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Performing with trees as shifting attention

Annette Arlander

Working at the periphery of a discipline, or at the intersection of several fields, in an in-between position, can be both central and marginal at the same time. As with interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary endeavours in general, such an in-between position can be problematic. What is marginal, exceptional, and therefore interesting in one field can be basic and commonly known in another. Moreover, moving from one area to another is more difficult than one would imagine. For the project to be discussed here, such areas or fields would be performance art, environmental art, and media art and the border zone between them, as well as artistic research more broadly. In terms of cultural studies, some relevant disciplines could be performance-as-research and performance studies, critical plant studies, and environmental post-humanities or even media studies.

Performance art as a medium or as an area of interest is peripheral in the contexts of both performing arts and visual arts or fine art and placed in the intersection between them. Performance art practices that involve performing for camera are marginal, because most performance art has traditionally been concerned with the embodied and ephemeral encounter between the artist and the audience, or the viewers. Due to the recent pandemic, however, and the increasing need to explore digital forms of communication, the situation has changed, and performing for camera in one way or another, often in live streaming, is more and more common.

Performing with plants might seem utterly peripheral to the core concerns of visual, performance, or media art, although historically there is no lack of artists engaging with plants, from vegetally inspired music or ornamentation on textiles, pottery, and architecture, to paintings, poems, and science fiction stories of plants. Living plants are used as material in practices as divergent as garden design, sonification, floral arrangements, and contemporary bio art. Today plants and vegetation are receiving increased attention in the context of the current climate crises and the rapid extinction of species. The growing interest in plant

studies, to some extent as a further development of the burgeoning of animal studies, is influencing artistic research as well. The emerging field of critical plant studies has been linked to ‘art’s return to vegetal life’ and to looking at plants in art.¹ Ethical discussions have focused on plant rights,² plant philosophy or plant thinking,³ plant theory,⁴ the language of plants,⁵ queer plants,⁶ and more.⁷ There is an abundance of popular accounts of scientific research on plant sentience, intelligence, memory, and communication.⁸ With recent developments in plant science, artists, too, are looking at plants in new ways. Due to the debates concerning biopolitics and post-humanities, this marginal interest is suddenly placed close to the heart of current concerns in many fields. How to perform with plants is a question of utmost interest, and not only, or even mainly in terms of art.

Practicing in a park

While preparing the artistic research project called *Performing with Plants*,⁹ I was not fully aware of the extent of such interests. The most important inquiries I wanted to explore were: 1) How can I collaborate with nonhuman entities like plants? 2) How can I further develop experiences from previous attempts at performing landscape? 3) How can I create actions with plants, in which humans can be invited to participate? The overarching research topic was: How can I perform landscape today by collaborating with trees and other plants, with an awareness of the insights generated by post-humanist and new materialist debates? Thus, I asked questions such as what can I do together with trees, how can I perform together with trees for the camera on a tripod, and how can I appear in the same image space with trees? I sought to combine my previous practice of creating rough time-lapse videos to document changes in the landscape with a focus on trees. As part of this three-year project,¹⁰ I made time-lapse videos with specific trees, first both in Helsinki and Stockholm, then in Stockholm only.¹¹ In this text I present one part of the project, performances with trees made in Stockholm during the year 2018 (Figure 1.1), and I focus on some of the ethical dilemmas involved.

By post-humanist debates, I refer to the critique of the legacy of European humanism as summarized by Rosi Braidotti¹² and others. They see that legacy as a tradition that separates the so-called civilized Western ‘man’ from other forms of life and denies such others, including plants, all agency and consciousness. Within the broad spectrum of new materialist thought, I have been particularly interested in the agential realism of physicist and queer theorist Karen Barad, who continues the work of Niels Bohr, and critically develops the ideas of thinkers like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. In Barad’s account, the differential boundaries between humans and nonhumans, culture and nature, science and the social, are constituted through causal intra-actions. *Intra-action* is her term for ‘the mutual constitution of entangled agencies’ which, unlike the common term of *interaction*, stresses the fact that ‘distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.’¹³ Different intra-actions produce different phenomena, and who or what is excluded through them matters.¹⁴ I have explored the idea of intra-action in the context of artistic research elsewhere.¹⁵ Due to the current climate crisis, however, it has become ever more important to acknowledge our co-constitution with other life forms, including plants.



