

PRODUCT



Tanja Silvestrini
Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki
Dept. of Time & Space
MFA thesis

Supervisor: Malin Arnell
Examiners: Maija Mustonen & Pilvi Porkola

4th October 2023

TABLE OF CONTENT

SUMMARY	3
FACT SHEET	4
ALIVENESS	8
TESTING THE BOUNDARIES OF PUBLIC SPACE	11
FICTIONAL REALITIES	14
CREATION OF A HUMAN PET SHOP	17
- Background	18
- Field work	19
- Time & Space Exhibition Vol. 1	22
- Business plan	
- Online presence	27
- Physical presence	31
- The installation	33
INSIDE/OUTSIDE	44
NORMALITY	48
SAFETY	50
CONSENT AGREEMENT AND CARE INSTRUCTIONS	52
CONSENT	55
SIMPLY MAMMALIAN	58
SCALE	62
SOMETIMES I THINK ABOUT	65
ABOUT THE LIVE PERFORMANCE	67
THE LIVE PERFORMANCE	69
THE PET DIARIES	88
- The Bunny	89
- The Guinea Pig	94
- The Rat	108
- The Hamster	116
OWNER REVIEWS	129
CONCLUSION	132
BIBLIOGRAPHY	133
PHOTO CREDIT	134

SUMMARY

My thesis work is called *The Pet Shop*, and is a multifaceted installation and durational performance work in the form of a conceptual human pet shop/adoption service, taking place online, in participants' homes and as a multimedia installation and live performance in Kuvan Kevät 2023.

The Pet Shop is a real, fictional business that offers anthropomorphic pets for temporary adoption. I hand sewed four pet costumes that I photographed with models in a photo studio, using the photos as marketing images for The Pet Shop's official website and instagram account. Through the website people could access an adoption interest form, from which they get the opportunity to live with a human pet for 24 hours.

During Spring 2023 I was adopted by four different households as their bunny, guinea pig, rat and hamster. My owners were instructed through a consent agreement how to care for me and to document our life with their phone camera. At the end of the adoption I took a photo of us in my owners' home. Afterwards I kept a diary writing about the experience from my perspective as a pet, which I then made an audio recording of. The videos, photographs, consent agreements and diary recordings were presented as a part of my hamster house installation in Kuva/Tila gallery. In addition, I made a 15 min performative business pitch with self composed electronic music to accompany the installation.

The work is an immersive exploration of interpersonal- and interspecies relationships, with a special focus on care, intimacy, trust and the power structures that shape them. By framing the work as a business, I tap into consumerism, otherness and desire, questioning what is normal and natural in a reality shaped and run by fictions.

This written part is trying to fill in the blanks of my motivation and drive, explaining why choices have been made the way they have. The title *Product* refers to an article or substance that is manufactured or refined for sale and a thing or person that is the result of an action or process.

Four hand sewn pet costumes (faux fur), four 24 hour pet adoption performances in people's homes, hamster house installation of chipboard, wood, newspaper prints and neon green fleece interior (200x150x150 cm), four neon green handmade pet beds for humans (60x60 cm), two fleece covered stools, four three-page consent agreements in plastic folders, pink paper clips, four pet and owner portraits (21x30cm), three group photos of the pets (30x40 cm), four screens with adoption documentation (Bunny: 27:32 min, Hamster: 26:56 min, Guinea pig: 37:13 min, Rat: 8:49 min), website¹, instagram account², a logo, 250 business cards, feeder, water bottle, chains, mp3 player, one headset, "The Pet Diaries" sound piece (40:40 min) + a 15 minute live performance with self composed music and self designed uniform

¹ <https://thepetshoppets.wixsite.com/thepetshop>

² <https://www.instagram.com/consensualpetshop/>



I am thinking that the line between the real and the imagined is a construct.³

³ adrienne maree brown, "Introduction," in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, ed. adrienne maree brown (Chico, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019), 7.



ALIVENESS

Nothing makes me feel more alive than being intoxicated on a packed dance floor. When my body is taken over by the force majeure of the rhythms and the energy of the people around me. There is no yesterday, no tomorrow, only now. It's not so often I can say that I'm not existing in the past, present and future at the same time. But on the dance floor I'm only in one place. Right here. Sweating, breathing, moving. We are here together, surrendering to the beats.

tikitikitikitiki
untz-untz-untz-untz

Do you hear it?

There is something so irresistible about a house beat in a room with dimmed lighting. Flashing strobes. Our faces light up in brief moments. The music is so loud that we are forced to be physically intimate when we want to say something to each other. I crawl up in your neck. *Thank you for being here with me*, I whisper.

Do you trust me?

Music is an important part of both my artistic and everyday life. Periodically I get hangups on one specific song that functions as the anthem to a certain time and place. I want to listen to the same song over and over until I have drained the melody and lyrics like a vampire with their prey. I like to imagine that the energy of the music is rubbing off on whatever I'm engaging myself in, becoming an invisible part of my life and work, a part of my identity.

The ceiling lights turn on. Bouncers appear. They tell us that the magic is over. We go to fetch our clothes. Exit into reality. Sunshine hits our sweaty skin. We hug and part.

I put my headphones in. I love the intimacy of having an artist singing, talking, whispering, shouting directly into my ear. As the sound is penetrating my exterior, I am carrying the artist with me. All my atoms are vibrating. *Are you also carried away by the same rhythms that I am? Are we on the same frequency, wavelength?*

I'm walking the same way as yesterday and the day before yesterday, but today it feels different. Everything is different, it always is. Today I am in a really good mood. I want to skip and sing along to this super catchy tune. I really, really want to - *I need to!*

Doubtful thoughts start popping up. *What if I look weird? What if you think I'm crazy?*

I resent this doubt, because I know it comes from fear and shame. The fear of rejection and judgement; of standing out, taking space and being visible; of becoming an outcast. But I don't want to be guided by fear and shame. If I saw you skipping down the road singing with your heart's lust, I would be so happy. I want more dancing, more singing, more feelings, more joy, more pleasure. Make every day a Pride parade. *Begin to understand the liberation possible when we collectively orient around pleasure and longing.*⁴

⁴ adrienne maree brown, "Introduction," in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, ed. adrienne maree brown (Chico, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019), 3.

(..) Pleasure is not one of the spoils of capitalism. It is what our bodies, what our human systems, are structured for; it is the aliveness and awakening, the gratitude and humility, the joy and celebration of being miraculous.⁵

So I dare myself to do it. Feeling a bit awkward at first, but then, little by little, I become more daring. Longer leaps. Higher, higher, higher! It feels so good! *It takes courage to enjoy it. The hardcore and the gentle. A big time sensuality.⁶*

I'm trying to make eye contact with those who cross my path. Our eyes meet. I send you an acknowledging smile and form a soundless *hello* with my lips as we pass by each other.

There you are!

*There you are with your whole life of experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings.
Where are you coming from, where are you heading?*

I wonder what reality feels like for you. I wonder which sensory inputs are stimulating and shaping your life.

What makes you feel alive, connected, in touch with your wilderness? What brings you joy and pleasure?

⁵ brown, "Introduction," 16

⁶ Guðmundsdóttir, Björk. 1993. *Debut*. UK. One Little Independent Records, Elektra.

TESTING THE BOUNDARIES OF PUBLIC SPACE

When I started in 8th grade I became a part of a lovely friend group. We played a lot with our presentation; experimental clothing combinations, vibrant hair colours, made our own jewellery, photographed and made videos that we posted on a blog that we ran. At some point I decided only to wear colourful clothes in resistance to Nordic noir, coolness and monotony. Most importantly we were playful and loud as fuck in public space. We'd swing ourselves around the poles in the metro, sing and dance, laugh, hold hands, sit on each other's laps. We were visibly affectionate towards each other and visibly stood out.

I loved the ugly looks we would get. It felt like we were hitting a societal nerve. That the way we presented or acted was not how we *should*. And that made me want to do it more. This friend group taught me to be fearless of the judgemental eye of *the law of jante*, that is deeply ingrained in Norwegian society. First rule of jante: *You're not to think you are anybody special*⁷. But there were also people who smiled at us, which was a nice confirmation that we could actually be a momentary spark in someone's day by presenting in specific ways.

*Fashion has definitely helped to define my pleasure activism. When my father passed away over a year ago I felt a grief I've never had before. After two months of being in a catatonic state, I began craving laughter and joy. I decided to wear the one thing that gives visual pleasure instantly no matter who is wearing it, sequins. I wore sequins every single day for about a month. Although my energy was low, my sequin jackets would make someone giggle, and then they would send me that good energy, which would soothe my wounds. It was, and still is, the best healing therapy I've experimented with.*⁸

In this period I learned a lot about visibility. This is something that has strongly affected my work; how I present and how that changes the context, situation and/or other people's behaviour and attitude.

When I was in upper secondary school, I wanted to become an illustrator and started doing freelance illustration jobs for magazines and newspapers. What I enjoyed most about this was the translation process from words to images. The deconstruction of meaning and the reassembly of it. Read between the lines, pick up the emotional undertones and exaggerate them. When I was introduced to performance art I quickly left figurative drawing behind. I realised I could do the same as I did on paper in real life by turning myself into the living embodiment of the fantasies that were playing out in my head. In this sense it was a slippery slope from creating scenarios on paper to bring the scenes into real life situations.

⁷ Sandemose, Aksel. *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*. (Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1933), 85.

⁸ Ingrid LaFleur, "A Pleasure Philosophy," in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, ed. adrienne maree brown (Chico, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019), 99.



FICTIONAL REALITIES

My works develop as a response to the surroundings I'm finding myself in. They are a result of my body meeting the world in different ways. Every place is loaded with visible and invisible information to be extracted, fictions that unfold from fictions that already exist. I start trying to figure out how I could fit in or stand out from all of this. All my works have roots in everyday observations. They are information or materials gathered from lived life, recycled and reassembled in a new form, time and space. For me, art and life are not separable.

The term *fiction* has become important to me. A few years ago I came across a TED talk by Yuval Noah Harari called *What explains the rise of humans?* and it was one of those life changing moments where everything turned upside down and finally made sense.

(...) We humans control the world because we live in a dual reality. All other animals live in an objective reality. Their realities consist of objective entities, like rivers and trees and lions and elephants. We humans, we also live in an objective reality. In our world too, there are rivers and trees and lions and elephants. But over the centuries, we have constructed on top of this objective reality, a second layer of fictional reality, a reality made of fictional entities, like nations, like gods, like money, like corporations. And what is amazing is that as history unfolded, this fictional reality became more and more powerful, so that today, the most powerful forces in the world are these fictional entities. Today, the very survival of rivers and trees and lions and elephants depends on the decisions and wishes of fictional entities, like the United States, like Google, like the World Bank - entities that exist only in our own imagination.⁹

The reason this talk is so dear to me, is because it describes how even what we take for granted as objective truth are imaginary constructions dependent on belief. I see all my works operating in this fictional layer of reality. I create stories that I project onto the objective reality, coexisting with the other fictional realities, that fuels my actions and objects with energy. The world is vibrating with stories and interpretations of them. When I imagine my works, my fantasies never take place in a white cube for this reason. I want to be in places where random people would stumble upon me, people who are not actively going to a space with the goal to experience art. I want my work to exist in contrast to the habitual rhythms of everyday life, something that makes you stop and wonder what is going on.

⁹ Harari, Yuval Noah. *What explains the rise of humans?* London: TED Global, 2015.



CREATION OF A HUMAN PET SHOP

BACKGROUND

The Pet Shop is an extension of my BFA project *Kitty*, where I sewed a cat costume and made an online advertisement looking for people who wanted to adopt me as their cat for a week. My main focus was on relationality. How well can I blend in with your everyday life? How will our non-verbal relationship shape itself, and how will it change over time? However, a few days after I posted the ad with an overwhelming response, the first Covid lockdown in Norway happened.

As I followed the news, I read stories about people acquiring pets for company in the boring state of self-isolation and increased revenue for pet shops. As the months went by, the news was replaced with stories of people dumping their pets at shelters or even outside because they wanted to go on summer holiday. The shelters were begging people to understand that getting a pet is a huge responsibility and commitment. Thus, my focus went to the pet shops and the pets who are sold there.

I find pet shops' extremely fascinating as a legal place where you can walk in and pick and choose a friend from the selection of living products whom you will purchase the life of. Now, different countries have different policies regarding which species are allowed to be sold in pet shops. In Norway it is illegal to sell cats, dogs and ferrets in pet shops, however, smaller pets are still allowed. It seems like the smaller the animal, the lower the value. I wanted my creatures to be fluffy, so I decided to upscale four furry pet shop creatures that my customers could choose from; a rat, bunny, guinea pig and hamster.

FIELD WORK

A part of my preparations was field research. I decided to visit as many pet shops in Helsinki as possible, gathering information through presence and observation. How are the shops designed? What products do they have? Who are the customers? What language is used on packaging? What kind of images would I find? How active are the employees? What kind of pets are sold and how are they living?

All of the pet shops I went to looked like chaotic storage spaces with product filled shelves from floor to ceiling. Strong lighting. For cats and dogs the products looked like toys for children. For the smaller pets, the selection was more modest, mainly toys made from wood to fulfil these animals' need to gnaw. And amongst all these non-living products; the living products. I was surprised to see how many shops actually sold pets, and so many different species. Hamsters, budgies, chameleons, turtles, so many species of fish.

It felt disgusting to stand on the other side of the glass cages looking at the beings inside. Pet shops are really like small zoos. The inside of the cages were generally small and scarcely decorated. Some had a little house that the pets had the possibility to hide inside. However, if the animals weren't visible, people would actively try to look for them, like they were involuntarily participating in a game of hide and seek. As if the fact that they were hiding made them even more visible.



