Another conscious other

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“The other then, is not so much (implicitly) inferior, but radically alien... the interpreter ends up interpreting the other from the point of view of the self, thus negating the very idea of objectivity.”\(^1\)

4. Our First Date
5. “I usually take a shot before a date but this time I forgot!”
Performance, 00:30:00, Script excerpt. Photograph from performance at Fylkingen, Stockholm, October 15, 2016 as part of Hej Hej PALS Performance Festival.
6. International Texting
13. “http://ileftmyjoy@home.com”
Performance, 00:30:00, Script excerpt. Photograph from performance at Vita Havet, Konstfack, November 4, 2016 as part of Masters Solo Presentations.
15. Travelling Mindsets
21. “Remember when you were funny in person but I couldn’t translate it onto the internet?”
Performance, 00:15:00, Script excerpt. Photograph from performance at Polymer Culture House, Tallinn, May 14, 2016 as part of Combobulate my Face, Group Show.
22. Portable Vibrations
26. “Underneath the 3 White Crosses,”
Text work, 29.7x42cm, 2016-17
27. On Another Radar
34. “IRL://URL-T_IRL- TBH\:TBQH”
Performance, 00:30:00, Script excerpt. Photograph from performance at the Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, Salvador, January 28, 2017 as part of Impasse, Finesse, Neverness, Group Show.
35. Progression/Impression
Growing up in a heteronormative society in the south east of Melbourne, Australia as a non-binary identifier sexually interested in men posed some internal issues. Issues concerning acceptance, conscious notions of othering and educating myself on what it meant to be grouped within the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) spectrum, as that was not to be taught in the public school environment. This is not going to be a coming out tale, as that information can be found all over YouTube. This is not going to be searching for answers as to why identity labelling is important, or what roles it pertains to, to identify as something other than heterosexual. This was background, that was archived, insight into the past, where I am coming from. I thought it would be important for you to know that like many effeminate teenage boys in high school I went through the same trials and tribulations you may have seen in your schoolyard. I deem it essential for you to know how I identify as it embeds itself within my personal practice, which in turn engulfs my experiences in day to day life. It is necessary, as I am about to discuss nations that are not related to my passport, the part of the world where I initially thought LGBT laws and legislations were confined within borders, as that’s how it appeared on paper. Where I previously speculated whether values cross over the invisible lines, in the Scandinavian and Baltic nations, separated by the Baltic Sea and the nation of Russia. I am Australian, an outsider, the other, and have observed and experienced times in cities in Scandinavia and the Baltics. All in an attempt to understand the subcultural variances of LGBTQIA life, and the acceptance of this community and its citizens in both their individual hometown cities and the broader mainstream of the culture.
Throughout the past 18 months I have adopted a construct for creating art in regards to what will be presented in this text.

Research and statistics about LGBT legislation and societal attitudes inform perceptions of citizens and values within specific cities. Perceptions of these attitudes inform my experiences within these cities. The experiences within these cities inform the creation of text I write. The text I write informs the art, whether it be text, video or performance, that I create.

This methodology has been applied before, during and after travelling to Stockholm, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Lappeenranta, Tallinn, Riga, Kaunas and Vilnius, during 2015 and 2016.
"I usually take a shot before a date but this time I forgot!"

Hey! It's your Gal Pal Cal.

I’d like to start of by sincerely apologising on behalf of my parents for naming me so, Australiana. I hope you can forgive me. I really don’t want you to be disinterested.

I’m an artist. So I don’t have an actual job that provides me with any stable financial income. Cash the cheque, coins from the pant machine, singles slotted into G strings. Art’s great, Life’s ok. Sorry, I’m a really fragile person. Someone shattered my vase the other day. But it’s fine; career choices are so out of fashion anyway.

I’m 23. So according to everyone from high school, that I still haven’t deleted on Facebook, I should have had a baby by now. Alone, arrogant as an after dinner mint, melted into the motel one pillow.

Licking linen in the night.

Sometimes, I worry about mid life crisis moments. And then, I realise, that, I’m too young.

I’m an Aries, OMG I know right, I’m such a total fucking Aries! I have not a single fucking clue what that means. And now, NASA decided to switch up the game and add a zodiac that already existed but they couldn’t previously locate, and now I’m a Pisces. Astrology, astronomy. Oh my.

I get drunk alone at 11am on weekdays, ok. I knew I should have changed my online dating profile before I came here.

I can promise you though I am kind of the complete package deal. I’m the TP. I am THE T P. Alright, like, I may not be financially stable, and I may not be mentally stable. Um.
International Texting

As an artist dealing with the personal and political around LGBT identification and culture, I came to Stockholm with the intention to learn more within the EU (European Union), around why the geographically close Scandinavian and Baltic nations differ in regards to a gender and sexuality subculture I identify with. On the Internet it seemed that Scandinavian and Baltic values didn’t blend into each other and that their legislative practices around LGBT equality on a national scale were on different ends of the spectrum. Due to legislation variances, political parties in charge, whether left or right, were to be taken into consideration when formulating a personal viewpoint from my liberal perspective, when I was to arrive in Stockholm and investigate the cities within these varied nations.

I was also intrigued as to how this attained information may affect my experience and behaviour within a foreign context; influenced by prior legislative analysis. Also, how would my altered perceptions affect how I identify or portray myself within these contexts? A foreigner exploring notions of self-identification on an international scale, may be too broad an investigation, but how do I conduct myself without feigning my identity, has proven to be indeed more beneficial and interesting. This experiential notion has altered my bias prejudices against laws and statistics against homosexuality, as I interact with the spaces and cities, as a foreigner.

I wanted to visit LGBT unions, the local communities (gay bars, safe houses, etc.) and utilize social networking (hook up and dating mobile applications) to work out their social functions within the cities of these nations. Social apps have a tendency to create ‘keyboard courage,’ and can contribute to meeting in real life, but can also alienate and segregate within
the gay community. For example, on Grindr, terminology such as ‘no fats, no femmes, no Asians,’ has been boiled down to sexual preferentialism, however it actually manifests into a non-inclusive environment within gay culture. In an age where accessibility of sex and dating can be found in the convenience of a mobile phone application, it can be seen as a reductive superficial issue of how people search for love and intimacy. People are choosing sexual partners, based solely on appearance.