Figure 1.1 Hanging in a pine (video still). Photo by the author.

Working with urban nature or nature-culture¹⁶ often means dealing with the peripheral also in a literal sense, strolling on the outskirts of a city, in parks, wastelands, or recreational forests. Here, however, I will describe repeated visits to a small wood in the centre of Stockholm, where I was performing for a camera on a tripod with trees. The small wood called Lill-Jansskogen, 'Little Jan's Wood,' is placed right in the centre of Stockholm, between the campuses of the Royal Institute of Technology and Stockholm University. The area looks like a small forest, but is in fact part of a park, northern Djurgården, and is in itself an example of the peripheral in the centre. The hilly woods are maintained in a seemingly unkempt condition, with lots of dead trees left lying to serve a variety of species, at the same time as the path is lined with streetlights to help runners and walkers keep up with their training all year. I chose this area for my practice mainly because it is right next to DOCH – the Dance and Circus School of the University of the Arts Stockholm, where I was based in 2018.

In this small wood, I made a round where I stopped at four sites repeatedly, visiting two spruce stumps and two pine trees, sometimes three times a week (100 times in all). The performances were recorded by a video camera on a tripod and later edited into rough time-lapse videos. Removing the entering and the exiting from the image creates an impression of a continuous action or pose. Each visit was documented with still images from the videos on the project website.¹⁷ In all performances I wore a pale pink woollen scarf, and in three of them, I posed immobile with my back towards the camera to make the human figure more impersonal.

At the first site, I sat on an old spruce stump with the felled trunk still attached to it, relatively close to the camera. At the second site, I sat on a small spruce stump on the ground among tall spruce trees, this time further away from the camera. At the third site, I first swung and then just hung from the branch of an old pine tree, with the aim of exploring continuous movement, which I had previously explored by sitting in a swing. At the fourth site, I sat in a small pine tree on the slope next to a path, almost hidden between its branches. Although my principal aim was to perform for the camera to produce time-lapse videos, I was inevitably performing for passers-by as well. Especially the dogs were interested in my unusual behaviour.

Repeated visits and respect for the site

The purpose of these repeated attempts at performing, posing, or appearing with trees was to explore how one might perform with plants while respecting their sense of time, by visiting them in their own place, and how to collaborate with plants. Whether such posing or appearing together can be called collaboration is questionable, though, because the trees or stumps had no option but to collaborate. Collaboration would probably need some more substantial acts to benefit the trees, as in practices of gardening.¹⁸ Through the act of repetition, however, a specific type of bonding occurred, which hints at the possibility of developing another kind of relationship with trees and with vegetation more generally.

Within performance studies, such performances could be considered marginal at best.¹⁹ These repeated visits could nevertheless be analysed as performances on several levels: in terms of repetition as a mode of performing, in terms of site-specific performances for occasional passers-by in urban space, in terms of posing for the camera as a silent witness and placeholder for future viewers, or in terms of appearing with plants in a more general sense. While singular poses create surprise performances for passers-by, repeated visits form a recurring and therefore recognizable performance for the frequent users of the area. Moreover, they have performative power while functioning as a habit-forming activity for the performer. The video recording serves as a selective documentation of the live event or as a mode of gathering and preparing material for the video works as performance. The activity of editing is a performance as well, albeit not publicly displayed as one. Presenting the edited video in various contexts and circumstances as well as online form performances in their own right. The weekly documentation of the process with still images and blogposts on the project website could be called an artistic research performance. And finally, writing an account of the process and the videos here forms an academic performance as well.

The most important performance was probably the exchange of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other chemicals that I performed with the surrounding vegetation, the trans-corporeal exchanges taking place during each visit, to use the notion proposed by Stacy Alaimo.²⁰ She understands 'human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world,' and 'underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from "the environment."' ²¹ Her notion trans-corporeality emphasizes 'movement across bodies' and 'reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures.'²² She notes that it also aids in cultivating 'a tangible sense of connection to the material world in order to encourage an environmentalist ethos' and in counterbalancing the tendency to treat "'environmental issues" as containable, eccentric, dismissible topics.'²³