Bunnies are always the bosses



Delicious
snack-mix

BEST FRIEND
PARTY MIX

SUPER PREMIUM
QUALITY!



PARTY MIX

Fuldfoder til kaniner og gnavere *) - Helfoder till kaniner och gnäsnare *)
Complete feed for rabbits and rodent *) - Täysravinto kaneille ja tyrskyille *)

No colorants

Low fat

Improved recipe
for the teeth

With vitamins

900ge

THE PET (WORK-) SHOP

Simultaneously as I was visiting pet shops around town, I was also a part of the *Time & Space Exhibition Vol. 1* in Kuva/Tila. My work was an open studio together with Natalie Seifert Eliassen. We sat there during the opening times, sewed and invited the audience to chat with us about pets, pleasure, performance or whatever was on their mind. We wanted to be transparent about our processes by making our private space public.

Most of the time I was sitting in a bean bag on the floor in the middle of the room, cutting fabric, sewing parts together and trying them on my body to see how they fit. On the walls I hung information and speculations about the domestication process of the pets I was fictionally breeding. On the floor under this was a cage on a piece of artificial grass. The finished bunny costume was sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall.

In the first pet shop I visited, I filmed the pets and secretly recorded a conversation with the employee that I edited into a 6 minute film without a narrative. The voices were high-pitched and unrecognizable. The film was screened on a TV that was placed on the floor, on top of a large piece of synthetic fur that the audience could lay down on.

We were surprised that a lot of the audience didn't enter. The majority stopped in the door, watched us for a bit and moved on, even though we were greeting them. I wondered if people were shy, if the situation felt too intimate or if they didn't want to disturb us. Maybe they were startled to find two people working in an exhibition space. We never got to ask, so I guess I'll never know. Maybe next time I'll run after them and ask why they didn't come in.









BUSINESS PLAN

ONLINE PRESENCE

Most businesses nowadays have a website and an account on social media, so it was clear to me that I should also think about my online presence. I booked the photo studio at school and invited four friends to model the costumes as I photographed them. I wanted the images to have a commercial look and instructed the models to look inviting and appealing, gazing at the camera all the time. The photographs were used on the website and instagram for marketing purposes, and were also a part of the installation amongst the adoption documentation. The website was designed minimalistically, white with sans serif fonts, containing a logo and a few fictional reviews. The “about” us text was a generic pet shop text that was automatically generated by the platform itself, that I adapted to fit my project with inspiration from other online pet shops. From the site you could click the “Adopt now” button that would redirect you to a “Pet Adoption Interest Form” from which you could send and potentially become a human pet owner.

After Kuvan Kevät the website is still active, but remade to function as its own online gallery, where you can access the material that was presented in the exhibition, still with the possibility to adopt.







PHYSICAL PRESENCE

In the real world I hung simple posters around town and in school. I ordered 250 business cards that I have always carried with me and actively gave out to those who would be interested in the project. The business cards were the only element you could physically take with you from the installation. In the future I want to design brochures and flyers to hand out in public space, make a sales booth on wheels, as well as creating a line of merchandise using clothes and bags from the recycling centre.

The business pitch is the live, stage-based performance part of the work, that functions as a marketing campaign that each time it is performed marks the official, physical, temporary opening of the shop that closes again after 15 minutes.

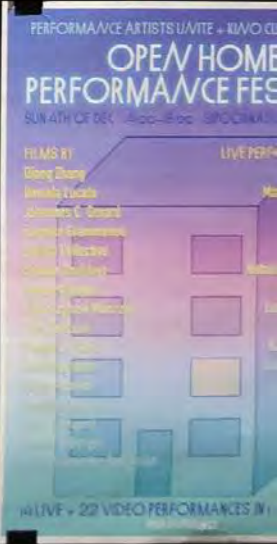
K346

Ateljee K346
Ateljé K346
Atelier K346



Editointi K343
Redigering K343
Editing K343

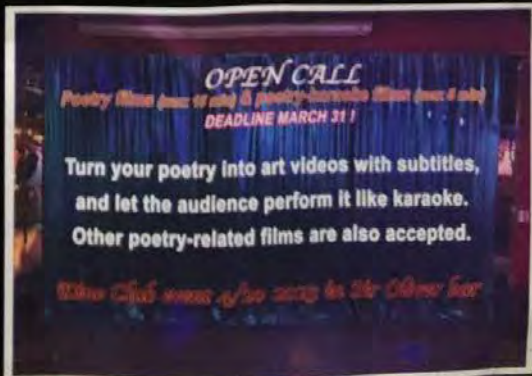
Filmiskannaus
Filmskanning
Film Scanning



K345



K343



OPEN CALL: Poetry films and poetry-karaoke videos!
DEADLINE: March 31, 2023

THE INSTALLATION

The main construction of the installation was an upscaled hamster house modelled after a real hamster house that I found in a pet shop in Helsinki. A white, rectangular box (200x150x150cm) with a rounded doorway and a circular window that the audience could enter.

On the front of the installation you could see The Pet Shop's logo; one group photo of the pets in a white frame; an empty pet water bottle and a feeding box with business cards for the audience to take and neon green, furry letters spelling "WELCOME" above the doorway. On top of the house the four pet costumes laid passively and deflated, hands attached to the installation in different gestures; pointing at some parts, holding onto something else. Each face gazing over each corner.

On the three remaining external walls the material gathered from the adoptions were presented. The two short sides presented the bunny and the guinea pig in the same way; a large photograph of each pet wallpapered to the surface, large vertical screens showing the video documentation; the photographs of the pet with its owners in white frames; the consent agreements hanging in plastic folders from pink paper clips and the two other framed group photos of the pets. The backside was shared between the rat and the hamster, presented in the same way as the sides of the bunny and guinea pig, except that the screens were smaller and vertical.

For each pet there was a circular, neon green pet bed (60x60cm) on the ground connected to the house with chains for the audience to sit on, as well as two stools with a neon green cover on the seat.

The inside of the box was covered from floor to ceiling with the same neon green fleece as the letters and pet beds on the outside. Here the only other element was a pair of headphones where you could lay down and listen to the recordings of The Pet Diaries, or just hang out.

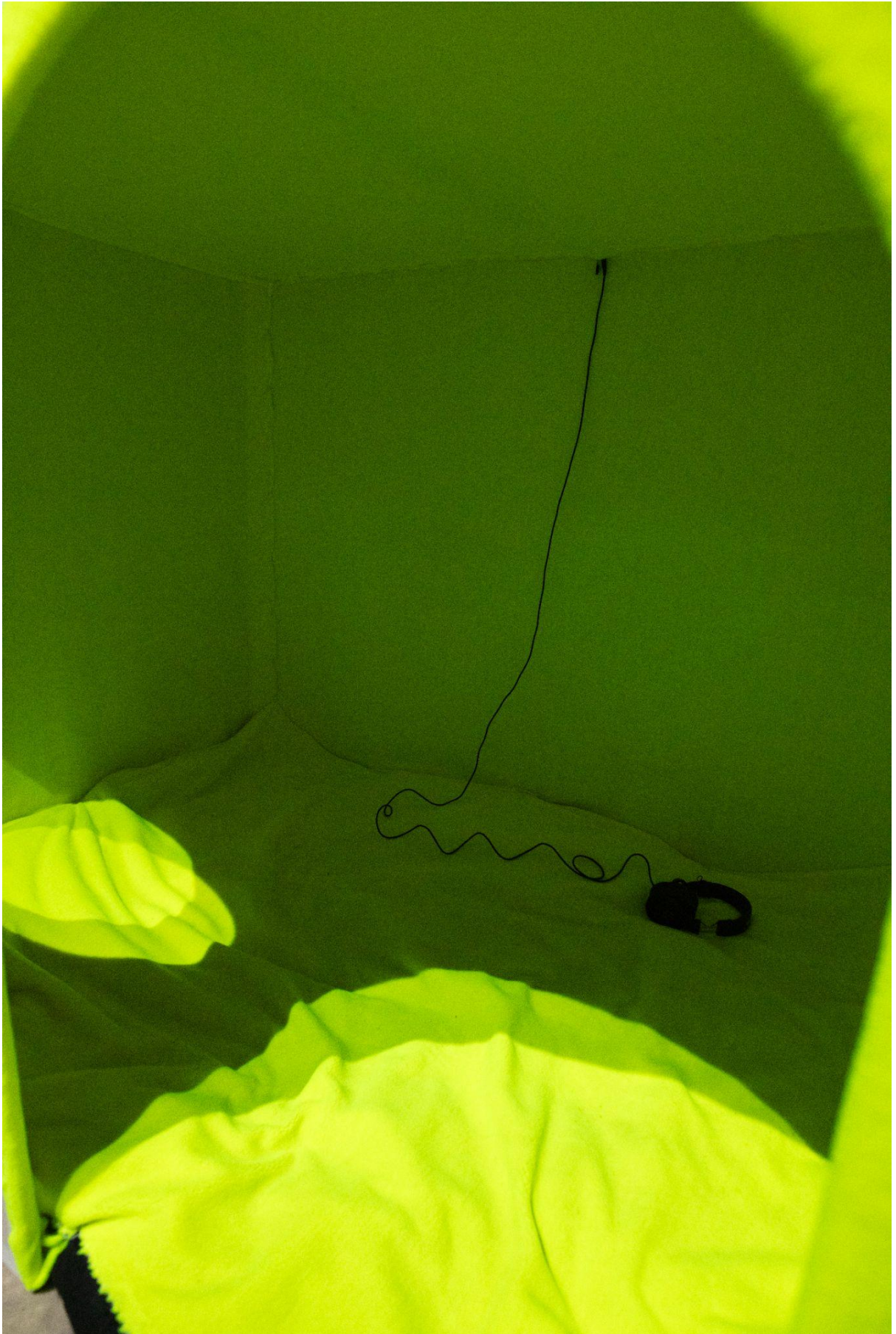
I wanted to create an installation that encourages physical engagement and alteration of movement in different ways and that stimulates multiple senses. The box itself is 150 cm tall and the doorway 130 cm, so if you are taller than this, you have to crouch or crawl to enter. On the floor outside there is a sign that says that you should take off your shoes before entering. The four human pet beds are laying on the ground. Some photographs are hung almost at floor level. The consent agreements hung at different heights. Except for the screens and frames, everything had the possibility to move and be touched.









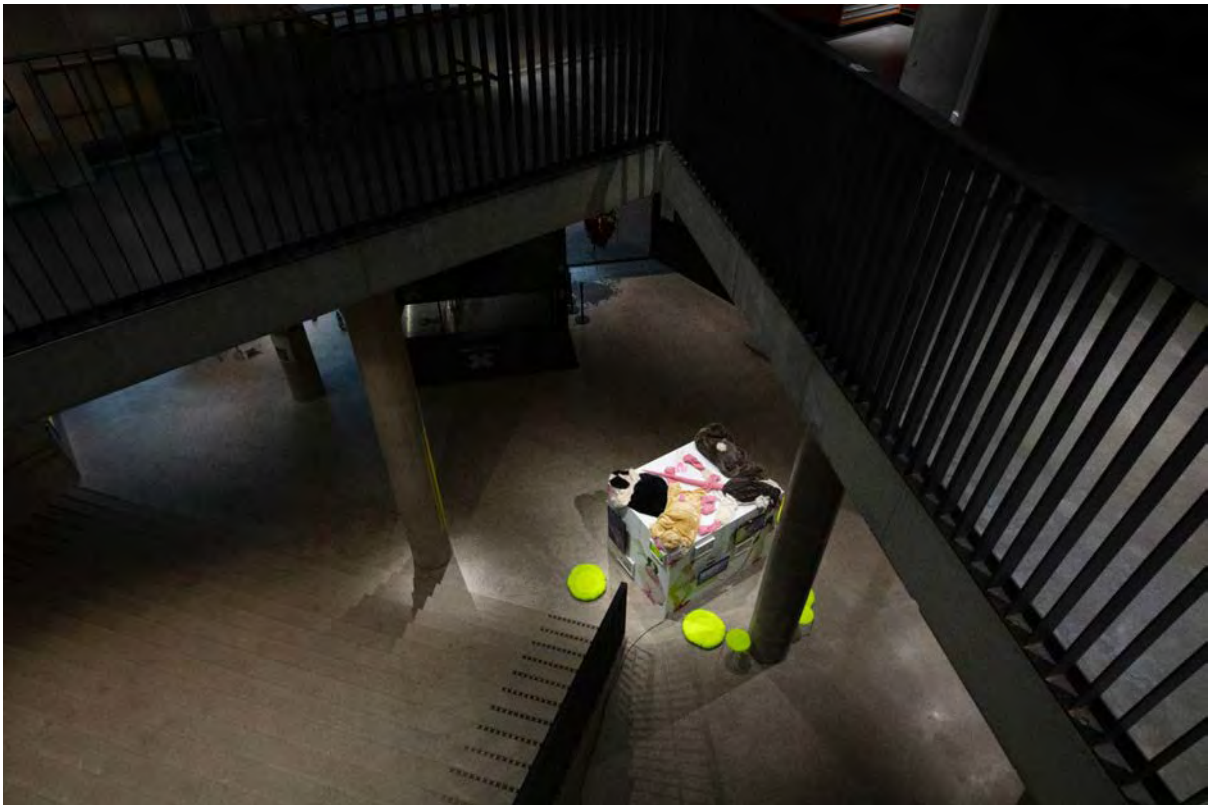












INSIDE!
OUTSIDE

Throughout the project, I am consciously playing with the outside/inside and the visible/invisible. In the home performance I am physically entering a full-covering costume that only reveals my eyes, and performing for a limited audience, who are also collaborators, in a very limited space which is their home. They decide who gets to enter and therefore who gets to be the other “audience”/participants experiencing the performance first hand; who has access. Since my owners are in charge of the documentation, their choices decide what will be visible for the audiences later on. This choice was made inspired by the online pet video phenomenon and my desire to let go of control. I was wondering what my owners would choose to document. But mainly, the performance is a personal experience, which automatically creates exclusivity.

