

QUEER COMMUNITY
THROUGH
PHOTOGRAPHIC ACTS

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Three Entrances to an Artistic
Research Project Approaching LGBTQIA Russia

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Abstract

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This compilation thesis is made within the field of *fotografisk gestaltning* (photography) and is a study of the potential for queer community to emerge through photographic acts. It consists of two artworks that have been presented in a series of exhibitions, published texts, workshops, and lectures. The artworks are the photography-, video-, and sound-based installation *State of Mind*, and the photographic series *At the Time of the Third Reading/Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/Во время третьего чтения*, which is presented as framed images as well as in book form. This publication introduces the research through three entry points: photography, queer, and artworks. The first two entries highlight how these concepts are used in the research as practices and theories. The latter is a written visit to the artworks that takes place from different temporal and situational positions, and reflects on the work with LGBTQIA issues and community over borders.

The focus is on the emergence of community within, and through, the artworks, and how this may produce recognition of certain identities. At the same time, the artworks may destabilize what is taken for norms. How community emerges in the process of making art, as well as when activating the finalized works through exhibitions, workshops, and other presentations, is also explored.

The subject of the artworks is lesbian living in St. Petersburg, a Russian women's camp, and how one may navigate through society as queer identities. Group portraits and community form the overall foundation for the *gestaltning* of the artworks. The conditions for making art with the Russian LGBTQIA community as an artist from abroad are taken into consideration, as well as other shared *embodied positions* such as queerness and whiteness. This is performed through notions of positions and movement, as well as paying attention to an *in-between* – Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept which opens for a space of change and resistance to fixed positioning.

Keywords: queer community, photographic acts, *fotografisk gestaltning*, photography, feminist theory, queer theory, community, embodied positions, movement, performativity, intersectionality, situated knowledge, in-between, insider, outsider, Russian LGBTQIA, artistic research, Trinh T. Minh-ha.

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INTRODUCTION

Fotografisk Gestaltning

In research and exploration, the question is not merely to gain vision and visibility. And in the politics of interpreters and interpretation, raising the question “Who is speaking?” is also asking “Who is listening?” To be aware, without closing off, of where and from where one speaks, or else of how, when and by whom one can be heard cannot be reduced to a mere question of audience and readership. For me, it’s an ability to advance in the dark, a field of opening possibilities of creativity, as well as a necessity to work with multicliplity in relations of power.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *D-Passage*

The aim of this artistic doctoral project, with the emphasis on *fotografisk gestaltning* (photography) is to study the potential for queer community to emerge through photographic acts. The research focus lies on the methods of making and thinking about *performative* qualities set in relation to processes of producing community. It is an inquiry into how acts of photography can give recognition to the queer community, whereas, simultaneously, photographic *gestaltning* may queer notions of community by, for example, acknowledging *insider* and *outsider* positions (which form the conditions for any community). Some propositions will be offered for how various photographic acts may be applied for queer community to emerge, and be enabled, employed with respect to the artworks *State of Mind* (2008) and *At the Time of the Third Reading/Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/ Во время третьего чтения* (2013).¹ The research is carried out by taking particular ideas of photographic practice as a point of departure and by connecting this to queer

as a multilayered concept. Group portraits form the visual and conceptual foundations for the artworks, and the performative qualities are addressed through empirical and theoretical concepts of *position* and *movement*. The conditions of making queer art that approaches the LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) community of Russia from the position of a visitor from abroad, together with the series of exhibitions that took place in different sites, contexts, and times, laid the foundation for how the art projects were formulated and carried out. Issues of community, embodied positions, *gestaltning*, inside/outside/in-between, intersectionality, performativity and situated knowledge, speaking nearby, and what it means to do queer with photography emerged as critical concerns and were considered and reconsidered as the project progressed. One endeavor with the research project was to inquire into how an exhibition visitor can be encouraged to consider different degrees of positioning through the artworks' *gestaltning*. An important issue that follows is how *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading* may provide spaces for the recognition of a marginalized group and how simultaneously the artworks' *gestaltning* may destabilize notions such as identity as fixed and the existence of an authoritative "truth."

In Swedish the designation of my doctoral field is *fotografisk gestaltning*.² The verb *gestalta* (*gestaltade, gestaltat*) and the noun *gestaltning* are used throughout this text because I find it difficult to translate these terms with appropriate English words, particularly in relation to what the thesis is proposing. In dictionaries *gestalta* is translated as "to shape, form, mold, create, compose,"³ but in my field of research I would also include qualities such as "visualize," "emerge," and "perform." Given the emphasis in this research on photographic *acts* and the *performative* qualities of the artworks (Butler [1993] 2011; [2004] 2006), these multiple meanings make *gestalta* the most appropriate term, and thus I have decided to retain it throughout.

By implementing the foreign, that is, non-English, word *gestalta* I also wish to illuminate the many different thresholds of translation

that have been present all through this project, for example by moving between three languages: English, Russian, and Swedish. Of these I only understand two, which means that the art project in Russia necessitated a dependency upon volunteers from the LGBTQIA community helping out with the translation. Working with people with varied English skills meant that the building of linguistic understanding often entailed collective negotiations of non-understandings. On the other hand, working closely with the local community opened for other kinds of translations, which were invaluable for the work, and provided a deeper understanding of the queer culture of St. Petersburg. Furthermore, not translating *gestalta* into English also emphasizes that I am writing this book in a language that is not my own, and as such I am writing in a mode "which includes hybridization, and doing/writing 'mimicry English'" (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2012, p. 12).

The decision to use a word from my mother tongue is inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa who constantly integrated multilayered, embodied positions into her writing by mixing two of her languages (1981; 2009). Interrupting the English language with *gestalta* may create a sense of awkwardness, and possibly cause a lack of rhythm in the reading. It is a word that some readers will struggle with, and it might possibly create a sense of being excluded from something that might be accessible to others. The extensive use of *gestalta* therefore also points towards positions of insider and outsider, which is also one of the fundamental aspects of the artworks produced within this research project.

The Parts Constituting This Compilation Thesis

The research is submitted in the format of a compilation thesis where three artworks form the content. The installation *State of Mind* stands out as the most comprehensive part of the research. It has been presented in a number of different contexts and it also constitutes the main segment of this book. The short-duration video *State of Mind, Prologue* (2006), made during the initial research phase, was an important pointer for what directions the project should take. I am considering it as part of the entire *State of Mind* project and it is therefore kept within the framework of the thesis. However, as this book is focusing predominantly on the installation, notes on the prologue are only provided in the appendix. Both *State of Mind* and *State of Mind, Prologue* were made in collaboration with the artist Anna Viola Hallberg. The third, and concluding, contribution is *At the Time of the Third Reading/Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/Во время третьего чтения*. This later work was produced after the *State of Mind* exhibition tour was concluded. Being an independent artwork, it also forms an epilogue to the research project as a whole and is presented within the framework of this introductory book.

State of Mind is presented in the installation format combining photography, video, and sound in a three-dimensional staging. It embraces queer community as a theme, and raises questions on belonging and the desire for visibility and equality in society. Group portraits constitute the aesthetic and structural foundation of *State of Mind*, whereas positions of inside and outside emerge in and through the *gestaltning* of the installation, as well as through the ways in which the artwork invites the viewer into a movement *in-between* these. The work is based on photographic portraits and filmed interviews addressing the queer environment of St. Petersburg in Russia, and may be seen as an exploration of the boundaries between ethics, legislation, prejudice, and civic expectations in the LGBTQIA life of the city. The living conditions of lesbians and bisexual women are specifically in focus.

State of Mind has been exhibited five times in the post-Soviet region and five times in the West.⁴ The opportunities to exhibit came about one after the other, depending on the invitations we received. Hallberg and I were predominantly intending to show the work in St. Petersburg and at as many other Russian-speaking sites as possible. We worked actively to find venues and funding to achieve this goal. We managed to show *State of Mind* at various photography and art institutions in St. Petersburg (2008), Kharkiv (2009), Kiev (2009), and Minsk (2010). Two of the institutions were supported by state funding: The State Russian Museum and Exhibition Centre ROSPHOTO and Kharkiv Municipal Gallery. In Kiev, *State of Mind* was part of the cultural festival GogolFest and in Minsk the installation was exhibited at – Y - Gallery of Contemporary Art, an independent art space presenting Belarusian and European art. In 2012 the work was once again brought back to St. Petersburg, this time to be exhibited in *Queerography* at QueerFest – International Queer Culture Festival.⁵ The very first exhibition took place at Kulturhuset in Stockholm. It was coordinated with Europride 2008, and was subsequently included in the Stockholm Culture Festival. The group exhibition *Talkin' Loud & Sayin' Something: Four Perspectives of Artistic Research* at the Gothenburg Museum of Art in 2008 was made in conjunction with the 10th conference of the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA). The project was digitally presented as part of the 2010 *Moderna Exhibition* in Stockholm.⁶ In 2011, *State of Mind* was invited to be exhibited at the artist-run FOTOHOF in Salzburg, and the inclusion in *In Mind and Memory* at Worth Ryder Art Gallery the same year grew out of my doctoral studies exchange at the University of California, Berkeley.

State of Mind, and a selection of the photographs from *At the Time of the Third Reading*, will be installed at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg in conjunction with the public defense of this thesis. The exhibition opening coincides with West Pride, the yearly local LGBTQIA festival. Two events, one panel discussion and one lecture by Nadia Plungian, one of the authors in the book *At the Time of the*

Third Reading, are planned as part of the program. As for archiving and future accessibility, the entire *State of Mind* installation has been donated to the permanent art collection at Gothenburg Museum of Art. *State of Mind* must be seen as a temporary and situational event that took place at a number of occasions, and from the fall of 2016 onwards it will be archived in a context of fine art and research and most likely only rarely be publicly exhibited. It is now up to us artists to consider what to do with all the material that was collected for this project in order to contribute to an important recording of queer culture that should be accessible for other reasons than donating the art installation to a Swedish museum.

As part of the work around *State of Mind*, Hallberg and I introduced *Lezzie Think Tank*, a series of workshops that served to locally situate and contextualize the artwork in the cities where it was shown. The workshops were made in collaboration with local queer groupings and were formed as a relay that traveled from city to city, collecting topics and responses. *Lezzie Think Tank* was planned for eight of the ten cities where *State of Mind* was exhibited.⁷

Different aspects of *State of Mind* are brought up in three previously published essays and articles. The first, titled the same as the artwork, is an introduction to the installation, the methods used when making the project and the conditions that informed the production of the art installation. It was published in the exhibition catalogue *Talkin' Loud & Sayin' Something: Four Perspectives of Artistic Research* (2008). The second published essay, "Handlingsrymd,"⁸ focuses on the exhibition in Minsk and captures tensions between integrity and dependence from the point of view of working as artists (Hallberg and Karlsson Rixon 2012). The third, "Trots Allt/In Spite Of" (2013),⁹ takes the form of a dialogue between Lena Martinsson, professor in gender studies, and me. We discuss the issues and urgencies of making transnational queer and feminist work based on our respective practices.¹⁰ The essays and articles are not reprinted here, but serve as references already available in the public domain.

The last artwork made within this doctoral project is *At the Time of the Third Reading*, which came about after the *State of Mind* exhibition tour ended. This series of photographs was taken at a yearly women's camp on a remote island somewhere between St. Petersburg and Moscow. This year's camp, which was the tenth and also the last, happened to coincide with the third reading of the bill forbidding information on "non-traditional sexual orientations" to be conveyed to children under eighteen. *At the Time of the Third Reading* performs movements of withdrawal as an occasional outing for a marginalized group, as well as a political and a photographic moment. The retracing movement of taking a step back can also stand in for the finalization of a long-term project – a time for a third reading, a reflecting position of an *after*, in order to (re-)visit a *before* and a *within*.

The *At the Time of the Third Reading* photographs have been presented in the exhibition format at three Swedish art institutions: Artipelag, Malmö Art Museum, and the Hasselblad Center. Selections from the series can be found in the collections of the Malmö Art Museum and at the Hasselblad Foundation. *At the Time of the Third Reading* will be published as an independent book that also contains four texts on the situation of queer women and trans identities in Russia. They are set in relation to history and to the recent political developments in the country, as well as providing examples of queer activism in St. Petersburg and Moscow. The book includes essays by Nadia Plungian and Sasha Semyonova, both operating at the crossroads of Russian queer feminist art, activism, and academia. An interview with Elena Botsman, the initiator of the women's camp, serves to supply a framework for the event where the photographs were taken. Yet another interview, with the Children-404¹¹ activist Hana Kochetkova, exemplifies a kind of activism that can be said to have emerged from the current political situation in Russia. A preface to *At the Time of the Third Reading* is provided by me, and the text part of the book is introduced with a text by the American cultural theorist Jack Halberstam. The book is bilingual in English and Russian.

Exhibiting *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading* has provided me with opportunities for public scrutiny, to see how the “works work” on the basis of the parameters for the research project. However, the forums where there have been opportunities and relevance to build the three-dimensional, spatially extensive, and technologically demanding installation *State of Mind* have only rarely coincided with forums where it has been possible to have it peer-reviewed in relation to the protocols of an academic research system. The contexts that the artworks have been presented in have been given priority, since these are absolutely crucial for the inquiry into how queer community may emerge. It is not possible to distinguish the matter of how, when, and where the works are exhibited from the performative qualities at the heart of this inquiry. The variety of exhibitions, workshops, and other presentations that have been realized over the duration of this project has highlighted how place and time is decisive. In the case of *State of Mind*, this has been proven in a number of countries that differ greatly from each other in terms of their political and cultural climate. Moving through art, activism, and academia, the stance of the various institutions in which the installation has been placed has also differed, ranging from contemporary art, art photography, educational, research, and queer activist institutional contexts. When it comes to *At the Time of the Third Reading*, the making of a book will open up for a new way of showing and contextualizing this series, and it has yet to be seen what impact this will have. The numerous exhibitions, workshops, lectures, seminars, and panel discussions where the artworks have been presented have been important occasions to formulate the research over and over again. The interdisciplinary environments around gender research have become especially crucial components of my work, and it is therefore at the intersection of artistic research and gender studies that this project should be placed.

All the different parts mentioned above have contributed towards building up to this compilation thesis. The outcome of the research is manifested within, and through, the artworks, as all of them *gestaltar*

queer community through photographic acts. The performative aspects of the artworks are twofold, as I will suggest, and can function as visualization and recognition of a queer community and yet make concepts of “fixed” identity uncertain. They may challenge normativity (Butler 2004; [1993] 2011), as well as ideas of “truth,” linearity, and a master narrative (Haraway 1991). In this way, the artworks open up for queer potentials to emerge, as well as contributing to queer theory as an affective and bodily situated knowledge (Haraway 1988).

Finally, to gain more insight into the situation of queers in Russia, within this project, one has to turn to the actual artworks: the book *At the Time of the Third Reading* and the art installation *State of Mind*. The reasons why the latter is a three-dimensional installation, and not made into the more accessible book format, will be clarified below. Likewise, *At the Time of the Third Reading* was photographed in such a manner that the images can be published and widely distributed. The intention of this publication, *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*, is to provide three entry points into the research, not to try to translate the artworks into a book format. It is also important to add that the research is not *about* queers in Russia, but constitutes a proposal for how queer community may be *gestaltat* through photographic acts and artworks. This is set in relation to the specific conditions of doing this work in the context of Russia and the sites where the exhibitions have taken place. Nevertheless, the fundamental reason why the research project was carried out the way it was, was because of the material from which it emerged: the interaction between us artists and the queer community in St. Petersburg, and later a visit to a women’s camp on the Russian countryside. A number of these events and encounters are consequently woven into this book as stories, highlighting the issues of embodied positionings as alternately being outsiders and insiders.

Outline

As for this book, it opens up three entrances into an artistic research project conducted through the making of artworks. The concept of *entrance*¹² is used to signify an access point that leads into the research outcomes, and is especially useful as it connotes a palpable entry point into the art installation *State of Mind*. The book's structure is organized so as to link the artworks to issues that are my motive for taking on this task of completing a PhD in *fotografisk gestaltning*, i.e. how queer community can emerge through photographic acts. The methods used in making the artworks are integrated into the chapters about them, whereas the methods and theories that form my approach to this research as a whole are introduced under the chapters related to the first two entry points *Photography* and *Queer*. These two key concepts constitute my starting points for research on this project, and how, and why, these are relevant tools are questions that are developed here. Concepts of photography and queer both emerge as, and produce, theory *and* practice – this co-emergence and co-production of “theory and practice” is something that has been an essential condition for the research process.

The “Photography” section starts with a review of the project's connection to intersectional feminist theory and art, and some of the concepts that have been applied throughout the process are pointed out. Following on from this, the section also contains details on how the research project relates to earlier works of mine, as well as to the works of others. The focus is on photography that embraces issues of queer, identity, and community. Proceeding with a passage on photographic acts in relation to embodied positions, an account is made of photography as a point of departure for art projects that sometimes incorporate various media and approaches, and of how notions of movement and positioning accompany my artistic work. The last part of the “Photography” section, “Positioning with Photography,” discusses how embodied positions, such as gender, sexuality, race, and age

affected the making of the artworks, in particular *State of Mind*. It emphasizes the artists' multilayered positions in relation to where, when, and with whom the work was made, and suggests what *insider* and *outsider* positions may imply. This chapter forms the basis for how positions of *insider* and *outsider* later are discussed as interlaced in both the artworks.

In the section on the second research entrance, “Queer,” this term is used as an example of the complex yet productive challenge that acts of translation and engaging in transnational work posed for this project. This section also comprises a review of the many applications of the notion of “queer” and how they make it an especially useful concept in this artistic research project: as a theoretical concept; as a critique of heteronormativity; as an expression of sexuality; as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual identities; as activism; and as acts of resistance. The term *community* is addressed in both sections, as this concept constitutes an all-embracing theme running throughout the entire project. Interwoven through these sections are also introductions to other concepts that are important, such as insider, outsider, in-between, performativity, speaking nearby, and situated knowledge.

“Photography” and “Queer” support the third research entrance, which opens onto the artworks. The entrance into *State of Mind* is written as the experience of a visit to the exhibited art installation. The visit is made from a plurality of positions, moving in time and space, but also *in-between* multilayered identities, such as sexuality, profession, and nationality. The tour highlights potentials of how queer community might emerge, within and through, the art installation. The chapter on *State of Mind* ends with a section on the *Lezzie Think Tank* workshop, yet another aspect of the “doing” of community. The entrance to *At the Time of the Third Reading* that follows, discloses how the photographic strategies change in alignment with new conditions for people living queer in Russia, but also as a response to the character of the camp.

Before entering into “Photography,” “Queer,” and “Artworks,” something will be said about the collaborative aspects of this project and how I position myself in relation to them. The following section “Why Russia?” will not answer the question as such, but will hopefully provide some pathways leading into the relationship between coincidence and intention that very often forms an artist’s work. Some of the aspects of what it meant to have St. Petersburg as the point of departure for this project will also be raised. The chapter “Russian LGBTQIA Culture: Some Sources” highlights some of the material that provided an understanding of queer living in Russia, material that was predominantly available after the installation *State of Mind* was made.

The appendix includes rather extensive project documentation that is presented through photographs from exhibitions, workshops, presentations, and other events. It also consists of a number of lists, sometimes with complementary notes, of the artworks, exhibitions, workshops, and more.

On Collaborative Practices and the Research Position

This project has been fundamentally dependent on collaborative work as indicated by the many contacts and networks that have been created along the way: from interacting with a number of smaller groupings of friends, lovers, and activists while making *State of Mind* in St. Petersburg, to the exhibition tour followed by the *Lezzie Think Tank* workshop series that was accomplished as a rally of experience exchanges between local queer groupings at the exhibition venues. The book *At the Time of the Third Reading* can also be said to be constituted by collaborative work, as the contributed texts essentially form the content together with the photographs. The collaborations have stretched over the spheres of art, activism, and academia.

Becoming part of new networks has been a rewarding outcome of my engagement in artistic research, and exposing my research to the

various networks has been an important part of the process of understanding what artistic practice can do within academic research, and vice versa. I deliberately directed my attention towards the interdisciplinary field of gender studies, where I have found many relevant discourses that form the basis for my research. This is also where I have received the most productive and challenging responses. Within feminist and queer studies there are people, methods, theories, as well as platforms where the subject to be discussed bridges the individual research fields. “Gender research should,” claims Nina Lykke, professor in gender studies, “keep to the tension implied by defining itself as both an *independent field of knowledge* and as a field characterized by *complete openness to transversal dialogues crossing all disciplinary borders*. It is this *duality* I refer to when I speak about *post-disciplinary discipline*” (2009, p. 29). The writing project realized together with Lena Martinsson, cited earlier, is one example of an inspiring, interdisciplinary encounter that proves that shared experiences and theoretical grounds can evoke new insights (Karlsson Rixon and Martinsson 2011; 2013), in spite of the different academic affiliations. Over the years, more and more queer and feminist artists have joined artistic research in Sweden (for example Mara Lee, Imri Sandström, Malin Arnell, and Petra Bauer) which has further expanded my network, leading back into the context of art.

The most extensive collaboration in this project was between Anna Viola Hallberg and me as we made *State of Mind, Prologue* and *State of Mind* together. We formulated much of the concept, researched for the project, and made the art installation together as a whole. Then, for five years, between 2008 and 2012, we brought *State of Mind* to different places to be exhibited and discussed. Our common interests were to inquire into how queerness could be expressed and lived in the Russian society, how it was performed and visualized in the public sphere, and how one related to other queers in order to create a sense of community. What were the hopes and the fears? What was the view of the future? It was a tight collaboration based on our relationship as lovers and friends, as well as our individual personal and professional skills.

Since our different qualifications were merged into the project, the shared collaboration became a fundamental condition of making the work. But it is also a fact that making *State of Mind* shaped new abilities, we learned along the way. The realization of this project entailed a great deal of the roles many contemporary artists occupy and inhabit, not merely coming up with a concept and possessing the practical skills of producing an artwork such as being a photographer and a videographer making installation art together. Other skills that came into play were curating, researching, entrepreneurship, producing, budgeting, lecturing, educating, administrating, assisting, installing, and writing numerous press releases, grant applications, reports, and essays. Embracing all these different tasks made it possible to realize *State of Mind* as an art project in its entirety and as an exhibition tour. Engaging in the different functions of the project was not always something we chose, it was often a result of the low production budget. But, this meant that we were given a freedom and the possibility to independently decide how to manage *State of Mind*, which in turn entailed that we could act in an interdisciplinary manner and direct the project towards the different spheres with which we were interested to connect. To be in charge of the project as a whole was also something we felt was a necessary ethical choice made in order to be able to take as much responsibility as we possibly could. Addressing issues of non-normative sexualities is provocative for many, and the people who participated in *State of Mind* took a risk by doing so, especially given that the work was exhibited in their hometown twice. We had to manage this project carefully and sensitively, and the knowledge we gained from engaging, and discussing, the project with queer communities and others in the different cities became a useful source that supported our understanding of how to operate with *State of Mind* at each site.¹³

Aside from the collaborative work with, and around, *State of Mind*, there is another artist position featured in this project – the one held by me individually. I am currently pursuing a PhD in practice-based research, which is taking place within an academic context, and I am

the author of this text. I have been active as a visual artist and photographer since the mid-1980s, and, as I will explain further on in the “Photography” entrance, the methods and themes employed in *State of Mind* are closely connected to earlier projects. Likewise, commonalities with previous works can be recognized in *At the Time of the Third Reading*, my individual art piece that is part of the dissertation. But, as I am also part of the collaborative project *State of Mind*, the two positions cannot be separated completely since I inhabit both. The many shared experiences and discussions with Hallberg do of course affect what I write and how I understand the work. However, to position myself as an “I,” inhabiting the collaborative work, my individual art practice, and artistic research, opens up for a deepening in the areas of theory, art, and photography that I have a special commitment to, as well as these areas of specialization having contributed to the joint collaborative work. The “I” position prepares for a space where I can reflect on my artistic practice as a photographer with an interest in intersectional feminist theory, on how these two emerge in relation to each other and in relation to other embodied positions. It opens up for a site where other works of mine are interconnected with *State of Mind*, and allows me to push further the experiences and issues that Hallberg and I shared in a direction that is productive for my individual art and research practice. Two positions, an “I” and an “us,” merge and intersect, they depend on and create each other. So when I write “we”/“us”/“our” indicating the position of the collaborative work between Hallberg and me, it does of course intersect with my individual position as a researcher and artist.

Making this doctoral project into a compilation thesis solves a possible dilemma of research ownership in relation to the different collaborations appearing in the project as a whole, and I hope that the three entrances offered in this book will clarify what my individual contribution was.

Why Russia?

Why did Hallberg and I decide to travel to St. Petersburg in order to make an artwork on LGBTQIA issues? Would it not have made more sense to initiate such a project in Sweden where we lived and would have had a better understanding of the subject matter? Why would we go to a place we never had been to before, that we know very little about and where we would have communication difficulties? Neither of us spoke Russian and most of the people we met with did not understand English or Swedish. How did we come up with the idea to start with?

In the process of making, showing, and presenting the work we were often asked questions about our decision to select Russia as the point of departure for an art project like *State of Mind*. As relevant as these questions might be, there is no obvious answer and I am not able to deliver a coherent explanation as to why exactly St. Petersburg became the destination for the project. From the beginning there was something about the common experience of having lived in the USA – Hallberg in New York and I in Los Angeles – that made us curious to focus our attention somewhere else, in another direction. And being born and brought up in Sweden during the Cold War era, situated in between the USA and the USSR, was one consideration we discussed as a reason for spending some time in Russia. Both of us had a strong connection to American culture, from the experiences of living there, but just as much from the American domination of mass culture in Sweden. We were both inspired by America's grassroots movements, queer culture, and art scene.¹⁴ In contrast to the strong impact on us from the culture of the USA, our knowledge of Russia was limited, even though St. Petersburg is only an hour's flight away from Stockholm, where we both lived at the time we started discussing this joint project. Thereby, one could say that the motivation grew out of a curiosity to explore a place that was geographically close, yet seemed somehow remote. There were also practical reasons – we applied for and

received a stipend consisting of an apartment for two months in St. Petersburg. This made it possible for us to begin researching for *State of Mind* with no requirement that we achieve a specific result. We were given time to investigate the possibilities of making an art project in Russia on LGBTQIA issues, and initiate contacts with the city's queer community. However, it is important to emphasize that this first longer visit to St. Petersburg was carried out without us being sure whether we would find it appropriate to make a work on the subject, and without knowing how such a project should be implemented. The decision as to how to proceed with *State of Mind* was taken after the initial eight-week stay in the fall of 2006. We also realized then that the project would grow and take considerable time, and a major part of the work was our investment in exhibiting the art installation and activating it at each site.