Within critical plant studies or environmental post-humanities such a project, which explores the possibility of performing or posing repeatedly for camera together with trees, could be linked to 'art's return to vegetal life,' to use the subtitle of Prudence Gibson's book *The Plant Contract*.²⁴ Many recent studies are looking at plants and art, with the journal *Antennae* devoting several issues to plants.²⁵ Despite scientific research into plant sentience, however, and the popular attention on the topic, there are not many studies on plants and performance, with a few exceptions.²⁶ Due to the veritable explosion of performances with plants recently, more studies are to be expected to follow the recent issue of *Performance Philosophy*²⁷ focusing on plants. Elsewhere I have tried to distinguish various ways of performing with plants, such as plants performing for humans, humans performing for plants, humans performing as plants, and plants performing as humans, as well as think of whether the performances take place in human spaces of display, in places where plants grow, or entangled in the same organism.²⁸ Trees are harder to move around, but plants and vegetal growth are often used as material for various types of

artworks in galleries or museums. In the examples discussed here, however, I have chosen to perform with plants, or rather trees, on the sites where they grow.

As sessile beings, plants are sensitive to place; their life is literally site-specific. We could say that trees are experts of site-specificity in their manner of adapting to circumstances. A plant is 'an organism that has formed itself by informing itself with the environment that supports it.'²⁹ And, as philosopher Michael Marder points out: 'All radically contextual thought is an inheritor of vegetal life.'³⁰ One way to perform with sessile beings like trees, respecting their specific sense of time and space, is to visit them repeatedly, as I have done in several projects over the years. Therefore, two characteristics are important for this practice, namely the idea of repeated visits and the idea of visiting the plants in the place where they grow.

The practice has evolved over time, informed by specific contexts. Sitting on the spruce stump was partly inspired by my experience of sitting on an alder stump in Helsinki the previous year, as a sculptural gesture of sorts. In working with pine trees, I drew on my experiences in Nida Art Colony in September 2017, where I performed with various pine trees that cover the dunes.³¹ In hanging from a pine tree repeatedly for a year, I continued the work I did twelve years before during the previous year of the dog, in 2006 and 2007 on Harakka Island and in Kalvola. In *Year of the Dog – Sitting in a Tree* (2007)³² I sat in a pine tree on Harakka Island once a week from 7 January 2006 to 11 February 2007. And in *Year of the Dog in Kalvola – Calendar*³³ I was hanging from and leaning against an old pine tree in Kalvola once a month during the year 2006. The idea of swinging from the branch of the pine was also a continuation of my swinging experiments in previous years, starting with *Year of the Snake – In the Swing*³⁴ 2014, albeit without a swing; I wanted to try to create the movement only with my body. Swinging can relatively easily be edited into a continuous movement, which supports the flow from one image to the next.

Despite variations and several attempts over the years, the problem remains unresolved: How to perform with plants in a reasonably ethical manner? Think of the choice to sit on a spruce stump; if I really would respect trees as living beings, sitting on a corpse would be rather weird. Regardless of this disrespect, there is no way for me to know what a tree wants on anything but a very general level; I assume it wants to live, grow, and spread; enjoys sunlight; prefers a specific range of temperature and humidity, and probably also the company of fungi and microbes; and so on. Another ethical-aesthetical dilemma is the balance between the human performer and the tree in the image space. The human easily dominates in the framing. Moreover, movement tends to draw attention. One could ask, in what way am I really performing 'with' the tree? Or am I rather using the pine tree as my structural support, as the backdrop for my performance, as my 'site'? Am I utilizing or exploiting the situatedness of the pine tree to situate myself? Or could my use of the pine tree be understood as simply seeking the help of the pine tree in experiencing the site?

Usually, I think of my work as a practice that moves in the periphery of and the border zone between performance art, video art, and environmental art. After writing about my work for camera in the context of dance and somatic practices

and expanded choreography,³⁵ I noticed there are other possible contexts or border zones such as screen dance. One might suggest that even a simple movement like hanging from a tree is an instance of dance. Or that recording an action like repeatedly hanging in a tree on video and constructing an illusion of continuous movement with the help of editing is an example of work made specifically for the screen. Since the durational movement takes place only in the edited video, this could be understood as an example of screen dance in a very basic and minimal sense. Another aspect, however, might be more provocative, namely the question of who the performer is. Could the pine tree I am hanging in and repeatedly recording be considered a performer, or a co-performer? The question expands the proposal by Silvia Vitaglione³⁶ to consider natural elements as materials rather than as a backdrop, in her discussion of site-specificity and screen dance. What if natural elements like trees or plants are not only materials to be highlighted in contact with the body, but actually co-performers to work with?

