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Kalevala—Unwritten Fragments by Teatr Węgajty / Field Project: Trevor Hill's Autoethnographic Narration

Abstract

The text discusses the performance *Kalevala The Unwritten Fragments* of the Węgajty Theatre / Field Project, which in 2000/2001 opened a new phase in the theatre's activity. The performance continued the thematic, aesthetic, and method choices of the Węgajty Village Theatre, while also opening new paths of exploration. The group's work was particularly transformed, and a new quality was brought into its accompanying reflection, by the presence of the actor and anthropologist Trevor Hill. The analysis of Hill's autoethnographic description of their work on *Kalevala* allows us to distinguish three dimensions of autoethnography: as an innovative technique of obtaining information, as a research method (analytical autoethnography), and

as an indicator of a new paradigm of producing knowledge about social life and its participants (evocative autoethnography). The use of the autoethnographic method in research on the Węgajty Theatre made it possible to access information that is otherwise difficult to obtain, including the actor's experiences and internal processes.

Keywords

Węgajty Theatre, *Kalevala*, epic poem staging, improvisation, collective creation, autoethnographic research in theatre

Abstrakt

***Kalevala* – fragmenty niepisane Teatru Węgajty / Projektu terenowego: Autoetnograficzna narracja Trevora Hilla**

Tematem tekstu jest przedstawienie *Kalevala – fragmenty niepisane* Teatru Węgajty / Projektu terenowego, które w 2000/2001 roku otworzyło nowy etap działalności Teatru Węgajty. Spektakl stanowił kontynuację wyborów tematycznych, estetycznych oraz związanych z metodą pracy Teatru Wiejskiego „Węgajty” a zarazem otwierał nowe drogi poszukiwań. Elementem w szczególny sposób transformującym pracę i wnoszącym nową jakość w towarzyszącą jej refleksję była obecność w zespole Trevora Hilla – aktora a równocześnie antropologa. Analiza autoetnograficznego opisu pracy nad *Kalevalą* autorstwa Hilla pozwala wyodrębnić obecne w nim trzy wymiary funkcjonowania autoetnografii: jako nowatorskiej techniki pozyskania informacji, jako metody badawczej (autoetnografia analityczna) oraz jako wyznacznika nowego paradygmatu wytwarzania wiedzy o życiu społecznym i jego uczestnikach (autoetnografia ewokatywna). Zastosowanie metody autoetnograficznej w badaniach nad Teatrem Węgajty pozwoliło dotrzeć do informacji trudnych do uzyskania w inny sposób, w tym dotyczących doświadczeń i procesów wewnętrznych aktora.

Słowa kluczowe

Teatr Węgajty, *Kalevala*, inscenizacja eposu, improwizacja, kreacja zespołowa, badania autoetnograficzne w teatrze

In 1986, a small village in the Polish region of Warmia became home to a theatre, since then changing its format three times, and with it the name: Teatr Wiejski Węgałty (until 1996), Teatr Węgałty / Field Project (1997–2011) and, from 2012, Teatr Węgałty. Teatr Wiejski Węgałty (Węgałty village theatre) was founded by Erdmute and Waclaw Sobaszek, along with Małgorzata Dzygadlo-Niklaus and Wolfgang Niklaus, after the performance-concert *Książeczka nigunim* (The book of nigunim)¹ as well as performances of *Historie Vincenza: Historie dziwne, zaśnione, lecz niezmiernie wyraźne... o Prawdziwym Żydzie, Antychryście i Preoswieszczenym Metropolicie* (The Vincenz stories: Strange stories, dreamed of, but immensely clear . . . about the True Jew, the Antichrist and the Preoswieshchenny Metropolitan, 1988), *Gospoda ku Wiecznemu Pokojowi* (Inn towards eternal peace, 1992) and *The Canterbury Tales* (1996). It split in 1996 into the Schola Teatru Węgałty (School of the Węgałty Theatre)—now Schola Węgałty—led by Niklaus and Teatr Węgałty / Projekt Terenowy (Węgałty Theatre / Field Project) with Waclaw Sobaszek as artistic director. In the latter group, until 2000, apart from the Sobaszeks,² only Marijka Łubiancewa was a permanent member.³

Kalevala—Unwritten Fragments by Teatr Węgałty / Field Project was the first performance produced in the company's new format, and marked an important phase in the theatre's history. What can be observed here is both a continuation of the thematic, aesthetic, and working-method choices of Teatr Wiejski Węgałty and the beginning of new approaches to exploration. An element that particularly transformed the work and brought new quality to accompanying reflection on the working methods was introduced by the arrival of Trevor Hill, a Scottish theatre instructor, puppeteer, actor, and musician, but also an anthropologist and a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. Hill introduced new tools for artistic practice, such as plaster masks and shadow theatre, as well as methods of evolving social skills, aimed at developing greater democratization in the group's actions. What is particularly significant is that in the nearly forty years of Teatr Węgałty's existence, Hill was the only person with a dual work identity,

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¹ Ryszard Michalski provides the alternative Polish title *Książeczka Nigunów*, see Ryszard Michalski, "Ośrodek Działań Teatralnych Pracownia przy Wojewódzkim Domu Kultury w Olsztynie," in *80-lecie amatorskiej twórczości teatralnej: Z przeszłości polskiego ruchu społecznego na Warmii, Mazurach i Powiślu*, ed. Henryk Behnke et al. (Olsztyn: Towarzystwo Kultury Teatralnej, 1987), 28.

² In 1997–1998, the photographer Jan Ołędzki also worked at Teatr Węgałty / Field Project; he was responsible for logistics.

³ She later performed as Marijka/Nela Brzezińska.

both artistic and scholarly. He became involved full-time in Węgajty's theatrical work in 2000 and 2001, joining the then three-person ensemble and moving into a neighboring village. He co-created the activities of the Field Project, including the performance of *Kalevala*,⁴ at the same time researching the method of artistic work. His writings can serve as an example of autoethnographic research and are the only research of this type published to date on Teatr Węgajty.⁵

This article presents the specific characteristics of a Węgajty performance of *Kalevala—Unwritten Fragments*, an autoethnographic description of the work, as well as an analysis of this description.

On March 2–3, 2000, Teatr Węgajty / Field Project, was invited by the Polish Consulate in Barcelona to participate in meetings devoted to the work of Jerzy Grotowski. They were to perform a Shrovetide performance titled *Carnestoltes—Carnival*. The presentation hung in the balance when a car rented by the theatre caught fire at a gas station in Orange due to a technical malfunction. Eventually, the artists found an alternate means of transportation and gave the performance.⁶ After returning to Poland, they faced a dilemma—should they engage in a lawsuit with the company that rented them the faulty vehicle, or should the energy that the lawsuit would have consumed be channeled into a different area of activity? And it was under these circumstances that they began rehearsals for *Kalevala*.

The very selection process of the text was different than before. Until now, it had been Wacław Sobaszek who would have made suggestions to the company. This time the impulse came simultaneously from him and from Trevor Hill, who had long been interested in the Finnish epic. Sobaszek was led to *The Kalevala* by Stanisław Vincenz, who included it in his selection of the most outstanding literary masterpieces.⁷ Also Magda Grudzińska,⁸ who had participated in many Hungarian expeditions in the second half of the 1990s, had a significant role in this selection. It was she who brought in a CD to the theatre which contained

⁴ Throughout this article the original epic will be referred to as *The Kalevala* and Węgajty's project as *Kalevala*.

⁵ Trevor Hill, "The Use of Literature and Songs from Varying Cultures in Węgajty Theatre's *Kalevala: fragmenty niepisane*," *Acta Neophilologica*, 25, no. 1 (2023): 51–69, <https://doi.org/10.31648/an.8664>.

⁶ The presentation almost ended in scandal. Teatr Węgajty's performance, due to its aesthetics and subject matter, did not fit into the expected post-Grotowski theatre format and was met with criticism from the Consulate staff.

⁷ Based on author's conversation with Wacław Sobaszek on March 28, 2020.

⁸ Magda Grudzińska, a theatre scholar, director of the Wojciech Bogusławski Theatre in Kalisz in 2014–2017. Information about Grudzińska's influence on interest in *The Kalevala* was based on author's conversation with Marijka Brzezińska (Marijka Łubjancewa) in Warsaw, November 17, 2022.

recordings of various melodeclamation forms of *The Kalevala*, released in 1996 by Radio France.⁹

The text also caught the interest of other female actors. Erdmute Sobaszek referred to the German-language translation of the epic and introduced the theme of *The Kalevala*'s connection to the anthroposophical community into her work.¹⁰ In turn, Marijka Łubjancewa was inspired by the theme of witches and magical practices. In the interpretation of the Mistress of Pohjola, the actor sought experiences that she found during a research trip to Svarychiv in Ukraine a few months after the opening, in June 2001. At the time, she participated in Pentecost rituals, during which women wept, whispered, and sang on graves. Łubjancewa tried to “tap into” this energy and use it in her work.¹¹

From the beginning of rehearsals, it was obvious that only fragments of the epic would be brought to the stage. The choice of staged themes resonated with the individual explorations of the performers and the idea of cultural cross-roads that they found important for theatre, as well as the political and social situation of a unifying Europe at the time. The issues of opening borders and international exchange, but also of greater opportunities for criminal activities, such as human trafficking, and rising crime, found resonance in *Kalevala*. It echoed the topic of war, alluding to the recently ended war in the Balkans¹² and the Russian Federation's war in Chechnya at the time. At one level of interpretation, the performance, like all previous ones, became a commentary on the current political situation. However, these references were not read by all audience members. For the director, the philosophical message was particularly important. *Kalevala* was meant to inspire the audience to form questions about the sources of evil. Sobaszek saw in the struggle between two feuding villages, Kaleva and Pohjola, two sides of the world—countries at war. He pointed out how the emotional frustration of “Lemminkäinen caused by the fact that his wife went to the village dance turns into viciousness, a search for an enemy, a desire to retaliate. [Meanwhile] . . . the enemy resides inside us. And it sometimes seems to us that we have to look for it in the world,” stated Sobaszek.¹³

⁹ *Finlande. Music Traditionelle*, 1996, Harmonia Mundi. https://www.discogs.com/pt_BR/release/5624801-Various-Finlande-Musique-Traditionelle. Marijka Łubjancewa transcribed the score from recordings. Eventually, another song in the Saami language, the lullaby *Oađe oabbožán* (Sleep my sister), was included in the performance, Hill, “The Use of Literature,” 57–58.