“I feel like straight art tries to take the position of, we’re the neutral or the standard thing, and everything else is like this other.” – Kenturah Davis

This notion of the other is externally produced, but is also something that artists seem to identify with, including myself. Coming from a society embedded in heteronormativity, the idea of the other was introduced at an early age. In Australia, surveys have shown that 11% of citizens fall under the LGBTQI spectrum. This statistic is quite large when compared to other countries around the world, yet it still falls into a category, a generalized minority in the overall nation. Despite Australia’s ‘bogan’ culture entrenched in traditional gender formats outside of the capital cities, even depicted in our commercials, and as a nation that doesn’t have marriage

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4 A bogan is usually someone who can be defined as heteronormative, lower class and unsophisticated, it also is commonly used around pub and drinking culture, in regards to attire, sport culture and slang.

5 The gendering and racist Australian sports commentator and former Australian Football League player Sam Kekovich being ‘true blue,’ online here for an advertisement supporting lamb consumption on Australia Day, the day that White Europeans first fleet docked in
equality, the majority of the nation are pro-equality and for same sex marriage. Only one electorate (county) in the entire country, Maranoa in rural Queensland, has a citizen majority, which doesn’t support the motion of same sex marriage, out of all 150 electorates. Identifying one’s self as an ‘other,’ is really essentially about self-awareness. Through my practice I utilize art as an informative tool, to encourage and create awareness for the majority to engage with, to create dialogue. People inherently categorize art, and to subset can be reductive toward a works content and intent in its entirety, however it makes it easier for a broader audience to understand; queer art, racial art, indigenous art etc. You can point out queer art, for being overt, for being in your face, (like works by The Divine David, Catherine Opie, Vaginal Davis and Jonny Woo just to name a few) but the queer artist is also potentially perceived as being overt, out there, because that’s what society does, it stereotypes. It others. To break down, to simplify in a heteronormative society, is a conventional way of understanding.

In my practice, I intend to express something internal and personal, and try to reflect upon my understanding of my queer identity, through states of mind, expression, choreography and makeup. In “I usually take a shot before a date but this time I forgot!” I engage with notions of online dating, being a queer Australian, moving to Stockholm and experiencing change, as well as recollecting a second date with a Grindr user in Stockholm. The flamboyant pink, purple and orange glittery makeup, the

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exaggerated eye, the costuming of black short shorts with a fluorescent pink knee high sock, all point to camp aesthetics. Mixed with the textual performance style of emotionally dark, honest poetry and stand up comedy, the balance of intensity is in constant flux. The content, full of sexual innuendos and intimate, personal moments, creates tension in the disparate difference of living an openly carefree life and how LGBT citizens are represented, perceived and discussed in relation to politics and media. Usually when discussing sensitive topics, the audience doesn’t necessarily want to be confronted. A method I employ is adopting humour as a tool and a colourful, rapid paced, overwhelming sensory aesthetic, to draw people into the work, allowing time for the audience to let the subtext of the content sink in, and then realize what they have become involved with and in turn subjected to.

“Almost all of this comes from writing and then later I try to say well how can it be visually interesting… all the writing is associative and comes from my own experience.” Mike Kelley.  

Text is the starting reference point of everything created in my practice, ranging from travel diaries, messages on dating and hooks up apps, poetry written in various emotional and physical states and in my studio. The admixture of these texts organically formulate into the medium I choose to ensue, be that a text work, a script for a video or a monologue for a performance. Whether or not the text is to be read, verbalised or experienced live or via a screen depends a lot on the experience, and

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breadth of what I was allowed to do within the cities I visit in terms of acceptance, comfort and whether LGBT facilities were available.

My performance “http://ileftmyjoy@home.com,” originated through text journals I have kept in Sweden, and harks back to texts, drawings and traces of memory from occurrences in my life in Melbourne made in my studio in Stockholm. The amalgamation of these prior works and sketches merged into a monologue, a poetic stream of consciousness, referencing national identity, sexuality and notions of self-change and progression. Throughout the performance, it alters from the heteronormative upbringing in Australia, growing up through puberty in suburbia, and progresses into self awareness and education, understanding the politics and viewpoints of my nation, and the conflicting differences between current societal attitudes and the political party in power, the Liberals; which ironically is not the liberal left in Australia, and is perceived as the conservative party. In Australia there are two main running political parties, similar to the Democrats and Republicans in America. In Australia the opposition party is the comparatively progressive, to the Liberal’s at least, Labor Party.

“Surely, my taxes would never have paid for a $160 million dollar joke right? Why give me a vote if nothing is going to happen?” is a line in the performance that refers to the costly plebiscite the Liberal government proposed, to allow the public to vote for a change in legalisation for same sex marriage. All this despite the knowledge of the majority of the public was in favour to a change in law. Also, recent history has shown that past plebiscites have actually created more tension and depression in LGBT youth, as the lengthy and costly process can create an idea of difference, of hierarchy, of lesser than, of the other.
The same sex marriage plebiscite in Ireland actually created controversy, due to the simple, obvious fact that a debate has two sides. Anti-gay lobbies were allowed to spread and conduct anti-gay speeches through media and in public settings. Dr Grainne Healey, a former Co-Director of the Yes Equality campaigns, had described these speeches as brutal, ill informed and “deeply hurtful and upsetting for LGBT headed families – explaining to our children that they were ok and trying to hide the posters from them was awful for LGBT parenting families.” There were many campaigns from the organization Australian Marriage Equality in the lead up to blocking the plebiscite in Senate, with the intention of bringing it to a free vote in parliament, in regards to these issues.

Other political parties representatives, including the opposition party’s (Labor) leader, Bill Shorten, managed to block the Australian same sex marriage plebiscite in the Senate on Monday November the 7th, 2016, influenced by and citing reasons above.

The performance continues into my personal experiences coming to Sweden, re-enacting tales of experiences, conversations, statistics and legislation. I admit that “I could set up camp and recline here,” due to public comfort, progressive legislation and facilities tailored toward queer people in Stockholm. Yet I do recognise that hate crime is on the rise, demonstrating that all is as is not as good as everything you may read in the papers. However in relation to Australia, it is still a more comfortable

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situation in a public context to be queer: ‘What a time to be alive, right? Right here, in the now! Well, ok, so I admit that hate crime is on the rise… I still feel safer with the transition though. Top in the continent in that regard, I’m so cosy, cuddled into my comfy blankie, or is that a white straight jacket.’

