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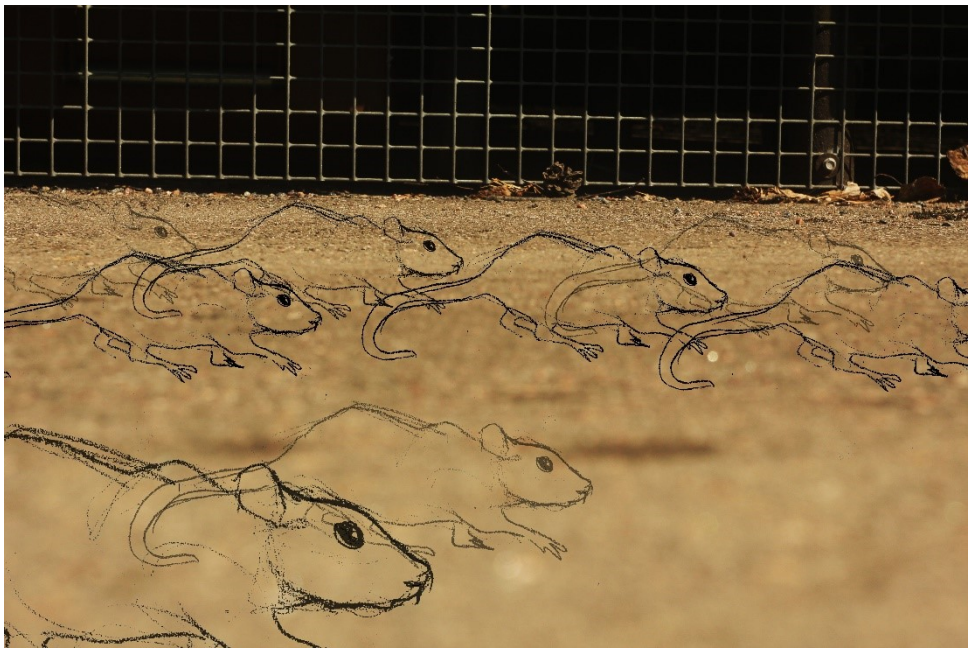
Tracing rat paths

In search of interspecies performance

MAIJA LINTURI



Rat City. Photo by Olli-Pekka Jauhiainen, editing and drawing Sanna Nissinen.

LIVE ART AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES

ABSTRACT

DATE:

AUTHOR	**MASTER'S OR OTHER DEGREE PROGRAMME**
Maija Linturi	Live Art and Performance Studies
TITLE OF THE WRITTEN COMPONENT/THESIS	**NUMBER OF PAGES + APPENDICES IN THE WRITTEN COMPONENT**
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TITLE OF THE ARTISTIC/ ARTISTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL WORK

Rat City, Director. Performer: Maija Linturi; co-director, performer: Camilla Andérzen; performance dramaturg: Vera Boitcova; Sound designers: Olli-Pekka Jauhiainen and Johanes Timothy; visual designer: Sanna Nissinen; musician Heli Hartikainen.
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The artistic work is produced by the Theatre Academy. X☐

Tracing rat paths: in search of interspecies performance is a companion to my artistic thesis *Rat City. Rat City* was a site-specific, interspecies performance that took place in Myllypuro, Helsinki in September 2023. In this thesis, I open up the performance process and consider more broadly what interspecies can mean in the context of performance art. My main questions are how a performance could be made together with urban rats, *Rattus Norvegicus*. How could authorship be shared with a wild species that simultaneously lives in close proximity to humans and avoids them? How does taking other species seriously as a co-creator of a performance affect the content, the form and the very notion of what a performance can be?

At the beginning of the thesis, I define interspecies performance based on the writings and theories of Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kokkonen, Jessica Ullrich, Una Chaudhuri, and Lisa Jevbratt, and place it in the context of posthumanism and animal studies. I consider the performance as an arena, or a "more-than-human contact zone", where humans and non-humans can encounter, change, and transform each other. Next, I approach interspecies performance from three perspectives: art-science collaboration, rat-human collaboration and site-specificity. Each of these "lines of inquiry" raises new questions and new conceptual tools for thinking about interspecies performance, eventually intertwining and leading to the *Rat City* performance, which I will describe in the final chapter.

Through questions about interspecies collaboration — and through the rats themselves — I discovered the "politics of entanglements", in which many other things besides rats started to matter. One of the main findings of this thesis is this "making things matter" in and through interspecies performance. Meaning-making occurs through both active work (learning to read rat writing, participating in research events) and passive being and passing time. It requires an understanding of the "other", but also an understanding of one's own agency in relation to the other. This multifaceted understanding requires multiple knowledges, surrender to affect, various forms of empathy and reflection on one's own actions. This discovery also opens up the process that led to the Rat City performance from a new perspective: the process was not so much a "rehearsal period" culminating in a work presented to a (human) audience, but a durational performance that is actually still ongoing.

KEYWORDS

Interspecies performance, interspecies art, interspecies collaboration, non-human animals, animal studies, posthumanism, more-than-human, site-specific, art-science collaboration, non-anthropocentric performance, affects, non-human agency

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1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of my thesis is interspecies performance. Specifically, I am studying how a performance could be made together with urban rats, *Rattus Norvegicus*. How could authorship be shared with a wild species that simultaneously lives in close proximity to humans and avoids them? How does taking this other species seriously as a co-creator of a performance affect the content, the form and the very notion of what a performance can be?

In this thesis, the "case study" of an interspecies performance is my artistic thesis *Rat City*, a performance that took place in September 2023. However, my intention is not so much to analyse the actual performance as to reflect on the process that led to *Rat City* and what interspecies can mean in the context of performance art. I consider the performance as an arena, or in Donna Haraway's words a "more-than-human contact zone[1]", where humans and non-humans can encounter, change, and transform each other. This is why I repeatedly asked the following two questions, both in the artistic process and in this written thesis: 1. At what point in the process interspecies performance actually takes place (if it does)? 2. Where and when did humans and rats meet in a “reciprocally transformative way” (Cull Ó Maoilearca 2019) in the *Rat City* performance and the process that led to it?

When I started working on *Rat City* in the spring of 2022, I had three starting points in mind: collaboration between art and science; collaboration with rats; and site-specificity. In this thesis, I approach the human-rat performance with this original triad in mind. Each of these "lines of inquiry" raises new questions and new conceptual tools for thinking about interspecies performance. The different approaches also feed off each other, eventually intertwining and leading to the *Rat City* performance. Social scientists Hinchliffe et al. (2005, 648) write about diagrammatic writing[2] in their article *Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment*. By this, they refer to a collection of different types of texts that make sense of a particular animal species without attempting to simplify, appropriate or represent said animal. Diagramming means writing *around* rather than directly *about* the animal. Perhaps this thesis could be approached through

[1] Contact Zone is a term and concept originally introduced by Professor Mary Louise Pratt in 1991. She used the term in the context of (post)colonialism to describe spaces where cultures meet and clash with each other in a highly asymmetrical power relationship. Subsequently, many environmental and/or posthumanist scholars have derived the term more-than-human contact zone to describe the complexity and diversity of encounters in a more-than-human world (Isaacs & Otruba 2019, 700). Donna Haraway (2008), for her part, has highlighted the more-than-human contact zone as a space where power is not necessarily evenly distributed, but where real, transformative encounters can nevertheless occur.
[2] See 5.1. *Making rats matter*

the concept of diagramming. Through different concepts, perspectives and text types, I write *around* interspecies performance, trying to get closer, little by little, to what it is or could be about.

The structure of the thesis is divided into 8 chapters, 1. *Introduction*, 2. *Interspecies Art and Performance*, where I define and contextualise interspecies art and performance, 3. *Towards Rat City: why urban rats?* where I briefly explain why I chose to do a performance with rats, 4. *Interdisciplinary interspecies performance*, where I write about the collaborative process with Helsinki Urban Rat Project, 5. *Working with rats: from rat writing to common protocols,* where I describe the efforts of the working group to come into contact and collaborate with rats, 6. *Site,* where I approach interspecies from a perspective of place, 7. *Rat City,* which consists of a description of my artistic thesis, and 8. *Conclusion*. The structure therefore follows the process of my artistic thesis in the sense that it moves *towards* the performance. However, it is also possible to start from chapter 7 and read the description of the final performance first. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 can be read interchangeably, as each chapter returns to the beginning of the process and looks at the process that led to the *Rat City* performances from a different perspective.

2. INTERSPECIES ART AND PERFORMANCE

In this chapter I describe how I have ended up working with "animal themes" in my performances, and later with live non-human animals. Through my personal history, I also try to shed light on some of the more general (art) historical continuities through which interspecies art may have emerged and spread in the 21st century. Furthermore, I the writings of performance philosopher Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, performance artist-researcher Tuija Kokkonen, art historian Jessica Ullrich, Professor of English, Drama, and Environmental Studies Una Chaudhuri, and multimedia artist Lisa Jevbratt. At the end of the chapter, I will justify some of the linguistic choices I have made for this thesis.

2.1. Personal and historical trajectories

In the autumn of 1998, many things happened in my life. I started studying at the Upper Secondary School of Visual Arts in Helsinki and thus moved to a new city on my own. I left behind the volunteer work at the local animal shelter and the small-town animal activist circles, and I didn't feel quite at home in the much larger activist circles of Helsinki. Then my beloved dog Ami died. I was alone in Helsinki when I heard the news. Ami was the first person really close to me that I lost, and I didn't know how to react. I set off to wander the city on my own, and eventually ended up at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, which had opened that year. I went into a dark room to watch a video that finally brought tears to my eyes. The video showed two children and a small dog walking along a dirt road surrounded by cornfields. The children playfully nudged each other, stopping every now and then and then took off running. The dog shared the children's energy, running free at their feet and occasionally sprinting across the field. At the end of the road was a deserted belfry, and the children climbed to the top of the tower. They grabbed the ropes of the bell and swung on them like lianas. The sound of the bell filled the room, and the children just swung, swung. The dog ran free in the field.

I have tried many times to trace the name and the author of the video work, without success. I have begun to doubt whether my imagination produced the whole work. Perhaps it was something I would have liked to see at that time and in that state of mind, at the crossroads of childhood and adulthood. The work gave my grief the space and value it deserved. The piece didn't say that Ami was just a dog, therefore not worthy of proper mourning. It showed the children and the dog as equally free and playful, as fully alive, at once open to each other and to the world and oblivious to the fact that any

other way of being was even possible. There was a bond between the children and the dog that did not need a leash or a collar to maintain. It was that connection, that openness, that I felt I was losing with Ami.

I remember another animal artwork from my high school days. In 2000, an exhibition by Polish artist Katarzyna Kozyra opened in the Kunsthalle Helsinki. Perhaps the work that attracted the most public attention was Kozyra's *Pyramid of Animals*, completed back in 1993. In it, four animal taxidermies — a horse, a dog, a cat and a rooster — were arranged on each other's backs, like in the story of Town musicians of Bremen. The work was accompanied by a video which showed the killing and skinning of the horse in the pyramid.

The work evoked mixed feelings in me. As for many Finns, seeing taxidermies was in itself quite commonplace for me; school corridors of small towns were full of them at the time. As an animal activist, I was also aware of the hypocrisy of the Western attitudes towards non-human animals: people are horrified by the death of a horse for the sake of art, while they fill their plates and stomachs with the bodies of other equally sentient and intelligent creatures. Still, seeing dead and stuffed animals in a gallery space, stacked on top of each other, made me shudder, not to mention the video. The setup felt grotesque, somehow fundamentally wrong. I had personal relationships with many cats, dogs and horses. I had grown up with them. However, the artwork, or perhaps rather the art school, or the zeitgeist, forced me to suppress such sentimental feelings.

I didn't know it at the time, but Kozyra's work was quite typical of postmodern animal art: her animals did not function as human surrogates, or as symbols or metaphors of human phenomena. Their dead bodies are "the real thing", and their function was to display their "thingness". (Aloi 2012, 114) The artwork itself does not tell us what to think about it, but on the contrary, typical of the postmodern era, it emphasises the lack of a moral statement (Baker 2000, 24–25). However, Kozyra's species choices, especially the dog, cat and horse at the top of the Western animal hierarchy, are a clear provocation, intended to evoke emotions and reactions. Theatre scholar and playwright Peta Tait (2015, 113) has written about how artists who bring animal death into gallery spaces make visible the brutal death of animals in industrialised agriculture, which usually takes place hidden from view. In interviews, Kozyra has also positioned herself on the side of the animals, against the hypocritical scandalmongers. "I am very animal-loving. When I was doing my thesis [The Pyramid of Animals], I wanted to address

how humans exploit animals. My starting point was ethical," Kozyra said in an interview in Helsingin Sanomat (Kivirinta 2000).

For an art student who spent at least as much energy trying to understand what one *should* think about art as what she actually felt and thought about it, Kozyra's work seemed like a trap. If I reacted to it with emotion, if I let the cat and the dog and the horse and their bodies trapped between death and life affect me, I would be caught in hypocrisy. In retrospect, it is perhaps quite natural that of the two "animal artworks" that impressed me, it was Kozyra's work that seemed to define the role of non-human animals in art. The work that appealed directly to my emotions and gave me comfort, felt somehow less “serious” than the work that shocked and distressed me, and forced me to suppress my feelings. At that age and time, it seemed more valid to resist emotions and to approach art with a cool rationality. This, I learned later, is also typical of the postmodern zeitgeist, which was characterised precisely by a fear of sentimentality (Baker 2000, 176–177).

I find it interesting that my first contact with "animal art" was in such a postmodern context. According to the art historian Jessica Ullrich (2019, 70), it was the phenomena associated with postmodernism, such as the distribution of authorship[3] and the establishment of performance art into a genre of its own, that made possible the return[4] of animals to art in the first place and, more recently, the emergence of interspecies art. However, as a young art student, I didn’t see the possibility of such trajectory. I could not question the role given to the animals in Kozyra's work, or imagine any other place for non-human animals in art. Since I personally did not want to stare into the glassy eyes of dead animals and add to their suffering for the public to see, I concluded that it would be wiser to exclude animals from art altogether, for their own sake.

Later on, I ended up studying puppet theatre and working in theatre. The human-centredness of these art forms was so obvious in the first decade of the 21st century that it never occurred to me to question it. Partly this was because I myself had lost a living connection with non-human animals. In his famous essay *Why Look at Animals?*, art

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3 The change in the concept of authorship is crystallised in *the death of an author*, announced by philosopher Roland Barthes. In his essay of the same name in 1967, Barthes separates the text from its author and his/her intentions, and instead emphasises the role of the reader in the final formation of the work. Thus, texts are always unstable and open to change. (Barthes 1993). Barthes' ideas were quickly adopted not only in literature but also in other art forms.

4 According to art historian Steve Baker (2000, 20), it was the absence of animals that characterised modern art. Modernist artists, who sought increasingly abstract expression, were not interested in animals as subject, model or symbol, and the symbolic and sentimental animals of the Romantic period could not have been further from the ideals of the cool modernist avant-garde artists.

critic John Berger (1980) suggests that non-human animals have been part of art since the dawn of humanity, providing the first artists not only with concrete materials but also with the first metaphors and motifs. Animals formed the first sphere around humans: humans lived with and among other animals, under their gaze. According to Berger, however, this immediate connection began to break down from the 19th century onwards, when animals gradually began to disappear from both the immediate human sphere and from art. When we do not see them, we are not subject to their gaze. And when we are not bound by their gaze, we are not forced to reflect on our own relationship with them. I feel that the same phenomenon happened to me on an individual level. Since I was no longer in daily contact with non-human animals, questions about them and human–animal relations began to seem distant, secondary, even in my own mind.

For me, the turning point was when, in my thirties, I adopted my first dog. As my own relationship with non-human animals began to revive, questions of human–animal relationships began to feel essential again. Around the same time, I noticed a change in the general atmosphere. More and more performances and artworks were dealing with the relationship between humans and non-humans, trying to embody non-human ways of being, or looking at the world and history from non-human perspectives. This was the result of both posthumanism, which in the late 2010s seemed to have really taken hold in the Finnish art scene, and the "animal turn[5]" of the early 2000s. With this change in zeitgeist, I began to realise that I too could deal with non-human animals and human–animal relationships in performance.

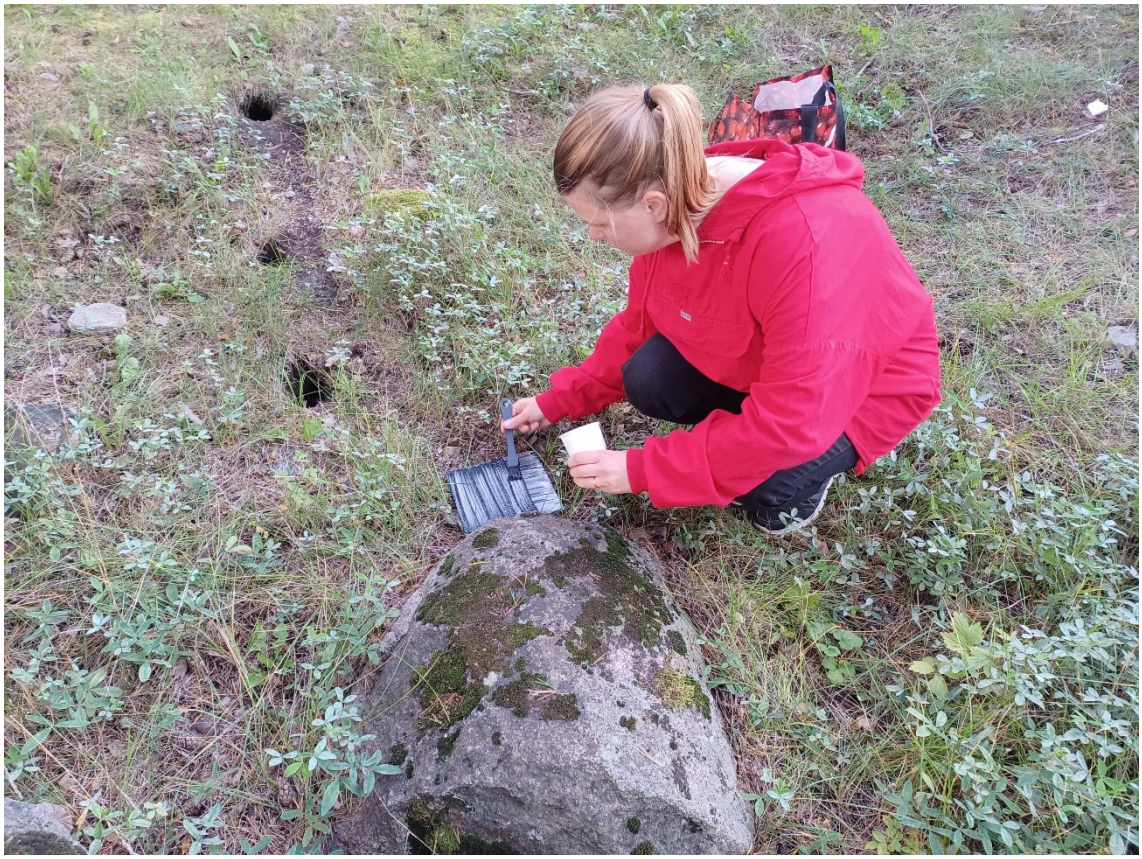
My first "animal performance", *Heppatytöt* (*Horse Girls*) in 2018, co-directed with choreographer Leena Harjunpää, reflected the complex relationships between girls and horses, coloured by nurturing, cruelty and emancipation, trying to capture something from the horse's point of view, too. However, it took a few more years, a few new dog family members, some animal trainer studies, and finally studying in Theatre Academy, before I started to seriously consider whether non-human animals could be included in performances on more than just a thematic level. Although I no longer thought that Kozyra's *Pyramid of Animals* was the only way to include "real" animals in art, I still thought, to quote the artist duo Olly and Suzi, that "animals are too busy to care too

5 Philip Armstrong and Laurence Simmons (2007) date the term "animal turn" to 2003, when Sarah Franklin used it at the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia conference. It refers to a(n academic) paradigm shift, influenced by the development of the animal rights movement, new insights in ethology and behavioural science, and a general increase in environmental awareness (Ullrich 2019, 71) In short, animal turn in research and in art meant the change of mindset concerning the relationship between the subject and the object ("the human" and "the animal"), which also forced the creation of new methodologies and theories to assist this rethinking.

much about art (Olly and Suzy according to Baker 2002, 88)". But now I began to question this narrative and to realise that my concept of art was still very human-centric even though I claimed to want to deconstruct the human-centeredness of performance. Following the lead of performance philosopher Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca and other artists and theorists who have written about interspecies art (more of them in the following chapter), I became interested in the possibilities of interspecies art and performance to rethink what artistic agency or performance means.

Alongside these questions, I have recently been pondering a new question, namely, what does interspecies performance *do*. When I finally began to address non-human animals in my performances, new ideas, interests and questions emerged, which in turn were reflected in my own life and my personal animal relationships. My current striving towards interspecies performance has, on the one hand, deepened this feedback loop. On the other hand, even more has happened: performance and performance processes have become a space for creating relationships rather than simply reflecting on them. It has become a space where things and beings *start to matter*. Rats are a good example of this: I had no special relationship with rats before *Rat City*, I knew almost nothing about them, and I didn't think about them much. But this changed during the performance process. I encountered rats in many ways, I was affected by them, I got to know them better and I formed a relationship with them. I have begun to think that perhaps this very process of becoming meaningful is what interspecies performance can do for others, too. Going back to Berger and how animals have disappeared from our immediate circle, I wonder if the interspecies performance could serve as a space where human and non-human animals meet, where new relationships are formed, and where we human animals are once again also the object of the non-human gaze.

2.2. Definitions



Indirect interspecies interaction. Camilla Andérzen, tracking plate and a rat colony living underground. Photo by Maija Linturi.

The objective of my artistic thesis *Rat City* was to create a performance together with urban rats. When I started planning the performance, I didn't know how it would be possible or in what way the rats would be involved. However, my hope was that their influence would be as great as possible, both in the form and content of the piece. I wanted to treat rats as artistic agents and co-creators of the performance. This approach led me to call *Rat City* an *interspecies performance*. Some of the writers on interspecies art and/or performance art include performance philosopher Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, performance artist–researcher Tuija Kokkonen, art historian Jessica Ullrich, professor of English, Drama, and Environmental Studies Una Chaudhuri, and multimedia artist Lisa Jevbratt. Their writings have served as a basis for my own search for what interspecies performance is or can be.

According to Jessica Ullrich (2019, 72), bare bones definition of interspecies art is “art in which members of various species interact with one another”. Further attempts to define interspecies art more precisely are complicated by the fact that neither art nor species are concepts on which there is clear consensus. But not everyone agrees even on

this cautious definition. For Una Chaudhuri (2014, 6), direct interspecies interaction is not necessary for interspecies art/performance, but it is sufficient that performances "are records of and reflections on the relationships — real and imagined — between human and non-human animals". There is therefore no single all-encompassing definition of interspecies art. However, certain concepts or elements recur in the writings of the artists and scholars mentioned above that I have found relevant to my own work: challenging the human-centredness, shared agency, horizontal relations between species and individuals, encounter, and ethical consideration for the implications of the artwork for the non-human partner. These elements partially overlap and unfold from each other to form a kind of network or terrain in which I have tried to navigate when outlining the practice of interspecies performance in the context of *Rat City*.

