



**Nordiques**

46 | 2024  
Seul(e) dans la nature ?

---

## Auto-sym-poiesis in Heini Aho's Installations: Re-thinking the Agency of Natural Forces

Murat M. Türkmen

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/nordiques/10077>

DOI: 10.4000/12llg

ISSN: 2777-8479

**Publisher:**

Association Norden, Bibliothèque de Caen la mer

**Electronic reference**

Murat M. Türkmen, "Auto-sym-poiesis in Heini Aho's Installations: Re-thinking the Agency of Natural Forces", *Nordiques* [Online], 46 | 2024, Online since 01 November 2024, connection on 04 November 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/nordiques/10077> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/12llg>

---

This text was automatically generated on November 4, 2024.

The text and other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

---

# Auto-sym-poiesis in Heini Aho's Installations: Re-thinking the Agency of Natural Forces

Murat M. Türkmen

---

*I thank my supervisors Katve-Kaisa Kontturi and Milla Tiainen for their insightful comments that sophisticated this article, many thanks to the editorial team of Nordiques and the anonymous peer-reviewers for their helpful suggestions. I thank Federica Stevanin and my colleagues Suvi Vepsä, Jenni Vauhkonen, Santeri Vuori, Inkeri Suutari, and Mari Vento for their comments. I also thank Dani Progno for translating the abstract from English to French, and Laurence Rogations for proofreading. I am grateful to the artist Heini Aho for her generous and attentive collaboration. This research has received funding from the Jenni and Antti Wihuri Foundation.*

- This article engages with two site-specific, durational installations by Finland-based artist Heini Aho (born 1979) that co-emerge with natural forces, such as sea, wind, sun, and rain. The first installation, *A Poem by a Plumber* (2021), takes place in Tammissaari, Finland, on an abandoned pier where the body of seawater connects with the land: the work emerges on and through a meeting point, the pier, to set a new platform for these natural forces. The second installation, *Thirsty Giant* (2017), is located on the shore of a lake where water and land meet in Nastola, Finland (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The works may recall open-air “laboratories” where a set of exploratory procedures and practices take place. Indeed, the artist purposely installed the works in “in-between” spaces, one on a pier, and the other on a lakeshore, thereby highlighting their experimental features.<sup>2</sup> In my view, during the exhibition processes, constant exchanges emerged between the solid, rather immobile installation materials of copper and wood, and the visible moving agents, such as water and wind, as a way to explore the potentiality of novel, unfixed, and co-emerging creative relationalities within nature. Thus, the installations offered imaginative artistic laboratories to initiate reflective inquiries into the agency of nature and natural forces.

Fig. 1: Heini Aho, *A Poem by a Plumber*, 2021 (above); Heini Aho, *Thirst Giant*, 2017 (below)



© Heini Aho and Ahmed Alalousi.

- 2 Such imaginative laboratories can become constructive mediums for explorations that can challenge the end-of-the-world approaches to the human-induced ecological crisis, as this crisis has led some to fall into pessimism or despair – as if there is no hope anymore.<sup>3</sup> In the catastrophic end stories, natural forces are often considered “evil” actors, as in the cases of floods, hurricanes, heat waves, and so on. Scholars, for example, anthropologist Anna Tsing and media philosopher Joanna Zylińska, argue that these kinds of discouraging approaches only result in demotivating people to act for change. Instead, these scholars suggest the advocacy of interconnected new beginnings and the coexistence of human and nonhuman beings.<sup>4</sup> The idea of coexistence broadly refers to acknowledging the contribution of all intrinsic agents of nature to the environment.<sup>5</sup>
- 3 Concerning coexistence, land art (or earth art and earthworks) has investigated the relation between the Earth and its inhabitants – among other things – from the 1960s onward.<sup>6</sup> Since its inception, land art has predominantly taken place outside the museum and gallery premises. At these outdoor sites, many elements that do not usually inhabit conventional spaces for making art became involved in the creative processes.<sup>7</sup> For example, Robert Smithson (1938-1973), one of the pioneers of land art, explains his approach to co-creation as follows: “You could take a beetle, for example, and clear some sand and let it walk over that and then you would be surprised to see the furrow it leaves. ...these tracks relate, I think, somehow to the way the artist thinks – somewhat like a dog scanning over a site.”<sup>8</sup> This quote importantly suggests that acknowledging the coexistence of agencies in creative processes was already central to the early land art of the 1960s and ’70s.

- 4 In contemporary land art, the emphasis on coexistence has become even stronger in parallel to raising awareness of the human impact on the environment. Contemporary artists have increasingly addressed the topic in multiple ways, for instance, by contesting the so-called nature-culture division and the human primacy over other beings.<sup>9</sup> An example of this is the landscape installation *Future Island* (2017–2023) in Stockholm, Sweden, created by Eva Pfannes, Sylvain Hartenberg, and Marjetica Potrč.<sup>10</sup> The work is anticipated to endure over the next hundred years while exploring long-term reciprocal relations between environmental agents, such as rocks and plants, humans, and animals. Another example that challenges the nature-culture division and the Western idea of Nature is Raimo Saarinen's *Floating Island* (2019–2022), which is an artificial, yet natural-looking rocky island, where pine trees and plants such as mountain hemlock and juniper still grow.<sup>11</sup> The artist Anna Widén's *Materialisering* (2011) criticizes the made-up borders and dichotomies between the human and “more-than-human” as it resembles a living organism crossing a fence.<sup>12</sup> As they emerge through the participation of many agencies, these works (and many others) call us to consider land art and site-specific installation as creations of both the human (artist) and “more-than-human” beings. In studies of art, the more-than-human often refers to recognizing the contribution of all agencies, for example, the artist, animals, and the involved substances and material elements, which all partake in the production and exhibition processes of art.<sup>13</sup>
- 5 In this article, I focus on natural forces or weather agencies in the context of the more-than-human coexistence of contemporary art. This subject of study may have remained undeveloped up until recent years because the natural forces, as art historian Hanna Johansson points out, are often overlooked in the humanities and are merely represented as passive subjects in the history of art.<sup>14</sup> Researchers, in various fields related to the arts, have recently begun to embrace the natural forces as some of the key actors in further understanding and developing more-than-human forms of coexistence. For example, in their co-written article, “Weathering”, Astrida Neimanis and Rachel L. Walker argue that thinking with weather aims to bring “humans into relation with more-than-human weather”.<sup>15</sup> Kristi McKim, in her study *Cinema as Weather*, investigates weather-related phenomena within and beyond the studied movies from the standpoint of coexistence.<sup>16</sup> In their co-edited book *Words of Weather: A Glossary*, media theorist Jussi Parikka and art curator Daphne Dragona map terms for natural agencies in the context of political ecology.<sup>17</sup> Sasha Engelman, in her book *Sensing Art in the Atmosphere*, explores aerial elements in the works of artist Tomás Saraceno.<sup>18</sup> The chief aim of these studies is to understand the ways in which weather agencies can be grasped from a non-anthropocentric point of view. As such they offer rich and novel engagements with natural forces. Nevertheless, in the study of contemporary art, more work needs to be conducted to capture the complexity of the creative capacities of natural forces. Concentrating on Heini Aho's installations, I explore how natural forces, such as sun, wind, and rain, are entangled with human existence in multiple ways and how these natural agencies actually are creative forces in the context of such coexistence.
- 6 In this article, concerning the discussion outlined above, I aim to elaborate on the notions of *autopoiesis* (self-creating) and *sympoiesis* (creating-with) to study the creative capacities of natural forces in the context of Aho's artworks. Posthumanist thinker Donna Haraway, an advocate of the term *sympoiesis*, argues that *autopoiesis* and