“I just want to be part of your 6%! “

“May 1st has a double meaning for you all, just adjudicating from afar, but I think it’s really special. It would mean a lot to me.”

“2009, eight years behind you and counting.”

These are all references to Swedish LGBTQI facts. The 6% of the nation identifying under the LGBTQI spectrum, the fact that May 1st 2009 was the day that same sex marriage was legalised in Sweden and is also a public holiday (International Worker’s Day) so everyone has a chance to unwind and relax. The last line is a deconstructed comparative fact that as an Australian, where 11% of the population is LGBTQI, coming from a nation without marriage equality, we are still 8 years behind Sweden in achieving marriage equality.
You should learn to laugh at yourself. Not with yourself, @ URL self.

I just can’t believe this. I just can’t believe this! However, you don’t always get what you want. You can’t control everything. It’s kind of like when you have one too many beers, cross that fine line, black out for 16 hours and wake up in some random’s front garden, in another country. At least that’s what my teachers used to always tell me.

Heteronormativity as a hindrance, hold your head high, devoid of emotions. Climax conspiracies regarding religion. I leave my email signed in @ all times so no you can’t use my laptop. The Wi-Fi wondered away anyway. But you’ve been there, done that, stole the t-shirt. Everybody likes a bad boy. That was the only thing television taught me as a kid.

LOL, lot’s of love! Yet, you can’t yield the rewards of respect, tilted tapestries taken over by teenage vandals. Vilify my abnormalities. Arrogance. Testosterone.

Don’t pull my final tether. I can’t afford a new one with my casual unemployment. I can’t afford the exposure. I can’t afford to understand. It’s terrifying. Don’t push my buttons, my keyboard is busted, I’m not manufactured that way, the store built me wrong. I wasn’t even trusted with a mobile accessory until I got casual employment. Now I understand why, phallic photos. Eggplant emoji’s.

The media taught kids of my generation, it’s not ok to play outside. My parents ignored that. Forced recreational activity. I couldn’t partake in the adolescent act of frustrations. I didn’t see myself on the television anyway. I didn’t see a state of acceptance or understanding. I didn’t see what the problem was with attempting to find joy at the bottom of a little aluminium tin can. It’s always 5 o’clock somewhere. Blue monitor lights illuminate the room at 03:00. However, I left my joy @home.com
“When identity is presented as a category or a set of categories, I try to remember it is also a pocket. It is expandable, like the bottomless velvet bags used at magic shows. Folded over and doubled onto itself, this pocket of identity can also be used when performing a trick in public. From the perspective of an audience, the pocket looks like a pocket – it has an interior and an exterior. But from the perspective of the pocket itself, the pocket is everything: interior and exterior but also ulterior. Cinched together as it also falls slack, it is open to being turned out.” – Park McArthur\textsuperscript{11}

"Most of the paintings are using my own body sort of as a surrogate… I make these paintings for a younger version of me possibly." - Devan Shimoyama

Utilizing the body as a surrogate for a previous experience, using make up and clothing to convey a mindset, a mood or atmosphere, are strategies that can enhance or develop characterizations.

When designing make up and costuming, it stems from travel encounters and national identification (be it a nation, state or cities flag, the colour of the clothes worn by people I met and am referencing, a club that I went to etc. it is an exchange of experience replicated onto my body). This is executed in an over exaggerated format, a hyper real representation of a body, and subtly infers the encounters via colour and how much or little of my skin I cover up, fashion stylisation and hair styling.

The travel experiences, which were preluded by research, inform all the text I have written in the past 18 months. I deem this as both personal and internalised, as it is a personal experience and an internal evaluation of a situation. The varied durations of these foreign endeavours also are commented on through the text and reflection. For example, “24 kilometres before the red’s incorporated,” a text work, references a very specific day trip to Lappeenranta, whereas “Is helsinking beers w/ queers QT or what?!“ is a video with 7 characters, referencing Finland’s capital city Helsinki. I spent a lot more time in Helsinki and was able to engage in more experiences, gather more accounts and material and enjoy a more liberal

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LGBT experience, compared to the formerly mentioned smaller town near the Russian border, where attitudes appeared, at least in my opinion, more conservative in every day to day life. This could even be due to the apparent mixture of licence plates heading to and from the border and floating around town, with the EU logo and the RUS demonym code intermingling on the roads. The text work is also restrained in terms of aesthetics, in comparison to the glitter and high intensity editing in the video work.

Day trips are associated with enjoyment and relaxation, but disappointment rears its head around the corner; always, sitting shakily at the end of a bar checking into Grindr, only 5 'Hi's', one ending with cute, one ending with how's it going, all ending in no responses; phones and privacy aren't synonymous in this space. Fortress; broken walls, continuous crumbling, yet barriers still held up, sitting behind a hill by myself, avoidance prevailing. Available, but not up for fun. Fear. Bless. Best, superiority in a hierarchical system of self-judgment. Never pack your personal opinions, don't follow me in your car, slowly sidling, snipping whilst rolling up the window as I made my way away from the road. Buckets of brochures, English untouched, Russian emptied. Retouch. Remember, disengaging with an appropriation of a filtered perception, reflecting in the peripherals. Light shifting, uneven stones, reducing pace, heading round the winding katu, rushing past small business owners. Alone on a boat with the bees, sweat, sweat, sway, scenic viewer experience is consensus as the green cascades down the hill. Is there slow Wi-Fi on this boat? Drifting out into the lake, deepening from ducks, pollution of bodily water from outsider perspectives. Query, are we another species? Two good minds can't think alike, but good never meant healthy: equal. Walking down the natural pier, peering at licence plates for flags; flagged identification. It's all a choice to the generalised them. Change your passport if you could; that don't seem unified. Drop it in a boat, and send it off to the neighbours, judgement day is impending, pending... run into the nearest bar to drown your sorrows, finding a bill at the bottom of the glass, tickets sold one way only. Return back to rehypnotise reality, mode of wrapping up under utilitarianism. Yet I wasn't there, the linearity of the contour, brush my cheek, don't watch, don't touch, placed in your glass vixee. Museological vision of foreign values, shock value, do I exist in your mind? Doubtful, detrimental street trash, located under lost, not found. Absent on Google maps however, unrealistic monument of monolithic desires in progressive alternate paradigms. Reddit that in, you slanderman, pouring urine on my face is not a pharmaceutical cure. Wander, further into the water, boats passing following the fortresses lead as the trains follow along suit. Hand me an extra beer, liver living in linguistic disparity as a defence mechanism, kitch surroundings reminding me of other bars that wouldn't dare be mentioned here. Is it 20:43 yet, or will that time ever dare to be.