What felt important throughout the process was never “why” we picked Russia as the target for making art, but rather “how” we worked with the project: to constantly consider and reconsider ethical questions in relation to what we were doing alongside the making and exhibiting of *State of Mind*. Relevant issues were for example the responsibility it entails when you engage people in a subject that is considered delicate, that is, making queer art out of Russia. What had to be considered was also Hallberg's and my multilayered positionings in the project, moving between *outsiders* as artist visitors from abroad to being *insiders* belonging to a queer community. One issue was, for example, what kind of expectations we would raise among the people that came to participate in *State of Mind*? The particular “why” that is addressed in this book, is rather then addressing *why* the art installation is *gestaltad* the way it is, in relation to the “how.”

Russian LGBTQIA Culture: Some Sources

One reason that made it a challenge, but that also served as a motivation to make an artwork in response to the community in St. Petersburg, was a lack of literature and other sources on Russian queer lives and cultures. For example, in 2005 when Hallberg and I started to do the initial research for *State of Mind*, the Russian LGBTQIA websites were only translated into English (a language we could understand) to a very limited degree.¹⁵ In the case of printed publications focusing on queer women in post-Soviet Russia there were, and still are, only few, which holds for both English and Russian literature. This meant that the preparatory research for *State of Mind* was predominantly conducted through the many conversations we had with people in St. Petersburg in 2006.

Even if *Queer Community through Photographic Acts* is not focused on researching about queer identities in Russia, but on how art may be used as a tool to *gestalta* queer community, I have since the beginning of the project searched for literature on the subject as a way to get a broader understanding of the issues that the *State of Mind* participants address in the interviews. After all, these stories form the basis for how the installation is *gestaltad*. To partake of the sources that were available felt necessary because of Hallberg's and my inability to understand Russian, and because the collection of the material for *State of Mind* was made in a relatively short period of time.

My focus has particularly been on finding publications on the lesbian environment, as well as texts that reflect the position of engaging with the Russian LGBTQIA environment from abroad. Most of the literature was published after we collected the material for the artwork in St. Petersburg. While working on *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading*, this was a way to update myself to a degree of feeling familiar with the discourses that were taking place, specifically considering the tensions of conducting queer studies in Russia from a so-called Western perspective.

Historically, the reason why there are so few works on lesbian lives in the Soviet era is that, according to the Russian author Olga Zhuk, issues of lesbianism and homosexuality were strictly taboo and only approached in medical journals. In these they were treated as “deviation from the sexual norm, as a perversion, or an illness” (1994, p. 146). During *Perestroika* it became possible to publish a few books on the subject, but most literature is still to this day focused on the male gay culture with only very little being directed towards contemporary lesbian culture. One exception is *Queer in Russia* (Essig 1999) that constitutes, similarly to *State of Mind*, the journey to Russia of a visitor from abroad made at the intersection of the outsider and the insider position. Essig, who regularly travelled to Russia for almost fifteen years before she wrote the book, captures a definition of LGBTQIA identities taking place over the years of *Perestroika*. The book puts forward and places in time many of the issues that were raised among the people we met in St. Petersburg, such as an understanding of the construction of the informal networks that formed a base for social activities for queer women. However, how Essig uses the queer concept to map the Russian community has been criticized, as it consolidates the author's experience of interacting with sexualities in Russia with Western-produced queer theory, particularly filtered through Judith Butler's critique of gay and lesbian identities (Baer 2009, p. 32). Baer's own approach to the subject ten years later takes another turn, as it does not intend to reveal the realities of Russian homosexuals but instead focuses on Russian society's discourses around “non-traditional sexual orientation.” The collection of essays in *De-centering Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives* (Mizielińska and Kulpa, eds. 2011) stresses queer studies coming out of Eastern Europe and thereby also challenges the idea of the Western discourse as omnipotent. Another useful source has been Katja Sarajeva's doctoral project *Lesbian Lives: Sexuality, Space and Subculture in Moscow* (2011). The research for Sarajeva's thesis in social anthropology took place in Moscow at the same time as Hallberg and I worked with the material

collection for *State of Mind* in St. Petersburg, and it is a good source to get a comparative understanding of the situation experienced by younger lesbians at the time and to clarify some of the concepts that was used within the community. It is also an interesting read in relation to *State of Mind* in order to get a grasp of the differences between the lesbian spheres in the two cities.

The lack of visual representation of queer women was also addressed by the people we spoke to during our visits to St. Petersburg. As visual artists it was of course interesting to find out what had been previously produced on the subject, but unfortunately we never got a chance to actually view any of the few projects we heard of, apart from an amateur movie that had been made by two women from one of the activist groups in the city. According to what we were told, the exhibitions that had taken place had been in clubs or at events that were oriented directly towards the community, often arranged for a specially invited audience.

In 2011, when *State of Mind* was about to be exhibited at Worth Ryder Art Gallery at the University of California in Berkeley, Hallberg and I got in touch with Sonia Franeta. Franeta had made a remarkable work together with videographer Tracy Thompson in the early to mid-1990s. They had travelled in Russia and conducted in-depth interviews with people who had experienced the Soviet society as queers, including transgender identities. A book in Russian by Franeta with some of the interviews, *Rozovye Flamingo: 10 Sibirskih Intervju* (Pink Flamingos: Ten Siberian Interviews) came out in 2004. It was not mentioned by the people we spoke to in St. Petersburg; for some reason it was not known among them. To protect the integrity of the people who had participated in Franeta and Thompson's large archive of filmed footage, it had thus far not been shown in Russia or anywhere else more than as excerpts in lectures and presentations.¹⁶ When exhibiting in St. Petersburg in 2012 we were given the opportunity to show some of the filmed material alongside the *State of Mind* installation.

Two major initiatives that were launched around the time when *State of Mind* was exhibited for the first time in St. Petersburg have radically changed the possibility to have access to queer art in the city. The Side by Side LGBT International Film Festival was meant to open for the first time in October 2008, in parallel with our exhibition at ROS-PHOTO, but was banned by the fire department the evening before the opening. The St. Petersburg Queer Culture Festival that took place for the first time in 2009 also suffers from constant harassment from the authorities as well as homophobic hooligans. In spite of the restrictions and the violence, both the initiatives continue their work and are getting increasingly established each year.¹⁷

Furthermore, the development of the Internet makes it now possible to post projects that challenge the heteronormative dominance in representation. I was introduced to such a project entitled *Display of Intimacy: A Psychological Art Project about LGBTQIA Couples and Families* (2013) by photographer Yulia Malygina and psychologist Anna Golubeva during a visit to Moscow in October 2015. An important contemporary contribution to the visual as textual writing of the Russian lesbian history is made by Nadia Plungian, accessible through the catalogue *Queerfest 2013: 20 Years since the Repeal of Article 121 from the Soviet Criminal Code* (2013), and in the essay "Russian Lesbians: A Group still in the Making" in *At the Time of the Third Reading* (2016), which is part of this research project. Both publications are in English and Russian.

Three Entrances

“Photography” and “Queer” constitute two out of the three entrances that serve as introductions to the research project. Interlaced in *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*, these two key concepts inform each other as both practices and as theories. However, as entrances the attempt is to address them separately (even if they inevitably make visits to each other) in order to highlight different aspects that make them relevant in general terms, and in this project in particular. Interwoven throughout the text are also a number of other important concepts: position, movement, in-between, insider, outsider, performativity, intersectionality, and situated knowledge. I often use the phrase “embodied positions,” which refers to identity categories such as class, gender, race, age, and sexuality. It also refers to my professional position as a photographer, artist, and researcher. The Swedish word *gestaltning* was addressed at the beginning of the book and will be used for the reasons mentioned above.

Community is an overall theme and a condition for the project, as it is carried out throughout the whole process and constitutes the foundation for the *gestaltning* of the artworks. It points toward a collective belonging and using it is a way to focus on the group instead of the individual. A sense of belonging to a community, wherever that community is situated, may function as an affirmation in itself. The way I for the most part apply the concept is as an “imagined community” that constitutes a group whose sense of belonging is not necessarily based on interactions in real life, but on a commitment to a social and emotional affiliation (Andersson 1996). Nevertheless, an imagined community does sometimes transform into social or political activism, for example queer movements that are performed both locally and trans-locally. All these aspects are present in this project, and community may then be addressed in this text as local groupings, translocal events, as well as a notion of transnational belonging. Community is dependent on the conceptions of being on the inside of a group,

which then demands someone else’s outside position. *Queer Community through Photographic Acts* is an artistic inquiry into the tensions and movements between these positions. They are performed through Hallberg and my positioning while making the work, exemplified with a sense of belonging to a transnational community and yet being outsiders for reasons such as nationality and language. Furthermore, as will also be made clear later, the positions of insider and outsider are fundamental to how community is *gestaltat* within and through the artworks.

“Photography” and “Queer” form the basis for the third entrance that leads into the artworks, and for that reason I continuously return to these concepts throughout the text. Questions and issues are sometimes raised to be returned to later, and one may therefore keep the two first entrances in mind when reading about *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading*. The last entrance begins with a reconstruction of visits to *State of Mind*, in which the installation is being looked at, walked through, engaged with, thought about, and experienced from various embodied, situated, and temporal positions. The focus is set on how queer community is performed through photographic acts, and how queer community may emerge through the *gestaltning* of *State of Mind*. Potential positions of exclusion or inclusion are also suggested, as mentioned above, the condition for any community is that belonging to a group always assumes that there are others who are on the outside (cf. Butler 1993). Other stories reflect how queer community is enabled during the process of collecting the material, and while exhibiting the work. Woven into the text are excerpts from interviews appearing in the installation, but also with people that have experienced the finished artwork. Finally, just as *State of Mind*’s *gestaltning* is structured so as to counteract a linear narration, this written visit is interrupted with parallel stories as it moves between different places.

The entrance to the artworks ends with *At the Time of the Third Reading*, which also constitutes the completion of the entire research project. In this photographic series the artistic strategy changed compared

to the method used in *State of Mind*. The text reflects on why steps backwards were taken, a movement that emerges through the photographs as a response to the situation when and where they were taken, and how and where they were thought to be distributed.

Entrance I
PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographic Acts and Feminist Thinking

Photography constitutes the foundation of my artistic practice: as a material, a method, a process, and a tool used to make, think, interact, and affect. To interconnect “act” with “photography” is a way to mark that the project in *fotografisk gestaltning* is accomplished from the position of an artistic practice; it is practice-based research. I consider acts that take place in the process of taking and making photographs, but also while exhibiting, writing and speaking about, and relating to the artworks in different ways. The notion of “act” also directs the attention towards the *performative* qualities of doing photography, a concept I will return to in the entrance “Queer.”

The acts of photography are particularly oriented toward concepts of group identity. It is an inquiry into how photographic acts may contribute to the creation of community (conceptually and literally), but also how photography may be used to “queer” notions of belonging. I have mainly devoted myself to intersectional feminist theory all through the process, which involves queer and postcolonial theory. In this chapter I will address some of the concepts that are borrowed from the field and that have been useful in my work, such as *situated knowledge*, *in-between*, and *speaking nearby*. I will give a few examples of how they are applied in the research, but they will further be reconnected to in the entrances to *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading*.

One reason to lean toward the field of intersectional feminist theories is the feminist approach of proceeding from personal experience in theoretical and artistic work. This is exemplified by the works of Sara Ahmed (1997), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991), Zanele Muholi (2014), Cathy Opie (2008), Adrian Piper (1996), and others, as it also goes along with my own projects. Trinh T. Minh-ha, the filmmaker, writer, composer, and feminist/ postcolonial theorist, has put in words many

of the issues that I am concerned with in my work as an artist in general, and this research project in particular. She argues that one may be personal by unmasking “the social self (and selves) which necessarily mediates the making as well as the viewing” (1991, p. 119). The “social selves,” that is identity constructions such as class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, and race, are in this text addressed as *embodied positions*. To embody implies giving form to something, to *gestalta*. The use of *embodied positions* may therefore point toward both the social selves and photographic acts.

While making the artworks that constitute the basis for *Queer Community through Photographic Acts* it felt necessary to incorporate what *embodied positions* might mean to the project, for example what it meant to make a project on, and with, queer community in a Russian context coming from Sweden. Donna Haraway’s concept of *situated knowledge* is one example of how photographic acts in relation to embodied positions can be thought of, as it also relates to Trinh’s unmasking of the social selves. “Feminist objectivity,” says Haraway, “is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (1988, p. 583). She suggests a feminist embodied objectivity indicating that only a “partial perspective” enables an “objective vision” (p. 583). In other words, the viewpoint means something to how we act and how we think, and this is something we should acknowledge. What positions we acts from should be recognized as part of what is asserted. A way to take *situated knowledge* into account while working with *State of Mind* (further examples of this will be addressed later) has been to emphasize the locality of the work. For example, Hallberg and I have always been very careful to speak about the work as coming out of some visits to St. Petersburg and interacting with a certain number of individuals in the city, and not as a “work on Russia.” Our concern has also always been to situate the installation at each exhibition site, and make it a local concern together with the queer communities at the different places. Likewise, the insider and outsider positions

that are reflected in the *gestaltning* of both artworks are a way to challenge the visitors’ *positions* in relation to what they are partaking of.

I find Haraway’s concept of *situated knowledge* particularly intriguing to apply in order to reflect on photography as a tangible practice. This is a way to inquire into the actual process of taking photographs and what the notion of embodied positions may do to the work: from what viewpoint are the pictures taken and how does one place oneself in relation to the subject to be photographed, for example. A photographer moves: approaching the subject, taking a step further away, or climbing up on something to get an elevated perspective. One travels away, or approaches the most familiar surroundings. Pictures are taken to establish a photographic position – a position that does not merely fixate the point of view seen from the camera, but that also says something about the embodied positions one possesses – what one has learned and how one feels.

However, the process of taking photographs is never one-dimensional. What is most fascinating about photographing the way I have been doing in both *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading* is the combination of being in control and having no control. There are concepts that are placed into each image and segment of the work, and at the same time, since the photographs are made outdoors with plenty of the surroundings being part of the image, unexpected elements emerge. Likewise, unexpected reactions to the exhibited work occur. I will name some examples later on of how details – planted on purpose or occurring accidentally in the photographs – become meaningful for some, while they are ignored by others. These are also examples of what *situated knowledge* may suggest, in other words that what visitors of the exhibition space know and how they feel also affects the way the artwork is received. The feelings about the work may be an effect of embodied positions, and the experience these produce. This is yet another reason why Hallberg and I found it necessary to “work with the work” as a method to understand and manage the situationality and locality of the project we produced and exhibited.

The way in which Trinh T. Minh-ha addresses questions of embodied positions in her work is one reason why I refer to her so often in this dissertation project. She underlines that it is essential to work with the multiplicity of these, and that they should constantly be challenged (2013, p. 73). As a space of resistance, a refusal to easily admit to categorizations Trinh has created a notion of *in-between*, which she connects to in various ways in her works, filmic as well as written (1982; 1989a; 1989b; 1991; 1992; 2011; 2013). An *in-between* is also constituted through a reluctance to set up barriers between theory and practice, and she emphasizes that there are different ways to do theory. In an early interview, Trinh foregrounds a viewpoint on the relationship between film and theory as informing each other “in a reciprocal challenge” (1992, p. 123). She carefully points out that the experience a film offers should not be mixed up with what is written about it. More recently, in *D-Passage*, she wrote: “I theorize *with* my films, not *about* them” (2013, p. 143). Minh-ha’s approach to theory has been strengthening to lean on, given that I stress that the results of my research emerge in and through the works of art that are produced within the framework of *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*.

In several of her texts and lectures, Trinh returns to what she calls the “politics of form” and emphasizes the importance of challenging how form constitutes content, and vice versa. Again the concept of *in-between* is applied, here as a space or event that is emerging between the content, the form, and the material, just as it can be situated within each of these aspects. Trinh speaks about how she works with the rhythm of film and sound, and how camera movements and editing are used to challenge the norms of filmic narration (cf. 1991, 1992, 2013). The filmic material, and later the digital material, itself becomes a tool for exploration. At other times, she uses *in-between* when she speaks about her own work in relation to filmic genres. She describes the documentary genre as an outside-in movement “whereby images are created by letting the world come to us with every move” (2014, p.142). The other way around, the fictional moves in the reverse direction “in

which images are produced by reaching out to the world from the inside” (p. 142). When it comes to her own films, she avoids admitting to any of these categories, which she says are a construction that is demanded by the film industry. Instead she places her work in what she calls the “in-between realm,” pointing towards a space between fixed categories. An example is the life stories of Vietnamese women in *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), where layers of narrations overlap in the interstices of documentary and fiction. In the film Trinh used a French text by another author featuring interviews with women in Vietnam. She translated the text into English and worked with actors, which is not obvious in the first half of the film. As the film progresses, one understands that the women are actually refugees from Vietnam living in the United States reenacting the stories of the real-life characters featured in the book. The film works with sound, layers of voices, and images, as it interrupts and undermines essentialist ideas of “truth” and the authority of the documentary genre. Yet, it plays with the spectator’s desire to construct narratives. “The best documentaries,” says Trinh, “are those that remain aware of their fictional nature as image, and the best fictions are those that document the reality of their own fictions” (2014, p. 142).

As I will discuss more fully later on, the concept of *in-between* is used in *Queer Community through Photographic Acts* to articulate the interstices and interactions between the different elements of *State of Mind*, as they also connect to each visitor’s moving and lingering in the exhibition space. This constitutes one example of how narratives of truth are interrupted within the art installation, and how it is situated in an area between a documentary practice and a fictional artwork. It also concerns queer community, suggesting a site for change and resistance in relation to the *inside* and *outside* positions that the artworks provoke. In *At the Time of the Third Reading* notions of *in-between* can be thought to relate to movements between closeness and distance.

In the previous film *Reassemblage* (1982) Trinh introduced another concept by claiming: “I do not intend to speak about. Just speak

nearby” (1992, p. 96). *Speaking nearby* can be used to denote an artist’s ethical relationship to the subject one is approaching. What she points at is an endeavor to always speak as if you assume that the person who is addressed in the speech is standing next to you. It is a way to create a space to respond, but that also may be contradictory. Trinh criticizes claims to “give voice” (1992, p. 193; 2014, p. 74) to someone, through a documentary practice for example, and describes it as a blindness to not realize one’s own position as an artist. To go along with Trinh’s *politics of form* and *speaking nearby*, these should be reflected within the artistic *gestaltning*, and not only theorized *about*. *Speaking nearby* is reflected in different ways in *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*, for example in thinking about what it would imply for *State of Mind’s gestaltning* that it should be possible to bring back the work to the queer community in St. Petersburg. In *At the Time of the Third Reading* it can be used to reflect on how movements of withdrawal can be a way to still stand behind the queer community.

Photographic Background

The same year as Trinh’s *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* premiered, Martha Rosler’s “In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)” was published in *The Contest of Meaning* (Bolton [1989] 1993). As an artist and writer, Rosler represented a new critique on photography together with for example Allan Sekula (1993). In the essay she asks: “How can we deal with documentary photography itself as a photographic practice?” (Rosler [1989] 1993, p. 303). Her essay covers a period of documentary photography in the United States starting with the work of Jacob Riis at the very beginning of the 1900s. It is a critical review of the position of the (male) photographer, and how the genre of documentary photography alters from serving as a testimony of social injustice (yet not challenging the underlying structures) to a kind of “personal documentary” represented by photogra-

phers like Winograd, Arbus, and Friedlander. This later genre is described as an attempt to isolate the image from what it once depicted: its social context and historical meaning. Rosler reads it as two temporal steps: the first is called “immediate” and is held as a testimony to what is momentarily present as a relationship between what is being photographed and what the image is depicting. It then enters a conventional “aesthetic-historical” moment, whereupon the image succumbs to the viewer’s aesthetic pleasure, commodified for the market of surplus value (p. 317). The image becomes what remains within the frame, now disconnected from the first immediate testimonial quality connecting it to a specific event or certain people. Instead the documentary rather becomes a global claim such as the photographer capturing the human conditions of mankind.

If I would describe something as a “photographic background,” I would say that I began my practice within an environment that was situated within the tradition of the “subjective documentary photography” that Rosler criticized in her essay. It was as a student at the Nordic School of Photography in Stockholm in the latter part of the 1980s, a school which had been founded by the legendary Swedish photographer Christer Strömholm decades earlier. During the years at school I became increasingly skeptical towards this approach to documentary photography, which I felt separated the photograph from its subject and yet exposed people. The documentary was accentuated as a way to “express oneself,” detached from considerations of one’s own power position as a photographer. What were often highlighted were photographic practices that, with quite intrusive methods, used people in vulnerable situations for their own causes to make work that quickly became disconnected from the subject that was photographed. The kind of reflective critique of the media and the role of the photographer that both Rosler and Trinh called for, was not introduced at the school at the time.

After school, I worked as a press photographer and made photographic art projects simultaneously. As an exploration of my role

within news media, and as a reaction toward the school environment I had recently left, I made a series of works that absurdly played with the photographer as the travelling “global witness,” and the image as evidence. The first series was completed in 1989, at a time when the photographic scene in Sweden had moved on to a point when it was about to undergo quite a comprehensive transformation.¹⁸ The critical discourses of Rosler, Sekula, and others were now introduced, set in relation to the Swedish scene, and often met with agitated discussions from many of the established photographers. The former dominance of the male coded genre of personal documentary was apparently threatened. Significant for this time period was that we were a group of women photographers who entered the scene with work that challenged the prevailing norms around photography and became part of an emerging feminist discourse within the arts.¹⁹

Being part of the creation of this new wave of photography and feminism urged me to search for an environment where I could study art in the intersection of the two. This was one of the reasons why I relocated to the United States in 1994 and one year later I began the master’s program at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and became a student of Allan Sekula, Millie Wilson, Michael Asher, and others. I was now situated in the heart of the critical discourse that had been lacking in my previous education, and I could direct my studies towards the topics I was engaged in. One of the most important things I learned at CalArts, which I still embrace today and which gives me confidence in my artwork and in this research project, is that there are many ways of performing theoretical reflections. Just like Trinh’s urging to make film politically, I understood that the thinking would not have to happen parallel to the work. On the contrary, it could be implemented in the artwork’s *gestaltning*. After some years of making work out of a studio space, often including digital montage, I now returned to taking photographs that directly referred to the environment I was surrounded by. I “stepped back out to the world” with my photographic practice, which essentially meant that I once again

pointed the camera towards a reality that was not staged digitally or in a studio. In that way, I would say that my photographic work still relates to the documentary, but intersecting with a conceptual and feminist practice.

In California I made two larger works, *Truckers and Others* (1994–1999) and *Portraits in Nordic Light* (1997–1999), which in principal form the basis for this doctoral project that I am about to complete now, some twenty years later. Using photography I was already then addressing issues like community, embodied positions, queer interventions, movement, performativity, and intersectionality in relation to positions of *insider* and *outsider*. With Rosler’s and Trinh’s, understanding of the documentary and the problematics of photographing “others” in mind, I had (and still have) an urge to find ways to address social issues and to work with “reality,” in terms of that the people participating in the artworks are representing themselves and their own life stories.

Portraits in Nordic Light was the first in a series of ongoing projects, of which *State of Mind* is one, that have a point of departure in personal networks. All these projects use photography to produce community, both conceptually and literally. In *Portraits in Nordic Light* a select group consisting of my own generation of artist peers is approached, and it looks at the phenomena of artist colonies and the need to create networks within the arts. The series of portraits is made in dialogue with a genre of Nordic painting from one hundred years earlier, and has over the years grown into a number of subprojects. By art critics and others, it has often been addressed in terms of representation of men versus women within the art world, but it may just as well be discussed within the intersections of race, sexuality, nationality, and gender. For example, the portraits offer quite obvious potential for queer readings, which was completely ignored when the project was first introduced in Sweden at the end of the 1990s. The work on artist communities operates twofold: on the one hand it is a *gestaltad* documentation of a group of people within the arts at a specific time, which

also serves as creation of community by working its way into the writing of art history. On the other hand, since it mimics a particular genre of painting, it may call for comparisons of the artist's role during two different eras. However, I imagine that by affiliating contemporary queer portraits with the history of particular paintings that are linked to Nordic National Romanticism, it opens up the potential for a queering of this era as well.²⁰

Another series of works, *På Lagom Avstånd* (*Proper Distance II*, 2003), also approaches the personal surroundings and traces the history of my biological family on my father's side. This work is a photographic visit to the various environments that used to be part of everyday life for my father and his siblings: everything, from their former workplaces to a mapping of all the marks made on the walls of my grandmother's 150-year-old house right before it was demolished. The series also constitutes an exploration of the large family archive consisting of wills and other documents that stretches back to 1839. The documents are combined in different series in order to let other or new stories emerge. This later series has an overall emphasis on place, class, and memory.²¹

State of Mind forms a third direction of the ongoing projects on community, which all have particular identity-based groupings in focus. To simplify, the three works are divided into three components of life: work, biological family, and chosen family (friends and lovers). Similarly, they can be categorized into gender, class, and sexuality, and thus both complement and inform each other. However, *State of Mind* differs from the other two by not having my own more or less established personal networks as a starting point. In this latest project I collaborated with Hallberg and together we relocated to an entirely new context: a new country, a foreign language, and a group of people whom neither of us had any previous connection to. The question was, what would it mean to apply a similar method and *gestaltning* that had been developed in the former works on community (particularly in *Portraits in Nordic Light*) to an art project situated in such a different

context, especially since it was directed towards the LGBTQIA community, a specifically vulnerable group? Furthermore, what would the relocation mean to the project, and how could the artistic methods and the *gestaltning* be developed for this situation? Considering my background within the documentary field and the urge to address the social through working with "real" people and situations, the study on how community may be *gestaltat* through photographic acts was also an underlying examination of what a documentary approach to people that lived outside my own closer circle meant for my work as an artist. This time the focus was on people who were not part of my own personal history, although we had a number of shared experiences. It was a group that I could belong to and simultaneously be outside of, depending on what position one looked at and what viewpoint one took.