*sympoiesis* creatively incorporate a system and function as “foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of systemic complexity”.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, I understand these two prefixes “auto” (self) and “sym” (with) as two vital components of poiesis (creation). They operate as two equally important cores of creative activity, and as such neither of them can prevail over the other. To express this convergence between the notions, or creative actions, I will use the combined term “auto-sym-poiesis” in this article. Relatedly, I engage with the artist Brancha Ettinger’s term *co-poiesis* which refers to the intersubjective feature of artmaking, and performance scholar Erica Fischer-Lichte’s view on *the autopoietic feedback loop* meaning that a performance emerges through the involved (human) participants.<sup>20</sup> While doing so, I will expand on art historian Katve-Kaisa Kontturi’s take on the *autonomy of process* which suggests that artmaking always emerges in and through a web of interactions with an emphasis on more-than-human agencies, and is thus never exclusively mastered by the human subject.<sup>21</sup> Through the process-orientated auto-sym-poietic point of view, I will also revisit and challenge the conventional idea of the autonomy of art, namely, that addressing the topic of autonomy would automatically mean a disinterested attitude, art cut from socio-political issues.<sup>22</sup> In the course of this article, I will elaborate on these notions by focusing on Aho’s site-specific installations which inspired the discussion at hand.

- 7 In the first section, my inquiry focuses on *A Poem by a Plumber* and its “participatory” agents e.g., wind, seawater, sun, and chemicals in terms of their co-creative potentialities. The second section engages with *Thirsty Giant* and explores how the natural forces, specifically rain, sun, and wind, make tangible the entanglements of nature and the human within this installation. The analyzed material consists of photographs and video documentation of the installation, and a commentary by an audience member that I collected in Tammisaari, Finland, as well as three interviews with the artist conducted in Turku, Finland, between November 2020 and June 2023.<sup>23</sup> While engaging with *A Poem by a Plumber* I will also reflect on my own embodied experience of the work, which I had the opportunity to encounter on site. In the analysis of *Thirsty Giant*, I will mainly concentrate on the photographic material and the interview with the artist.<sup>24</sup>

## Auto-sym-poiesis: A Sculptural Performance

- 8 On 3<sup>th</sup> September 2021, Heini Aho invited me to embark on a field trip to Tammisaari, Finland, where her installation *A Poem by a Plumber* took place between 5<sup>th</sup> June and 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Aho’s work was part of the *Oasis* exhibition organized by the Pro Artibus, and one of the aims of this exhibition was to draw attention to the environmental agencies, such as the Baltic Sea, coastal plants, and local gardens with which the residents of this town constantly interact. As Tammisaari is a peninsula and part of the Finnish Archipelago, the agencies of wind, rain, sun, and sea play an important role in the everyday life of the inhabitants. Likewise, the active agents of *A Poem by a Plumber* are, as we shall see, the wind, rain, sun, and the water of the Baltic Sea. They are either direct contributors to the installation or initiators of interaction with other components.

Fig 2: Heini Aho, *A Poem by a Plumber*, water pump, iron, copper, brass, porcelain, enameled containers, hand towel, textile, salt, and seawater, 2021, Tammisaari, Finland.



© Heini Aho and the photographer Ahmed Alalouisi.

- 9 The artist had chosen an urban pier on the seashore for the installation space to enable the natural agencies to shape the work (Fig. 2). The wooden, lightweight, unroofed, open pier serves as a kind of bridge that connects the land with the sea, acting as a meeting point for both human and more-than-human “passengers”. In this installation, the pier turned into a locus for the gathering of the natural forces, and it was on the pier that their co-creative capacities became noticeable. The artist explains this as follows:

A central motivation for me was to build something human-made and leave the work open to nature’s impact. The pier in Tammisaari was a perfect spot for this [purpose] because it was in-between [in multiple ways]: for example, it was a pier, but it was not in use; it was very simple, minimalistic in style: it seemed to me as if a remnant from the past, and my work, on the contrary, gives the impression that it is slightly “surreal”, as if it belongs to the future. I thought that the surroundings and my work can produce something new via this contrast.<sup>25</sup>

- 10 This in-between state of emergence, described by the artist, unfolded through this experimental contrast and also located the work in constant flux. To highlight such flux in installation art, Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), one of the pioneers of the field, uses the term “environment” to include all the active and passive elements taking (spontaneously) part in an installation.<sup>26</sup> In my reading, *A Poem by a Plumber* incorporates and creates such an environment within which a durational poem emerges. To explore this further, let us look at this “environment” more closely. First of all, the installation is located at the edge of an approximately forty-meter-long pier, very close to the water. The visitors reach the work by walking along the pier, where they are allowed to experience the installation from a distance for safety reasons. When looking at the installation site from the angle of the visitors: four, up to two meters high, tower-like constructions made of iron and resembling fountains can be seen. The first fountain, the farthest from the visitor’s point of view, has a ceramic sink on its top

(Fig. 2 and 3a). A spiral-shaped pipe goes through the tower by circling it, and the sink on the top is filled with seawater. When the top sink becomes full, seawater spills over to a lower-level, metallic sink and then falls on a plate at the bottom of this fountain. In this way, seawater makes two different types of splashing sounds according to the surface that it falls on. The water itself is circulated by a water pump located under the pier.

Fig. 3: Details of the installation. 3a the farthest fountain (on the right), 3b the top of the second fountain (on the left above), 3c the third fountain (on the left below).