Ullrich (2019, 70) writes how art has long been seen as a closed and self-perpetuating system from which non-human agents are excluded. Non-human animals have been seen as material, models, motifs, representatives of a vague “animality” or simply as others. The use of animals in art has been based on a hierarchical system in which the creative human artist forces passive animals into images. Similarly, Laura Cull (2015, 21) (later Cull Ó Maoilearca), writes about the human-centric roots of performance and performance studies. Such central figures in performance studies as Victor Turner, Richard Schechner and John Simons have each defined performance as a domain that is specifically human. Turner called the human as “homo performans”, making the ability to perform a defining characteristic of humans (and consequently, a characteristic that distinguishes humans from other animals). Performance was defined as intentional, conscious and chosen activity, capable only of humans and perhaps possibly some great apes[6]. Tuija Kokkonen (2017, 21) also recalls how "nature" and non-humans have long been seen in performance mainly as a resource, while the human body and the relationships between humans have remained at the centre of theatre, contemporary theatre and performance art alike.

Interspecies art and interspecies performance challenges this long-standing human-centredness in art. All the above-mentioned authors stress that interspecies art and performance is interested in “real animals”, instead of treating non-human animals as symbols, metaphors or, for example, as aesthetic shortcuts to achieve a certain impression. Non-human animals are seen as autonomous actors with their own perspective on the world, in Ullrich's (2019, 71) words, "different-yet-equal". Such a

[6] In his earlier writings Schechner saw the possibility that some activities of some nonhuman animals, especially great apes, could fit into this "broad range of activities" interpreted as performance (Schecner according to Cull, 2015).

perspective allows other animals to enter the art world as creative agents instead of passive objects. Ullrich (op. cit. 72) thus ends up formulating interspecies art a little more precisely than her previous definition as “relationally intended artworks in which a human artist interacts with a non-human animal, so that both play a work-constituting role, and in which a fundamental critique of anthropocentrism is, at minimum, implicit. In interspecies art, the animals involved are given at least a rudimentary agential status."

Kokkonen (2017, 24), too, sees the participation of non-humans as an essential factor in interspecies performance. She describes interspecies performances as performance events in which agency is shared with "non-human co-actors”. For Kokkonen, these co-actors are not only non-human animals but also all the other organisms with which we share living space, as well as various natural processes such as weather. Both Kokkonen and Laura Cull emphasise how this shift in perspective affects what is understood as performance in the first place. Cull (2015, 24–25) calls the recognition of the (artistic) agency of animals in performance and performance studies “radical inclusion”. The recognition of non-human animals as (artistic) agents and (co-)creators of performance means abandoning human-centred and preconceived definitions of performance, such as the requirement of intentionality. Radical inclusion opens performance up to constant redefinitions in the face of encounters with non-human animals.

Radical inclusion and sharing the artistic authorship of a performance (or other work of art) with non-humans requires a non-hierarchical relationship with these non-human actors. The word 'inter' suggests that something happens *in-between,* in the relationship between two or more actors. For an interspecies relationship to evolve, an interspecies performance should not include even well-meaning attempts to explain or speak for the non-human, as this inevitably implies a reduction of the agency of the “other” in the relationship; a representation in which the other remains passive and voiceless. Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-3) emphasises precisely this primacy of the relationship rather than the individuals forming the relationship. Kokkonen (2017, 22), too, stresses the essential nature of the relationship in interspecies performance, in other words, what is possible to take place when non-humans are treated as actors, on the same level, without making resources out of the other.

Most of the writers emphasise the importance of *encounter* in building a relationship, or at least the possibility of an encounter. For Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-3), encounter is fundamental to interspecies performance, both ontologically and ethically. (Physical

and performative) encounter represents an event of non-recognition[7]: a kind of embodied thinking that is different from habitual ways of dealing with and preconceptions about the non-human world. According to Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-2), performance has the capacity to produce encounters in which both human and non-human participants can be transformed, unmade and re-made. For Kokkonen (2017, 27), the possibilities of encounters open up through time and place: by bringing the performance outside, away from the black or white boxes that traditionally exclude everything but the human, Kokkonen creates conditions for human and non-human relationships and encounters over time.

Una Chaudhuri's (2014, 6) interpretation of interspecies performance differs from that of previous authors since for her, physical encounters and interactions with non-human animals are not a prerequisite for interspecies performance. According to Chaudhuri, the way non-human animals are treated and represented in performances has in any case implications for the cultural discourse[8] on animals. Cultural attitudes, in turn, directly affect the lives of real, live animals. Interspecies performance is aware of this impact and seeks to influence the animal discourse (and thus the lives of real animals) in a positive way. For Chaudhuri (2014, 7), the "second article[9]" of the interspecies performance is "to act on behalf of animals". "Acting on behalf" can seem to approach representing and speaking for non-human animals, which Kokkonen and Cull Ó Maoilearca argue *is not* what interspecies performance is about. However, I understand acting on behalf of animals in the sense of "being on their side".

Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kokkonen, Jevbratt and Ullrich all see interspecies performance as having a fundamental ethico-political dimension. For Ullrich (2019, 72), the very fact that interspecies art includes non-human animals as artistic partners blurs the boundary between humans and other animals and calls into question the idea, that phenomena such as aesthetic expression and artistic agency are solely human qualities. In its ideal form, interspecies art is dialogical and respectful of the non-human animals involved and their creative contributions. According to Cull (2015, 25), interspecies poses the question of how performance could contribute to dismantling and combating anthropocentrism and speciesism, and the violence against animal bodies that such perspectives enable. She sees interspecies performance as an opportunity for an ethical

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[7] Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-3) borrows the concept of non-recognition from Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition.*

[8] Chaudhuri (2014, 6) refers to this broad cultural discourse and representations of animals with the term zooësis. The term is partly inspired by Platonic "poïesis" and Aristotelian "mimesis", but also owes a debt to early feminist theorist Alice Jardine's concept of "gynesis".

[9] The first article is the reference at the beginning of the chapter to "real" animals.

way of knowing non-human animals and producing knowledge about them that is different from objectifying and reductive scientific knowledge.

Jevbratt (2009a) has chosen to use the term "collaboration" for her interspecies art projects, partly because of the ethical requirement that the word implies. Collaboration suggests a respectful and egalitarian relationship in which partners do not harm each other. Not-harming requires sensitivity to each individual situation, and when working with wild animals, for example, it can mean not seeking direct contact with them. I see similarities here with Tuija Kokkonen's concept of the “weak actor”. According to Kokkonen, the perception of non-human agency is often predicated on weak human agency, even inaction. For Kokkonen (2017, 85–88), weak agency also means an ethical stance through which it is possible to create a listening and accommodating relationship with human and non-human others. In a world where it is (human) action and the need to be active that has caused so many problems and overshadowed so many other ways of being, withdrawal and inaction can be seen as political resistance.

It is in this terrain of definitions and concepts that I try to navigate when outlining the *Rat City* performance and interspecies practice. Any interspecies or interspecies-aspiring performance is always a special case in the sense that the non-human partners in the performance determine what is possible to do at all, how it is possible to encounter the other, what kind of relationship it is possible to form between us, or what it means to be ethical. In the case of *Rat City*, things were complicated or made interesting — depending on the perspective — by the fact that the other “species” in the interspecies performance were the urban rat. For example, most of the interspecies performances Cull Ó Maoilearca writes about take place between humans and domesticated animals. In these cases, human and non-human animals can meet and interact with each other without undue stress or danger to either party. Kokkonen, on the other hand, includes in the ecology of her site-specific performances all non-human actors that are active in the place. Encounters and relationships are thus formed through place, not between predefined species.

Urban rats, however, are wild animals, even though they live close to humans. Human-rat encounters are often not positive, so for rats, avoiding humans is usually a viable strategy. When it comes to rats, it is also not obvious how to get to know "real animals" rather than cultural representations. The cultural–historical burden of rats is so heavy that it is impossible to ignore it completely when trying to build a relationship with them. This baggage and its real–life implications (such as pest control) also mean that it

is not always easy to be "on the side of rats", or to assess the impact of a performance on the welfare of rats.

I approach *Rat City* and the process that led to it not so much as a "finished" interspecies performance, but rather as an evolution or unfolding in which both we human participants, the rats and the performance itself sought for our place and relationship to each other. Thus, the theoretical terrain of interspecies performance presented in this chapter serves more as a reflective surface and question-raiser than as a clear roadmap to interspecies performance. Throughout the process, we ended up repeatedly asking what kind of agency rats suggest, what kind of agency is required of us humans, what it means to encounter or form a relationship with rats, and where and when interspecies performance actually takes place. The *Rat City* performance for the human audience was therefore ultimately only one part of this unfolding, not necessarily the end point where the interspecies performance took its final shape.

2.3. Contextualisation

Interspecies art and performance have not emerged in isolation within the art world but are part of a wider social and academic development. Interspecies is a concept that is often associated with posthumanism and animal studies. For example, Tuija Kokkonen (2017, 20; 50) positions her interspecies performances within a posthumanist framework and Laura Cull (2015, 21) places her own research at the intersection of animal studies and performance studies. I also see posthumanism and animal studies as natural contexts for my own exploration of interspecies performance.

Posthumanism is a multi-disciplinary and multi-branched theoretical orientation, which can accommodate various schools of thought. I attach both my own thinking and the interspecies performance to the posthumanist tendency represented, for example, by Cary Wolfe. According to Wolfe (2010, xxv), the posthumanist approach puts humans on the same level as other animals and life forms. Such an attitude does not seek to bypass or transcend our own humanity[10] (or rather, our human-animality), but on the contrary allows us to examine and re-consider our own particular forms of

[10] According to Rosi Braidotti (2019), however, posthumanism does not necessarily mean the same as post-anthropocentrism, which criticises the hierarchy of species and the myth of human exceptionalism. Thus, posthumanism is sometimes associated with tendencies such as transhumanism, which seeks to improve human performance through various technologies. Cary Wolfe, (2010, xix) however, defines posthumanism as the opposite of transhumanism, which, according to him, should be rather seen as an intensification of humanism. For him, posthumanism also directly addresses the issues of anthropocentrism and speciesism.

communication, social meanings, affective investments, and perceptual modes more precisely, as humanity is no longer seen as an ontologically closed domain.

Animal studies, on the other hand, is defined by the anthrozoologist Margo de Mello (2012, 4) as "an interdisciplinary field that explores the spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural worlds and the interactions humans have with them. Central to the field is an exploration of the ways in which animal lives intersect with human societies." At the heart of animal studies is the recognition of the central importance and value of non-human animals and their experiences in understanding the world. Kari Weil (2010, 4) places the emergence of animal studies in a continuum of, for example, women's studies (later gender studies) and postcolonial studies, which questioned and politicised the relationship between (research) object and subject by bringing the voices of marginalised and silenced groups to the fore. According to Weil, animal studies takes to the extreme the questions of language, epistemology and ethics raised by aforementioned disciplines: “how to understand and give voice to others or to experiences that seem impervious to our means of understanding; how to attend to difference without appropriating or distorting it; how to hear and acknowledge what it may not be possible to say.” In my opinion, these questions are also central to interspecies performance, and I will attempt to address them in this thesis as well[11].

Historian Julie Livingston and gender studies scholar Jasbir K. Puar (2011) have sought to define interspecies as an independent framework of thought, not simply as the intersection of posthumanism and animal studies[12]. In their book *Interspecies*, they define the concept as a broad framework that simultaneously identifies the human/non-human binaries and recognizes the interrelatedness of human, animal and plant taxonomies as well as the political implications of these relationships. Livingston and Puar, however, acknowledge that “interspecies” necessarily implies recognition of the concept of species and thus of the Western taxonomic classification dating back to the Enlightenment. Santtu Pentikäinen, the ecologist we interviewed for *Rat City*, also pointed this out. He wondered whether the word “interspecies” is ultimately a good term to describe what it is intended to mean. As a biologist, he understands species as a technical term and ultimately as a rather artificial construction that says almost nothing

[11] For example, the questions of appropriation will follow along the way, while the question of epistemology will be discussed in more detail in the chapter 4. *Interdisciplinary interspecies performance*.

[12] Livingston and Puar (2011) argue that both posthumanism and animal studies suffer from a Euro-American focus that often leads to an imprecise and unhistorical interpretation of human and animal categories, and of the relationships between humans and other species. According to Livingston and Puar, “interspecies” offers a broader geopolitical understanding of how different categories (human-animal-plant) are inherently unstable and bound by time and place.

about individuals, their world, let alone the relationships between individuals. (Santtu Pentikäinen Interview in English 2023) However, Livingston & Puar (2011) suggest that the concept of interspecies may also have the potential to complicate this rigid classification by placing the concept of species in a different taxonomic framework. Thus, “interspecies” could serve at least as a preliminary attempt to go beyond species by emphasising relationships rather than categories or types, and by questioning the origins, uses and outcomes of classificatory hierarchies.

Since language in any case sets limits to what can be talked about, I take this opportunity suggested by Livingston and Puar to use words like “species” and “interspecies” without fully surrendering to their histories and conservative interpretations. Perhaps instead of a hierarchical categorization, the concepts of interspecies art and performance can offer an opportunity to reflect subtly on categories, shared histories, and the individual and situated relationships in which the definitions of agency and performance, of “human”, “animal” and “species” are in flux.

2.4. Linguistic choices

In this thesis I chose to use the unsatisfactory word "non-human" when writing about non-human animals, even though it is almost as vague and generalising a word as animal without the prefix, combining a huge variety of different life forms into one neat bundle. It also puts “human” at the centre and as a point of reference, echoing the distinction and emphasis on human exceptionalism that has characterised Euro–American thought at least since Aristotle (e.g. Batra & Wenning 2019). However, I feel that the prefix also reminds that human animals are ultimately part of this vast group of animals. The term "non-human" puts the difference into context: instead of a categorical distinction between human and animal, it refers to the distinction between a human animal and another animal species that occurs in this particular situation. For the sake of fluency, I have sometimes omitted the prefix altogether. However, I have tried my best — and hopefully succeeded — to avoid using the singular form “the animal” when referring to a group of non-human animals[13].

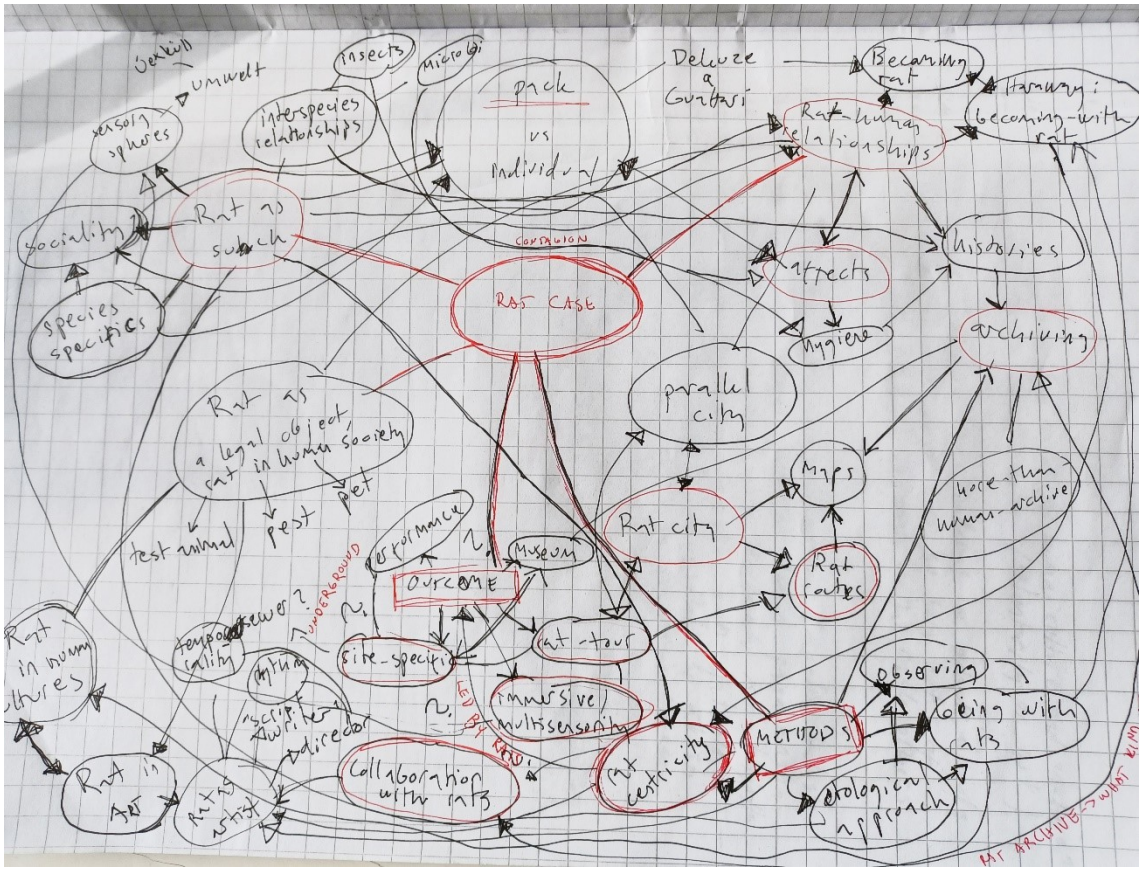
Another linguistic choice concerns the word "nature". Following many posthumanist thinkers, I understand human, culture and nature as inevitably intertwined, and the separation of nature and “non-nature” (human, culture) as a violent and artificial distinction in the same way as the separation of “the human” and “the animal”.

[13] Jacques Derrida (2019) has written how violence against animals begins with the pseudo-concept of "the animal", which, through its unitary form, lumps all other animals from the earthworm to the chimpanzee into a homogeneous whole, from which "man" stands in stark contrast.

However, when talking about urban rats, the idea of the separation of the city and nature, for example, is constantly raised. In my thesis, I have therefore chosen to put the word "nature" in quotation marks to emphasise and remind of the de facto artificiality of this division.

The third linguistic decision I had to make when writing about non-human animals was the choice of pronouns. The Finnish language is merciful in that the third person singular has no gender, so it can be used for any person. English, however, forces us to refer to persons with a gendered expression. Since I often had no way of knowing the sex of the non-human animals I was writing about, I was faced with a difficult dilemma. In a similar situation, Lourdes Orozco (2013, 7), in her book *Theatre & Animals*, decided to use the pronoun "it" for non-human animals, despite its objectifying echo. However, I wanted to emphasise, even at the level of language, the personhood of the non-human animals I am writing about. I therefore arrived at the somewhat clumsy solution of referring to them in the base form as s/he and in the inflected form as them/their.

3. TOWARDS RAT CITY: WHY URBAN RATS?



A mind map at the start of the project in April 2022. Image by Maija Linturi.

The choice of urban rats as the "species" of my interspecies performance was both a coincidence and the result of a longer-term interest. At the beginning of the *Rat City* performance, I explained the initial impetus for the performance as follows:

> I would like to share with you an encounter with a rat that was kind of a starting point for this performance. This happened in spring 2022. I was walking in Hakaniemi in the early afternoon. I had just turned onto Miina Sillanpää street when I saw a rat crouching against the stone footing of the house. The sight was so surprising that I stopped to stare at the rat. This, I suppose, was an impolite thing to do. I am much bigger than the rat, and my attention must have been uncalled for. All of a sudden, the rat ran towards my feet. I acted as probably most people would: I jumped in the air and screamed. When I recovered from my surprise, the rat had disappeared. I tried to look for a crack on the wall or a drainage hole but couldn't find anything. Somehow the rat knew an escape route which was totally invisible to me. (Rat City 2023)

But actually, rats had already been on my mind for a while. In 2020, I directed a performance called *Hajoaminen* (Decomposition), in which I and the working group reflected on the relationships between insects and humans, and the feelings of disgust often associated with "bugs" and the processes of biological decomposition. In 2021 and 2022, together with the same working group, we created an installation called *Shared Spaces* at the Lassila farm in Tuusula, where we aimed for creating positive encounters between humans and insects. These art projects sparked my interest in unwanted and "uncharismatic[14]" animals.

When it comes to "difficult" animal species and relationships, the rat is at the top of the list. Hardly any other animal species evokes so many negative associations and even physical feelings of disgust in people in Western culture as the rat. Science journalist Bethany Brookshire (2022), however, writes in her book *Pests: How Humans Create Animal Villains* that the status of an animal as a pest or a protected animal depends on perspective. Rats, mice and pigeons, typically considered pests, do not stay where we think they belong, that is, away from our homes, food, and waste. The status of the same animal can also change over time. Urban pigeons were originally planted in Finnish cities to bring an "urban vibe" to them, deliberately, at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In the mid-20th century, the increased number of pigeons and the growing awareness of hygiene led to campaigns to destroy them. (Nieminen 2017). The Saimaa ringed seal, on the other hand, was considered a pest and was still being paid a killing price in the 1940s, whereas today it is the target of a wide range of conservation measures (*Suomen luonnonsuojeluliitto* 16.11.2023). Through these difficult animals — pests — it is thus possible to look at the attitudes and perceptions of individuals and communities more broadly. What and who are we prepared to tolerate in our immediate environment? Where do we draw the line between "us" and "them"? What is the hierarchy between humans and other animal species?

In an interview we conducted for *Rat City*, historian Heta Lähdesmäki describes her own interest in difficult animals and difficult animal relationships as follows: "It is much more interesting to study animals with which humans have some friction, with which interaction is somehow problematic, than to study very harmonious relationships. In a way, these [difficult] animal relationships are so fundamental, they say a lot about us humans. They are essential, fundamental relationships". (Heta Lähdesmäki Interview in English 2023) I share Lähdesmäki's idea of the fundamental nature of difficult animal

[14] Geographer Jamie Lorimer (2007) has explored the role of affects in environmental management, through the charisma of species. The narrative of charisma helps to see the differences in non-human nature and the potential for species agency. According to Lorimer, the study of species charisma provides an acceptable channel of expression for the affection that underpins conservation.

relationships. The rat, if anyone, forces us to look at human exceptionalism and the boundaries we construct between ourselves and other animals. The species-specific characteristics of rats, such as rapid reproduction and omnivorousness, their physical proximity to humans[15], and the cultural-historical baggage they must bear make them a target for a wide range of affects, emotions and even destructive measures.

At the same time, the rat resists simplifications and easy solutions. Even the toughest animal rights activist must scratch their head from time to time when trying to decide how to deal with rats in certain situations. Rats have spread with European colonialists to places where they cause enormous damage to local animals and ecosystems (Howald et al. 2007). Rats also cause damage on farms by contaminating crops (McLean 2021). Rats multiply rapidly if they have enough food, causing hygiene problems, economic damage and mental stress, especially in areas where socio-economic problems have already accumulated (Brookshire 2022). And especially in warmer and more populated areas, rats also spread disease (Burt 2005, 177). Because rats are everywhere where humans are, rats are never somewhere else, out of sight and mind. Becoming-with-rats[16] inevitably means succumbing to messy entanglements.

So I set out to work on *Rat City*, both impressed by my own rat encounter and aware of the status of rats as pests and difficult animals. My hope was, on the one hand, to come to terms with and unravel the difficult emotions and cultural and historical baggage associated with rats, and on the other, to try to come to terms — or rather, to enter into a relationship — with rats themselves.

