles when we dared to discuss the views of the bogs through more foreign fields of research to ourselves. We tried to stop before sinking.

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