© Heini Aho

- 11 Similarly, the second fountain has a simple bucket on the highest level filled with seawater. The bucket and the pipe that carry water to the bucket have an opening that squirts seawater to the surface (Fig. 2 and 3b). In contrast to the first fountain, the second one rarely makes splashing sounds but rather generates soft, water-blowing sounds. These two openings function here as a fountain sprinkler that sprays the water smoothly, thus creating humidification. The third fountain contains small geometric and found objects through which seawater is poured down (Fig. 2 and 3c). At the top, a pipe pours the water into a small bucket, and then the water flows to a corner pipe. The water may go through this corner pipe, or it may just splash over it. The scale of wind defines how the water will flow and what kind of sound it will make. Before the water reaches the surface, it flows through two different plates that each have a geometric shape. One has a round metal form, while the other has a pyramid-shaped object in it. At the bottom of this specific fountain, a strainer echoes the flowing and splashing water droplets.
- 12 Lastly, on the right side of the visitors' point of view, a white shower tray is positioned on a half-meter-high iron platform (Fig. 2 and 4b). A rolled copper hose is placed under

this platform. It passes through the white tray and extends over this tray by making an elegant curve. At the edge of the hose, a shower head sprays water toward the sea. The scale and direction of the wind affect which direction the water goes. Next to this platform, a flat (brass) copper panel, which is composed of thirty-five square platters, is placed on the ground (Fig. 2 and 4a). On the surface of the copper, a patina gradually emerges as the copper is exposed to salty seawater and rain. The shiny orange-like or reddish color of the copper consequently turns into different tones of orange and green. A bucket is situated on this panel, and a towel leans from the bucket against the brass panel. The embroidery on the towel presents a color palette of orange, blue, and green that refers to the oxidation process of the copper panel that results from the process just described.

Fig. 4: Details from the installation: 4a a copper panel (on the left), 4b the fourth fountain (on the right).



© Heini Aho

- 13 A question may now arise: what is happening here, in the flux of participation of multiple agencies?<sup>27</sup> To address this question I would like to quote Kaprow's understanding of the term happening:

Happenings are events that, put simply, happen. [...] They exist for a single performance, or only a few, and are gone forever as new ones take their place. [...] The most intense and essential Happenings have been spawned in [...] basements, natural surroundings, and the streets where very small audiences are commingled in some way with the event, flowing in and among its parts.<sup>28</sup>

- 14 In light of this quote, I suggest that *A Poem by a Plumber* creates a performative event in which each noticed detail, moment, and interaction is crucial because the work emerges with the creative participation of multiple agencies. Noticing the minor details can help to grasp this poetic event and thus the creative capacities of the involved natural forces and agencies.

- 15 To highlight the poetic capacities of the natural forces, Heini Aho just sets the “stage” where these forces can make things happen, interact with the work, and co-create a durational poem. In a similar vein, Ilya Kabakov (1933-2023), one of the pioneers of installation art, argues that an installation artist works as a “director” of a well-structured theatrical performance, and all the elements, such as the audience, light, sound, and objects, contribute to shaping the space of the installation.<sup>29</sup> Both Kaprow’s and Kabakov’s insights are cornerstones in the development of installation art in multiple ways, for example, by transforming the position of the artist and embracing the participation of the audiences and the involved materials.<sup>30</sup> However, they still mostly emphasize the artists and audiences in the sense of how human agency affects and is affected by a work of art. In *A Poem by a Plumber*, the emphasis shifts towards more-than-human agencies, more specifically towards the natural forces. The artist limits her agency as a co-creator, or “co-director” in Kabakov’s analogy, not solely as a creator or director. This limitation of the artistic agency may enable the installation to become more than a *happening* because the artist has almost no control over the installation site. One might even claim that the installation operates at the fringe of the event: nothing is fully fixed but rather a performative event emerges with the participation of human and more-than-human agencies, as Aho points out:

To me, this work is a performing sculpture together with natural elements. For example, what roles does the wind play in this work? The wind can function as an interrupter or enabler as it effects the way the water goes. Nothing is fully certain. The spot is open for many possibilities. In comparison to the capacity of wind, the work is not firm enough. So, the natural elements can play and influence the work [in their own weathering ways].<sup>31</sup>

- 16 Before further analyzing the installation, I would like to consider the artist’s statement about the installation together with the notions of *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis*. The biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela propose the theory of autopoiesis, which broadly refers to how a system or the minimal organization of life, such as a cell, can reproduce itself without receiving external support.<sup>32</sup> Later, the chemist James Lovelock and biologist Lynn Margulis have expanded Maturana’s and Varela’s understanding of *autopoiesis* by focusing on a simple unit within its environment.<sup>33</sup> They suggest that a unit exists and flourishes in an emergent, complex, and contingent system. In this way, Lovelock and Margulis offer a (more) comprehensive and inclusive notion of *autopoiesis* that stresses coexistence.<sup>34</sup> In response to *autopoiesis*, Donna Haraway has proposed the term *sympoiesis* to put even more emphasis on relationality and the environment in which a single unit is embedded.<sup>35</sup> For Haraway, *sympoiesis* means “making-with” and “is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems”.<sup>36</sup> In Haraway’s thinking, all beings are equally dependent on each other as none of them preexist the relations in which they are incorporated. Rather, they emerge and flourish through this kind of relationality.<sup>37</sup>
- 17 The two notions, *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis*, might, at first sight, seem to confront each other. However, I would claim, following some discussions on these respective notions, that they rather co-evolve and thus are gradually closer to one another than often thought.<sup>38</sup> For example, Haraway explains that “as long as autopoiesis does not [only] mean self-sufficient ‘self making,’ autopoiesis and sympoiesis, foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of systemic complexity, are in generative friction, or generative enfolding, rather than the opposition”.<sup>39</sup> To exemplify this “generative enfolding” between *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis* in the context of contemporary art, she

reflects on artist Christine Wertheim and mathematician Margaret Wertheim's work *The Crochet Coral Reef* (2007-ongoing), —an ever-evolving sculpture which highlights the reefs' manner of the relationality.<sup>40</sup> In this case example, Haraway characterizes relationality and entanglement between the human and more-than-human beings as an “open-ended and exploratory process”.<sup>41</sup>

- 18 In the field of art theory, conceptualizations parallel to *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis* have been developed to broaden the understanding of agencies involved in artmaking. These include terms such as *co-poiesis* by Bracha Ettinger and *autopoiesis loop* by Erica Fischer-Lichte.<sup>42</sup> Ettinger's *co-poiesis* designates a creation process as “transsubjectivity” and “intersubjectivity” to include various impacts that affect an artistic creation process.<sup>43</sup> The term, then, suggests that artistic agency is not isolated from other human subjects, such as partners and random or everyday encounters of the artist. In a similar vein, Fischer-Lichte's *autopoiesis loop* pinpoints “the mutual interaction between actors and spectators” in artistic performances, expanding the agency of artmaking so that it comprises both artists and spectators, as well as the space and time that they co-shape.<sup>44</sup> This means, for example, that the audience inevitably participates in the emergence of a performance just by being present in the same environment. Thus, both *co-poiesis* and *autopoiesis loop* take into account other human subjects in the art-making process, be it a performance or a sculpture, and in this way contest the idea of complete supremacy of the artist, or isolated artistic agency.
- 19 In the more recent literature on contemporary art, autopoietic and sympoietic approaches have come to encompass more-than-human agencies. For example, by referring to the philosophers Alfred N. Whitehead and Brian Massumi, artist and philosopher Erin Manning argues that creation “is not a human-driven cosmology”.<sup>45</sup> Manning adds that “the field of a nature [where a work of art emerges] is not reducible to me, to my agency, to my volition [as an artist or spectator]. It is *movement*. What moves experience is not a preexisting [human] subject”.<sup>46</sup> This view delineates the artistic agency as one of the partakers in the emergence of artwork and accordingly emphasizes the more-than-human partakers in the movement of artmaking. Instead of focusing merely on the artistic agency, Manning embraces artworks within the movement. This maneuver, I suggest, enables one to notice the complex and nuanced expressions of more-than-human agencies in the artworks.
- 20 Following a similar line of thinking, art historian Katve-Kaisa Kontturi offers a detailed account of how more-than-human agencies affect, enable, and sometimes interfere with the artmaking process, sometimes pursuing the intention of the artist and sometimes not.<sup>47</sup> Kontturi's understanding of more-than-human agencies in artmaking ranges from particles of matter to color pigments, and she also elaborates on the ways these agencies contribute to the emergence of artwork in and through certain space and time, for example, in the artist's studio or art gallery.<sup>48</sup> Together, Kontturi and sound and performance scholar Milla Tiainen propose a further theoretical mapping of how “the material processes of more-than-human environs or ecosystems” are creatively interwoven in contemporary artmaking.<sup>49</sup> Put together, these suggestions show that the complexities of the emergence of artwork cannot be grasped by focusing only on artistic or more-than-human agencies but rather by embracing their interwoven structures with the given physical environment and temporality.
- 21 These approaches related to autopoietic and sympoietic processes provide a way to tackle polarized and dichotomized understandings of human and more-than-human