As in the case of performance in general, one can of course ask how far it is meaningful to expand a notion, artform, discourse, or discipline; how much energy is it worthwhile to spend in the margins, on issues peripheral to the field? Is there a point where one risks losing the specificity of the form by casting the net too wide? In the current era of climate crises and debates concerning post-humanism, new materialism, and decoloniality, regarding plants as our co-performers, our allies in maintaining the planet in a livable condition for humans as well as for other animals, is a relevant topic. Expanding our sense of who and what can perform, whether screen dance or performance art, and to consider vegetal beings such as trees in that context is not as far-fetched as it first might seem.

Next, I will present one experiment, a video based on the material created during the third stop on my round in the woods in Lill-Jansskogen, *Hanging in a Pine* (2019), and a lecture performance turned video essay based on that material as the starting point to discuss the possibility of addressing the pine as a co-performer. 'Hanging in a Pine Tree or Appearing with Plants' was a video essay (19 min 31 sec) created for the performance philosophy conference in 2019,³⁷ where the organizers invited a broad range of artistic and activist experimentations and interventions. I tried to address the question of how to perform with plants focusing on the ethical dilemmas involved, which I deemed might be interesting in a philosophical context.³⁸

Hanging in a pine tree

The video essay 'Hanging in a Pine Tree or Appearing with Plants'³⁹ demonstrates and discusses how to perform with trees, as an intervention into dominant notions of who and what can perform. Within our ongoing performance of trans-corporeal exchanges⁴⁰ with vegetation in the world, deliberate artistic performances can be developed to intervene in the continuous disregard of plants. In a blog post on 17 March 2018,⁴¹ I wrote:

[A] ... surprise ... , almost a shock, awaited me on the top of the hill by the pine tree. Somebody had broken my swinging branch! Well, the pine's

branch, that is, the branch I normally swing on and hang on was broken ... and the remains lay scattered on the ground ... My first reaction was a rather paranoid one, that somebody had deliberately broken the branch to prevent me from continuing swinging on it, or even worse, to put a blame on me for hurting or damaging the tree. I immediately realized this was a rather far-fetched idea and examined the broken branch. I could still hang on it as usual; what exactly had happened? Pieces of the branch were lying on the ground as if after a battle. Could it be that somebody had looked at the images online and then wanted to try swinging themselves, but had grabbed the branch too far away near the tip, rather than close to the trunk? Not very likely, but somebody might have seen my repeated footsteps by the tree and therefore decided to try it out, but was much heavier than me, or was careless with the branch. That is perhaps the most likely explanation, but in each case, I have some ethical responsibility for what happened. Although the broken branch would not influence my practice in any catastrophic way, I felt deeply sad for the accident and somehow responsible for it.

Despite the flourishing scientific research into plant sentience,⁴² and the popular attention on the topic,⁴³ there is no way for me as a performer to know what a tree wants, on anything but a very general level. How then to perform together in a reasonably ethical manner? How can we act or perform with creatures, with whom we cannot communicate directly, or even ask for their consent for posing for a camera with them? Ironically, in *Performing with Plants* I have tried to follow some basic rules of thumb, like

- 1 Try not to hurt the plant – choose plants that are bigger than you, stronger than you, plants that can share some of their energy with you – like trees.
- 2 Visit the plant where it grows; respect its particular relationship to place.
- 3 Spend time with the plant. Visit it repeatedly. Although you cannot share the temporality of the plant, respect its relationship to time.

In this case, the plant and co-performer was an old pine tree that I visited repeatedly for one year, from 16 February 2018 to 4 February 2019, that is, the Chinese year of the dog, performing for a camera on a tripod with it. The pine grows on a hill in Lill-Jansskogen or Little Jan's Wood, in the centre of Stockholm, in an area popular with runners, walkers, and dogs. Unlike my usual manner of sitting in, or on, or with a tree, as an immobile, faceless figure, in these performances with the pine I tried to first swing and then hang from a branch to explore movement – and that immediately brings attention to the human performer. While editing I combined all swinging images and all hanging images to create two versions of the video. The hanging version is perhaps more in tune with the time of the pine than the swinging version, which really is an intervention⁴⁴ or interruption in tree time, if we can use such a term. Our collaboration is rather one-sided, however. The pine tree does not need me or anybody else to hang from its branch, but I do need the pine tree – in more ways than one – to be able to perform. On 16 June 2018,⁴⁵ I wrote:

Sitting on a spruce stub or swinging on the branch of a pine tree are probably not the first activities that come to mind hearing the term ordeal performance. Funny enough, they too can turn into an ordeal, especially the sitting-on-the-stub part. /--/ I realized I had to endure the fact that mosquitoes were climbing around on my face, searching for the best spot to inject their nose and suck out some blood. I tried to breathe slowly, resist my reflexes, and think that the nuisance would be over soon. /--/ but while I was... trying to relax as they were sucking my blood it really felt like an ordeal, albeit in miniature. /--/ In ... Michael Pollan's book *The Botany of Desire*, I read his summary of available stories of the human "relationship" with nature ... : "There's the old heroic story, where Man is at war with Nature; the romantic version, where Man merges spiritually with Nature (usually with some help from the pathetic fallacy); and, more recently, the environmental morality tale, in which Nature pays Man back for his transgressions, usually in the coin of disaster – three different narratives (at least), yet all of them share a premise we know to be false but can't seem to shake: that we somehow stand outside, or apart from, nature." (Pollan 2002, xxv) /--/ A fourth kind of story, what could that be? No story at all, only images?

A story of hanging in a pine tree for a year? That would be an ordeal performance, for sure, but this continuous hanging is created by editing. It is a fake, a joke, not even an illusion, but a story. A story of dependence? Or perhaps an intervention in time?

These performances with a pine tree form one part of *Performing with Plants*, an artistic research project, which started with the question of how to perform in a landscape today, focusing on plants and especially trees. It soon evolved into exploring what it means to be 'performing with' entities unlike us. For philosopher Michael Marder, in his book *Plant – Thinking. A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, 'the dispersed life of plants is a mode of being in relation to all the others, being qua being-with' and thus 'we have a lot to learn from plants that have mastered this way of being ...'⁴⁶ Or, to put it in the words of Donna Haraway: 'We become-with each other or not at all.'⁴⁷ And *we*, here, does not refer to humans only. A new materialist and post-humanist perspective prompts us to consider how the world consists of creatures, life forms, and material phenomena with varying degrees of volition, needs, and agency. Performing 'with' plants is an example of the problem of living with life forms unlike us that we nevertheless are completely dependent on. To understand performing as appearing together, in the same city as well as in the same image space, is perhaps a way to begin to practice acknowledging this dependence.

Using the word *performing*, we assume an intentional act, a subject-forming activity, where the performer is produced in the performance. Appearing need not be intentional in a similar manner. Probably not everybody would agree that plants perform, but there is no doubt that they appear. The interesting question is, can humans appear with them?

In Swedish *performing* or *appearing on stage*, 'uppträda,' literally means 'stepping up,' or 'treading up.' Appearing can also be translated as 'framträda,' 'treading into the front,' or to come out. Perhaps we can 'tread up' or 'tread into the front' in the image together, the pine tree and I, without assuming more wilful

acts than setting up the camera as witness. The possibility of performing as appearing, without an intention to perform something or as something, is even clearer in Finnish, where two words are used for performing. The transitive form 'esittää' is used when you perform something or as someone, and the intransitive 'esiintyä,' when you are performing yourself in the sense of appearing, being on display. In Finnish the word does not necessarily have the philosophical connotation of appearance as opposed to truth or reality, but is concerned with being visible, foregrounded ('esillä'). Perhaps this distinction between the two modes of performing, 'the showing doing' and the 'showing oneself' or 'being shown,' appearing, can help us see how the pine tree performs. We are on display together, the pine tree and I. We perform intransitively; we are being shown, although movement tends to take over the viewers' attention in this case.

Am I thus forcing the pine tree to join in the current selfie-culture, a continuous self-presentation, self-representation, self-entrepreneurship, and self-development in the hope of future gains? That seems like the opposite of the dispersed life of plants. The idea of occurring or appearing with plants actually resonates with Marder's suggestion that 'plants articulate in their language devoid of words ... [f]irst of all, themselves ... they reaffirm vegetal being, which, through them, becomes more spatially pervasive.'⁴⁸ He notes how 'plants articulate themselves with themselves,' but they also 'articulate the burgeoning emergence, or self-generated appearance,' thus 'demonstrating how a being can come into the light, appear, and signify itself.'⁴⁹ If this is the case for plants, why not for human beings as well. Could I not try to appear and signify myself together with the pine?