Half marathon, standing still, hitting the wall: hindered, prior to any race rounding that point.

Mixture of licence plates: the solidity of the invisible line seemingly blending bodily.

Method: lost that, at the platform, sensing domestication through eradication of expectation via cartographic contemplation.

Overload. I can't unlock my Grindr account. I'm sorry; I won't be able to get that on your desk first thing Monday morning.

Clouds conjoining in the sky, where does the blood begin to integrate?

Stare harder, intimate intimidation, passing flâneur.

Oppression through objectification.

The other, trapped target: nailed and snared within the iris.

Vein, scratching off nail varnish.

Clouds parting in the waters reflection.

No offers for a shot of vodka, seeking safety in the instability, self-reflective vulnerability, located amongst invisibility.

Twenty/20 vision, drop off: contacts assaulting pupils. Burned lines.

“24 kilometres before the red’s incorporated” Text Work, 2016-17
“I definitely want to have a line between myself… and the figures in the videos… when I am working on the video, looking at the screen, I would describe any of the characters as him, or it, or that, not me, I don’t even think about it as myself… but obviously it’s myself.” – Heath Franco.¹³

I think of the figures in my videos and performances as mindsets. They are not necessarily a representation of myself or even a reflection of one point of view, but of a scene, a group of people I met at a bar or nightclub, a representative at a LGBT union or the colleagues they reference, or even a bill or amendment. I find Franco to be an interesting artist in that regard, as this statement resonates with me. Text, as aforementioned, is the starting point of all my works. When I am creating these mindsets, to interact and intertwine with each other, to create dialogue, I think about them from my point of view, inserting my

experiences and beliefs of how I perceived them to be into the mindsets characterisations. Yet I never see them as me, just residue of a trip, of a meeting, of an interface.

In "Stereotyping: Meating Expectations (55.6761° N, 12.5683° E)," a video work made in 2015-16 around my trip and research into LGBT culture and life in Copenhagen, Denmark, there are different mindsets in the video. There are conversations between a group of queer kids that were like a family whom had all had sex with each other in the club’s bathroom I met them in. A 55-year-old Grindr User I met up and hung out with alongside his older male friends who had a great time sexualizing my youth at a gay bar. An interview I had with Vivi Jelstrup, a volunteer and spokesperson for Bio politics at LGBT Danmark. The legislative laws in Denmark themselves, and the mindset of online dating and hookup apps in Copenhagen that had many faces and persona’s, documented from my own experience. The make up and costuming reflected the positivity, personalities and viewpoints that all of these encounters and experiences offered me, with green screened footage depicting various parts of the city, including nature, the meat packing district (innuendo to be expected), domesticized contexts, bars and the local cruising park that had been sent to my Grindr account numerous times as a potential hookup location. Although I politely declined or ignored these location offers during my stay, I was intrigued enough to take a walk around at night to film the area and see how discrete it would actually be; which it was. I at least didn’t see any rustling movement in the bushes.

These experiences became residual interpretations, reanimated through the video work. Its visual intensity depicts the sheer amount of dialogue experienced within the condensed duration that was my week in Copenhagen.
“Let me ask you guys a question. Do you ever hate your body so much that you rip framed pictures off the wall and smash them onto the ground and then take the shattered glass and start stabbing the air? Me neither. Well not anymore because you know, who cares what you look like, it’s what’s on the inside that counts.” – Casey Jane Ellison.\(^\text{14}\)

Superficial judgments on perceptions of individuals are no longer about how we look on the outside, but how the outside reflects the inner. To look queer, to look masculine, to look feminine is something that I think about in my day-to-day life, with how I want to dress or how I feel on the day. Do I feel more masculine or feminine; do I feel more flannel or pink? It seems reductive to say that flannel is masculine and pink is feminine, but the perception of normativity has been projected onto us through media and society for so long, that it is engrained in not only other’s in society, but

\(^\text{14}\) Casey Jane Ellison, “It’s So Important To Seem Wonderful.” Video, 5:48 minutes, 2012
relayed into thoughts of how others are going to perceive one's self.

Over time I have attempted to make that irrelevant to me, as I am going to dress for myself and how I feel, but if someone stares long enough, you are going to notice, and think, is it because of how I look? How am I standing? How am I behaving? Are they othering me? Did I just other myself?

I think about this a lot when choosing costumes and make up for the mindsets I have in my videos, and whether their personalities and attributes are stereotypically leaning toward masculine or feminine. What is their identity, and how would they identify themselves. How can the words they express, the emotions they convey, be represented or even counter balanced via their costuming and makeup. Body language and one’s visual presentation is on par with the importance of the verbalised text.

Travelling to places, I often thought of what to bring to cities, to neutralise myself, because of how I thought locals, due to their statistical societal attitudes, which differed from country to country, would perceive me. However walking around the cities as a foreigner, I was still conscious that other type of othering would occur regardless. Inside gay bars and clubs the décor had similar aesthetics internationally anyway, so maybe I should have allowed myself to feel more comfortable in my skin. I just didn’t want it to come out as a cry for attention, when I wouldn’t know how people would perceive, and in turn, react. As a foreigner I felt impelled to be courteous of the locals values and perceptions in terms of how someone should behave and appear in a public context. I noticed this more so whilst travelling to the less LGBT progressive Baltic nations, at least statistically speaking in terms of societal attitudes.
“Remember when you were funny in person but I couldn’t translate it onto the Internet.”

Equal in disparity, intermingling viewpoints, desired detrimental decisiveness, devoid of all individualistic interpretations.