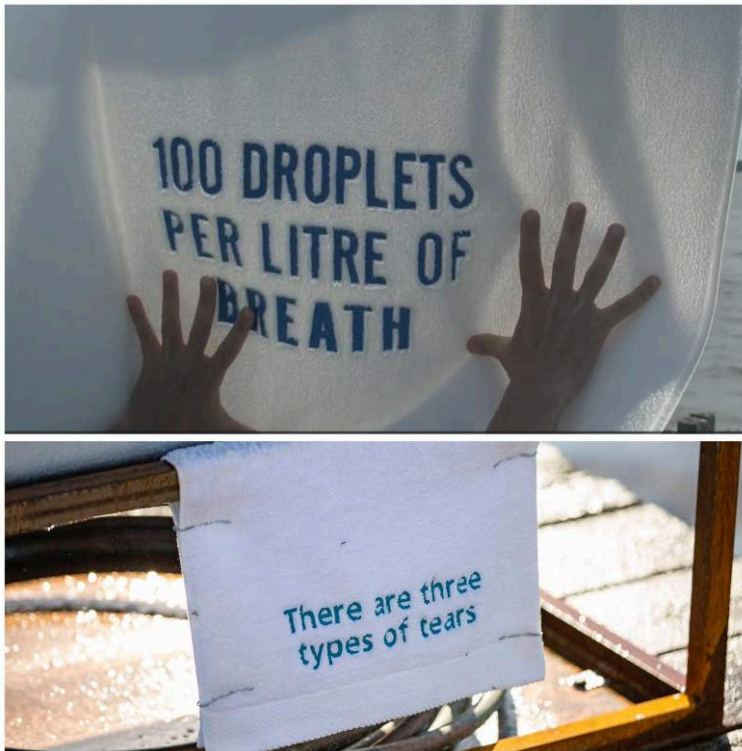
environments in the context of art. My aim here is to emphasize the imbrication of these notions (*autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis*) further by bringing two crucial prefixes, i.e., *auto* and *sym*, side by side and linking them to *poiesis* as in auto-sym-poiesis. I propose that thinking through auto-sym-poiesis can help to conceive how every single unit of nature is enveloped by its surroundings, and in return, how every unit operates in its singularity within the same surroundings. This entails that all the parties who take part in a relation cannot, ontologically speaking, precede that relation but also cannot be reduced to each other.

- 22 In the same manner, site-specific installation or land art is enveloped by the surrounding environment. Accordingly, in the case of *A Poem by a Plumber*, the more-than-human agencies such as the weather take part in the unfolding process of the installation. In other words, the entanglements between the installation and the surrounding environment unfold the work in an auto-sym-poetic way as the pieces of the installation affect the environment and are affected by the very same environment. In this article, I propose that the notion of auto-sym-poiesis is specifically suitable to engage with Aho's site-specific installations that focus on the complex entanglements of natural forces and the coexistence of more-than-human agencies of nature.<sup>50</sup> However, it is possible that the notion of auto-sym-poiesis, can also further facilitate the exploration of such creative entanglements in and through installations that operate in undetermined, open-ended ways, or to recall Haraway's words, in an "exploratory process."<sup>51</sup> Next, I focus on how Aho's installations generate auto-sym-poietic exploratory processes by addressing the creative potentialities of natural forces.

## A Playground for Wind, Saltwater, Sun, and Rain

- 23 When I visited *A Poem by a Plumber* together with Heini Aho, the summer was already turning to autumn (3 September 2021). The seasonal transition could be sensed in the chilly air although it was a partly cloudy and mostly bright day in Tammisaari. The wind was blowing a little stronger than in the summer, and the seawater was swashing against the wooden pillars of the pier. We arrived at the installation site by walking along the pier. I noticed that the swashing sounds of the waves were mixing with the splashing sounds of water from the fountains of the installation. The wind was sprinkling seawater almost all over the site, and water droplets were landing also on my body and my face. While standing before the installation site sprinkled with seawater, I noticed a white towel hanging on a bar and flapping in the wind. A note made with blue thread was embroidered on this towel: "100 Droplets Per Liter of Breath" (Fig. 5). This note refers to human breath that contains approximately one hundred water droplets per exhale.<sup>52</sup> These droplets often suspend in the air for a while as they are so light – one droplet weighs around one hundred micrometers.<sup>53</sup> The note made me realize that while I was experiencing the installation, around a hundred droplets from each of my exhalations were mixing with the work and its environment. In return, I inhaled many droplets from the air and thus felt that I, the artist, the installation, and the enveloping environment, all were taking part in this vital circulation through the agency of water.<sup>54</sup>

Fig. 5: Details from *A Poem by a Plumber*.



© Heini Aho and Ahmed Alalousi.

- 24 While I was mesmerized by the splashing sounds and flying water droplets in the air and on my face, my attention was caught by another note sewn with blue string on a second towel: “There are three types of tears” (Fig. 5). This note refers to the three different types of tears that are called basal, reflex, and emotional, and each is made up of different substances, such as electrolytes, proteins, lipids, and mucins.<sup>55</sup> All land mammals have these transparent liquids in the eyes to maintain health through basal tears, to keep clean from irritants by reflex tears, as well as to release stress and calm the body down through emotional tears.<sup>56</sup> This reference brought to my mind how numerous living beings share similar expressions and coping mechanisms, including sentimental and emotional, via these three types of tears. Saltwater connects the body of the sea and the bodies of living beings as well as non-living forms as saltwater moves through those bodies and affects, nourishes, and dissolves them. In other words, water keeps the bodies in a circular connection.
- 25 In the installation, the fountains circulate salty seawater to refer to the described three types of tears. The farthest fountain from the visitor’s point of view runs smooth washing movements that are similar to basal tears (Fig. 3a). The two higher fountains squirt saltwater from two openings and also flow the water as leaking and washing the surfaces that give the impression of reflex tears (Fig. 3b and 3c). The fountain, close to the viewer’s point of view, sprays and sprinkles more water into the sea by means of a showerhead that relates to emotional tears as in the case of physical pain, suffering, mourning as well as feeling pleasure and happiness (Fig. 4b). As such, the installation generates a teary, weepy, and watery performance to show that water interconnects many agencies in its multiple forms, for example, saliva, teardrops, seawater, and rain.