Marder combines artistry with plants. 'To assert that plants are the artists of sensuous appearances, ... is to claim in the same breath that they are the artists of being,' he notes. 'In effect, plants create and recreate themselves all the time ... They are performative creatures *par excellence*, the artists of themselves.'⁵⁰ And more than that, they are the true experts in site-specificity, because '[v]egetal self-creation and self-recreation takes its cues from the conditions outside ... without a rigidly predetermined organismic plan,' he adds. 'The artistry of plants that make themselves is, therefore, of one piece with the world.'⁵¹ On 3 December, ⁵² I wrote:

Reading “The Wretched Earth – Botanical Conflicts and Artistic Interventions,” an introduction to a special issue of *Third Text*⁵³ by Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh is eye-opening and also inspiring, because it gathers together so many artistic projects dealing with plants, soil, agriculture, resistance to corporate colonialism and environmental degradation. Sitting on a spruce stump [or hanging in a pine], without explicitly taking a stand regarding current practices of monocultural forestry, feels utterly naive and pseudo-innocent. And that is nevertheless the only thing that seems somehow within my reach now /--/ What else can you do at this time of year, except to hope for the midwinter darkness to come (and go) as soon as possible – hopefully with some snow!

Does this make sense to you, pine?

When looking at the images I realized that I hardly know you despite seeing you regularly, often three times a week for a whole year. I have been placing my tripod on the rock nearby, framing the image according to the lines formed by some of your neighbours, trying to keep it constant from one session to the next, not always as exactly as I would have wished. And then swinging from your broken branch, moving my knees as much as possible to exaggerate the movement, then hanging for a few breaths, looking up through your crown. As an ending, I always touched your trunk, as if to say ‘thank you’ or ‘forgive me my intrusion’ or something like that. But you never answered in any manner that I would understand. Not that I expected you to. And then I returned to the camera and stood there recording an image of you on your own for a while. The idea was to perform together, to pose for the camera together, to appear together in the image space. But I never really asked for your consent, or perhaps I asked, but did not wait for your reply. In the images, you remain in the background, as a supporting structure, only partly visible. Most of you and all of your crown is actually cropped out of sight. My movement is catching the attention, actually on purpose; the vigorous or soft swinging of the human body carries the continuity from one meeting to the next, across shifts in framing, changes in light, and the passing seasons. It is nevertheless strange that I know so little about you. Sometimes I wondered about the red mark on your trunk. Was it something accidentally painted there, or to mark the path, or was it a sign that marked you for felling, like the ones they used in timber marking? Nowadays they mark the ones to be saved, I hear. You look very healthy and stand on the hill away from the main path. Why would they cut you down? And you survived the Alfrida storm at the beginning of January, unlike many of the spruces further down the slope. On 11 January,⁵⁴ after the storm, I wrote:

The first working week in Stockholm in the year 2019 and the first visits to Lill-Jansskogen provided quite a shock – the storm Alfrida really had left its marks; plenty of trees lying around uprooted, and many trees also cut into pieces because they had fallen across the path or on electric lines. /--/ Up on the hill, with the pine trees, the storm had not left that many marks.

After my last visit to Lill-Jansskogen, on 3 February,⁵⁵ I encountered another kind of surprise:

... when I wanted to add the images recorded in January, I realized the session recorded on 25th January, the one with heavy snowfall, was missing. The still-images captured from the videos were there in the folder where they should be, but the video clips were nowhere to be found. I looked in all likely and unlikely folders, ... the other external hard drives, no! I must have destroyed them by mistake, how irritatingly stupid of me! I tried to insert the still-images in the video, and of course that could be done ... (see Figure 1.2).