Gestalta Queer Community

I am sitting on a bench idly browsing through a magazine while waiting for the ferry to take me home. It is a Swedish paper that is delivered for free to house owners, articles depicting middle-class home furnishing. A full-page photograph draws my attention, advertising for a company selling sheet metal for roofing. In the image, a short-haired woman dressed in overalls is squatting on top of the roof of a house. She is holding some sort of special tool in her hand. Her gaze is fixed somewhere far away, as if looking into the future. The sky is cloudy and a rainbow rises behind her back. It is nothing really, but it does something to me. It hits me as it intends to do, being advertising catering to a Swedish privileged middle class that is ready to embrace the rainbow family. However, it doesn't solely deliver a feeling of comfort and recognition. It does something more to me, an awkward feeling that makes me both excited and embarrassed (Notebook entry, May 2011).

The desire to *look* for signs of queerness in media, fine art, and popular culture is something that probably most people within the LGBTQIA community can relate to. Still, I was puzzled over my own reaction over seeing a seemingly queer figure in the advertisement. What felt awkward was not the image itself, but that it indeed did affect me in such a personal way. The incident happened five years after Hallberg and I started working on the project, and at the ferry landing I was suddenly reminded that I also had a desire to be recognized, just as the people in *State of Mind* whom I had been photographing in St. Petersburg. It was not only an artistic concept or an activist work, but also something that actually touched me deeply. The feeling that emerged at the moment I saw the photograph affected me physically and emotionally, and it was not anything I could place outside myself.

To see queers in photographs, films, and other artworks is important as there is a lack of representation of LGBTQIA issues and experience in the media and in history books. On the contrary, evidence of queer living has been erased and excluded from the collective memory, whether that is in the form of the destruction of private belongings, or an officially sanctioned ignorance, refusing to acknowledge the non-normative. Records of queer existence have often only been found in registers for criminals or the mentally ill as it has been criminalized, or pathologized, until quite recently in the West, and still is in many other places. In recent decades there have been several artistic and research projects with different approaches to the subject, some of which have taken the form of a reinterpretation of existing material, whereas others have recreated historical narratives or made new ones. I will here mention a few that constitute examples that are of relevance for the *Queer Community through Photographic Acts* project. Unfortunately, most references rest on a Western narrative due to my own cultural and linguistic experiences, as well as the location of the sites where queer works have been given a chance to be publicly presented.

Some initiatives have been dedicated to discover “queer moments” in existing works. For example, the American activist Vito Russo’s

research into Hollywood cinema resulted in the classic book *The Celluloid Closet* (1981). The book, which is based on a number of interviews with people connected to the Hollywood sphere, highlights the treatment of queer events and characters within films and the film industry. However, an effect of this work is not only the recognition of LGBTQIA people and issues, but Rosso turns our gaze towards the potential for queer moments to arise within cinema that is produced for a mainstream (heterosexual) audience.²² He offers a tangible understanding, exemplified with a multiplicity of filmic moments, that queerness does not only take the form of representation of queer bodies. Queer can emerge as an *in-between*, as per Trinh’s concept of a space that can be seen to take place in the interstices of a normative narrative, but it can likewise be a parallel story, situated “side by side with the non-queer” (Rosenberg 2002, p. 119).

One example of a queering of existing art that was situated in a Swedish context is Nationalmuseum’s exhibition *Queer: Desire, Power and Identity* (2008). For the exhibition, curator Patrik Steorn scrutinized artworks in the museum’s collections and suggested new narratives emerging from the works. Some were directed towards acknowledging the lifestyles of artists, or their models, who had same sex relationships or were living “queer” in other ways. Other stories suggested queer readings as an attempt to interrupt the heteronormative history writing within which the artworks are usually inscribed. It can be expressed through, for example, a “queering” of gestures, bodies, events, or glances. Another Scandinavian initiative is the exhibition *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive* (Rowley and Wolthers 2009), in which an international selection of artworks challenges a normative history writing by contributing with new stories based on experiences and memories which deviate from the established norms of gender and sexuality. As argued by Mathias Danbolt in the exhibition catalogue, new understandings and uses of the archive have become an increasing focus for both queer art and theory. As for earlier approaches to the archiving on lesbian and gay history as a matter of

representation, a queering of the archive highlights the temporality of “homosexuality” as “a fairly recent construction” (2009, p. 33). In yearning to make up for lost history, attempts to “out” historical persons or cultural products run the risk of ignoring the actual historical conditions. Further, by the reclamation of identities there are always new positions to be excluded, as this reclamation becomes, quoting Claire Hemming, “itself productive of minoritization” (2002, cited in Danbolt 2009, p. 34).

There are many contemporary photographic projects that aim to achieve visibility for queer women and trans identities, projects that also serve to gather the community. With the possibilities of posting images online, many of these works are now widely accessible and events such as LGBTQIA festivals constitute a platform for queer projects. However, as “fine art” that has made it into the gallery and museum scene, visual representations of queer women and trans identities are still a rarity. I consider *The Domestic Series* (1995–1999) by Catherine Opie and Zanele Muholi’s *Faces and Phases* (2006–2014) as two works that can be seen in relation to the photographic portraits in *State of Mind*. Opie’s series is part of a longer project on her own community of lesbians, butch and trans identities, which has drawn wide attention on the Western art scene since the mid-1990s. For this work, she drove cross-country throughout the United States and visited the households of queer women making photographs of their domestic lives. Emphasizing the importance of what Opie calls social documents, her desire was “to introduce a queer element to those representations,” placing her project alongside works such as Tina Barney’s photographs of her upper-class family and friends (2008, p. 141). Just like the images in *State of Mind*, Opie’s portraits are taken with an analogue large-format camera, a process that is complicated and time consuming. This photographic process does not only enhance the technical quality of the photographs, but affects the photographic situation and brings a certain sense of half staged and half documentary into the work. Even though Opie’s works, just like Barney’s, are a doc-

umentation that are made in the home environment, and *State of Mind* is photographed in different public places around St. Petersburg, there are other similarities between the works.²³ In Opie’s images, as in *State of Mind*, the surroundings are of great importance. The models only occupy part of the image, and space is left to the furnishings of the home, something that also highlights issues of style and class.

The work of the South African photographer Zanele Muholi has also gained recognition far beyond her own community. Muholi, who calls herself a visual activist, has for years dedicated her practice to capturing the black lesbians and trans people of her home country. Her book *Faces and Phases* 2006–2014 contains no fewer than 258 portraits of queers depicted in a straight forward manner, proudly facing the camera in a counteraction to all the abuse lesbians and trans people suffer in South African society. In a similar way to both the still and the moving portraits in *State of Mind*, it is crucial for Muholi that her pictures are taken outside. It is a gesture that claims space, making visibility a process that takes place while photographing, as much as when the images are later on display. However, there is a considerable difference between Muholi’s contribution and the work Hallberg and I were engaged in: Muholi is very much part of the community she is documenting and empowering. We may all feel that we are participating in a transnational queer community that in some ways unites us, but whereas Hallberg and I could safely travel back to a place where it is far easier to be living queer, Muholi has herself been harassed and robbed many times. Louise Wolthers, head of research at Hasselblad Foundation, points out that “photographic communities do not simply occur or emerge out of collections of photographs from ‘the whole world’” (2016, p. 7); the gesture of “making community” through photographic acts must therefore reflect other aspects of positioning. What may then differentiate this research project from both Opie’s and Muholi’s projects, is the striving to incorporate these aspects as part of the artworks. This does not necessarily take place within the framing of the photograph, but in relation to other components.

Movements with Camera

Experimenting with photographic acts in different ways is for me a way to inquire into the multiplicity of embodied positions that Trinh T. Minh-ha, as earlier mentioned, is urging us to work with and challenge. In order to establish spaces that allow affirmation while at the same time challenging notions of identity as essential, I have applied photographic methods such as seriality, repetition, mimicry, referentiality, and adjustment of the size of the photograph, as well as the size of the motif within the photographic frame in relation to how the visitor to the exhibition space moves and lingers. Most of my works are presented in spatial, three-dimensional installations where the different elements relate to each other. It is an ongoing inquiry into how movements, bodily and emotional, can be interconnected with acts of seeing and positioning, and how movement can contribute towards “queering” an understanding of photography as mere representation. I am particularly interested in how space, or even tension, can be created *in-between* different positions and how this may be performed by movements. Bodily movements become a way to acknowledge, and possibly destabilize, the embodied positions of the viewer, and not only recognize what one is looking at, that is, what is captured within the frame of the photograph.

In *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading*, as in many other works, movement has been implicated in the form of travelling. Many times this has meant going somewhere else to make a project, but in *Truckers and Others*, the second project that was accomplished while living in California, the photographic act happened while travelling. The almost 2,000 snapshots that the series consist of were taken at high speed while passing trucks on the highway, predominantly on Interstate 5 between Los Angeles and San Francisco. At the moment of passing by, three elements are repeatedly captured in each picture: the truck, the trucker, and the landscape.

Another kind of travelling, namely in time, takes place in *View (Grimmered)* (2003), part of the series *På Lagom Avstånd (Proper*

Distance, II). For this work I walked through my grandmother’s house and took pictures of every individual mark on the walls caused by the wear and tear of up to 150 years of living. The house was emptied of all things and was soon to be demolished. I used a simple “point-and-shoot” digital camera, which had difficulties establishing the focal point on the flat walls. The camera’s focus zoomed in and out, in the same way as one’s memories are made up of fragments that fade and return. The final 226 close-up photographs are each mounted individually on pieces of aluminum. In exhibition venues, these are placed together forming a new wall. The sometimes blurry and sometimes sharp images of the marked wallpapers encourage the viewer to walk up close to see the details, then to step back again to get the abstract overview of all the pieces of wallpaper reflecting different time periods. *Truckers and Others* also moves between abstraction and realism when presented in the exhibition space. The many snapshots are installed as a color-coordinated diagram, presented in grids stretching from the floor towards the ceiling. When stepping up close to the small pictures one becomes aware of the repeated scenario of trucks, truckers and landscapes in each photograph.

The challenge of translating movements that take place during the act of taking the photographs into the space where the photographic object is later presented is probably the principle reason why I came to develop my practice to include installation. I became interested in encouraging the visitor of the exhibition to interact with the artwork not only by looking at the work, but also by moving in relation to what one sees. This can be expressed within the framing of the photographs, of the size of each individual work, but also how separate photographs relate to each other. In *Proper Distance (I)* (2000–2002) I distanced myself from the subject by taking a step back while photographing – something that causes bodies in the exhibition space to move the other way around. *Proper Distance (I)* is a series of panoramic portraits where two seemingly oppositional photographic genres collide: the landscape and the portrait (Lundström 2003). The

title was taken from the many technical instructions on the Internet on how to make “good portraits” – what kind of lens to use or how to place oneself in relation to the model. In *Proper Distance (I)*, all the people portrayed are positioned excessively far from the camera, whether it is my own father vanishing into a foggy industrial landscape among giant trucks at his former workplace or a reindeer herder in the arctic landscape far up in northern Norway. In spite of the far distance, they all seek eye contact with the camera’s eye (the lens) – an instruction given beforehand.²⁴ In different exhibition spaces, these images has been displayed together, edge to edge, forming a landscape panorama stretching all around the walls, encouraging the viewer to take a walk along this visual terrain. This series might engender a filmic experience, but instead of the images moving the viewer performs the movement with their own body by walking alongside the photographs.

Another similar “filmic” method is used in the public artwork *Här är vi (Here We Are, 2014)*, a dedication to those who came before us and prepared the ground for younger generations of queers.²⁵ The project was made for an apartment building for senior citizens in Stockholm and the three top floors of the nine-storey building are dedicated to the elderly within the LGBTQIA community. Part of *Här är vi* is a series of nine photographs of a springtime landscape with a group of people from the community walking towards the camera on a green field. The photographs are printed on wallpaper and mounted on the walls outside the elevator on each floor. On the first floor one may only get a glimpse of groups of people standing at the edge of the forest far away. The higher up the elevator moves the closer to the camera/viewer the community of queers gets. In the final photograph on the eighth floor, one is met by a group of smiling and waving people. The series *gestaltar* a literal as well as a symbolic movement from invisibility to visibility.

In both *Proper Distance (I)* and *Här är vi* the presence of people is initially not obvious, as they are not revealed until a closer look is

taken. Possibly you then realize that the people portrayed in the photographs are looking back at you. A close look is necessary in order to see the person in the distance – a subtle reminder of acts of looking and being looked at, of moving and being moved. The works provoke bodies to move close to the photograph to perceive the details, and then to back off to get a view of the entire landscape. Only to once again move closer. Just as in *Truckers and Others* and *View (Grimmered)*, back and forth movements are performed by bodies relating to photographs: a performance of closeness and distance, and of moving and lingering *in-between* different positions. The method of taking a step back as a photographer and later encouraging a viewer to approach the photograph was used again in *At the Time of the Third Reading* and is accounted for in the “Artworks” entrance.

Positioning with Photography

The inquiry into how queer community emerges through photographic acts also involves considering how queerness intersects with other embodied positions. To begin with, one needs to be reflect on what it entails for two artists from abroad working on a queer art project located in a Russian context. Referring back to Haraway’s *situated knowledge*, and Trinh’s *in-between* and *speaking nearby*, the intention in this chapter is thus to take the position as “photographer” as a starting point, and in relation to a professional identity pinpoint some of the various other embodied positions that are worth noticing when considering *State of Mind* and *At the Time of the Third Reading*.

Inhabiting the position of “photographer” implies being in control of the artistic decisions that, among other things, place the people portrayed in both the artworks in a vulnerable position. The position of the artist, or artists in the case of *State of Mind*, sets the framework for how the material for the artworks was collected and how the queer community is *gestaltat* within the artworks. Tensions between artistic

freedom and responsibility may be overshadowing other issues, but one ought to reflect on how other positions intersect with the professional role. An intersectional approach to various identities and positions of power from the field of gender research is also applied. An attempt to understand how different positions, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, are articulated in relation to each other has long been an integrated part of feminist thinking, but the dominating white, middle-class, straight, and Western discourse in feminist activism and theory has also been criticized. An early critique that highlighted the urge for intersectional analyzes was made by Kimberle Crenshaw when she pointed out the role of women of color within feminism: "Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (1993, p. 1244). Instead of trying to define the borders between different categories, an intersectional approach guides us to an understanding that different power relations interact, create, and transform each other (de los Reyes and Mulinary 2005, Lykke 2005).

A queer position obviously affected the work in different ways, here used as an umbrella term for LGBTQIA identities. Thinking of queer community as a translocal engagement, this position can be said to be shared with most people who are part of the artworks, and it influenced how the community in St. Petersburg responded to our call to make the project. As an example, there were many people who supported us with contacts, translations, and more, and I would say that the reason for this was the sense of community we shared.²⁶ In that way, positioning as "queer" can be said to be a situated privilege, as it supported the implementation of the artworks in relation to the marginalized community we approached. In general terms, an "invisibility" as queers, compared to skin color or gender performance, can also be argued in support of Hallberg's and my purposes. Even though we addressed an utterly controversial subject, we could for example photograph and film in public space without anyone questioning us or the Russian

participants.²⁷ The benefit of "passing" as "norm" is of course then only set in relation to the possibility to negotiate access to the public space of St. Petersburg when we were collecting the material for the work. In 2006/2007, as public awareness in St. Petersburg regarding homosexuality was only starting, most people would not even reflect on deviations from the norm. The vagueness of queer visibility meant that we could choose to be "out," or not, depending on the situation, or what space we were entering.

To live queer is to live a constant double life, as a temporal and situational event. Because of society's heteronormative gaze, as queers we are often hidden in our bodies, no matter whether we desire to be recognized or not. It is an ongoing process where one has to decide from situation to situation whether it is relevant, or worthwhile, to reveal the opposite. Situations of deliberations like this are discussed in the Swedish book *Dubbelliv* (Lindholm 2010), where four lesbian women are interviewed. Lindholm explains the tensions between society's expectations and the women's experiences saying that to "reveal" sexual identity (or a life pattern) in an apparent situation does not merely mean to deliver information, but the actual situation changes. Both parties are "revealed" as part of a heteronormative interpretative system, where someone is forced to speak (maybe about something completely personal and private) in order to not remain invisible, while the other part does not have to do it (2010, p. 21). The position of queer is something that has to be performed in specific ways; it has to be pronounced in order to be recognized in society in general. It is apparent that the women in Lindholm's book, as well as many of the people we interviewed, choose to keep silent in most situations. Besides the issue of whether one would be exposed to risk or not, being "open" in one's personal life involves the wearisome chore of always having to educate ignorance.

This queer vagueness could be seen as beneficial for Hallberg and me in the sense that it made it easier to accomplish our work in St. Petersburg. We also got the impression that it often made life easier

for the participants. For example, when we asked if they were “out” at their workplaces, we often got the answer that nobody in Russia discussed their private lives at work to start with. Being out, or not, was often not seen as an issue in everyday life, yet many felt unease, or even fear, at the thought of what would happen *if* those around them would find out. To participate in *State of Mind* challenged this – it entailed a personal risk of being “revealed” to people one would not have had the reason to raise the subject with before. Therefore, participating in the work with a desire to contribute towards a collective process meant taking a stand in order to support a development towards the visualization of LGTTQIAs. This and the goodwill that Hallberg and I encountered because we were “part of the family” meant that we had to reflect upon our intersecting positions as artists *and* queers and what this did to the project. How we were positioned always had to be placed in relation to others.

Adrian Piper is another artist who has approached identity and “visibility” versus “invisibility” in her artworks and writing. In the unannounced performance *Calling Cards* (1986–1990) she addressed the experience of being racialized from the perspective of being a light-skinned African American. As a performance, every time she overheard racist and ignorant comments she handed over a typed card which responded to the situation. One example is *My Calling (Card) #1*, which starts with: “Dear Friend, I am black. I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark.” In her essay “Passing for White, Passing for Black” (1996) she continues the discussion of the reactions she encounters in the different rooms she enters, and how her “racial ambivalence” often causes annoyance, as if she is cheating on people for not “outing” her blackness:

So a white person who accuses me of deceit for not having alerted her that I am black is not merely complaining that I have been hiding something about myself that is important for her to know. The complaint goes much deeper. It is that

she has been lured under false pretenses into dropping her guard with me, into revealing certain intimacies and vulnerabilities that are simply unthinkable to expose in the presence of someone of another race (that’s why it’s important for her to know my race) (Piper 1996, pp. 23–24).

Hallberg and I also received disappointed comments from some people when they later saw the photographs in *State of Mind*. They thought that the people portrayed appeared too “normal” – they could pass as heterosexual and were not featured as sufficiently queer. How would anyone understand that these women (and one man) belonged to a queer community? However, as I will return to later, a performance of normality as a surface is also an artistic strategy when it comes to *State of Mind*’s *gestaltning*, and not only a condition for making the work. Besides the fact that the people in the photographs are “being themselves,” one must separate the artwork from the actual bodies it *gestaltar* – positioning queer in *State of Mind* may also imply that norms get challenged.

Besides sexuality, skin color is something that Hallberg and I share with the participants in *State of Mind*, as we all can be identified as “white.” It can be argued that the intersection of these two mutual positions affect the work in a similar way: an apparent visual, and privileged, position as white certainly made it more “convenient” to navigate the project in St. Petersburg, just as the situational visibility/invisibility of our queerness did the same. Just like Adrian Piper, Sara Ahmed uses her own bodily experiences to theorize on racism (but also queer embodiment). Referring to bell hooks, she describes how certain bodies affect the space that they are entering, to a degree of “getting in the way” of how other bodies possess the room” (Ahmed 2011, p. 11). In a similar way, a space can appear to be acknowledging to some and easier to occupy because it is constructed to serve certain bodies. On the other hand, as I will be returning to later in the entrance “Artworks,” one should not take for granted that a concept of “black” and “white” is the

only race- or ethnicity-related position that is relevant for someone who visits *State of Mind*. Once again, this has to be set in relation to the situationality of the work: where and for whom it is exhibited.

Other possible embodied positions can be lined up, aside from the roles as artist, white and queer, that had an impact on how we could implement the work. Age, gender, and nationality are also some of the factors that affected how we could navigate the project in St. Petersburg. As simple a thing as us being read as middle-aged *babushkas*, the Russian word for an elderly woman, was helpful when we travelled around the city with all the ridiculously expensive technical equipment stuffed into a worn army bag. Nobody ever bothered us, and we never felt threatened despite all the warnings we constantly received from people who wanted to protect us from the violent city. Moreover, since Sweden appears to many as a paradise for queers (an assumption based on relativities between Sweden and other places), our national belonging also helped us carry out the project, as this opened doors into the LGBTQIA community.²⁸ National identity also implied that we later, when we exhibited *State of Mind*, could apply for Swedish state funded grants to finance all the exhibitions in the post-Soviet sphere (and the exhibitions abroad in the West as well). This meant that we could achieve the goal of “bringing back” the project to the area where it was made, in other words to people who shared the language and many of the experiences that are addressed in the interviews.

However, no matter how many layers of identity were added onto each other (and the constant risk of leaving out so many others), I always felt that it was, above all, the intersection between “white” and “queer” that made the project possible, but that also creates a certain tension in the artwork. It is a fact that the resemblances affect as much as the differences, which formed the conditions for how the work could be implemented (and how it is received). Intersecting embodied positions make imagined lines between *insider* and *outsider* positions more difficult to define, and it is something that constantly has to be negotiated and is never fixed.

Entrance II

QUEER

Performativity

The various ways queer may be applied makes it a relevant concept to use as the second entrance into this research project, as it also travels and is practiced in different contexts and places. Queer defines certain sexualities, and at the same time it constitutes a theoretical tool that scrutinizes heteronormativity. For example, in *State of Mind* portraits and stories about the living conditions for *queers* in St. Petersburg are *gestaltade*, simultaneously *queer theory* is used to discuss the emergence of *queer* community within and through the artworks. The foremost intention is to reflect on the *performative* qualities of the artworks' *gestaltning*, as they for example move within normative expressions and at the same time may challenge normativity. They may provoke feelings of being inside or outside and the possibility to move between different positions is embedded in the structure of the work.

To think about photography and its performative qualities, I have turned to Judith Butler, one of the foremost queer researchers. Butler underlines that words, gestures, enactments, and other forms of expression are performative. The attention should be directed towards what these “do” and the effects of what is being expressed, performed or *gestaltat*. Performativity implies that expressions are constituted through repetitions and citational practices “by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler [1993] 2011, p. xii). The discourses and norms in society are formed by iteration, and as imagined on the outside or on the inside of these, the embodied positions are constructed through the repetitive acts.

Considering performativity and the fact that it is norms that make us think and act in certain ways, since they are productive, making some identities and subjectivities possible, is central for *State of Mind's* *gestaltning*. The installation plays on the fact that this implies that there are others who are not recognized within the existing norms, but are

posited as the “other,” i.e. as a constituting outside that creates a framework for the normative. In the installation, this relationship can be claimed to be reversed, or at least challenged, as the non-normative (the queers) are placed in a central position, whereas photographic norms, norms that are already established, are used to queer the visitor of the installation (cf. Scheman 1996). This is one example that highlights how queer potential may emerge from *State of Mind*. It can be seen, in the form of the artwork’s *gestaltning*, as an endeavor to provoke reflection on how we are recognized by society’s regulatory norms, as well as how we recognize ourselves in relation to the norms in which we are always inscribed, since we cannot exist outside of them (Butler 2004).

Given that speech is part of *State of Mind*’s *gestaltning*, expressed in the interviews, but also through how the work is talked and written about, it is necessary to emphasize that performativity is not only understood as expressed in spoken and written words. It emerges through objects, visuals, and bodies – through movement and acts. Citational and repetitious practices that are being expressed through objects and visuals, in relation to bodily movements, play a vital role in how positions of outside and inside can be considered in *State of Mind*. It is *gestaltat* by how the different parts relate to each other: the tensions between the photographs that may confirm certain norms, and the video interviews that reveal non-normative identities for example, and what kind of affects might emerge depending on how one moves in *State of Mind*.

To continue to think about performativity, and how people might move differently in and through *State of Mind*, we can also take the company of Sara Ahmed’s queer contribution to phenomenology (2006). She emphasizes that how we move and towards what we are orienting ourselves, is an ambivalent relationship between “following a line and the conditions for the emergence of lines” (p. 554). The conditions that affect the direction in which we move, how we follow lines, is dependent on the norms we are exposed to:

Lines are both created and followed by being created. The lines direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as effects of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way, we know which direction to face, only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view (Ahmed 2006, p. 555).

Thus, following Ahmed into *State of Mind*, what lines we are directed to follow determines how we move within and through the art installation. Where we come from and what we have learned, in other words Haraway’s “situated knowledge,” points towards where we are heading. The “work” which Ahmed addresses, involves these directions, as well as an investment in forms of social life. We follow what is expected from us, and by following these paths, or norms, we also create them. Something to keep in mind when entering the art installation is to question what the norms of *State of Mind* may be, that is, something that repeats what is seen as “normal” and when, how, and where the queer potentials take place.

As artists we express something through artworks, and what is expressed may be intentional, thought to be directed in a certain way. However, considering Ahmed’s lines, one should remember that the relationship between what an artist wishes to express and what emerges may be complicated as it also relies on the person who enters the space. What *emerges*, and how artworks affect, might not necessary be equivalent to the deliberately delivered and pre-conceptualized content (cf. Butler 2004, p. 200). It is therefore important to again underline the situationality and temporality of both the artworks that are part of *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*.

Positioning as Queer

While queer theory undermines the notion of identity as something essentialist and fixed, and instead stresses that it is a social construction, Butler still emphasizes the importance of recognition. Norms recognize some groups, and make the lives of others more difficult to live. Thus, politics based on identity categories can sometimes be necessary; one might need to define the group one is marginalized into by society in order to achieve social change (Butler 2004, p. 227). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls for a *strategic essentialism*, meaning that it is possible to come together to fight for common goals on specific issues in spite of differences (1987, p. 205). Spivak's approach, as well as Butler's, is deconstructive. It is a strategy to acknowledge that there are social differences dependent on embodied positions, for example class, gender, age, sexuality, or race. Using the classifications may be necessary in order to dismantle stigmatizing structures and the oppression of certain groups. However, she also points out that one should constantly critically investigate the meaning of essentialist terms. For Spivak, uncritical application will lead into its own trap of reaffirming the structures within which one is caught. Trinh also addresses the risks of labeling oneself with the vocabulary of the dominating forces, and thereby submitting to categories that are often decided by society's prejudices and power structures. The struggle often becomes about shifting, or at the best, equalizing positions of power, yet keeping the fixation of borders and not liberating the boundaries as such. For a marginalized group, re-appropriating a negative term, "queer" for example, and making it one's own, may serve as a reminder and a historical contextualization of one's position in society, and simultaneously it becomes a way to escape the humiliating connotations of the words. At best, these strategies may lead to contesting and loosening existing borders. However, it is a challenge to negotiate the questions when one should surrender to determined categorizations, and when one should refuse to admit to the limitation imposed by such boundar-

ies. The answer, says Trinh, "remains bound to the specific location, context, circumstance, and history of the subject at a given moment. Here, positionings are radically transitional and mobile. They constitute the necessary but arbitrary closures that make political actions and cultural practices possible" (2011, p. 51).