26 In this watery, performative installation, the wind plays a particularly significant role as it determines in which direction aerosols will flow, where waterdrops will fall, and thus what kinds of soundscapes will also emerge in the site. For example, when the wind blows at different speeds, the aerosols may flow further away or may stay on the site; the waterdrops may produce easing and calming sounds or elicit unrelaxing and worrying feelings. It all depends on the agency of the wind. While I was experiencing the installation, there were some instances when the wind blew smoothly, and the work generated a soothing soundscape. There were also some moments when the wind breezed a bit more roughly, and the work consequently created a turbulent, cataclysmic, and stressful atmosphere. The sounds of the flapping and fluttering towel accompanied these opposing soundscapes by resonating sometimes faintly sometimes loudly. The sound of the wind itself was also a direct contributor to the soundscape: sometimes slightly howling, gusting, and flurrying, while at other moments breezing gently and softly. The intensity, type, and speed of the agency of the wind were a decisive element in the emerging soundscape of the installation. In some moments, the wind also affected how and when the installation site could be experienced. For example, a visitor, Aino Järvinen, explained their experience of the installation as follows:

When I came to see the installation for the first time, this “crazy” work did not allow me to visit because the wind was so strong, and water was coming toward me from the shower head. I thought that maybe this was not the right moment. Later, I went there again and this second time I managed to experience the work.<sup>57</sup>

27 Furthermore, the wind functions to develop a patina on the surface of a flat copper panel composed of thirty-five square platters. If the wind blows strongly enough, the sprinkling of seawater from the showerhead can fall on the copper panel. This encounter of water and metal initiates a chemical reaction, oxidation, and a patina starts to develop: the shiny orange color of the copper gradually turns into multiple shades of brown and green. The sun and rain also have a say in this emerging patina as they partake in this chemical reaction on the copper panel. The color transition is embroidered on the towel next to this patina as a visual representation of time and the interaction of multiple agents. This durational installation presents varied temporal engagements by multiple more-than-human participants. For example, while the emerging patina presents one aspect of the temporality of this installation, my witnessing of the process involved another aspect of the temporality of this emergent artwork, as did the artist's presence on the installation site, too.

28 I would claim that the notion of auto-sym-poiesis helps to grasp the complexity of this emerging, durational, site-specific installation. The natural forces, such as salt water, wind, rain, and the sun, became generative forces and participated as co-creators in this performative installation. They unfolded the site in an entangled manner but also through their respective unique weathering features. The work evolved in an unpredictable and contingent way as none of the elements were fully fixed and predetermined. As such, the forces literally ran the installation site: they were the performers in making tangible their very own existence. I witnessed how they cooperated in forming and transforming the site during the process, for example, in the case of developing the patina. Thus, Aho's installation, *A Poem by a Plumber*, operated in an auto-sym-poetic manner by engendering generative interactions with the participation of natural forces and the surrounding environment.

- 29 Through its entangled formation, I propose that auto-sym-poiesis offers a new, wider perspective on the autonomy of art compared to traditional understandings of this idea. Auto-sym-poiesis does not separate art from its social-material emergence but rather acknowledges that a work of art emerges through the participation of both human and more-than-human agencies. The emerging artwork inevitably includes the expressions, meanings, and material qualities of the participating agencies. Thus, the emergent and complex nature of artworks generates novel experiences that can become a political catalyst in the socio-political sphere toward change. In the case of *A Poem by a Plumber*, the work sets a stage where the participating more-than-human agencies, e.g., wind and saltwater, perform and transform the work and make themselves felt in their own manner. In this way, the installation invites us to revise how we understand these natural forces. For instance, I encountered these atmospheric forces in their creative, world-making capacity in *A Poem by a Plumber*, hence embracing them as active agents. I would suggest that this transformative gesture that the work advocates have political implications. This is because the installation may reconfigure our perception toward noticing the reciprocity and entanglement between human and more-than-human agencies. Thus, instead of the catastrophic approaches, *A Poem by a Plumber* advocates new, emergent, and co-living engagements.

## Coexistence between Humans and the Earth's Cycles

Fig. 6: Heini Aho, *Thirsty Giant*, wooden piles, clay pots, carbonized sculptural elements, rain, wind, 2017, Nastola, Finland.



© Heini Aho.

- 30 Heini Aho's *Thirsty Giant* was exhibited on the shore of a lake called "Pikku-Kukkanen" (Small Flower) in Nastola, Finland between 16<sup>th</sup> June and 13<sup>th</sup> August 2017, along a local

sculpture path called “Häh”.<sup>58</sup> *Thirsty Giant* also offered a durational, open-air imaginative laboratory to explore how relationships emerge with the environment and the participating natural forces on this specific site (Fig. 6). The used materials consist of unglazed clay pots in various sizes, forms, and colors; piles of wood gathered by the artist from the surrounding environment; a chunk of a tree branch; and three burned or carbonized pieces of wood in the forms of a human hand and a bird. In addition, several participating natural forces, such as rain, wind, sun, and growing plants, particularly grass, co-facilitated the emerging installation site. Aho explains:

I explored the great [natural] forces in this work, for example, I asked how rain can affect the work. I chose unglazed pots as they can preserve water. The pots stay between the sky and the Earth. They captured and sculpted the movement of water: from the sky to the Earth and backward. Unglazed pots are porous, so evaporation is faster than with glazed pots. However, the movement of water became slow through evaporation and yet still palpable.<sup>59</sup>

31 To set up this exploratory site of *Thirsty Giant*, the artist piled up nine sculptural, tower-like constructions, which were approximately one meter high, and delicately balanced in a constant danger of falling down. The tower constructions had up to four elements each, laid upon one another vertically, often wooden blocks of different sizes and shapes. The towers did not rise directly from the ground but mostly stood on flat wooden rectangular pedestals. Every tower had multiple wooden elements loosely stacked on one another in a fragile balance. The lidless ceramic vases were positioned on some of the blocks, and this increased the fragility of the setup. Thereby, the balance of the fragile towers and the installation as such remained, as the artist notes, “at the mercy of nature and the natural forces”.<sup>60</sup>