¹⁰ Rudolf Steiner, *Der Zusammenhang des Menschen mit der elementarischen Welt: Kalevala—Olaf Asteson—Das russische Volkstum—Die Welt als Ergebnis von Gleichgewichtswirkungen* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1993). Based on author's conversation with Wacław Sobaszek, March 28, 2020.

¹¹ Based on Marijka Brzezińska's letter to the author, June 15, 2023.

¹² This topic was significant for Sobaszek during the staging of *The Canterbury Tales*.

¹³ Wacław Sobaszek, “Ten spektakl to pytanie. . .” *Zeszyt festiwalowy Wioski Teatralnej*, July 11, 2005, 4.

In *The Kalevala*, just as in the productions of Teatr Wiejski Węgajty, it is possible to indicate the implementation of the idea of “descending upon the earth.”¹⁴ In practice, this meant staging only such texts in which the artists were able to find a connection to a significant topographical experience, such as in Warmia, or frequently visited locations, such as Beskid Niski or Suwałki Region. Material traces related to the local context, as well as songs, dances, cries, musical instruments, and performative ritual structures, used by the troupe during visits to their local hosts or taken over from them during Christmas and Easter caroling trips, were also included in all of the theatre’s performances. Thanks to these efforts, the performances had a distinct metatheatrical feature. On a meta-level, they became stories about Christmas and Easter carolers and medieval minstrels. In *Kalevala*, the building of this dimension did not disappear, but it was done in a much more subtle way; Sobaszek’s idea to show scenes of the Finnish epic from the perspective of troubadours embodying the characters of *The Kalevala* was eventually rejected.

In the case of *Kalevala*, the director Waław Sobaszek found a connection between the Finnish epic and the topographical experience of his ensemble, evoking Truso, a specialized Scandinavian craft and trade center, that existed from the seventh to the tenth centuries and that was located in the eastern part of the Vistula delta, on Lake Drużno. The settlement, which belonged to the Baltic economic and cultural zone, was inhabited in the early Middle Ages by Scandinavians, Prussians, and Eastern Slavs. It was one of the places of contact with communities occupying the Baltic shores—among others, with the Finns.¹⁵ It cannot be ruled out that Truso was also reached by those who knew and told the stories which were written down many centuries later, in 1835 and 1849, by folklorist Elias Lönnrot and incorporated into *The Kalevala* as we know it today.

On the other hand, among the “material traces” introduced in the performance, referring to the local context, there are objects related to the personal history of the performers and the prehistory of the ensemble. Erdmute Sobaszek in the role of Lemminkäinen’s mother used a long black shawl, at times resembling a veil, previously belonging to Waław’s grandmother, a farmer who lived outside of the town of Ożarów. The Raven’s mask, introduced by the director, was made by painter Tadeusz Piotrowski for *Skacząca myszka* (Leaping mouse, 1981), a performance of the Placówka Twórczo-Badawcza Pracownia (1977–1981),

¹⁴ Based on a Tadeusz Kornaś interview with Waław Sobaszek, “W stronę tradycji żywej: Z Waławem Sobaszkiem, dyrektorem Teatru Wiejskiego Węgajty, rozmawia Tadeusz Kornaś,” *Teatr*, no. 1 (1997): 41.

¹⁵ Marek Franciszek Jagodziński, *Truso—legenda Bałtyku* (Elbląg: Muzeum Archeologiczno-Historyczne, 2015), 15, 21–24, 43, 81–82.

co-created by the Sobaszeks in Olsztyn. In *Kalevala*, for the first time, the troupe used plaster masks created by the actors, which were inspired by *commedia dell'arte*, and added to the Węgajty arsenal by Trevor Hill.¹⁶

Kalevala is in a precise line of evolution of the epic form, particularly important for Teatr Wiejski Węgajty. In realizing its first productions, the troupe consistently drew from grand narratives and selected individual plots, images, and voices from them, weaving them into a patchwork tapestry and presenting them in a theatrical form resembling storytelling, enriched by caroling or juggling interludes composed of songs, dances, and mime acts. In all the plays from *The Vincenz Stories* to *The Canterbury Tales*, the epic elements were gradually scaled back in favor of a dramatic form that emerged more and more clearly, combining elements of tragedy and tragicomedy. This process was, so to speak, the reversal of the phenomenon analyzed by Péter Szondi in his *Theory of Modern Drama* (1976), concerning the gradual encroachment of epic elements into the form of modern drama. It was *Kalevala* that marked the turning point in the emancipation of dramatic form in the productions of Teatr Wiejski Węgajty. The evolution of dramatic form was accompanied by the development of comic elements and erotic allusions. Beginning with *The Canterbury Tales*, the importance of female characters was also clearly becoming greater. In *Kalevala*, the aforementioned tendencies continued. The main character Lemminkäinen (Trevor Hill) was accompanied by strong female characters—Mother (Erdmute Sobaszek) and the Mistress of Pohjola (Marijka Łubiancewa), as well as two more episodic ones, Kyllikki and Sister (both also interpreted by Łubiancewa). The male characters of the Master of Pohjola and the Raven (played by Sobaszek) were secondary. Erdmute Sobaszek pointed out that in each successive performance of Teatr Wiejski Węgajty, and then in *Kalevala* and *Synczyzna* (Sonland, 2004), which were performed by Teatr Węgajty / Field Project, increasingly expressive, full-sized characters began to appear.¹⁷ This evolution was probably due to the performers' growing experience in working with the body, gesture, movement, and masks—from *Kalevala* onward, but also due to the choice of the literary material, which accentuated the importance of the characters.

From the beginning, work on the script was done in several languages. It was based on editions of the epic in Russian and Ukrainian, English, German, and

¹⁶ Hill prepared a mask with a large nose introducing ityphallic connotations. Of the three masks made by Łubiancewa (Brzezińska), the most expressive was the mask of the Mistress of Pohjola. In creating it, the actor was inspired by her own experiences encountering the women she met during the theatre's visits to the homeless shelters in Olsztyn. Based on author's conversation with Marijka Brzezińska in Warsaw, November 17, 2022.

¹⁷ Based on author's conversation with Erdmute Sobaszek, March 20, 2020.

Polish in two translations, by Jerzy Litwiniuk and Józef Ozga Michalski. The decision to make the future performance multilingual was based on necessity. The ensemble did not speak any one language. During the rehearsals, this meant that when an actor read aloud a fragment of the script in their own language, the others followed the relevant lines in the available translations. “*The Kalevala* paved the way for mutual understanding,” the director emphasized.¹⁸ The Finnish story became a kind of “common language” and system of reference. This way of working accentuated the value of the text’s auditory aspect and its musicality much more strongly, which was appreciated by critics,¹⁹ and at the same time inspired the performers to introduce additional elements from both their own as well as foreign cultures into the performance. Thus, numerous folk songs found their way into *Kalevala*—performed in Polish, German, Russian, Ukrainian, Finnish, and the Saami language.²⁰ Elements of training, such as spinning, were also introduced to the stage as part of dramatic function.

In fact, *Kalevala* was the only production of Teatr Węajty in which multilingualism was introduced with such consistency. Polish, Ukrainian, and English coexisted on stage. However, the theatrical form’s referencing of the multilingual social realities posed quite a challenge for the audience. Some of them seemed confused and even appalled at the fact that they did not understand parts of the text. The situation changed when Trevor Hill was replaced by Jan Sobaszek and the performance was played mostly in Polish, with only the characters played by Marijka Łubjancewa speaking in Ukrainian. The show’s multilingualism also posed some challenges for the creators themselves. Communication during rehearsals took much more time and, in the process, generated difficulties, which we will detail later on.

The actors, including Waclaw Sobaszek, also created the script together. Today it is difficult to determine who chose Lemminkäinen’s story. Hill remembers that the decision was made by the director, who in turn mentioned the key role of the Scotsman.²¹ Lönnrot combined the songs about Kaukomieli and Lemminkäinen in *The Kalevala*, turning—as Martti Haarvio, a researcher of Finnish mythology noted—a singer and enchanter into “a Finnish farmhand, a Don Juan . . . proficient in songs and incantations.”²² This interpretation was pursued

¹⁸ Based on author’s conversation with Waclaw Sobaszek, March 28, 2020.

¹⁹ Joanna Wichowska, “(Nie) wystarczy być,” *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna*, no. 69 (2005): 70.

²⁰ Hill, “The Use of Literature,” 58.

²¹ Based on author’s conversation with Waclaw Sobaszek, March 28, 2020.

²² Martti Haarvio, *Mitologia fińska*, trans. Jerzy Litwiniuk (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1979), 254.

by Teatr Węgałty. In his work on the character of Lemminkäinen, Trevor Hill moved from a flirtatious, somewhat heavy-handed lover to a seductive rascal, akin to the Il Capitano and Pulcinella of *commedia dell'arte*. Other interpretations by folklorists compared Lemminkäinen with one of the major Norse gods, Tyr, while some compared him with Christ. Haarvio also thoroughly analyzed the connections between the runic song (a form of Finnish oral poetry) about Lemminkäinen and the Egyptian tale of Prince Khaemwaset and his son Siusire, within which the “Nubian letter” was included. The researcher determined that references to the latter found their way into the Lemminkäinen runic song via a *bylina*, a type of Russian oral epic poem, about Vavile, an actor and mime. The first part of the runic song about Lemminkäinen came to Finnish Karelia from Egypt. The second part is an interesting reference to the Osirian myth. Both pieces probably made their way to the North via the *skomorokhs*, medieval East Slavic actors. Thus, Lemminkäinen was not exactly the most authentic shamanic hero of Finnish folk poetry.²³

This figure also embodies the Finnish emotion of *sisu*, implying willpower, courage, and boldness, but also excessive stubbornness and perversity, often equated with “stupidity or crudity.”²⁴ In the case of the mythological Lemminkäinen, the latter traits manifested themselves in his restless disposition, recklessness, and fickleness, and are indicated in the very etymology of the nickname.²⁵ The wealth of references and influences possible to point to in Lemminkäinen’s character and his story made it possible to treat him, but also the other characters chosen by Teatr Węgałty / Field Project, such as the Mistress of Pohjola or the Mother, as a kind of palimpsest. This interpretation turned out to be one of the keys to Sobaszek’s syncretic staging.