However judgements hinder generations, the contemporaneity of the mindset ‘infiltrating,’ eases the mind.

Pacify my naivety, stuck in my teeth, gums, rolling tongues, around in a circular motion, matching the eyeballs of those passing, well, by.

Falling into the paradigm, statistics strategizing against this stand, against ambiguity.

44% for equality
40% say there is nothing wrong with equal love
31% believe it should spread
19% feel comfortable with the highest elected political person identifying with this

With a 34% comfort level I don’t know if I would feel comfortable working here, as only 22% of people would feel comfortable with me dating their son, although 31% would feel alright seeing me hold his hand in public.

Compared to a 65% comfort ability if I was holding a females.

These levels don’t align with the paintings, the walls are skewed, crooked, but in good comfort, we can forget about this, temporarily, until we exit through the doors into the car park. I forgot where we parked. I forgot how to drive.

Plateau, the topographical eroticism, erosion of flat surfaces, A4 sheets of paper faxing downward, no paper cuts received in the message, yet blood drips from the tips of teeth.

Or is it? Emotional liquid, liquidising into informal stability of progress, running into the Baltic Sea, or is it actually the other way round.

Something is entering the water, the air, breath in, something’s changing in the schools.

Open bores, books sweating, trees moulding, growing and carving into a meal at the buffet.

It’s not quite as cold anymore, and it isn’t just climate change.
Upon first arriving to Stockholm, there was a noticeable variation in societal attitudes compared to Melbourne. There were more outlets, clubs, information and education around LGBTQIA issues than I’d ever seen in in Melbourne. RFSL (Riksförbundet För Sexuellt Likaberättigande/ The National Association for Sexual Equality) offers education, free HIV testing (and some hospitals also offer free STD testing) and also work toward general equality for race, asylum and laws. Comparing this to Australia, where the Government doesn’t even cover sexual health checkups, and therefore a quick HIV test can start at $35AUD,\textsuperscript{15} left me feeling that Sweden’s health priorities were more in check than my home country’s.

Now before I continue, I will state the obvious again. Even if my travels to various cities were for working or investigative purposes, I was still a foreigner. A tourist. I cannot comment on the lifestyle to a full extent, I can only share my experiences and the stories of those whom I encountered. I will also go on to say in terms of dating applications, for more authentic engagement, I only presented myself, and sought out men interested in men only, reducing the LGBT spectrum to ‘G.’ I wasn’t interested in cat fishing anyone.

In terms of dating applications, my initial contact in Stockholm, my impressions were that people were a lot less thirsty than they were in Melbourne. However that could have been due to my location in the cities

\textsuperscript{15} Information on Melbourne Rapid HIV testing can be accessed here, accessed December 10, 2016 http://melbournerrapidhivtests.com.au/rapid-hiv-test-melbourne/cost/
North microcosm Rinkeby, where people are a lot more community oriented than the cluster of horny single middle aged men scouring the internet for a younger bedroom acquaintance in my current residential area of Hägersten. However throughout my travels, I found that the thirst exists everywhere on applications such as Grindr. It is very specific in terms of its function. Smaller towns like Bollnäs in Sweden, Lappeenranta in Finland and Kaunas in Lithuania had fewer people within a close proximity. Therefore there was less contact and conversations were more generic, shy and geared towards starting off on a friendly note. This was usually just a ‘hey,’ or something of the like.

Throughout my research, I read an anecdotal article by Bert Archer about using Grindr in Doha, where consensual MSM activity (men who have sex with men) can be punishable by death. This quote, although coming from a differing context, is still applicable to the application, from my personal experiences, in a universal context; “But for what it’s worth, everyday life for a man-fucking man in Qatar, citizen and guest-worker alike, seems un-dramatic, un-frightening, operating on pretty much the same principles as it does anywhere else in the world with internet connections and selfies.”16 However Doha can be replaced with whatever capital or major city you find yourself in, if this sort of interaction is your thing.

In larger cities, no matter where I went, there was always a man seeking another man for a hook-up, and as a foreigner with the profile name ‘Australian,’ the tagline NSA (No Strings Attached) appeared in my

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inbox frequently and with vehement excitement and anticipation. I gave the same information every time, my current age, slim build, white, single and 178cm in height: basic, bland facts. I will say that in Scandinavia there was a more local population online, and that in the Baltic nations it was heavier on the tourist profiles, but the city centres still had a thriving online presence within a 2km radius. Copenhagen in particular, I never had anyone in my top 100 closest Grindr users over the 1km away spectrum, as far as my frequent checking would suffice. It was also the thirstiest city I had been to on my travels, with many a dick pic, many a Location received at the cruising park near my hostel. A man 33 years my senior bought me many beers on a date with his elderly friends who all openly sexualised me telling me what they would do to me that night. I then managed to escape them all to hook up with someone in an S&M club. Having someone cycle to my hostel and come down to my dorm to try and exchange oral services the morning after for, in their words, ‘a light breakfast.’ All of this, through the convenience of a 14x6cm technological object that rests in my pocket. All of this, within the space of my first 24 hours in Copenhagen. All of this, on a Monday.

In my work entitled “Underneath the 3 White Crosses,” I share three vivid scenarios I took from my stay in Vilnius in July 2016. Although Vilnius, an old town with a rich history, recent disconnections from Soviet relations and a strong emphasis around religious architecture, was indeed a joy to visit, there was an underlying dark tone throughout the trip, with quite a few misfortunate circumstances and scenarios encountered. In a country where only 44% of citizens believe LGB citizens deserve the same rights as heterosexuals, only 35% would feel totally comfortable working with an LGB citizen, and only 20% would feel totally comfortable if their highest elected official was an LGB identifier, it seems that many gay men turn to the
comfort of anonymous online hook up apps to try and find someone to talk to or sleep with.\textsuperscript{17} This opposed to meeting in a public setting, or the only gay club in Vilnius, Soho Club, which is only open on Fridays and Saturdays. The vaunting display of religious activity coinciding with my self influenced comportment to not draw attention to my suppressed flamboyancy left me wanting to share these experiences in a journal style text work. The fragmented silver background, blacked out gold chains (luxurious colours with connotations to wealth and religion) and a view looking up into the heavens, depicting the beauty of Vilnius serve as a background. The overlayed quality and rectangular format is reminiscent of a phone, blending technology and applications, meshed together over the sporadic interactions I had on Grindr in Vilnius, in various contexts; outside churches, in cafes, looking out of my hostel dorm window etc. The text component is a simple recollection of three incidents that I reflected upon on my last day, as I looked over the city underneath the 3 White Crosses, on the hill in Kalnu Park.