32 When the *Thirsty Giant* was first installed, the unglazed pots were filled with a certain amount of water to ensure the balance of the towers (Fig. 6). Then rain and sun appeared and became co-creative agents of the artwork either by keeping the balance of the installation as it is or by dissolving the equilibrium. For example, clay pots could get filled with too much rainwater, and consequently, the fragile wooden sculptural forms would fall down. In case of high temperatures, the water could evaporate from the clay pots, and again the tower would lose its balance, causing the sensitive composition to collapse. In other words, the balance of the entire composition depended on rain and the sun’s participation in the installation. Aho elaborates on her exploration regarding balance in the following way:

Balance was a prominent topic in this work. I have been exploring balance for a long time, and I think it is experienced as something simple in everyday life. Balance is everywhere and seems so obvious, yet it is not easy to grasp it in every case. To me, it is not a frozen or rigid phenomenon or condition. Rather, balance is an element and moment within the movement. It happens while one walks and [or the Earth] moves.<sup>61</sup>

33 To make this balance a felt experience, Aho set up and activated two opposite natural balancing processes: evaporation and saturation of water. Rain and the sun played crucial roles in *Thirsty Giant* as did the human-made construction of *A Poem by a Plumber*. The amount of water inside the unglazed pots was increasing and decreasing according to the participation of rain and the sun. Therefore, these natural forces provided a certain level of mobility to the installation while keeping it in balance or imbalance. I suggest that the installation can be associated with a natural phenomenon called “evaporation equilibrium” which is central to the vaporization and saturation cycles of water on the Earth.<sup>62</sup> A well-balanced evaporation equilibrium can serve to

keep, for example, the soil from turning into either severe drought or extreme moisture.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, as all the Earth's cycle systems are dynamically connected, the condition of one cycle inevitably affects the others, such as water and carbon cycles.<sup>64</sup> In the future, due to the human-caused imbalance in the Earth's cycles, more floods, droughts, and hurricanes will take place globally.<sup>65</sup>

- 34 Aho's installation can be understood as presenting the broken balance between humans and nature in general, and it draws attention to the damaged water equilibrium in particular.<sup>66</sup> This reference becomes even more apparent via the burned, charred wooden pieces in the form of human hands that are part of the multiple towers (Fig. 7). For example, in one tower, a carbonized hand is installed to prevent rainwater from entering the pot. In another tower, a burned hand holds a piece of rope tied to a vase and gives the impression of pulling this rope. In my interpretation, these hands represent the elements of imbalance: human impact on the environment. The charred hands specifically address how the increased carbon dioxide level interrupts the global water cycle. The installation tackles human impact on the environment in two ways: first, *Thirsty Giant* visually presents the impact through the sculptural elements, i.e., the carbonized human hands, and second, it makes tangible how the natural forces affect the installation even destructive way; for example, heavy rain could lead to complete collapse of the constructions.

Fig. 7: Details from *Thirsty Giant*, 2017.



© Heini Aho.

- 35 In addition to rain and the sun, the agency of wind was an active force in the installation too, mostly in a destructive manner. As *Thirsty Giant* endeavors to make notions of balance and imbalance a felt experience, it involves tension: the installation is constructed on a delicate balance with unsteady fragile materials, and yet it remains

at the mercy of formidable natural forces. In this sense, a strong wind could easily break the towers during the exhibition process. The work moves and unfolds through this tension, as Aho aims to make tangible the sensitive balance on Earth.<sup>67</sup>

- 36 I argue that the concept of auto-sym-poiesis can help to grasp how Aho's work addresses the human-induced imbalance by way of its unfolding process. As formulated above, auto-sym-poiesis means that none of the involved agencies exist alone and no agency can be reduced to the others. (see the section: Auto/sym-poiesis: A Sculptural Performance). In this installation, *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis* again function as two imbricated dimensions. Each natural force affects the installation site according to its own specific agential features. For example, wind moves the air, and rain carries water droplets. This enables the installation to unfold in an autopoietic manner: the site evolves in an uncontrolled, unfixed, and thus distinctive way. However, the site unfolds in an autopoietic manner because of *sympoiesis*: the multiple natural forces co-creating the work. For example, during the installation process, the water in the pots evaporated with the participation of the sun, while the participation of the rain refilled the pots. Some towers got broken by the wind, and some pots fell to the ground. In other words, the natural agencies mobilized the installation by participating in it in their own weathering ways. These forces operated in the auto-sym-poetic way in *Thirsty Giant*, and their operation processes recalled the weathering dynamics of Earth in general.

Fig. 8: Heini Aho, *Thirsty Giant*. Toward the end of the exhibition.



© Heini Aho.

- 37 When the installation was about to be dismantled after being exposed to or rather co-created with the natural forces for almost two months, six out of its nine towers remained unbroken. The rain and the sun had helped the grass grow approximately

thirty centimeters during the two-month period, thus providing a smooth ground for the fallen pots.<sup>68</sup> Aho also adds that “most of the unfallen, intact pots were still half filled with water because the summer was rainy in Nastola during 2017”.<sup>69</sup> The outcome of this durational exploratory installation was that the balance was partly kept in the constructions of the installation as the work was not completely destroyed (Fig. 8). In my interpretation, this refers to a hope of still ensuring the vital cycles of the Earth more globally. Instead of wasting precious time, it is better to pay more attention to the human impact on the water, wind, and carbon cycles on this planet. Although these natural cycles are indeed formidable forces, they are not immune to the impact of other agencies, especially humans. *Thirsty Giant* proposes that it is crucial to grasp how human beings affect and are part of these cycles; and how humans can coexist with various more-than-human agencies rather than negatively interfering with their balanced processes.

## Conclusion

- 38 In this article, I have proposed that natural forces, such as wind, rain, and the sun, are creative agencies in world-making processes and that Heini Aho's analyzed installations make palpable the potentialities of such forces by embracing them to become co-creators of the works. I argued that *A Poem by a Plumber* and *Thirsty Giant* challenge the understanding of natural forces as something passive, invisible, or standing at the “backstage” of nature. Instead, the installations propose a broader perspective on the agency of natural forces in the context of coexistence. Hence, I suggested that the installations generate novel experiences that help one to consider the entanglement of human and more-than-human agencies. To further comprehend the complexity of this entanglement, I combined the notions of *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis* as auto-sym-poiesis in my study of Aho's site-specific installations. I analyzed the works through an auto-sym-poietic lens, and the analysis showed that the installation site unfolded with the participation of natural forces in unfixed, open-ended, and exploratory ways. I noted that auto-sym-poiesis can contribute to expanding the concept of the autonomy of art by showing how artworks, in fact, carry political implications. The political aspects were apparent, for example, in *Thirsty Giant*, where visual and processual elements presented the human impact on the environment. In this article, I claimed that *A Poem by a Plumber* and *Thirsty Giant* unfolded in an auto-sym-poetic manner with the participating natural forces, thereby making tangible how agencies neither stand alone, nor are fully enmeshed with each other, but rather take part in creative, cooperative, and continuous earthly cycles.

---

## NOTES

1. See the installations here <https://www.heiniaho.com/a-poem-by-a-plumber> and <https://www.heiniaho.com/thirsty-giant> (24.11.2023).