Queer in Motion

The liquidity of the word "queer" is important for this research project. Queer is by itself performative and acquires new meanings through repetition (Butler [1993] 2011, 2000), but also through travelling over borders as it gets appropriated in new contexts and by other languages (Mizielińska 2011). Queer points towards the destabilization of identity as a notion and a critique of the heteronormative, but can at the same time be used as recognition of certain embodied positions. Queer functions as an umbrella term for the many identities within a marginalized group based on non-normative sexuality (as opposed to heterosexuality), simultaneously it constitutes a more radical definition of gender fluidity or non-binarity. It may imply an anti-identity position and a designation for alternative political movements (cf. Ambjörnsson 2006). Queer can be a problematic term considering its origin in relation to this project's moving over national, cultural, and linguistic borders, a project that has also stretched over more than ten years of changing times. Considerations of the significance of using a term that is rooted in a specific history, but that becomes appropriated and re-appropriated as it moves to new places, is something that has followed this research project since the very start of making queer art in St. Petersburg. The application of the queer in a context where it was hardly used raised delicate issues, especially considering that the artists, Hallberg and I, who introduced a project on local queer issues, started out with a limited understanding of what it signified for the community that was being approached. The meaning of "queer" and

other terms that express sexual belonging were consequently something we had to work with on site as an integrated part of the project. Likewise, queer has continued to be a challenging yet productive concept all through the research process.

For me, the word “queer” was appropriated into my native language and culture as well. This is important to note, since it is often loosely referred to as a Western concept, without taking into account that words also travel within the “West” (Baer 2009, p. 6; Kulpa and Mizieleńska 2011, p. 13). I was first introduced to the word in 1994 while living in the United States, where queer had initially been used as a condescending word for gay men. At the end of the 1980s it was appropriated by activists and became commonly known through Queer Nation’s actions in 1990 (Queer Nation [1990] 2013). It is said to have been introduced as a theoretical term by Teresa de Lauretis at a conference the same year (Jagose 2009, p. 157). Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and Ewa Kosofsky’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, both published in 1990, count as early contributions to the formation of queer theory. In Sweden, the term queer was adopted in the latter part of the 1990s, mainly through academia and queer theory (Kulick, 1996). The use of the word soon became criticized for its lack of connection to its specific anglo-historic connotation (Kulick 2005; Rosenberg 2008). Rosenberg describes it as landing in “a terminological and theoretical vacuum” (2008, p. 5), but also notes that it has become a commonly applied tool for studies on normative heterosexuality over the years. However, also in Sweden queer stands for a radical kind of activism exemplified by the Gothenburg-based Queerinstitutet, Queers against Capitalism, and the Transmilitant Brigade (Wasshede 2013). At the time when we started working on *State of Mind* queer as an expression of belonging had broadened to also be used as an umbrella concept embracing the many non-heterosexual and trans identities. Simultaneously it was, and still is, also used as a less conformist and more fluent and radical understanding of what sexuality can be, a way to oppose gender binary thinking.

The various ways of understanding and using queer as it moves in

meanings and over borders, and as a vanishing point to grasp for the Russian terminology around sexuality, was one of the reasons to try out its implications among people in the LGBTQIA community of St. Petersburg. This was especially important since we did not speak Russian and were dependent on helpful translators from the community with varied skills in English, which was of course a considerable factor when it came to understanding the nuances in a language. Was it a relevant term to use in order to introduce ourselves and the project? Was there a linguistic and cultural common understanding of it? However, even if the liquid term “queer” is often seen as problematic, we cannot take for granted that the other terms that define sexuality are fixed in one global and eternal understanding. As Anzaldúa writes:

Lesbian doesn’t name anything in my homeland. Unlike the word “queer,” “lesbian” came late into some of our lives. Call me *de las otras*. Call me *loquita*, *jotita*, *marimacha*, *pajuelona*, *lambiscona*, *culera* – these are words I grew up hearing. I can identify with being “*una de las otras*” or a “*marimacha*,” or even a *jota* or a *loca porque* – these are the terms my home community uses (2009, p. 163).

In 2006, when Hallberg and I started to ask around, most women would use the word “lesbianca” (Russian for lesbian), but quite a few identified as bisexual. Just a few of the women we spoke to applied the word queer. Katya, who contributed to a discussion and information forum on the Internet called *Kvirumir*, was one of them. She described the website as follows: “It is not lesbian, it is not gay. It is queer.” At the time, *kvir* (Russian for queer) was, according to Katya, at most used by a couple of specific groups within the LGBTQIA community, and the general public was not at all familiar with it. It was explained to be a vague and rarely used term for sexual identity. Furthermore, the people we spoke to were not familiar with the concept of queer as a theoretical tool.

During our attempts to understand the terminology of identity and self-definition and what the different expressions meant to people in St. Petersburg we were also faced with concepts that were unclear to us. One was *tema*, the Russian word for theme, which we first perceived as similar to the English *dyke*. However, whereas *dyke* in the USA and other english-speaking countries is yet another appropriation of a condescending word (for a lesbian), *tema* seemed to have no such connection. We soon understood that the word was some kind of coded signifier for lesbians that had been initiated by the community themselves. It was a word used by a younger generation and of which the underlying significance was only, and was only meant to be, known to the initiated. It could refer to lesbians in a general sense (Sarajeva 2011), but was also a term for a subculture expressed through their choices of music and clothes. This culture was predominantly inhabited by lesbians, but according to Tanya, another of the *State of Mind* participants, seeing herself as part of this loosely structured sphere, *tema* would also include bisexuals and even straight women. The use of the word “tema” has been criticized by some for reinforcing the homophobia of Russian society by agreeing to an encoding. It is argued that this reinforces an acceptance of the difficulties to live openly as a homosexual.

Hallberg and I had to grasp after concepts like *tema*, or try to figure out a Russian understanding of *queer* – if there was one at all. Bringing up the word “queer” encouraged us to be more specific about what all terms defining sexualities meant for different people and it became a tool for being more careful about definitions. This persistent questioning of terminology (given that we did spend quite some time doing this especially during our stay in the fall of 2006) supported the search for ways to talk about the issues we were interested in raising. It brought us closer to a sense of how we were positioned in relation to where we were interacting and with whom, and it forced us to formulate a vocabulary around ourselves and what we were working on. I believe that this struggle with the wording was one crucial component of how we

later came up with the structure of the art installation. This is based on the feeling of sometimes understanding, and other times being locked out, and how we constantly felt that we were moving in this in-between sphere of insiders and outsiders.

It is interesting that the kind of linguistic confusion that came out of our attempts at formulating sexual identities during our first longer stay in Russia, mainly felt as a question while speaking and writing about the project. It became an issue when we had to put what we wanted to do into words, which largely had to do with our own cultural and linguistic failings and our attempts at understanding the meaning of concepts travelling over borders. In *State of Mind*, the actual art installation, the solution came to be that the participants would speak for themselves in the video segments, and whatever terminology of queerness they used is present in these. In the visual language, the appearance of the participants in both the photographs and the videos, the codes of belonging to certain identity categories are not produced within a certain combination of the LGBTQIA letters. The more ambiguous coded queerness in the visuals is something that also became a useful strategy for the art installation and the possibilities of addressing non-normative sexual identity, something I will come back to later in the entrance to *State of Mind*.

Here, in *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*, I have continued to use the word queer, or alternatively LGBTQIA, while on a general level addressing people within the community. This is relevant because queer intentionally does not stick to fixed identities, but rather opens up for the fluidity *in-between*. While working with a project such as *State of Mind*, which stretches over many years, it becomes evident that societies, lives, identities, and terminologies change, and hence applying the word “queer” to the community Hallberg and I approached in St. Petersburg makes particular sense. For example, some people who referred to themselves as lesbians in 2007, identified as straight when we came back in 2012 to exhibit at the Queer Culture Festival (the festival that was initiated by Coming Out St. Petersburg in 2009). The

title of this event alone already shows that a lot of things had changed since we started the project! Furthermore, other *State of Mind* participants had changed their names to be gender neutral or masculine. When we researched for the project, none of the people we interviewed addressed transgender issues or addressed themselves as identifying as trans. Five years later transgender was applied and discussed within the community. Yet, this new wording did not necessary respond to a different gender performance.

Queer is used as an umbrella term because it is a word that travels over borders and gets appropriated, and it allows changes. However, when the content of the artworks is addressed I am inclined to lean toward the terminology that people used at the time when the works were made. I am careful not to point out the participants' sexual orientation because of the reasons mentioned above, that people and concepts are changing, but also because it is a fact that not everyone in the project identified as being part of the LGBTQIA community. Another reason to avoid "outing" specific people is linked to the changes that Russian society has undergone since the project was initiated. Even though people at a certain time agreed to be part of *State of Mind*, society around them has changed in a way that it now means something different to be open in Russia. When addressing the content of *State of Mind* I will therefore stick to the formulation Hallberg and I decided on when we started to exhibit the installation: "the focus is set on the living conditions of lesbians and bisexual women." With this formulation, the intention is to stress that people appearing in the installation will address the subject, but do not necessary represent such an identity.

Entrance III
ARTWORKS

State of Mind

Conditions

During the summer of 2016, *State of Mind* and a selection of photographs from *At the Time of the Third Reading* will be exhibited at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg. The works will be installed for the public defense event, which will take place at the end of the exhibition period. The opening is coordinated with West Pride, a local queer festival, and two events are planned together with Nadia Plungian who was curator for the exhibition in St. Petersburg in 2012, and who is contributing an essay to the book *At the Time of the Third Reading*. As the entire *State of Mind* installation was donated to the Gothenburg Museum of Art this year in order to secure its accessibility as a research project, it will soon enough be stored in the museum's warehouse and most likely not be shown again in its entirety in a long time. This lack of access to the physical space that constitutes *State of Mind* is one reason for the writing of this last chapter.

The title of the installation reflects the temporality of the project. It is an expression chosen to emphasize the feelings and thoughts, the state of mind, of a society at a certain time, in a specific city viewed from queer positions. Temporality is *gestaltat* by the movements that are embedded in the work, expressed by the video segments that are screened on the seven monitors and the projection forming the background. It is also performed as visitors approach, and move within, the installation, positioning themselves in front of the photographs and the monitors, or passing by and moving on to the next object. Furthermore, although *State of Mind* is a tangible artwork consisting of several objects that are built into an installation, it is presented as a temporal, volatile event. The exhibitions have been open for limited time periods: for ten days, a couple of weeks, or almost three months. This

means that the actual artwork has only been accessible to people who had the opportunity to attend the different venues. This is a condition for the project, as art and as research. However, the temporality and the situationality of *State of Mind* are not only “conditions” – the volatility of the exhibition event is even a *necessity*, meaning that it is an artwork that in its *gestaltning* should not be permanently accessible.

It was a challenge all along, but there was a period in time when *State of Mind* could be exhibited in places where it is now impossible to show it. If it was to be exhibited in Russia now, for example, it would have to be made in a different manner. This does not merely have to do with the LGBTQIA content. Even though a lot fewer venues would be available to host the project now, it is not forbidden (yet?) to exhibit queer projects in Russia as long as one follows the regulations for minors to be informed about “non-traditional sexual orientations.” However, the recent ratification of several laws that are hostile towards the LGBTQIA community makes life for queer people even more complicated and risky. The reasons to not exhibit *State of Mind* today would, consequently, rather have to do with the security and integrity of the people whose images and voices feature in the work, and not the queer content in a more general sense.

In 2006 and 2007, when Hallberg and I collected the material, we drew up agreements with the participants on how and where to exhibit, and some of them requested that we always get in touch with them before exhibiting in the post-Soviet sphere and check if it would feel okay for them to be included at each site. This meant re-editing videos and removing of some of the photographs in St. Petersburg (2008), Kharkiv, Kiev, and Minsk.²⁹ However, most participants agreed to take part wherever the work was be shown.

Today the situation for LGBTQIAs in Russia is very different from when we collected the material, and it is an artistic responsibility to now treat the artwork in a different way. In 2012 for example, when *State of Mind* was exhibited the second time in St. Petersburg, a regional law forbidding “homosexual propaganda” in the Leningrad Oblast

had already been adopted. The installation was then exhibited within the framework of the Queer Culture Festival (QueerFest), a semi-closed event targeted at a select audience, and the festival organization controlled the circumstances of the event. It was thus secured by the organization’s understanding of the politics and the situation for the community, but also by hired security guards. Nevertheless, before this event we had someone contact every participant, directly or through friends, in order to ask how they felt about being exposed at the festival. For most of the *State of Mind* participants it was still generally okay to be exposed in LGBTQIA contexts in Russia. After all, most people in the project was already openly queer, and the choice to take part in the project was a choice to make LGBTQIA issues and representations more accessible and visible. Yet, it is remarkable, but not really surprising, to note that when the installation was shown at QueerFest, everyone agreed to be part of it – even those who had not wanted their faces exposed when exhibiting earlier in the post-Soviet region. The festival was probably considered a “safe” context, but I also believe that at the time it felt more important than ever to contribute towards the recognition of queer lives in Russia.³⁰

These political and social changes that are exemplified above, and that take place outside the installation, are the foremost reason to not also present *State of Mind* in a more permanent format, such as a publication. The installation format meant that we, in regard to the circumstances, could constantly negotiate and make adjustments to the work.

Visiting State of Mind

If “Photography” and “Queer” are entrances into some key interests and concepts that are relevant for the research, this section is meant to be an entrance into a more literal way – a way into the actual artworks. Maintaining the point of departure in the intersections of queer and photography, *State of Mind* is here placed in the center. In this central

position the work is approached from various directions: from before (preparing and planning), from behind (a concept), in front of (looking at, watching), within (engaging with), moving through (in-between various positions), being inside or outside (physically and imaginatively), and after (consequences and afterthoughts). My intention is not to render a correct representation of the installation, or make another version of the art project. It could rather be described as a visit, a visit that reflects something of what may happen in a meeting between a visitor and the artwork. This visitor is obviously myself in the position of an artistic researcher speaking from the embodied positions, which was accentuated in *Positioning with Photography*. Foremost, it is a visit that is taken from the artist's viewpoint, an artist who in the case of *State of Mind* was part of the collaborative team. Many of the events and thoughts concerning the work are shared with Hallberg, with whom I worked closely all through making and exhibiting the installation. Since it is a gathering of some of the experiences, memories, and thoughts that have been collected, reflected on, and discussed over the course of the research process, the stories I have chosen to incorporate in this text are only a few of all those that were experienced while making the work, and they are filtered through my research interests. In the text I also include the company of several others – this may be people who appear in the work, or people who have partaken of any of the exhibitions. They are either chosen to emphasize why *State of Mind* is *gestaltat* the way it is, or as suggestions for how different bodies may interact with the work.

The visit takes place at different times and in different places, as it moves within and through the work and highlights specificities that mean something to how and why *State of Mind* emerges the way it does. The visit also includes accounts of what *State of Mind* might do to its visitors (one being myself), in order to pay attention to the artworks, affective and performative qualities in relation to the research interest: *Queer Community through Photographic Acts*. The emphasis is on how positioning and movement can be thought to function within and

through *State of Mind* in order to *gestalta* queer community, acknowledging that community is always constituted by someone else's exclusion. The installation is meant to provide a space for recognition of queer identities, but I will argue that it also carries the potential to counteract identity as something fixed and predictable. The text aims to highlight the temporality and situationality of *State of Mind*, and the dependency on where, how, when, and for whom the work was exhibited. In following the installation's structure, this text is not linear – it moves back and forth in time and space and is interrupted with side-tracks and parallel stories.

The Overall Structure of the Installation

The installation that stands as a model for this text is the one that was set up at GogolFest 2009, the Ukrainian cultural festival that took place in the 20,000 square meter Art Arsenal in Kiev (see pp. 162, 159, 162–163). This structure is also the model for the dissertation exhibition at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg. How *State of Mind* was installed varied from place to place depending on the architecture and eventual regulations of the institutions where it was exhibited. Since GogolFest took place in an enormous and rough space, we had the freedom to install however we preferred. The limits were the budget and the short period of four days that we had to install, starting from a tremendously dirty and dusty place with no access to electricity the first day. Through an artist friend in Kiev we had gotten in touch with two technicians, and Andreij and Andreij were hired to work with us. They usually worked for the privately run Pinchuk Art Center and were used to installing so-called fine art. All four of us worked for more than sixteen hours each day. Hallberg and I carried forty-six heavy plywood boards up the stairs and two hundred meters through the building. All my clothes were so filthy after the days of installing that I had to throw them away. I am mentioning this to illustrate what hard physical

labor it sometimes took to exhibit *State of Mind*. For me it adds yet other aspects of movement, of materiality, corporeality, and affect to the work. This physicality of working with *State of Mind* that was present throughout the process is something that I cannot ignore when writing about the artwork. It can be found in my climbing up on rooftops in St. Petersburg carrying a large-format camera on a heavy tripod, in building the transportation boxes, in packing and installing the artwork. It is part of how I experience *State of Mind* and it is situated in my body and expressed as a sense of both heaviness and joy. These are feelings that permeate the work as a whole: the pleasure of making something that feels important and that has an impact on people's lives, including myself. It is, for example, a joy to realize that several of the participants in *State of Mind* became engaged in the new and in many ways successful organization of queer activism in St. Petersburg. At the same time, a heavy sense of hopelessness occupies me, knowing that the situation for the LGBTQIA community in Russia has not improved but rather the opposite.³¹ I am not sure how this impacts on the way I view the work today, but it cannot be overlooked while making this written visit.

Returning to the actual installation in Kiev. Four adjustments to the original design were decided on for this exhibition event: Firstly, we opened up two entrances to the construction, instead of only one. This was because they expected large numbers of visitors and there did in fact turn out to be around 10,000 visitors to the festival each weekend. We were lucky to have the two openings, the room for the video installation was often packed. This also made us place two sets of headphones at each monitor instead of the usual one set. The third adjustment was made in order to accommodate our *Lezzie Think Tank (LTT)* partners in Kiev, the queer organization InSight. They had expressed a desire to make the workshop open for the public to watch, something that was possible at this site.³² This requirement made us paint the transportation boxes in the same blue as the installation walls, and use them as tables and seats. We placed them next to the installation, and they

became a part of the exhibition. After the workshop, the notes were left for display. The fourth adjustment that differed from the initial installation plan was the removal of three of the photographs, as well as the re-editing of some of the video interviews. This was made as part of the deal we agreed on with the participants. In this written visit to *State of Mind* I am bringing back the three photographs into the installation to get the complete version as it was originally conceptualized.

In Kiev: the dark blue rectangular cube is placed diagonally and protrudes between two sturdy brick columns. The color was inspired by the tarpaulin that covered the many buildings being renovated and reconstructed in the center of St. Petersburg when we collected the material. It is a personal association that might not be clear to most visitors, but the dark blue brings a certain feeling to the installation. It also makes the eleven photographs that are scattered on the outside of the structure stand out. The large portraits are mounted in heavy birch wood frames and covered with Plexi glass. They are big enough to give dignity to the project and the people taking part in it, but small enough for one person to be able to carry them by themselves. It was a decision that was not merely taken on aesthetic grounds, but taking into account the practical and economic situation that could be expected – an effect emerging from the decision to give priority to exhibiting the project in contexts in which we could show it to people who could share certain aspects with the portrayed: such as language, and cultural and political history. We realized that this entailed that it could very well be at institutions where we would have to seek funding to pay for transportation and installation ourselves. Furthermore, we realized that we most likely would have to do a lot of the work such as installing and packing ourselves. The work could not be too heavy to handle. This turned out to be consistent with about half of the exhibition venues, GogolFest in Kiev being one.

Friends and Lovers – Something About the Artistic Methods

As part of the process of understanding how (or even whether) we should make a work on queer issues coming out of St. Petersburg, during the first longer stay in 2006 Hallberg and I met up with and interviewed a number of different constellations of LGBTQIA groups. We tried to meet with as many as possible within the community and a kind of snowball effect was generated, meaning that getting in touch with one person led us to meeting several others.³³ The person who was the initiating contact was later asked to introduce us to their *svoi*, a Russian word we learned was used to describe a group of selected friends and lovers (Sarajeva 2011, 57). Several of these loosely constructed groupings were actively working to enhance the quality of life of St. Petersburg's lesbian community: by organizing social events such as clubs, exhibitions, theater plays, round table discussions, or home parties with music and poetry readings. One couple was distributing movies all over the country with "lesbian" content dubbed into Russian and for a cheap price. Others were contributing by writing on LGBTQIA issues on blogs or social networks on the Internet. They were activists, but the activities were mostly directed towards social and cultural events. Organizing politically was not possible yet, at least this was the feeling of the people we spoke to.³⁴ In the words of three of the *State of Mind* participants:

Our country is not yet ready for such changes like, for example, the ones that happened in Sweden, where same-sex marriage is allowed. I think that here, our mentality will stand in the way, Russian orthodox religion will be very intolerant of such changes. There is also another factor – basic moral oppression. Every citizen of our country thinks that non-traditional orientation is something "out there" (Interview, *State of Mind*, Irena, 2007).

I think that the situation is for the most part positive. Because for those in power, what is most important is that gays stay out of politics – the rest is allowed for them. But I think that gays are least interested in politics. What they are interested in is love and sex. That's what interests me too, by the way. Only that (Interview *State of Mind*, Gennadiy, 2006).

For the moment, gays and lesbians don't feel themselves to be a social force with political rights, and I think that this process is just starting, and in reality the people who do feel it are very few. There will be a dual process and on one side the government will increase its pressure. On the other side, this will provoke an increased protest reaction movement, and maybe this will help gays and lesbians to become aware of their political situation. That's what it seems to me (Interview, *State of Mind*, Rima, 2007).

After the two initial months in St. Petersburg in 2006, Hallberg and I looked through all the material that had been recorded thus far. It was only then we decided to continue working on the project and could understand what direction it should take. It became clear that the structure of *svoi*, the small groups of friends and lovers that formed a base for local activism, should constitute the all-embracing foundation for *State of Mind*'s *gestaltning*. The entire installation is therefore constructed as a group portrait, like a picture of a family or a gathering of friends. The concept *svoi* is reflected in the photographs as well as the video installation. However, in the latter the group emerges in quite a different way, which I will deal with later.

Something we noted during the first stay was a lack of connection between men and women within the LGBTQIA sphere. There were few initiatives for activities between them, which was often commented on. The lesbian community also seemed to think that gay men

generally received more attention, both negative and positive, in the media, politics, and cultural life. Besides that it was easier for us to connect to the lesbian environment, this was the reason why we decided to focus predominately on the life situation for lesbians and bisexual women, and how they felt they could navigate through the Russian society. However, people who were interested in participating in *State of Mind* were welcome to speak from other points of departures – they did not have to identify as lesbian or bisexual, for example. It was important, though, that the participants would approach the subject from their own viewpoint. Part of the interviews were therefore conducted with straight feminists, gay male activists, a human rights lawyer, a labor rights lawyer, musicians, and so on – people who were in one way or another connected to the lesbian environment and could say something about this relationship. Another crucial decision was that we would not reject anyone: everyone who wanted to participate could be present in the artwork. In fact, anyone was free to participate as long as they had something to say on the subject and were not hostile towards the queer community. This method of inclusion meant that even though some of the interviews were technically slightly unsatisfactory, they are still part of the installation, and, in the same vein, if I was to only consider the aesthetic values of the work I would remove one of the photographs (I will not reveal which one). It should be added that one of the conditions of the project was that we were rarely given a chance to redo any of the interviews or portraits; only a few of the people were interviewed twice. We gave priority to the conceptual and activist aspects of the project, which became a fundamental part of *State of Mind's* *gestaltning* and how we later came to work with the finalized artwork.

In the months after the first longer visit, Hallberg and I formulated a method for how the remaining interviews should be realized. Because of our own shortcomings when it came to understanding Russian, and the fact that we were supported by people from the community to translate (meaning that the linguistic translation quality varied from

time to time), we decided to formulate a few questions that people could freely respond to.³⁵ When we continued the work in St. Petersburg in the summer of 2007, these questions were delivered in Russian by the person who assisted us at each occasion. Nobody was given the questions beforehand as we wanted spontaneous reactions. We stuck to this method, apart from the interview sessions we had with people who represented some sort of expertise and therefore were asked specific questions (it could vary from someone who was invested in the club scene to someone who was a spokesperson for an activist gathering, or a lawyer working for a human rights organization). One disadvantage of not translating on site was that we could not respond with follow-up questions. In fact, the material collected in 2007 was not transcribed and translated until we were back in Sweden.³⁶ The benefit of this method was the often direct and intense performance that was delivered. We asked people to look into the camera, and the result is that many speak straight to a viewer on the other side of the monitor in the installation. To ensure the accessibility of the work, everything was later translated into either Russian or English (depending on what language the person spoke, although most interviews are in Russian), and all seven films have subtitles in either language. The interviews varied greatly in duration, from just a couple of minutes, up to half an hour or more. The questions were removed and the longest sessions were shortened, but generally most of the footage was kept.

As mentioned earlier, our aim was never to mark individual identities, but to raise issues on queerness and community in a specific time and place. Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance for the *gestaltning* of *State of Mind* that the people who appear in the photographs and the video footage represent themselves and that their stories are grounded in their own experiences and ideas. This authenticity gives credibility to the work, and it makes it more charged – politically and emotionally – than would be the case if we had hired actors. Above all, it was significant for an LGBTQIA audience in St. Petersburg, but also in the three other exhibition venues in the post-Soviet and Russian speaking sphere.

There were connections between the countries, many from Minsk went for example to St. Petersburg to enjoy the club life and cultural events. Many knew about each other, and it was a significant gesture that several people in *State of Mind* were known in this translocal network.