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15 Proximity, both in the sense that they share the same habitat with us, and in the sense that their DNA is close to ours, which is why rats are well suited as laboratory animals on the one hand and carry (and transmit) many of the same diseases on the other. (e.g. Aivelo 2021)

16 The concept of "Becoming with" comes from Donna Haraway (2008). See more in 6.1. *Historical rat connection*.

4. INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERSPECIES PERFORMANCE

Interested or disgusted? The Helsinki Urban Rat Project's "rat mobile" is also a minilaboratory.

An important part of both my artistic and written thesis was the connection to the Helsinki Urban Rat Project (HURP), a multidisciplinary research project at the University of Helsinki. I learned about HURP at the Animal Research Days in Turku in the spring 2022. There, two members of HURP, social scientist Nina V. Nygren and geography teacher Anttoni Kervinen presented their own research projects on urban rats. I was impressed how both presenters approached rats as agents that also affected the researcher's own emotions and actions, rather than as mere objects of study. This approach was close to what I thought was important in interspecies performance. After the research days, I contacted the leader of the research team, disease ecologist Tuomas Aivelo, through my university and asked if I could be involved in the project in some way. I presented my research plan to Aivelo and he welcomed me to HURP.

The relationship between interspecies performance and scientific knowledge can be considered close if complex. As previously mentioned, interspecies art stems from a

paradigm shift in which different disciplines influenced each other. This “animal turn” was at least partly driven by new discoveries and insights in ethology and behavioural sciences, among other things. Scientific research has thus helped to break, or at least shift, many of the boundaries between humans and other animals that had previously been considered absolute. Research has disproved notions that abilities or qualities such as self-consciousness (Birch, Schnell & Clayton 2020) language (Shah 2023), or the use of tools (Proffit et al. 2023) were unique to humans. The current scientific consensus is that the human species differs from other animals only in degree, not quality (Tarazona et al. 2020). In addition, the interest in "real” animals and interaction with them means that (scientific) knowledge about animals also plays a role in interspecies art. At the same time, many theorists and artists who have influenced and been influenced by the animal turn have maintained a critical distance from the scientific approach, not least because of its inherent human-centredness[17].

I, too, have found it important to "know" the animals I deal with or work with in my performances. This has meant that I have sought either collaboration or at least some kind of dialogue with "the experts", for example biologists, ecologists or, say, animal trainers. With expert or scientific knowledge, I have hoped to bridge the gap between myself and other animals: I expect it to provide some understanding of how the animal perceives and senses the world, and perhaps also tools for encounter and help with interpretation. However, my interest in scientific knowledge and the collaboration between science and art is partly unclear, even to myself. Scientific knowledge has prestige, above all science *feels* important, and therefore it can be tempting for an artist to borrow this authority for their own works and purposes. Scientific knowledge provides a sort of back door out of one's own insecurities, but at the same time it can overshadow more sensitive and hidden ways of producing knowledge.

I took my first, hesitant steps towards a dialogue between art and science during the *Hajoaminen* performance. During the process leading up to the performance, the working group and I had conversations with entomologists and other experts on the subject matter. For *Lassien kaksoiselämä* (Lassie’s Double Life) performance in 2023, I drew on my own dog trainer studies, but we also interviewed a professional who trains

[17] For example, the philosopher of science Vinciane Despret (2012), has criticised research on animal behaviour, questioning both the research questions and the research methods that led to the results. She argues that both are often purposive and human-centred, and therefore the results obtained are predictable and reinforce human exceptionalism. By using humans and human characteristics as a yardstick for studying other animals, scientific research has failed to identify what is special, let alone interesting, for the animals themselves. Laura Cull (2015) has also been critical of the dominance of scientific knowledge about animals. According to her, the power of (interspecies) performance could be to create a counter–knowledge to the dominant scientific narratives.

animals for films and TV series. The most extensive collaboration I had done before *Rat City* was on the *Shared Spaces* installation in 2021 and 22. The installation was carried out in collaboration with the Finnish Lepidoptera Association, and particularly its Executive Director Jari Kaitila. Kaitila generously shared his expertise with us, and with his help we for example selected the plants to be used in the installation.

Indeed, Kaitila's help was invaluable in the planning and execution of the installation, to the extent that it could not have been realised in its final form without his help. On the other hand, I was not sure what Kaitila and the Lepidoptera Association had to gain from the collaboration. In fact, I felt very much on the receiving end of the collaboration, both in *Hajoaminen*, *Lassien kaksoiselämä* and in *Shared Spaces*. When I spoke to Kaitila about my concerns, he said that the association would benefit from collaboration, as through the art installation they could reach new audiences and possibly even gain new members. He also saw an educational element in the installation, as we were sharing scientific information (for example, naming the plants growing in the installation and inviting insect experts to our events with the installation) as well as creating a platform for attitude change (by presenting insects in a positive light and enabling positive encounters between people and insects). It was therefore a kind of exchange between science and art, with each party receiving something of benefit from the other. Yet *Shared Spaces*, like my other performance projects, left me wondering if the relationship between science and art could mean something deeper.

Partly the challenges of collaboration were due to my own preconceptions, partly to my inability to share the artistic process with others. I have wanted to avoid "bothering" researchers and save them from a messy artistic process — while assuming that the scientific process is radically different from the artistic one. I have perhaps unconsciously thought that scientific knowledge and scientific processes are more "serious" than their artistic counterparts. In this way, I have maintained the idea of an ultimate boundary between science and art, where scientific knowledge is more important and more “real” than artistic knowledge. So, when I entered the HURP collaboration, I had vague hopes and expectations of what it could mean, but at the same time I had few tools or ideas on how to put it into practice.

4.1. Framing

For a year, I participated in monthly meetings, one stakeholder meeting and one workshop on HURP. During spring 2023, I also completed an internship on the project as part of my studies. During the internship, I was able to, among other things, classify survey data and calculate rat tracks from the tracking plate data entered into a database.

I also had access to other HURP data, such as the stories collected by Venla Österdahl, Nina Nygren and Virpi Valtonen about human–rat encounters. In other words, there was a lot of information in many forms, but I found it difficult to judge what was relevant to my work. In fact, the scattered snippets of information made the rats seem even more distant for me. This observation made me re-evaluate my objectives for the collaboration with HURP. Instead of simply trying to absorb as much of the knowledge produced by the researchers as possible — as I had done in my previous projects — I began to reflect on my position in the group as an artist. What would be my perspective on rats and rat knowledge? What kind of knowledge could my way of approaching research events and the rats in them produce? However, it was only when I got the change to go out into the "field", i.e. to follow researchers from different disciplines as they worked with rats, that I felt I was beginning to find my own perspective in this interdisciplinary environment.

Laura Cull (2015) suggests that in order to radically include animals in performance, we need to abandon predetermined and human-centric definitions of performance and open it up to animals' own ways of performing. I decided to take this suggestion by Cull as a guideline for my HURP collaboration and start looking at the research activities I participated as interspecies performances. My goal was to understand how rats and humans "perform" for and with each other in each situation. Such a perspective approaches the trend in performance studies which does not focus on performance as an art form, but looks at various phenomena, practices, and behaviour (human and cultural) through the lens of performativity. (e.g. Clancy 28.1.2024) In my analyses, however, I do not apply or follow any particular tradition. I am primarily interested in performance as an art form and how the agency of non-human animals and interspecies collaboration could work in an artistic context. Even if the events I examine are not originally art, by framing[18] them as performances I try to keep at least one foot on the artistic side. It is therefore important not to position myself as an observer outside the situations, but as a participant: as an experiencer or audience member of the performances, or, in the case of *Rat War*[19]*,* an audience member of the stories told about the performances. I return here to Barthes' idea of shared authorship, according to which the work is ultimately created by the “reader”. What the authors (researchers, rats) of the performance intended is ultimately irrelevant. It is enough that I, as the viewer/experiencer, interpret it as a performance.

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[18] Marvin Carlson (2004, 307) defines framing as "a device or way of allowing certain messages or symbols to be extracted and examined in relation to everyday reality". I use framing loosely in the same sense.

[19] See the chapter *Rat War: Spatial Negotiation between Humans and Rats*

By framing the research situations explicitly as performances, I also wanted to detach them from the authority of scientific knowledge production. By taking them into a more familiar context, I was able to take control of the situations. This also meant that I didn't have to focus solely on the scientific information — often too specific for the layperson to make meaning — that the situations were built to produce but could shift my focus to what else might emerge in the situations. Next, I will look at three research events through this kind of performance-framing. Since the aim of my own project was to collaborate with rats and to engage in interspecies performance, I will focus on the kind of agency and/or interspecies collaboration that the rats proposed in each case. One event lasted two hours, another one morning and the third one over three months. The researchers' accounts have given me an overview of what each study was about. However, it is possible that I have misunderstood something or left out something important to the study. My intention is not to give a scientific account, but to recall what I observed from my own perspective as a performance artist.

4.2. Dead rats in the laboratory: affects and empathy

An old anatomical model of rat intestines at the Department of Biology, University of Helsinki. Photo by Maija Linturi.

On the 23rd of February 2023 I went to see a rat dissection at the Helsinki University veterinary department. The dissection was operated by R, a master student in ecology and evolutionary biology. She is making her thesis work about the correlation of parasites and rat poison in the bodies of urban rats. The rat carcasses had been provided to her by the pest control company. I was offered the opportunity to observe the dissection process and after some hesitation, I agreed.

Since my goal was to make an interspecies performance with *living* urban rats, and learn about their ways of being in and experiencing the world, I wasn't sure what I could expect to learn from seeing a dead rat being cut open. What could a dead rat in the laboratory setting tell me about their life? At the same time, I was curious. I had never seen a mammal being dissected, and I wasn't sure how I would react. In the end, I decided to participate, if only to learn about my own feelings and reactions. It wasn't until after the procedure that I realised that I had actually participated in one kind of an interspecies performance. The non-human partners were not willing participants, but they were the protagonists, nonetheless. And although they were dead, they did possess agency in the performance.

4.2.1. The preparations

The first thing I noticed was a biohazard warning sign on the laboratory door. R told me to leave my jacket and bag outside the laboratory, to keep them safe from contamination. When we entered the lab, R put on a white coat, and I automatically followed her example. Then I realised the coat probably wasn't necessary for me since I was there just to observe. R encouraged me by saying that wearing it would help me get into the right frame of mind. I kept the coat on. This combination of warning signs and lab coats gave a certain weight to the upcoming procedure, as well as to the rat(s) to be dissected. Even when dead, the rats are not harmless or tamed. They still have the power to attack us humans, and we must protect against them with our own weapons: with hygiene practices, fume hoods, and rational mindsets.

The preparation for the actual dissection took a long time. R had to organise 40 or so test tubes in the tube holders and write the sample codes in each of them. While making the preparations, R unexpectedly mentioned that she had always been afraid of rodents. She told me about an instance in the lab, when a tail of one rat had slipped in her sleeve. She described the slithering movement of the tail with disgust. She had managed to keep her calm, pull the tail out of the sleeve and put the rat away. Then she just washed her wrist several times and continued the dissection. But in the evening, at home, the memory of the incident had caused her to break down. I found the story both fascinating and affective, I could almost feel the tail on my own wrist.

According to Sara Ahmed (2018, 83-85), affects are not products of the individual psyche but rather they float freely between individuals and objects. Thus, fear of rats is neither produced by the object of the fear (rat) nor the mind of the fearer (R). Instead, the object of the fear can change or get attached to other objects through lateral

movement. This movement ties the objects together, simultaneously strengthening the fear towards each individual object. These associations are not formed randomly but by manifold histories. In the case of rats, the associative objects of fear might include disease and contamination, death, uncontrolled reproduction, slithering movement, living dead, decomposition and underground. Throughout history, these objects have in turn been associated with qualities such as evil, malicious and disgusting, and the movement between all these associations makes the fear stronger and stronger. It is not easy to think of rats as just another animal species, even in the birthplace of modern science, the laboratory[20].

4.2.2. The dissection

R pulled three plastic bags from the fridge. She had taken them from the freezer the previous night to thaw. R put the bags inside the fume hood and pulled the first rat out. It was a big one, the size of a kitten or a pup. The rat lay curled up with eyes closed, s/he reminded me of a sleeping dog. The fur was reddish brown. R pointed out the tail (long and a bit scaly, fine hair growing here and there), teeth (also long and yellowish, lower teeth longer than upper), and paws (very primate-like, I felt similar wonder as watching the hands of human babies: how can they be so small and so perfect?). I had never seen a wild rat up so close, and I thought s/he looked cute. The rat, however, was so big that s/he hadn't thawed completely, and R had to put them aside.

Next R pulled the remaining rats out from the bags. To her surprise there were two rats in each bag, so instead of three, she would have to dissect five rats on that day. All the other rats were pups, less than half of the size of the first one. When I saw all five rats together, I felt a sudden wave of repulsion. There were too many of them. The first rat began to look unproportionally large compared to others.

R chose one of the pups as the first one to be dissected and placed the rat on a yellow hand paper on their back. She remarked that it always feels a bit bad to dissect a baby. The actual cutting happened with scissors. Just before R started, I had a fleeting feeling that the scissors and the small rat body don’t go together. The body looked too perfect and intact, and the scissors too clumsy and violent.

[20] For example, Dr. Henning Schmidgen (2021) writes about the laboratory as an exemplary site of modernity. During the last third of the 19th century the laboratory became “a space of knowledge which primarily served to establish new scientific facts. This special form of knowledge production was increasingly subjected to an economic regime which was guided by the principles of specialization, mechanization and standardization“.

4.2.3. Sensory shock

Theatre scholar and playwright Peta Tait (2015) writes in her text *Fleshing Dead Animals: Sensory Body Phenomenology in Performance* about her own experience as a spectator for Jill Orr's durational performance *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters: Goya* (2003). In the performance, Orr utilised the remains of dead farm animals, silently moving them around and creating sculptures during the nine-hour performance. Tait describes how the sensory shock that hit her when she entered the space preceded any attempts for semiotic reading of the piece. The smell of the carcasses itself was so strong, that she had to fight back the urge to turn around and leave the performance.

I experienced something similar to Tait's description of sensory shock when I watched R cutting a piece of the rat's ear and the tip of the tail. I had to lean back to distort my vision a bit. I felt the first two cuts as a physical sensation in my own body, even though I realised that the rat no longer felt anything. But unlike in Tait's description of Orr's performance, I felt that watching got easier when the procedure got further. When R had cut open the stomach, the rat stopped being someone who once was a living, feeling creature, and became anonymous material. This was probably very much influenced by the context in which the "performance" took place. Having lost their identifiable "ratness", the rat–child metamorphosed from an individual to a scientific object. Lying untouched on a piece of paper with their tiny toes and closed eyes, the rat seemed to be in the wrong place. S/he should have been running around out there — not "in the wild", perhaps, since "the wild" is not rats' habitat — but out of this clinical space of tubes, microscopes and white coats. But when their body had been touched enough, the rat began to look as if s/he belonged there, in the laboratory. S/he became "it": openable with scissors, cuttable with a scalpel, examinable under a microscope. A natural fit in a scientific context.

From the audience point of view, Orr's dead animal remains had never been alive or part of someone. They had no individual features, they were not "that cow" or "that pig". They were just the kind of mixed mass associated with "meat" and slaughterhouses. The origin of meat is supposed to remain obscure; it is not thought to be made up of individuals, not of the muscles and viscera of an individual animal. Therefore, the process by which animals become "meat" must take place in hidden, closed slaughterhouses. The shock effect of Orr's work is thus partly due to the fact that she brings this hidden intermediate stage (the stage between animal and meat) from the slaughterhouse into the gallery space, in front of the eyes of the audience and in the context of art. Unlike in the case of R and the rat, the animal remains did not blend into their new context but continued to disturb throughout the performance and beyond. In

its chaos and intensity of sensory stimulation, Orr's work was in some ways the antithesis of the dissection of a rat in a laboratory fume hood. "Spread across the space, the remains appeared chaotic and out of control and abject" (Tait 2015, 114). Perhaps the presence of the abject, as in Orr's performance, reminds us of our own animal body. In responding to another body through our senses and bodily responses, we must acknowledge the existence and similarity of both.

4.2.4. Towards empathy

In Tait's example, the human spectator is shocked to connect to the bodies of others. Through the extreme load on the sensory system, the spectator is forced to bypass their "humanness" — understood here as rationality — and react with more "animalistic" instincts. By connecting to the animal within, they are also able to connect to the animal on stage, even when the animal is unidentifiable and in the stage of decomposition. In this approach, it may not be so much about the animal, but the experience becomes a project of the self. Through their own experience, the experiencer becomes aware of the suffering of others. But that awareness is vague, objectless. Such a phenomenon could be called emotional contagion. Elisa Aaltola writes about the difference between emotional contagion and affective empathy in her and Sami Keto's book *Empatia* (Empathy). Emotional contagion is an embodied and social response to other bodies, like yawning or imitation of facial gestures. In emotional contagion, the original source of emotion disappears or becomes irrelevant, while one's own emotions become the focus of attention. In affective empathy, on the other hand, one remains aware of the difference between oneself and the other. Empathy becomes possible partly because of this difference: in order to feel *with* the other, one has to understand that the feeling really belongs to this other individual. (Aaltola & Keto 2018, 66)

R pulled out an organ after organ, and pointed out to me what they were and what was being examined. Parasites, viruses, toxins. The rat was filled with information for someone who could crack the code. We only got to learn the basics, but something, nevertheless. The rat was female. She was seemingly healthy, no parasites in her intestines, heart or lungs. Her bladder was full and stomach and intestines nearly empty. She had been hungry and in need to pee when she died. I wondered how it would feel to die in such a moment, in an in-between-stage just before a relief (before eating, before peeing).

I felt both the emotional contagion (cutting of the ear) and affective empathy (hunger and full bladder) being activated during the dissection. But even in the case of affective empathy, the information I got from the rat was information about my own body and

my own feelings. I didn’t learn what it’s like to be a hungry rat, only how I might feel in the same situation. And according to Elisa Aaltola, if one doesn’t understand the difference, affective empathy can be toxic and appropriative (ibid.).

Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-4) writes in her essay *The Ethics of Interspecies Performance* about interspecies empathy, especially embodied empathy, as a tool for interspecies performance. She describes embodied empathy as “a felt knowledge of the differential continuity between humans and non-humans, rather than as an empathy through analogy that operates as a one-way anthropomorphic projection”. Embodied empathy makes it possible to think affectively *alongside* the animal rather than *about* the animal in a performative encounter. For her, this opens a way to know the non-human animal in an ethical way. The spectator of Orr's work could hardly get in touch with the interspecies, embodied empathy of Cull Ó Maoilearca, and neither could I when I looked at the viscera of the dead rat. Embodied empathy, as Cull Ó Maoilearca defines it, demands an encounter that has a potential to be “reciprocally transformative”. In the encounter with the dead rat, I was the only one still capable of transforming.

When I look at the rat dissection as a performance, I realise how much agency the dead rat and her predecessors possessed. They activated multiple affects that floated around the lab. They had contributed to the development of complex hygiene procedures and expensive lab equipment. They employed numerous people in multiple professions from pest control to laboratory analysts and from researchers to cleaners. However, the rats themselves were not able to participate in their own agency. They were and remained dead. And If I think about the knowledge I got from the performance I witnessed, it wasn't so much about rats or even about the relationships between rats and humans, as it was about humans, especially myself.

4.3. Invitation to dance: the role of duration in fieldwork

An assemblage consisting of a rat burrow, a tracking plate and a field camera. Photo by Maija Linturi.

On 30 June 2023, I had the opportunity to participate in a field research project with ecologist Santtu Pentikäinen, a PhD student. That summer, he was also joined by A, who was working on her master's thesis in ecology and evolutionary biology. The work took place in Ruskeasuo allotment garden in Helsinki, and it had started already a couple of years earlier. The aim of the study was to capture rats moving in the area, anaesthetise them, take DNA samples and install microchips under their skins to enable more accurate tracking of the rats' movements. The procedures would be carried out in a "rat mobile", a mobile laboratory built into a van, and after the procedures the rats would be released back to their trapping sites.

The morning I joined Pentikäinen and A was a special one. Late the night before, the researchers had set the traps to trigger for the first time. The traps must be checked no later than 7 hours after being set, so I would get to witness this first trap check. We met in the garden at 8.30 am and split into two groups. Pentikäinen went to check the traps

on the north and east sides of the area, A and I the south and west. The purpose of this first tour was just to check if the traps had been triggered at all, so we stayed as far away from them as possible so as not to add to the stress of the animals that might have been trapped.

In the duration of the research project, the trapping and subsequent anaesthesia and sampling are just the tip of the iceberg. However, it is this tip that, to outsiders, appears as research. It separates the research question, methods and results. The roles are clear and straightforward with the researcher being the active subject, and the researched — the rat — the passive object. In our interview for the *Rat City* performance, Pentikäinen describes the relationship between the rats and himself in this phase as follows:

> Rats are objects [in that situation], I'm ashamed to admit. I feel that when I'm handling them, they're there and they're sleeping, and the aggregate is spinning and the anaesthetic machines are roaring and there are all the masks and gloves... I'm so dominant in it, it's such an unfair situation. (Santtu Pentikäinen Interview in English 2023)

Thus, the situation that I witnessed took place at the very moment when rats would become the objects of research and researchers the dominant subjects. What is perhaps more interesting from the point of view of interspecies performance, however, is what happens before research becomes clear-cut, before the roles of object and subject are locked.

4.3.1. Durational performance

In performing arts, performances in which duration is the most important element are often classified as a genre of their own: the durational performance. Famous examples of durational performance are the year-long performances of Taiwanese-born Tehching Hsieh in the 1970s and 1980s, in which he, for example, punched his timeclock once an hour for a year, spent a year outside in Manhattan, and spent a year tied up with a 2.4 metre lead rope to artist Linda Montano. Such performances are not limited to the moment the audience shares with the performers. Hsieh's performances are attested to by various documents such as photographs, an instruction or score written by the artist himself, and a certificate signed by another person that proves that the performance have taken place. (*Tehching Hsieh* 2023) The performance itself, however, took place without constant audience monitoring. Following this tradition of performance art, I too will examine Pentikäinen’s fieldwork — the interspecies performance — from the perspective of duration. I consider the performance itself to have begun long before the

audience, that is, before I arrived. As in the case of Hsieh's performances, my own knowledge and understanding of the performance consists of documents: the researchers' accounts, the interviews Pentikäinen and I conducted for the *Rat City* performance, the tracking plates I had seen around the garden throughout the early summer, and the field camera videos.