While searching for a theatrical form for the semantic multilayeredness resulting from the transtextuality²⁶ of the runic song about Lemminkäinen combining Osirian, shamanic, and magical themes along with erotic and war themes, the company reached for elements inspired by *commedia dell'arte*, shadow theatre, ritual chants, and dance. They also introduced subtle autothematic references to ritual theatre with elements of oration and communal feasting, as well as to the

²³ Haarvio, *Mitologia fińska*, 255–57, 266–67, 282.

²⁴ Andrzej Pankalla and Joanna Grońska-Turunen, “Sisu – fińska emocja kulturowa i jej mitoanaliza w koncepcji R. Shwedera,” *Roczniki Psychologiczne* 13, no. 2 (2010): 30–31.

²⁵ Haarvio, *Mitologia fińska*, 263.

²⁶ For Gérard Genette, transtextuality is “all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts,” Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1.

zapusty (Shrovetide) tradition, which emerged in Teatr Węgajty / Field Project in the second half of the 1990s and which is currently central to the group's work.²⁷

In the show the storylines were limited to a selection of scenes from the first and second Lemminkäinen series, as well as an episode from Kullervo's story regarding the involuntary seduction of his sister. The final script was assembled from excerpts of texts from runic songs 11–15, 27, 29, and 35, as well as short passages from Väinämöinen's second and third cycle—runic songs 20 and 45. The fragmentary text, which does not follow the principles of chronology or classical dramatic structure, was paired with songs. The plot axis of the play was Lemminkäinen's exclusion from the wedding celebration of the community, of which he considered himself to be a full-fledged member. Uninvited to the wedding, he attends as an intruder. This social scandal culminates in war.²⁸

Although the form of the performance, as in the productions of Teatr Wiejski Węgajty, referred to storytelling,²⁹ the telling of the story took place through acting; the characters of the narrators had disappeared completely. Tragicomic elements and erotic themes predominated, tending toward the obscene, which was never so clearly exposed in any performance of Teatr Węgajty. The director emphasized that its source was not only the text, but also the presence of Trevor Hill, whose *vis comica* introduced an erotic subtext.³⁰ An important reservoir of such references was also the use of the commedia dell'arte form. Tadeusz Szyłłejko pointed out that no other Węgajty performance drew to such an extent on the repository of folk humor as *Kalevala*.³¹

²⁷ Martti Haarvio pointed to the possible treatment of the runic song about Lemminkäinen as "ritual texts" accompanying the contributory feasts of religious-social groups and also as wedding orations. Investigating the activities of the *skomorkhs* as dispatchers of the Osirian myth, the researcher of Finnish mythology pointed out that Osirian processions were celebrated at the same time as the *zapusty* (Shrovetide). Haarvio, *Mitologia fińska*, 282–284.

²⁸ Based on author's conversation with Wacław Sobaszek, March 28, 2020.

²⁹ Wichowska, "(Nie) wystarczy," 70.

³⁰ Based on author's conversation with Wacław Sobaszek, March 28, 2020.

³¹ Tadeusz Szyłłejko, "Mit w pigułce," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 29, 2001, 4.

Trevor Hill

Working with Theatre Węgałty / Field Project on *Kalevala*—*Unwritten Fragments*

Between 2000 and 2001, The Węgałty Theatre / Field Project devised and performed *Kalevala—Unwritten Fragments*. It was, arguably, an important piece in the group's repertoire, being the first “play” that the group performed after parting ways with members of Schola Węgałty on joint projects in 2000. However, it has been very much overlooked, having only a handful of reviews³² and popular articles³³ written about it during its lifetime and hardly anything written in the following twenty years (the major exception being Magdalena Jasińska's 2012 article).³⁴ The main aim of this article, therefore, is to present a picture and partial analysis of the creative process behind *Kalevala—fragmenty niepisane* with the hope it may stimulate further research.

Having been one of the team members of the *Kalevala* project, I will present some of my recollections about the creation of the piece and highlight such aspects as the creation method, utilization and adaption of texts for dramatic performance, differences in working methods and how the process affected me as a performer and theatre practitioner. This will be examined using Foucault's theory of the “technology of self.”³⁵ In addition, I shall examine critical responses to the piece and how the project influenced further work by Field Project.

The Węgałty Theatre / Field Project is an off-shoot company founded from Teatr Wiejski Węgałty (The Village Theatre of Węgałty), a noted “alternative” theatre company from Northern Poland. Founded in 1986 in the village of Węgałty in northern Poland, Kocemba-Żebrowska considers it “one of the most interesting and important Polish alternative theatres of the last thirty

³² Przemysław Borkowski, “Po co Kalewala?,” *Portret*, no. 12, (2001): 143–45; Krzysztof Górski, “Donzuan tysiąca jezior,” *Gazeta Morska*, September 8, 2001; Dorota Mrówka, “Pięty krąg wtajemniczenia,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 23, 2001; Szyłkajko, “Mit,” 4; Iza Walesiak, “Mroczny oddech Fina,” *Portret*, no. 12, (2001): 140–41; Sabina Waśko, “Świat zabobonów,” *Gazeta Toruńska*, March 13, 2001, 13–14; Piotr Zaczkowski “Projekt Terenowy,” *Gość Niedzielny*, December 10–16, 2000, 18.

³³ Katarzyna Regulska, “Węgałty or Celebrations,” *Le Théâtre en Pologne*, no. 3 (2001): 17–19.

³⁴ Magdalena Jasińska, “Teatr Wiejski Węgałty jako teatr antropologiczny,” in *Polski teatr alternatywny po 1989 roku z perspektywy Akademickich/Alternatywnych Spotkań Teatralnych* Klamra, ed. Artur Duda et al. (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012), 219–235.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2016), 16–49.

years.”³⁶ Influenced by such Polish theatre practitioners as Jerzy Grotowski and the Gardzienice theatre, Węgajty explored forms of performance in “village” customs (e.g. seasonal rituals, songs, dances and music), sometimes gathered through fieldwork expeditions to different ethnic/cultural communities in Poland.³⁷ In addition to theatrical performances, they began undertaking seasonal caroling in remote regions, often inviting guest participants, such as fellow performers, musicians and students.³⁸

Background to the Project

The *Kalevala* project came from discussions between myself and Theatre Węgajty in the late 1990s. The main period of creation and performance took place in 2000 whilst I was undertaking research into the group’s working techniques and social interaction.³⁹ The research involved being a participant-observer; as such, I was involved in numerous aspects of the theatre, including as performer and workshop leader. Much of the material within this article comes from personal observation, experience and personal communication with theatre members. To contextualize how the project came about it is necessary to provide some historical background to both The Węgajty Theatre / Field Project and my own theatrical “career”.

My own background involved amateur dramatics and student theatre as well as several years as a busker. In the early 1990s I also became acquainted with masked theatre, mask-making, commedia dell’arte, and puppetry, later becoming a puppeteer as well as an instructor at the Glasgow-based Scottish

³⁶ Joanna Kocemba-Żebrowska, “A Foreigner in the Village: Caroling Practices by Węgajty Theatre,” paper presented at the conference *Decentering the Vision(s) of Europe: The Emergence of New Forms*, European Association for the Study of Theatre and Performance, Paris, October 25–27, 2018.

³⁷ Justyna Biernat, “The Landscape of Węgajty Theatre,” *Theatre Research International* 46, no. 3 (2021): 303–21; Joanna Kocemba-Żebrowska and Magdalena Hasiuk, “The Węgajty Theatre: From Collectivity to Participation,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 32, no. 1 (2022): 81–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2021.2007898>; Jasińska, “Teatr Wiejski,” 219–35.

³⁸ The caroling seasons include *kolęda* (between Christmas and Candlemass), *alilujki* (Easter caroling) and *zapusty*, (Shrovetide), the latter of which is usually performed by Węgajty as a theatrical event rather than door-to-door caroling. See Trevor Hill, *Active Theatre and the Technology of Self: Polish Caroling with Projekt Terenowy of “Węgajty Theatre” (1998–2001)* (self-published, 2021); Trevor Hill, “The Borders of Reception: Differing Expectations and Reactions to the Work of Teatr Wiejski ‘Węgajty’ in various locations,” *Regiony i Pogranicza*, no. 5 (2017): 160–73; Trevor Hill, “Winter Caroling with Teatr Wiejski ‘Węgajty,’” *Context: Review for Comparative Literature and Cultural Research* 12 (2014): 199–214; Trevor Hill, “Teatr Wiejski Węgajty: Travelling Theatre, the Urban and the Rural,” *Ethnoanthropozoom*, no. 11, (2014): 41–61.

³⁹ Hill, *Active Theatre*. This text is a detailed anthropological analysis of τw’s caroling work but contains no information about the *Kalevala* project. The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and carried out under the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh (1998–2002).

Mask and Puppet Centre. In 1998 I established a theatre group called Best-Kept Sekret (hereafter BKS), which utilised Celtic music, masks and aspects of British folk traditions.

I first met members of Teatr Węgałty (hereafter TW) at the Vevchani festival, a traditional masked carnival in North Macedonia, in January 1996. In 1998 BKS were invited to bring our production of *Canterbury Tales* to Węgałty to play alongside their own version. Following this, we took part in several caroling expeditions to the villages of Nowica (Carpathian region) and Dziadówek (Suwałki region) (1999–2000). During our communications, Waclaw Sobaszek, Węgałty's artistic director, and I both expressed an interest in *The Kalevala*. I subsequently changed my anthropological research at university to study the work of TW and I entered the field in April 2000. Shortly after my arrival the two branches of the theatre, Field Project (hereafter FP) and Schola decided to discontinue future joint projects. *Kalevala* would be the first dramatic project of FP. Work began almost immediately, with the original team of myself, Waclaw and Erdmute Sobaszek, and Marijka Łubjancewa.