However, the artworks, important connections to “real” people and “real” situations should not be confused with a claim to an essentialist “truth” authored by the artists, as has been criticized by Trinh, Rosler, and others (see the “Photography” section). The content of *State of Mind* may be based on people’s own voices and stories, but as I will return to later, interruptions of “truth” emerge through the staging of the photographic portraits, the design of the video installation and the tensions between these two elements that can be seen to *gestalta* different “truths” depending on how one approaches the work. Yet another way to counteract ideas of a universal “true” narrative is to stress the locality and temporality of the work. Hallberg and I have always been careful to address the content of *State of Mind* as coming out of a certain city, St. Petersburg, and having been made during a limited time, from 2006 to 2008. In the same way each segment of the installation is situated with the title consisting of the first names of the people portrayed, the name of the city, and the year it was made. If the photographs are exhibited separately, a text is included informing about the production context of the image. The temporality and locality of *State of Mind* are also highlighted with the *Lezzie Think Tank*, the workshop that was developed to situate the installation in every different context it was exhibited in.

The Photographic Portraits

When approaching the installation at the exhibition site, the first images one sees are groups of women (and one man) posing in eleven photographs. Friendly, smiling people looking back at you. No harm, no friction. No sex. What these photographs of people in St. Petersburg

are passing on is a sense of dignity and pride. They are taken in a mood of community and companionship that mirrors the warm and friendly encounters Hallberg and I had with people in St. Petersburg. An additional condition for the making of *State of Mind* was shaped by the engagement for the project that we felt from many. This was evident from an early stage of the process, and made us become involved on a level that neither of us had expected. I would argue that it was this that made *State of Mind* expand, and from being an art and research project it became an activist project as well. Comments on the lack of representation – visual or written depictions – based on LGBTQIA experience were brought up again and again in the first interviews we conducted during the fall of 2006, and continued in stories that were told to us the following summer. Our aim to bring *State of Mind* back to St. Petersburg, a wish that was expressed by many of the participants, therefore became a decisive factor in how we proceeded with the project. A conviction to make it possible to show the material in St. Petersburg also became part of the ground for how we formed the art installation as well as how we continued to work with various LGBTQIA communities when exhibiting in the different cities.

I am here linking back to Trinh T. Minh-ha’s *speaking nearby* (1992), which was introduced in the “Photography” entrance as an ethical way of approaching the subject. An understanding of the concept is that you should dismantle an authoritative voice in the work, something Trinh approaches through the artistic treatment of her films. One should avoid speaking about the people addressed in the work and instead approach the subjects as if they are standing next to you. Considering *State of Mind*, the *speaking nearby* takes another turn as it here also may imply that the work should be *gestaltat* in a way that made it *possible* to show for those involved *in the context where they live*. It may be argued that it is a matter of representation: providing a temporary site for a community that expressed an urge to be recognized in their society and by each other, and whose stories of the everyday life were rarely voiced. It can be seen as part of a struggle to prepare the ground for a

higher acceptance of LGBTQIA people. The challenge Hallberg and I faced was to make art that would address queer life in St. Petersburg in a way that would show respect for those involved and that would openly highlight issues in nuanced terms that were seldom spoken about, at least not officially or with voices coming from within the queer community. Yet, the artwork would have to be feasible to exhibit, which here is not referring to the artistic qualities. The question was rather how we could make an artwork that placed queer in the center, but at the same time would not provoke unwanted violence against either the recognizable participants of *State of Mind*, or the local LGBTQIA community as a whole. We had no wish to make a counter-productive work.

As for the eleven framed portraits, the women (and the one man) constitute some of the groups of friends and lovers, several of whom created events or other activist actions for queers in the city. Each is centered around one of the people who we initially got in touch with, and of whom we asked to bring their *svoi* for a group portrait. Taking these photographs with a large-format studio camera is a very slow process that demands accuracy. The camera has to be on a steady tripod and everything is handled manually: focus, change of film sheets, and so on. You cannot easily move around or change the position of the equipment. On the other hand, if you avoid directing within the set framework it opens for some spontaneity. People in the photographs were not told what to do or how to act. Instead I pushed the trigger when something “happened” that possibly would “make a good picture” (for working with a large-format camera, I use a lot of film). This kind of semi-staged and semi-spontaneous photographic method is a way to balance the expression *in-between* a sense of documentary and fiction, again borrowing Trinh’s concept that was discussed in “Photographic Acts and Feminist Thinking” in order to situate the work.³⁷ I am not exactly sure what I mean when I say that the smiles of the women are genuine, but their expressions capture a moment of wordless exchange, which might have to do with the lack of a common

spoken language. This transmitted a shared sense of intimacy and friendship into the later exhibited photographs. As I wrote earlier: “No harm, no friction. No sex.” No matter which sexualities they portrayed identify with or what lifestyle they may practice – the photographs are, at least seemingly, normatively *gestaltade*. You may then wonder how these photographs are queering, if queer is not just applied as an umbrella term for non-normative identities in this research, but is also intended to be used to challenge norms?

Here in St. Petersburg, I think it’s the atmosphere of the city itself. . . we activists – the people who try to do something in the way society works – we don’t do anything extreme or provocative. We do things in a soft, gradual, diplomatic manner (Interview *State of Mind*, Lena, 2007).

That you really want to be loved by that person who you truly love, really want to create your own family, have kids, be a normal person in your own way (Interview *State of Mind*, Sasha, 2007).

Well, I think Russia has not yet reached that point. I mean, first somehow our rights should be protected and legalized, and only then we can march with flags. I think it’s a bit too early (Interview *State of Mind*, Natasha, 2007).

Visitor: “They look so normal, so if you don’t know they are lesbians, they might just be two friends hanging out.”
Annica: “They are two friends hanging out.”
(Conversation with a visitor at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2011).

A non-provocative approach to achieve openness and understanding for queers among the Russian population was something almost all of

the interviewees spoke of – they advocated a more soft line of activism.³⁸ Very often St. Petersburg was declared to be more “cultural and sophisticated” than Moscow, and the attempt to hold the Moscow Pride in the summer of 2006 was something that was often brought up as an example of differences between the cities. This was one reason why we chose to put up a non-provocative, smooth façade in the installation, to go along with the attitude of how to do activism among the participants.

The other reason to stick to a non-provocative strategy had to do with our own position as temporary visitors. It is different if the Russian Pussy Riot’s feminist guerilla performance in Cathedral of Christ the Savior in 2012 seemed provocative to the authorities and society in general, something they unfortunately had to stand up for and which brought with it severe consequences (Gessen, 2014). Artists and activists in Russia continue to protest against oppression and the political system in spite of violence and threats, often with a strategy that curator Andrey Erofeev calls “burlesque aesthetics” (2014, p. 8). A questionable example of an outsider’s action performed in the name of free speech is the “bombing” with teddy bears in Belarus. The unannounced action was initiated by a Swedish advertising agency in 2012, and gave president Aleksandr Lukashenko a reason to kick the Swedish ambassador Stefan Eriksson out of the country. Likewise, a Belarusian blogger was indicted for posting images on the Internet (Melén 2013). When it comes to *State of Mind*, if the installation had provoked an aggressive reaction it could possibly have caused harm to the people who had participated in the work, whereas we, the artists, could safely jump on a plane and fly back home. This imbalance was yet another reason to be “aesthetically cautious.” It was also why we invested so much time trying to understand how to work with this project when later exhibiting in different places.

Yet another motive for opening up the installation with friendly faces comes back to the prospective visitor of the installation and how this person may position themselves in relation to what they see. Since

heterosexuality constitutes the norm, you may need to look for something in order for queerness to emerge in the photographs, whether this means that you have prior information about the work or that you scrutinize the portraits with the queer eyes of Vito Rossi (see the chapter “Gestalt Queer Community”). For others, the photographs might pass as images of ordinary women posing in the cityscape. The way the women portrayed appear, they might well fit into a (prejudiced) idea of the norm of a St. Petersburg (or Northern European): straight, white women of various ages. The seemingly “non-queer” large-format portraits might emerge as reaffirming, disarming, or provocative depending on what you see – or wish to see. And then of course how you feel about what you believe you are seeing. However, the ambiguous qualities of the photographs might open up for queer potentials in another way. They might even be seen as subversive (cf. Butler [1993] 2011), something I will return to later.

The predominance of whiteness that was striking in the city of St. Petersburg is transmitted into *State of Mind*. The art installation is occupied by the white bodies of the people portrayed – a room that may be, referring to Sara Ahmed, made possible to identify with for some and not for others (see the chapter “Positioning with Photography”). To think intersectionally, one suggestion may be that the whiteness of the artwork, corresponding to what is viewed as a norm, contributes towards obscuring the queerness. This may be one reason why it was possible for the art installation to later be exhibited in, for example, St. Petersburg in 2008. It was (and is) a city with serious issues of racism, whereas issues relating to homosexuality, especially queer women, were only rarely addressed in the media or acknowledged in the public sphere when we exhibited the work the first time.³⁹ What I mean is that for someone who feels recognized in a room with white bodies, the striking whiteness may dislocate, or delay, an emergence of what is queer – something that is already obscured by the invisibility of queerness in the society as well as the normative *gestaltning* of the photographs.

However, what can be viewed as a certain dominance of race in *State of Mind* from one (Western) perspective, may mean something else for others. To apply a conception of “white” and “black” and use the work of Piper which is grounded in a North American context (see the chapter “Positioning with Photography”), can be a useful discussion, but it may reveal an outsider’s viewpoint of the representation of difference in the work as well. There are other kinds of racialization processes at stake among the participants of *State of Mind* as well, such as the various nationalities within Russia. This is something that might not be obvious for some visitors to the art installation, but that is part of the social reality in St. Petersburg and that might be visible within the work for people who share this experience. People from many places in Russia are represented in *State of Mind*: from different parts in Siberia, the countryside of Karelia, a small city in southeastern Russia, a village three hundred kilometers outside the city, and many other places. Some people were born and raised in St. Petersburg, whereas others moved there from Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and other countries. Yet, some are temporary visitors from Moscow, or somewhere else. The people had moved to St. Petersburg to study and to find work, but remarkably many explained that they had located to the city because of its vital queer life: “St. Petersburg is a capital, truly a capital of gay culture” (Tanya, *State of Mind*, 2007). It was considered liberal compared to other places:

I am never met with hostility [in St. Petersburg]. Since I am an Uzbek, and have an Eastern mentality . . . What I mean is that I had enough problems in Uzbekistan with this issue – in comparison with Uzbekistan there are no problems here. (Interview *State of Mind*, Muchabad, 2007).

Yes, I suppose it’s probably better in St. Petersburg than in other regions. For example, one doesn’t have to hide, or at least a person like me – more brave, who is not afraid because of some high job positions that they hold. In

Moscow I think it’s worse because for some reason the persecutions started happening more often. But if you want to live in Russia and be a lesbian, it’s better to do it in St. Petersburg (Interview *State of Mind*, Valeria, 2007).

However, although the community in St. Petersburg was represented by people from many places because of its relatively liberal attitudes towards queers, some were treated differently because of their physical appearance. This was something that could be connected to queer identity as well as ethnicity. One couple declared how in their daily lives they were both often treated with suspicion. They explained, laughing about the absurdity of the situation, that both of them were often stopped by the police and forced to show their identification documents. One because she was from Georgia – this was a year before the war between the two countries. People from Georgia suffered from the time of rising tensions: Georgian restaurants were closed down, it was harder to find a job and people were harassed by the police. The other person, the police stopped to check if he had completed his military service, being mistaken for a young man. The woman, who identified as a lesbian, had appropriated a masculine appearance and a gender-neutral name. This is only one example of several “behind the image” stories that are expressions of nationalism and ignorance of gender variations. If one is familiar with what the appearance of the two women may imply, this may be evident in the photograph where the women are posing with two friends in one of the city parks.

As a gesture to mark a queer presence in public space, all the portraits are photographed outdoors. The sites were most often picked by the people portrayed, as we asked them to choose a place that they felt represented the city, a place they had a special relationship to. As opposed to Opie’s *Domestic Series*, and just like Zanele’s portraits of queers in South Africa, we felt it was important to do this project outside the home. There were several reasons for this choice: one was that we wanted to demonstrate that queers are part of the general public –

a “we are everywhere.” Another was that the women we spoke to actually felt less controlled in the more anonymous public sphere than at work or at home around family and neighbors. Many felt free to walk around holding hands in public for example, reassured that their relatives would not be in this part of town. And it seemed that at the time when we collected the material, the public’s awareness of queer women was not really there, whereas gay men acting the same way instantly would have been harassed.⁴⁰ Yet another reason to occupy the public space, were the performative, “queer” moments that sometimes seemed to emerge when the photographs were taken. The large apparatus and the slow procedure of working with a large-format camera gathered a curious audience around us that wondered why these ordinary women were being photographed with such special equipment.

Qualities of slowness can be seen as a general advantage of still photography, at least in comparison with the more volatile moving images format. I am now addressing the site for the exhibition when the photographic moment has been transformed into a photograph on display. The photographic object offers you the opportunity to decide how carefully you want to study the content – you can linger in front of a photograph as long as you wish. This opens up for a consideration of the meaning of the specific places where the photographs were taken. Especially because it has gradually emerged that what meanings these environments, and details within them, hold depends on where and to whom the photographs are being exhibited. This may very well depend on the individual people’s experiences and associations, but what has been interesting is how these meanings often seem to be culturally, and often queerly, charged. For example, in one of the photographs a person stands alone. It is Lena, one of the main figures of the lesbian scene in St. Petersburg at the time, and an important contributor to the project. Lena had been organizing clubs and cultural events for years and was connecting us with many of the participants, especially those who were somewhat older.⁴¹ She is also an important figure when it comes

to being publicly queer and has lost a number of job positions because of this. When we met her the first time in 2006, she was engaged in producing a feminist magazine.

Lena is portrayed in front of an open gate, one of the city’s typical shortcuts that enable one to move through to the other side of the block, instead of having to walk around the expansive buildings. Only the initiated, Lena for example, know about them and she led us smoothly through unlocked gates and fences with large holes when she guided us around the city center. These semi-secret passages also function as escape routes for political dissidents as well as queer protesters, fleeing from the police or from homophobic attackers. They were used as such during Soviet times, as another of the older activists stated, and they still are, but as the city is being commercialized and reconstructed, more and more of the passages are being locked with entry codes or rebuilt into shopping malls. Someone in Minsk, who often travelled to St. Petersburg for the lesbian bars and clubs, recognized the city from this specific image (and not from the parks or other city views). This demonstrates how characteristic these passages are for the city, but also that different embodied experiences affect how the work is perceived. A Belarusian who often visits St. Petersburg because of its vivid queer scene recognizes things in *State of Mind* others will miss.

In another photograph two women are holding up their son between them as they pose in front of an apartment building. They are all dressed in orange tops and look sweet together. This is one of the few sites that was not planned beforehand, as we just walked outside their home to conduct the interview and the portrait was taken at the end of the session, right before sunset. We had wanted to get in touch with the couple for a long time since they were well known within the queer community for blogging about their longing and later the decision to have a child. They were even famous among the Russian queer community in the United States. A book on their experience had also been published, a small edition which had quickly sold out. However, it

is not the figures in the photograph that catch Irina Sandomirskaja's, attention when we walk through the installation together at the Gothenburg Museum of Art in the fall of 2008.⁴² Her gaze is directed towards a window right behind the family, the only one that is lit up in the rows of windows that covers this Soviet-era building from the 1950s. "This is so typical," she says, and continues with a long exposition on Soviet times and how the KGB forced neighbors to spy on each other – and how this is still happening, at least in people's minds. Sandomirskaja's striking observation on the detail in the background was something I probably did not recognize when the photograph was taken. Yet, it is tempting to connect her reading with the story of the women, revealing their worries about their immediate surroundings. How they had concerns about what would happen at the boy's school if they found out that he was not living in a heteronormative family, but had two mothers. They told us how they were being careful around their neighbors, fearing that it could possibly cause trouble if their relationship was revealed to the wrong person.

These are two examples of how queer may emerge within the individual photographs depending on the viewer, something we can think through the notion of *situated knowledge*, as noted by Haraway (see the chapter "Photographic Acts and Feminist Thinking"). For others, the queerness may be obscured by the whiteness of the work, or just not be recognized because one may be positioned differently and thereby have another set of references based on gender, sexuality, or where one lives for example.

The Video Segment

To get back to the exhibition in Kiev: two openings in the blue construction, one in front and one on the side, lead into the video installation. An uneasy, difficult to define sound emerges from the construction. It is coming from two head speakers placed in the back of the video room and is comprised of processed and distorted street sounds from St. Petersburg. It links the two installation segments, the exterior with photographs and the interior with the seven monitors and one video projection.

Mumbling voices penetrate the ambient city sound while entering into the video installation. They emerge from sets of headphones that are attached to the monitors. In each of the monitors one can see people talking, facing the camera, one or two at the time. The monitors are suspended on metal pipes that extend from floor to ceiling. As with the dark blue color, these pipes are yet another associative connection to all the reconstructions taking place in the city when we collected the material for *State of Mind*. They also resemble the pipes used for pole dancing, which was a regular feature of most nightclubs in St. Petersburg – queer and straight – at the time. These are things that stuck with us and that were transmitted into the artwork. Together with the open frame monitors the pipes give the space a raw feel. A video projection of the Neva, the river that flows through the city, covers the wall behind. It was filmed in the blue light at four o'clock one early summer morning, somewhere a bit up the river in the industrial part of St. Petersburg. You can see morning traffic twining along the river banks, car headlights moving in the blue cityscape. In the video room as a whole there are constant movements: swirling water, passing clouds, moving car lights, sound waves, and gesturing people appearing on the screens. Visitors walking in and out of the room, and back and forth between the monitors.

Like the gatherings of friends and lovers in the photographs on the outside of the box, and following the overall visual concept of *State of*

Mind, the video installation viewed from the back also resembles a group portrait. However, this group of people is in constant flow, one being replaced by another. The video installation gathers people who might not know each other, but who all have in common that they speak out on issues that are rarely given a place in the public sphere of St. Petersburg – at least not in the politically and personally open and revealing way that is seen here.

The interviews formed important material for the understanding of how the installation should be constructed, but they are also part of the final artwork. The thirty-nine women and men who appear on the monitors convey stories about queer life that span personal experiences, the social life of the city, political reflections, and some thoughts of the future for the LGBTQIA community of Russia. Hopes and fears. The stories are full of contradictions, one celebrating St. Petersburg as being “Russia’s San Francisco” referring to a vibrant scene for young lesbians while someone else talks of the lack of labor rights hitting the queers as an exceptionally vulnerable group. Many speak freely about their identities as lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men. This is perhaps not surprising since these are participants in a project who have chosen to show their faces: openness is definitely greater in this select group than in Russian society as a whole. Nevertheless, there are people who try to hide their love relationship with a woman fearing that their supervisor would find out. At the same time many of them seem confident that nobody from their workplace would ever go to an exhibition with queer content. Also when it comes to family relations, they seem assured that their parents back home will never be exposed to the artwork anyhow as quite a few moved to St. Petersburg from other cities far away.

Most of the people who express fears or insecurities direct this towards the private networks like family or colleagues, rather than towards being open in the public space. Being out could imply the risk of losing one’s job, being randomly kicked out of one’s apartment, or one’s child being bullied at the daycare center. It has to be noted that

even though it was not forbidden to be queer, and the law against “homosexual propaganda” was not yet introduced in St. Petersburg in 2007 when most interviews were conducted, the basic rights in areas such as labor and housing were more or less non-existent.

I’ve met people who were fired or had some problems at work due to their orientation, but personally I haven’t met with this problem (Interview *State of Mind*, Tanya, 2007).

But in reality, for the Russian province, sexual minorities is a concept that is so far removed from them, for them it doesn’t exist. It’s just all ridiculous and it can’t really be true – that’s what they think. That’s why if my mother found out that I am a lesbian, she would probably start crying, and I don’t know what would happen next. But, I can’t see my mother’s tears, and I will not let it happen (Interview *State of Mind*, Sveta, 2007).

I am afraid you’ll be disappointed, because to be honest, no problems really come up to me. I am completely out. At my work everyone knows I am a lesbian. No harassment happens, aside from the regular behind-the-back gossip that probably happens in any work in any country, I think (Interview *State of Mind*, Alyona, 2007).

What united all the participants of *State of Mind* was a desire to achieve an improvement for the queer community in Russia – a basic goal was to combat homophobia and be accepted as equal members of society. This is the foremost reason why people decided to become part of the work: to share their stories and give a face to the queer community of Russian society and thus increase the acceptance.

One issue that was raised by many was the lack of leadership. There was a sense of waiting for someone with the right qualifications to

unify a divided community, but so far no such person had shown up, at least according to the participants. There was also a sense of competition among the *svoi*, the smaller groupings, and the failure to find a leader that could bring people together was one explanation for this.

We have leaders that just want to be leaders, maybe that is not enough (Interview *State of Mind*, Katya, 2006).

So, gays and lesbians themselves being able to form such a party, maybe 15 to 20 years from now, and even that providing that we don't have another totalitarian period, which is what everyone is afraid of (Interview *State of Mind*, Lena, 2006).

Considering the mistrust in being able to unite on a larger scale, the structure of the video installation counteracts what is put forward in the interviews. Here, everyone is brought together in one group. If the portraits displayed on the outside of the installation highlight intimate relationships expressed between a few selected friends and lovers as a ground for constructing a sense of belonging and doing activism, the group on the inside of the installation shows another form of community. The ever-changing group portrait constructed by the seven monitors constitutes a visionary proposal that suggests an approach where temporary alliances can be created to focus on common goals (see the chapter "Positioning as Queer"). We do not have to agree on everything, but sometimes we can unite our voices to make ourselves heard. By the way the material is organized nobody is more or less accentuated no matter what position one might have in the social hierarchy of the queer community. There are no leaders put forward even though there are some, self-imposed or designated, that are part of the project. People appear randomly and there is no list with information on who appears on what screen. Their first names are shown only for a short moment at the beginning of each interview segment. In this sense the video segment is counteracting a hierarchy within the community as well.

The *State of Mind* visitor who decides to take a step forward and pick up a set of headphones and listen, becomes part of the picture for the ones who remain in the back watching the scene taking place in front of them: people moving *in-between* the monitors. Some linger to listen longer while others hasten back and forth, apparently having a hard time deciding whose story to prioritize. The choice to listen to someone always means the risk of missing another's story. Maybe the one you would like to listen to is already taken by someone else. Having only one set of headphones at each monitor evokes a sense of frustration, maybe feelings will emerge of having access, or not having access. I know this from positioning myself at the back of the room for quite some time – travelling with *State of Mind* has given me plenty of time to observe how people move within and through the structure. I also know that the visitors who stay for a while and take the time to listen are offered a sense of closeness and intimacy – the privilege to listen to personal stories. But this one-on-one situation encountered by visitors who choose to engage with the stories that are screened on the monitors might also rub against a feeling of being observed by other visitors standing at the back for an overview of the moving group portrait. Positioning oneself within the video installation consists of acts that may create performative positions of becoming *outsider* or *insider*, at the same time as the installation opens up for movements and lingering *in-between* positions. I am again applying this concept of Trinh's as a space where queer potentials might emerge – a site that may open up for the recognition of marginalized embodied positions, but that also may destabilize the heteronormative. I am imagining that different feelings may emerge while listening to someone's queer story and suddenly realizing that you are being watched from the back. Are you the becoming (or being viewed as) part of what is queer? How does this feel? Do you feel exposed, vulnerable, affirmed, or possibly provoked?

Different ages, different experiences. Whether it is okay to make out in the streets or not is more about how one expresses love in public space generally, than whether it is okay for two lesbian women to kiss. Some questions are universal such as the longing for children, others are more specific like the lack of laws that provide security for homosexual couples. There is a lot to learn. And quite a few experiences that even I can relate to (Cecilia Blomberg, *Kulturnytt*, 2008-07-30, author's translation).

I was standing in the dark room watching the interviews of different people. Less words, more feelings. Right there I started crying. It was like an avalanche and then a relief. I am sure I left the room as a more liberated person. The gay art was real to me at that very time. Reality. In Russia. I feel it was a turning point for my personality. The healing moment... (A Facebook message received from one of the volunteers at QueerFest 2012).

Besides uniting the participants of the project into one cohesive group portrait, the video installation is constructed to operate against notions of a master narrative as formulated by Haraway (1991). There is no linear story to follow, no suggestion of an authoritative "truth." Instead, each person entering the room will construct their own narrative from whatever one might perceive from listening to the interviews, and depending on how one moves between the monitors. Whom one chooses to listen to. The impression one gains of queer life in St. Petersburg will be based on a random choice of monitor, or even on spending hours to make sure one has listened to everything.⁴³ How queer community emerges with and through *State of Mind* is therefore dependent on how one navigates through the videos, how one positions oneself, and how one moves in the space.

The Installation

The video segment is constructed to reflect on the complexities of living queer, in St. Petersburg or anywhere else. It also constitutes a *gestaltning* of Hallberg and my navigation through St. Petersburg. It reflects our moving *in-between* positions of simultaneously being *insiders* and *outsiders*: of feeling able to grasp a situation while at the same time being lost, or like sometimes being part of a community and at other times being a stranger. The aim was to position ourselves as the intersectional and multilayered embodied positions we embrace – as artists, queers, Swedes, and white, for example – and in doing this situate ourselves in relation to the group we approached, the LGBTQIA community of St. Petersburg. An inside and an outside is also *gestaltad* by the actual structure of *State of Mind* as a whole – of the exterior and the interior of the blue box and the opportunity to move in and out of this structure. One may experience a tension between the seemingly normative photographs of the groups of women lined up on the blue walls, photographs that could be of “anybody,” and the video installation on the inside in which people are speaking freely about their thoughts and experiences of queer life in the city. What is addressed in the filmed interviews can hardly be mistaken, whereas the photographs may seem to reenact conceptions of norms in Russia: straightness and whiteness. In fact, straightness and whiteness have been the prevailing norms in all countries that *State of Mind* has so far been exhibited in. I can then only presume what may happen to a visitor who looks at the images on the outside (from whatever embodied positions that person might occupy), and then enters into the moving group portrait with the seven monitors and the swirling river in the back. I like to believe that visitors who have seen the portraits and who might have found a way to embrace the friendly looking people who confront the installation visitors with warm and open looks, has a greater ability to also engage with the stories revealed inside the blue box.

Lezzie Think Tank

Hitherto the emergence of queer community has been addressed as taking place within and through *State of Mind* while exhibiting, but also as an effect of collecting the material. Likewise the text has been reflecting the temporary visitor of the installation, and the potential for different embodied positions to move and linger as outsiders or insiders in relation to the artworks, *gestaltning* of a queer community.