The morning I arrived and the traps were checked for the first time had been preceded by a process that had been going on for months, even years, as the rats and the researchers gradually got to know each other. Pentikäinen describes the process: “It takes some practice, which comes from just staring at rats or trying to keep up with them. You get a little better at it all the time ... this is tacit knowledge, which is not really a research question, but it has to be there to give you a sense of what you're doing.” (Santtu Pentikäinen Interview in English 2023)

Tuija Kokkonen (2017, 73), for whom time is a key element in her work, writes about the temporal attitude that she associates with weak agency. Time and weak human agency are required for non-human agency to become visible. For Kokkonen, "performance — which in this context equals time — is the practice of slowness” (op. cit. 74). In the case of rat field work, Pentikäinen emphasises the importance of paying attention to his own agency in relation to rats and their behaviour. “Of course, everything I do affects what the rat does. And learning that if I do this and then the rat reacts to it in some way, that is also important. And it comes slowly. It's a bit like riding a bike, you can't teach it by explaining it, but then it gradually becomes natural.” (Santtu Pentikäinen Interview in English 2023) Thus the duration of the pre-trapping stages is determined by the rats as well as the ability of the researchers to learn to notice their own influence on rats. In a way, Pentikäinen’s and A's task is to wait, to reduce their own agency, to pay attention. Perhaps one could call it the “practice of slowness” (Kokkonen 2017, 46).

The duration of the performance between Pentikäinen, A and the rats was therefore influenced by both the species-specific and individual characteristics of the rats. As a species, rats are said to be neophobic. They are suspicious of new things such as new places, new objects in familiar places, and new foods. This suspicion is probably one of the reasons for the worldwide success of rats, they are not easy to eradicate as any pest controller can attest. (e.g. British Pest Control Association 12.1.2023) In order to trap a rat for study, the researcher must therfore surrender to a process of mutual familiarisation.

The first step is to find out where the rats are moving in the area. To this purpose, researchers use tracking plates: 25cm x 25cm plastic plates coated with resin. A rat running across the plates leaves its footprints on it, but so do squirrels, mice, birds and humans. So, the researcher must first learn to read the very tracks left by a rat. Once the researchers have a rough idea of where the rats are moving, field cameras will be installed. Rats will initially avoid walking near the camera, so it takes several days to work out whether the camera is in the right place. From there, the process of getting to know the individuals begins: little by little, the researchers begin to distinguish between the individual rats and their characteristics in the field camera footage. Through the identification of the individuals, the researchers begin to form a relationship with the rats, and emotions arise. For example, A showed me a rat burrow where a large female rat and a lone male rat used to live, at least seemingly, in harmony. One day a strange male rat, clearly scarred by many fights, had wandered into the mouth of the burrow. The female and the strange male got into a fierce fight, which took place right in front of the camera. The female managed to evict the male, but at the cost of an injured eye. Now the female is easy to identify by the infected eye, but it is a pity, said A. She had been such a healthy- and good-looking rat.

Once the movements of rats have been monitored using tracking plates and field cameras, it is time to place traps along their routes. Pentikäinen and A use elongated cages with both ends openable. When the traps are set, the weight of the rat triggers a mechanism that closes both ends. The rat remains alive and physically unharmed in the cage. However, the traps are not set for weeks, even months, as it takes rats that long to get used to the cages. When rats stop avoiding traps, researchers start making them attractive with a gourmet food: peanut butter and oatmeal. This is repeated for days. Only when the videos show the rats eating inside the cages with complete confidence, is it time to set the traps.

According to Tuija Kokkonen (2017, 72), duration is a performance tool for removing various barriers to performing and viewing. For the performer, duration often involves testing physical stamina, and for the spectator, it involves enduring waiting and boredom. In Pentikäinen’s and A's fieldwork — or interspecies performance — duration is not an end in itself the same way as in some durational performances, but even so, its importance cannot be ignored. Over time, rats and humans get used to, get to know, and to trust each other. Perhaps there is also a kind of fatigue that comes with duration, just as there is with durational performances. Performing, posing and being alert takes energy. With repetition and habituation — but also with sheer physical fatigue — maintaining a posed performance becomes impossible. Something else takes its place:

the blurring of roles, the unconscious response to the impulses of the other, the intimacy of physical proximity, the becoming-with-each-other. The days, weeks and months during which the rats get used to new objects in their habitat and the researchers get to know the rats through tracking plates and field cameras, is a time shared[21] by the rats and the researchers. The construction of a shared space and a shared world cannot be rushed; in a sense, time is the building material of this common world.

4.3.2. Partner dance

Pentikäinen describes the construction of this common world as follows:

> I feel that the goal I have is perhaps in some way to wedge myself into their world, so that I could get them to let me be some kind of observer of what they do. And that doesn't happen on my terms, of course. I must learn and ask them and find the possible way to get into the game. And then it's on their terms again. (Santtu Pentikäinen Interview in English 2023)

Pentikäinen's description sounds a lot like what Laura Cull (2015, 25) calls "animal performance as research". It focuses on performance "as a lived, embodied process of coming into contact with the ways in which animals are differently conscious from themselves and one another, regardless of whether it culminates in the production of 'performances' for a human audience". Such an approach, says Cull, does not necessarily aim to produce knowledge *about* the animals, but physical proximity to the animals' own ways of thinking and acting.

Bodily proximity, embodied knowledge of another being, and the reaction to the other being's impulses based on this knowledge, seems to be essential to Pentikäinen's study, too. According to Cull (ibid.), such embodied experience resists attempts to formulate it into a clear scientific discourse. Perhaps because of this resistance and difficulty, the "tacit knowledge" mentioned by Pentikäinen does not make it into a research question or even a research report. It is too ambiguous, too embodied. But it is still an essential part of research, without it research could not exist. Therefore, embodied knowledge is, in my opinion, not so much a "counter-knowledge to the dominant scientific knowledge" (ibid.). In the end, according to Pentikäinen, even what can be studied at all depends on the animals being studied:

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[21] Theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann (2009, 306–307) introduces the concept of "shared time". Shared time is a temporal entity shared by the audience (in Lehmann's words, the visitors) and the performers, which is fundamentally different from the 'dream time' of dramatic theatre, where the audience forgets, as it were, the temporality of the real world. Shared time is present to the greatest extent. We "do time" together.

> Of course, the purely scientific idea is that the research question comes first. Then we think about how it could be done and what kind of data is collected to answer it. But then, of course, practical constraints limit what can be asked and so on. In the same way that, say, money, or how much resources or time you have limits research, so does what those rats do. What we get to do really affects that. It's kind of a partner dance for a really long time before I even find the thing that I can research, and only then can I use the rats as objects that tell me or people something meaningful about their ecology. (Santtu Pentikäinen Interview in English 2023)

Perhaps the difference between research and art in this case is that art can focus on exactly what a scientific report ignores. In both cases, however, that tacit knowledge is present, existing, and essential.

4.3.3. To be continued

When I arrived to follow Pentikäinen's and A's field work, the partner dance Pentikäinen mentioned was about to come to an end. At the first round of checking, it appeared that only one of the traps had been triggered. We returned to the rat mobile, and Pentikäinen and A prepared it for upcoming anaesthesia and experiments. Then gloves and note-taking tools were pulled out and roles were assigned: Pentikäinen would handle the cage and A would record information about the rat's behaviour. My job was to stay out of the way and be careful not to touch the cage, let alone the rat. We walked together to the triggered cage. It was placed in the bushes between the wall surrounding the garden area and the outlying plots. The view was obscured by a large stone and nettle bushes. A and I stayed a little further away, A with a pen and notebook at the ready. Pentikäinen approached the cage, carefully avoiding the nettles. As he leaned towards the cage, he saw that it was empty. Something or someone had triggered the mechanism but still avoided getting trapped.

So not a single rat was trapped. The roles were not yet clear, the dance would still be on. We set the traps for another attempt, added peanut butter and oatmeal and emptied the memory cards of the cameras. One trap was placed in a particularly good place next to a tool shed. Pentikäinen knew for sure that there was a rat's nest under the shed. This trap was also empty, both of rats and peanut butter. Pentikäinen decided to check the footage of the spot right away. And sure enough, in the video we saw a rat come out from under the shed. S/he circled the cage, climbed up to the roof. Only when the rat had thoroughly examined the outside of the cage did s/he enter. At the door, however,

s/he stopped one more time and turned to look directly at the camera. Then the rat disappeared into the darkness of the cage.

4.4. Rat war: spatial negotiation between humans and rats

Weapons of the Rat War: D.I.Y rat traps. Photo by Maija Linturi

During the spring and summer of 2023, I assisted psychologist Karolina Lukasik in their postdoctoral research project in two allotment gardens in Helsinki: in Tali and Ruskeasuo. The overall aim of the research project was to explore human–animal interactions and conflicts in allotment gardens. My participation was focused on the interview[22] part of the study: we interviewed 22 residents of the allotment gardens about their relationship to gardening, the allotment garden environment, community and regulations, and non-human animals visiting the garden. After each interview, we placed a field camera in the interviewee's garden to see which animals were visiting the

[22] Lukasik used Grounded Theory, a qualitative research method mainly used in psychology and sociology, as a basis for the interviews, which I also became familiar with before the project started. Some of the principles of Grounded Theory include treating the interviewees as experts, letting the interviewees lead the interview in directions they feel are important. Questions should be open-ended and not just yes or no questions, so that the interviewee is forced to use their own words and follow their own thought processes when answering the question. (Charmaz 2014)

plot. Lukasik went through the footage and showed it to the residents. As part of the research, they wanted to see if and how residents' thoughts and behaviour change after seeing animals on their property.

The interviews lasted on average just over two hours, with the shortest interview lasting one hour and the longest almost five hours. The interview was roughly divided into four sections: the interviewee's background information, the interviewee's relationship with their garden plot, the interviewee's relationship with the allotment garden and its community, and the interviewee's relationship with non-human animals (Lukasik 2023). Rats were therefore not the main focus of the interview, although they were discussed in each interview. As the interviews were quite extensive, quite different from each other, and conducted in two different gardens, it was not initially clear what the "performance" between humans and rats would be that I could explore.

After a few interviews, however, I noticed one rat-related event being mentioned almost in every interview. Gardeners in both allotment gardens mentioned that a few years ago they had had a "rat crisis" in the garden area. People started seeing more rats than usual, and in new places and times of day. This caused discussion and even panic among some of the residents. In Ruskeasuo this event was referred to as rat panic, rat crisis or even rat war. The language used in Tali was less bellicose, but even there the sudden increase in the number of rats had caused strong feelings among the residents.

The *Rat War* (from now on capitalised, as the name of the performance) caught my interest, and I decided to take it as the "performance" to be examined. This time my role was different from my participation in dissection or rat trapping. I was not able to experience the performance myself, but my role was to try to reconstruct it based on the participants' first-hand accounts, which sometimes differed considerably. As already discussed in previous chapters, the "performances" between rats and humans — i.e. how rats are encountered — depend on place and context. The appearance of rats in an allotment garden creates a different performance than the appearance of rats in the construction site of a luxury hotel in the city centre, let alone in a grocery store[23]. Therefore, I observe the *Rat War* primarily as a site-specific and interspecies performance. Through this framing, my aim is to understand, on the one hand, what kind of actors the rats were in the *Rat War* performance, and on the other hand, how the

[23] Helsingin Sanomat reported on a rat found in a Helsinki grocery store in the summer of 2023 (Virtanen 2023). The national media coverage shows how out of place a rat is considered to be in a grocery store. A rat population spotted at the construction site of a luxury hotel in Kruununhaka also made the news (Korhonen 2023).

narrative of the performance changes when the events of are viewed through a spatial negotiation between humans and rats.

As already mentioned, the same type of performance took place in both Tali and Ruskeasuo gardens. However, due to the differences between the gardens, the events are not identical in all respects. Above all, there are differences in the measures taken in the gardens to deal with the increase in the number of rats. For the sake of clarity, in this text I will focus on the events in the Ruskeasuo garden and use the interviews we conducted in Tali to provide background on the "spirit" of the allotment gardens and the attitudes and thoughts of the gardeners.

4.4.1. Site-specificity and Deep Mapping

When considering *Rat War* as a site-specific performance[24], I draw on definitions that emphasise the plenitude of the “real” place, its specificity and uncontrollability (Pearson 2010, 1), and that see the site-specific work as defined by the qualities and meanings that arise from the specific relationships between the performance and its location (Kaye 2000, 1). Such definitions suggest that in site-specific performance, the site not only provides the setting for the performance, but the performance arises out of this very place and its particular quality, as the meanings of the performance emerge from the relationship between site and event.

In my attempt to analyse the events of *Rat War* through site-specificity, I found the Deep Mapping method developed by the artists Brett Bloom and Nuno Sacramento particularly helpful. Deep Mapping emphasises a multi-layered and non-reductive understanding of a place. Bloom and Sacramento's method thus does not aim for a single universal understanding of place, as traditional maps do, but allows for multiple, even conflicting perspectives to coexist. Deep maps consider not only direct observations of a place, but also, for example, the memories of its inhabitants, the ideologies that influence the community, geological formations, non-human agents such as animals, plants and weather, the infrastructure of a place, biological processes and much more. For Bloom and Sacramento, Deep Mapping is the process of reading a place "from below", considering different perspectives that are often hidden and challenging accepted knowledge and beliefs. (Bloom & Sacramento 2017, Deep Map 27.1.2024)

[24] I use “site-specific performance” as an umbrella category for all place-oriented performances. Different variations of site-specific performance include, for example site-responsive, site-determined, site-related, site-referenced, and site-conscious performance (Pearson 2010, 1).

I therefore loosely use Deep Mapping as the basis for my analysis, because by emphasising a multi-layered understanding of place, non-human perspectives and the simultaneity of conflicting perspectives, I feel it is well suited to understanding a complex and multi-species performance such as *Rat War.* However, since the focus of my analysis is on rats and the relationships between rats and humans, I will be concentrating on the layers that I feel provide information from this perspective.

4.4.2. Rat War in human narratives

> [Some gardeners] got scared when they started to see lots of rats. They didn't want to do what is sensible, i.e. put net underneath the huts, close composts and prevent rats from getting to food and nesting sites. Some of the people went really overboard and the situation escalated. These people wanted to get rid of the rats immediately, in other words, they wanted to poison them. There were lots of arguments. In the end, people who wanted to poison the rats paid the pest control themselves. It became expensive: 250€/rat! (Anonymous interviewee according to Linturi 2023a)

> A few years ago, people started to notice the rats in the garden area. [The interviewee] saw rats in her own plot several times, and once a rat even nested in her compost bin! That really frightened her. [The interviewee] and a group of other garden residents demanded on the association's board to act and call in a pest control company. But the board refused even to address the issue. It was actually against the law, and [the interviewee] considered taking the association to court. But that would have been expensive and made future life in the allotment garden rather awkward. (Anonymous interviewee according to Linturi 2023a)

> 2021 was a very snowy winter. Some residents had noticed rat footprints in the garden area, and that caused serious panic among the gardeners. Some residents demanded that rat control and poisoning should be started immediately, and that the association should pay for it. The board reminded them of the rules of the garden and said that the pest control should be paid by the residents themselves. Panic continued until [rat researcher and disease ecologist] Tuomas Aivelo came to give a talk about rats and their behaviour. That really calmed people down. In the end there was a vote whether the association should call for pest control and pay for it. The result was "no". (Anonymous interviewee according to Linturi 2023a)

The events that I will examine here as a performance called Rat War took place in the Ruskeasuo allotment garden in 2021, when rats began to appear in the garden in much

greater numbers than usual. The reason for this was clear to most of the interviewees: major construction work had begun on the bus depot next to the garden. This drove away the rats, which had apparently nested in the gaps in the stone fence separating the depot from the garden. The sudden swarming of rats in the garden area frightened some residents, who wanted the board of the garden association[25] to call in pest control immediately. The board, however, did not feel they had the authority to make such a decision. The situation escalated into a dispute between residents, with some demanding control and others opposing it.

In the end, there was a vote on the issue, and the anti-pesticide side won. The residents in favour of the pest control decided to order it at their own expense for their own plots. The endeavour was not very successful: only ten rats were caught in the traps during the year-long trapping period. The association's board did not remain completely inactive, either, and invited a rat researcher and disease ecologist Tuomas Aivelo to give a lecture on rat behaviour to the residents. Based on the recommendations, the board decided to ban open composting and require residents to protect the underfloor of their cottages with nets. The situation gradually calmed down as the rats were no longer seen so often and in such numbers.

The narrative that emerges from the interviewees' accounts is dramaturgically recognisable. It has a clear arc: beginning, middle and end. Original status quo is destroyed but after dramatic steps, a new status quo is achieved. The rats are the driving force behind the events, but in the interviewees' accounts they seem to be almost a sideshow, while the conflicts between human residents come to the fore. But this also says a lot about the agency of rats: they generate emotion and action in human communities. In an interview we conducted for *Rat City*, social scientist Nina Nygren said that rats are social actors that influence people and government on many levels (Nina Nygren Interview in English 2023). At the Ruskeasuo allotment garden, too, the impact of rats extended far beyond the concrete measures that were eventually introduced to combat rats. Rats influenced neighbourly relations, reinforced or undermined the perception of the rightness of one's actions, changed waste management practices and even the rules of the garden association. However, to understand the Ruskeasuo *Rat War* from truly interspecies perspective, it is necessary to understand specifics of the performance site, i.e. what kind of places the allotment gardens are.

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[25] The allotment garden is run by an association whose members include all the garden's residents. Decisions are taken by the Board, whose members are elected at the annual meeting. (*Suomen puutarhaliitto* 2.12.2023)

4.4.3. The ethos of allotment gardens

The roots of the allotment garden movement in Finland go back to the early 1900s, although the real rise of the movement occurred during the Second World War (*Siirtolapuutarhaliitto* 2.12.2023). Small garden plots were seen as providing poor urban families with access to healthy food, fresh air and useful activities. Here, the allotment garden movement was particularly influenced by Elisabeth Koch (1891–1982), who worked as a city garden adviser from the 1920s to the 1950s. According to her ideology, gardens should be both functional and beautiful. Where fresh air and physical work brought relief from lung disease and other urban ailments, the beauty of gardens offered relief from another urban scourge: nerve stress. (Karisto et al. 2015)

Today, the socio–economic demography of the plot holders is quite different from the early days of the allotment gardens, as today the price of an allotment garden cottage in Helsinki can easily rise to over 100,000 euros. The role of the allotment gardens is therefore first and foremost to provide recreational and leisure activities for their inhabitants. However, the original purpose of the gardens is still reflected in the ethos of the gardeners as well as in the rules for allotment gardens set by the City of Helsinki: at least two-thirds of the plot area must be cultivated or planted with trees, berry bushes or flowers, and each plot must have at least one fruit tree and berry bush. The rules further specify the appearance of plots by defining the models and sizes of cottages, the materials to be used for paving the yard and the maximum heights of trees, hedges and even lawns. (*Helsingin siirtolapuutarhat* 2.12.2023).

Although individual gardeners may have different interests and aesthetic preferences in garden management, all must commit to a fairly high degree of uniformity in the appearance of their gardens. Almost all interviewed gardeners stressed the importance of the hard work it takes to keep such a garden. The demand for uniformity and tidiness was reflected in neighbourly relations: some residents find rules and peer pressure oppressive, while others resent rule-breakers. However, almost all the people we interviewed ultimately agreed that strict rules are a positive thing. As one interviewee put it, without rules the garden would become a jungle. This can be interpreted as meaning both a physical and metaphorical jungle, where weeds would grow uncontrollably and people would behave according to the "laws of the jungle", i.e. selfishly and without understanding the common good.

4.4.4. Interspecies negotiations

Karolina Lukasik's research focused on interaction and conflicts between human and non-human animals. The interviews sought to find out with which animals and for what reasons conflicts arose, as well as which animals were welcomed into the garden. During the interviews, the concept of negotiation proved particularly useful. Interspecies negotiation helped to frame the relationships between humans and other species in gardens in terms of communication, and as a result, gardeners' relationships with both rats and other animals began to appear more varied.

Unlike in the early days of allotment gardens, when crop-eating animals were a direct threat to a full stomach, no modern allotment gardener grows food for a living. This is not to say that human–animal conflicts do not still arise. Any amateur gardener will surely recognise the annoyance when a vole, snail or rabbit destroys a hard-won crop, even if its destruction doesn't mean starvation in the coming winter. In allotment gardens, the requirements of tidiness, industriousness and uniformity add to the annoyance. Conflicts between humans and animals were a constant occurrence in both gardens, and all gardeners tried to prevent the presence of certain animals in their plots. Commonly used control measures included the installation of nets to protect apple tree seedlings or berry bushes, various bird deterrents, planting certain plants to repel pests, and erecting fences around crops. At the same time, the presence of some other animals was considered desirable. Gardeners tried to attract these animals to their gardens for example by providing them with water and food, planting certain plants, or hanging insect hotels on walls and birdhouses on trees. All the ways that gardeners use to invite or reject non-human animals, and the animals' reactions to these rejection and invitation messages, are what we call interspecies negotiation.

In the gardens, humans and other animals sometimes went through lengthy negotiation processes that were not always won by humans. For example, one interviewee told us that every year a crow makes a nest near the public toilet in the allotment garden. During the nesting season, that toilet cannot be used; the crow makes sure of that by attacking the hapless approacher. In another case, the interviewee described how she had wanted to build her cottage as ecologically as possible and had therefore painted the window frames with ecological linen putty. However, the putty also appealed to magpies, and they pecked away at the last crumb of it while the frames were still drying. Eventually the gardener had to give up and replace the “natural” wooden frames with aluminium ones.

According to Bethany Brookshire (2022, 23–24) the annoyance caused by animals (their "pestdom") is linked to notions of ownership. When humans see themselves as owners of a place or thing — my city, my house, my garden, my crop — animals that take advantage of the same place or a thing become threats and competitors — in short, pests. From the interviews, it seems that allotment gardens are not so clearly human owned and managed places that their use cannot be negotiated with non-humans. This negotiation process involved rats, too, although the gardeners' attitudes to them differed markedly from their attitudes to other “difficult” animals.

4.4.5. Rats in the gardens

Based on the interviews it seemed that the reasons why some animals were considered desirable and others undesirable in the garden were mainly determined by three factors: the animal's "cuddliness[26]"/unattractiveness, their usefulness/harmfulness and their status as a native or invasive species. Almost all interviewees thought the hedgehogs were cute and did not harm the plants. As a result, many people invited them into their gardens to feed. Pollinating insects were welcomed into gardens primarily for their usefulness. Rabbits were considered "cuddly” but were generally rejected because of the damage they caused to plants. The animal's status as either a native or invasive species was an interesting addition to this fairly straightforward decision-making process. The alien status of a species — animal or plant — made it undesirable for many interviewees, even if the animal did not cause any real harm in the garden. The raccoon dog was such an unwanted animal because of its alleged invasiveness.

However, the rat fell almost entirely outside these three categories. Rats did not seem to be disparaged because of their harmfulness, as almost none of those interviewed mentioned that rats had caused particular damage[27] to their gardens. The cuddliness of rats is, of course, a matter of opinion. Many interviewees thought that rats were actually quite cute, but at least as many thought that the general dislike of rats was due to their appearance, more specifically, their bald tails. Only one interviewee thought rats were

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[26] Jamie Lorimer (2007, 919) has classified non-human animal charisma into different types. One of the three types of charisma proposed by him is aesthetic charisma, of which a subtype is “cuddly charisma”. Lorimer sees the appeal of endearing charisma as based on the ethologist Konrad Lorenz's claim that humans prefer species that share features with human children and have recognisable faces.