The backgrounds of the team differed a lot. The Węgałty members had been working together intensely for over a decade. Each was multi-linguistic, a multi-instrumentalist, dancer, singer and fieldworker. I spoke only a little German as a second language and my previous theatrical background was as previously noted. Whilst I had little in the way of formal actor training, I had a wealth of experience as a performer and working with audiences. In addition, my mask-making would be very important for the *Kalevala* project and future work by the group. Despite this, I was somewhat over-awed at working with Węgałty.

The university research immediately set time limits on the work (one year). This meant research expeditions to the region of the source materials, which TW had done with some previous projects, were simply not possible in the time frame.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the initial production period would need to be accelerated to produce a functional show, even as a work-in-progress, suitable for presentation and touring while I was in the field. Although the production continued to play after my exit departure, my role was subsequently played by Jan Sobaszek (the Sobaszeks' eldest son).

⁴⁰ This lack of field research was noted, but not explained, by Magdalena Jasińska (Jasińska, "Teatr Wiejski," 227), in a curious comparison between Węgałty's production and Peter Brooke's multi-million dollar *The Mahabharata*, which, presumably not having to answer to university regulations, took approximately three years to prepare. Malini Nair, "Brook Ready to Unveil New *Mahabharata*," *The Times of India*, September 13, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/brook-ready-to-unveil-new-mahabharata/articleshow/48941076.cms>.

Why *The Kalevala*?

The Kalevala is the national epic of Finland, created by Elias Lönnrot through the compilation of ancient folk songs of the Finnic-speaking people. Published in its final form in 1849 (the so-called *New Kalevala*), it quickly became a literary hit. The story comprises ten cycles and fifty cantos, including stories of powerful wizards, demi-gods, and warriors.⁴¹

My own relationship with *The Kalevala* began during Erasmus study in Finland and a growing interest in Finnish/Saami folk music. Waclaw had long had his own interests and connections with the epic. What became apparent through our conversations was how the forthcoming 150th anniversary of the book's publication coincided with many contemporary events and situations, both in international political matters and our own lives. These also reflected some of the long-established elements and features of Węgałaj's work, such as borderlands, collecting songs, itinerant/nomadic performers—some of which mirrored my own interests.

Poland's forthcoming EU membership was of interest due to Węgałaj's fascination with the subject of borders (cultural and geographic). In *The Kalevala*, the heroes often travel between their region and that of Northland, crossing cultural and linguistic borders, but are familiar with each other's cultures (such as magic, singing traditions) and inter-marry. The open borders of Schengen-EU raised many intriguing possibilities of cross-cultural pollination, population movement but also more questionable aspects, such as cultural erosion through over-exposure to more dominant cultures and easier movement of less desirable things, like crime and human-trafficking. The latter was a major concern at the time, particularly in the wake of the Yugoslavian conflict of the later 1990s where rape had been weaponized by various parties.⁴²

In addition, *The Kalevala* was being marketed by the Finnish as an "epic of Finland and all mankind,"⁴³ which helped inspire a multicultural and

⁴¹ Keith Bosley, introduction to *The Kalevala*, ed. Elias Lönnrot, trans. Keith Bosley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), XIII–LIV.

⁴² Nicole Lindstrom, "Regional Sex Trafficking in the Balkans: Transnational Networks in an Enlarged Europe," *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 3 (2004): 45–52.

⁴³ This phrase is based on the title of Kirkinen Heikki and Sihvoo Hannes, *The Kalevala: An Epic of Finland and All Mankind* (Helsinki: Finnish-American Cultural Institute, 1985).

multi-linguistic approach, including songs from different cultures,⁴⁴ Asian martial arts and seven different languages.⁴⁵

Blending Stories: “The Unwritten Fragments”

One of the first artistic differences we encountered was the perception of the form of the show. My ideas were based around a straight retelling of one of the stories (the magic singing battle between the wizard Väinämöinen and Joukahainen, found in cantos 6–9) using the outside space and large puppets. However, Waław Sobaszek, as director, had already formulated his own concept which revolved predominantly around the stories of Lemminkäinen (cantos 11–15 and 26–37) and Kullervo (cantos 31–36). Thus, the decision was made to focus on a wider but more concentrated aspect of the work, excluding some of the other notable characters in the collection (as mine also would have). Another factor was that it is difficult to tour urban venues when your performance is based in a forest. The creation process involved a radical doctoring and reworking of the original source text to adapt it for the stage. This too was a process which was new to me.

Lemminkäinen is basically a rakish braggart who spends much of his time womanizing and declaring his intention to go to war, against the wishes of his mother. At one point he kidnaps a girl called Kyllikki, who agrees to marry him if he agrees never to go to war (in exchange for her no longer partying with other young women). When she breaks her promise, he divorces her then goes to Northland (Pohjola) to find another wife. To win the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola, he attempts three tasks, during which he is killed but later resurrected by his mother. In the second cycle he gatecrashes a wedding party in Northland and kills the Master of Pohjola in a duel, which results in him taking refuge on an island to escape the Northlanders. Kullervo’s cycle is a tragic story of a slave who kills his master’s wife, then goes to war and brings heartbreak to his own family, not least through unwittingly seducing his own sister. The partnering of these tales actually acknowledged the source material of *The Kalevala*, in that the cycles are an amalgamation of different

⁴⁴ The specific songs are discussed in detail in Hill, “The Use of Literature,” 58–66.

⁴⁵ Ukrainian translation: *Kalevala*, ed. Elias Lönnrot, trans. Ėvgen Timčenko (Kyiv: Osnovi, 1995); Polish translations: *Kalevala*, ed. Elias Lönnrot, trans. Jerzy Litwiniuk (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1998) and *Kalevala*, ed. Elias Lönnrot, trans. Józef Ozga Michalski (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1980); English translation: Lönnrot, *The Kalevala*.

songs about similar characters (Lemminkäinen and Ahti) and some of the Kullervo cycle was based on songs originally about Lemminkäinen.⁴⁶ These aspects were of particular artistic interest to Sobaszek.

The episode of the sister's rape is reminiscent of Lemminkäinen's "courting" of his wife Kyllikki (who he also kidnaps) but also suggestive of possible events connected to his later exile on the island, where he subsequently seduces all the resident females. Lemminkäinen's mother states that his father had previously sheltered there and it may be inferred that father and son share similar characters. One of the seduced women may well have been his sister. These joinings of dots to create a wider narrative are aspects of "the unwritten fragments" of our piece's title.⁴⁷

The treatment of women in times of war was reflected in the tales of the kidnap and "seduction" (possibly rape?) of both Kullervo's sister and Lemminkäinen's wife as well as his journey to the Northland (crossing borders) to demand a wife from the Mistress of Pohjola. This was performed comically, as a client demanding of a brothel-keeper to view her prostitutes, with an aim to subvert the epic image of the questing hero in search of a bride. The subject of war, dealt with by *The Kalevala*, also stimulated a conversation about how the performance should end. Marijka knew women whose sons had served in the Soviet forces in Afghanistan and the question arose whether Lemminkäinen should be seen to return to his mother and wife or to set off once again on his adventures, emphasizing the never-ending circle of "male" warfare and the recurring abandonment and suffering of women.

Other aspects of the unwritten fragments might be purely suggestive. For example, the motif of fish appears several times in *The Kalevala*, such as the giant pike from which Väinämöinen makes the first *kantelar* (a kind of Finnish zither). Although the story was not included in the show, it was suggested by a fish-shaped lampshade made especially for the performance.

The concept of "fragments" also fed into the eventual structure and form of the theatrical piece, which was a montage of events, songs and physical routines rather than a "traditional" beginning-middle-end format. While I had seen similar montages in T.W.'s work, the form of *Kalevala* was much more abstract and utilized disjointed fragments rather than the linear narratives of T.W.'s *The Canterbury Tales* (each a self-contained story). This was also made more complicated in that by adapting the source text for the stage,

⁴⁶ Bosley, introduction, xxxii.

⁴⁷ This is discussed in greater detail in Hill, "The Use of Literature," 56.

many narrative elements of the original poetry were removed and had to be portrayed through physical representation on stage or through dialogue (which was taken directly from the source text). The overall form of the work followed a non-linear narrative where the chronology of episodes was often disrupted and mixed. As such, audience members unfamiliar with *The Kalevala* could find it difficult to understand. This was complicated by the use of three different languages, something a number of reviewers found distracting.⁴⁸

To me, this kind of work was a revelation. Although I had done some forms of non-traditional theatre before, it had followed a fairly lineal path; *Kalevala* used fragmentary narrative and a multitude of signs were given to the audience, some of which they may respond to whilst others they might not even be aware of. Whilst not something I have adopted in my own theatre work, it did give me a deeper understanding of such technique.

Rehearsal and Creation Process

The creation process began around April 2000, following the *Alilujki*, Easter caroling expedition. Our mutual interest in masks would be part of the project. Although Węgajty had experience of masks through their caroling work, I had introduced a method of mask-making using plaster-bandage and sticking tape which allowed very precise and close-fitting masks to be made and developed. This style of theatrical mask was new to the perceived “Węgajty-style” but subsequently became a major feature in the work of Field Project, including the seasonal *zapusty* (Shrovetide) and later dramatic performances. The figures of Lemminkäinen and the Mistress of Pohjola would wear such masks. A hand-carved wooden mask (used in caroling) was also considered for Kullervo but proved too unwieldy.

The form of actor work and working with a director at Węgajty were very different to most of what I had previously experienced. It was also one of the most challenging areas in that, as Joanna Kocemba-Żebrowska and Magdalena Hasiuk-Świerzińska point out, there was a certain amount of miscommunication, or rather a lack of communication between myself and other group members.⁴⁹ This was partly due to my own lack of Polish as well

⁴⁸ Zaczkowski wittily compared his experience to being on a tour of the Tower of Babel after the guide got lost. Zaczkowski, “Projekt Terenowy,” 18.

⁴⁹ Kocemba-Żebrowska and Hasiuk-Świerzińska, “The Węgajty Theatre,” 85.

as being unfamiliar with the group's working methods. On several occasions I complained about not being informed of changes in the work only to be told I had been present when they were discussed. We realized the others had code-switched into Polish without realizing, thus neither translating nor informing me about the conversation. I presumed that anything in Polish did not concern me (a casual rule we had agreed on).