Yet another way to think around emergence of queer community is the workshop *Lezzie Think Tank (LTT)*. The *LTT* was implemented together with activists and academics, and was performed in order to locally situate *State of Mind* at each site where the installation was exhibited. In each country every exhibition was prepared by at least one prior visit to the city. We went to either search for an exhibiting institution, or meet with the one that had invited us. On these trips we also met with LGBTQIA organizations and groupings, as well as with feminist and gender researchers from the local universities. One of the queer groups we met with at each place was asked to be the host for the upcoming *LTT*. The workshop was formed as a relay that travelled from city to city, collecting topics and responses that were shared between queer communities in the different places where *State of Mind* was shown. It was always held in the native language of each country and served as a way to create a temporary platform for discussions on the local situation for queers set in relation to the art installation. It offered an opportunity to gather people from different strands of the queer communities within the cities. As for Russia, the Ukraine, and Belarus, it was difficult for LGBTQIAs to find occasions to meet, besides in commercial clubs or at home. To hire locals was expensive, most places would be reluctant to lease to an event unless they could make money out of it. If possible, *LTT* was carried out at the locations where the artwork was installed, but in St. Petersburg and Kharkiv we were not given permission to hold the workshops in the galleries because of the theme of the workshop. These places were state spon-

sored.⁴⁴ At these sites, the host organization arranged for us to rent a café for the event.

Meeting with the LGBTQIA communities ahead of the exhibitions was crucial for the work in other ways. It connected us to people that could inform us about the situation of queers in the different cities, something that was necessary in order to get an understanding of how to best introduce *State of Mind* at each specific place. It was also a way to share information about the exhibitions with the queer communities, in some of the places the state-owned media would be reluctant to inform the public about *State of Mind*. In Minsk, for example, one of the directors of Y – Gallery of Contemporary Art was a regular guest on a television show where she presented the many exhibitions at their gallery, as well as other art events. Her presence in the program was cancelled on a short notice when our project was exhibited. However, by connecting to as many of the local queer groups as possible beforehand, we were confident that information on the exhibition and the workshop would be distributed through the many networks on the Internet. This did not only mean that we reached out to the queer community, but that a broader audience was brought to the venues, than the usual art visitors. There were of course already people from the queer community attending art exhibitions, but many of our audiences came to the art spaces for the first time. This was proven by, not only the crowded exhibition openings, but also the fact that the visitor numbers increased by sixty percent at ROSPHOTO in St. Petersburg the month *State of Mind* was shown at the gallery, according to the curator Xenia Nikolskaya.⁴⁵

By connecting to local LGBTQIA groups we could also make a connection between them and the staff at the exhibition venues. One important reason to do this was to gather a group of “experts” from the queer community that could support the exhibition institution if something happened after *State of Mind* was up and running and we, the artists, had left the country. An example of this could be that problematic media attention could be attracted because of the

queer content, and the gallery needed someone to talk to the press. Luckily, nothing ever happened that stirred up any negative media attention, nor was there ever any sabotage of the artwork. On the contrary, the queer communities brought the media to the galleries on some occasions. In Kiev we were interviewed and became part of a half-hour documentary on rainbow families, which was broadcast on a national television channel. Another example was in Kharkiv where one of the members of Sphere, our local *LTT* partner, was a journalist who invited a number of newspapers, magazines, and TV channels. There were at least ten different media representatives and teams who came to the press opening. This attention in the media was probably the reason why the director of the Municipal Gallery received a call from the city's Culture Committee. An official phoned her after opening day and asked about the suspect content of the art exhibition and wondered if it was suitable to show in a public space. The director invited the committee to come and see for themselves, assured that the friendly portraits would give nothing to complain over. However, nobody showed up from the local Cultural Committee and the exhibition could continue until closing day without any problems.

The stories presented here on how the media and the authorities reacted towards *State of Mind* are all from the exhibition venues in the post-Soviet region. This is also where we got the most attention from the queer communities. The reason for this, I would say, is that *State of Mind* was an early and unique project in this sphere. As noted before, showing queer art was not easy and having *State of Mind* exhibited in open, public spaces, two of them being state-supported galleries, was seen as something very special. Particularly since the installation addressed queer issues from the region, and in the Russian language.⁴⁶ There are probably several answers to why we succeeded so well in accomplishing this project. I am convinced that it had to do with the unprovocative façade of the installation, as well as the thorough work we put in to learning how to situate *State of Mind* at each specific site:

the close collaborations with queer activists, the art spaces and with academics. As a result of this, a common understanding for how *State of Mind* would best be marketed and talked about at each place was created.

However, there were probably also other reasons that enabled us to show *State of Mind*. Us coming from abroad is probably one reason: we were not dissidents from within, but two visiting artists arriving with support from the Swedish embassies, as well as funding from the Swedish government.⁴⁷ It also had to do with timing: at the time when we presented *State of Mind* at the different venues, it was possible to show such a project in the way it was executed. An example of this is the emerging activist movement in St. Petersburg in 2008, which was in its cradle already when we started the project (we got in touch with people within the Coming Out organization and the Side by Side queer film festival when we were about to exhibit in 2008). Things were already happening in the Russian queer society, at least locally in St. Petersburg, something *State of Mind* supported, considering that several of the participants later became part of the movement.⁴⁸

As for the *Lezzie Think Tank* event, the participants were asked to take notes that were later translated into English. However, these collected notes varied as some are a compilation of short comments, whereas others developed a discussion on several pages. At each new exhibition venue we added the notes to a *Lezzie Think Tank* folder that was placed in the gallery space together with photographs from the earlier sessions. In Kiev we posted the handwritten notes from the session on a blue board, and they became a part of the art installation. Nevertheless, even though the events were documented (and translated into English by someone in the group), these notes are not considered an important outcome of the *LTT*, nor do I consider them of much use in the research. The workshops were appreciated opportunities to meet with other local queers. There were lively discussions at each site, as they were a possibility to set one's own situation in relation to the stories that are shared in the video installation. It was these

actual temporary gatherings, and not the documentation per se, that felt important. This, alongside all the other outcomes mentioned above, such as securing the work at each venue, made the *Lezzie Think Tank* an important component of a palpable making of community through *State of Mind*.

At the Time of the Third Reading

Coinciding Temporal Events

At the Time of the Third Reading/Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/Bo время третьего чтения (2013), the second artwork that serves as a contribution to the research in *fotografisk gestaltning*, was made after the *State of Mind* exhibition tour had ended. It may also be viewed as an epilogue to the entire project. The artwork consists of a series of photographs in which two coinciding temporal events are placed: the third reading of a bill that led to the adoption of the federal law against “propaganda of non-traditional sexuality among minors” in Russia, and a temporary women’s camp taking place on a remote island situated somewhere between Moscow and St. Petersburg. The series can be said to bring forth an affective sense of history writing – a performed memento that is constructed by a fateful political decision set in relation to a notion of photography’s ability to “capture moments.”

The photographs were taken at the ten-year celebration of the camp. It was the last camp to take place at this site, and around sixty women had gathered to socialize for a few days. Another aspect of the Russian queer community is *gestaltad* through *At the Time of the Third Reading*, as it differs from the city life of St. Petersburg. At the temporary camp, women from all over the country gathered, at most over three hundred came in 2009. It was initiated by the activist Elena Botsman whose ambition had been to create an occasion for women from different cities to get to know each other, and to have an event where one could socialize, discuss, and perform for each other.⁴⁹ After organizing the camp for ten years, she decided that this should be the last. Hallberg and I were invited to the camp already in 2008 when Botsman was in Stockholm, where she attended our presentation of *State of Mind* at the

EuroPride Festival. Now we were there to present our joint project at one of the common gatherings. I took the photographs for *At the Time of the Third Reading* while walking around the camp in the early mornings and in the evenings.

The arrival day at the camp, June 11, happened to coincide with the third reading of a bill with the aim to prohibit information on “non-traditional sexual orientations” from being conveyed to children under eighteen. This latter event, reflected in the artwork’s title, took place at the State Duma in Moscow and attracted a small number of activists, many more police officers and massive, Russian and international, media attention. The bill was passed and the federal law was to be a fact as soon as the president signed the paperwork shortly afterwards.⁵⁰

The changing situation for the queer community in Russia affected how I moved as a photographer when the pictures were taken at the camp. The photographic method also constitutes a response to the character of the camp and my own role at the occasion which differed from the previous work. The participants of *State of Mind* had made a conscious decision beforehand to stand up and appear with their own images and voices in the work. Hallberg and I arranged preparatory meetings with people and planned the interviews and photo sessions ahead. The St. Petersburg-based work is made out of the friendship we had built with many of the participants, and our goal was to make everyone understand what intentions we had with the work in order to have them feel engaged and safe. Many of the people in *State of Mind* can be considered to be activists in one way or another, and for many the participation in the project was a way to contribute towards the recognition of the LGBTQIA environment of Russia.

In *At the Time of the Third Reading* another situation is *gestaltad*. Many of the women who visited the camp were not part of a major city’s lesbian sphere. They came to socialize with others as an occasion to “be oneself” and most were not ready to reveal their identities for a public art project. The reason for this was the “double life” that they were

leading at home, as exemplified earlier with Lindholm’s book by the same title (2010). This implied that a limited circle of people knew about their sexuality and love life, but to be open in all contexts would mean too many risks. However, the reluctance to be recognized may very well also reflect the overall increasingly frightening situation for queers in Russia that had developed since Hallberg and I made the *State of Mind* project in St. Petersburg six years earlier. For these reasons, I did not perform the new work in a similar way as *State of Mind* was conducted.

To “Gestalta” At the Time of the Third Reading

When photographing *At the Time of the Third Reading* I positioned myself in relation to the integrity and safety of the camp visitors. A positioning that entails taking a step back is performed physically – I am literally stepping backwards (still using a normal camera lens) in order to achieve a greater distance to the motif. At the same time, the movement of withdrawal expresses an ethical statement that considers an increasingly threatening situation for people in Russia who challenge the prevailing norms of heterosexuality. Trinh T. Minh-ha’s notion of *speaking nearby* (see chapter “Photographic Acts and Feminist Thinking”) may here be claimed to be performed as a moving away from the community. However, the backward movement was a way to be able to (ethically and practically) stay with the subject – to continue *gestalta* queer community.

As an art object, *At the Time of the Third Reading* is presented as a series of framed photographs that are sized so the people still appear small in the image (see pp. 184–187). Unlike in *State of Mind*, they are more difficult to identify as they have their backs to the camera or are situated far away (a few may be recognizable, but they have agreed to this). Nevertheless, the photographs mediate a sense of intimacy between the women and children at the camp as they gather in small

groups around campfires. Others sit alone contemplating, cook or do other chores. Scattered groupings of tents, randomly spread out in the forest, constitute colorful visual markers, and the smoke from the fires that winds between the trees contributes to a certain charged atmosphere. In the exhibition space the photographs are displayed in a row forming a stretched out panoramic landscape, not unlike the work *Proper Distance* mentioned earlier in this book. The camp is set up on an island with pine plantations: bare, high trunks in straight lines. These vertical lines form other visual marks in the photographs as a positioning of being part of the group, or as a viewer from the outside.

At the Time of the Third Reading has not yet been exhibited in Russia, but only at a few art institutions in Sweden. At these exhibition sites, no attempts to directly connect the exhibited photographs to a LGBTQIA community have been made, and neither have there been attempts to find a target audience like when we exhibited *State of Mind*.⁵¹ Nor have I had the opportunity to spend time at the exhibition sites in order to study and speak to the visitors, as was the case with *State of Mind*. In other words, I cannot present similar stories around this later artwork that would support theories on a possible emergence of queer community, and it is yet to be explored how queer community may emerge through the artwork's *gestaltning*.

The book format is an attempt to distribute the work internationally, moving both "East" and "West" from the position of Sweden. The bilingualism is a gesture towards making it accessible to several linguistic regions: the Russian-speaking and the English-speaking worlds. The composition of the photographs makes this possible, since they *gestaltar* the queer community without exposing specific individuals, and they will be even less recognizable when printed in the book. Making *At the Time of the Third Reading* into a book also allows the photographs to be contextualized through the essays by Nadia Plungian and Sasha Semyonova, through the interviews with two other Russian activists: Elena Botsman and Hana Kochetkova, as well as through Dmitri Bartenev's compilation of the Russian laws

banning information on "non-traditional sexual relations." These may all be seen as contributions from *insider* viewpoints, different stories on lesbian and queer cultures of Russia emerging from within the community. They are situated in relation to the distant photographic position.

A Sense of Our Times

There has been one occasion when I was given an opportunity to "try out" possible effects caused by the photographic positioning of "taking a step back." In the early summer of 2014 I was invited to talk at the seminar *A Sense of Our Times: A Symposium on Current Debates in Feminist and Queer Theory*,⁵² and decided to conduct an experiment. For the first time ever I brought actual artworks to a lecture. They were two framed photographs: one of the *State of Mind* portraits and another from the *At the Time of the Third Reading* series. I brought the art objects into this academic context firstly because I had a desire to make a statement on what forms the result of artistic research may de facto take. Secondly I wanted to investigate how the audience would react to the different artworks, which represented two quite different photographic styles.

As I have emphasized many times throughout this book, size and space matters quite a lot in my photographic work. So does material, positioning, and movement. It is therefore always frustrating to show photography in the form of a PowerPoint presentation when I am lecturing on my work. Nothing of what I am talking about can be proven, or experienced by the audience. In fact, the presentation format may even be counterproductive, as for example if the women in *At the Time of the Third Reading* suddenly appear much larger than in the actual artwork while projected on a big screen. It was therefore a rewarding experience to make the effort and bring the photographic objects this time.

In the seminar room at the Department of Cultural Sciences the framed photographs were placed on chairs and simply leaned against the wall. The one of Muchabad and Alyona from *State of Mind* depicts two women sitting on the bank of the Neva River. The close-up picture shows the two women facing the camera in a friendly manner. The other image, the one from *At the Time of the Third Reading* is of a group of women and children hanging out at the camp. They appear at a distance between the tree trunks. Nobody is paying attention to the camera – they were probably not even aware that I was photographing them since I was positioned quite far away. At the seminar, before starting my talk, I invited the audience to come up and have a look at the photographs. There were about twenty-five to thirty people in the room, a research seminar, and quite a few walked up to look at the artworks. When approaching everyone took a step away from the *State of Mind* photograph to get an overview – just for a brief look. By contrast, when approaching the other image, they all walked up very close and spent time studying the details. This event made me reflect on what causes intimacy in photography, the relation between what is depicted in a photograph and how the viewer acts in relation to the image. In other words, how the photograph moves the viewer and how materiality, bodily movements, and affects are interlaced. In this case, the movement of withdrawal made by me, the photographer, provokes the opposite reaction in the viewer of the photographs. The performed positioning of an *outsider* made by the photographer, here encouraged viewers to move closer to the subject.

Conclusion: Queer Community through Photographic Acts

Placed at the core of the research outcome is the photography-, video- and sound-based installation *State of Mind*, followed by the photographic series *At the Time of the Third Reading*, which is presented as framed images and in the book format. Three research entrances – photography, queer, and artworks – have led to proposals for how queer community may emerge through photographic acts. The acts were considered to take place in the process of taking photographs, that is, making the artworks, or within and through the *gestalting* of the artworks. They were also performed by activating the artworks, for example exhibiting them in various contexts or arranging seminars and workshops around the work. The focus has been on the methods of making and thinking around photographic acts as performative. It has also been important to allow for recognition of certain identities.

The main part was dedicated to community as *gestaltad* within and through *State of Mind*. The structure and expression of the installation opened the potential for a visitor to situate themselves on the *outside* or on the *inside* of queer community, depending on how the person engaged with the art. I also highlighted how *State of Mind* encourages movements and lingering *in-between* positions – a concept borrowed from Trinh T. Minh-ha describing a site that opens up for change as well as resistance against fixed positions. As elaborated in *Positioning with Photography*, position can on the one hand indicate *embodied positions*, in other words identities that are constructed in relation to society's norms. Where you come from, what you have learned, and what kind of experience you bring into the artwork mean something to how the work emerges, referring to Haraway's notion on *situated knowledge*. Position can also be understood in a literal way, how visitors physically position themselves in relation to the actual structure of the installation

and the different objects that are part of it. The two suggested ways of positioning are interlinked, as they may create each other. A visitor moves towards what they are drawn to, what they can identify with, which in turn depends on where they come from. However, according to Sara Ahmed, lines are created while moving, something which may also be considered through Judith Butler's notion on how norms are made through repetitive acts (see chapter "Performativity").

By navigating through *State of Mind* a visitor might acquire queer experience, feelings that emerge through the artwork become embodied by the visitor. In this way, the installation may evoke recognition in someone who identifies as queer (or someone who is queer friendly). However, moving and lingering in *State of Mind* might also destabilize normative identities, that is identities that are seen as norms such as "straight" or "white." Maybe someone who has certain ideas of inside and outside, of us and them, suddenly gains the insight that the "other" is actually a part of oneself. This may occur when a person has embraced the outside photographs of friends and lovers, believing that these are portraits of "normal" women, people representing the norm. Imagine what kind of feelings may emerge in that visitor when they then enter the video room and are faced with another kind of group portrait and the stories of queer living in St. Petersburg: affirmation or provocation? *State of Mind* thus has the potential to destabilize identities that appear as fixed – through normative images of queers, the normative might become queered (cf. Scheman 1997).

Looking at the different aspects of how *State of Mind* can be thought to *gestalta* queer community is an inquiry that has been going on throughout the research process. Some of these aspects were performed as stories in the text above, which took place in different positions in relation to the art installation: as a before, in front of, within, through, after, and so on. The positions were situated in different contexts, times, and places. However, *State of Mind*, the installation, has always been placed in the center, and so were the queer bodies that occupy the artwork.

The stories of how the project came about in St. Petersburg, experiences and impressions, formed the basis for the *gestaltning* of *State of Mind*. One decision was to bring together a seemingly shattered community in one room, as in the video installation, and through this suggest a temporary activist assembly. Similarly, the gathering of some of the queer groupings of friends and lovers, *svoi*, came to constitute the all-embracing model for the entire project. This can be considered as *gestaltning* of queer community. However, the stories also highlight the *State of Mind* project as part of the becoming of a community that took place while collecting the material. It can be exemplified with how Hallberg and I, at least for a while, associated with a queer community in St. Petersburg. It can also be said that queer community was performed during the photographic sessions in the city center. Yet another aspect of community is that *State of Mind* has inspired several people in the process to become activists. This applies to some people who worked with us during our visit to St. Petersburg in 2006/2007, as well as to people who saw the installation when it was exhibited.

Other stories, the ones about the visitors' interactions with the art installation when it was exhibited, support an understanding that the emergence of queer community, with and through the artwork, is dependent on the contexts of where, when, how, and for whom it was exhibited. They also suggest how queer affects, in different ways, might be produced by *State of Mind*. This was something that were occasionally calculated by us, the artists, as concepts that were *gestaltade* as part of the artwork. One example is Lena's placement in front of a portal that is one of the shortcuts that have for a long time been used as escape routes for dissidents as well as contemporary queer activists. However, we can never take for granted that these are acknowledged by everyone who visits the exhibited artwork. Similarly, queer affects might very well emerge unexpectedly, not intentionally *gestaltat*. The story with Sandormirskaya and the illuminated window is such an example.

The context of making art about, and with, the queer community in St. Petersburg as outsiders from abroad directed the process of making

State of Mind, but it actually also led to the emergence of community through the work in more ways. For example the *Lezzie Think Tank* that we presented to connect to the local queer communities in order to learn more about the different exhibition places and to distribute information, also provided quite a rare occasion for people to gather and discuss.

In the second artwork, the photographic series *At the Time of the Third Reading*, another artistic strategy was implemented: an act of withdrawal reacting to a harsher situation for queers in Russia, but also as a response to the character of the camp as an occasion for queer women to have a space of their own – if only for a couple of days a year. Nevertheless, to take a step back does not necessarily always mean to distance oneself from the subject. A photographic position of stepping back can also mean an ethical response to what matters, a way of finding other methods to still be able to approach that which is engaging one. And, as opposed to the three-dimensional and close-up emergence of queer community in *State of Mind*, the aesthetics of a faraway distance in *At the Time of the Third Reading* make this work suitable for the book format that can be distributed around the world, because the integrity of the people is protected through the photographic *gestaltning*.⁵³ The book may be seen as a more long-term contribution to the recognition and history writing of queer community, just as the *State of Mind* installation was a more temporary and situated contribution that was activated at each exhibition site. On the other hand, the book could never have been made without the knowledge and experience that came out of the thorough and profound work with *State of Mind*.

NOTES

- 1 The trilingual title of this artwork points towards three linguistic and geopolitical positions – of having access to, and an understanding of, some things, while not others. For better readability in this text, I will henceforth refer to this work with solely the English title. As for the independent book production *At the Time of the Third Reading/Во время третьего чтения*, the title is bilingual, as this reflects the two languages present.
- 2 In English, the University of Gothenburg simply uses the word Photography when addressing the subject.
- 3 See for example WordFinder Norstedts engelska ordbok Pro. Version 1.0.0. 2012.
- 4 List of exhibitions p. 190–191.
- 5 We made several attempts at exhibiting in Moscow as well and succeeded in finding a space in 2013. The exhibition was to be opened in the late fall, but we decided to cancel because of the “anti-propaganda” law that had been adopted earlier the same year. The exhibition conditions felt too unsafe.
- 6 The work was displayed in a room dedicated to artistic research projects and this was the requested format from the curators. In conjunction with the exhibition a series of panel discussions and lectures were held.
- 7 List of the *Lezzie Think Tank* pp. 198–205.
- 8 Handlingsrymd is a fictitious word in Swedish made up by the authors. It can be translated as something like “Sphere for Action.”
- 9 The article is written in Swedish with a summary in English.
- 10 An earlier version of the conversation was published as “Översättningar i rörelse: Experimentell etnografi och konstnärligt forskande,” in *Kulturella Perspektiv: Svensk Etnologisk Tidskrift* (2011).
- 11 Children-404 is a Russian LGBT online community active on the social networks Facebook and VK. It was established in 2013 by the journalist Lena Klimova. In 2014 a documentary by the same name was released. Available at <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children-404>>, <<https://www.facebook.com/children.404/>>, and <<https://www.facebook.com/children404film/timeline>>.

- 12 I owe thanks to Mara Lee for introducing entrance in *När Andra Skriver* as a useful concept to open routes into an artistic research project.
- 13 More on the collaborative work can be found in Angelica Olsson's text "Annika Karlsson Rixon och Anna Viola Hallberg, Samarbetet som metod," *Paletten* (2010). Exemplified with the exhibition in Minsk, artistic integrity in relation to dependence and dealing with different actors within the art world, queer activists, and other contributors is reflected on in the essay "Handlingsrymd," *Paletten* (Hallberg and Karlsson Rixon, 2012).
- 14 As for me, I completed my graduate studies at California Institute of the Arts and the basis of my theoretical knowledge of feminism as well as in photography and art, was grounded in the USA. I was also on a doctoral exchange at Rethoric Department at University of California, Berkeley during the PhD program, as well as a visiting scholar at the BBRG program, Department of Gender and Women's Studies in the fall of 2014.
- 15 This has changed over time while the Russian queer community has come to be organized internationally. The larger interest from Western media started only when the Russian laws that limit the rights for LGBTQIA people were ratified around 2009.
- 16 Some of the footage is now part of a private lesbian archive in Moscow and accessible to researchers and other interested parties. Franeta recently published a book in English, *My Pink Road to Russia* (2015), that deals with, among other things, her encounter with the LGBTQIA community of Russia at the time when the interviews were accomplished. The book also includes two of the interviews from the 1990s.
- 17 Due to the "Foreign Agency Law," Coming Out was shut down as an officially registered organization in 2015. It is now working as an "initiative group" without official registration.
- 18 The works are *Turismer* (1989–1994), *Among Us* (1993), and *The War* (1993). For example, in the series *The War*, a digital montage, I mounted a self-portrait reflecting the same expression as the Serbian soldier whom I placed myself beside. The "original" photograph was purchased through the image agency belonging to Sweden's largest newspaper, where I had worked a couple of years earlier. In the montage I am portraying myself as the "photographer" (through the repetitive "selfie" character of the series as a whole), although it is actually someone else's work. Yet, I am also becoming the victim of the photographer, just like the soldier, having the camera pointed towards us. The soldier, in turn, is also viewed as the perpetrator as he was accused of war crimes for having, among other things, raped and killed a number of women. The image of the soldier was widely distributed in media at the time, just like all the other "original" photographs I used in the series, it represented a high-profile media event from the same year. My work was in this sense still dealing with "reality," yet mocking the concept of "truth" through the combination of seriality and collage.
- 19 Apart from a vital period of art criticism in the Swedish newspapers, *Bildtidningen*, which changed its name to *Index: Contemporary Scandinavian Art and Culture*, led the discussion on photography in the media. An important contribution was also Jan-Erik Lundström's (ed) *Tankar om fotografi* (1993), a collection of translated essays on photography by predominantly American writers such as Rosler, Sekula, and Solomon-Godeau. Another factor that contributed towards creating a "photographic paradigm" in Sweden was the department of photography at Konstfack (University College of Arts, Crafts, and Design) in Stockholm, where many of my emerging artist peers working with the photographic media (e.g. Annika von Hausswolff, Lotta Antonsson, Maria Miesenberger) were educated. The feminist research magazine *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift* (1993: 3-4) dedicated an entire issue to women "behind the camera." A contemporary contribution on this period is offered as part of Niclas Östlind's comprehensive doctoral thesis project *Performing History: Photography in Sweden 1974–2014* (2014).
- 20 The other projects in the series on artist peers made after *Portraits in Nordic Light* (1998) are: *Annika by the Sea* (2001), *The Iaspis Studio, March 30, 2001* (2001), *Private Premises* (2003–ongoing), *Resonance, Installation* (2006), *Resonance, Conversations* (2006), and *The Annika Seminar* (2014). *Resonance* is a deepening of some of the questions that *Portraits in Nordic Light*, and the other works on fellow Scandinavian artists, had raised. It is also the first work that included video and Hallberg was therefore asked to work on the project. *Resonance* was made for my retrospective *Today Tomorrow Forever* (2006–2007), and was initially meant to be the focus for this PhD project. *Portraits in Nordic Light* is also used as an overall name for the entire project.
- 21 The first installation focusing on my biological family, *På lagom avstånd/Proper Distance (II)*, was made for the Gothenburg International Biennial in 2003. Some of this work was also brought into the installation *Moment: Grimmered, Documents – Memories – Stories* (2011), which is based on the family archive. This latter installation was made in collaboration with Hallberg specifically for the exhibition *Världar och Verkligheter* at Gävle Konstcentrum in 2011.
- 22 Russo's book was made into a movie capturing cuts from the many movies that are mentioned in the book (Epstein and Friedman 1995).