The hamster house installation is a space that you can enter and hide in, inside a large building with a lot of open space. On the outside of the box, you get the spectacle, a lot of visual stimuli that is the documentation taken from the outside, from a camera. You are an outsider looking in on an experience you were not a part of. The inside of the box is covered with a fabric with a colour that is screaming high-visibility. On the inside you can listen to the pet’s own side of the story, entering the pet’s mind. When entering, you also make yourself visible for the audience’s analytical gaze. You become the observed pet.

One big motivation of mine has been power relationships. Not only between a pet and an owner, but between the performer and the audience. Usually, the audience is actively coming to a performance, and in the setting of an art specific space, the performer has a lot of power over the situation. I wanted to shift this relationship, so that instead of you coming to me, I would come to you. The performance would take place in a space where I as a performer am in a lesser position of power. I was also curious to learn how different environments would affect the performance.





NORMALITY

When I'm taking on the form of another species, I'm exploring what is perceived as normal within our cultural frame. So much oppression is disguised as a protective shield of the "normal" and "natural". Racism, trans- and queerphobia, carnism, capitalism. This is of course relevant to artistic expression as well, with the current attack on drag art. This year my fiancé, who is also a drag queen, was going to do a show at a children's pride event organised by Save the Children in Bergen, but the whole event had to be cancelled due to violent threats. She was hung out on Twitter by an account that had taken some screenshots out of context from an innocent video performance she did involving sex toys and said that *This is the sick, paedophile stuff they were going to expose our children for!*

After my cat adoption project went viral in Norway, one of Norway's biggest newspapers picked up the story and made an article about it. When it was posted on their facebook page, there were quickly 500+ comments, a majority of which claimed that I was mentally ill and should be locked up.

There is a vast mythology surrounding eating animals, but all the myths are in one way or another related to what I refer to as the Three N's of Justification: eating animals is normal, natural and necessary. The Three N's have been invoked to justify virtually all exploitative systems, from African slavery to Nazi Holocaust. When an ideology is in its prime, these myths rarely come under scrutiny. However, when the system finally collapses, the Three N's are recognized as ludicrous.¹⁰

When I started playing with this idea of turning myself into a non-human animal it was because I was exhausted with the *normal*. Having a job so that I can make money to cover basic needs, contribute to the eternal economical growth and exploitation of the world's resources and beings, so that a few people can take the money and run. This is a narrative embedded so deeply in society that questioning it is out of question. I looked at the lives of pets with envy, even though I know their lives are not all sunshine and rainbows, that their reality is also far more complex and nuanced. I hope that I have been able to make these complexities shine through in my work.

When I make a costume, enter it and put myself in a situation, I'm in the most literal way asking: what if you were in this position, and what can we learn from that? How can we reimagine our lives and expand the sense of the normal? I know I can (probably) never know how it actually feels to be a pet. In this sense I'm exploring something impossible, and I am completely aware of that. That is why The Pet Shop is a *real, fictional* business. But like storytelling in all forms can transform someone's worldview, I believe playing expands our minds to imagine what could be possible.

¹⁰ Melanie Joy, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism* (USA: Red Wheel, 2020), 86-87.

SAFETY

Safety is something I have had to think about in detail in my work. Moving in with people, depending on them for my basic needs without speaking has its obvious risks. What if they want to take advantage of the situation, harm me in any way? What if I would be chained to a heavy piece of furniture in my sleep, being held hostage? During a studio visit an artist asked me if I had thought about the chances of being murdered. I think about it every day just by wearing a rainbow coloured piece of clothing or holding my fiancé's hand. But I also want to believe the best of people. Give people a chance. Trust them. Without being too naive, of course.

I decided to not take this lightly. The selection of potential owners is based on my gut feeling, our interaction online through our exchange of emails. In my preparations for the actual adoption, the words of Jaana Kokko were sounding in my head, about the importance of taking emotional care of yourself as a performer. Since I hadn't yet tried out living as a pet, I turned to the internet to find resources. I found it helpful to read about the experiences of pet players, and read an extensive guide called *How to care for your human pet* where I realised a lot of things that I hadn't thought of, like protecting my knees and joints and the importance of staying hydrated. My fiancé agreed to be my safety person. She would be in touch with my owners during the adoption time, and if she didn't get a reply, she would physically come and check on me. Luckily that wasn't necessary this time.

I imagined all sorts of scenarios that could occur, from the mundane to the critical, and put together a document called *Consent Agreement and Care Instructions*. The point of the document is both to make myself and my owners feel safe and comfortable, making the roles as clear as possible. After all, it can be quite weird and overwhelming to suddenly have someone entering your private space. The consent agreement would be sent to the potential new owners, after they had filled out and sent the Pet Owner Interest Form on The Pet Shop's website. If they agreed to what was stated in the agreement, we would proceed to find a suitable date for the adoption. Upon arrival, I would arrive as my character The Pet Shop Manager. We'd go through the agreement one more time, to make sure the guidelines were fresh in the mind for both of us. If they had any questions, I'd answer them. After both parties had signed the agreement, I would say "Thank you, see you tomorrow!", go into the bathroom, set an alarm to 24 hours later, transform and come out as their pet.

The document was significantly shorter before my first adoption. That first experience taught me so much about what I needed to clarify. Including my own reflections on my experiences was something I debated whether I should include or not. Originally I didn't want to expose my own thoughts and feelings about the adoptions, because one doesn't really know what a non-human pet is actually thinking or feeling. One can interpret their behaviour, but they can't use words (that we understand at least) to express themselves. I also was worried about my owners feeling exposed. However, in both the preparations and the aftermath of the first adoption, I had so much on my chest, that I eventually figured out that this was my prerogative as a human pet to have the ability to talk about my experience. So I started writing a diary from all the adoption experiences that I recorded and exhibited as the main element inside my installation in Kuvan Kevät.



The Pet Shop Consent Agreement and Care Instructions

Thank you for your interest in caring for one of our pets!

This is an agreement between you, hereby *The Pet Owner, The Owner, Tanja Silvestrini, hereby The Pet Shop, The Pet, The Pet Shop Manager* and Victoria Løvheim, hereby *The Pet Shop Employee*. Please read the agreement carefully, and make sure you have understood the responsibility of the role of being a pet owner before signing the document.

The Pet Shop is a real fictional business, where we offer anthropomorphic pets for temporary adoption. When you take in a pet, you will be in charge of its well being. In this form you will find instructions for how to care for your pet.

When the consent agreement is signed and sent, the pet shop manager will shortly be in contact with you to schedule a suitable adoption time. The purpose of this form is to ensure a safe and pleasurable experience for both the pet and the owner.

1. Documentation

- As the owner of our pets, one of your important tasks is to document you and your new pet's life together.
- Documentation is done by filming with your phone camera.
- Please choose a format, either vertical or horizontal, and stick to it.
- You can document as much as you want, but please collect a minimum of 20 minutes of footage by the end of the adoption time. Longer clips are preferred.
- You can take pictures with and off the pet whenever you want, except for when it's going to the toilet.
- You can share whatever you want on social media.
- After your time with the pet is over, all documentation taken during the adoption will belong to The Pet Shop and used for exhibition purposes.
- Before leaving, the pet shop manager will take a staged picture of the pet in the home environment.
- At some point after the adoption, the Pet Shop manager will be in contact with the owner to do a short video recorded interview about the experience, as well as asking you to write a short review (3-4 sentences) of the experience, the pet or the service.

1.1 Hydration

- The pet needs to have accessibility to water at all times.
- Make sure to have a large bowl or bottle on the floor available for the pet.
- Remember to refill the bowl or bottle when it's empty.

1.2 Feeding

- The pet is dependent on you feeding it.
- The pet should be fed three to four times per day.
- Our pets are vegan. If you are vegan as well, you can give it some of the food that you make for yourself to the pet. If you are not vegan, you should feed it vegan food.
- Let the pet know verbally when it's feeding time.
- If the pet is not eating immediately, leave the food on the floor. The pet will eat when it's hungry.
- If you leave home for many hours, leave food on the floor for the pet to eat when it's hungry.

1.3 Toilet

- Our pets are potty trained, and use a regular WC.
- The pet will go to the toilet when it needs.
- Do not follow the pet into the toilet.

1.4 Communication

1.4a You communicating with the pet

- Our pets are sociable beings and love being talked to.
- You can talk to the pet in any language, but it's not certain that it will understand what you say.
- To ensure understanding, you can talk to the pet in English or a Scandinavian language.

- If the pet does something you don't like or want, f.ex. climbing on you for petting, tell the pet to stop.

1.4b The pet communicating with you

- The pets communicate with body language and actions.
- If the pet is hungry or thirsty, it will approach you and go to the previous place the food or water was served.
- If the pet is too hot, it will approach you and go to the window and scrape on it. You should then either open the window or take the pet out to cool it down. This is really important to avoid overheating.
- If the pet wants to go out for a walk, it will go to you and then to the door and scrape on it. You decide if you are going for a walk or not.

1.4c Communication with The Pet Shop Employee

- During the adoption time, an employee of The Pet Shop will be in contact with you to check in on the pet. This will happen by calling or texting. Please answer or return the call or messages as soon as possible.
- When talking with our employee, let them ask the pet itself how it goes.
- If you do not answer the call or text from our employee within a few hours, the employee will come to the house to check on the pet.

1.5 Going out

- Since the pet is now yours, you can take it with you when you leave the house.
- Communicate to the pet where you will go and for how long prior to taking it with you.
- If the pet does not want to go out, it will not go with you.
- If the pet comes with you, do not leave it unattended.
- If the pet wants to go home, it will resist walking further and move in the direction of the home. When the pet wants to go home, you should go home with it.
- Our pets walk on two feet when outside.
- Our pets have limited vision and need a lot of guidance, especially when being outside. Hold its paw when walking it.
- You may leave the pet at home by itself. Let the pet know approx. how long you will be away so it will not be afraid that you have abandoned it.

1.6 Playing & activation

- Providing your pet with enough exercise and activity is extremely important for their mental and physical well-being.
- The pets instinctively love searching for food. You can help them live out this natural interest by hiding treats, fruits and vegetables around the house. Anything that gets your pets working for the reward of some really good treats is great in terms of activating them.
- If your pet is comfortable with it, a great way of activating them is to play together. Get down to their level and give them some time to get used to your presence. Eventually they will likely approach you and you can slowly introduce games and interactive playing. You can bring toys and treats for encouragement, depending on what it likes.
- Our pets love music, so do not hesitate to pump up the jam.
- If the pet does not want to play, it will not engage with you. Let it rest.

1.7 Touch

- The pet may enjoy being pet and cuddled with. You can try to pet it and see how it responds.
- You can try to pick up and hold the pet, but if it resists being lifted, let it go immediately.
- The pet might want to cuddle. It will then get close to you. If you do not want to cuddle, tell the pet to give you space.
- If you try to cuddle the pet, and it does not want to be cuddled, it will move away from you. If the pet does this, give the pet space and do not force cuddles upon it.
- Do **not** touch the pet between its legs, on its butt or on the chest area. Attempts on this will result in an immediate cancellation of the adoption.
- Do **not** try to take off the pet's fur. Attempts on this will result in an immediate cancellation of the adoption.
- **Sexual behavior towards the pet or attempts to harm it in any way is strictly forbidden and will result in an immediate cancellation of the adoption and police report.**

1.8 Sleeping

- If the pet is sleeping while you are at home, do not try to wake it up.
- If you are leaving the house, you may wake the pet and let it know that you are leaving, and for how long.
- The pet likes to sleep by itself, and will not sleep in bed with you.
- Our pets are nocturnal creatures, and might be active in the nighttime.
- The pet might lose its fur in the nighttime. This is completely normal. With or without fur, the pet is still your pet, and should be treated as such.
- When you go to bed, leave a window slightly open in case the pet gets warm and needs to cool down.

1.9 The goodbye

- When the adoption time is up, The Pet Shop manager will come to pick up the pet.
- Before leaving, the manager will take a staged photo in the home environment.
- Then the manager takes the pet with them and leaves.

2.0 What's in it for the owner

- The owner will get a special, personal, durational performance in their own home and a limited edition photography after the adoption time is over.

2.1 Sudden cancellation of the adoption

- Unforeseen circumstances may happen. If you for some reason need to cancel the adoption before the official adoption time has ended, let the pet know, and The Pet Shop manager will come and pick up the pet and leave immediately.
- In case of a sudden cancellation, The Pet Shop will ask you to do a small video or phone interview where you explain why it ended before the agreed time.
- If the pet gets sick during the adoption, The Pet Shop manager will come and pick it up and leave. You can then decide to reschedule the adoption or not.

I declare that I have read the consent agreement and care instructions, and will commit to it for the whole adoption time. This agreement is for the PET, who will stay in OWNER's home from DATE AND TIME to DATE AND TIME.