[27] Two interviewees mentioned possible disease outbreaks caused by rats in the garden. Interviewees said they knew of a few cases where people had contracted a stomach bug caused by campylobacter after eating apples that had fallen to the ground. Presumably the apples had been contaminated by rats. The origin of the campylobacter infection is in fact impossible to verify because in addition to rats, it is carried by many other animals as well as humans, said disease ecologist Tuomas Aivelo (2023) in an interview we conducted for *Rat City*. So, the rumours of the disease outbreak may have been more driven by the reputation of rats as disease vectors than by the proven origin of the outbreaks.

simply disgusting. However, this disgust can be seen as encompassing more than just their supposedly unpleasant appearance. The rat is officially classified as an alien species in Finland, but not as an invasive one (*Vieraslajit* 2.12.2023). None of the interviewees mentioned rat's status as an alien species as a reason for the undesirability of rats, and most did not even seem to be aware of it.

According to Bethany Brookshire (2022, 540), the same themes recur in every pest story. An animal deemed a pest arrives in a place where it is not expected to be encountered, as it is about to find a new “niche”. Perhaps it is a concrete niche, such as a hole in the wall, or perhaps it is a new habitat created by humans through their own actions such as open compost heaps or apples left on the ground. Or perhaps people have invaded its habitat themselves. As discussed earlier, the allotment garden was not considered by most interviewees to be a place that belongs entirely to humans. Therefore, most of them were willing to accept that there were *some* rats living in the gardens. They argued, for example, that rats belong in "nature" or, alternatively, in cities, or that rats can never be completely eradicated. However, interviewees stressed that rats should not be too many or in the wrong place.

Where the line of "too many" or "wrong place" was drawn depended on the interviewee. Some were disgusted to see rats in places used by people at all, such as walkways, public waste shelters, or toilets. Many reported that the boundary ran along their own property. Some did not want to see rats on their plots at all, for others it was enough that rats did not build their nests there. Not everyone was bothered by this either. One interviewee said she had observed with fascination how two rats moved back and forth between the hedge and the terrace in her yard. However, none of the interviewees wanted rats to enter their cottage. One interviewee, who had nothing against rats per se, said that he had installed rat traps after noticing a rat moving around in the structures of the cottage. The cottage, the “home”, was therefore the ultimate place belonging to humans, within whose walls the rat became an unwanted pest.

4.4.6. The moral battle

Given how big an issue *Rat War* became, it is perhaps surprising that only one interviewee said they personally disliked rats. Many were ultimately quite neutral in their attitudes. If rats do not cause much damage to gardens, are not seen as invasive pests and the dislike for them is not even very personal or deep, what was the cause of such a chain of events as *Rat War*? One reason may be the social stigma often associated with rats. Both Karolina Lukasik and educationalist Virpi Valtonen spoke of rats as a mirror of human beings in our interviews for *Rat City* (Virpi Valtonen

Interview in English 2023; Karolina Lukasik Interview 2023). Lukasik argued that because we associate rats with things like disease and dirt, we assume that the environment in which rats are found is also diseased and dirty. Class and ethnic differences also play a role, as in many countries with high income inequality, rats are particularly prevalent in poorly managed, low-income areas. Rats are seen as evidence that these people have failed to maintain their spaces. (Karolina Lukasik Interview 2023) Bethany Brookshire (2022, 39) writes about the same phenomenon. The presence of rats in an area is seen as a moral failure of the people living there.

This mechanism would seem to have played an important role in *Rat War*, too. The ethos of cleanliness and industriousness that prevailed in the garden added to this. A couple of interviewees who had not been personally affected by the rat problem, considered it to be the result of their own actions: by taking good care of their cottage, plot and waste they had managed to avert the threat. Some interviewees showed us a “haunted house”, i.e. a deserted cottage and its untended garden. They disapproved of the dilapidation of the deserted house and said that rats were nesting under the cottage. The decay and rats were seen as belonging together, as it were. In contrast, one interviewee, who lived in the central part of the garden where rats were most prevalent, had found a rat in her own enclosed compost. She was one of the most ambitious interviewees, both in terms of gardening and cleanliness, so the appearance of a rat in her compost, despite the precautions, was deeply upsetting. She was also the most ardent advocate of heavy rat control among those interviewed.

Also indicative of the conflicting feelings aroused by the presence of rats was the fact that many interviewees mentioned that they didn't want to *see* the rats in the garden. One interviewee said bluntly that she was prepared to accept the presence of rats as long as they kept out of her sight. Another gardener even refused to participate in the interview after being told that it would involve installing a field camera on the plot. She was afraid of finding out that there indeed were rats on her garden. Even Lukasik's promise to leave potential rat sightings to their own knowledge did not change the gardener's mind. The mere fact that the information would be there, that *someone* would know, was reason enough for the gardener to refuse the whole project.

This requirement of invisibility applied only to rats, suggesting that the reasons for negative attitudes towards rats were indeed not the same as for other animals. *Rat War* was ultimately about rats becoming visible, not about their sudden reproduction. As many interviewees mentioned, rats had already been living in the garden area before the construction work. And, as *Rat War* showed, becoming visible is not without risk,

either. On the one hand, the demand for invisibility and, on the other hand, forced visibility created an interesting tension in terms of interspecies performance, as performance and performing are often intrinsically linked to looking and being looked at. This observation also raised a question central to the *Rat City* performance: what kind of dynamics can arise in an interspecies performance when one species does not want to see the other, and for the other species, being seen can even mean a death sentence?

4.4.7. Rat War from rat perspective

It seems that *Rat War* was ultimately about people's perceptions of how visible (where, how often, and how many) rats are allowed to be in the allotment garden. The war was as much between humans and their perceptions and attitudes as it was between humans and rats. But when one looks at the *Rat War* as a negotiation about said visibility, the rat's perspective also begins to emerge. The noise and vibration of the construction site drove the rats away from their old nests in the cracks in the stone wall, forcing them to look for new nesting sites and food sources. The rats headed for the central part of the garden, where the disturbance from the roadworks was far enough away and where the area was more densely populated than on the edges. Since rats are omnivorous and eat food waste and many vegetables grown in gardens, a densely populated area means more composts, bins and vegetable gardens — in short, more food. The undersides of cottages provided rats with sheltered nesting sites close to food sources. There are also likely to be fewer predators, such as foxes, in the middle of the gardens than on the edge near the Central Park. So, from the rats' point of view, the centre of the garden was full of welcoming messages from humans, and the rats responded positively to these messages.

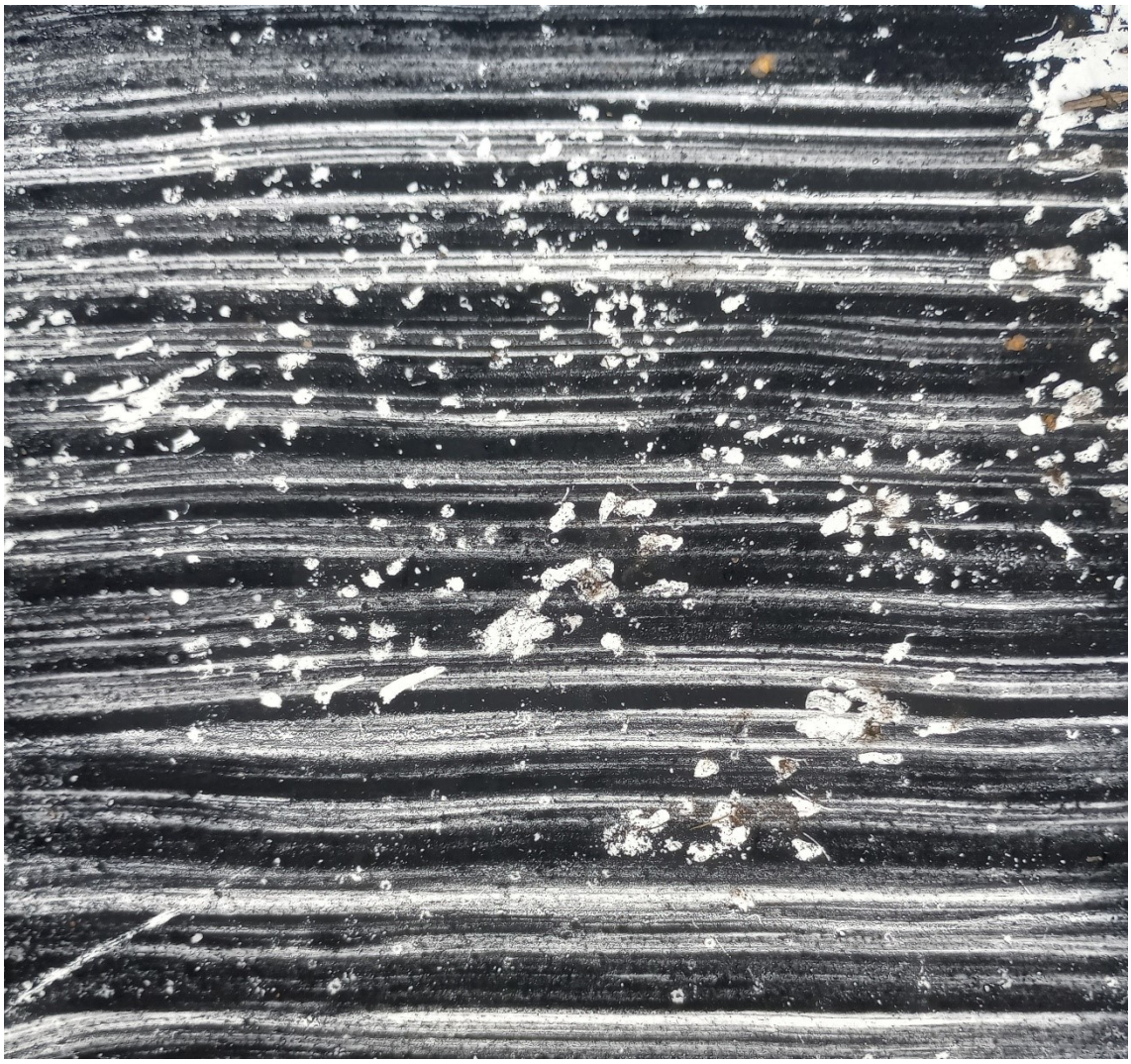
Again, following the logic of negotiation, humans in turn reacted negatively to the rats' response. Surprising physical encounters with humans were probably as unpleasant and frightening for rats as they were for humans. Both food and nesting sites gradually declined as gardeners began to follow new guidelines issued by the board. Traps also appeared here and there in the garden, killing at least a few rats. These are all signs to rats that they should limit their movements in the garden, and perhaps avoid some places altogether. However, as Ruskeasuo is a garden and not a tightly controlled environment, at least some of the rats found new nesting sites and food sources for themselves[28]. So, it seems that, as a result of the negotiation process, rats and humans came to some sort of agreement on where and at what time each should move around

[28] Rats are proven to still live in the garden, see chapter 4.3. *Invitation to dance: the role of duration in field work*

the garden. The gardeners' desire for the rats to be invisible and the rats' desire for a life free from constant disturbance thus coincided, as evidenced by the fact that none of the interviewees said that the *Rat War* was still going on.

But encounters still happen from time to time, and not all gardeners mind. One gardener, who was not among the interviewees, laughingly told a rat-related anecdote. She said that she sees rats so often in the garden that she and her friends have named the dark, shiny furred rats as “Manolo’s” and the grey, plain-looking rats as “Reiska’s”. One evening, she was sitting on her garden swing when she saw a large female rat dive out of the hedge and stop, tail up, in the middle of the yard. A moment later, the female was followed by a handsome Manolo, and the rats began to mate frantically, ignoring the gardener sitting a few metres away. Eventually, the gardener interrupted the rats by loudly clapping her hands, causing them to scurry off to continue their frolic elsewhere. Perhaps the rats have drawn their own Deep Map of the Ruskeasuo allotment garden, marking not only the best places to eat and nest, safe routes and times of day to move around, but also the gardeners whose sense of humour can withstand more explicit performances.

5. WORKING WITH RATS: FROM RAT WRITING TO COMMON PROTOCOLS



Rat writing on the tracking plate. Photo: Sanna Nissinen.

I came up with the idea for *Rat City* in spring 2022 and presented it for the first time to the research panel organised by my degree programme in May. At that point I knew I wanted to do an interspecies performance with rats, but the questions of what kind, how and where were still very much open. The idea of interspecies collaboration was also on the table from the start. I presented the idea to the research panel as follows:

> I am throwing here the term Interspecies collaboration as a provocative research question. Eben Kirksey who has written about multispecies ethnography writes: ”regarding animals, plants, or microbes as ‘artists’ or ‘collaborators’ in a common project … risks hiding relations of domination and exploitation”. My approach to the

> idea of interspecies collaboration is critical but curious. It is possible that I give up the idea at some point when it comes to my artistic thesis. But at the same time, I want to take it as a serious possibility and aspiration. (Linturi 2022).

So, I presented the idea of collaborating with rats with great reservations. I was aware that without a critical examination of the concept of interspecies collaboration, I might fall into the pitfall articulated by the anthropologist Eben Kirksey (2014) in his book *Multispecies Salon*: A glib argument about collaboration could mask the imbalance of power between species and individuals, and, at the same time, the human-centeredness of the whole project, in my case, the performance. Despite my scepticism, I wanted to keep the idea of collaboration with me as a kind of hypothesis, at least until I was forced to abandon it. I thought that while the false claim of interspecies collaboration may, in Kirksey's words, hide power relations, the desire for collaboration may also steer the process in a more equal and balanced direction.

Artist Lisa Jevbratt (2009a, 2009b) writes that by taking interspecies collaboration as a goal, the artist can explore the world *with* non-human animals rather than taking the animal as the object of study. In fact, such a process forces us to rethink the power relations between humans and other animals, as the ethos of collaboration should also permeate the methodologies of artmaking. For Jevbratt (2009a, 1–2), collaboration with other animals requires a personal commitment. Thinking of other animals as collaborators, however artificial it may sometimes seem, ensures that they are treated as sentient and agential beings. This makes the work ethically binding, and the well-being of the non-human partner a priority.

Following Jevbratt's example, I decided to approach rats *as if* we were collaborating. Collaboration suggests a horizontal relationship between partners, where one is not more important than the other. Moreover, the ethical obligation mentioned by Jevbratt was, in my opinion, particularly important to remember in the case of an animal species that arouses a lot of negative emotions in humans. Therefore, I decided that I (and later we, when the rest of the working group joined in) should proceed with the process with the best interests of the rats in mind. If there were a conflict between the interest of the performance and the interest of the rats, the interest of the rats should prevail.

5.1. Making rats matter

A snow tunnel dug by rats in my backyard. Photo by Maija Linturi.

However, the idea of actual collaboration seemed for a long time to be a very theoretical and distant idea. The more burning question was how I could get to know rats at all. As I wrote earlier[29], the encounter with a rat in Hakaniemi in spring 2022 was the first time I saw a live wild rat in Helsinki. This was one of the things that piqued my interest. It got me thinking that given how much negative attention rats get, they are surprisingly rarely seen. Perhaps the rats have a knowledge of the city and its routes, a kind of "street smarts" that I, a human city dweller, do not have. The idea of a parallel but invisible city of rats fascinated me. Over time, however, the invisibility of the rats started to become an obstacle to the progress of the performance process. How to get to know, let alone work with, someone one hardly ever sees?

After I had decided to make a performance with rats, however, I started to see them here and there. Perhaps this first decision alone changed the way I perceived my

[29] See the chapter 3. *Towards Rat city: why urban rats?*

environment and the things I focused on[30]. During the summer and autumn of 2022, I encountered a rat in the bin shelter of my apartment building, on my home street, twice in front of a nearby shopping centre, in a cemetery, on the terrace of a pizzeria and on the shore of a pond near my home. But despite these quick encounters, the rats still seemed inaccessible to me. My encounters with rats illustrated my attempts to understand them better: by the time I even realised what I had seen, the rat had already slipped into a hole somewhere out of my sight.

Frustrated by this, over the summer and autumn 2022 I developed the idea of portraying myself as a rat in the places where I had encountered rats. I didn't really know what I was looking for in this activity, except perhaps some kind of connection through physical identification. After a few photo sessions I gave up the idea, as it didn't seem to bring me any closer to the "actual[31]" rats. In hindsight, the photography project was perhaps about wanting to do something: to be an active agent and artist. When I took the lead and started to "make art" out of my rat encounters, however, I learned nothing about rats or from rats, not about *their* artistic agency.

In their article *Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment*, social scientists Hinchliffe et al. (2005) write about issues of non-human political representation and the "mattering of things[32]" through a case study. The authors took part in a mapping project of water voles in the city of Birmingham, UK. In the UK, the water vole is a native but endangered species. To protect them, it is illegal to build new housing in areas where the water vole is present. The presence or absence of water voles is verified by a team of "consultants", made up of ecologists and volunteers, who are specially trained in water vole detection. To understand what is happening in the mapping process, the writers of the article themselves participated in such consultant training.

In the case of water voles, a (political) decision had been made that the water voles and their presence matter. However, this decision is only the starting point in a process

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[30] Eugene T. Geldling has developed a focusing method, in which attention is opened to the multiple layers and aspects of life. The name of the method comes from the idea that it requires a particular kind of "focus" to notice what is fuzzy, vague, and implicit in the way one interacts with one´s environment. (*The International Focusing Institute* 17.1.2024). At this early stage, my focus on rats did not follow any methodology, but nevertheless it probably made me unconsciously and intuitively interact with my environment differently.

[31] Donna Haraway (2008) writes in her book *When Species Meet* about "actual animals" as opposed to animal representations that render the animal into a symbol, stereotype, or allegory.

[32] With "things that matter", the authors refer to Bruno Latour. According to the authors, "things" are not just things for Latour, but become "an assembly of a judicial nature gathered around a topic, reus, that creates both conflict and assent" (Latour according to Hinchliffe et al. 2005, 644).

where “things” become meaningful, and which will not ultimately result in a simple yes or no answer to a planning permission form. I, too, had made a decision that rats mattered, because I was determined to make a performance about and with them. By spring 2023, however, I had made little progress in my relationship with rats. I had learned a lot about them: I knew more about their lifestyle and behaviour than before. Nevertheless, I felt that rats as real, living beings remained beyond my reach. They had not become meaningful to me in a personal, embodied sense.

To change that, I decided to start looking for rats more intentionally, this time taking a cue from Hinchliffe at al's water vole mapping and ecological fieldwork in general. I set out to find rats and their tracks in their own habitat, the "city". Through HURP, I had learned some general laws about what kind of environments rats could thrive in and where in Helsinki rats are most prevalent. When I started my expeditions, there was still snow on the ground, so the chances of spotting rat tracks were good. Despite this background, my first tracking expedition felt like a bit of trial and error. Rats are small and fast, and the city is big. So where should I even start?

I did my first rat walk in one of the most rat-dense areas in Helsinki, that is, in Kallio district. I remembered that the largest of the rats dissected by R had been caught on Mäkelänkatu in Kallio[33]. It seemed as good a place to start as any, so I started my tour at Mäkelänkatu and ended up at Dallapé Park. On this first expedition I saw no clear signs of rats, but it still felt educational. I wrote the following in my work diary:

> I tried to look for rat-friendly places like litter bins, bird feeders, and cultivation boxes, and signs of rats like footprints on the snow or holes in the walls. I kept my eyes on the street level, and it already changed my perspective on the city quite a lot. I started to see many potential rat hideaways as well as architectural details I normally don’t pay attention to. I also realised how difficult it is to slow down my own pace in the city environment. I felt weird, almost like I would be doing something criminal. (Linturi 2023b)

Just the fact that I was looking for rats changed my perspective on the environment. I also became more aware of the invisible norms of the urban space, and that by looking for rats in places that are typical for them (waste bins and shelters, people's yards, nooks and corners, and the ground level in general), I was breaking these norms. If I had walked around with binoculars around my neck and looked upwards, people would

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33 see 4.2. *Dead rats in the laboratory: affects and empathy*

have interpreted me as a birdwatcher, and I would not have felt so uncomfortable. Hinchliffe et al. (2005, 648) might say that I began to get affected by the rats. At the same time, I was drawn into their circle of affects. Garbage, rats and oddly behaving people are all part of the same bundle of affects, and when these affects pass from one to another, they reinforce each other.

Although the rats remained invisible to me, there were other encounters on this first expedition:

> When I peered under the bushes, I suddenly saw a blackbird just over a metre away. We stared at each other for a while, and then the bird decided I wasn't a threat. S/he continued their business, i.e. searching for food under the half-rotten leaves. S/he kept jumping closer and closer until I could see the yellow ring around their eyes and the movement in the throat as s/he swallowed. I stood very still, eyes locked on the bird, but simultaneously I could hear people walking past. I was aware of how strange I must look but tried not to care. The blackbird is one of the non-human citizens of the same "world" as rats. If I had not been looking for a rat, I would not have noticed them. (Linturi 2023b)

Already on this first rat tour, I felt I was getting much closer to the rats and their world than I had during my photography project. The rats began to become more meaningful as their world began not only to emerge, but also to be embodied through various encounters and affects.

5.1.1. The ABC book of rat writing

Hinchliffe et al. (2005, 647) call tracks left by water voles, such as footprints, burrows and droppings, as "water vole writing". The authors point out that they understand that writing is a risky term. However, they use it to undermine the notion that non-humans are always written up. By using a term like "water vole writing" (or in my case, "rat writing"), it is possible to cede at least some of the power that the writer exercises to the animals themselves. Learning to read such writing takes time, just like learning to read human writing. The authors write that merely finding tracks requires not only knowledge of the habitats and lifestyles typical of water voles, but also, among other things, suitable weather conditions. Furthermore, water vole tracks can easily be confused with those left by any small animal or even a gust of wind. Reading the presence of water voles requires combining numerous separate signs and comparing them with previous experiences, texts and images. (op. cit. 647–648).

Following Hinchcliffe et al's example, I call the signs left by rats as rat writing. I got my first lesson in rat writing by chance and closer than I thought. On 28 March 2023, I noticed an update on my housing association's Facebook group that a rat had been spotted near the bin shelter of the building. The update sparked several disgusted comments from other residents. I, however, was thrilled by the update and went to investigate the place. I wrote in my work diary:

> It didn't take long for me to see the footprints in the snow. The snow had been soft and deep for a rat, their belly had left a trail and the footprints were deep. I assume s/he had been a very large rat. The footprints went alongside the wall of the hut, and then took a straight turn left. But then there were so many other footprints (rabbit, maybe a dog, human), that I lost the rat prints. After some searching, I concluded that there is no other possibility than that the rat had headed towards the rose bushes on the other side of the walkway. I kneeled and soon enough found a hole in the snow. I lit up the hole with my mobile phone, and realised it was a tunnel with no other end in sight. The rat remained hidden though. (Linturi 2023b).