23 In 1997 Opie and I were both printing in the color lab at the California Institute of the Arts where we had both studied previously. She was working on *The Domestic Series*. I was printing *Portraits in Nordic Light* for the 10 exhibition at Lunds Konsthall. We commented on the links between our works.

24 As in the portraits in *State of Mind*, I was using an analogue large-format camera while making this work, which means that I would not look through the viewfinder while taking the picture, i.e. the person ought not to look at me in order to look straight into the camera since I was standing up behind the camera. Had they looked at me while taking the photo, they would have appeared to be looking upwards in the later printed picture.

25 *Här är vi* was also made into a book including interviews with some of the people that are depicted in the photographs (From and Karlsson Rixon, eds. 2014).

26 One example of how people from the queer community in St. Petersburg opened doors for us so we could proceed with the project is when we wanted to conduct an interview with Svetlana Surganova, the famous singer and songwriter, who was going to give a concert in the city. We gave up after sending a number of emails to the press office of the rock star, who was mentioned by many as an icon for lesbians in Russia.

One evening in November 2006, at the house of two of the interviewees, we mentioned how we had tried to reach Surganova to no avail. I am not quite clear on how it happened, but a short phone call later we had tickets to the front row of the concert, and a half-hour interview directly afterwards which we were allowed to record on video for the installation.

27 On the rare occasions when LGBTQIA activists did gather to demonstrate, however, this was invariably met by violence. Other occasions of homophobic violence were talked about in the conversations we had with people within the community, but it was predominantly gay men who suffered from this in the public sphere, even though we heard a couple of stories about women who had been attacked outside a lesbian bar. We had only two incidents when authorities tried to stop us in action, but these were not connected to the LGBTQIA theme. The first time was when we were filming at a subway station in the fall of 2006. As it is forbidden, several guards approached us. However, there was nothing they could do since we had acquired a special permission to film for an hour at that specific station beforehand. The second time was the following summer, when we were going to film and photograph a group of friends in the Summer Garden. We were questioned by a park police man who demanded money, something like 500 roubles, to allow us to continue working. We moved

to another location since we were not willing to pay bribes.

28 This was not something we necessarily proclaimed, but in a quite an awkward sense, we came to represent our home country when collecting the material, as well as while exhibiting the installation. The role as representatives of Sweden was twofold: it appeared in relation to the queers we connected to, but also later, when the exhibitions in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (2012) were funded by the Swedish Institute and supported in other ways by the Swedish Embassies in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. We felt that our project fulfilled one of the Swedish State's calls to address issues of human rights and queer women in these countries, and through this became a part of a political game that was being played above our heads. On the other hand, the state-funded support made it possible to exhibit *State of Mind* in these countries. This dilemma is discussed in Hallberg and my essay "Handlingsrymd" (2011).

29 This meant that we had to remove some of the photographs and re-edit the video segments a couple of times. We kept the voices, but replaced the image with a photo of the Palace Bridge, a symbol for the city of St. Petersburg. Showing *State of Mind* in a Western context has never been an issue. The reason why some participants wanted to stay anonymous was a fear of losing their positions in family or professional relations. It was

not because of a threat of being tracked down by the state or any LGBTQIA hostile groupings. Another security arrangement that we made is that only first names are used throughout the work. This counts for everyone, even people who are considered official. In this way people cannot be traced by their names. The reason why we decided to work the way we did, to include people with special requests of where to be exposed, was because we wanted to represent a variety of different experiences. It was for example hard to find elderly queers that were prepared to be recognized in their home region (it was hard to get in touch with older queers in the first place), but some agreed to share their stories in a Western context where they felt there was less risk of being identified.

30 To deal with this new situation, the festival posted signs with information about the law. Professional security guards had also been hired to protect the festival visitors as well as the exhibited artworks. The press was not informed about the event until after the opening, the information was distributed via internal networks. The opening was crowded with people anyhow, and this festival was the first one that could be fully implemented without any sabotage from the city authorities or hooligans.

31 In a conversation at the Queer Culture Festival in 2012, the leader of Coming Out St. Petersburg Polina Savchenko pointed

out that even if the situation had not legally improved, queer issues were now being written about and discussed in the media much more and in a more nuanced way.

- 32 In the two previous exhibition venues in St. Petersburg and Kharkiv, galleries that were supported by governmental money, the *Lezzie Think Tank* workshop had to be held in cafés that were booked by us for the occasion. Management did not allow us to hold a queer event within these art institutions.
- 33 For example, the first time we went to the lesbian club Tri-L we met Tanya, a copywriter and queer blogger. She became one of the main figures in the project, and introduced us to several of her friends and lovers. Alexander, the leader of one of the very first LGBTQIA organizations Krilja (krilija.sp.ru) lead us to Lena, who was one of the main people in the city's lesbian scene at the time. She, in turn, put us in contact with several other women within the community. She was especially important in the role of putting us in touch with the "elderly" lesbians, which was more or less interpreted as people who had passed the age of thirty-five. Meanwhile, Lena introduced us to some women who were close to sixty and who became participants of *State of Mind*. We were also meant to meet a couple who were well passed seventy. They lived quite far outside the city, and unfortunately the plan to meet them never worked out. How-

ever, the age of participants in *State of Mind* ranges from seventeen to sixty-seven, including some of the older gay men who take part in the interviews in the video segment. The so-called snowball effect also functioned in terms of getting a wide range of occupational variations, including students, a journalist, a driver, psychologists, a pole dancer, clerks, lawyers, academics, business owners, a security guard, physicians, homemakers, a security guard, a psychic etc. One of the main events was the reception at the Swedish General Consulate initiated by the General Consul himself, Gunnar Klinga, after we had introduced our project to him. To this event we invited people from the different groupings we had been in touch with, or just heard of. The consulate also invited people from the queer community. There were also representatives from the art scene at this event, which turned out to be the largest reception that had taken place at the consulate during Klinga's time. More than seventy people attended. After Hallberg and I had introduced ourselves and the project, we encouraged people to come up and speak to us and sign up for an interview, which lead to many new people's participation in the project.

- 34 The St. Petersburg-based Russian LGBT network was founded by the lawyer Igor Kochetkov as an online network in April 2006, and was mentioned by some. The beginnings of another kind of organizing in 2006 is also men-

tioned in Sasha Semyonova's text in *At the Time of the Third Reading*. This group became part of the foundation for Coming Out St. Petersburg that hosted the *Lezzie Think Tank* in 2008.

- 35 The general questions that were asked addressed the lesbian scene in St. Petersburg at the time: what it looked like, and whether and how people engaged in it. We also asked people to talk about their personal situation, how they navigated their lives as queers: at work, with family and friends and in the public space of the city. Yet, another subject addressed the living situation for lesbian women in St. Petersburg in more general terms. Lastly we asked about the future visions, what they imagined queer living would be like in St. Petersburg in five years. Even this subject was approached personally and on a general level.
- 36 One of the *State of Mind* participants, Polina, came to Sweden and worked with us on the project for two weeks. Polina is bilingual since she was brought up in Russia and moved to the United States when she was fourteen. She had recently moved back to St. Petersburg after eighteen years of exile. She is now deeply involved as one of the main figures of the organized LGBTQIA movement in the city.
- 37 The same photographic method was used in *Portraits in Nordic Light*.
- 38 The non-provocative approach of queer activism also became the strategy of

Coming Out, the regional non-profit St. Petersburg public initiative that was founded 2008: "We work for universal recognition of human dignity and equal rights of all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI). We base our work on the principles of collaboration, visibility and community involvement" (<http://comingoutspb.com>).

- 39 Racism was, and is, a serious issue in Russian society. One incident that happened during our first visit was for example the murder of two children whose parents were students from Tanzania, a crime that was explained as racist in the media and by people we discussed it with. Almost ten years later, in February 2016, I was looking through snapshots I took during this first stay in the city and found another reminder of an apparently racist society. The photo is of an article in the newspaper *St. Petersburg Times*, with the following headline: "Anti-Fascist Activists Target Hate Graffiti" (Nov. 20, 2016). The article is about how a small group of activists gather information on racist graffiti via a hotline and paint over it. They accuse the police of not doing their duty. The article also mentions that during 2005, 434 people suffered violent, ethnically motivated attacks in Russia, with thirty-five of the victims dying from their severe injuries (statistics from SOVA). It is predominantly a problem in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the people who were victims of these crimes were most often from Africa.

- 40 It was also customary for women to hold hands, straight or queer, whereas one never saw men doing the same thing.
- 41 We did not succeed in meeting lesbians who were older than sixty. Lena was going to introduce us to an older couple who lived in a "dasha," a small house outside the city, but unfortunately the meeting never took place.
- 42 Irina Sandomirskaja is Professor at the School of Culture and Education at Södertörn University, Sweden, and functioned as a "consultant" while making and exhibiting *State of Mind*. We met with Sandomirskaja on three occasions, in 2007, 2008, and 2011 to discuss the project.
- 43 I received an email from a person in Moscow who told me (besides asking for the phone number to one of the participants) that she had taken the train to St. Petersburg to see *State of Mind* in 2008. She had spent more than four hours listening to all the video footage. A group of other visitors at the same exhibition venue got upset because they had heard that the rock musician, singer, and poet Sarganova had been interviewed for the project, and they were frustrated because there was no information regarding what monitor she appeared on. They went to ROSPHOTO to listen to her with an expectation that she would "come out" as a lesbian, but ended up spending time listening to many of the others' stories as well.
- 44 We were invited to hold a Master Class at both spaces, where we introduced the art project for a general audience. It was then no problem to address *State of Mind's* queer content.
- 45 ROSPHOTO kept statistics on the number of visitors.
- 46 In Kiev, for example, we were told that it was the first time a large, public project focusing on lesbians was shown.
- 47 While making the project in St. Petersburg my salary as a professor at the School of Photography as well as having support as a doctoral student funded our living and the material we needed. A grant I was given from the Stena Foundation funded the production of *State of Mind*, together with a donation of all the technical equipment for the art installation, which was organized by Stockholm Pride. The tour in the post-Soviet region was predominantly supported by several grants from the Swedish Institute, but the first exhibition in St. Petersburg in 2008 was financed with money from the Swedish Art Grants Committee.
- 48 When it comes to a Western context, one could say that *State of Mind* came about "too early." Even though the first exhibition in Stockholm was visited and appreciated by a large crowd because of its connection to EuroPride, there was not much media attention around the project. The Swedish media's focus turned to Russian queer issues only when the "anti-propaganda" laws started to be introduced. The *State of Mind* project has attracted more media attention after it was exhibited in Stockholm and Gothenburg the first time.
- 49 An interview with Botsman made at the camp in 2013 is printed in the book *At the time of the third reading/Во время третьего чтения* (2016). The name Botsman is a pseudonym.
- 50 The Federal law that was passed on June 29, 2013, bans the distribution of "propaganda" to minors which promotes "non-traditional sexual relationships" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Russia. The lawyer Dmitri Bartenev wrote a compilation of the laws banning the public dissemination of propaganda of homosexuality that were successively enacted in thirteen regions of Russia from 2008 onward until being implemented on a federal level, which is included in the book *At the time of the third reading/Во время третьего чтения* (2016)
- 51 An exception will be the dissertation exhibition that will coincide with the Gothenburg local West Pride.
- 52 *A Sense of Our Times: A Symposium on Current Debates in Feminist and Queer Theory* was hosted by the Department of Cultural Sciences at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Panel discussions and presentations were held by Jackie Stacey, Anu Koivunen, Lena Martinsson, and Annica Karlsson Rixon. The respondents were Lisbeth Larsson and Mikela Lundahl and the symposium was held on June 16, 2014.
- 53 On a trip to Moscow in October 2015, I met up with Elena Botsman, the initiator, and several others who attended the camp the same year the photographs were taken. This was an important opportunity for me to get a sense of how they would feel about the book project, and especially the character of the long-distance photos. The response I got was very positive, especially since the book would be published in two languages. As a woman who runs an archive of Russian LGBT history in her home town said at the meeting: "It is an important project for the sake of Russian queer history writing. Our history disappears so fast since we do not have any documentations."

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APPENDIX

Visual Documentation



1.

1. *State of Mind in Talkin' Loud & Sayin' Something – Four Perspectives of Artistic Research*, Gothenburg Museum of Art, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2008.



2.



3.

2. *State of Mind, Prologue* in *Inside Out*, Brunnsparken, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2006.

3. *State of Mind* at GogolFest 09, Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine, 2009.

4. *State of Mind*, Galleri K1, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden, 2008.

5. *State of Mind* at GogolFest 09, Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine, 2009.

6. *State of Mind* at GogolFest 09, Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine, 2009.

Following pages:

7. *State of Mind*, Y – Gallery of Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus, 2010.



5.



4.



6.



7.



8.



9.

8. *State of Mind* at GogolFest 09,
Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine, 2009.

9. *State of Mind* at GogolFest 09,
Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine, 2009.

Following pages:

10. *State of Mind* in *Queerography*,
International Queer Culture Festival, Art
Space TAIGA, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2012.



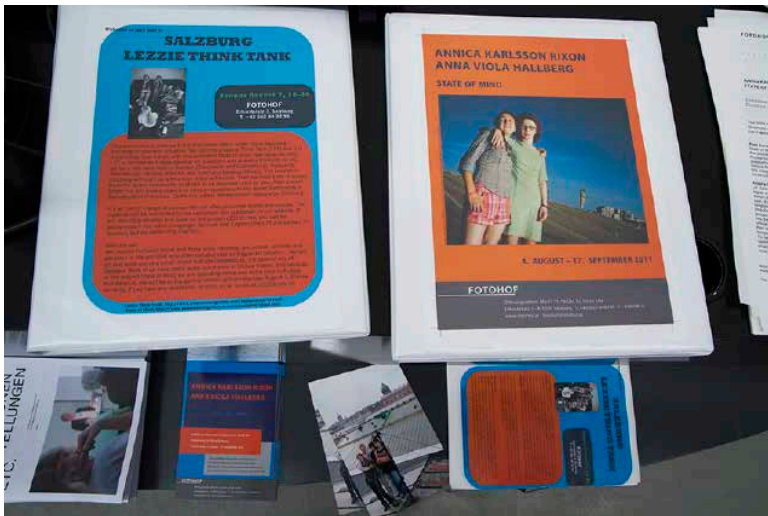


11.

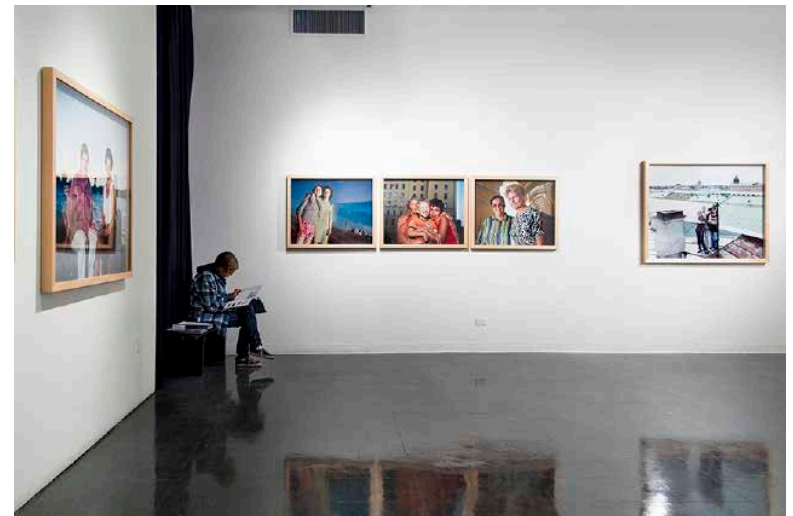
11. *State of Mind* in *Queerography*,
International Queer Culture Festival, Art
Space TAIGA, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2012

12. *State of Mind*, FOTOHOF, Salzburg,
Austria, 2011.

13. *State of Mind* in *In Mind and Memory*,
Worth Ryder Art Gallery, University of
California, Berkeley, USA, 2011.



12.



13.



14.

14. *State of Mind and Resonance*,
ROSPHOTO – Russian National Centre of
Photography, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2008.

15. *State of Mind* in *Queerography*,
International Queer Culture Festival,
Art Space TAIGA, St. Petersburg, Russia,
2012. Monitor with Sonja Franeta's *Pink
Flamingo Archive*.



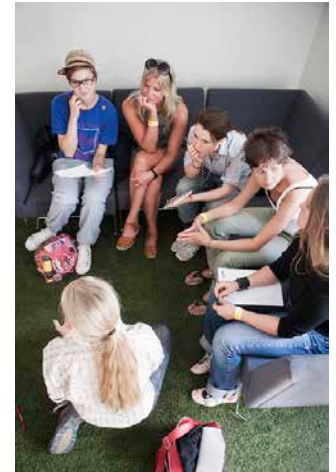
15.

16–17. *Lezzie Think Tank*, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2008. Hosted by Coming Out, an LGBT organization.

18–19. *Lezzie Think Tank*, Pride House, Stockholm, Sweden, 2008. Photographer: Sara Lindquist.



16.



18.



17.



19.



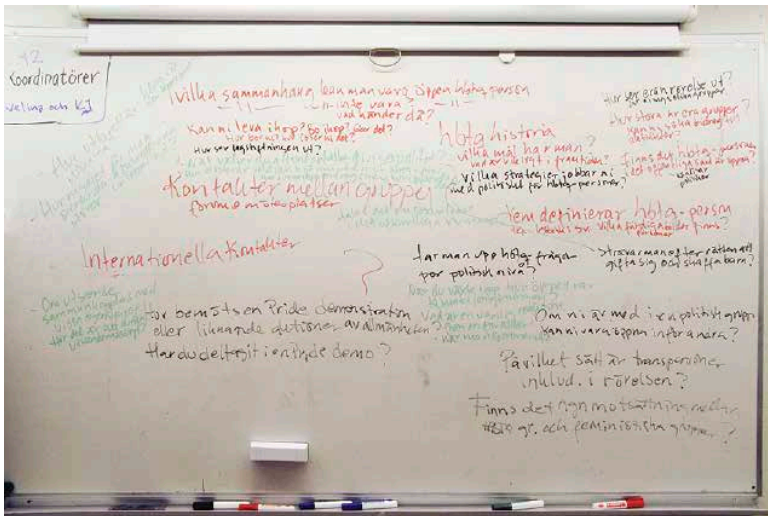
20.

20–21. *Lezzie Think Tank*, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2008. Hosted by the Video Activist Group at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, a feminist college.

22–23. *Lezzie Think Tank*, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2009. Hosted by Sphere Women's Organization.



22.



21.



23.

24–25. *Lezzie Think Tank*, Kiev, Ukraine, 2009. Hosted by Insight, a non-governmental LGBTQ organization.

26–27. *Lezzie Think Tank, Y* – Gallery of Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus, 2010.

Following pages:

28. *State of Mind*, Anna Viola Hallberg interviewed by a television broadcast team, GogolFest 09, Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine, 2009.



24.



26.



25.



27.





29.

29. *State of Mind*, contact trip, Kiev, Ukraine, 2008.

30. *State of Mind*, Master Class, ROSPHOTO, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2008.

31. *State of Mind*, opening at Y – Gallery of Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus, 2010.

32. *State of Mind*, press Y – Gallery of Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus, 2010.



31.



30.



32.



33.



34.

33. *State of Mind*, Master Class, Kharkiv
Municipal Gallery, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2009.

34. *State of Mind* presentation, Annica Karlsson
Rixon, Pride House, Europride/Stockholm Pride,
Kulturhuset/Stadsteatern, Stockholm, Sweden,
2008. Photographer: Sara Lindquist.



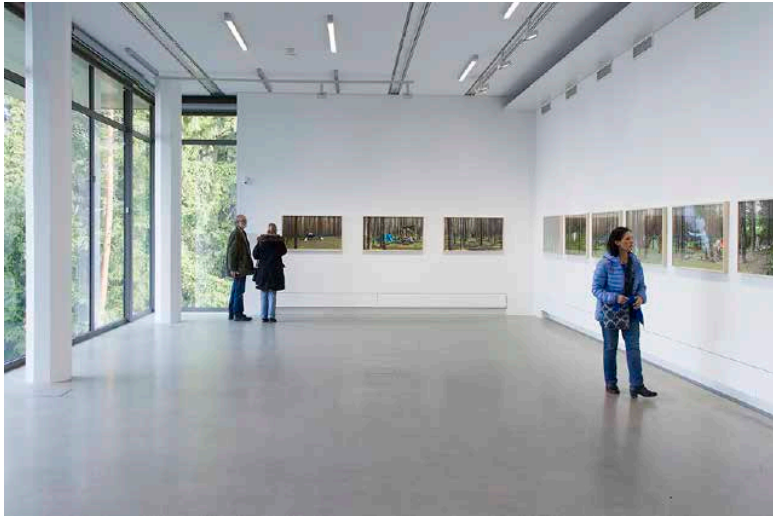
35.



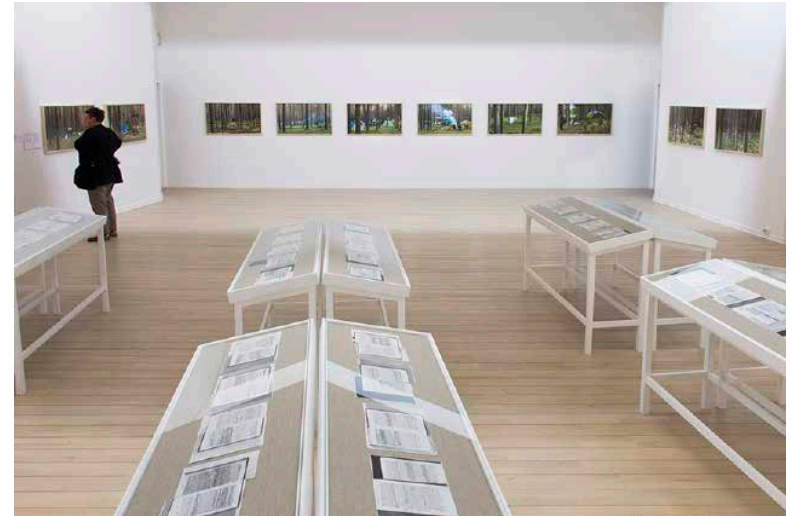
36.

35. *Queer Culture Festival*, curator Nadia Plungian in panel discussion, Space Taiga, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2012.

36. *A Sense of Our Times: A Symposium on Current Debates in Feminist and Queer Theory* at the Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Panel discussions and presentations with Jackie Stacey, Anu Koivunen, Lena Martinsson, and Annica Karlsson Rixon. Respondents: Lisbeth Larsson and Mikela Lundahl. June 16, 2014. Photographer: Louise Wolthers.



37.



38.

37. *At the Time of the Third Reading/
Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/
Во время третьего чтения* in *The Visible:
Contemporary Swedish Photography*, Artipelag,
Stockholm, Sweden, 2014.

38. *At the Time of the Third Reading/
Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/
Во время третьего чтения* and Kajsa
Dahlberg's *A Room of One's Own/
A Thousand Libraries in A Voice of One's Own:
On Women's Fight for Suffrage and Human
Recognition*, Malmö Art Museum, Sweden, 2014.



39.



40.

39. *At the Time of the Third Reading/
Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/
Во время третьего чтения #05.*

40. *At the Time of the Third Reading/
Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/
Во время третьего чтения #07.*

Artworks

State of Mind, Prologue

Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Media: Single-channel video with sound

Production year: 2006

Duration: 4:50 min.

Language: Russian

Subtitles: English

Narrator: Irina Avetangi

Translation: Tatiana

Location: St. Petersburg

State of Mind

Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Media: Installation, photography, video, and sound

Production years: 2006–2008

Video installation: Eight-channel video and sound

Seven 19-inch open-frame monitors, Standard Definition video (SD) with sound (headphones)

One High Definition video (HD) projection with sound (ambient, two loudspeakers)

Seven scaffolding pipes

Duration: Seven films (looped), ca. 35 min. each and one projection/backdrop (looped)

Participants (35 interviews with 38 people): Alexander, Alina, Alya, Alyona, Dmitri, Elena & Marina, Gennady, Ilja, Inna, Irina, Katya, Kir, Ksenia, Lena, Lena, Liliana, Marina, Marina, Marina, Mariana, Muchabad, Nadia, Natasha, Olga, Polina, Polina, Rima, Sasha, Sarganova, Sveta, Sveta & Oksána, Tanya, Valeria, Violeta, Yulia & Elena

Voice: Russian, English, Swedish

Subtitles: English, Russian

Photographs: 11 chromogenic color prints, wooden frames (birch), Plexi glass

State of Mind (Irina, Ilja, Sveta, and Oksána, St. Petersburg, 2007)

131 x 106 x 5 cm (52 x 42 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Muchabad and Alona, St. Petersburg, 2007)

131 x 106 x 5 cm (52 x 42 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Tanya, Vika, and Dasha, St. Petersburg, 2007)

131 x 106 x 5 cm (52 x 42 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Marina, Senya, Lena, St. Petersburg, 2007)

93.5 x 76 x 5 cm (37 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Mariana, Marina, Kir, and Valeria, St. Petersburg, 2007)

106 x 76 x 5 cm (42 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Natasha and Violeta, St. Petersburg, 2007)

93.5 x 76 x 5 cm (37 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Ksenia and Liliana, St. Petersburg, 2007)

93.5 x 76 x 5 cm (37 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Katya, Marina, Lena and Yana, St. Petersburg, 2007)

106 x 76 x 5 cm (42 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Rima, Nadya and Inka, St. Petersburg, 2007)

93.5 x 76 x 5 cm (37 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Lena, St. Petersburg, 2007)

93.5 x 76 x 5 cm (37 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind (Polina, Alya, Polina, Ilja and Sveta, St. Petersburg, 2007)

93.5 x 76 x 5 cm (37 x 30 x 2 inches)

State of Mind was made as a collaborative project between the artists Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Photographer: Annica Karlsson Rixon

Videographer: Anna Viola Hallberg

Interviews: Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Photography editing: Annica Karlsson Rixon

Video editing: Anna Viola Hallberg

Interview editing: Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Ambient sound: Anna Viola Hallberg

Installation design: Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Production years: 2006–2008

Language facilitator and translator (RU–ENG, ENG–RU): Polina

Language facilitators (RU–ENG, ENG–RU): Nadya, Liliana, and Tanya

Language supervision (RU): Irena and Therese

Prints: Staffans bilder, Gothenburg

Post production video: Produktionsdesign, Stockholm

At the Time of the Third Reading/Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/Во время третьего чтения – the photographic series

Annica Karlsson Rixon

Media: Photography, pigment prints, acid-free cotton rag, wooden frames (birch), glass

Production year: 2013

Size: 113 x 67 x 4 cm

Post production: Sven Westerlund, Projektor, Stockholm

At the Time of the Third Reading//Во время третьего чтения – the book

Publisher: Art and Theory

Editor: Annica Karlsson Rixon

Design: Leo Form

Proofreading and translation EN: Bettina Schultz

Proofreading and translation RU: Yulia Gradska

Preface and photography by Annica Karlsson Rixon.