Signed:

Tanja Silvestrini
Pet Shop Manager
DATE

OWNER'S NAME
Pet owner
DATE

CONSENT

When I was 7 years old, a cat started coming to the window of my family's apartment. My dad gave her some cream, and she kept coming back. Eventually moved in and lived with us until she passed away 12 years later. We called her Nina. She has been on my mind when I have been reflecting around the element of consent in the relationships between pets and people. The previous owners were apparently friends of my friend's family. The word spread that the cat who came to our home was in fact theirs. One evening, the son of the family came with a friend, laying on the rock across from our balcony, pointing at our apartment with soft guns, wanting to get the cat back. My mother said that if the cat wanted to live with them, she would have gone back already. This statement is probably infuriating to many pet owners, but I find it so intriguing. Because rather than seeing the pet as a possession, it acknowledges the pet as an individual with their own will and desire; with agency. Most pets don't choose their owners, but Nina chose us.

Four years ago I turned vegan because I realised that the way I viewed myself, as a compassionate, loving and caring human being, didn't align with my consumption of animal products. It was speciesist. Every animal is an individual with intrinsic value, and I didn't want to support this systemic violence anymore. After this realisation, I started to further question all interspecies engagements through a critical lens. After making a work about unwanted predators; bears, wolves, wolverines and lynxes, my focus shifted to wanted predators; cats and dogs.

If there is a category of animals we most often acknowledge the intrinsic value of, it is our pets. But when I see dog owners walking down the road with their dog on a leash; or when I see guinea pigs running inside a wheel inside a small cage, I can't stop feeling icky about it. I don't doubt pet owner's love for their companions, I'm just questioning the whole ideology behind it. Christine Overall has a fantastic formulation of this ickiness. *To call an animal a "pet" simultaneously expresses both fondness and condescension. It suggests a hierarchical relationship of a particularly insidious kind, in which the animal so labelled is both singled out for special favor and also expected to be submissive and obsequious. (...) Pets are certainly loved - the adjectival version of "pet" is defined as "[s]pecially cherished; for which one has a particular fondness or weakness; favourite; (also) particular" - but the concept suggests they are maintained (and retained) at the favor of the persons to whom the pets belong.*¹¹

One key element in The Pet Shop is consent. In this performance it is important that everyone involved is actively interested in, informed about and agrees to the rules of the performance. All material is consensually presented. Consent is also present in the sense that animals cannot usually consent to their destiny of being adopted. However, as a human with significantly more legal rights, I can actively consent to this.

Not only is it the relationship and hierarchy between pets and owners that interest me, it is the whole system - the breeding, the marketing, the consumerism, the purchase, the performativity. This topic causes so much friction that it is irresistible to me.

¹¹ Christine Overall, *Pets and People: The Ethics of Our Relationships with Companion Animals* (Canada: Oxford University Press, 2017), xix.



SIMPLY MAMMALIAN

Every time I came to check on the installation during Kuvan Kevät, something had changed. Often the pets laying on the roof were in a new position. Their heads tilted in a new way. Paws dangling. Sometimes the whole body of the costume would hang over the edge covering the screens and photographs, looking like they had given up. It is like they have a life of their own, their own will. I would continuously change their position back to how I think they should be, but the next day, they would still have moved. At some point I nailed the paws, legs and heads in the “right” position, but still there would be minor changes to their positions.

I experienced great pleasure in spying on the audience engaging with my work. There were a lot of smiles and laughter, which filled me with joy. Some of the more daring audiences have given the costumes a little caress. I felt touched by this empathic gesture towards the creatures. I also saw one case of brutal treatment of the rat, when a teenager grabbed it by its tail and pulled it across the roof with force. What I think has been most rewarding has been observing the different approaches between children and adults.

Two children are playing in my installation. One of the kids is taking one of the pet beds, turns it around and jumps on it, dragging it around the floor. They throw themselves inside the installation repeatedly with force. Action! I have to stop myself from wanting to interfere. Let go of the need for control. This is out of my hands now. Speaking of hands, suddenly a pair of small hands are now sticking out from the entrance, laying still for a while. Resting. The children get up and leave. New children arrive.

A small child has taken a business card and sits on the floor, head moving from the card to the front photograph, that contains the same image, comparing them, seemingly looking for a match, like a game of memory. The child’s lips are moving. They are talking to themselves.

A majority of the children I have observed while sitting here are throwing themselves into the installation, hanging in and out of the window. Some have been sitting and drawing, with and without the headphones on. Observing the videos with an engaged body language. They spend a lot of time with it, in it, on it. The adults spend less time with it. A majority of them are smiling when looking at it. I wonder what I could have done differently so that I could make them spend more time there.

My guess is that it probably has to do with two things: the installation’s placement and discomfort. The installation is placed in the middle of the lobby; a place that is not designed to spend time in. It is a place inbetween, for passing by. It is also not a particularly comfortable installation, even though it may seem like it - both physically and mentally. By entering the house or sitting down on one of the pet beds, you become a part of the installation. You become visible.

The adults I assume are the parents of the two current children are having a photoshoot of the children playing, having them posing. The children are inside the box, the adults remain outside. They are laughing, taking pictures for a long time. One adult enters. Sits down in the entrance of the box, the two children still inside. The adult don’t take their shoes off to enter completely, but place themselves between the inside and the outside, leaving their shoed feet on the concrete floor outside the entrance. Most of the conversations around it have been in Finnish so far. I wish I could understand what they were saying.

A calmer child that I have seen a couple of times, returns as they are leaving with their adult. The child asks their adult something, and they go to the installation to take one of the business cards with them. The child leaves with the business card in their hands, smiling.

One adult sits down at the backside of the installation. There are four seating options, but instead of sitting down, the adult chooses to squat. They are smiling while looking at one of the videos. They sit down for maybe a minute before standing up again and leaving. I decide to leave as well.

When I return a few hours later, two people are sitting inside the house on their computers with concentrated faces. Two animals at work.

I am aware that I am calling the costumes creatures, but as they are installed in the work, they are more like objects. Soft, inanimate objects with the potential of coming to life (in the most literal sense), activated at your wish, with bodies and facial expressions that one can project emotions onto.

I think it is deeply fascinating, people's desire to touch, especially when these materials are soft and fluffy. Maybe it's not even desire, it almost seems to be like a reflex. It is as if the tactility of the material is directly communicating to the will of the hand.

I recognize this desire for softness myself. When I see something fluffy at the second hand markets in Helsinki, often in the children's section, I can't stop myself from craving these bags in the shape of sheep, bees, tigers, chickens etc. Fluffy fabrics, bright colours, wonky faces, upscaled or downscaled bodies out of proportion. I often wonder why these inanimate objects are so appealing to me. They evoke something in me, a feeling of empathy. Their shape and texture instantly makes me want to take them with me, hug them and care for them. Where does this urge come from?

I picked up *Why we love dogs, eat pigs and wear cows* again, and skimmed through the foreword, which also happens to be written by Yuval Noah Harari, where I accidentally found an answer to my question. *There are basic emotions common to all mammals. Perhaps the most basic emotion that defines mammals is the love between a mother and her offspring.*¹² He goes on to talk about the behavioural approach to raising children in the first half of the 1900's, where psychologists argued that *the relationship between parents and children was based on material feedback: that all children need is food, medicine and shelter; and that children are attached to their parents only because they provide for their material needs. Children who also demanded warmth, hugs, and kisses were considered "spoiled" (..).* In the 50's and 60's American psychologist Harry Harlow put this approach to the test by conducting a series of experiments with Rhesus monkeys, separating baby monkeys from their mothers from birth, raising them in separate cages equipped with one "mother" made of wire and a bottle of milk, providing their material needs, and one "mother" made of wood covered with cloth and velvet, with no bottle.

¹² Yuval Noah Harari, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism* (USA: Red Wheel, 2020), xv.

To Harlow's surprise, the monkeys clung to the velvet mother and preferred to spend almost all their time with her. (...) Even after putting the two "mothers" next to each other, the monkeys clung onto the velvet mother while suckling from the bottle of the metal mother. Harlow concluded that the monkeys were looking to the velvet mother for something beyond nutrition and body heat. They were looking for an emotional bond. Millions of years of evolution had imprinted a strong need for emotional attachment in the baby monkeys, as well as the assumption that there is a better chance of developing an emotional bond with soft and furry things than hard and metallic things. This is why small children develop emotional bonds with dolls, blankets, and rags, and not with wooden blocks, stones and forks.¹³ I was surprised to learn that the desire for the soft, fluffy touch is simply mammalian.

¹³ Yuval Noah Harari, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism* (USA: Red Wheel, 2020), xvi-xviii.

SCALE

When we went on a master's trip to Documenta 15, I met the most gorgeous creature all the way back in one of the gigantic exhibition venues. It was Krümel (eng. Crumbs). A huge, maybe 5m x 5m, rough looking dog sculpture consisting of an enormous head with a sympathetic face; a prominent, pink snout, kind brown eyes, an open mouth with tongue slightly poking out, long ears and two front paws. If you went to the back and pulled the strings the ears would flap, making Krümel look excited. I was on the verge of tears.

Krümel was born as a part of a performative concert called Moondog in Bochum theater, 2016, honouring the American composer and musician Louis Thomas Hardin, who adopted his artist name *Moondog* from his guide dog who supposedly howled at the moon more than any other dog he knew. After that, Krümel only met the audience twice more before being placed in various storage spaces. And now it¹⁴ was placed in this exhibition space in Kassel, crammed into a corner with a confused look on its face, looking for a permanent home within a certain time - if not it would be digitised and dismantled for creative reuse¹⁵. I seriously considered adopting Krümel, but the deadline had already passed. Sharing the space with it the sculpture was also a metal box stuffed with what I assume is the rest of Krümel's gigantic body; a video showing Krümel shining on stage in one of the performative concerts and the adoption terms presented formally on a table covered with glass. I noted this presentation for future exhibition inspiration.

When I'm reflecting on my strong emotional response to meeting Krümel, I am sure its size has a lot to do with it. The scale gives it a larger-than-life, breathtaking effect. You can't ignore its presence; it is *there* and demands your attention. Upscaling is a powerful artistic tool. Often it is used to honour and emphasise the power, status and importance of an event or a person, like in commemorative public sculptures. However, I think it is even more interesting when used to draw attention to something unnoticed, undervalued, neglected - whatever that might be in whichever social- or cultural context.

Now, the meeting with Krümel and Moondog is a quite recent one, however there is another artist who I have admired the work of for a long time, who also often plays with scale and displacement; the Norwegian multidisciplinary artist Anja Carr. She has made upscaled and altered sculptures referencing children's toys, such as My Little Pony and Goodluck Troll - amongst a whole bunch of other things. What I really admire about her is her ability to infinity-dive in the ocean of playfulness and experimentation, continuously expanding and exploring her own colourful and bizarre universe, where humour and seriousness skips hand in hand down the road.

*I'm fascinated with our fundamental need to categorise. Child and adult; animal and human; man and woman. We can easily become insecure, categorization is a way to understand the world. I think that is why I started working with the toy industry, because it is very gendered in comparison to society's development otherwise.*¹⁶

¹⁴ This is the pronoun that is used about Krümel in the exhibition text, so that is what I will be using.

¹⁵ Exhibition text on the wall in Hübner area. 2022. Documenta 15.

¹⁶ Carr, Anja. 2020. Video interview with Silje M. Enga Sigurdson. KUNZT. Accessed 8th Sept. 2023.

I am fascinated by the toy industry's seductive language. The ones who produce toys are often focusing on that things should be small and cute, so I wanted to test if this little figure would still be cute if I upscaled it to adult size and put an adult diaper on it.¹⁷

Scale is something I have played with for a long time in my work, and it never stops fascinating me how making something larger or smaller, slower or longer, changes everything about something. How does time look? How does length feel? How does time sound? How does time and space relate to our bodies? What happens if you make something big small or something small big? How does one document or measure something abstract like time, space, relations? These are questions I sometimes think about. Speaking of which..

¹⁷ Carr, Anja. 2021. Video interview with Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium. Accessed 8th Sep. 2023.

**SOMETIMES I
THINK ABOUT**

The list of artists that have influenced me is long and whimsical. This is a list without a particular order.

After I initiated my cat project, I was introduced to **Thomas Thwaites'** *GoatMan: How I Took a Holiday from Being Human*, where he made prosthetic limbs and an artificial exo-stomach that could digest grass with a plan to join a flock of goats over the alps during the course of three months. Sometimes I think about this project and admire Thwaites' acceptance of failure, as he called off the project after only three days. Speaking of failure - sometimes I think about **Bas Jan Ader's** falls, which he describes as gravity making itself master over him, a statement I feel resonates with me as well. Perhaps not gravity itself, but in the way that external forces draw my attention and flesh towards them.

Marina Abramovic's early works were of course an early inspiration for me, so I need to mention her. I admire her risk-taking, the way she puts her body in uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous situations, the way she explores the limitations of the body. Sometimes I think about **Marina and Ulay's** *90 days* performance, which I find deeply poetic and inspirational. Sometimes I think about **Tehching Hsieh's** one year performances and would love to explore this extreme level of durational dedication to the situation sometime. Sometimes I think about **Pilvi Takala's** *The Trainee* and *The Stroker*, and admire how they manage to challenge and expose invisible social structures by inserting themselves in a situation. I also really admire their work *The Committee* and would also love to make works in collaboration with children. Sometimes I think about **Abraham Poincheval's** durational performances, especially *Oeuf*, *Dans La Peau de l'Ours*, *Pierre* and *La Virgie Urbaine*. Sometimes I think about the other end of the durational spectrum, and think about **Erwin Wurm's** *One Minute Sculptures*, and how much I loved seeing the audiences freezing momentarily as extensions of the objects, being in physical dialogue with them.

Sometimes I think about **Sophie Calle's** *The Hotel*, and admire the way she seamlessly blurs the border between art and everyday life, even though I would maybe feel iffy about sneaking through people's personal belongings myself. Sometimes I think about **Anthea Moys'** playful and relational performances, especially *What if I was the ball?* And *The Vs. Project*, which makes me want to collaborate more with people from outside the field of arts.