Finding the yard rats was a jackpot for me: the rats sort of offered me the ABC book of rat writing, with a concise presentation of all the alphabet, from the shape and size of the footprints to the different nest types and route choices. I wrote in my work diary that day:

> Later, around midnight, I decided to go check on the rats. First, I checked the previous tracks and the rose bush. No rats, no new footprints. Then I went around to the other side of the hut, and soon found a new trail. It started right next to the wall and led to one of the cultivation boxes behind the hut. When I looked more closely at the wall, I noticed a round hole maybe 40 cm above the ground. I lit the hole and noticed that on one side was a horizontal bar, a convenient passageway for a rat.
>
> Next, I checked the boxes. There were three or four of them, all covered with snow. The middle one, where the rat tracks led, was surrounded by pots of dried plants. I noticed that there were several footprints around the box, and small tunnels between the pots.
>
> I was just heading back home when I noticed three sets of footprints leading from the boxes in the opposite direction to where the hut is. I followed the tracks and came to a large spruce maybe ten metres away. I peered under the branches and saw that the tracks led to a snow-covered box. I lit the box and realised it was a rat trap. But in the

> light, I also saw that the trail didn't end there. They ran right alongside the box, leading to a hole in a pile of rocks maybe half a metre away. There seems to be another nest there. (Linturi 2023b)

For me, following those first clear rat tracks was a holistic experience. In fact, the experience seemed to approximate embodied empathy[34]. Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-14) quotes Vinciane Despret, referring to embodied empathy as "a tool that attunes bodies". I didn't imagine I understood what it was like to be a rat in that complex of cultivation boxes, rose bushes, spruce tree and trash hut, nor did I imagine myself in the rat's place as I did in my short-lived photography project. But when I examined the tracks left by the rats with a flashlight, I felt what could perhaps be described as thinking affectively alongside (Cull Ó Maoilearca 2019, E-2) the rat. This thinking alongside and reading rat writing created a different understanding than if I had read about the rat tracks from books in human language or even if I had seen the pictures taken at the site. When learning to read rat writing, I felt connected to rats in a way that perhaps indeed more closely resembles the reader–writer relationship than the researcher–research object relationship. This sense of connection was also linked to the embodied experience of the situation: I experienced the same weather conditions, temperature and even time of day as the rats when they left their marks.

Later, as I began working with the Rat City working group, we continued these rat tracking expeditions together. Even though I had had a crash course in rat writing in my own backyard, it still took a lot of time and new tools to hone my perception and senses to detect rat writing where its presence is not so obvious. But as the working group and I became more practised readers, the shift in perspective that I had already tasted on my first rat expedition became more and more apparent. This change in the perception was described by our working group member Camilla Anderzén in the *Rat City* performance as follows:

> I still remember the first rat holes I found. The discovery, as it were, put new lenses on my eyes. The urban space didn't look quite the same anymore, but I began to see it from the perspective of rats. Would rats have access to that bin? Could that be a rat's nest? Would a rat be able to move from one place to another undetected? For me, the big thing was to start noticing the paths made by rats. Often, they lead from the feeding site to the burrow or from one burrow to another, and they are remarkably similar to shortcuts made by humans. Once I started to notice the paths, I could no longer understand how I had been so blind to them before. (Rat City 2023)

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[34] See also 4.2. *Dead rats in the laboratory: affects and empathy*

Hinchliffe et al. (2005, 647–648), too, write that with time and experience, reading water vole writing became easier. When the water vole consultants attune to the water voles, the landscape starts to look different. Water voles begin to "make sense" in new ways as the reading skills improve. The description seems recognisable. With rat literacy, rats began to matter and "make sense" in an inarticulable embodied way.

5.1.2. Writing around rats

Hinchliffe et al. (2005, 648) stress the importance of understanding the meaning of texts about water voles when reading water vole writing. These human-made texts are not equivalent to the traces left by the voles themselves, but they act as “sensitising devices” that make the water voles more real to those who began to use them. The texts help to observe the landscape, the differences between species and the possible presence or absence of water voles in the site. These texts are interwoven with the water voles and the traces they leave behind, forming together a complex body of writings. The authors call this complexity of multiple activities and interactions "diagramming", which they say involves the idea of writing *around* water voles, rather than directly about them. All these different diagrams not only increased the authors' understanding of the water voles, but also began to change the way they perceived and sensed the environment.

As I said at the beginning of the chapter, I too had “sensitised” myself with various texts and existing knowledge about rats. Without these “diagrams”, I would not have been able to track down rats and rat writing so quickly. The collection of diagrammatic writings on rats also included an update on the housing association's Facebook group as well as my work diary. The idea of writing around rats followed me throughout the project, and the number of different "diagrams" grew as we worked collectively. Together with the working group, we gathered and built up our understanding of rats by interviewing rat researchers, searching for rat tracks “in the field”, reading texts and watching documentaries about rats, leaving track plates in places where we suspected rats were present, drawing maps, interpreting messages between rats and people, having long discussions and writing a collective working diary. All these different interwoven diagrams not only changed and increased our understanding of rats and the environment shared by rats and humans, but also helped us to form a relationship with rats.

5.1.3. Diagrammatic performance

Hinchliffe et al. (2005, 650) offer diagramming as an alternative to the (political) representation of non-human animals. The idea of political representation is that a particular group is represented by a sovereign, i.e. someone or something with sufficient knowledge and understanding of that group. In the case of water voles, they could be represented by the report written by the consultants, in which water voles are rendered into figures which clearly states the scientific facts about water vole absence or presence, the population number, and range of movement. Such a representational approach suggests that water voles are something knowable and immutable, that they are here to be represented.

The reality, however, is more ambiguous and messy. Water vole populations move from place to place and vary greatly in size from year to year. Water voles also change, and change their behaviour. The authors describe how previous studies had shown that the brown rat and the water vole are competitors. The presence of the brown rat was therefore considered to indicate the absence of water voles. However, during the consultant training, local ecologists discovered that Birmingham voles actually use the same burrows with rats. A rigid and hierarchical model of representation, in which one species is removed from its environment, appropriated and then represented, is unable to deal with such subtle changes because it assumes that what is represented is the same at the beginning of the study as at the end. The task of the study is to answer predetermined questions (the presence or absence of water voles), and the representee itself has no say in either the formulation of the questions or the study itself.

Hinchliffe et al. are social scientists and write about political representation in their text. However, their way of dealing with questions of representation also gives food for thought in the context of performance art. In this thesis, I have not dealt much with issues of representation of non-human animals, as it was clear to me from the start that *Rat City* would not seek to represent the rat. Like political representation, representation in performance is prone to appropriation and simplification. I didn't want to explain or represent rats, but to interact with them. At the beginning of the performance process, I even had the idea that the performance would take place between the audience and the rats. Thus, the role of the human performers in the performance would be, following Tuija Kokkonen (2017), to act as a kind of weak actors, helping to notice and perceive non-human agencies.

I had previous experience of this kind of attention-direction in the *Shared Spaces* installation, where both the physical installation pieces and the audio works

accompanying them were intended to direct the attention of human visitors to the insects living in the installation, to enable positive encounters between humans and insects, and to create an experience for human visitors of sharing time and space with these non-human neighbours. In *Rat City*, however, matters were complicated by the fact that our partners and focus of attention was a species that, despite sharing very close habitat with humans, was unlikely to surrender to or benefit from close interaction with humans. Our working group would therefore have to simultaneously nurture the rats' need for invisibility and privacy and draw the public's attention to them.

For me, the idea of diagrammatic writing opened a new way to think about performance with rats. Whereas representation is content to repeat something that already exists and is known, diagramming sensitises us to small changes, contradictions and ambiguities. Such sensitivity is, according to the Hinchcliffe et al., a prerequisite for any new knowledge formation, and it requires that the other species be approached horizontally, as co-subjects, instead of hierarchical top–down explanations. According to Hincliffe et al. (2005, 653), this means that non-humans (water voles, rats) are treated as colleagues with the ability to tell about themselves and influence the whole process of knowing. In the case of water voles, the diagrammatic writing not only revealed water voles as dynamic subjects, capable of change and responsive to their environment, but also drew into relevance other non-human agents and entities connected to water voles, like rats competing for or sharing living space with voles. According to the authors, diagramming enables just this: the formation of new connections, relationships and meanings, what they call "the politics of entanglements" (op. cit. 55).

The "politics of entanglements" that we discovered in the process of *Rat City* included, among others, the blackbird, whose foraging activities I followed on my first rat trip; the beach rose bushes under which the rats often nested; the fences and no–go signs in Myllypuro neighbourhood; the hares that sometimes watched us curiously, sometimes ran away in fright; Mai, an 11 year old labrador who sometimes participated in our rehearsals; the numerous other dogs who came to greet us in Alakivi park, as well as their handlers; the friendly and curious drunks at Myllypuro metro station; the guards who chased us away as we searched for rat burrows near the metro tracks; the looks we collected and the affects and emotions we experienced as we searched for traces of rats in bin shelters and other suspicious places.

I began to see the role of both the performance and us human performers in a slightly new way: the performance itself was a kind of collection of diagrams: a sensitising device in which the rats and the whole rat politics of entanglements became visible,

relevant and meaningful for a moment. Instead of representing and appropriating rats on the one hand and leaving the performance entirely between the rats and the audience on the other, we sought to offer an assemblage in which different perspectives and text types were intertwined with the traces left by the rats, the histories and environments shared by rats and humans, and the affects associated with the rat and the performance site.

5.2. Negotiation and Collaboration

Negotiation on the use of a bin shelter. Photo by Maija Linturi

As we got to know rats better by learning to read their writing, I started to reconsider the possibility of collaboration with rats. I gained new insights into the potential for collaboration from two directions: firstly, from the interview study of Karolina Lukasik in allotment gardens[35], from which I learned the concept of interspecies negotiation, and secondly, from the writings of the multimedia artist Lisa Jevbratt, which I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In what follows, I will describe in more detail how we approached interspecies negotiation on the one hand, and Jevbratt's proposal for

[35] See chapter 4.4. *Rat war: spatial negotiation between humans and rats*

interspecies collaboration on the other, and what kind of understanding the resulting exercises produced.

5.2.1. Myllypuro as a space for interspecies negotiation

The work with *Rat City* working group was divided into two phases: a workshop in May 2023 and an actual rehearsal period from the beginning of August to the end of September. During the spring workshop, we searched for rat habitats, taking a cue from ecological field studies: we considered what are the necessary conditions for the presence of rats, and began to explore the Myllypuro area from this perspective. Did rats have free access to the bin shelter? Was the plug at the bottom of the waste bin in place? Was there a hedge or other sheltered nesting area near the garbage bins? With such an "ecologist's eye" we were able to locate two concentrations of rat burrows in the area around Myllypuro metro station.

In August, however, I wanted to take a different approach to detecting the presence of rats. Inspired by the concept of interspecies negotiation, I wanted to explore the Myllypuro district as a space where different animal species and individuals negotiate with each other. I hypothesised that by interpreting interspecies messages, we could better understand not only the rats, but also the ways in which humans and non-human animals already communicate, share space and perhaps even collaborate to some extent in urban space.

We started by mapping the messages in a small area at a time (a park, a yard of an apartment building, a stretch of street). Initially we focused on the messages sent by humans, as they were the easiest to notice and understand. Thus we listed, drew or otherwise noted down all the signs that non-human animals could interpret as an invitation or rejection. We also wrote down all the questions raised by the mapping process, to which we later tried to find answers either in written sources, by asking experts or by reflecting on them together. In the following example, I have mapped the messages of a children's playground of about 20 square metres:

Type	**Sign**	**Explanation**	**Who**
Invitation	Private area -signs on both sides	Less people i.e. less disturbance	Any non-human animal
Invitation	A litter bin between two benches.	Food.	Rats

	The bin is made of mesh-like material.	Benches form a route to get to the bin. The material of the litter bin makes it easy to climb into.	
Invitation	Picnic-table	Probably some leftovers and crumbs every once in a while	Rats, mice and birds
Invitation	Hedge surrounding the play area	Nesting places and protected passageways.	Rats, mice, hedgehogs?
Invitation	Litter on the ground	Food, perhaps material for nests?	Rats, mice, birds
Invitation, ambiguous	Litter bin, made of metal and with an open mouth.	Food.	Seagulls and crows, they might drop litter for rats and mice, too.
Ambiguous	Two sewer covers just outside the park.	An entrance to the sewer system?	Rats
Rejection	Street lights	Risk of being seen by people and predators	Rats, other prey animals
Rejection	Busy streets on both sides of the park	Risk of being seen by people, risk of being run over by a car	Any non-human animal
Question	Can rats climb up and down the manhole if the sewer cover has large enough holes?		
Question	Can rats be actually useful as a small scale waste management system? They do eat the organic part of the litter, which means that bio waste doesn't end up in mixed waste.		
Question	Do rats use trash in other ways than food? E.g. as material for nests.		

The longer we continued the mapping process, the more messages we noticed. The urban environment started to look different. To humans, a litter bin looks like an object to throw an empty take-away cup or dog poo bag into, but to rats and seagulls it means a potential meal. For humans, a low fence surrounding a grassy plot means they are not allowed to trample the lawn or walk their dog on that area. For rabbits and hares the fence can mean the opposite: because the area is off-limits to humans and dogs, they are more likely to be able to roam undisturbed. A hedge planted around a waste area may

provide a visual barrier and aesthetic pleasure for humans, but for rats it may provide a sheltered pathway or nesting site.

Trash bins and bin shelters proved to be particularly interesting places for human–animal negotiations. Commensal animals[36] such as rats feed on human waste and food scraps. According to disease ecologist Tuomas Aivelo (2023), there is no research on how much of the rats' diet is made up of human waste, but presumably, at least in winter when berries and other edible plants are not available, the proportion is quite high. Therefore, waste concentrations such as bin shelters in housing estates may well be interpreted as an invitation to rats and other animals that eat human leftovers. However, by protecting these areas in different ways, people can refine, weaken or neutralise this initial invitation. I presented one such bin shelter on my guided tour of *Rat City* as follows:

> As you can see, people who built this shed have put a net around the window area. It is probably intended to act as a rejection message to birds and squirrels. But a few days ago, I saw a magpie systematically investigating the net, finally slipping through a gap between the tin roof and the wall. The magpie did their thing inside and then came back the same route. So, the magpie responded to the original message with their own actions: perhaps the human message was unclear, or the magpie thought it was unreasonable. Next, we, or the maintenance company, could respond to the magpie by plugging the holes. Or they can just accept that the magpie has made their point and is now allowed to use the space.
>
> The lower part of the shed is also surrounded by a net. This message is probably aimed at rats. The mesh eyes are too big to prevent mice from entering the shed, but the rats will probably get the message. As you can see, there is a rubber strip under the door. Its message is intended to be the same as that of the net. But rats may not read it the same way. → *check the rat hole in the rubber strip*. To them it might mean "come only if you're really hungry" or "here's a challenge, let's see how you do”. (Rat City 2023)

As the excerpt shows, we began to notice the reciprocal nature of the exchange of messages. Magpies found a gap in a carelessly attached net, rats gnawed holes in poorly chosen materials. Rats claimed a spot as their own by filling it with unnecessarily large

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[36] In biology, animals that adapt to the living space of another species, are called commensal animals. The word comes from Latin and literally means "together at table". (O’Connor 2013, 7) The term has been criticised (e.g. by geographer Philip Howell 2020, 397) for being imprecise. Personally, I like the idea behind it. Commensal animals like rats are our guests at the table.

holes[37], or alternatively dug their nests in the middle of a thorny beach rose bushes and nettle patches. Camilla Anderzén speculated on this connection between rats, beach roses and other plants that are unwelcome to humans, as follows:

> At some point I noticed that there was often a beach rose bush near the rat burrows, and in many cases also a patch of mugwort and nettle. These are also undesirable from a human point of view: mugwort is considered a highly allergenic plant and nettle is known to burn on contact. I began to wonder if the rat might be sending us humans a message by making a nest at the root of these very plants. Perhaps the plants act as a similar repellent message to the netting we put around the bin shelter. (Rat City 2023)

Although at an operational level this mapping of interspecies messages does not look very different from the rat tracking we did in the spring, it fundamentally changed our own thinking. Rats were no longer objects of study, objects we were trying to track and understand. Instead, they were now seen as active agents in the (urban) space we shared together: we humans, rats and other non-human animals were co-citizens, neighbours negotiating the use of a shared space in the same way that human neighbours do. We also began to see our own role in a new way: we were no longer just objective observers, but part of this network of negotiations.

5.2.2. The ethics of attention

Our own involvement in the network of relationships and messages between rats and humans was made concrete by a rat site found by Anderzén. The site was the waste area of an apartment building, where unprotected waste bins often overflowed, the rotting waste creating an enticing odour landscape for those who could appreciate it. It would have been no trick for a small and agile animal to explore the contents of the bins: pizza boxes and other cardboard packaging were stacked between the bio waste bin and the cardboard bin like a staircase. The bottom of the mixed waste bin was also missing a plug, which meant that rats could easily sneak in through the hole. The area was surrounded by rose bushes planted on a low slope, under which rats could easily build their burrows. All in all, the area provided a perfect oasis for the rats, meeting all their

[37] When I presented the rat site I had spotted to Tuomas Aivelo, he said he had been wondering why the mouths of rat burrows are often so disproportionately large. You would think it would be worthwhile to make as inconspicuous a burrow as possible for a prey animal. Since there is no scientific explanation for large burrows, we can speculate that the rat is using it to send a message. To whom and why is even harder to say. Maybe to other rats, maybe to predators like ermines or humans, to make them think the rats are bigger than they really are and thus scare the predators away.

physical needs. Anderzén visited the site again and again over several weeks, and finally her persistence was rewarded with a physical encounter with a rat:

> A couple of weeks ago I was squatting at the foot of a bush as usual, when I suddenly noticed a small rat returning from the bins. When the rat spotted me, they froze in place. We stared at each other for a few seconds. The rat was the first to recover from their shock, and quickly slipped into a hole. I, for my part, remained stunned, staring at the hole, hoping that the rat would return. I found myself hoping the rat would be as curious about me as I was about them. (Rat City 2023)

In mid–September, however, Anderzén noticed three rat traps behind the rubbish bins. Apparently, the rats had been spotted by the residents of the housing association and someone had called the pest control. With the installation of poison traps, the situation changed for Anderzén, too: “I felt sad and guilty. What if some resident had started paying attention to the rats because of me? I don't really want to go back to the site anymore because I'm afraid my new friend has been trapped.” (Anderzén/Rat City 2023)

As I wrote earlier[38], I had decided at the beginning of the project that the interests of the rats would take precedence over the interests of the performance. However, we now found that weighing up the different interests would not be so simple with rats. In her book *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway (2008, 19) writes about the etymology of the word "seeing". The Latin root word — respecere — invites us to reflect on the intertwining of attention and respect. According to Haraway, to respond, to notice, to pay attention and to look back are all related to the idea of a “polite greeting” and the creation of a polis where species can meet. When we began to pay attention to rats and the communication between rats and humans, we created a respectful relationship with rats, we “responded” to them but at the same time created a relationship where we were responsible for them and to them.

With rats, this responsibility linked to attention became both more concrete and more complex. Anderzén described how, after she had first *noticed* a rat site, she began to *pay* more and more *attention* to it. This attention even led to an encounter with a rat. Anderzén looked at the rat and the rat *looked back* at her. However, by drawing attention to the rats and creating a polis that allowed interspecies encounters, Anderzén might have inadvertently attracted the attention of other people. Their gaze did not carry the same respect as Anderzén's, which may have been the fate of the rats.

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[38] See 5. *Working with rats: from rat writing to common protocols*

This was an important reminder for us. Although we used neutral or even positive-sounding terms such as negotiation or collaboration in the context of *Rat City* — as I also use in this thesis — the stakes for humans and rats in the negotiation process are of a completely different scale. For humans, a failed negotiation can perhaps result in aesthetic harm, material damage or, at worst, a stomach flu caused by campylobacter. For rats, negotiation can lead to a slow and painful death by poisoning. If one forgets this, it can easily fall into the trap that Kirksey warned about. For this reason, we realised that one of *Rat City's* goals should be to create a polis where the audience could pay attention to rats and the world they open in a respectful and responsible way. To this end, we decided to ask the audience for confidentiality at the beginning of the performance. Naturally, we did not want the information about the few rat sites that we presented to the audience to spread too widely. But it was equally important to engage people in this respectful reflection, to get them to think about the human–rat relationship from a rat's perspective and to put the audience on the rat's side, at least for the duration of the performance.

5.3. Interspecies collaboration

In this chapter, I will look a little more closely at the concept of collaboration in the context of interspecies art and performance in general and *Rat City* in particular. Lisa Jevbratt (2009a, 2009b) has outlined models of interspecies collaboration particularly in the context of art. She addresses an issue that often arises when talking about interspecies collaboration, namely the "problem of other minds". In other words, how can we know what others (especially other species) think, feel or how they experience the world? According to Jevbratt (2009a, 2–3), the question, as applied to interspecies collaboration, is how we can collaborate with a species whose knowledge, emotions and experiences are almost impossible for us to understand. Is it possible to collaborate if we have no common goals or motives?

I, too, encountered these questions when I presented my initial plan for *Rat City* to the panel in the research seminar of my degree programme. In their feedback on my presentation, one panellist gently criticised the collaborative approach I proposed. According to them, applying the concept of interspecies collaboration to art does not work because each species is tied to its own sensory abilities to perceive the world, in short, to how we "world" the world. As representatives of the human species, we do not have access to the worlds of other species and therefore could not enter into real collaboration with them. (Linturi 2023b)

I understood the panellist to be in line with Eben Kirksey (2014), who warned that the term “collaboration” often conceals a hidden abuse of power. My reading of their argument is that due to the different ways species "world" — in other words, different "Umwelts[39]" —, the human-centeredness of the goal — to make a work of art or performance —, and the imbalance of power that inevitably follows, interspecies collaboration would be impossible, at least in the context of art. It is therefore more honest, as it were, to admit the facts and not to call working with other species a collaboration, even if it is done with respect for animals and their welfare.

This logic suggests that collaboration is defined as an activity in which power is shared equally, in which the partners share both similar Umwelts, motivations and agendas for collaboration, and perhaps even a language to conceptualise it. However, humans also enter into collaborative projects with very different starting points, motivations, goals, stakes and contributions. The collaboration I did with the HURP researchers was very different from the collaboration I did with *Rat City* working group. The researchers and I may have shared somewhat similar motivations for working (interest in rats) but we each had different goals. Within the *Rat City* working group, we shared the same goal (to make a performance) but the motivations for participating varied. There was also an uneven distribution of power (and therefore responsibility) in both collaborative projects. However, it cannot be denied that in both cases we had a language to negotiate our motives, agendas and forms of collaboration. We could also count on understanding each other because of our similar Umwelts.

Lisa Jevbratt (2009a, 3–4), however, gives examples of collaboration between humans (which she calls “species collaboration") where even shared language or "worlds" do not matter. Jevbratt herself has worked in network art, where she has made use of collaborative information filtering systems, and through her work she has drawn attention to the collaborative forms enabled by new technologies, where what matters are not shared agendas, motivations, or intentions, but shared protocols. Such new collaborative models include open source softwares, where users contribute to the development of a program for their own reasons, without ever encountering other participants and without knowing their motives, goals or even the number of

39 The theory of Umwelt was proposed by Jakob von Uexküll, an Estonian natural scientist born in 1864. In his work *Umwelt*, it refers to the "concrete or lived" milieu of an animal. The idea behind the theory is relatively simple: animals with sensory organs different from ours do not perceive the same world. Thus, each animal lives in its own “bubble”, with little intersection between the bubbles. (e.g. Despret 2016, 161–162) The theory has undergone something of a renaissance in the course of animal studies, although it has been strongly criticised by writers such as Vinciane Despret for simplifications and errors of assumption.

collaborators. In fact, the whole internet[40] is the result of such non-exclusive, large-scale collaboration. Internet developers do not hold regular meetings to discuss common goals and the measures that lead to them. This would not be possible because the "developers of the Internet" are all of us who use it. We do it by creating and responding to protocols and guidelines, and ultimately all these individual responses create the staggering complexity that is the Internet.