Another problematic factor was my own experience of theatre work being mainly non-professional, where a director was more likely to explain their requirements exactly and the actors would do it, or to workshop something with explanations. This differed to Waclaw's methods, which involved a constant searching, revision, destruction and reshaping. Thus, I was less likely to be told what he wanted than being expected to find something that he liked. However, even being told didn't always help. I was once asked to make a Kullervo scene "more abstract." I just sat wide-eyed, "How do I make it abstract?" The routine was ultimately dropped.

During individual sessions with Waclaw, he would give me some basic instructions and the freedom of the theatre space. At times I had a different understanding of what we were both doing. I explored the boundaries of what might be possible in the space; climbing into the rafters, running around, experimenting with props. However, Waclaw rarely commented on a particular action. For this reason, I simply experimented some more. He later admitted to me, "It was very hard to find things in your work in those sessions because you never did the same thing twice!" I felt guilty of "tourism" or dilettantism, an act of seeking excitement in the moment but lacking the discipline to repeat the action and experience the mundanity which constant rehearsal may bring. I would have worked accordingly had I known it was required of me (which I presumably would have if I had worked more with the group).

An illustration of the "destruction" in the creation process was the change in form of the concept of the piece over the first period of the work. Waclaw's initial point of departure was the idea of a group of travelling performers somehow ending up in the world of *The Kalevala* (reflecting our own backgrounds as travelling players) and either interacting with characters or becoming them. We practiced several routines and songs portraying the group of troubadours, as well as some scenes related to *Kalevala* characters, such as Lemminkäinen and his mother (Erdmute Sobaszek) or the seduction of Kyllikki (Marijka Łubjancewa). However, as the deadline for the first performance approached, the "troubadour" scenes vanished and the piece focused solely on the *Kalevala* characters, but even these were liable to cutting.

One particular scene, using large sections of the poetic dialogue, showed Lemminkäinen fleeing Northlanders and pleading with his mother (Mute) to hide him. She considers a number of places but then negates them before suggesting the islands where his father once hid. The action had myself in one spot, on the floor, and Mute running around me to each “place,” whilst reciting the text. I could face towards the place but not move from the point on the floor. This was symbolic of Lemminkäinen being trapped, offered a refuge by his mother but then having it denied. The mother is actually controlling her son and making sure he chooses the same path as his father. From another artistic point, the action actually reversed our personal styles of performance. I was usually explosively dynamic, running about, constantly moving; Mute often played scenes in a more static style, channeling energy from one place and expressing it through the voice and body in a very intense way. This scene had her running (in a non-stylized way) around the room, while I stayed in the same place. Personally, I felt it to be a very strong scene but it disappeared abruptly and never returned.

The seduction of Kyllikki marked a change in both the shape of the play and my own characterization of Lemminkäinen. I had previously tried to play him as a suave, roguish lover-boy. The seduction involved him dancing romantically with Kyllikki, reciting text, before throwing her over his shoulder and exiting stage. There was a problem in that my dancing was not very good, making it hard to look suave and romantic against Marijka’s. Eventually this scene also disappeared, or rather morphed into a kind of comic, Benny Hill-style chase with two masked grotesques, characters. Lemminkäinen slowly, through me, became less of a suave rogue and more of a boorish braggart, a kind of hybrid Capitano and Punchinello of the *commedia dell’arte*. This subsequently influenced a scene where Lemminkäinen imagines fighting Northlanders, which was initially performed as a kind of *kata* (martial arts form of set movements) using a wooden *tai chi* sword but later, in keeping with Lemminkäinen’s new style, became a comic pantomime.

Although frustrated that these scenes apparently disappeared or changed without explanation, I realized the need for the “destructive” process. Whereas I, and most of the directors I had worked with previously, had a clear image of what was wanted, often driven by adherence to a text, Waclaw worked in a more fluid, “freestyle” way, spotting opportunities and barriers and implementing, changing and molding things as they presented themselves. This was quite an important lesson for me.

The creation process occasionally produced interesting results apparently by accident. It often involved long improvisation sessions, which sometimes

had less to do with the scenario than with rooting for ideas. These included observation and feedback within the group. It was during such a session that one of the most significant elements of the production took place.

In her article *Mroczny oddech Fina* (The dark breath of the Finn), Izabela Walesiak describes the scenery and lighting of *Kalevala—Unwritten Fragments*:

the picturesqueness of the show [is] built upon reflexes of one candle's flame, the reflection of warm light on the faces and masks of the actors and out of the terrifying darkness behind them. There, among the evanescent apparitions, shadows growing large on the walls, the other show is going on, a duel, spell-against-spell, charm-against-charm. This world of shadows is the mysterious land of Pohjola, the land of wizards, where nothing is what it seems to be.⁵⁰

The show was performed in two types of light, a “normal” electric overhead bulb in the fish lampshade. Walesiak describes it thus:

In the visual sense, the performance is clearly divided into two parts. The first part is the bright one . . . it is the buffo part of the show. The second part—the dark side of life—is all serious. . . . Pohjola is the land of unknown powers, of death, but also of dark temptation. . . . It is in the black world of Pohjola where there is place for qualms of conscience, despair, love longing and lack of fulfilment.⁵¹

This reliance on two forms of lighting (the electric light being a new feature in the group's work) led to experiments with both the candlelight and the moving of the performers' shadows. One evening stands out as pivotal. Whilst working with enacting folk songs, I began to sing an Irish children's ballad about an old lady murdering a baby then getting hanged. I sang the song sitting on the floor but also began playing out the action of the lyrics using my huge shadow on the wall. At the line about the hanging, I put my arm up, level with my head, creating the shadow effect of a rope (and my head jerking sideways). This aspect of shadow puppetry, where the shadow suggests something different to the performer's real appearance, instantly became something to play with. The mysterious environment of the shadowy

⁵⁰ Walesiak, “Mroczny oddech,” 140.

⁵¹ Walesiak, 140–141.

Northland became somewhere where what we see is not necessarily what is being done, imagery and reality intertwine and separate depending on one's position to the light.

This murky atmosphere, we felt, also suggested a shamanic tent, where the flickering, shadowy half-light allows stories and simple actions to become laden with significance and trickery, sleight of hand to tweak the imagination. Thus, the Demon Elk which Lemminkäinen hunts in his quest became a kind of British panto horse, with myself and Waclaw covered by a blanket, the antlers shaped by our hand shadows. The singing battle of Lemminkäinen and the Master of Pohjola, where each “sings” (magics) a spirit animal, became a hand-shadow show against the wall.

A Greater Confidence

The shadow episode was also pivotal in my personal development within the group. My experience of shadow theatre and my training in masks and movement demonstrated that I had more to contribute. I became a stronger “voice” in the process, enabling me to appreciate my own background and knowledge. This became more obvious (to me) during the second stage of the work.

Following its premier at the Węgajty theatre (as a work-in-progress), the piece received mixed comments from some of the audience, prompting a period of reflection before the second stage began. A VKS member who had travelled to Poland to see the show was particularly scathing about my performance, not least the physical aspects. Although I argued I had tried to parody some performance conventions, she just replied, “It was bad technique and you know it!” She was right.

I considered that no comment had been made during rehearsals about my “bad technique,” suggesting that either people thought I was doing it on purpose or they didn't actually realize it. Commedia was something I seemed more familiar with than the other cast members, so I decided to draw on my own experience and start using my “expertise” (however limited). In a subsequent rehearsal one of the masks was being presented in such a way that it lost much of its effectiveness. I pointed this out and suggested an alternative angle. I stood my ground in the ensuing discussion, refusing to continue until the director had made a ruling (which he did, in my favor).

I now felt greater confidence in sharing my own technical knowledge. While it had never been discouraged, my own feeling of awe (insecurity) at

working with the company (as well feeling I should simply observe, shut up and listen) had held me back. Arguably, it was a kind of “imposter syndrome” but as my UKS friend pointed out, “Do you think they’d want to work with you if you didn’t have something to contribute?”

Over the next few months, the piece developed in numerous ways, including the occasional breaking of the fourth wall, additional comic elements and revision of certain scenes. It toured to several festivals and external venues around Poland and Germany. By the time I returned to Scotland the form was well established and Jan Sobaszek took over my role. Initially Jan had the unenviable task of basically copying my performance until both he and the other players were able to find a path without me, whereby he began to create his own character. It is notable that he performed the piece in Polish.

Self-Examination and Self-Realisation

The period of working with Projekt Trenowy had several effects on me: some of these included feelings of isolation or *otherness*, while others were more positive and fulfilling. It is useful to examine my experience using Michel Foucault’s notion of technologies of self, something I have used elsewhere to explore Węgajty’s working and training methods.⁵² Foucault suggests four “technologies” which people may use to examine themselves: technologies of production (by which to create and shape things), sign systems, power (to objectify the subject), and technologies of self. The technologies of self permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.⁵³ Foucault proposes that individuals who either seek to or are required to align with a certain philosophy may undergo a process of self-examination and either choose to renounce an aspect of themselves deemed undesirable to their required state or assess and modify it, exercising control over themselves. Having reached a certain stage of their desired state, the next stage would be a form

⁵² Hill, *Active Theatre*, 90–101.

⁵³ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”, 18.

of disclosure (performance) of this improved aspect of self (e.g. confession in a Christian context or public display of the “new” status).⁵⁴

Regarding my Węgajty experience, while my interest in the group’s work stemmed from both that of an academic researcher and a theatre performer, the latter was of greater personal interest. The practices and philosophies of Węgajty attracted me artistically, as part of a culture I wished to be both associated with and a part of. This may have led to my self-restriction during the first period. The desire to be a part of the group led to me suppressing aspects of my usual character (speaking out about creative processes etc.) but also created a situation where I positioned myself as a less than equal partner (due to feeling less experienced) and more of an “apprentice” (certainly not something conveyed to me by the rest of the group). I felt a need, if I were to fit in, to learn and adopt as much of the Węgajty “method” of movement, voice etc. as possible and to “disconnect” to some extent from previous experiences and training. Ironically, this self-restricting is not part of Węgajty’s philosophy; indeed, many of the training workshops focus on helping people achieve things they may have previously considered impossible (e.g. physical exercises). Conversely, there were times that I found aspects of earlier training (such as martial arts) were not necessarily acceptable in the “Węgajty style” of movement and performance.⁵⁵

In order to achieve my aims, it was necessary to examine my physical habits as well as those aspects of my mental character which might prevent me from accepting the new methods. Therefore, my usual tendency to protest was often suppressed (although not always, occasionally reappearing rather heatedly) under my own idea that I was the soldier acting as my commander required.⁵⁶ This did lead to the beneficial insight of my own tendency to be “clingy” with ideas when a more ruthless approach might be more beneficial (something I have adopted to some extent). It should be stressed that this was never something knowingly imposed on me by the group.