Sometimes I think about **Ingela Ihrman's** *När inlandsisen dragit sig tillbaka från Sverige vandrade granen inifrån norr*, *The Toad* og *The Giant Clam*, and admire her playful performances, costumes, installations and videos that also teaches the audience about the world around them. Sometimes I think about **Tori Wrånes** and how she fuses the magical and the ordinary in immersive tactile and playful installations and performances.

Sometimes I think about **Superflex'** *One Two Three Swing!*, **Solvoggen's** *Julemandshæren*, **Oleg Kulik's** *Mad Dog*, **Xu Zhen's** *18 Days*, **Do Ho Suh's** *Grass Roots Square*, **Carsten Höller's** slides, **Iiu Susiraja's** absurd videos and photographs and **Yoko Ono's** *Grapefruit*.

Sometimes I think about **Björk**, **Chicks on Speed**, **Peaches**, **Gorillaz** and **Tacobitch** and hope to one day make as captivating music and stage performances as them.

ABOUT THE LIVE PERFORMANCE

In November last year I had a trip to Norway, organising a queer performance event for Performance Art Bergen. The night after the event, a friend of mine asked if I wanted to come along and see a performance at BIT Teatergarasjen. I said sure, and went to experience one of the best performances I have ever seen.

The work was a one hour long solo called *Uprising*, described as *bordering on a live pop concert, fashion show or boxing match*, by the French dancer and choreographer Tatiana Julien.¹⁸ From the first moment until the very end my attention was fixed. What really amazed me was the audience interaction.

The performer suddenly looked me straight in the eyes. In one sweeping movement she had taken off her large woollen coat and threw it directly onto me with force. I sat and held her coat until the very end. In the last part of the performance she was naked, power sliding all over the now water covered floor on her knees. As the music intensified, she started caressing audience members' legs, before suddenly starting to run and throw herself over us with speed and force, using us as some sort of human obstacle course. Then she exited. The door slammed shut behind her. She never returned. It was so bold.

Never had I experienced a performance where the performer was so physical with the audience's literal bodies like this. This work was a big inspiration when I imagined my own live performance for Kuvan Kevät.

I was thinking for some time about what the function of the live performance would be. How could I construct it in a way that compliments all the project's other elements? I thought about the words I am using. My work is framed as a *business* and a *shop*. It dawned upon me. The live performance will be a business pitch. An absurd, high-energy business pitch developing in unexpected ways. I thought about which elements I can appropriate from the realm of retail. Intense focus on *you*. Repetition of questions. Overly excited to help. Service mindset. Open and friendly body language. Demos.

We have two human characters; the CEO, a formal, goal- and achievement oriented character that you never really see, but who cannot resist talking to crowds; and the manager, a familiar face to those of you who already have adopted a pet. The manager is the person who drops the pets off for the adoption, handling customer service both physically and online. I am both. Then we have the products; of course the pets themselves, embodied by three performers and myself. The audience? You are customers.

We are in a shop, and the shop is opening now!

¹⁸ Julien, Tatiana. 2018. *Uprising (Soulèvement): a solo on resistance*. Interscribo.

THE LIVE PERFORMANCE¹⁹

¹⁹ Sound of *The Pet Shop Business Pitch*,
<https://shows.acast.com/65198e29ebbe5d0011f47d9c/651c95078cacd500114ca5fc>

The CEO stands by a mic stand in the middle of the big staircase of The Art Academy, looking down at The Pet Shop installation and the audience, wearing a pink blazer over a black jumpsuit with sneakers to show that the CEO is indeed both classy and practical

Elevator music comes on

The CEO starts holding a speech



CEO:

In early March 2023 we in The Pet Shop opened our first online business. In late March, we momentarily expanded to Stockholm, and now we are officially, physically, temporarily opening **right here**, in **THIS** staircase in Helsinki, Finland. Yes! Business is blooming - that's definitely worth a round of applause! Thank you, thank you.

For those of you who don't know, The Pet Shop is a real, fictional business, where we offer anthropomorphic pets for temporary adoption. In our shop you can choose a companion animal in the shape of a bunny, guinea pig, rat and hamster that will come to **your** home and be **yours** for 24 hours straight.

For this time, the power is in your hands - *under certain guidelines that you will receive when you fill out the Pet Adoption Interest Form on our website.* The Pet Shop has **great** ambitions, and our goal is to be available for pet lovers everywhere. We are so

excited and can't wait for **you** and thousands of other customers to visit our shop.

Everyone who works in The Pet Shop loves animals. You will notice that from our joy and commitment. **That's** what **we're** known for! We always go a little further so that **you** can experience true customer service. This is because we care about and love our profession, which you will notice when **you** take **us** home.

Music changes

CEO quickly takes off the blazer and jumpsuit and throws them to the side. Underneath is a uniform consisting of a half-purple, half-green set of shorts and a sweater with The Pet Shop's logo on the arm. The Pet Shop Manager has arrived. The manager takes the microphone and starts moving amongst the customers, looking them in the eyes while speaking with confidence



Manager:

Welcome to The Pet Shop!

Today we have a discount on **all** products
both living and not - *hahaha!*

Fresh fluffiness to fulfil **your** needs and desires
And now they are waiting for **you** to take **them** home,
what are you waiting for?

Everything is on sale for a limited time

Our opening hours are TODAY 17 to 17:15

Welcome in and see if there is something you want!

Come inside, don't be shy!

Come inside, don't be shy!

How may I help you?

How may I help you?

How may I help you?

How may I help you?

(Repeat until dance break)

Dance break

The manager dances for a few bars then continues to walk among the customers, looking everyone in the eyes asking:

What would you like?

Do you have any questions?

What are you waiting for?

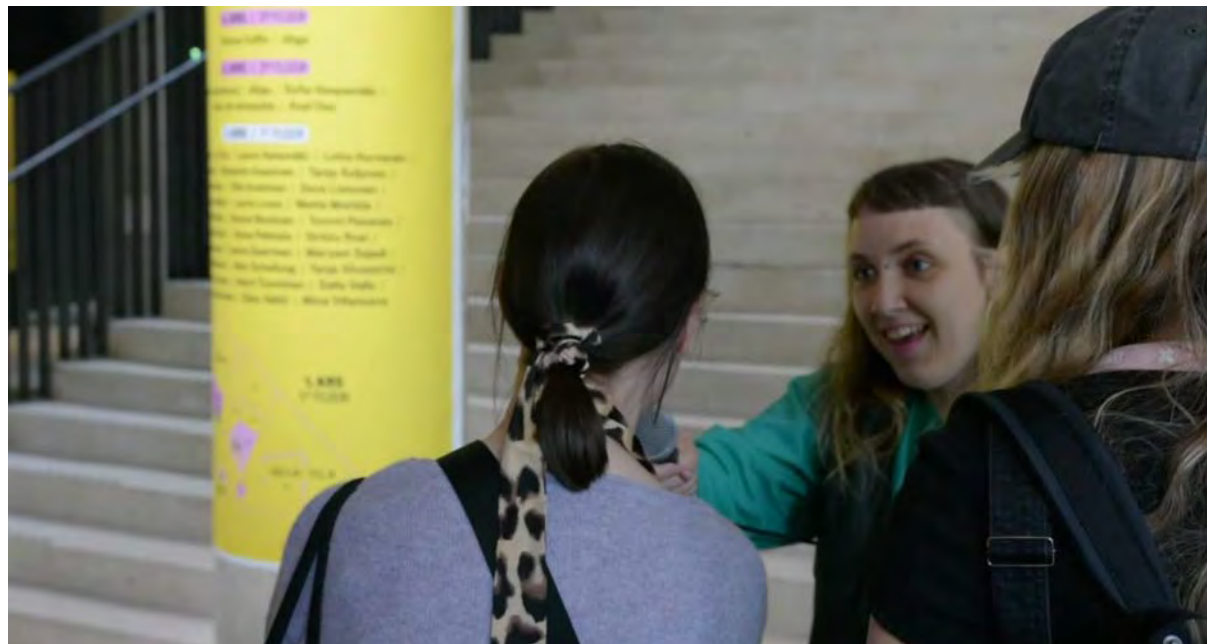
How may I help you?

(Repeat until question and answer time)



The music disappears suddenly, replaced by animal cuddle sounds

The manager runs to a random person in the audience, asks one of the questions above and directs the microphone to them, waits for a reply, responding and running to the next random customer. Repeats until the beat returns



The beat returns

The manager continues to dance and shout repeatedly the same four questions

What would you like?

Do you have any questions?

What are you waiting for?

How may I help you?

(Repeat until existential crisis)

The music changes. The manager runs to set back the microphone. Sits down with their head in their hands. A high pitched voiceover starts talking. The manager has an existential crisis. Starts moving, falling slowly, head-first down the stairs. Gazing into the floor or ceiling



Voiceover

I'm thinking about all these labels that dictate how we engage
with our surroundings and those in it
The trouble with language and the limitations of it
Words can be both uniters and dividers
Both abstract and concrete division of power
If you are the customer
and I am the manager
How does that affect our relationship?
If you are the owner
and I am your pet
How does *that* affect our relationship?
What is a pet?
a domestic or tamed animal kept for companionship or pleasure.
Are we all each other's pets,
Individuals living at the mercy of each other?
Is the love we experience from our pets some sort of Stockholm
syndrome?
What is freedom really, does it really exist?
What is nature, does it really exist?
What is perceived as natural seems so unnatural to me
I don't want to get some bullshit job just because I need to make
money to survive
but I also want comfort and safety
I want to be wild
but I also want to go home to my girlfriend
Lay in her lap and cuddle
Can you be both wild and domestic?
What is desire and where does it come from?
Why do you want what you want,
and why does it change?
So much ambivalence but all in all
I just want to

The manager wakes up again

I want to

Looks at the audience

I want to

I want to

I want to **bite**

Bites

I want to **mate**

I want to **gnaw**

Gnaws

I want to dig **holes** in the ground and **crawl** into them

Digs and crawls

I want to

I want to



I want to

I want to be your pet

The manager transforms their movements, channelling their inner pet

I want to be your pet

Human pet nr. 2 emerges from the audience, finds a position and their animal form

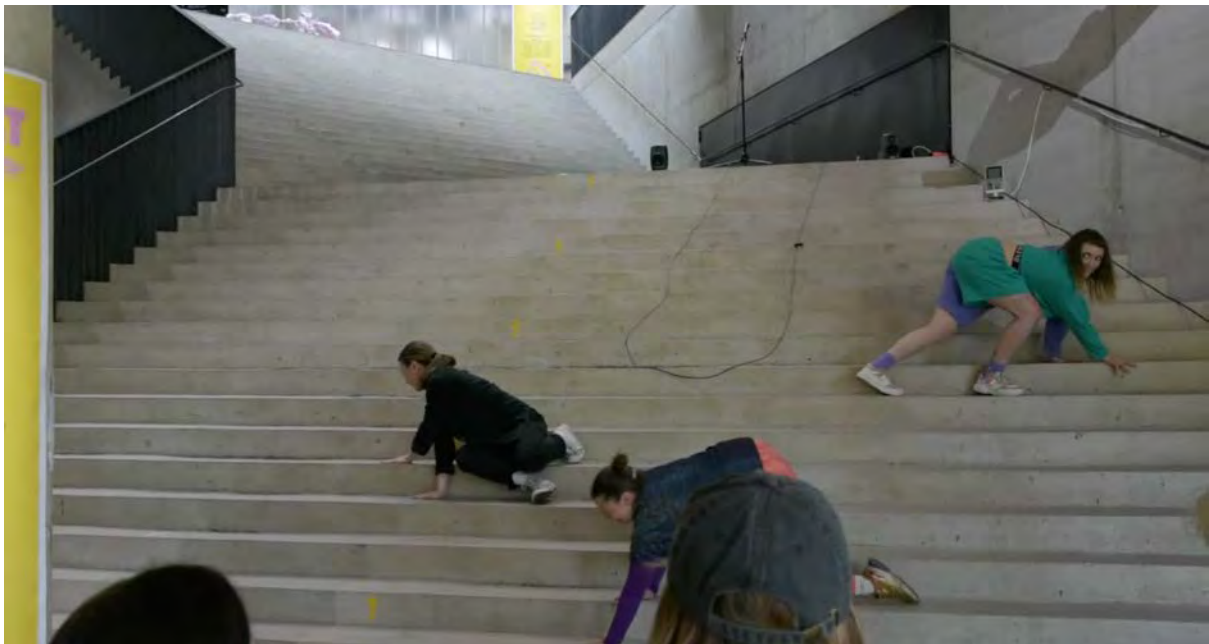
I want to be your pet

Human pet nr. 3 emerges from the audience, finds a position and their animal form

I want to be your pet

Human pet nr. 4 emerges from the audience, finds a position and their animal form