I wanted this work to be anecdotal yet unsettling. It was the things that brought discomfort out in me that drove the journal I kept in Vilnius, potentially as I felt uncomfortable, in some of the public settings I situated myself in.

Empty morning laneways, 
apart from the drunks. 
A teenager with a 
bloody eye sways in 
the middle of the road. 
A stranger walks to a nearby 
church and prays for him.

Witnessing a cat get run 
over in the street, amidst 
the pitch black of the midnight 
sky.
It creepily crawled under 
a parked taxi, dysfunctionally 
dragging its two broken 
back legs. A woman gasped, 
and her man grabbed her 
ard and escorted her away.

Someone messaged me on 
a hook up application and I 
asked them what it was like 
to be openly gay here in a 
predominantly homophobic 
society. They replied with a 
picture of their erect penis.
“Attitudes towards homosexuality are more tolerant among younger adults, those with education, those attending religious services less often, and residents of large metropolis areas.” –Tom W. Smith\textsuperscript{18}

This statement from W. Smith may appear obvious to many people, as it did to myself, but it is a statement worth reflecting upon when researching, when observing and comparing statistics. It is personally important to consider when critiquing a context and engaging with a differing culture than my own.

In a EU Discrimination report, it was noted that influential socio-demographic and cultural factors play a part in generalised acceptance. It stated that the most likely parties to be inclusive were to be female, being under 55 years of age, having a longer period of full-time education, being politically left or belonging to a sexual minority group.\textsuperscript{19} This was backed up again in the most updated version of this report, published 3 years later, which actually had EU wide statistics defined by gender, age brackets, educational qualifications and a category broken up into self-defined minorities, when responding to questions in regards to societal attitudes


toward LGBT identifiers. All the information in these demographic brackets supported W. Smith’s idea.

In regards to the EU, the differences of acceptance of LGBT citizens in terms of societal attitudes and legislation do not appear unified. In a 2015 EU survey around discrimination, when posed with the statement “there is nothing wrong in a sexual relationship between two persons of the same sex,” 93% of Swedish respondents agreed (the highest in the EU), whereas across the Baltic Sea, only 23% of Latvians approved (the lowest in the EU). The EU average was 67%. Obviously, these countries are all individually governed, and the desire to be in the EU is not focussed around equality, however such contrast in the context of how close Scandinavia and the Baltic nations are geographically was intriguing.

Besides their close proximity in regards to the world map, other factors have to be considered. In Sweden, the Swedish Social Democratic Party is currently in office, and is considered a centre-left party. In Latvia, the Latvian Green Party is in office, and despite the name, is considered centre-right. Both nations have a very high HDI (Human Development Index) ranking, however Sweden sits at number 14 in the world, whereas Latvia sits in the 44th position. In terms of economy, Sweden’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) Nominal ranking worldwide is 23rd, compared to Latvia, sitting at 100th place.

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20 European Commission, ‘Special Eurobarometer 437: Discrimination in the EU in 2015 Summary’
21 European Commission, ‘Special Eurobarometer 437: Discrimination in the EU in 2015 Summary’
However, you can also look at who Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia also border with, and given their history with the Soviet Union, it isn’t hard to see how Russian morals may have influenced the Baltic cultures; especially considering how recent it is for each Baltic nation in terms of regaining their independence.\(^{24}\) It is also apparent in Finland, where although there are more progressive attitudes statistically than the Baltics, there is a national average significantly lower to another neighbouring nation of Sweden. When survey respondents were asked whether ‘gay, lesbian and bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people,’ Sweden (95% agree) and Denmark (90%) had a high acceptance rating, whilst Latvia (42%), Lithuania (44%) and Estonia (44%) had below EU average ratings towards equality for LGB citizens. The EU average sits at 71%.

Finland was still above this average, at 74% acceptance, but in comparison to neighbouring Sweden, fell almost 20% beneath in terms of respondent’s acceptance.\(^{25}\) This could be partially due to influence from neighbouring countries from the east, via Russia and Estonia (which is just a stones throw away over the ocean).

When you compare this with Russia, a place where in 2013 87% of citizen’s opposed holding Pride marches,\(^ {26}\) and also has rising views through the past couple of decades in societal attitudes against same-sex relations\(^ {27}\) it is visible to see how viewpoints can transport themselves over

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\(^{24}\) The Baltic nations were recognised by the Soviet Union on September the 9\(^{th}\) 1991, and became independent thereafter, with Russian military presence filtering out over the rest of the 1990’s.

\(^{25}\) European Commission, ‘Special Eurobarometer 437: Discrimination in the EU in 2015 Summary’


\(^{27}\) W. Smith “Cross-national Differences in Attitudes towards Homosexuality,” p16
the invisible borderlines into the EU. Even in Estonia, where the majority of the population don’t follow a religion, the Orthodox religion is the most followed faith in the country. The highest believers of this faith are of Russian descent. Out of the 176,773 Orthodox religious citizens in Estonia, 134,268 are Russian nationals, and 39.5% (69,893) of Orthodox citizens reside in the 5 counties bordering Russia (Ida-Viru, Jõgeva, Tartu, Põlva and Võru). In the Harju county, there are 70,379, with 59,353 living in Tallinn alone. In a nation where 30% of the population live in Tallinn, the spread of the religion is quite contained close to the Russian border counties, and the capital city, where there is more work and prosperities. Russian citizens make up 29.69% of Estonia’s population. Half of these citizens are Orthodox.

The reason Russian Orthodox as a religion is important to cite, is that it is a prevalent religion with a strong oppositional opinion towards homosexuality. Some followers of the faith have used their religion as an excuse to attack LGBT citizens, believe that homosexuality is wrong, that it’s corrupting today’s youth and they are striving for traditional Russian values. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, a key figure in the religion today who has strong connections with Putin, also recently blamed the rising acceptance of homosexuality around the globe as a factor for the creation and work of ISIS.