The criticism following the first performance provoked a new period of self-examination and the realization that by restraining myself I was arguably contributing less and holding back the performance. I felt I had undergone enough “training” in the Węgajty “method” to be able to bring my own areas of expertise (as noted above). It might therefore be argued that my

⁵⁴ For a more in-depth examination of this matter see Hill, *Active Theatre*, 137–141.

⁵⁵ In one instance I was required to jump from a table and land on one foot, something undesirable in my military and martial arts training.

⁵⁶ Kocemba-Żebrowska and Hasiuk-Świerzińska, “The Węgajty Theatre,” 87.

self-examination and adoption of Węgajty's methods and techniques also allowed me to find a greater confidence in my own abilities and to integrate them into the groups work for our mutual benefit.

Critical Reactions to *Kalevala*—*Unwritten Fragments*

Despite the lack of academic interest in *Kalevala* there are several reviews from the first few performances which are of interest, although I only encountered these texts recently, so I can only comment from a retrospective consideration. As such, I will deal with them briefly and leave any interested researchers to seek them out for themselves.

Reviews to the show were mixed: the combination of different languages and audiences' unfamiliarity with *The Kalevala* caused some confusion. This was aggravated by the non-linear framework of the narrative. This was also evident in some of the audience comments following performances; people were unclear about the relationship between Lemminkäinen, his mother and the Mistress of Pohjola. Some asked whether the story was about a man with two mothers. Several reviewers criticized the length of the piece; Tadeusz Szyłłejko in particular, wondered how such an epic work could be handled in forty-five minutes.⁵⁷ Przemysław Borkowski wrote a thought-provoking enquiry into the relationship of Węgajty with ritual theatre, something he felt unsatisfactory in *Kalevala*.⁵⁸ While interesting, Borkowski's main critique appears to be based on a misconception of what *Kalevala* hoped to achieve. He questions the play's efficacy as ritual theatre, something neither Waław Sobaszek nor myself considered it to be. On a more positive note, both Walesiak⁵⁹ and Szyłłejko praised the staging and lighting. Szyłłejko recognizing that the piece was a new stage in the work of Węgajty, both with the greater use of masks (which would continue in later projects) and of folk humour.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Szyłłejko, "Mit," 4.

⁵⁸ Borkowski, "Po co," 143–45.

⁵⁹ Walesiak, "Mroczny oddech," 140–141.

⁶⁰ Szyłłejko, "Mit," 4.

Conclusion

Kalevala—Unwritten Fragments is arguably one of the most overlooked works in the repertoire of the Węgałty theatre, perhaps due to its short life-span and mixed reception. Unlike some of the Węgałty's earlier pieces, it has not been revived since it finished in 2002 and it has not received academic attention. Despite this there are several aspects of the project (albeit small ones) which have been influential in the future practice of Field Project, allowing the group, in some ways, to move away from the more "folk-based" aesthetic of previous work.

Firstly, the plaster-bandage construction technique introduced for *Kalevala* led to the construction of more elaborate masks for future projects, not least the *zapusty* performances, where the masks became more carnivalesque, and the theatrical masks, which featured in later work such as *Synczyzna* (Sonland, 2004) and were mentioned by Ewa Jarzębowska.⁶¹ Likewise, the electrical lighting and sound equipment used in the group's work with residents of a local home for senior citizens, *Iwona Poślubiona* (Yvonne married) and *Ubu król, czyli Polacy* (*Ubu Roi*), would have been almost unthinkable in the old "Węgałty style" pre-2000.⁶² While the use of the single electric light in *Kalevala—fragmentsy niepisane* caused some heated discussion amongst some members of the wider Węgałty company, it ushered in an acceptance of technology in the works of The Węgałty Theatre / Field Project. A further point, revealed by Erdmute Sobaszek, was that the experience of my fieldwork period and *Kalevala* led to the group's working methods becoming more democratic in future projects.⁶³

The lack of attention given to *Kalevala—Unwritten Fragments* in over twenty years, coupled with the very small amount of photographic record, makes it difficult for contemporary researchers to obtain a wider knowledge about the project. While there are several pieces of video footage, those that I have seen were unable to capture much (if any) of the candle-lit scenes. This article has been an attempt to introduce aspects of the *Kalevala* process to

⁶¹ Ewa Jarzębowska, "Magia Masek w Węgałtach," *Gazeta Wyborcza Olsztyn*, February 13, 2006, 1. Pictures of the *Sonland* masks can be found at: <http://www.teatrwegajty.art.pl/pliki/english/etresc.php?go=10> (accessed February 28, 2023) and Shrovetide masks at: <https://teatrwegajty.eu/zapusty-warsztat-innej-szkoly-teatralnej-2018/> (accessed February 28, 2023).

⁶² Kamila Paprocka, "Narracje litotyczne w wielkiej narracji teatru antropologicznego na przykładzie pracy Teatru Węgałty / Projektu Terenowego w Domu Pomocy Społecznej w Jonkowie," *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, no. 2 (2013): 148–185.

⁶³ Kocemba-Żebrowska and Hasiuk-Świerzińska, "The Węgałty Theatre," 87.

the growing number who never saw the show and have little to read about it. While the paper has undoubtedly skipped over many things, I hope it will inspire a little more research on an influential, but neglected period of The Węgajty Theatre / Field Project.

“Autoethnography does not exist without first-person writing. While it may be regarded as an oral story, it nonetheless lands on record.”⁶⁴ Such was the case with Trevor Hill’s autoethnographic reflection on *Kalevala*. Before it was written as a text, the researcher first presented it in a form resembling an acting performance, during an international conference *Węgajty jako czasownik? Krajobrazy—Społeczności—Pogranicza* (Węgajty as a verb? Landscapes—communities—borderlands, July 25–26, 2022). Two issues seem particularly important in doing so, one relating to the timing in which the text was created and the other regarding the motivation of its origin.

Hill worked on *Kalevala* from the spring of 2000 to winter 2001. The first previews were held in the fall, and the premiere was held on January 27, 2001. For a while he presented the play at home and abroad, including Germany, then he was replaced in the role of Lemminkäinen by Jan Sobaszek. He expressed his thoughts on the performance more than two decades later. Introspection, central to autoethnographic research,⁶⁵ in the case of Hill’s text is closely related to a retrospective view placed in a distant time perspective. The relationship between time and memory was also not without influence on the motivation of the author’s efforts. He wrote down his experiences motivated by the need to pass on the history he was a participant in and witness to, before he would forget, and in response to the possible need of future seekers of information regarding the events he personally knew. This motivation was associated with a desire to discard memories, to clear the mind (experience relief?), to close a certain chapter that had been left open over the years, as if awaiting people with whom he could share his knowledge.⁶⁶ This mindset echoes a reluctance to leave this knowledge only for himself, and a belief that its broadcast is an obligation and

⁶⁴ Krzysztof T. Konecki, *Przekraczanie granic, zamykanie granic: Perspektywa pierwszoosobowa w badaniach socjologicznych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2021), 13.

⁶⁵ Anna Kacperczyk, „Autoetnografia—technika, metoda, nowy paradygmat? O metodologicznym statusie autoetnografii,” *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej* 10, no. 3 (2014): 34, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.10.3.03>.

⁶⁶ Trevor Hill wrote: “I am a person who collects information, experiences and stories and stores them in my mind. When I can, I use them, share them, tell stories or write about them. I store them because they *might be useful* one day. The problem is that I *started to forget* things because I didn’t write or talk about them. I kept the information for years *in case someone needed it*. Now [by writing] I can *get rid of it and clear my mind of it*.” Based on Trevor Hill’s letter to the author, June 20, 2023 (italics—M.H.).

that knowledge that is not passed on will fade away.⁶⁷ Therefore, to write it down is both an act of preservation and sharing and a form of personal purification. And so, Trevor Hill applied autoethnographic writing.

Autoethnography as a particular method of qualitative research developed within the social sciences, shaped under the influence of the postmodernist shift and inspired by the performative shift,⁶⁸ is classified, along with contemplative research and transformative phenomenology research, as first-person research.⁶⁹ Autoethnography can be described as an “ethnography of one’s own experience,” “where the ‘I’ is the zero point from which the subject observes himself and the external world,” and from which he writes about himself and his “lifeworld”—according to Alfred Schütz.⁷⁰ “A key feature of autoethnography is that the researcher’s own personal experiential narrative is ‘written in,’ explicitly, in rigorous and analytic fashion as a central, fundamental and integral part of the research process.”⁷¹ Published autoethnographic materials are often personal in nature. In the records of personal processes, researchers often demonstrate how the research changed their perception of themselves, other people, and situations, and how it transformed the way they existed in the group and experienced internal and social reality.⁷² In autoethnographic practice, the researcher’s attention is directed in two directions, outward—or in relation to the external—and inward. The latter direction is what makes the process of self-observation, “the realization and naming of internal states, experiences, feelings and reflections, being so significant under this method. . . . The very act of recording is tantamount to becoming aware of and naming various aspects of the object of observation.”⁷³ Therefore, it is not surprising that first-person

⁶⁷ In another letter, Hill wrote from a slightly different perspective about his motives for working on a text about the Węgąjty’s *Kalevala*: “Another reason is to try to gather more information about the *Kalevala* performance before I forget it completely. There is so little written that one day *people will wonder about it, but there will be no one to ask.*” Based on Trevor Hill’s letter to the author, June 20, 2023 (italics—M. H.).

⁶⁸ Kacperczyk, “Autoetnografia—technika,” 36–37, 49.