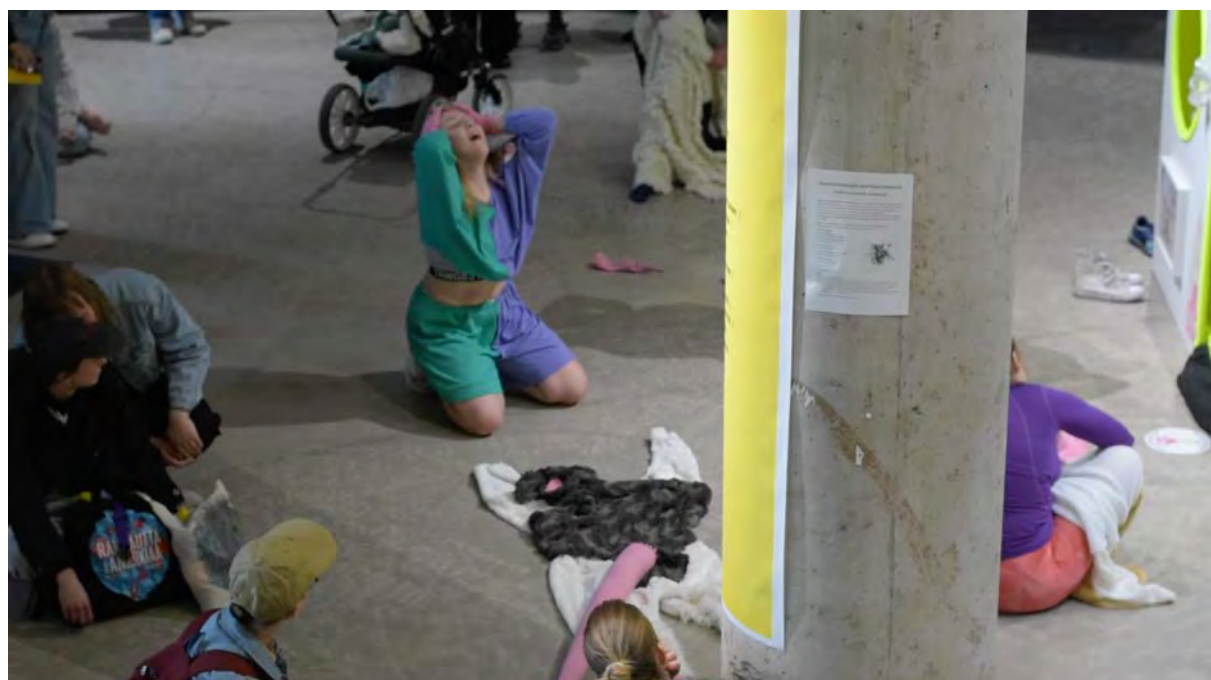
All the four pets are now on stage, exploring the space and each other following their own instinct, still in human appearance



The music changes

The human pets are moving towards the placement of the costumes and starts slowly exploring and getting into them

When everyone is in costume, they keep exploring the space, getting comfortable in their new skin





Scratching sounds

The pets start scratching on their preferred surfaces simultaneously to the rhythm of the scratch

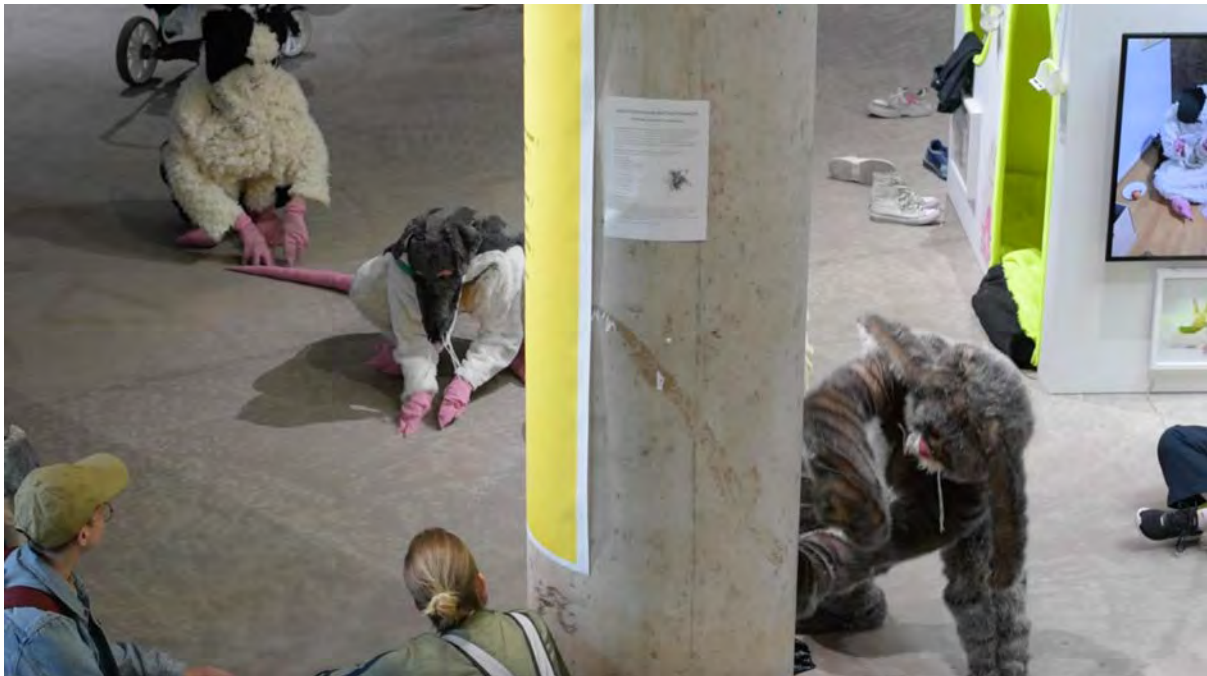
Roaming around

The music intensifies

The pets become more dominant in their movements, claiming the space

The music changes

The pets run into the audience! Over legs, under chairs, between legs, sliding, quickly, quickly, over, under, between, under, over, next to, between, quickly, restless, searching, searching, searching for something, something, something









The music calms down

The pets find a person to cuddle up against

Lays down next to their chosen person, stays in place, catching the breath, calming down

Elevator music comes back on

The pets quickly stand up and march determinedly into The Pet Shop installation, take off the costumes, come out and march back into the audience.

The manager cleans the scene a bit and marches up to the middle of the stairs again. Picks up the microphone and thanks everyone of the customers for coming to this opening.

We are now closing, but if you are interested in getting one of our pets, you can access our online shop 24/7. We are very happy to answer all of your questions.

Welcome back and looking forward to seeing you again!







THE PET DIARIES²⁰

²⁰ The Pet Diaries audio recording,
<https://shows.acast.com/65198e29ebbe5d0011f47d9c/65198edfc8d4ce00117fc05e>

THE BUNNY²¹

²¹ Bunny adoption documentation film, <https://youtu.be/FB1xaksuHD4>



BEFORE THE ADOPTION

Today is the first day I'm going to be adopted, and I start to feel a bit nervous. Or, not a bit, very nervous, and I feel that I'm just fumbling around the apartment trying to stretch out the time. I actually need to go to school to fetch the costume and print the consent agreement. Or, not actually, I need to do it. Ughh, it's very frustrating, because I don't know where the nervousness is coming from. I think I am scared that I can't let go of the feeling of being entertaining and active all the time. And I'm going to be their bunny, and the bunny costume is the hottest one, it's extremely warm. I'm afraid to get over-heated, afraid to be too demanding. At the same time it is demanding to be a pet owner, it's a demanding role, it's demanding to take care of someone. The entertainment thing is also an idiotic worry, I'm not even going to be myself, I'm going to be a bunny, so I don't understand why I have all these thoughts and worries. Maybe because someone has been so generous and will take me in and take care of me for 24 hours, and I don't know what they are expecting, and since I don't know what they are expecting - not that I should care about what they are expecting, it's not like you convey to people's expectations in every relation you would start. I'm afraid that they would think I was boring, if I would just lay and sleep for example, or just sit in some corner or on the sofa because I'm exhausted and hot, afraid that I won't be able to express the needs that I have. At least now I have said these worries out loud, so maybe I will be able to let them go. I'm very excited to see how this will go. It is ca. 3 hours until I have to leave, and I feel that I'm just fumbling around, worried about forgetting something important, even though I don't actually need much, since my owners will provide most of the basics. And I feel stressed about my own things I would need to fix.

But this is the reason I am doing this project, to find a place, a mental place, where I can find peace and relax and not think about all these things and multitask all the time. I think I need to focus on that, on finding some peace of mind in the role, just relax. I'm going to be a bunny for 24 hours, so at some point I have to find that peace, because I can't physically jump around for that long, moreover I feel that I have quite bad stamina these days, I haven't been working out or anything prior to this project.

I wonder if it is stupid if I would walk on two legs as a bunny, at the same time as I'm presenting as an anthropomorphic animal, so there isn't really anything wrong with keeping some of my everyday qualities, like the ability to walk on two legs. I don't have to jump around like a bunny. But is that what they expect? But how much should I care about what they are expecting? We haven't talked about expectations, and the person I'm going to live with is really excited about the project, has read through the consent agreement and said that it looks good, so we're on the same page. I have met them once, randomly at an exhibition, and we got along really well, so I don't know why I'm starting to become so nervous now. Maybe something about giving up so much of my time to not be myself.

AFTER THE ADOPTION

The bunny has now come back from its home, and it has been quite a journey. I have been so fucking sweaty. But actually not as sweaty as I feared. I think I to some extent managed to find peace in the role, and that I didn't have to be so entertaining. There is something about the conflict of roles that is causing friction in me. Of being both a pet and a guest. Because, here we have someone who has agreed to participate in the project by opening

their doors and welcoming me into their home. At the same time, I am trying to behave as much as a pet as possible. It was very hard to let go and be like “I can do whatever I want and don’t have to listen to you”, the internalized socialization and the people-pleasing. I thought that was a bit disappointing to be honest.

The costume is also so hot that I didn’t have so much energy as I would have liked to have. TPSM came to my owner yesterday at six o’clock, and talked a bit with them to break the ice, since TPSM don’t really know them at all, having only met them briefly. The owner gave TPSM some borscht, which was a lovely gesture. In the bathroom, they had put a note over the hand towel that said “for hands (and paws)”. To make the house more inclusive, they said. I thought that was so cute. We went through the agreement, and signed it. Then TPSM left and the bunny appeared.

From the first moment I received a warm “Hi bunny”, which made me feel very welcome. I must say that my owner took their role seriously from the very beginning. At first they were energetic and wanted to activate me by playing with me. I didn’t feel like playing, I just wanted to accommodate myself and chill. But I felt bad about not playing with them, so I played after all, even though I didn’t really want to.

The first few hours I was walking and jumping around on all four, and for some reason it was really hard for me to let myself stand up. Even though I had said to myself that that is okay - it’s the perk of being an anthropomorphic pet - I felt like I was breaking character, even though I am the one who is making the character. It is important to take care of oneself as a performer, and standing up, resting my joints, sensing what I need, not doing the things I don’t want to do, taking my emotions seriously - are ways to do that.

I got really warm from being so active, and really needed to cool off. So I went to my owner and pet their leg and ran to the balcony door to signalize I needed air. They understood and said “Oh, you want to go outside? Okay, but only for a little while” and in my head I was like “oh my god, please just let me be outside, you don’t need to guard me”. It felt really frustrating not being able to verbalize that. I got out to the balcony and sat there, observing the landscape. My owner was talking a lot to me, which was really cute, but also annoying. I just wanted to breathe. In a weird way, it was annoying to understand what was being said to me. If I hadn’t understood, I could have ignored them more easily. But I could also just practice turning off the people-pleasing.

Anyway, when I sat on the balcony, I just wanted to stay there. It felt so good with the cool air. I didn’t even feel the cold, because of my hot fur. My owner insisted on keeping the door open, and said to me “are you sure you want to be outside for so long, I don’t want you to get sick”. I tried to ignore what I sensed was some desperation, but they kept on with “I don’t want to leave you alone there, you might jump over the rails”. My owner was probably also getting cold, and I didn’t want my owner to get sick either, and they didn’t want to close the door. I really wanted to stay outside for longer, but the dilemma of whether or not to fulfill my owners needs vs my own got too tough again. Reluctantly, I went inside again, feeling like I had let myself down.

This feeling turned into sadness and despair, and I couldn’t stop myself from thinking “It fucking SUCKS to be a pet”. The lack of autonomy and agency in my own life got

overwhelming. I missed my girlfriend so much. With all these conflicting emotions, I crawled into one of the rooms and laid down on the sofa and cried silent tears, and questioned if I would be able to carry out the whole 24 hours - let alone go through three more adoptions.

When I woke up the next day, I wanted to go outside, since it was such a beautiful, sunny day. My owner took me on a little walk, which was amazing. They held my paw and as I skipped alongside my owner, my heart got filled with joy and a sense of freedom. I really did not want to go back to the apartment. We went to the shop, and I smelled some lemons and cucumbers, which was fantastic. Got a lot of peculiar looks and smiles from passersby. I was grateful that my owner didn't feel ashamed of walking me in public. When we got back to the apartment building, my owner let go of my paw to unlock the door. As stated in the contract, the owner should always hold the pet's paw when outside. I saw my chance to run. So I ran, but my owner quickly caught up with me and laughingly guided me into the apartment again.

I felt how my energy dropped when entering the apartment again. It was interesting to feel how I started to feel resentful towards my home as a physical place. My owner got a friend over, which was really nice. I was a bit insecure about them in the beginning, so I hid in a corner of the living room when they arrived. My owner came and reassured me that they were really nice, and asked if I wanted to eat with them. I was touched by my owner's care, and slowly followed them to the kitchen where I got some delicious food and even matcha, which you can probably still see traces of on my whiskers.

Today I felt more comfortable with my owner, and I also think my owner felt more comfortable with me. The rest of the day was really nice and relaxing. I spent the rest of the time resting next to them, while they were reading and doing some computer work. They also read for me, which I thought was super cosy, and also cuddled me a lot. Even though the first day was a bit of an emotional roller coaster, it turned out really lovely, and I could totally see myself living with my owner for a longer time.