5.3.1. Ratty protocols: communication through objects and space

Jevbratt (2009a, 4) suggests such collaboration based on common protocols as one possible model for interspecies collaboration. In practice, this means formalising the interaction between human and non-human animals into a protocol or system of rules, which then produces some kind of output. This kind of formalisation is similar to the scores much used in performance art, where a performance or artwork is formed by following as closely as possible a score written by the artist. For example, the previously mentioned performance artist Tehching Hsieh[41] had created a score for his durational performances, which he then followed throughout the performance (*Tehching Hsieh* 2023). Jevbratt also points to the holistic worldviews of many indigenous peoples as models for such formal protocols. In these cultures, things, organisms and phenomena are understood to be interconnected through causality. The flowering of a particular tree signifies the end of the spawning season for a particular species of fish, and thus that fish can begin to be fished. These causalities can be thought of as a protocol to be followed in order to live in harmony with the world around us, as part of a network, not as its master. (Jevbratt 2009a, 4)

In a simple protocol, for example, a human chooses to react to an animal's behaviour in a certain way every time. It is also possible to view the environment as a protocol, and call upon animals to respond to objects and spaces we place in the environment. Jevbratt (2009a, 5) refers to Alex Galloway's book *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*, where he describes speed pumps as “protocological artifacts” that contain their own system of rules; that is, a protocol. Following Jevbratt and Galloway's suggestion, we could call for example bin shelters I introduced to the audience in *Rat City* as such protocological artifacts, containing an invitation to collaboration.

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[40] According to Jevbratt, “The Internet is developed through the RFC (Request For Comments) system. It allows people to add and update the protocols that the Internet consists of” (Jevbratt 2009a, 39).

[41] See 4.3. *Invitation to dance: the role of duration in fieldwork*

Inspired by Jevbratt's ideas, Anderzén and I decided to try to develop our own protocols for collaborating with rats. We kept the idea in the back of our minds when we started mapping the Myllypuro area from the perspective of interspecies negotiation, and eventually both our protocols emerged quite organically from our observations during the mapping process. As I wrote earlier[42], Rat *City* can be seen as a kind of collection of diagrammatic writings and a politics of entanglement unfolding through rats. The collaborative protocols developed by me and Anderzén are intrinsically intertwined in this whole, even if they ultimately had no direct connection to the performance for a human audience. However, they can also be viewed as stand-alone performances or “diagrams" that helped us to visualise the possibilities of working with rats.

Protocol 1: Litter

A rat site near the metro station. On the second day, the bottles had disappeared from the pile. Photo by: Maija Linturi.

I had noticed the litter in the area between the metro station and Alakivi Park from the very first time I visited the site in April 2022. Myllypuro is one of the so-called 1960s "wooded suburbs[43]". It is characterised by natural woodlands and concrete apartment blocks that “blend” into the landscape. (Hurme 1991, Pakkala 15.12.2023). The area

[42] See 5.1.3. *Diagrammatic performance*

[43] Wooded suburb is a direct translation from a Finnish word “metsälähiö”, but it does not fully convey the meaning of the word. More of that in the chapter 6.2. *Liminal animals in liminal spaces*. In practice it refers to a built-up area in the vicinity of a greater city with lots of trees between the houses.

around the metro station has since become increasingly built up, and natural areas have been increasingly fragmented. Between the houses, however, there are still rocky outcrops and small strips of scrubby no-man's-land. These areas are mainly used for dog walking, shortcuts and youth drug experimentation, as evidenced by the littered bushes with cylinders of nitrous oxide and broken beer bottles. Because of this uselessness (for humans), the areas are characterised by neglect: no effort is made to pick up dog poop, rubbish is not carried to the bin but thrown straight on the ground. I wrote in my work diary on my first visit:

> I walked to the park from Myllypuro metro station, it took from 5 to 7 minutes. The route was nice, too, in a ratty sort of way. I had to take a path between blockhouses, and there was lots of trash on the ground. April is a cruel month, all the dogshit and trash is very visible. … Brushwood, birches, pines. Half melted candies on the ground, empty crisp and nut bags, baby food bags, and something unrecognisable. (Linturi 2023b)

As I mapped the interspecies messages, I started to think about the litter on the ground from the perspective of rats. How much food did the rats get out of the litter people threw on the ground? Would they be able to use the garbage in other ways? Or as asked in the "map" I presented earlier: can rats be actually useful as a small scale waste management system? Rats and garbage are often linked at the affective level[44] , both are associated with messiness, dirt, and even moral failure. I began to wonder if I could break this negative link between rats and garbage by positioning myself on the same side as the rats, "against" the garbage. The protocol I developed was inspired by this question.

The protocol or "score" I developed was as follows:

1. Find a place where rats are present.
2. Collect all the litter in the area in a pile near the rat burrows.
3. Leave the pile in place for one day
4. Collect the remaining litter and sort it appropriately.

With this protocol, I wanted to give the rats the opportunity to go through the litter and use it for whatever purpose they wanted. I also decided to photograph the piles before and after to see if they had been touched during the night. If the rats didn't touch the

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[44] See for example 4.2. *Dead rats in the laboratory: affects and empathy, 4.4. Rat War: spatial negotiation between humans and rats,* and 5.1. *Making rats matter*

piles, they would hardly mind me clearing the area of any rubbish they didn't need. By then we had found 3 definite rat colonies and one uncertain one. I didn't want to test the score at the rat site Anderzén had found, as I was afraid that my actions would draw the attention of the residents of the house next door to the rats. In other places, however, I took action.

As I was picking up the litter, I realised that it was unlikely to be of much use to the rats. The rubbish consisted mostly of plastic, glass and crumpled paper, with nothing organic left. Rats and other animals had most likely eaten everything edible long ago. Some of the litter was already half buried in the ground, perhaps having been dumped there years ago. As I suspected, the piles were pretty much unchanged the next day. The top debris had moved a little, but that could just as easily have been the wind as the animals. Around a rat hole near the metro station, I had found a few returnable bottles, which I placed in a pile with other waste. They had disappeared the next day, though hardly with the rats. It felt good, however, that my protocol was of some use to someone.

So instead of interspecies collaboration, the protocol created was perhaps more of a "species collaboration" (Jevbratt 2009a, 4). I didn't get to test my protocol more than a few times, because after collecting the litter once, the rat sites remained tidy for the rest of the project. Apparently, the cleanliness of the place served as a mental barrier to throwing more rubbish. I was quite happy with this outcome and considered it a kind of joint effort between the rats and me: if the rats had not been present in those particular places, I would not have collected the litter and therefore other people wouldn't have taken up this suggestion of tidiness, either.

Protocol 2: Roses and Paths

Photos by Camilla Anderzén

Anderzén's protocol was less utilitarian. As mentioned earlier, Anderzén was fascinated by the connection between beach roses and rats. Our reading of the rat writing had drawn our attention to the paths formed by rats that criss-crossed the places inhabited by them. Anderzén in particular became adept at finding them. It may be that the connection between roses and rats is entirely coincidental, but more than once she found a rat trail by exploring the vicinity of beach rose bushes. Inspired by this connection, Anderzén developed the following score:

1. When you see a beach rose bush, collect the petals that have fallen to the ground
2. When you see a path made by rats, place the petals on the path.

So, through the protocol, Anderzén reacted to the "sign" (path) made by the rats by reinforcing it with rose petals. She then stepped aside and offered the rats the opportunity to destroy or modify the set-up she had made. Anderzén also documented her project with photographs. In practice, the petals skinned so quickly that the next day it was difficult to tell whether they had been touched. However, it is likely that for at least one night the rats ran along the paths covered with rose petals.

Unlike me with my litter protocol, Anderzén was able to repeat her score in the same places many times. She kept the protocol with her throughout the project, collecting petals in her pockets at every opportunity and placing them on paths made by rats. For some of us working group members, beach rose was associated with childhood, as it was a popular ornamental plant in Finland before being declared an invasive species.

Their petals were made into “perfume” and the seeds of the ripe rose hips into “tickling powder”. Vera Boitcova, a Russian-born dramaturg, recalled the jam her grandmother made from rose hips. Little by little, the emotional memories evoked by the scent became entangled in our minds with rats and this very performance. Thus, the intertwining of rose petals and rats became a kind of characteristic scent for the whole project.

Anderzén's gesture felt important because it clearly renounced both the negative associations with rats and the demand of benefit (to humans). There was joy and playfulness, neither of which is usually associated with rats, or perhaps with interspecies art in general. Of course, when dealing with animals of other species, one must be sensitive to issues such as exploitation and power imbalances. However, I don't think this should mean that interspecies communication or the performance (or other artwork) itself should be serious or devoid of playfulness and humour. Jevbratt (2009a, 11) writes that the concept of interspecies collaboration is intended to be a somewhat humorous proposition, to be smiled at and even laughed at. At the same time, however, it raises fundamental questions.

Anderzén herself described the thoughts evoked by her protocol in the *Rat City* performance:

> Little by little, the gesture [of placing rose petals on rat paths] began to generate questions and thoughts. ... I felt that the roses were meaningful to the rats in a way that remains a mystery to me. But could I nonetheless think that something about the experience of the rose might be shared by me and some individual rat? Why couldn't it also have something to do with art? (Rat City 2023)

It was the "futility" of Anderzén's gesture that led us back to the question of what rejecting human-centredness in performance and art really means. Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-2) writes that interspecies performance has the capacity to produce "reciprocally transformative encounters" where non-human animals are invited into other modes of being, relationships and new ways of inhabiting the human world. At the same time, Cull Ó Maoilearca implies that it is precisely performance that has this capacity or power, as distinct from some other contexts. In the *Rat City* project, many of our rat activities could have been carried out in another context, say, ecology or sociology. Anderzén's gesture, however, invited rats to enter the realm of art and aesthetics. Her proposal recognised that rats could have aesthetic perception and artistic

agency, even if we would never know — because of the different Umwelts — what rats' aesthetics and artistic perception entail.

5.3.2. Interference patterns

In addition to protocols, Jevbratt (2009a, 7) mentions the "interference pattern" as another model of non-explicit collaboration. In this model, an environment is created in which two or more different Umwelts overlap. Jevbratt suggests thinking of Umwelts as grids that, when superimposed, create a new form, an interference pattern. Interference is not part of any of the original Umwelts but is something created by their co-existence. In such collaboration patterns, rather than following a ready-made protocol, the protocol is created together as interference arises. Jevbratt (2009a, 7–8) gives the example of a performance by one of her students, in which the student re-contextualised dog walks as art. The student's Umwelt contained knowledge of Richard Long's walking art and Situationist derivés, and she experienced the walks filtered through this knowledge, while the dog experienced them from his own dog Umwelt. However, by superimposing these two Umwelts, something new slowly began to emerge: walks became longer, the dog took the lead more often. Both began to experience their walks through a new, interpersonal protocol.

This kind of re-contextualisation seems very similar to what I did with the HURP research activities. By reframing the research situations — or by overlapping the "grids" of the performance and the scientific research — I gained the kind of understanding of the rats that would have been hidden if I had followed the situations from a purely scientific point of view. The coexistence of humans and other animals in the allotment gardens could also be thought of as an interference pattern. The Umwelt of many human-city dwellers includes a notion of ownership and the boundary between humans and other animals, and they filter their perceptions through these understandings. The Umwelt of rats and other non-human animals includes their own sensory ways of perceiving the world, their efforts to eat their stomachs full or avoid danger, their ways of socialising with their fellow species, and so on. Superimposing these different Umwelts on each other creates an interference pattern and a new set of protocols in which both parties change and adapt their behaviour.

The single clearest interference pattern in *Rat City* was a scene on my guided tour. I presented the audience with a rat colony residence I had found and invited them to explore the site more closely if they wished. I introduced the site as follows:

> As you can see, the people [who built this bin shelter] have put much sturdier net in the windows than in the previous hut, so no access for birds. They have also built a concrete footing, a clear message of rejection for rats. But then, under the door, there is a 10-centimetre gap. Not even a rubber strip to send a message to rats.
>
> At first it felt a bit strange. The people who built the shed have really gone to great lengths to prevent animals from entering from any other side, so why leave an open passage for rats to enter through the door? But then I thought that this hut is like any other semi-public urban space, like the Myllypuro mall. You can go there, do your shopping, borrow books from the library or have a cup of coffee, as long as you respect the unwritten rules. You use routes and entrances that are designed for the purpose and don't, for example, enter the shops through windows or walls. You don't break or otherwise vandalise places. You don't sleep on the benches. Here, it seems, the rats have respected the rules. If they didn't, there would probably be rat traps all over the place.
>
> It is not enough to have food; one also needs a place to live. And the whole idea of "lähiö" is that these two are not far apart. If we look at this green plot, it is quite typical for Myllypuro. It makes the area look green and natural. But at the same time, it's quite impractical from a human perspective. It is too small for kids to play and too random for a picnic. So potentially it could be a place where some animals much smaller than humans could build their nests undisturbed.
>
> Now we can use a little bit of time to explore this area. You need to know, though, that it is a home for a small colony of rats. They are probably in their burrows, perhaps observing us as we speak. So be mindful. Check where you are stepping and don't stomp the ground too much. Don't make a lot of noise. (Rat City 2023).

At this point, three different grids overlapped: Umwelt of each individual spectator, Umwelt provided by me as a guide, and Umwelt of rats living in the site. The spectators' Umwelts were coloured on the one hand by their habitual ways of observing the environment and their prejudices and feelings about rats, and on the other by the understanding that they were participating in a performance. Performance involves a kind of unspoken agreement to play together; by coming to the performance, the spectators accept and often even hope to be affected. This preconception makes those experiencing the performance more receptive to the ways in which the performance views the world than if the context had been, say, an open house viewing next door to the rat site.

The Umwelt I shared with the audience included my understanding of the human–rat negotiation, the respect and responsibility I had for the rat colony I had spotted, and the parallels I had developed between the idea of a "lähiö[45]" and a rat place. The rats' Umwelt included sensory observations of us as well as their previous experiences of humans in general, and humans moving near their own nests in particular. These different grids formed an interference pattern in which the audience not only perceived the environment in a new way (for example, by paying attention to the paths and holes made by the rats), but also changed their behaviour (they walked carefully, avoided loud speech, etc.). This careful and respectful behaviour towards rats can be seen as a new protocol produced by the interference pattern.

I would argue that this protocol was probably meaningful for rats as well. I had found the rat site about a month and a half before the performances and had been visiting it several times a week since then and had also brought members of the working group and rat researchers there. I had mapped the movements of the rats on tracking plates, proposed a common *Litter Protocol*, and generally spent time there at different times of the day. I had left my own scent trail, which the rats had probably learned to recognise. Yet I didn't see a single rat in the place until two days before the premiere.

The sighting was quick, as always with rats: a small grey rat ran from one hole to another, less than two metres. The rat decided to run after I had already been there for a while, so I didn't surprise them in the middle of the action. The run was probably not entirely necessary, either, as the rat was not heading from the nest to the feeding area or vice versa. Such behaviour could, of course, be considered carelessness or an accident on the part of the individual rat. In the very last performance, however, the same thing happened again, as a member of the audience saw a rat slip into their burrow. The rat in question therefore felt it safe to move outside the nest, even though a pack of more than a dozen people were standing about 10 metres away from them. S/he only moved into the nest when we were almost within touching distance. So at least this individual rat had adopted a common protocol with us, whereby certain human behaviour does not mean immediate danger.

5.3.3. Dangers of Collaboration

If the behaviour of the above-mentioned rats (or one rat, if s/he was the same individual) was indeed the result of interspecies collaboration, this collaboration can

[45] Lähiö doesn't have a direct translation, closest being a suburb or a neighbourhood. More about this in chapter 6.3. *Liminal animals in liminal spaces*

also be seen as slightly problematic for the rats. Art historian Jessica Ullrich (2019, 76) points out the ambivalent meaning of the word “collaboration”, which Jevbratt ignores in her theorising of interspecies collaboration. In wartime, the word refers to working together with the enemy. In this sense, interspecies collaboration would imply a fundamental enmity between humans and other species, with the animal collaborator acting as a kind of “traitor”, perhaps to save their own skin. When working with rats, this connotation is not far-fetched. Indeed, many people see rats as enemies to be destroyed, and a single rat sighting can lead to a systematic war against rats. In this sense, the rats who appeared to me and later to one of the spectators can be seen as collaborators who put their entire community at risk. The responsibility for this ultimately lies with me, as my actions helped to create an interference pattern where the rat did not perceive the presence of humans as dangerous.

But it is a different kind of dangerous to accept the idea of inevitable enmity between humans and other animals. By thinking that animals belong in pristine nature and humans in cities, and that for the sake of animals the two should have as little contact as possible, the kind of "reciprocally transformative encounters" that Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019) wrote about cannot take place. Human exceptionalism is not really undermined when humans are seen as so powerful and evil that any contact and communication with other animals ends up destroying them.

There are other reasons that make such a view problematic. In a world where there is simply no pristine nature left, it is essential to learn to live with other species. Humans cannot afford to think that non-human animals would be better off without our presence, even if that were true. It is also an unhistorical view. In the interview for *Rat Cit*y, Karolina Lukasik suggested that cities should be understood as multi-species places. They do not belong to people alone, nor have they ever belonged. (Karolina Lukasik Interview 2023) Acknowledging this fact fundamentally changes the way cities are perceived: they are not human places where non-human animals are either strangers or intruders. A multi-species city is home to many species of animals and other organisms — including humans — and therefore also allows for multiple neighbourly relationships, complex spatial negotiation and collaborative sharing of space. Lessons from such collaborative neighbourliness can be drawn for example from the Ruskeasuo allotment garden[46], where unified communication means that coexistence between rats and humans is, if not completely frictionless, then still quite smooth.

[46] See 4.4.7. *Rat war from rat perspective*

Finally, the emphasis on the integrity of animals suggests that individuals of other species are not interested in us at all. Documentary film maker Juha Suonpää, a member of the HURP team, told me the following anecdote. For two years he has been filming rats in the same place with field cameras, so he knows almost everything about their lives. Yet he hardly ever sees the rats in person, although he visits the site every couple of weeks. Once, however, he was able to borrow infrared binoculars, which allow him to see living (i.e. heat-emitting) creatures in the dark. The next time he visited the rat site, he pointed the binoculars towards the quarry where he knew the rats lived. He found that from the shelter of the stone pile, a whole crowd of curious onlookers were watching him. (Linturi 2023b)

Jevbratt (2009a) writes that inviting another creature to collaborate means accepting that the other is indeed *someone* — a person with feelings, needs and agency. Recognising this was one of my motives for wanting to show my "own" rat site to the audience, rather than just tell them about it. As I discovered when I found the first rat tracks in my backyard, it is one thing to hear or read about non-human animals, and quite another to physically experience their presence, even if there is no direct physical or even visual contact. Suonpää's story also made me think of John Berger's (1980) claim that when we banished animals from our immediate sphere of life, we ceased live under their gaze, ceased to respond to them and be responsible for them. Rats, however, still live among us, closer than we often realise. And as Suonpää's story shows, we live under their gaze in a tangible way. In the *Rat City* performance, I decided to believe that we can learn to respond to these gazes with responsibility and curiosity.

6. SITE

Alakivi park in April 2023. Photo by Maija Linturi.

The *Rat City* performance was divided into two parts: the first part was a guided rat tour in the area between Myllypuro metro station and Alakivi park, and the second part took place in the park, during which the audience could move around the area at their own pace. In this chapter I will focus primarily on the role of Alakivi Park in *Rat City* and the process that led to it, as the location is not the most obvious choice for a rat–human performance. Due to its topography (low-lying, with little shelter from shrubs and trees) and its distance from human habitation, the park did not provide a clear habitat for rats, nor did we observe any rats there.

One of the premises of the *Rat City* performance was to let the rats determine where the performance would take place. I shared this starting point when I presented my thesis on 2md of March in 2023 at a joint event of the Helsinki Urban Rat Project and the Global Change and Conservation research group.

> I am interested in the idea of exploring and experiencing the city from a rat perspective and treating the rats as guides to that “city tour”. How does it feel to be a

> rat in the city? At the same time, I am curious whether treating rats as experts and guides could change our perspective and understanding of the urban space and who it belongs to. (Linturi 2023c)

So already at this stage, I considered the performance space to be almost as important an element as the rats themselves. Or rather, rats could not be separated from the place where they "perform". As already mentioned[47], rats are context-bound animals, and the way people relate to them depends largely on where the encounter takes place. Therefore, the site would also largely determine what kind of expectations and prejudices the audience might have about the performance and the rats, and what kind of encounters the performance would enable.

At the time of my presentation, I still had in mind that rats could act as guides in a concrete sense. Perhaps the performance would take the form of a guided city tour or an audio walk through the places inhabited by rats. However, in the spring of 2023, I began to hesitate with this plan. The more I learned about rats and the relationship between rats and humans, the more it became clear how persecuted animals rats are. I also learned the lesson from my own housing association, where a rat sighting by one resident prompted the association to order pest control. I began to fear the implications of my original plan for rats: if we took the audience to places where rats were likely to be abundant, would word start to spread? Would someone call pest control?

There was another reason for my hesitation, and it had to do with what I wished the interspecies — i.e. rat-human — performance to *do*. During the *Rat City* process, rats started to matter to us in the working group, and we created a relationship with them. I began to wonder if *Rat City* could provide a space where rats could start mattering also to the audience, and where new relationships could be formed. I began to understand the importance of place for this aim during my first rat tracking expeditions. One of the goals of these first trips, both alone and together with *Rat City* workgroup member Sanna Nissinen, was to understand what a "ratty" place is like. By ratty, I meant some kind of "vibe" or atmosphere that would connect in our minds (or perhaps in some general sense) with rats. We found such a "ratty vibe" in places like Merihaka parking hall and Dallapé park in Kallio district. In both, the presence of rats was made known primarily through massive pest control. I wrote the following about the Dallapé park in my work diary:

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47 See 4.2. *Dead rats in the laboratory: affects and empathy* and 4.4. *Rat War: spatial negotiation between humans and rats*

> It was another kind of ratty place. It is a trashy and gloomy park, and I soon noticed a rat trap under the bushes. There weren't just one but four traps, a few metres apart from each other. At the end of the row of traps was a needle disposal point and a public toilet. I could see at least one used needle on the ground.
>
> I recall a study from last spring's stakeholder meeting that said that people who see rats daily are also more likely to suffer from depression and other mental health problems. I can understand that if someone hung out in this park every day and perhaps saw rats, too, they might suffer from depression. But the rats wouldn't be the problem, it's the general atmosphere of the place. Maybe that is the atmosphere that people associate with rats. (Linturi 2023b).