2. Heini Aho, Interview by the author, 15.12.2021.
3. See, for example, James G. Ballard, *The Burning World*, Berkley, Berkley Books, 1964; Art Bell & Whitley Strieber, *The Coming Global Superstorm*, Atria Books, 1999; Jeff Goodell, *The Water Will Come*, New York, LB, 2017. The aim of these novels and their adaptation in movies, such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, was obviously to draw attention to climate change. So, I do not argue that they were unsuccessful. However, in my understanding, how they represented the natural forces, for example, water and sun, might curtail the main agency of climate emergency, namely, human beings.
4. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Monsters of the Anthropocene*, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan & Nils Bubandt (eds.) Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017; Joanna Zylińska, *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2018.
5. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993; Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003; John K. Grande (ed.), *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists*, New York, the State University of New York Press, 2004; Val Plumwood, "Nature in the Active Voice", *Australian Humanities Review*, Vol. 46, p. 111-128; Iris van der Tuin, "NatureCultures", in *Posthuman Glossary*, Rosi Braidotti & Maria Hlavajova (eds.), London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 269-270.
6. Jussi Parikka, "Earth Forces Contemporary Land Arts, Technology and New Materialist Aesthetics", *Cultural Studies Review* 21, 2015, p. 51-52.
7. James Meyer, "The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity", in *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, Erika Suderburg (ed.), Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 23-37.
8. Thomas W. Leavitt, 'Earth', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam (ed.), Berkeley, the University of California Press, 1996 (1968), p. 180-181. This quote is an excerpt from a discussion at a conference that took place at Cornell University on February 6, 1969. The participants were the key figures of land art, for example, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Neil Jenney, Gunther Uecker, Hans Haecke, and Richard Long.
9. The Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art launched an exhibition in 2019 under the title of *Coexistence* that explored the relationship between humans and more-than-human nature. See, Saara Hacklin & Satu Oksanen (eds.), *Coexistence: Human, Animal and Nature* (Exhibition Catalogue), Helsinki, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma Publication, 2019. See, <https://kiasma.fi/en/exhibitions/coexistence/> (10.6.2024). The topic of coexistence was also explored in the first Helsinki Biennial titled *The Same Sea* (2021). Curators Pirkko Siitari and Taru Tappola suggested this title as a metaphor to address "interconnectedness" on the Earth. The artworks in this biennial enquired into how human and more-than-human agencies continuously affect each other and how their well-being mutually depends on coexistence. See, <https://helsinkibiennaali.fi/sama-meri/> (10.6.2024).
10. See the artist's webpage: [http://www.ooze.eu.com/en/urban\\_prototype/future\\_island/](http://www.ooze.eu.com/en/urban_prototype/future_island/) (24.11.2023).
11. See the artist's webpage: <https://www.raimosaarinen.com/#/floating-island/> (10.6.2024).
12. See the artist's webpage: <https://annawiden.com/#/materialisering/> (24.11.2023).
13. See, Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014, p. 92-93; Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 59; Katve-Kaisa Kontturi, *Ways of Following: Art, Materiality, Collaboration*, London, Open Humanities, 2018, p. 18-21; Katve-Kaisa Kontturi & Milla Tiainen, "Introduction: New Materialisms and (the Study of) Art: A Mapping of Co-emergence", in *Methods and Genealogies of New Materialisms*, Felicity Colman & Iris van der Tuin (eds.), Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2024, p. 241-267; Sini Mononen & Milla Tiainen, "Performing with the Forest and to the

Forest: Tree Opera as a More-Than-Human Performance Collective”, in *Music Theater and Politics: Hegemonies, Resistances, Utopias*, Tereza Havelková and Marcus Tan (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, (forthcoming); Murat M. Türkmen, “Drawing as More-Than-Human: On Hanna Saarikoski’s Video Work C”, *TaHiTi*, Vol. 13, no. 2, 2023, p. 32-47; Murat M. Türkmen, “The Enabling Materialities of the Charcoal Suit: A Study of the Politicizing Capacities of Hanna Saarikoski’s Performance C”, *Nordic Theater Studies* 35, No. 2(2024), forthcoming.

14. Hanna Johansson, “The Moment of Reckoning: On Forgetting and Remembering the Air”, *Finnish National Gallery*, no. 3, 2019, p. 1-7.

15. Astrida Niemanis & Rachel L. Walker, “Weathering: Climate Change and the “Thick Time” of Transcorporeality”, *Hypatia*, Vol. 29, no. 3, 2014, p. 560. See also, Astrida Niemanis & Rachel L. Walker, “Weathering”, *Feminist Review*, Vol. 118, 2018, p. 80-84.

16. Kristi McKim, *Cinema as Weather: Stylistic Screens and Atmospheric Change*, New York, Routledge, 2013.

17. Jussi Parikka & Daphne Dragona (eds.), *Words of Weather: A Glossary*, Athens, Onassis Foundation, 2022.

18. Sasha Engelman, *Sensing Art in the Atmosphere: Elemental Lures and Aerosolar Practices*, New York, Routledge, 2022.

19. Donna Haraway, “Sympoiesis”, in *Staying with Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 61.

20. Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2006, p. 109; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, Trans. by Saskya I. Jain, New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 38-75.

21. Kontturi, 2018, p. 82-97.

22. See, for example, Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 65 and p. 150.

23. The two interviews took place at Heini Aho’s studio, in Turku, Finland on 22.12.2020 and 15.12.2021. The third one was at Tammisaari, Finland on 3.9.2021.

24. Following Donna Haraway’s understanding of “situated knowledge”, I express here my situated experience and knowledge related to the materials that I analyze in this article. “Situated knowledge” refers to all forms of knowledge that are produced in and from particular conditions and perspectives. See for more, Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, p. 575-599.

25. Heini Aho, Interview by the author, 3.9.2021.

26. Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelley (ed.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p. 1-10.

27. Here I understand the participation in a broader sense to include human and more-than-human agencies.

28. Kaprow, 1993, p. 16.

29. Ilya Kabakov, *On the ‘Total’ Installations*, Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1995, p. 275. See also, Claire Bishop, *Installation Art*, London, Tate Publishing, 2005, p. 14.

30. Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1999, Claire Bishop, 2005.

31. Aho, 3.9.2021.

32. Humberto Maturana & Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, Boston, Riedel, 1980.

33. Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution*, Amherst, Basic Books, 1998; James Lovelock, *Gaia, A New Look at Life on Earth*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979.

34. Margulis, 1998; Lovelock, 1979.

35. Haraway, 2016, p. 58-99.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

37. To see how *sympoiesis* is addressed in the context of contemporary “Multispecies art”, for example, Suvi Vepsä, “Minä Olen Moneus – Mikrobiaalisia Kohtaamisia Nykytaiteen Prosesseissa”, *TaHiTi*, Vol. 12, No 3, 2022, p. 28-49.