MARUV THE GUINEA PIG²²

²² Guinea pig adoption documentation film, <https://youtu.be/7rF8mU7jnUw>



Now I have come back after life as a guinea pig. I don't know where to start. It has been a truly pleasant experience. Really chill, so much stimuli, so easy to find peace. How come I feel this ease this time? Maybe because the first time was the first time, and the first time can always be scary, and I didn't know what to expect. But now that I had lived through the first time, with all nerves and nevroses, I was maybe mentally prepared and my body had maybe learnt that it is not a dangerous situation.

Another reason could be that I was going to live with not only one person alone, but with two people and their dog. That is how I function as myself as well, that I feel calmer to be surrounded with multiple people than this one-to-one interaction that can feel very intense. There were so many things that happened during the adoption that made time go by so quickly.

The pet shop manager arrived and was like "hey, hey! How are you doing today? So nice that you would like to adopt the guinea pig!". One of the owners had been at her studio the whole night and was really tired and the other was cleaning her room. Then we signed the consent agreement, and I went to change into character, came out of the bathroom. I was a bit stressed to be honest. I just said "well, you have already read the agreement, so let's just sign it". Maybe because I didn't want to waste their time. But for my own sake, I think I need to go through the agreement together with the new owners upon arrival, so that I know everything is fresh in their mind. I also forgot to ask them if they had any questions and tell them that they could think of a name for the pet. We just signed the papers and then I went into character. Another thing I forgot to say, that is not mentioned in the consent agreement, is that the owners should find me a name and choose my gender and pronouns. But I guess I can ask them when we meet for the interview. I told the bunny owner this when we went through the agreement though, but they still didn't find a name for the bunny. Finding names can be tricky.

One thing one of my owners said when the pet shop manager came back to pick up the guinea pig, was that they were so happy that the pets went so well together (the dog and the guinea pig). I was also very happy to have the company of another non-human creature. Whenever I felt a bit anxious, I looked over at Oili, the dog, to see how she was behaving. Often she was chilling somewhere, and suddenly she was interested in something and went excitedly towards a sound. It was really calming, and I felt that Oili was socializing me into the pet role, that she also took care of the guinea pig. She was the guinea pig's guide dog. I thought about the videos I have seen online of different species of pets growing up together that start to behave like one another. In the same manner, I found myself following Oili.

This time I felt the importance of being stimulated and activated. One of my owners took me out for walks with Oili in a leash in one hand and my paw in the other. I was looking at my owner sometimes to see if they felt uncomfortable with the situation, but they seemed calm and treated me pretty much just like they treated Oili. The first walk was around 01:00 in the night. When my owner asked me if I wanted to join, I was questioning the safety of it. Friday night, a lot of drunken people on the streets, in the busiest bar area of Helsinki. But then I thought that I need to trust my owner, that she will keep me safe. We first went to the back yard, which was safe and fenced in so both me and Oili could walk freely. Then she leashed us again and took us on a walk around the neighborhood.

It actually didn't feel as scary as I thought it would. We were approached by one person only, who just asked if we had a lighter and gave me a puzzled look, like they couldn't believe their own eyes. I could really see the wheels turning in their head, which I thought was hilarious. We went on quite a long stroll, with no uncomfortable interactions. Whenever I looked in the mirror I couldn't stop myself from smiling, it was such a sight. My owner, the dog on a leash smelling everything on the ground and me, the guinea pig walking on two legs wearing sneakers and a rainbow scarf.

It was really nice that my owner had visitors. It gave me so much joy to sit there, in the same room as these three people, listening to them talk in this language that I don't understand very well, without needing to participate in the conversation. Just sit and exist and listen. It was so energizing and refreshing. The visitors were complimenting and filming me, and I felt really seen and loved. Not as much as Oili though. Maybe I was a bit jealous of Oili getting so much more attention than me. But Oili took so good care of me, so it was okay. When I went to bed on the sofa, she even wanted to sleep with me. She did snatch my pillow, which I had to gently steal back from her by petting her and pulling the pillow at the same time, but I managed to get it back eventually. She seemed a bit offended that I took it, but she fell asleep shortly after - in the middle of the sofa, laying on half of the duvet. I was also tired, and fell asleep quickly. When I woke up, Oili was gone.

A new day started. I ate the night snack I had been given the night before, and was given breakfast that I didn't have space for yet. The same owner that took me out yesterday, asked if I wanted to join another walk. I had been thinking the night before, that she took us out for a walk at night time because there would be less people to witness this absurd scenario, that she might have been a bit ashamed of me and the situation and wanted as little people as possible to witness it, but here she was - asking me to join a walk in the middle of the day, on a sunny Saturday in Kallio! I felt so proud.

When we came home, I was laying on my other owner's lap for a long time while she petted me and Oili. It felt so relaxing and nice.

One of my owners got a visitor, and they went into her room. I sat in the living room with the other owner, watching a series with her. It was cute to sit beside her while she laughed out loud of what was happening. I put my head on her leg and watched a few episodes. Then I followed Oili into my other owner's bedroom and hung out with the owner and the visitor for some time.

Because of all these happenings, I didn't feel bored at all during the stay and time flew by.

I got so much good food and snacks! Oh my. For dinner the first night was this delicious rice and tofu-dish with coconut milk and veggies. They also gave me coffee, cookies, an amazing porridge for breakfast, yoghurt and rye bread with some spread and paprika and alfa-alfa sprouts for night snack. My owners so far have made so good food. I really appreciate the generosity of sharing these amazing meals with me.

When I returned home to the Pet Shop, I told my girlfriend about my experience. She said, *now you have experienced how important it is for pets to live with other pets.* You should

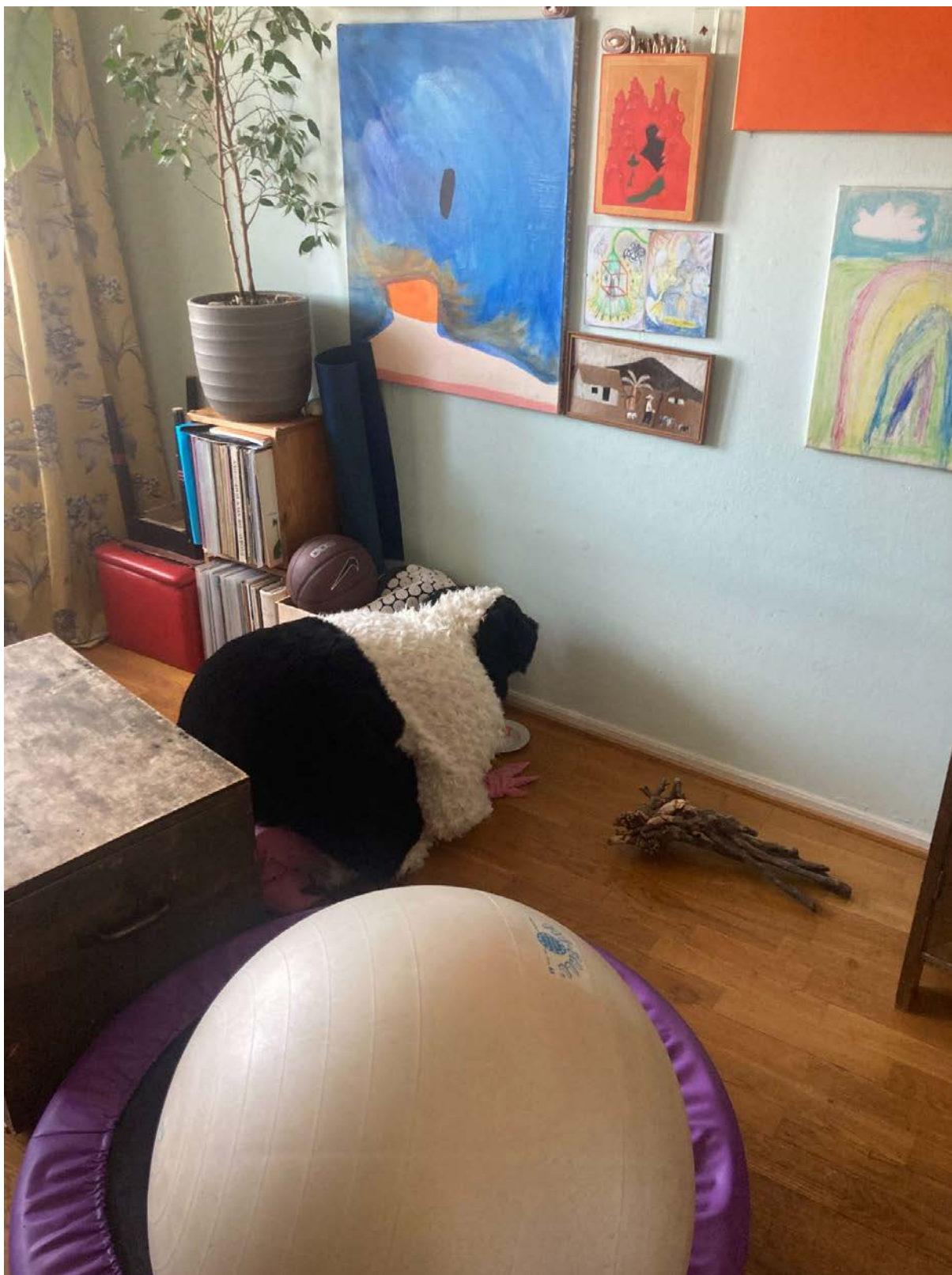
have seen the look of Oili when time was up, and I exited the costume. She looked like she felt like she had been scammed. It was hilarious and heartbreaking at the same time.





















KALLE THE RAT²³

²³Rat adoption documentation film, <https://youtu.be/yFkZN7wxr7A>



BEFORE THE ADOPTION

Now it is half an hour until I will start moving towards my new home for tonight. My owner messaged me and said that they were going to go to the cabin tomorrow, and asked if we could end the adoption three hours earlier than scheduled. I feel ambivalent about it. On one side, we have agreed upon 24 hours. This was planned many weeks ago, but I have to carry out the adoption, so I said it was alright, even though my thoughts went to the reasons I started this project. All the discarded covid pets when the owners wanted to go on holiday when the borders opened again. I don't want to throw my owner under the bus, but I think they should have taken into consideration that they were going to take care of me for the full 24 hours before planning a trip - or even bringing me with them on the trip, or planning around it. Well, well.

The only emotion I feel at the moment is practicality. I feel that I am going to work, and that I am going to get the work done. Not feeling particularly stressed about anything at the moment. I feel that I have learnt a lot from the previous experiences now, and will use this knowledge to make the transition smoother. I will remember to go through the whole consent agreement before handing over the pet, and remind the owner that they should find a name for me. When I write this I start to feel a slight nervousness, but I will manage. It will be fine. Just relax, do your job. Retreat if you need. Lay down when you're tired. Go to the bathroom to have a break if necessary. I'm sad that my partner won't be at home when I come back tomorrow, and sad that she is not here to comfort and cuddle me.

On my way to the adoption, my owner hadn't responded to my texts and I started to feel nervous. Worrying if they would not be home by the time I was there. I got inside the apartment building five minutes early and sat in the staircase until the time was due. I stood up and was going to take off my headset when my owner came rushing up the stairs, just in time.

26 HOURS LATER

Today I came back from being the rat, and guess what - it was yet another full moon night! We started the adoption with a full moon, and ended it with a full moon. Honestly I feel empty, which I often do on full moon nights. But maybe also because I had yet more new experiences and emotions. How the full moon is related to this project is a question, but still I think it is curious.

I came to my owner's place. We had some tea and chatted a bit before we went through the consent agreement. I asked them if they had any questions. They did not. I told them to think about a name for the rat. With a "See you tomorrow!" I went into the bathroom to embody my character, and came out as the rat. I start to feel that transition is an important word in this project.

The rat got a lot of cuddles. I layed on my owner's lap and was petted for a long time, with long, comforting strokes. It made me feel warm and welcomed. After an hour, my owner said that they were going to a dance class. They left some pieces of rye bread and a bowl of nuts for me on the floor and left the house. I was alone for two hours, and started feeling really bored. I started dragging some stuff around, but it was also not so exciting. I wanted to tear

up the paper on the floor, climb the bookshelves and make a total mess, but didn't want to upset my owner, so I didn't. After all, we had only known each other for an hour.

When they came back I was waiting by the door. As they opened it, I saw my chance to escape, and ran out in the hallway and was on my way down the stairs. My owner got a hold of me and guided me back into the apartment. I felt all sorts of conflicting emotions. Sad and deprioritized. Neglected and bored. Upset. However, they did make it up to me by petting me a lot. They let me know that a friend was coming over later. It was a really nice friend of theirs, who petted me a lot at first. My owner said to their friend that they had always wanted a pet named Kalle, so then I got my name. Then they made me some plant nuggets and veggies and we ate together.

My owner sat on the floor so that I could lay on them. That made me feel appreciated and wanted. But then my owner's attention went more and more to the guest, and eventually it felt like I was not important anymore. As I was witnessing my owner and their friend talking and interacting, I started feeling the loneliness creeping. Could I ever get a connection like that with my owner?

My owner and their friend asked if I wanted to go out for a cigarette with them, but I was too tired to go out. "What does Kalle want?" my owner asked their friend. I could sense some stress and insecurity from them.

When my owner's friend eventually left, my owner asked if I wanted to watch a series with them. They let me lay in their bed, and we watched a few episodes of an American show before they told me they were falling asleep, and so I went to sleep on the sofa bed that they had put out nicely for me.