The park was undeniably "ratty", but in a way that seemed to reinforce a negative atmosphere and negative affects (rats, poison traps, death, garbage, messiness, drugs, disease, addiction). During the performance process, we experienced for ourselves how "tuning into rats' frequency" changed our perception of the environment, and how previously uninteresting places such as waste shelters became fascinating spaces of negotiation between rats and humans. However, I suspected that in such a ratty place as Dallapé Park, the atmosphere would be too strong for such a change, at least in the time frame allowed by the *Rat City* performance. Rats have been found in every post code area in Helsinki (Aivelo 2023). Thus, we didn't have choose a performance site that would possibly reinforce people's stereotypical perceptions of rats. Instead, we could try to find a site where it would be possible to redefine what a "ratty" place is or can be.

6.1. Historical rat connection

In the end, the idea for the performance site came by a slightly different route than the one directly guided by (live) rats. At the HURP spring workshop in 2023, I learned how still in the 1990s, open landfills provided habitat for huge populations of rats. Rats, in turn, attracted eagle owls, goshawks and foxes. Now that recycling has improved and legislation has changed, such open landfills are no longer found in Finland. But at the time, open landfills created ecological entities in their own right, albeit rather toxic ones.

I was intrigued by the idea of a "rat's paradise" among human waste and began to consider the choice of performance site through a historical rather than a contemporary rat connection. This idea reminded me of Donna Haraway's (Haraway 2008, 16, 19, 32, 38) concept of "becoming with", where she stresses the historical situatedness of

companion species[48] and the interspecies relationships. Becoming with other species requires "looking back" at historical entanglements and contagions, even (and perhaps especially) when these shared histories are awkward, painful and muddy. According to Haraway, such “looking back” and “becoming-with-companions” enables us to enter into a real, respectful[49] interspecies relationship. The histories of rats and humans are intertwined in a way that can indeed be described as muddy. As the previous chapters have shown, the shared histories of rats and humans include such "knots” as zoonotic diseases (especially the Black Death), social problems, inequality and even colonisation. This shared history continues to influence human attitudes and feelings towards rats[50]. After the discussion on rats and landfills, I began to feel that the figure of the landfill could encapsulate some of these complex historical entanglements.

The place we finally chose as the performance site is located in Myllypuro, on top of the former Vartiokylä landfill. The history of the site is somewhat dramatic. Vartiokylä landfill was in operation from 1954 to 1962 (Suolahti 2022), and during that time, it served not only as a dumping ground for municipal and hazardous waste, but also as a home for rats, a playground for children, a shelter for the homeless, and a treasure trove for children and adults alike (Backman 2013). One rather hilarious contemporary account tells how, in addition to the rats, local kids and "bums" were also involved in the ecology of the landfill:

> The fierce-looking bums of the nearby forests were harmless, but still a little feared. With some, a common interest was found. Their cardboard huts were swarming with rats, and we got to shoot them with air rifles. It was a fun hunt for us, and the bums were pleased that the rat population that had been persecuting them had dwindled. (Backman 2013, own translation)

Even in the early days of the Vartiokylä landfill, there were already signs of toxins leaking into the environment and waterways. The actual ghost of the landfill, however, began to haunt the area at the turn of the 21st century. At that time, a residential area had been built on the site, which now had to be demolished because of the toxicity of the soil. The old waste and toxic soil were dug up, encapsulated in plastic and concrete and covered with soil imported from all over Helsinki. After a contentious period,

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[48] According to Haraway (2008, 16), companion species is not so much a category as a pointer to an ongoing becoming with. It refers not only to domesticated companion animals such as dogs or cows, but to all the creatures with which we humans have historically been formed. The rat can therefore be said to be, to a very large extent, a human companion species.

[49] More on the relationship between gaze and respect in the chapter 5.2.2. *The Ethics of attention.*

[50] See the chapter 4.4. *Rat War: spatial negotiation between humans and rats*

Alakivi park was opened on the site in 2017. The park is dominated by a landfill hill[51], a cone-shaped mound built on top of a waste capsule. (Reijonen 2022; Joukola 2014)

In my mind, this rich and complex history made the place fertile ground for becoming-with-rats and thinking-with-rats in a new way. Choosing a site based on historical context also solved both the ethical dilemma that choosing a site based on the presence of rats could lead to, and the problem of a site being "too ratty". However, the historical narrative is only one part of the deep map[52] of a site, and the decision on the site was only the beginning of the performance. In the process that followed the decision, we as a working group sought to understand the present of the site: what its atmosphere is like at different times of the year and day, who inhabits and uses the site, and how the site performs.

6.2. Liminal animals in liminal spaces

I visited Alakivi park for the first time on 8th of April in 2023. I wrote my first impression of the place after climbing up the hill:

> I'm sitting on top of waste, on an incredibly unnatural hill. On top of the corpses of rats. From here one can see for miles; because no attempt has been made to landscape the hill except with grass, trees do not obscure the view. I believe that in the days of the landfill there was more life here: rats, seagulls, eagle-owls. A whole ecosystem that lived off the waste. Now all I see is sand, last year's litter, children playing on colourful plastic blocks in a strange playground, joggers, and dogs and their humans. (Linturi 2023b)

The dramatic tone of the entry suggests that I was strongly influenced by the atmosphere of the place. My experience was, of course, coloured by an awareness of its history, but that was not the only influencing factor. The landfill hill itself was striking in its geometrical shape, and in April it looked barren without plantings, trees or shrubs. The park surrounding the hill, on the other hand, has an organic, undulating design, which only seemed to accentuate the artificiality of the hill. The park is located between different landscapes, with apartment buildings on one side, a rocky natural landscape on the other, and sports fields on the third. From the hill, these landscapes can be seen at a glance. The atmosphere of the park was created by this juxtaposition of different forms

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51 Landfill hills are either built on top of encapsulated municipal waste (e.g. Tali Peak and Vuosaari Peak), or they are built entirely from construction waste (e.g. Paloheinä and Malminkartano Peaks) (Suolahti, Ida 2022).

52 See 4.4.1. *Site-specificity and Deep Mapping*

and landscapes, and the park's location between them. It was this in-betweenness that began to fascinate me. The combination of the history of the place and its current "liminality" made it seem an appropriate place to think about and think-with such liminal animals as rats.

The term "liminal animal[53]" refers to any wild or domesticated animal species that live on human food sources and share their living space with humans (Howell 2019, 395). According to Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011, 210–211), animals in the popular imagination are either domesticated animals that belong to the human domain or wild animals that live in the “wilderness”. However, this domesticated/wild dichotomy leaves out a large number of animals that are wild but still live near humans, even in urban centres. Liminality means that these animals are deprived of the admiration, respect and/or fear of the wild on the one hand, and the affection for domestic animals on the other. From a human perspective, liminal animals are in the "wrong place", i.e. they have encroached on human territory.

Geographer Philip Howell (2019), however, has criticised Donaldson & Kymlicka’s attempts to define liminal animals through (ultimately human-centric) place-making. Howell points out that the problems with liminal animals mentioned by Donaldson and Kymlicka are finally *our* problems. The fact that certain animals do not fit into artificial categories created by humans has nothing to do with said animals and their lives except through (human) action arising from these concepts. In his article *The Trouble with Liminanimals*, he brings together the various connotations of liminality to conceptualise a "borderland" between human and non-human animals, that cannot be reduced to a concrete place.

Here Howell (2019, 399–402) draws on the concept of “liminal space” familiar from anthropology. In anthropology, liminal space often refers to the temporal moment of rites of passage, when a person has already moved on from the previous stage of life but has not yet entered the next. In anthropological terms, liminal space is a "borderland" where fixed roles are loosened and established identities are questioned. From the borderland, however, a person returns to a state where roles are once again stable (baptism brings the child into the Christian community, the rite of passage brings the child into the adult role). Similarly, the borderland between animals and humans should, according to Howell, be understood as a space in which not only liminal animals but also the very notions of animality and humanity are produced. Thus liminal space is an

53 Liminal animal is often used interchangeably with the term "commensal animal", see the chapter 5.2.1. *Myllypuro as a space for interspecies negotiation*

opportunity to rethink and redefine established roles and boundaries, but equally these roles and distinctions can be reinforced and consolidated.

The idea of a liminal space or borderland gave me new tools to think about the relationship between the performance site and rats, as well as helped to tie together histories of humans, rats, and urbanisation. The relevance of this concept to the *Rat City* performance was reinforced by my exploration of the history of Finnish suburbs, i.e. "lähiöt". Myllypuro is one of the many "wooded suburbs" built in Helsinki in the 1960s. Tiina-Riikka Lappi (2007) has written about suburbs as spatial, cultural and experiential borderlands. They are often isolated from the city in the middle of the forest, forming a border zone between the countryside and the city. Despite the massive construction, nature is strongly present. According to Lappi (op. cit. 188), the suburb breaks “the reality organised around cultural binaries”. The same can be said of rats and other liminal animals.

The idea of a liminal space eventually extended to a kind of meta-concept for the whole performance. Together with the working group, we made a conscious effort to strengthen the “liminal atmosphere”. This included, for example, the numerous transitions in the performance: from the metro station to the park, from the bottom of the hill to the top of the hill, from human speech to the sounds of rats and the environment, from sunset to darkness. With such movements from place to place or moment to moment, we wanted to make the liminal space bodily and affectively experienced.

6.3. Performance of the site

Mai (front) and Camilla Anderzén observe how the site performs in early August. Photo by Maija Linturi.

Choosing the site for a reason other than its immediate rat connection brought a new element — indeed a new performer — to the performance. As I wrote earlier, Alakivi park did not seem to be a suitable habitat for rats, and thus we had to explore the site on its own terms. We loosely used the idea of deep mapping[54] as a basis for our exploration of the site. The goal of deep mapping, developed by Brett Bloom and Nuno Sacramento, is to understand the site "in such a manner as to hold multiple layers of understanding of the present moment in a non-reductive and robust manner" (*Deep Map* 27.1.2024). We were aiming for the same thing: the concept of liminal space and knowledge of the history of the place added their own layers of understanding, but they were not yet enough.

As practical tools for exploring the site, we used writing, drawing concrete maps from different starting points and perspectives, score work, and various exercises to direct attention and sharpen our perception. It was also important just to spend as much time

[54] See 4.4.1 *Site-specifity and Deep Mapping*

as possible on the site at different times of the year and at different times of the day, to get the sense of the site and its varying atmospheres. Tuija Kokkonen (2017, 94) writes in her doctoral thesis about the question of perception in her *Memos of Time* performances. What does the spectator perceive when watching a performance that takes place outside? Kokkonen connects the question of perception to the question of agency: what kind of action, agents and performers in the performance do we perceive, and what do we exclude — especially in the case when the performance takes place outside?

Perceiving non-human agency was also at the heart of our exploration endeavours in Alakivi Park. Through observation, we tried to understand how the site already performs, who already performs on the site, and thus understand what kind of action or inaction it would require from us. The recurring questions we asked from each other were: What is in the place? What is missing? What does the place want/need? How does the place perform?

> 30.5.2023. Today the hill performs through absence and through its anomaly in the scenery. I was also thinking about its temporality: it lives in a different timespan than humans. The way the hill performs is slow. (Anderzén et al. 2023)

> 30.5.2023. Landscape wants:
> - To sigh
> - To fall
> - To reveal a secret
> - To open up
> - To remember/remind (Anderzén et al. 2023)

> 3.8.2023. The landscape was very different from what I had thought it would be after the summer. It was much more alive and diverse in terms of vegetation and animals than I assumed it to be. We were attacked by mosquitos, and I felt a blood thirst that was present. The landscape seemed to have passed a certain culmination point, it had slowly started to retreat. (Anderzén et al. 2023)

> 3.8.2023. The meadow lives its own cycle, it doesn't seem to need anything. (Anderzén et al. 2023)

6.4. The dramaturgy of the site

The *Rat City* performance began to take shape as our understanding of the site grew. In the end, the dramaturgy of the performance emerged quite organically from our observations on the site. Our main notion was that there were various “performances” going on all the time:

> 19.7.2023. A seagull flies over and maybe a tern. Sometimes a cricket also chirps somewhere in the background. … Two men run up and down the stairs, one must be the coach. A moped accelerates somewhere. The sound of the metro pierces the air at regular intervals. When I focus my gaze on the ground, I see little black ants everywhere. I can feel them climbing on my bare ankles. I notice small holes in the ground: do these ants live underground? (Linturi 2023b)

> 3.8.2023. I am sitting on the hillside. I find my gaze wandering between the sky, the “landscape”, and the tansies in front of me, depending who is performing: the birds in the sky, people walking or biking across the landscape, or butterflies and bumblebees on the flowers. The highlight of the day were two kestrels hunting and playing above the meadows. (Anderzén et al. 2023)

> 16.8.2023 At the sunset. The soundscape is soothing, grasshoppers and swallows being the loudest ones. There are a few dog walkers and people exercising on the stairs. One woman climbs the stairs very slowly, simultaneously making dance- or taichi-like movements. (Anderzén et al. 2023)

This observation made us realise that we need to give space for the performances already taking place in the park to be noticed, instead of filling the park with activities of our own creation. We therefore decided not to introduce too many new elements, but rather to reinforce and direct people's attention to what was already there. We eventually did this by means of sound design, among other things: Olli-Pekka Jauhiainen's sound design was based on the recordings made in the park during the spring, summer and early autumn. In addition, sound sources were placed in "ratty" places, such as litter bins, drains and stone pits, directing attention to places that might otherwise go unnoticed.

For the same reason we decided to allow the audience to move around the site freely and at their own pace without direction other than that provided by a map. As our own perceptive skills developed through various exercises and time spent on the site, we thought the audience might benefit from some guidance. For this reason, a guided tour

at the beginning of the performance was particularly important. In addition to providing rat information, the aim of the tour would therefore be to attune the audience's mind and senses to perceive non-human agencies. We hoped that after the tour, the spectators would be more prepared to sense the atmosphere of the site, to perceive the ways in which the place would perform, and to create their own associations between rats and the site.

The third dramaturgical element proposed by the site was the climb up the landfill hill that took place at the very end of the performance. The hill became a kind of magnet around which the performance revolved. For us, the hill appeared as a mystery: just when we thought we understood it, it revealed a new side of itself. This feeling was heightened by the knowledge of hazardous waste hidden inside the hill, and we found ourselves constantly interpreting the performances of the hill based on this knowledge. This sense of mystery is also what we wanted to end the performance with, and it gave rise to the idea of a collective climb up the hill led by a musician. While at the beginning we provided the audience with information, concepts and tools of perception, at the end we operated on another level of consciousness: the world of affects, associations and bodily sensations generated by music, collective movement and the silent meal.

6.5. Ratty entanglements

The longer we worked with rats on the one hand, and in the Alakivi Park on the other, the more these two originally somewhat separate "plot lines" started to make sense together. Rats and the place resonated with each other in ways that are not entirely obvious or easy to verbalise. I felt the place fulfilled a wish I had for it: it indeed felt like a space where rats and the rat-human relationships could be rethought. However, as a site-specific performance, it was not exhausted by the subject it was intended to address. Everything that happened on the site leaked into the performance and made it different each time. For example, at the premiere, fireworks were shot off somewhere just as the audience was climbing up the hill. In the second performance, at the same moment, a torrential downpour unexpectedly broke out. In the third performance, rabbits and mosquitoes were particularly active. In the last performance, a giant red full moon hung over the sports fields.

On the other hand, the discussions with the audience made it clear how people read everything that took place on the site through the subject matter. For example, during Saturday night's performance, an audience member told me how a group of drunk young men had come to ask them what was happening in the park. The spectator sensed

a slight aggression in the men's voices, although nothing ultimately happened. I apologised for the situation, but the viewer said it had been an eye-opening experience: This is how rats must feel when they are just trying to live their lives but are constantly interrupted and faced with various threats. Many others said they identified with the rats as they moved from one audio work to another in the park, forming random packs with other spectators. The "light design[55]" of the park also led many to ask if it was our handiwork. Many associated the vines projected on the sides of the hill with the rat paths they had seen moments earlier on the rat tour.

The choice of Alakivi Park as the performance site made me wonder many times whether *Rat City* was an interspecies performance at all. In one sense, the park formed an almost unrelated element in terms of human–rat performance. In the end, however, I concluded that through the site, our interspecies performance expanded to include not only rats and humans, but the whole ecology of the park. Thus, the rabbits, the dogs and their walkers, the grasshoppers that buzzed well into August, the seagulls, swallows, kestrels, meadow flowers, schoolchildren, gymnasts and many other critters that populated or visited the park during the *Rat City* performances or the process leading up to them became part of the performance.

55 The lighting in the park is a legacy of the landscape architecture competition for the design of the park. The competition was held in 2000 and was won by architect Mauri Korkka. In Korkka's design, the hill was to be landscaped with gazebos and climbing vines (Saloranta 2013), but lawsuits brought by former residents of the Alakiventie delayed the plan's implementation, and eventually the city's funds were exhausted. The park was finally opened in 2017, based on Korkka's plan "as appropriate" (*Myllypuro* 28.1.2024). In reality, all that remained was the conical shape of the hill and the colour-changing LED lights placed here and there in the park. The vines of the original plan had been replaced by leafy light patterns projected onto the sides of the hill.

7. RAT CITY

Rat City. Photo by Saara Autere.

Rat City was performed from 21 to 23 September 2023, a total of four times. The site-specific performances took place in Myllypuro, Helsinki. The Rat City working group included Camilla Anderzén, a master's student in theatre pedagogy, visual artist Sanna Nissinen, dramaturg Vera Boitcova, sound designer Olli-Pekka Jauhiainen, musician-sound designer Johanes Timothy and saxophonist Heli Hartikainen. We worked on the piece during a four-day workshop at the end of May, and more intensively from the beginning of August until the performances.

The performance started at Myllypuro metro station, where we asked the audience for confidentiality: because rats are such a persecuted animal, we hoped that people would not reveal any rat sightings made during the performance to anyone outside the group. We then divided the audience into two groups and headed towards the Alakiventie Park. The division was based on language: Camilla Anderzén guided one group in Finnish, and I guided the other group in English.

However, the tours differed in more than just the language. Anderzén and I had designed our own routes and the topics we would talk about, although certain key issues came up on both tours. My tour focused on suburbs in general and the Myllypuro suburb in particular as spaces for negotiation between humans and other animals, while

Anderzén's approach to the tour was more personal. During the tour, she opened up about her own process of working with rats and the questions that the combination of performance and interspecies collaboration raised for her. Both tours also showcased "rat writing": the tracks and nesting holes left by rats.

In the Alakivi Park, the audience were given hand programs with a map of the area. The map showed the audio works located in the park, as well as other "checkpoints". The audience were then given 50 minutes to wander freely around the park at their own pace. All but one of the audio works in the performance included interviews we had conducted with rat researchers from the Helsinki Urban Rat Project. In the interviews, the researchers talked about their research and discussed the possibilities of interspecies collaboration in their own work. The interviews looped for the duration of the performance, with each interview lasting about 15 minutes. With each round of interviews, there were more and more interference sounds, making it harder and harder to understand what the person was saying. By the end of the 50 minutes, the human voices had been replaced entirely by ambient, consisting of rat noises, field recordings made in the park over the summer, and sound experiments with various digital sound editing tools. The audio works were designed by sound designer Olli-Pekka Jauhiainen. The works were placed in various "ratty" places in the park: a litter bin, a bridge drum, a rock fissure and so on.

The timing of the performance was synchronised with sunset: the sun was setting when the audience arrived at the park. As the audience wandered around the park, the September darkness descended, revealing the park's distinctive lighting. The colourful plastic blocks in the park were illuminated with lights changing colour every few seconds, and the hillside was projected with light patterns resembling tree branches. We also added small lights next to the audio works and the tents we set up in the park.

There were three tents in total: the first housed an info desk where the spectators could pick up portable chairs, blankets and hot drinks. The second tent housed a sound work designed by Johanes Timothy, where field recordings, real-time live sound, saxophone sounds played by Heli Hartikainen and rat sounds were mixed into a meditative soundscape using an algorithm developed by Timothy. In the third tent, Camilla Anderzén and I took turns on duty, and visitors were welcome to chat with us about their own rat encounters, their rat feelings or other rat-related thoughts. The conversations took place in small groups outside the tent or one-on-one inside the tent.

During the performance, it was not possible to listen to and experience all the "checkpoints" of the performance, so the audience inevitably had to make choices about what they experienced. As a result, each audience member's experience of the performance was individual and different from the others. After 50 minutes had passed, Heli Hartikainen began her saxophone improvisation, and the audience slowly gathered behind her and wandered together to the top of the hill in the middle of the park. On the hill, myself, Anderzén and Nissinen handed out hot drinks and biscuits to everyone. With this communal "meal" the performance came to an end.

8. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined my artistic thesis *Rat City* and the process that led to it from the perspective of interspecies performance. I considered how the performance could be done with urban rats, or even in collaboration with them. This research question has raised new questions and insights about rat agency, communication between humans and rats, definitions of collaboration and even performance itself. Through the rats, I discovered the "politics of entanglements", in which many other things besides rats started to matter, such as the blackbird in the small park, the magpie in the bin shelter, bin shelters in general, kestrels and rabbits in Alakivi park, Alakivi park in general, allotment gardens, waste management in Helsinki, and the history of Finnish suburbs.

One of the most important findings of this thesis is precisely this "making things matter" in interspecies performance. Meaning-making occurs through both active work (learning to read rat writing, participating in research events) and passive being and passing time. It requires an understanding of the "other", but also an understanding of one's own agency in relation to the other. This multifaceted understanding requires multiple knowledges (scientific, intuitive, embodied), surrender to affect, various forms of empathy and reflection on one's own actions. In a word, one must enter into a relationship with the other.

So, was *Rat City* really a performance between rats and humans? At least in some respects. The rats performed through the signs they left for the human audience and even physically for one audience member. The signs were both material (the rat burrows, the hole in the bin shelter) and immaterial: the researchers' reflections, our reported observations, references to cultural rat material, people's own rat memories and associations activated by the performance. At least during the rat tour, humans also appeared to the rats by entering the same space with them, through the sounds of their footsteps and their scent trails. However, the main part of the performance was spent in the Alakivi Park, where the rats are not physically present, and thus the reciprocity of the performance can be disputed.

Rat City can also be looked at from the perspective of duration, which I took a cue in Santtu Pentikäinen's field work and also in Karolina Lukasik's research project “Living with the other”. The process leading up to the performance was not just a “rehearsal” for a performance aimed at a human audience. For us in the working group, it was a process where the rats became meaningful to us, where we learned to look at the rats

with respect, and where the rats eventually looked back (even if our eyes only met a couple of times). It was about discovering and building a contact zone between humans and rats so that eventually we changed, and perhaps the rats changed a bit, too. This process did not so much culminate in a performance of *Rat City* for a human audience, but these performances were part of this larger process or durational performance.

In some sense, this process is still ongoing. According to Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca (2019, E-22), the field of interspecies performance should not only be understood from the perspective of performing arts or social performance, but that it involves a continuum of different everyday activities and perceptual practices that require both repetition and unlearning in relation to encounters with non-humans. At least *I* still observe my environment from a "rat perspective" and am always delighted to find traces of rats. I try to maintain my perceptive skills through repetition: looking at bin shelters and litter bins has become a habit. Several audience members also came to tell us during or after the performance that their perspective on the urban space had changed. They believed that they would pay attention to new things in their environment in the future. This is not to suggest that *Rat City* as a great artistic experience changed the audience or their perception. Instead, I believe that rats have the power to bring about such change.

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