38. To see how the notions of *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis* historically relate to each other, for example, Audronė Žukauskaitė, “Gaia Theory: Between Autopoiesis and Sympoiesis”, *Problemas*, Vol. 98, 2020, p. 141-153.

39. Haraway, 2016, p. 61.

40. See the artists' website: <https://crochetcoralreef.org/> (24.11.2023).

41. Haraway, 2016, p. 78.

42. Ettinger, 2006, p. 109; Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 38-75.

43. Ettinger, 2006, p. 109 and p. 159.

44. Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 161-181.

45. Erin Manning, *Out of the Clear*, New York, Minor Compositions, 2023, p. 62.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

47. Kontturi, 2018, p. 82-97.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Kontturi & Tiainen, 2024, p. 242-243 and p. 258-259.

50. The way I described the term auto-sym-poiesis has some similarities to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of assemblage, described in their co-written book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987). In Deleuze and Guattari, *assemblage* broadly refers to a set of structures whose parts are neither predetermined nor arbitrarily selected (Wise 2005, p. 77). Rather an *assemblage* emerges at the intersection of the involved parts and the whole within a specific time and place (Holland 2013, p. 61-63). In the field of art history, the notion of assemblage is further elaborated to study artworks by art historian Dan Karlholm (2020, p. 5-17). Taking also into account Manuel DeLanda's *assemblage theory*, Karlholm developed a specific understanding of *assemblage* for art studies and art history and proposed several key assemblages to explore artworks, for example, *conceptual assemblages*, *interior assemblages*, and *exterior assemblages* (2020, p. 13-14). It is possible to interpret and analyze Heini Aho's installations from the perspective of assemblage, however, in this article, I preferred to devise a specific conceptual approach, i.e., auto-sym-poiesis, to study the artworks from my chosen vantage point view. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 1987; J. Macgregor Wise, “Assemblage”, in *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concept*, Charles J. Stivale (ed.), Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, p. 77; Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus: A Reader's Guide*, New York & London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, p. 61-63; Dan Karlholm, “Reassembling the Artwork: The Relevance of Assemblage Theory for Art Studies”, *TaHiTi*, Vol. 10, no. 4, 2020, p. 5-17.

51. Haraway, 2016, p. 78.

52. See, for example, Hualing Zhang, Dan Li, Ling Xie & Yimin Xiao, “Documentary Research of Human Respiratory Droplet Characteristics”, *Procedia Engineering*, Vol. 121, 2015, p. 1365-1374.

53. *Ibid.*

54. This experience was extraordinary because, at that very moment, the wind blew from a certain direction to sprinkle water droplets on our bodies which enabled us to feel our already embedded watery connection. As the artist was also present, the idea of auto-sym-poiesis became tangible in the sense that the artist, the artwork, the researcher, and natural forces were entangled in the auto-sym-poietic unfolding process.

55. See, for example, Angela Y. Chang & Boonkit Purt, “Biochemistry, Tear Film”, *National Library of Medicine*, Treasure Island, StatPearls Publishing, 2023, p. 1-8.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Aino Järvinen, Interview by the Author. 3.9.2021.
58. In Finnish, the phrase “häh” means what. Häh is also used as an exclamation and implies wonder.
59. Aho, 15.12.2021.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. See, for example, Benjamin W. Abbott & Kevin Bishop, et al., “Human Domination of the Global Water Cycle Absent from Depictions and Perceptions”, *Nature Geoscience*, Vol. 12, no. 7, p. 533-540.
63. See, for example, Thibault Lemaitre-Basset, Ludovic Oudin, et al., “Unraveling the Contribution of Potential Evaporation Formulation to Uncertainty under Climate Change”, *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences*, Vol. 26, 2022, p. 2147-2159.
64. See, for example, Tapio Schneider, Paul A. O’Gorman & Xavier J. Levine, “Water Vapor and the Dynamics of Climate Changes”, *Reviews of Geophysics*, Vol. 48, no. 3, 2010, p. 1-22.
65. *Ibid.*
66. To see how the topic of balance between agencies is also discussed from the viewpoint of “Plant Art”, for example, Jenni Vauhkonen, “Plants as Performers (And More): Rethinking Agency in the multispecies performance Ikebana”, *Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research* (Forthcoming in 2024).
67. Aho, 15.12.2021.
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*

---

## ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on Heini Aho’s two site-specific installations, *A Poem by a Plumber* (2021) and *Thirsty Giant* (2017), which enable natural forces, such as wind, sun, and rain, to become co-creators of the artworks. Both installations are situated in relatively remote places where creative dialogues can emerge with natural forces and the given physical environment. The artist intentionally created what can be called semi-stable constructions for both of the works to make visible and sensible the agency of natural forces and to explore how the human and “more-than-human” agencies are creatively entangled in reciprocal relations. Thus, each installation unfolds in an open-ended and autopoietic (self-creative) way as they entangle with the environment in a sympoietic (co-creative) manner. Instead of mutually opposing aspects, I understand the autopoiesis and sympoiesis as two sides of the very same event. To highlight this understanding, I employ the combined term “auto-sym-poiesis” to study Aho’s works in this article. I argue that agencies in nature and art are not isolated from the environment or each other. Instead, they are creatively entangled in an indeterminate, continuously unfolding process of relationality.

Cet article porte sur les deux installations in situ de Heini Aho, *A Poem by a Plumber* (2021) et *Thirsty Giant* (2017), qui permettent aux forces naturelles, telles que le vent, le soleil et la pluie, de devenir les cocréateurs des œuvres d’art. Les deux installations sont situées dans des endroits relativement éloignés où des dialogues créatifs peuvent émerger avec les forces naturelles et les environnements physiques donnés. L’artiste a intentionnellement créé ce que l’on peut appeler des structures semi-stables pour les deux œuvres afin de rendre visible et sensible non seulement

l'action des forces naturelles mais aussi la manière dont les agences humaines et non humaines sont créativement entrelacées dans des relations réciproques. Chaque installation se déploie de manière ouverte et autopoïétique (auto-créative) tout en s'entrelaçant avec l'environnement dans une connexion sympoïétique (co-créative). Au lieu de s'opposer mutuellement, je comprends l'autopoïèse et le sympoïèse comme l'avant-plan et l'arrière-plan d'un même événement. Pour souligner cette imbrication, j'utilise le terme combiné "auto-sym-poiesis" et j'étudie les œuvres d'Aho de ce point de vue. Je soutiens que les agences de la nature et de l'art ne sont pas isolées mais plutôt entrelacées de manière créative dans un processus indéterminé de relationnalité qui se déploie continuellement.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** installation, contemporary art, natural forces, autopoiesis, sympoiesis, coexistence

**Mots-clés:** installation, art contemporain, forces naturelles, autopoïèse, sympoïèse, coexistence

## AUTHOR

### MURAT M. TÜRKMEN

Murat M. Türkmen is a doctoral researcher in the art history department at the University of Turku, Finland. Türkmen's ongoing research is titled as "Ecocritical Art: Negotiating between Politics and the Autonomy of Art". ORCID: 0000-0002-0177-920X