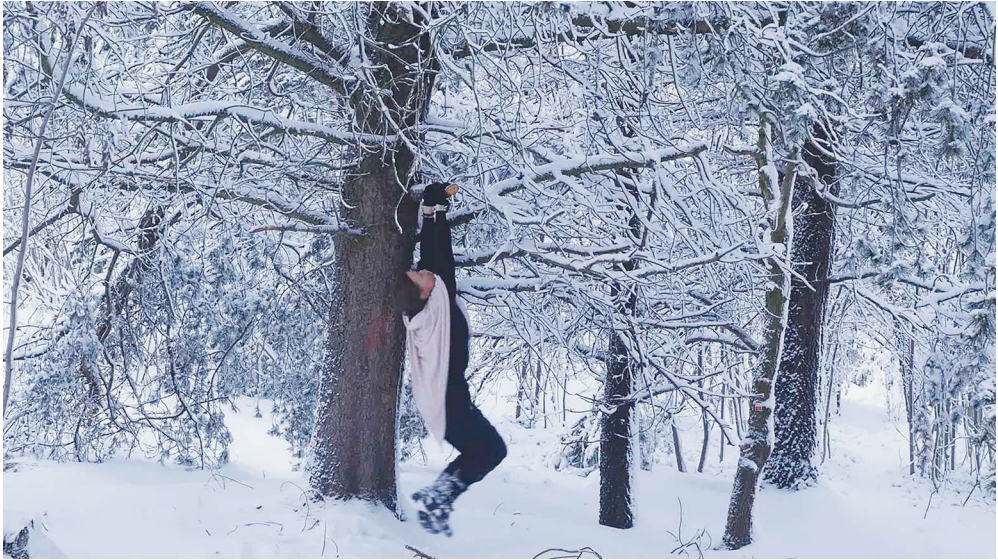


Figure 1.2 Hanging in a pine (video still). Photo by the author.

Was that how you felt when losing your branch? Or did it hurt more, like breaking a nail? Or even worse, like breaking a bone? In any case, you probably sensed it somehow ... and the truly pathetic, bizarre fallacy is imagining that you would not mind.

After writing this I returned to the woods to fetch a part of the branch that I assumed would still be lying on the ground after almost a year, to keep it as a token, a piece of evidence, a souvenir ...

Addressing the pine

Although I did not mention it in the text, I planned to carry the broken branch with me to perform together with it, as a substitute of sorts, and even packed it in plastic for the transport. When recording the text and adding it to the video, I abandoned the idea of performing with the branch, using it as a prop, as it were, which would have been a rather strange gesture, anyway.

After the presentation at the conference, there were indeed some interesting discussions about ethics, continuing, for example, Laura Cull's⁵⁶ discussion of interspecies performances with animals, as well as some conversations about the problem of representation. Representation is often in focus when talking about theatre (and politics), with the assumption that the ones represented are not present on stage themselves. When presenting the video essay to the audience, the pine tree was, of course, represented by video images. Despite creating representations in the form of video works, one of my main aims is to focus on the performative dimension and move beyond

representations, to attend to the tree, not a representation of it, and to the tree as that specific tree, not a representative of trees or plants in general.

The most important moment in this experiment of creating a video essay by combining the video work, notes written during the process, and some reflections afterwards into one whole was the moment of addressing the tree. There is a moment in the text where I turn my (and the viewers' or readers') attention to the pine and ask: 'Does this make sense to you pine?' Although completely fictional and written afterwards, this shift to direct address became almost like a turning point in my practice, the beginning of another way of performing with plants, which considers trees as subjects to be addressed rather than 'subjected objects' to be represented. This shift in attention, this subtle gesture, led me to experiment with writing letters to trees and to begin a completely new project called 'Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees.'⁵⁷ But that is already another story ...

Links to documentation of the project

Performing with Plants / Att uppträda med växter, project website
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/316550/316551> [accessed 30/9/2022]

Artistic Research in Stockholm / Konstnärlig forskning i Stockholm, blog
<https://artisticresearchinstockholm.wordpress.com> [accessed 30/9/2022]

Documentation of performances in Lill-Jansskogen
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/316550/410491> [accessed 30/9/2022]

Published project outcomes (a selection)
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/316550/709778> [accessed 30/9/2022]