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In conjunction with W. Smith’s discussion on demographics affecting viewpoints on homosexuality, it is apparent here that influence has crossed borders, in a nation where past President Toomas Hendrik Ilves (In office 2006-16) was quoted “The base document of the democratic Estonia – our Constitution – demands equal treatment of all people. The Estonian society cannot survive intolerance towards our own people. There are too few of us, to discriminate against anyone.” Despite Hendrik Ilves views, the majority of his citizens seem to be in disagreement with his sentiments.

Whilst visiting Finland in July 2016, I stayed in Helsinki for a week, and ventured to Lappeenranta for a day. Although to comment directly on the sociographic differences would be unreasonable in regards to the limited time spent in these places, the personal observations I experienced in these two differing contexts under one nations flag was intriguing. It was here where the nations borders weren’t as solidified in terms of societal attitudes, even if in Lappeenranta the same LGBT laws and legislations apply as to the gay friendly Helsinki (comparatively). For instance in one day in Lappeenranta, logging in 5 times, I only received 5 Grindr messages. They read as followed: 1) “Hey” 2) “Hey” 3) “Hey cutie J” 4) “Hey, how’s it going?” 5) “Hey.”

In Helsinki I also logged into Grindr 5 times a day, and on my quietest response day received 4 times this amount of messages, including dick pics straight off the bat, offers for cash in exchange for sexual services, locations were received, date offers, NSA hook ups and one persistent man under the

pseudonym “TOP FUN, 34” who was just interested in a sleep over snuggle fest every night.

There are no gay bars in Lappeenranta, although online reviews do hint at bars where gay men (no reference of lesbian or trans) hang out and grab a beer. On the other hand, Helsinki boasts many, including prestigious nightclubs, S&M venues, “Bear Park Café,” a cosy, kitsch café for hairy gay men and even a rooftop LGBT bar, 8 floors up above a shopping centre overlooking the central district of the city. Quite the difference in regards to exclusionary inclusivity, and the differences were made quite obvious in the vibes of the cities themselves. There were many cars heading down Highway 13 in both directions from the overpass near Lappeenranta station. This highway ends in Nuijamaa, about 24 kilometres distance from the Lappeenranta station, before changing into the A127, over the border into Russian soil.

My presence in Lappeenranta was more noticeable than that in Helsinki, due to numerous factors. Being a foreigner or tourist is commonplace in summer in a large city, but speaking English in a smaller town on the outskirts of Finland was less common, and that was noticeable in various circumstances. At a local boat tour, as referenced in “24 kilometres before the red’s incorporated,” a bucket of fliers for English tourists was aplenty, however the Russian bucket was empty, and a tour guide or employee was fetching more after some inquiring tourists showed interest in the trip. I felt the need to represent myself differently in Lappeenranta, as my higher pitched voice was drawing attention, as was my bright blue and green acid patterned lightweight jacket. I pushed the jacket in my bag wearing a plain basic grey tee, and found solace in a pub to wait for my train, after a car with a Russian licence plate slowly trailed me for half a kilometre, winding the window down, revealing 4 young men
jeering at me. What they said, I have no idea, but it was enough to provoke me to walk off road and find anywhere with a cheap tap beer.

Obviously this wasn’t a representation of everyone in Lappeenranta, the bartender was nice, however maybe she was putting a smile on for work. Either way, it seems as people, unfortunately in the fight for positivity and equality, it’s always the negative things that will stand out, as I’m sure many will feel when reading some of these statistics. It’s not necessarily gauging the reaction of, wow, Sweden is so progressive, but more wow, is there really 80% of Russian citizens against equal rights for homosexuals?  

That can easily translate into everyday life.

The differences in attitude in Lappeenranta can be compared to that of the Baltic counties bordering Russia. The influence of Russian societal attitudes is close and can even cross the nations with ease. Russia has a strong hold as a politically outspoken nation in regards to LGBT issues. The Russian Gay Propaganda Law came into effect in 2013, after all but one of the 436 parliamentary lawmakers in Russia abstained the bill on the 11th. Vladimir Putin signed and enacted the bill on the 30th of that same month. This caused much controversy over the Sochi Winter Olympics for LGBT athletes and allies. Protesters at the games were met with violence from citizens and Olympic attendants, and arrests from police.

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I'm confused about my identification.
Maybe I should be Username1980
Grouped.
Unified.
Unionized.

WHAT THE HELL ARE BODY ISSUES AND WHY
CAN'T I BUY THEM AT MY LOCAL NEWS AGENCY
WITH MY TV GUIDE?
Maybe that is too my space, I mean everything is
going away from traditions these days.
Also, MySpace is dead.
And this isn’t Username1980’s domain space
anymore.
Can't we just, like, talk in person for once?!
Or am I being too much of a sticky beak?

However, if we were to rewind,
appropriation is just a disguise,
a demure desire to cover up one’s mistakes
and embellish a lack of originality.
Basically,
you need an excuse if you don’t want to think
progressively.
Hide behind your 'communicative information' that
you read on your Facebook feed. That's a meme,
not the news!
However, people don’t care if you agree with
something,
they can also, laugh with/at it.
However, that’s just a meme that I’m creating
to re-flush, refresh, reflex, pecs,
into your Facebook feed.

Deportation device.
Deflation,
destruction.
Anarchy in the bedroom.
I’ll learn how to wash the linen correctly,
but maybe we have to workshop that decision.
Workshop me out of here.
Paper cut outs,
masking tape lining perimeters;
chalk was too dusty for asthmatic contentions.

I see too much familiarity.
This context is too reminiscent of reality.
I would rather live URL than IRL, tbh.
TBQH
Progression/Impression

Although I have seen that an individual’s values don’t necessarily match a nation’s legal standpoint on how LGBT citizens should be perceived or treated, I have been able to see a difference between larger cities and smaller towns in terms to societal attitudes. The affect of Russia’s history with the Baltic nations, and having borders with them and Finland has also created a present demographic and religious influence that has affected how these nations perceive LGBT citizens - to an extent. This seems to be more apparent in societal attitudes than legislation however, with Finland overall attaining marriage equality, with the bill coming into effect on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of March 2017. \textsuperscript{34} This could be attributed to the progressive values in Scandinavia overall, however with Russia still connecting at the other side of the country’s border, personally, coming from a country with an in office party that doesn’t want to legally enact same-sex marriage, I would deem it an accomplishment.