When I woke up the next morning, I crawled over to greet my owner, who was sitting on the computer by the kitchen table. They told me they had to work for an hour or so, so I went back to lay down on the sofa. I was getting really hungry, but didn't feel like eating. After a while, they came over to me to say that they were going to the gym, and would be gone for some time. I was left alone again. I just kept on laying on the sofa, bored and hungry, trying to make my mind dissolve. They came back and went to shower, then started making some food, excusing their bad cooking skills. I thought it was cute that they excused their cooking to me, who was busy looking for crumbs on the floor. I was fed rice noodles with tofu, hummus and peanut butter. By the time I was fed, the adoption time was already coming to an end. My owner had agreed with the Pet Shop Manager the day in advance to end the adoption earlier, because they were going on a cabin trip. Three hours before the actual 24 hours was over, I went back to the pet shop, feeling confused and sad.









UNICORN ROSE THE HAMSTER²⁴

²⁴Hamster adoption documentation film, <https://youtu.be/6sNuGfmtsfQ>



The rat and hamster adoptions happened right after each other, the rat adoption ending in the late afternoon and the hamster adoption starting in the early afternoon the day after. I was questioning if this decision to have such a short break was a wise idea. But I also felt in this competition mode with myself, and how much I could take. However, I am very happy I did it, because I felt so low after the rat adoption and the hamster adoption ended up feeling so good. It was a necessary rebound with the project, going from hopelessness back to the joy I had felt during the adoption of the guinea pig. It's exhausting and exciting at the same time, to experience these emotional fluctuations.

Before the hamster adoption, I was a bit worried. This was the first time there was a child involved in the adoption, and my owners said they thought the adoption could be a fun experience for their child. I was also very curious how a 5-year old would respond to me being their hamster.

When TPSM came to the hamster owners, TPSM was met by one of the adults and the child in the doorway. They were greeting TPSM cheerfully. The child exclaimed "I want to see the hamster!!". "You will meet the hamster soon", the adult said. TPSM thought "Oh god, how will this go?". The child was over the moon about getting a hamster, which was lovely and slightly scary, in the sense that it felt like there were some expectations I didn't know what could be. Now I would completely rely on the adult owners to set the boundaries between the child and the pet.

TPSM got some coffee and proceeded to go through the consent agreement. The child was on board with everything with ecstatic engagement, and even had her own ideas of how to take care of the hamster. The adult owners made sure to make everything clear with examples. TPSM felt reassured that this would work out well. TPSM then went into the hamster's new bedroom (yes, the hamster got a bedroom of it's own!) to transform.

When I came out, I was surprised to see that the child looked a bit scared and skeptical. The adult owners greeted me with a warm "Hi hamster!". That seemed to relax the child as well. "He is so cute!" the child said. "What should we call the hamster?" the adult owners asked the child. "Rose." the child answered immediately. And so my name was given.

It didn't take long before the child got comfortable with me being there, and started interacting with me. The child introduced me to all these weird human toys that I didn't know what to do with, so I tried to eat them. That made the child laugh and they continued trying to show me how to play properly, with little success. I had such a great time.

My owners had planned a really nice evening. They had invited a group of friends over to a dinner party to meet me, which was really heart warming. The first guests came a few hours after the adoption started, and since it was a beautiful, sunny day, my owners decided we should go out for a walk before everyone arrived.

The child got the responsibility of holding my paw, and they didn't let go of me once. As we walked, I was sniffing at bark, touching trees and kept an eye out for birds. After all, I didn't want to risk being eaten by some hungry seagull.

I started picking up stuff from the ground and offered it to the child, who accepted my gifts. The child joined me, and together we started collecting different materials. I gave the child

little sticks, stones and pinecones that they put in their pocket. Together with my adult owner, we went down to the water side, which was packed with people, since it was Easter holiday. The child and I stood and looked at the sparkling surface of the ocean for a long time. Then we walked some more, and looked at the blooming trees. Along the way, we met a few dogs. I got a bit scared and tried to hide behind my owners, but the dogs didn't care about me, so we continued our sunny stroll. "Mommy, I love my hamster!" the child said. My little hamster heart melted.

When we came back, the guests were soon arriving. I was tired after the walk, so I layed down on the sofa to rest. My owner's gave me a little snack - an indonesian dish that I really enjoyed. Then the doorbell rang. The first guests were here. I felt a bit insecure, so I went to sit in the corner of the living room. The guests seemed really happy to see me, and greeted me with big smiles. It was an adult with their child. They sat down on the sofa, close to me. My child owner informed them that they had to ask me before they pet me. So the guests asked me if it was okay that they pet me. I signalled that it was okay, so they pet me a bit.

They sat down by the table and talked, and I laid on the floor, listening to them. My child owner and the guest child went to play in the bedroom, and asked if I wanted to join them. After a while, I went into the bedroom, laid on the bed and hung out with them while they were doing some acrobatics. "Can you do this, hamster?" my child owner asked me as they were doing a split. I signalled no.

The other guests started to arrive. I sat on the sofa and on the floor, chilling. My child owner was really ecstatic and kept everyone entertained. I felt satisfied with not doing much, and enjoyed the good atmosphere of the room. One of the new guests approached me, and started to pet me. My child owner said "Hey! You have to ask before you do that!". The guests tried to test my child owner's boundaries, and continued to pet me. "You have to ask!" she said again. "I am watching you!". After that she kept saying that she was watching them, and that they were mean sausage heads for petting me without asking. I almost teared up of gratitude for the way she protected me. She really prioritised my well being, and I admired her for standing up for me like that.

As the night went on, some of the other guests came to me as I was sitting on the sofa. "Hey hamster, should we look at this book?" they asked. It was a book with paintings. They asked me what I thought about the different art works. I didn't have much to say. The guests understood that it was hard for me to form an opinion that they would understand, but I still enjoyed our conversation.

The guests started to leave, and my owners went to bed. I went into my bedroom and had a hard time falling asleep, being so well socially stimulated. I usually am most active at nighttime, so going to bed is usually quite challenging for me. Eventually I fell asleep. When I woke up it was already half past eleven! Only one and a half hour left of the adoption, oh no! I rushed out of bed, went to the bathroom and went to greet my owners. I was so sad that I had slept so late, and that I had so little time left in my home. I was worrying that they would feel like I didn't want to be with them, which was definitely not the case. My owners had planned to take me out for another walk, but now we didn't have time for it anymore. I was so ashamed. But I got some coffee and breakfast and started the day, regardless.

One of my adult owners asked if I wanted to join a video call with her friends. So then we - my adult owner, child owner and I, sat with my adult owner's friends on the phone. Then my child owner went to the living room table to draw. I was curious what she was up to, so I followed her. She welcomed me, and started trying to teach me how to use a marker. I had never used a marker before, so I found it a bit tricky - which part would leave a mark, but my child owner was a patient teacher, and eventually I think I got the hang of it. We made a whole collection of napkin action drawings which turned out really cool.

I didn't interact so much with the other adult owner that was there, but he did play some great music throughout the whole adoption time, which made me feel very relaxed and at home.

Then the time was up, and it was time for me to go back to the pet shop.

















OWNER REVIEWS

HILDAR (BUNNY OWNER)

This totally had a similar aftertaste that I have experienced when going to see a really good contemporary performance art piece! Why is it surprising? Because indeed somehow it mostly felt like something else besides art: co-presence. For quite a while I was left with many feelings and questions, just like when I go to see something thought provoking: "What did I just go through and what is the meaning of this?". This performance also pushes you to the stage to perform: your daily life and the new role you have as a pet owner. You are not just the audience but have to collaborate and follow some guidelines and instructions. As the roles and meanings are shifted during the performance the questions themselves also start to perform in time and shape-shift so you really have to take the time and look inside yourself. My favourite moments were those where we quietly co-habited the space with the Bunny.²⁵

²⁵ Feedback from Hildar Meister, bunny owner

ANNA (RAT OWNER)

My experience with the pet was funny, weird, hilarious and also awkward. Definitely a new situation - what i was looking for when i applied for the pet adoption. I was happy with the communication before adoption and i felt the agreement contract was very useful for me. I think it had all the necessary information before pet arriving to my home. I could have liked the transformation to be somehow softer or take more time (for myself) to get know this new pet when arriving. It was a big surprise to actually have a huge rat in my home!

The experience with the pet made me very conscious with how i am acting in my home, which was also challenging. Not necessary in a bad way, just that i noticed that i put myself in a situation that i haven't been before. I felt like also immersing myself in a performance in my home and somehow trying to act as a part of it. I'm glad i had this weird experience in my home, even though i think next time i would act very different. I was not prepared how the pet made me act, which was surprising to me.

Having this pet as a performance made me think a lot about other human service works, such as sex work. I think it had a lot of connection to sex working, even though this was not at all a sexual experience. It made me think about different kinks of how people want to act as animals or be treated as something else than a human. I am very curious how the artist felt during the adoption. Thinking of this, i felt that the connection with the pet and how the communication is created is very important in this experience. I had to finish the adoption a bit earlier than 24 hours and i felt that i had created some type of communication with the pet just before the adoption ended.

For me it was hilarious that i had opportunity to name the pet. It came as a very strong intuition to name pet as Kalle the Rat. Even now i am laughing out loud when thinking of the name and the pet. Kalle is a very typical Finnish name, and i would definitely give that name to a pet rat in the future as well. The pictures i have from Kalle are also very funny and i will remember this experience for ever. Everyone that i tell about Kalle and show the pictures are amazed that there could be something like this happening.²⁶

²⁶ Feedback from Anna Pietilä, rat owner

CONCLUSION

With *The Pet Shop* I have had the privilege to experience an intimate glimpse of four households' everyday life by moving into their homes and living as their pet. I am astounded with how seriously my owners have taken on their role, and am still fascinated with how one set of guidelines can feel so different depending on those involved and the environment I'm finding myself in. Even though all participants were connected to the art world this time, each performance caused new emotions and reflections.

It is a strange feeling to have formed a bond that is so out of the ordinary with the participants of this work. Our lives have become intertwined in this very intimate way, but still we don't really know each other. We are a piece of each other's reality that is now a story in our library of experiences. This library I want to keep on expanding, making a greater effort to reach people outside of the art bubble by creating that sales booth on wheels, taking to the streets and eventually building that physical shop downtown for passersby to stumble upon. I want to see if this can develop into a self-sustaining business that I actually can live off. In addition, I am curious to explore the owner role, and want to find people who would like to be my pet as well.

Even though it has been a tough process in many ways, I see *The Pet Shop* as a soft, fumbling and gentle work. Going forward I want to keep it like that, offering this break from everyday life that is still a part of everyday life, with all its habitual unpredictability. However, in the future I want to dare myself to test the boundaries of my owners more. When looking at the documentation, I see that it doesn't really matter which costume I'm wearing - I'm still the person inside, guided and limited by my own bodily needs and internalised social behaviours.

The topic of the human/animal is an infinite source of inspiration for me, and is something I will continue to work with. But before I move on with *The Pet Shop*, I want to make a work that is specifically tackling speciesism. I want to collect real meat, making kinetic sculptures of it, sewing it back into bodies that will rot over time. I want to make more music. I want to collaborate with people, get involved in a queer- and animal rights organisation and put my efforts into a community working for real change.

What can *The Pet Shop* contribute with in this real, fictional world? One performance at the time it becomes a story about life, and how it could be different. I keep believing in the power of stories and art's role as a medium between the real and the imagined. *The Pet Shop* is an invitation to slow down, be present, care for and trust each other, and to go in- and outside of ourselves and reflect on our relationship to our surroundings and the beings in it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

brown, adrienne maree. "Introduction." In *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, edited by adrienne maree brown, 3, 16. Chico, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019

Carr, Anja. *Til Deg: Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium intervjuer ANJA CARR*. Translated by Tanja Silvestrini. Norway: Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, 2021.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqXPFK4w1fI>

Carr, Anja. *Oslo Open er Norges største kunstfestival. Episode 1/2*. Translated by Tanja Silvestrini. Norway: KUNZT, 2020.
<https://www.kunzt.no/post/oslo-open-er-norges-storste-kunstfestival>

Guðmundsdóttir, Björk. "Big Time Sensuality." In *Debut*. UK: One Little Independent Records, Elektra, 1993.

Harari, Yuval Noah. *What explains the rise of humans?* London: TED Global, 2015.
https://www.ted.com/talks/yuval_noah_harari_what_explains_the_rise_of_humans

Harari, Yuval Noah. "Foreword to the Tenth Anniversary Edition." In *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*. USA: Red Wheel, 2020.

Joy, Melanie. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*. USA: Red Wheel, 2020.

Julien, Tatiana. *Uprising (Soulèvement): a solo on resistance*. Interscribo, 2018.
<http://www.cinterscribo.com/en/soulevement-uprising/>

LaFleur, Ingrid. "A Pleasure Philosophy." In *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, edited by adrienne maree brown, 99. Chico, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2019.

Overall, Christine. *Pets and People: The Ethics of Our Relationships with Companion Animals*. Canada: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Sandemose, Aksel. *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*. Translated by Tanja Silvestrini. Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1933.

PHOTO CREDIT

Nicolai Risbjerg, front + last page, from the exhibition *Skattejagt*, Sydhavn Station, 04.08-03.09.23

Iida Pii, p. 5, 105-107

Lennart Creutzburg, p. 7 (top image), 70-71, 73-74, 77-87

Best Before Collective, p. 7 (bottom image), from *Uääh!* Performance Festival, Fylkingen, 25.03.23

Juliana Irene Smith, p. 13, 121-128

Tanja Silvestrini, p. 16, 20-21, 23-26, 28-30, 32, 34-43, 52-54, 57, 90, 95, 109, 117

Natalie Seifert Eliassen, p. 46

Xenia Østergaard Ramm, p. 47

Kaisla Kyyhkynen, p. 75

Saara Koiranen, p. 98-104

Anna Pietilä, p. 112, 114-115

Terhi Hart, p. 113



Välkommen

70

5