⁶⁹ Konecki, *Przekraczanie granic*, 20.

⁷⁰ Alfred Schütz, *Collected Papers*, ed. Lester Embree, vol. 5, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 170–74. Konecki, *Przekraczanie granic*, 13. See Marcin Kafar and Anna Kacperczyk, eds., *O granicach i „graniczności” (w) autoetnografii* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2020).

⁷¹ Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, “Autoethnography: Situating Personal Sporting Narratives in Socio-cultural Contexts,” *Qualitative Research on Sport and Physical Culture*, no. 6 (2012): 191–212, quoted in Dominika Czarnecka, “Autoetnografia: Jej odmiany, atuty, ograniczenia i przydatność w badaniach dotyczących kultury fizycznej,” in *Antropologiczne wędrówki po „miejscach” bliskich i dalekich: Księga jubileuszowa dla Profesor Iwony Kabzińskiej*, ed. Dągnostaw Demski et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii PAN, 2020), 160.

⁷² Zob. Kinga Czerwińska, “Człowiek na-granicy, człowiek bez-granicy: Autoetnograficzne narracje z Cieszyna,” in *Opowiedzieć pogranicze: Koncepcje i narracje muzealne*, ed. Dawid Keller and Małgorzata Kurgan-Przybylska (Katowice: Muzeum Śląskie, 2020), 82.

⁷³ Kacperczyk, “Autoetnografia—technika,” 42.

narratives often reveal the subject of the researcher's transformation, their self-evaluation, awareness of self, and attitudes. In specific cases, first-person research can even play a therapeutic function.⁷⁴

Bringing conceptual order to the terminology as well as the practical applications of autoethnography, Anna Kacperczyk distinguished three dimensions of its functioning in social research.⁷⁵ At the data production level, autoethnography is treated as a novel technique for obtaining information, especially valuable when it comes from hard-to-reach regions of social life⁷⁶ or involves knowledge about experiences and inner processes otherwise not disclosed by participants in the social world. The use of autoethnography in this regard stems from the increasingly accepted assumption in social sciences that explanations of complex phenomena require the taking into account of the individual perspectives of those participating in them.

At the second distinctive level, at which autoethnography functions as a research method, Kacperczyk situates analytical autoethnography, as defined by Leon Anderson.⁷⁷ Its practice involves characterizing social reality taking into account diversified sources, including the researcher's personal experiences and feelings, emerging in the course of the research process.⁷⁸ The ultimate goal of this method is to create a theoretical framework in which the described cases could be explained and understood.⁷⁹

At the third level, Kacperczyk places evocative autoethnography, which is a new paradigm for producing knowledge about social life and its participants. The researcher noted that the very term "evocative"

introduces a new quality to social research, emphasizing the relational and interactional nature of the generated knowledge, the dialogical nature of relations. . . . Thus, evocative autoethnography is a type of cognitive practice that allows to generate knowledge in dyadic arrangements: narrator/performer—reader/viewer . . . [and] according to its creators and promoters, it is supposed to serve people to better understand themselves and the world.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Konecki, *Przekraczanie granic*, 22, 30.

⁷⁵ Kacperczyk, "Autoetnografia—technika," 32–34.

⁷⁶ Kacperczyk, 32, 42, 53; Czarnecka, "Autoetnografia: Jej odmiany," 168.

⁷⁷ Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 373–395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605280>.

⁷⁸ Czarnecka, "Autoetnografia: Jej odmiany," 163.

⁷⁹ Kacperczyk, "Autoetnografia—technika," 45.

⁸⁰ Kacperczyk, 48.

Evocative autoethnography breaks the scientific pattern of describing the world predominant in analytical autoethnography, and moves out towards new forms of knowing and experiencing the co-existence of others. Usually taking the form of a first-person narrative, it reveals “many layers of consciousness [of the researcher, M. H.] in the process, combining the personal with the cultural.”⁸¹

Trevor Hill’s reflection on *Kalevala* can be related to the three dimensions of the functioning of autoethnography highlighted by Anna Kacperczyk. The text contains a unique body of data, collected from inside the process of creating the play, containing personal observations and self-observations, and those on the creation of scenes that never made it into the show, as well as on the collaboration with the director and his way of working, and quoting the statements of others involved in the rehearsals. In presenting the context of the work on the performance, Hill’s “evoked sources” can be cross-referenced with other “evoked sources,” such as interviews with the other co-creators of the performance,⁸² as well as with existing sources,⁸³ those considered as well as omitted by the researcher. The next steps involve relating the researcher-actor’s text to analytical autoethnography and emotive autoethnography.

In presenting his method of working on *Kalevala*, Hill used analytical autoethnography. He described selected phases of rehearsals and the reception of the play, taking into account various sources, including personal experiences gained during the artistic and research processes. His observations of the rehearsals make it possible to outline the characteristics of the Węgajty work method,⁸⁴ which was also practiced outside this period.

When describing the work on *Kalevala*, the cultural and workshop differences between the researcher and the rest of the company are clearly highlighted. The diversity of experience and backgrounds has been a hallmark of Teatr Wiejski Węgajty’s creators from the very start. Hill’s presence in Węgajty was consistent with this tradition. However, in his case, diversity was associated with a difference

⁸¹ Stanisław Ossowski wrote “no social process can be defined without referring either explicitly or implicitly to the phenomena of consciousness,” Stanisław Ossowski, “Zoologia społeczna i zróżnicowanie kulturowe,” in *Dzieta*, vol. 4, *O nauce* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa, 1967), 343.

⁸² Based on author’s conversations with Erdmute Sobaszek on March 20, 2020, with Wacław Sobaszek on March 28, 2020, and with Marijka Brzezińska on November 17, 2022.

⁸³ Kacperczyk, “Autoetnografia—technika,” 40.

⁸⁴ Katarzyna Kułakowska, citing the opinions of adepts (and Sobaszek himself), that during the period of the Inna Szkoła Teatralna (Other Theatre School, run as part of the Węgajty Theatre since 2000) and Wacław Sobaszek, claims that not only is the working method not the essence of the company’s work, but that even the use of the term is inadequate, and one should not speak of the the Węgajty working method. Katarzyna Kułakowska, “Odkrywanie tego, co poziome: Wprowadzenie,” in *Polifonia: Rzecz o pracy twórczej Teatru Węgajty*, ed. Katarzyna Kułakowska (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2023), 17–18. I am of a different opinion.

in statuses, though such an arrangement was not in the optics of the director or the rest of the company's female members. As a performer, Hill in his first period of work not only adopted the role of a student who submitted to the process, absorbed knowledge and skills, and, by default, did not make any critical remarks, but also positioned himself below the other artists and, in a sense, was in opposition to them. This was perhaps due to the fact that he joined people who had been working for eight years, had gotten to know each other, and shared a workspace. In addition, Hill lacked the experience of working in a professional theatre, and after more than a dozen years of existence Teatr Węgałty / Field Project would have to be regarded as such. The actor-researcher was also the only non-Polish speaker in the company. This, in addition to a general feeling of being somewhat culturally alien, sometimes generated difficulties in communication. Yet, when viewed from a distance, the ranges of creative skills of all the artists at the time, though widely varied, were of comparable scope. Hill brought in many skills and a certain range of knowledge that neither Wacek and Mutka Sobaszek nor Łubjancewa had. His presence provided a strong impulse for the group to evolve. Years later, Łubjancewa pointed out that working on *Kalevala* was unique for all four performers. "Everyone was completely different, with a different energy, message; no one got in anyone's way just filled 'their' part in the entire thing."⁸⁵ From the actor's perspective, in this group there was no divide between master and disciple, elder and younger.⁸⁶

One of the most challenging areas for Hill was working with the director. The difficulties stemmed in part from the Scotsman's altogether different background. The directors he worked with formulated precise instructions performed by actors. Sobaszek worked (works) differently. He required actors to explore and suggest scenes individually and transform the contributed material. He left his colleagues a great deal of freedom, generated new situations, and encouraged and inspired individual development, but also required—even if he did not formulate it explicitly—independent creative work. He would then select and assemble elements from the actors' suggestions. The evolution was subject not only to the solutions of stage situations and gestures,⁸⁷ but also to the interpretations of the characters, where the biggest change, in fact, was in the character of Lemminkäinen. The description of Waclaw Sobaszek's directing as "fluid" and "freestyle," as well as constantly open to new possibilities, intuitive, and

⁸⁵ Based on Marijka Brzezińska's letter to the author, June 15, 2023.

⁸⁶ This was the case during work on *The Canterbury Tales*.

⁸⁷ The *kata*, the martial art form used to depict Lemminkäinen's fight with the Master of Pohjola, was transformed into a comic pantomime during rehearsals.

modal (focused on rhythm), seems accurate not only in the context of the work of Teatr Węgałty / Field Project, but also of both earlier and later periods. An encounter with such an open method of directing proved to be challenging for Hill, but also an important lesson, as did the contact with a non-linear plot, and a fragmented structure of dramatic action that ignores the classical drama format. There were times when the instructions given by the director were difficult for the actors to understand. Sometimes there was a lack of such feedback, and this was visible not only to Trevor Hill.⁸⁸ And it was more often under the influence of the opinions of other viewers rather than the director that Hill corrected his interpretation of the character he played.

Wacław Sobaszek's often "uncritical" attitude as a director was largely due to his philosophy's stemming from his way of being. For Sobaszek, it is important that a person be in their own context. He believes that there is a sense in all suggestions made by actors. He accepted this and looked forward to the development of the actors' proposals. As Erdmute Sobaszek explains, behind this attitude

lies his interpretation of reality, social relations. . . . A keyword of sorts may be the word "monad" and the notion that "a person is a monad." [Wacław] is very much defending himself and defending a reality in which a person will not disintegrate and lose their identity, their uniqueness in action or in thought in favor of a collective identity. . . . In my opinion, whatever is supposed to happen should happen between people. And according to Wacek, this happens inside a person, and a person has a duty to be defensive so that the collective doesn't take this away from them.⁸⁹

The director expected the actors' suggestions; he did not want to interfere with them, probably for fear of violating what is unique and at the same time subtle in the material presented by the performers. They, in turn, expected directorial remarks. There were communication problems. They led to situations in which the performer flooded the director with more and more new ideas and measures, but which failed to be worked on together. The director expected the actors to develop this process in a more in-depth way, and they needed a dialogue to do so. And that dialogue was difficult to enter into also because of the director's

⁸⁸ Erdmute Sobaszek recalled years later that the director's comments were often not clear to her as a *Kalevala* performer and did not translate into her work. Wacław "was not always able to speak to the actor in such a language that the actor could translate his remarks for his own use. In my work on the role of the Mother, when I asked him for directorial comments, there was often an inability to communicate. . . . [That is, comments] were [formulated], but often, for my needs at the time or in view of my insecurity about myself, there were not enough of them," concluded the actor. Based on author's conversation with Erdmute Sobaszek, March 20, 2020.