Although Scandinavia, and even the west countries of the EU, is undoubtedly one of the most progressive nation clusters in the world in regards to creating equality for LGBT citizens, the Baltic nations have work to do in terms of progressing to the same level of equality, in terms of societal attitudes, parliament values and laws. When a percentile of citizens were asked whether they believed same-sex marriage should be allowed throughout Europe, only 19\% of Latvians agreed with this statement, whilst

\textsuperscript{34} Nick Robins-Early, ‘Finland Allows Same-Sex Marriages For The First Time,’ The Huffington Post, Published March 1, 2017. Accessed March 12, 2017 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/finland-same-sex-marriage_us_58b6d90ce4b0780bac2eedd8
24% of Lithuanians and 31% of Estonians also did. However, that isn’t to say things aren’t moving in a progressive direction.

In Latvia, from 2012 – 2015, there was a rise of 4% of citizens feeling comfortable with the possibility of a transgendered person being the highest elected official in the country (granted it still only sits at a very low 13% compared to 62% feeling uncomfortable, but it is still a move in the right direction). It also rose in comfort by 9% over the 3-year difference, with the potential of an LGB individual running the nation, growing to a 21% comfort level. On top of this, Riga held EuroPride 2015, which according to ILGA (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), “was a huge success and attracted lots of positive media attention.” This also made Latvia the first Post-Soviet host of the event in history.

Although Estonian statistics between 2012-2015 actually went in the other direction, with less comfort around their leader being an LGBT identifier, people of influence and political power in the country have been speaking out. Heljo Pikhof, an MP for the SDE (Social Democrats Estonia) stated in a debate about the proposed implementation act, to protect LGBT citizens, “It’s the obligation of the state to stand for the rights of its citizens including the rights of minorities.” This implementation act would have had created 85 changes in regulations, including legally recognised partnership for same sex couples.

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35 European Commission, ‘Special Eurobarometer 437: Discrimination in the EU in 2015 Summary’
36 European Commission, ‘Special Eurobarometer 437: Discrimination in the EU in 2015 Summary’
When I asked Kaja Sepper, an assistant at the LGBT union OMA Keskus in Tallinn about the atmosphere towards LGBT citizens in Estonia, she said that there has been a positive progression in terms of societal attitudes in the past decade, “people are more aware and tolerant,” and that the air was becoming clearer. Sepper also said despite minimal change in governmental legislative acts for LGBT citizens in terms of equality, that the media portrayal of homosexuality had improved. She told me this in regards to the issue: “We have noticed that [the] media’s attitude has changed for the better regarding LGBT issues. A good example is [the] Registered Partnership Act, which was mostly reflected neutrally when it was all over the news. Also the terminology used in the media is mostly correct.”

In Lithuania, a poll carried out by RAIT, a market research firm, documented a rise in support for same sex marriage, sitting currently at 15%, compared to 7% in 2014. Vilnius also held the most recent Baltic Pride in 2016, with approximately 2000 in attendance.39 The mayor of Vilnius also supported the decision to run the pride march; even after the 2013 Baltic Pride in Vilnius went awry with protesters and arrests. In 2013 only an estimated 600 marchers were in attendance, with approximately 1000 protesters, some aggressively violent against Pride marchers, and 28 of those were arrested.40

For these three countries though, considering that the decriminalisation of same sex activity was only recently achieved, after the regained independence for each individual country from the Soviet Union,

1992 for Latvia and Estonia, 1993 for Lithuania, these progressive movements and accomplishments in a short time span show promise for a more equal future for their LGBT citizens.

“There’s always one, you know, you can be the juiciest, ripest peach and there’s one bitch in the corner that’s like, ’I don’t like peaches.’"
– Robbie Turner, Drag Queen.\(^{41}\)

Legislation can change, but not all people can. Although religion is far from equaling homophobia, it is apparent that some use their faith as a tool, or even an excuse, to condone discrimination. It is noticeable in Australia with the Liberal Christian lobby and the Liberal’s introduction of a potential harmful plebiscite. Russian Orthodox leaders also have spoken out against homosexuality, and Putin himself signed the anti gay law only a year before Russia held the Sochi Winter Olympics. With the older demographics heading out of the world and the presence of more liberals, atheists and agnostics, making progressive steps towards equality isn’t impossible within the near future, or this century at least.

It is clear that Sweden, Denmark and Finland have been more progressive in terms of experiences I’ve had in their respective capital cities, yet it isn’t as black and white as the statistics on paper. There is a blending of values, seeping over borders. Communities in rural areas, religious contexts and education all come in to play. Where the invisible line in the soil sits, doesn’t mean opinions and societal attitudes are clearly separated.

Nations are not conterminous. Borders aren’t containers; they aren’t restrictions but are there for individual nations laws, not townships and counties personal values.

In Copenhagen, talking to Vivi Jelstrup in December 2015 at LGBT Danmark, she mentioned something that stuck with me throughout this entire process. Talking about amending laws and strengthening LGBT relations in parliament, she reflected upon her work in the union, stating, “it really takes time… there is never going to be 100% on our side.”

Even though there may always be one bad peach in the bunch, through education, exposure, marching and art, we can show that the others are just as exciting and valid as the rest of the so-called normative society. My practice will continue to strive to represent this in the future, even if the context isn’t necessarily prepared for it. As past queer artists have shown, it could be the controversial or the lively push for acceptance and awareness a society needs. Political exposure, communal shifts, humour and even a touch of glitter, maybe the comfortable setting we need, to discuss more serious issues that lie under societies surface. I am an other, and I am othered.

Consciously.
Grabbing, grasping, lost papers in the building.

I couldn’t determine whether or not, 
today things look up, 
in the sky.

However storm clouds sceptically rear round corners.

Return.

We must all monitor the weather.

Script excerpt from “Remember when you were funny in person but I couldn’t translate it onto the Internet?” Performance, 00:15:00, 2016.