Notes

- 1 Gibson & Brits 2018; Gibson 2018; Aloï 2018.
- 2 Hall 2011.
- 3 Marder 2013; Irigaray & Marder 2016; Coccia 2019.
- 4 Nealon 2016; Myers 2017.
- 5 Vieira, Gagliano & Ryan 2015; Kranz, Schwan & Wittrock 2016; Gagliano, Ryan & Vieira 2017.
- 6 Sandilands 2017.
- 7 Two recent issues of *Antennae* (52/2020 and 53/2021) are devoted to vegetation and art, and an issue of *Performance Philosophy Journal* (2021) is focused on plants.
- 8 Pollan 2002; Mancuso & Viola 2015; Wohlleben 2016; Chamovitz 2017; Gagliano 2018; Simard 2021.
- 9 The project was funded by the Committee for Artistic Research at the Swedish Research Council and hosted by the Stockholm University of the Arts.
- 10 A preparatory year in 2017 was funded by Kone Foundation and hosted by the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies at Helsinki University.
- 11 My visits to some Elms and an alder stump in Helsinki in 2017 have been discussed in Arlander 2019b, while visits to a beech (or rather a hornbeam) and a sycamore in Stockholm in 2017 are discussed in Arlander 2020b. The visits to a Tatarian maple in Stockholm in 2019 are discussed in Arlander 2021.
- 12 Braidotti 2013, 13–25.
- 13 Barad 2007, 33.
- 14 Barad 2007, 58.
- 15 Arlander 2014.

- 16 Or natural cultural assemblages, Haraway 2016, 38.
- 17 Documentation of performances for camera in Stockholm 2018, video stills (Arlander 2016) <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/316550/410491> (Arlander 2016).
- 18 See for example Natasha Myers (2017) ideas of the planthropocene.
- 19 There have been some attempts at discussing plants and performance within performance studies, see for example Nikolić and Radulovic (2018), Brisini (2019), and Arlander (2020a).
- 20 Alaimo 2010, 3.
- 21 Alaimo 2010, 2.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Alaimo 2010, 16.
- 24 Gibson 2018.
- 25 See Aloi 2011a, b, 2020 and 2018.
- 26 For example, Nikolić & Radulovic 2018; Brisini 2019.
- 27 Performance Philosophy, Plant Performance Vol 6, no 2, 2021.
- 28 Arlander 2020a, 124–126.
- 29 Holdrege 2013, 115.
- 30 Marder 2013, 169.
- 31 Arlander 2019a.
- 32 *Year of the Dog – Sitting in a Tree* (2007) <http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/year-of-the-dog-sitting-in-a-tree/>
- 33 *Year of the Dog in Kalvola – Calendar* (2007) <http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/year-of-the-dog-in-kalvola-calendar/>
- 34 *Year of the Snake – In the Swing* (2014) <https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/year-of-the-snake-in-the-swing/>
- 35 Arlander 2018a; 2018b.
- 36 Vitaglione 2016, 106–107.
- 37 “Between Institution and Intoxication: How does Performance Philosophy Intervene?” at University of Amsterdam 14–17.3.2019.
- 38 The making of and the differences between the videos *Hanging in a Pine* and *Swinging in a Pine* and their combinations are discussed in Arlander 2019c and Arlander 2020c.
- 39 The following text is a slightly rewritten version of the voice-over text for the video essay, *Hanging in a Pine – with text* <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=592026>
- 40 Alaimo 2010, 3.
- 41 Shock or surprise? <https://artisticresearchinstockholm.wordpress.com/2018/03/17/shock-or-surprise/>
- 42 Myers 2015.
- 43 Wohlleben 2016.
- 44 Becky Hilton pointed this out at the Stockholm Uniarts research week in January 2019.
- 45 An ordeal performance in miniature <https://artisticresearchinstockholm.wordpress.com/2018/06/16/an-ordeal-performance-in-miniature/>
- 46 Marder 2013, 51.
- 47 Haraway 2016, 4.
- 48 Marder 2017, 120.
- 49 Marder 2017, 122.
- 50 Marder 2018, n.p.n.
- 51 Marder 2018, n.p.n.
- 52 Return of the rainy days <https://artisticresearchinstockholm.wordpress.com/2018/12/03/return-of-the-rainy-days/>
- 53 Gray & Sheikh 2018.
- 54 After Alfrida <https://artisticresearchinstockholm.wordpress.com/2019/01/11/after-alfrida/>
- 55 Last Visits to Lill-Jansskogen <https://artisticresearchinstockholm>.

wordpress.com/2019/02/03/last-visits-to-lill-jansskogen/

56 Cull 2019.

57 Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees <https://meetingswithtrees.com>

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