⁸⁹ Based on author's conversation with Erdmute Sobaszek, March 20, 2020.

fear that by interfering with the performers' proposals he was damaging the proposal. This mechanism blocked creativity, and probably not only of the actor.

Along with the method of acting, but also with directional suggestions and the reworking of scenes, sequences, and scenic solutions, there was a closely related treatment of rejection—shortening and skipping. The process of “destruction,” being an element of creation, resembled the work of a sculptor who, by casting away unnecessary elements of a stone block, uncovers the desired shape and form. This process of destruction affected both the structure of the entire performance—the abandonment of the idea of a dual-layered performance, i.e. troubadours playing characters—and of individual scenes—the sequence of the Mother's hiding of the fleeing Lemminkäinen. Discarding already prepared scenes is often difficult for actors in any kind of theatre, and it was no different during the *Kalevala* rehearsals.

The account is a valuable testimony to the effectiveness of Sobaszek's proposed method, consisting of creating space for the actors' improvisations, evoking unplanned situations caused by the director's remarks, sometimes “leaving the performers on their own” in the face of unforeseen circumstances and even in the face of a certain creative discomfort, difficulties, in a word—a “methodical” (!) expansion of the space in which the actors' improvisations will be the only support for the actors in seeking solutions..

The moment of introducing the scene born of Hill's initiative into the show was crucial to his development as an artist, as well as to his personal experience regarding his position in the ensemble. The strengthening of the power of his voice in the collaboration came not from a change in the way in which the other creators treated him, but from a greater confidence in his own actions. Thanks to this, the artist-researcher openly addressed some of the criticisms from viewers towards both the performance and the role of Lemminkäinen and then, under their influence, suggested some changes. He abandoned the assumed role of the disciple. Not only did he bring his knowledge of commedia dell'arte into the play in a much bolder form, but he also voiced criticisms of the proposed directorial solutions. Their legitimacy and consistency in the expression of them meant that many of these criticisms were addressed.

At the same time, the creative and research process was a significant internal process. Through his efforts during rehearsals, workshops, and performances involving corporeal, spiritual, intellectual, mental, and social dimensions, as well as the rejection of certain aspects of his personality considered undesirable, the researcher-actor underwent an inner transformation; he grew as an artist and as a human being. And in the end, he recognized that self-restraint is contrary to the working method of Teatr Węajty. It involves inspiring artists to acquire new

skills, build unexplored connections, and tap into what was previously out of reach for them when working. Hill, as a researcher-actor at Teatr WęgaJty / Field Project, reached a state of greater self-confidence, happiness, and fulfillment during the final stage of his work on *Kalevala*.

In Hill's study, the method of analytical autoethnography was coupled with elements of evocative autoethnography. The latter included first-person narration, the relational nature of the generated knowledge, consisting of both the interpretation of Lemminkäinen's character and the composition of certain scenes born—as is typical in theatre—in a dialogue between the actor and the director, but also, less commonly, in a dialogue between the actor and the audience. But also, there is a shift from the presentation of the external, cultural aspect of personal experience, like the initial sense of a certain isolation and alienation, towards attention directed inward, serving to reveal further layers of consciousness and the “sensitive Self.”

The actor's reflections on *Kalevala* do more than provide insight into the method of directing. They are equally important in describing the artistic and personal development process of Hill himself. The development of acting skills—in his case, primarily movement and dance, bolstering courage in improvisation as well as spontaneity—was associated with internal work, the deepening of self-observation, and the development of certain aspects of character. The record is as much a story about the needs, fears, and psychological strategies of an actor learning a new way of working, about the evolution of his belief in his own abilities, about the experience of acceptance or lack thereof, resulting not so much from external circumstances, but from internal attitudes and decisions.

The pivotal part of the process, as described by the actor-researcher, was to experience the causal relationship between a psychological standpoint and creativity, and to recognize that his voluntary adoption of the role of a pupil, stemming from both his weakened confidence in his own competence and his desire for control,⁹⁰ inhibited his creative contribution to the work process. In turn, this suppression of important aspects of the personality of one of the four performers left a clear imprint on the entire performance and meant that its aesthetic value couldn't fully develop. The example of Trevor Hill shows the close relationship between psychology and creativity. A prerequisite for creativity—the kind that Teatr WęgaJty pursues at least—is the feeling of self-confidence and the shouldering of responsibility for the collective work by all co-creators, as well as the contributing of that which makes each individual specific. Waclaw

⁹⁰ Cf. Oskar Hamerski, *Improwizacja teatralna według Keitha Johnstone'a* (Kraków: Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna im. Ludwika Solskiego w Krakowie, 2012), 121.

Sobaszek's method of improvisation, often used, and still practiced today, has been extremely helpful in training these skills. Improvisation teaches the actor not only to cooperate, think, and be creative, but also acceptance, including self-acceptance. This, in turn, frees the actor from trying too hard, since "trying too hard to do something . . . is the worst way of teaching spontaneity," emphasized Keith Johnstone, an English director, writer, and educator of improvisation.⁹¹ In addition to craft and talent, improvisation also develops the performer's strength and courage. Oskar Hamerski, who wrote a book on Johnstone's method, noted that the rules developed during improvisation, such as being here and now, being attentive, accepting change, and acting spontaneously and without fear, are identical to the rules governing the feeling of happiness.⁹² The use of improvisation therefore develops not only artistic but also human qualities. Both are closely connected. The actor-researcher's work on *Kalevala* and its analysis led him to unveil, but also strengthen, his "sensitive Self."

Hill described his own development of creative independence as well as partnership in an ensemble in which, despite their different roles, all male and female members were equally placed, as co-learners and also as co-teachers.⁹³ This process also helped unveil a certain characteristic of Teatr Węgałty as a place of growth, offering space and inspiration for formative work. On another note, already-formed artists often cannot find a place in the Węgałty structure. The company trains, but does not create space for the already trained to develop. It allows them to hatch, but refuses to keep them. It acts like a proper nest, that is, one that is initially safe but eventually empty. Hill's departure from the ensemble, like many artists before and after him, was somehow programmed into the structure of Teatr Węgałty.

Kalevala was, in a way, a borderline performance. It marked the ending of a certain form of theatrical work. It was the last performance created by an ensemble consisting of Warmia residents, the last referring directly to an epic, and their penultimate performance made by a permanent ensemble in a theatre hall (the last being *Sonland*, 2004).⁹⁴ The performance based on the Finnish epic also

⁹¹ Keith Johnstone, quoted in Hamerski, *Improwizacja teatralna*, 117.

⁹² Hamerski, *Improwizacja teatralna*, 131, 138.

⁹³ The term "co-learners" was introduced by John Amos Comenius (1592–1670), a Czech philosopher and Protestant reformer, a forerunner of modern pedagogy. See Barbara Grzegorzewska, "Komunikowanie się w edukacji w twórczości Jana Amosa Komeńskiego," *Siedleckie Zeszyty Komeniologiczne*, no. 4 (2017): 118–19. "Co-teachers" is a term inspired by Comenius's thinking.

⁹⁴ In 2010, after a long rehearsal process, Zofia Bartoszewicz and Erdmute Sobaszek created and performed in the theatre hall a two-author performance *Prolog komedii: Sceny pomiędzy poezją a dokumentem* (Prologue of a comedy: scenes between poetry and documentary). In this case, however, it is difficult to speak of teamwork.

opened up new areas of exploration: a series of performances and performance art works held in the surrounding landscape.⁹⁵

Kalevala was also a turning point in Waclaw Sobaszek's directorial path. It was only after the staging of the Finnish epic that he turned to dramatic texts in his work for the first time. Based on fragments of the first, second, and fourth parts of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) and An-ski's *Dybbuk*, he directed *The Ghostly Shroud* (2001), firstly titled *Dziady Warmińskie* (*The Warmian Forefathers' Eve*). In turn, he used Witold Gombrowicz's *The Marriage* in the first part of *Sonland*. In this production, the company also expanded the tools introduced in *Kalevala*—masks, electric lighting, shadow theatre. *Kalevala* broke new ground for these later productions.

What was also groundbreaking was the highlighted presence of an actor-researcher in the ensemble and his use of an autoethnographic perspective. The latter, although not easy to implement in theatrical work, as it requires dual expertise on the part of the people involved, in the case of the characterization of the Węgajty method of work provided important discoveries. As a method, autoethnography seems to be an interesting suggestion for wider application in theatre research than hitherto seen, not only because it makes it possible to “go beyond the familiar”⁹⁶ to reach information that is difficult to obtain in other ways,⁹⁷ but mainly because it takes into account, in addition to the artist's skills, their experiences and internal processes, both artistic and human. This method can be extremely helpful, especially today, when the creative process, which has been analyzed with increasing attention in recent years, has become the center of interest for theatre researchers.

Translated by Maciej Mahler



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⁹⁵ The notion of Teatr Węgajty as a theatre in a landscape was introduced by Justyna Biernat, “The Landscape,” 303–321.

⁹⁶ Edyta Andrzejczak, “Autoetnografia i dylematy postrzegania inności w kontekście doświadczeń studentki Erasmsa w Lizbonie,” in *Inny w podróży*, vol. 2, *Narracje podróżnicze w XX i XXI wieku*, ed. Magdalena Rabizo-Birek et al. (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2017), 261.

⁹⁷ Mediated information gained in conversations or extended interviews carries a different weight if only because of the existence of an intermediary interlocutor between the artist and the text.

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