Introduction by Jack Halberstam

Essays by Nadia Plungian and Sasha Semyonova.

Interviews with Elena Botsman and Hana Kochetkova.

Summary Russian laws banning information on “non-traditional sexual relations” by Dmitri Bartenev.

Exhibitions

State of Mind, Prologue

Inside Out, Brunnsparken, Gothenburg, Sweden. Curator: Tomas Ferm. 08.04.06 – 08.13.06.

Pride på Stan, Stockholm Pride, Gallerian, Stockholm. 07.31.06 – 08.13.06.

Spring Salon (Vårsalongen), Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm. 01.25.07 – 03.18.07.

State of Mind and Resonance, ROSPHOTO – Russian National Centre of Photography, St. Petersburg, Russia. Curator: Xenia Nikolskaya. 09.05.08 – 10.19.08.

State of Mind

State of Mind, Galleri K1, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden. 07.25.08 – 08.28.08

State of Mind and Resonance, ROSPHOTO – Russian National Center of Photography, St. Petersburg, Russia. Curator: Xenia Nikolskaya. 09.05.08 – 10.19.08.

Talkin' Loud & Sayin' Something: Four Perspectives of Artistic Research, Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden. Curator: Mika Hannula. 09.24.08 – 11.16.08.

State of Mind, Kharkiv Municipal Gallery, Kharkiv, Ukraine. 07.17.09 – 04.08.09.

State of Mind at GogolFest 09, Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine. Initiator and director: Vlad Troitskiy. 09.11.09 – 09.29.09.

State of Mind, Y – Gallery for Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus. 03.05.10 – 03.30.10.

The Moderna Exhibition 2010, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden. Curators: Gertrud Sandqvist, Lisa Rosendahl, and Fredrik Liew. A digital presentation of the project. 10.02.10 – 01.09.11.

State of Mind, Fotohof, Salzburg, Austria. 08.03.11 – 09.18.11.

In Mind and Memory, Worth Ryder Art Gallery, UC Berkeley, California, USA. Curator: Anurada Vikram. 09.28.11 – 10.22.11.

Queerography, International Queer Culture Festival, Art Space TAIGA, St. Petersburg, Russia. Curator: Nadia Plungian. 09.10.12 – 09.20.12.

State of Mind – Queer Lives in Russia, Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden. 08.06.16 – 21.08.16.

At the Time of the Third Reading/Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/Во время третьего чтения

The Visible: Contemporary Swedish Photography, Artipelag, Stockholm, Sweden.

Curators: Jessica Höglund, Magnus Jensner, and Niclas Östlind. 02.08.14 – 05.11.14.

En egen röst – om kvinnors kamp för rösträtt och mänskligt utrymme (A Voice of One's Own), Malmö Art Museum, Sweden. Group exhibition. Curators: Cecilia Wiedenheim, Joa Ljungberg, and Marika Reuterswärd. 06.06.14 – 09.07.14.

Framing Bodies, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg. Curators: Dragana Vujanovic and Louise Wolthers. 05.30.15 – 08.30.15.

State of Mind – Queer Lives in Russia, Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden. 08.06.16 – 21.08.16.

Publications

Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg, "State of Mind, Talkin' Loud & Sayin' Something – Four Aspects of Artistic Research," *ArtMonitor*, no. 4 (2008).

Annica Karlsson Rixon and Lena Martinsson "Översättningar i rörelse – Experimentell etnografi och konstnärligt forskande," *Kulturella perspektiv*, no. 3–4, (2011).

Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg, "Handlingsrymd," *Paletten* no. 4 – 1 (2011/2012).

Annica Karlsson Rixon and Lena Martinsson, "Trots Allt (In Spite Of)," *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, no. 1 (2013). Selected as "Article of the Month" by Qaisar Mahmood, *Tidsskriftsrevyn* no. 6 (2013).

Annica Karlsson Rixon, ed., *At the Time of the Third Reading/Во время третьего чтения*, Stockholm: Art and Theory (2016).

Presentations, Lectures, Seminars

"*State of Mind, Prologue*," Consulate General of Sweden, St. Petersburg, Russia. Screening and presentation: Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. Nov 3, 2006.

Loving the Alien – Artistic Research Conference, School of Photography, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Lecture. May 30, 2008.

"*State of Mind*," RFSL Benchmarking Conference, Consulate General of Sweden, St. Petersburg, Russia. Presentation: Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. June 12, 2008.

"*State of Mind*," PrideHouse/EuroPride 08, Studio 3, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden. Presentation. Aug 1, 2008.

"*State of Mind and Resonance*," ROSPHOTO, St. Petersburg, Russia. Master Class: Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. Sep 5, 2008.

Talkin' Loud & Sayin' Something: Four Perspectives of Artistic Research, ELIA 10th Biennial Conference, Gothenburg Museum of Art, Sweden. Artistic research symposium, presentation, and panel discussion. Oct 31, 2008.

"Queer Photography," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden. Lecture. April 21, 2009.

"*State of Mind*," 7th European Feminist Research Conference, "Gendered Cultures at the Crossroads of Imagination, Knowledge and Politics," Utrecht University, Netherlands. Paper presentation and panel discussion. June 6, 2009.

"*State of Mind*," Kharkiv Municipal Gallery, Kharkiv, Ukraine. Master class: Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. July 18, 2009.

"Beatrice Bain Research Group Presents: Impossible Translations and Unexpected Intersections, Panel Discussion on Two Intercultural Projects." Presentation and panel discussion: Ewa Majewska, Annica Karlsson Rixon, and Anna Viola Hallberg. Presider: Professor Paola Bacchetta, University of California, Berkeley, USA. Feb 9, 2010.

"*State of Mind*," Prof. Trinh T. Minh-ha's class "Film, Feminism and the Avantgarde," University of California, Berkeley, USA. Lecture: Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. Feb 11, 2010.

"*State of Mind*," Y – Gallery for Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus. Master class: Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. Mar 8, 2010.

"*State of Mind*," case presentation on artistic research made on Skype from Minsk to Hanasaari, the Swedish–Finnish Cultural Center. The video-moderated panel discussion was led and introduced by research secretary Johan Öberg from the University of Gothenburg. Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. Mar 7, 2010.

"Palpable Curating: In and Out of Institutions," "The Task of the Curator – Translation, Intervention, and Innovation," in the Exhibitionary Practice Conference, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA. Paper presentation and panel discussion: Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. May 15, 2010 (<http://macs.ucsc.edu/conference/home.html>).

"Dr Artist: A Conversation Around Artistic Research," with Matthew Buckingham, Magnus Bårtås, Andreas Gedin, Anna Viola Hallberg, Annica Karlsson Rixon, Matts Leiderstam, Sarat Maharaj, and Apolonija Šušteršič, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden. Panel discussion. Oct 3, 2010.

"Sublime said the Association – A Day on Feminist Strategies and Methods," morning conversation between the artists Petra Bauer, Anna Viola Hallberg, Sara Jordenö, Annica Karlsson Rixon, and Mary Kelly. Moderated by Gertrud Sandqvist. Staged by the YES! Association. Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden. Panel discussion. Oct 23, 2010.

"Annica Karlsson Rixon Talks about her Research Project *State of Mind*," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden. Lecture. Oct 24, 2010.

"*State of Mind* – ett konstnärligt forskningsprojekt," Art Theory Department, University of Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden. Lecture. Oct 26, 2010.

"*State of Mind*, Changing Identities and Contexts in the Arts: Artistic Research as the New European Paradigm for the Arts," Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, Finland. Conference, paper presentation. Nov 9, 2010.

International Photo Symposium in Gothenburg on Portraiture, Gothenburg University, Sweden. Arranged by the School of Photography, Gothenburg University, and the Hasselblad Foundation. With Geoffrey Batchen, Tanya Sheehan, Annica Karlsson Rixon, and Froidi Lazlo. Seminar, lecture. Dec 2, 2010.

"Queering Photography (or Photographs of Queers?)," Konstlab / Samtal, Atalante, Gothenburg, Sweden. Presentation and panel. Apr 11, 2011.

"Lokala handlingar i en global kontext," Global bildning, Gerlesborgsskolan, Gerlesborg, Sweden. Organized by Grundtviginstitutet and Faculty of Fine, Applied, and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg. Workshop, presentation. May 19-20, 2011.

"Gespräche zur Fotografie – eine Diskussion mit den Künstlerinnen," Fotohof, Salzburg, Austria. With Silvia Eiblemayr, Christiane Erharter, Katrina Daschner, Anna Viola Hallberg, and Annica Karlsson Rixon. Panel discussion. Aug 3, 2011.

"In Mind and Memory," research presentation hosted by Townsend Center Working Group on Socialism and Sexualities, University of California Berkeley. Organized by Anastasia Kayiatos and Annica Karlsson Rixon. Oct 3, 2011

"In Mind and Memory," Artistic Research Symposium, Wurster Hall, University of California, Berkeley, USA. Participants: Deena Al-Adeeb, Annica Karlsson Rixon, Anna Viola Hallberg, Johan Öberg, Lena Martinsson, and Greg Niedermayer. Moderator: Laura Fantone. Organized by Anurada Vikram and Annica Karlsson Rixon. Oct 3, 2011. <<http://anthropology.berkeley.edu/content/mind-and-memory-oct-3>>.

"*State of Mind*," Coming Out St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg, Russia. Presentation. Feb 15, 2012

"*State of Mind*," Conference on Identities and Resistance. Heritage, Shristi University, Bangalore, India. Presentation. Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. Feb 23, 2012

"ART TALKS/State of Mind goes Jönköping," Culturum, Jönköping. Arranged by Mike Bode. Presentation and panel. Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. April 15, 2012

"*State of Mind*," Gender Research Seminar, Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg. Research presentation. Apr 23, 2012

"Identiteter/Positioner," Department of Culture and Communication, Södertörn University, Huddinge, Sweden. Lecture. Apr 30, 2012

"Flatlobbyn 2.0," HBTQ Festivalen 2012, Storan, Gothenburg, Sweden. Presentation. May 31, 2012

"*State of Mind* and Other Works," Rodchenko Moscow School of Photography and Multimedia, Moscow, Russia. Presentation. Karlsson Rixon and Hallberg. June 18, 2012

"Art Movement – Civil Activism," International Queer Culture Festival, Art Space TAIGA Space, St. Petersburg, Russia. Presentation and panel discussion. Sep 14, 2012

"On *State of Mind* – An Artistic Research Project," School of Photography, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Lecture. Oct 8, 2012

"Artistic Research," Business and Design, School of Design and Crafts, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Lecture and seminar. Oct 29, 2012

"The Politics of Forms and Forces," University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Arranged by Lena Martinsson and Annica Karlsson Rixon for the Center for Interdisciplinary Gender Research (GIG). Lecture and two-day workshop with Prof. Trinh T. Minh-ha, UC Berkeley, USA. Apr 25-27, 2013

"*State of Mind*, konst i rörelse med rysk hbtq-aktivism," Uppsala Queerseminarium, Uppsala University, Sweden. Seminar, presentation. Oct 3, 2013

"*State of Mind*, konst i rörelse med rysk hbtq-aktivism," Globala Genusfrågor, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Lecture. Dec 11, 2013

"*State of Mind*, konst i rörelse med rysk hbtq-aktivism," Gendering Practices, Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg. Lecture. Jan 29, 2014

"A Sense of Our Times: A Symposium on Current Debates in Feminist and Queer Theory," Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Panels and presentations with Jackie Stacey, Anu Koivunen, Lena Martinsson, and Annica Karlsson Rixon. Respondents: Lisbeth Larsson and Mikela Lundahl. June 16, 2014

"HBTQ-personer, feminister, res er! Kom och smaka friheten med oss!," Bildmuseet, Umeå University, Sweden. Arranged by Konstfrämjandet. Fredrik Elg, Annica Karlsson Rixon, and Irina Sandomirskaja. Moderator: Camilla Pålsson. Lecture and panel. Sep 23, 2014

"*State of Mind* – konst i rörelse med rysk hbtq-aktivism," Temakväll Pussy Riot and the Cossacks, Havremagasinet, Boden, Sweden. Lena Jonson and Annica Karlsson Rixon. Lecture and panel. Sep 24, 2014

"Positions (1), Cultural Theories and Practices," Department for Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Seminar, lecture. Jan 26, 2015

"Vad gör man? En kväll om att bemöta intolerans," Röda Stens Konsthall, Gothenburg, Sweden. Arranged by Röda Sten Konsthall and Ada. Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anders Rydell. Presentation and discussion. Mar 18, 2015

"Queer Art in Russia", Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden. Participants: Nadia Plungian, independent curator and researcher, Moscow, and Annica Karlsson Rixon, visual artist/photographer. Moderated by Louise Wolthers, head of research and curator at Hasselblad Foundation. Panel discussion. June 8, 2016.

"The Making of a Soviet Transmasculinity", Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden. Lecture by Nadia Plungian. Arranged by Annica Karlsson Rixon. June 9, 2016.

Collections

State of Mind, Gothenburg Museum of Art permanent collection (2016)

Individual photographs are represented in the art collection of the Sten A Olsson Foundation for Research and Culture (2007), the Gothenburg Art Museum (2008), and the collection of Gävleborg länskultur (2013).

At the Time of the Third Reading/Vid tiden för den tredje läsningen/Во время третьего чтения, selected photographs from the series are represented in the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Collection (2013) and at the Malmö Art Museum (2014).

Some Notes on *State of Mind*, Prologue

State of Mind, Prologue is a video work that is nearly five minutes long and that was made during a weeklong visit to St. Petersburg, Russia, in July 2006. It is based on an email conversation with a couple living in the city. The email exchange took place between 2005 and 2006. The two women were also engaged in the making of the video on site: one of them translated the text into Russian and the other read it for the recording. None of them wanted to go public with their relationship and sexuality. Their names are therefore pseudonyms and the video footage is a filmed sequence of the Palace Bridge opening and closing during one of the city's famous White Nights. The Palace Bridge is in the very center of the city and stands as a symbol for St. Petersburg. The footage of the bridge opening and closing is an identifier of the city, as well as marking processes of opening and closure, which could include bridges, societies, and sexualities.

As the title indicates, this work is made as a prelude to the comprehensive installation to come. It has been shown as an independent work and on occasion in connection with *State of Mind*, the installation. When we made the prologue, we were in the very first stages of the project, and the video presents our first encounter with the LGBTQIA community of the city, which in many senses differs from what was later learned. As with

the installation, the video work is based on personal stories, friendship, and our impressions of and interactions with queer life in St. Petersburg. We had no intention of speaking in general terms, yet the work says something about being queer in St. Petersburg, as well as saying something about us who visited and became friends with the couple. The two women's names are not revealed, nor are their faces. They are both professionals and they felt that they could not be open as they feared being openly queer would risk their jobs. One was an associate professor at one of the city's universities, and the other was an art teacher for children. This took place before the regional law against "propaganda on homosexuality" was introduced in St. Petersburg, but since there is no such thing as labor rights, one could easily lose one's job from one day to the next.

The video was first screened at two exhibitions the same summer as we made the work. These events had in common that they were both taking place in an open public area. One was at a shopping mall as part of *Stockholm Pride in the City*, an art exhibition arranged by Stockholm Pride 2006. The other exhibition, *Inside Out*, took place at Brunnsparcken, a popular park in the commercial center of Gothenburg. The video was then displayed on a monitor in the window of a large bookstore chain. Two loudspeakers were placed on the outside conveying the story in Russian, subtitles in English. *State of Mind, Prologue* was also shown at the *Spring Salon* in Stockholm in 2007, and was part of our exhibition at ROSPHOTO in St. Petersburg the year after. It has also been screened as part of lectures a number of times. One such occasion was at the Swedish General Consulate in St. Petersburg in 2008, in conjunction with an event organized by RFSL (the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights).

The following is part of a press text written by Hallberg and me in 2006:

White Nights in St. Petersburg, a city full of expectations and possibilities. A woman reflects on her existence: "Some of you have privileges that I do not dare dream of. Some of you have the right to live my dream." It is the summer of 2006 and an upcoming G8-meeting. At the same time Russia holds the chairmanship at the Council of Europe's minister committee (Europarådets ministerkommitté). The country is required to comply with the ECHR protection of human rights and freedom. Nonetheless, it is a society that in many ways is regressing. Restrictions on freedom of organizing have been introduced and demonstration rights were restricted when the first Pride Festival was held in Moscow in June. Conservative tendencies prevail and for homosexuals threats remains on a personal level with people risking to lose their jobs as well as contact with their families.

The following is a script written in St. Petersburg in July 2006. The text was translated into Russian by one of the women and performed by the other:

*** Narrator ***

(1)

Some of you have privileges that I do not dare dreaming of. Some of you have the right to be living my dream.

(2)

The water flows, the ships are carried and the bridges are open. At the same time they are preventing me from reaching my destination. I have to wait, wait here.

(3)

The cargo ships go by with banners of freedom, heading towards foreign ports. But I am here in the middle of the city being estranged, the one that never can tell the stories of my morning, the stories of my evening. I have to reinvent myself. Reproduce a story that can be told, a story about someone else.

(4)

The dimensions are lost. The safe haven is remote. My everyday life belongs to someone else, the reinvention of me.

(5)

To you I will tell a story of my everyday life, a story of the two that raised me to be at my best. So they did successfully. I'm in a position. Being there is an act of balance.

(6)

One day as I was still living at home, sharing an apartment with my parents as many unmarried people my age do, I wanted to contribute with something that we all could enjoy but never quite got around to getting.

(7)

The gift, a new washer, was well received. One must remember that this is a contemporary story, a story of the effects of loss and fear, a story of maintaining the order of the masks in the act of life.

(8)

After finding the love of my life there is no way of doing the laundry any longer. My access to the washer is cut off. So are the family ties, the disposition of the only child.

(9)

Perhaps you know my name, but I have not shown you my life in fear of loosing my position. Your children might think I live alone, you might think so as well.

(10)

That is not my life, but you will never know. Perhaps I should never have told the two that brought me up either. Perhaps we should have kept our love a secret not revealing the love between two women, avoiding being estranged. The vessels are closer now, the beacons brighter. Am I dreaming now?

Lezzie Think Tank

LTT FORMAT (as presented for the hosting groups)

::: Two segments, 60 min + 60 min. First session is dedicated to responding to the topics sent from former LTT host and the second session to create topics for the next.

::: 3–5 new topics to the next LTT host.

::: The topics get delivered to the LTT host. As the installation is up and the LTT session begins, the topics of the relay get delivered. This way everyone participating gets the topics at the same time, regardless if the person is new to most group members.

::: A summary in English of the two sessions sent to aview(at)aview.se by each host.

::: A new LTT host is appointed by the artists. Anyone can indicate interest to become the local LTT host. It can be one of several groups working together. LTT is open to everyone willing to discuss issues focusing on women.

::: It is recommended that every LTT participant has seen the installation *State of Mind* prior to taking part in the Think Tank.

::: Other details decided by each LTT host.

An LTT session can take place when *State of Mind* is exhibited in an art venue in any city. The session kick-starts with the artists' Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg introduction of the art installation. After the introduction, held in English, the LTT resumes in the local language. To get the most out of the effort every participant is recommended to partake of the art installation prior to the dynamic process of the think tank. By blending what we see in other communities we try to shed new light on the local one. The LTTs are open to anyone regardless of identity (sex, gender, race, ethnicity etc.). The artists take part as observers.

At the end of every LTT, there have been a number of different components of documentation. Summary text, video, photographs, etc. Part of this documentation will be shared here so the network between organizations and individuals keeps evolving. The mission is to generate a source for inspiration and a network to share and turn to for advice.

Lezzie Think Tank was planned for the following cities: Stockholm (2008), St. Petersburg (2008), Gothenburg (2008), Kharkiv, Kiev, Minsk, Salzburg, and Berkeley, and was realized in seven of them.

Stockholm Lezzie Think Tank

Location: PrideHouse/Bandler room, Stockholm City Theater, Sweden

Date: Aug 1, 2008

Workshop Moderators: Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Number of participants: 25

Duration: 45 min.

In Stockholm during EuroPride 2008 activists from St. Petersburg (Russia) and Kharkiv (Ukraine) were especially invited to participate to jointly create the format for the *Lezzie Think Tank*. The session was only 45 minutes as we were obligated to follow the overall

concept of the sessions at the Pride House. The 25 participants in the first LTT came from Sweden, Ukraine, the USA and Russia. The space was provided by EuroPride o8/ Stockholm Pride and was part of the official Pride House Program. The workshop was held after a 45-minute presentation on *State of Mind*, also part of the program.

Topics developed at this first LTT and sent to the upcoming workshop in St. Petersburg:

1. What can be the benefit of reaching out to organizations working with human rights issues and educating them about the LGBTQ situation in St. Petersburg?
2. What makes one feel safe/unsafe in the city (work, public space, etc.)?
3. What do we need from a place where we can meet (socially/organizations)? What makes a place good?
4. What can be done to facilitate collaborations between organizations?
5. What can be done to fight social issues?
6. What are the social issues?

Stockholm Pride (<http://www.stockholmpride.org>)

St. Petersburg Lezzie Think Tank

Location: Funny Dogs (bar), St. Petersburg, Russia

Date: Sep 6, 2008

Hosting: Coming Out Saint Petersburg

LTT Organizer in StP: Anna Anisimova, activist

Workshop Moderator: Maria Sabunaeva, activist

Translators: Sasha Skoryh & Polina Savchenko

Number of participants: 12

Duration: 1+1 hour

Excerpt from the report of the organization Coming Out St. Petersburg:

This project exists in conjunction with their art exhibition *State of Mind*, but at the same time is a separate, independent brain-child of the artists. The main idea behind the project is to stimulate and gather the thought potential of lesbians regarding the LGBT issues and questions. Its format is akin to a game of ball: first questions were produced in Stockholm and the ball was "thrown" to St. Petersburg, where St. Petersburg lesbians, in their turn, interpreted the questions posed to them and came up with their own questions to the next group of "thinkers" in Gothenburg. From there, the questions will

travel to Ukraine, then on, and on... This produces a snowball effect, in which the thought grows in size, becomes more dense and concentrated.

What's most important is that in the process of this mega-dialog, an amazing feeling of unity arises – unity with the world and the people living in other countries, so far from us. But maybe over there the same problems occupy their minds.

And so this feeling of "US" spreads far beyond the graspable boundaries. What's especially important is that it's permeated with the feeling of pride and dignity: We are lesbians. We conceive ideas. We carry the strength and energy to create positive change in this world.

Even though all and anyone were invited to the seminar, finally only women came. Is that a good thing? It probably would have been good to have everyone. But one of the main characteristics of the work done in this lesbian circle was very well articulated by one of the participants, "We had a very friendly atmosphere, there was no rivalry or competition..."

Footnote: One thing left to add: this project is directed first and foremost at lesbians. The authors of this report clarify this as follows: gay men are more often visible, their problems are discussed more often, and they themselves articulate them more often (this is one of the results of gender inequality in the society). Anna and Annica set out to compensate for this inequality by working specifically with lesbians.

St. Petersburg's LGBT Organization Coming Out was selected as the main partner for the St. Petersburg LTT. The Organization unites LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people), and friendly heterosexuals. The organization emerged in April 2008 as an outcome of the Week Against Homophobia that took place in St. Petersburg, uniting those people who care about their present and who are ready to work to change their future.

A collaboration has been initiated between the organizations Out St. Petersburg and the Kiev-based Insight. This after sharing contacts from the LTT Network.

Coming Out Saint Petersburg, LGBT organization (www.comingoutspb.com)

Gothenburg Lezzie Think Tank

Location: Kvinnofolkhögskolan, Gothenburg, Sweden

Date: Oct 20, 2008

Hosting: Video Activist Group

Workshop Moderator: Gabrielle Högstadius, teacher

Number of participants: ca. 15

Duration: 1+1 hour

Excerpt from Video Activist Group's report:

We are activists working with video as our tool in pin-pointing women's issues. Not all of us would identify as belonging under the LGBTQ label. However, we are all born women, some working on reconstructions of the personal identity. As for strategy on how to proceed with the LTT, we simply divided the group into two smaller, so it would be easier to discuss the topics. Each group made "official" answers from a consensus strategy after discussing each topic for a bit. Then we regrouped and presented the outcome to the larger group. From this session we again discussed the topics. It was exciting and interesting to discuss.

The Video Activist Group is a course, which combines studies in feminist theory with activist filmmaking. *State of Mind* was presented for the group at the exhibition space prior to the workshop that took place at the school. Kvinnofolkhögskolan is a feminist college located in Gothenburg, Sweden. The school is attended by adult women and transgender persons of different ages, with various backgrounds, goals, and study habits (www.kvinnofolkhogskolan.se).

Kharkiv Lezzie Think Tank

Location: Café Agatha, Kharkiv, Ukraine

Date: July 19, 2009

Hosting: Sphere, Women's Organization

Workshop Moderator: Oleksandra Ilinska

Translator: Oleksandra Ilinska

Number of participants: app. 20

Duration: 1+1 hour

Excerpt from Sphere's report:

We think that these days with Anna Viola Hallberg and Annica Karlsson Rixon were exclusive for ladies who live in Kharkiv and for us as a social organization that works for women, including lesbians and bisexual women. It was very important for us that it was a three-ways collaboration. Firstly the exhibition was in the space of authority financing and it's a step of development, because it means that the subject is visible for people of power. Secondly it was a chance for LGBT community to mobilize, to meet a piece of art openly and frankly expressing thoughts, emotions, stories of real homosexual people living not that far from our city, in a neighbor's Russia. It's a brave experience for a person to be out; to be ready to share this experience with other people facing the same problems. And thirdly the exhibition is an art-event. It means that it's also for people who form a big professional field. And as we all know the best way to make an impact in our stable, ossified society is to suggest that people stop for a minute and think. And there is no better way to do that than by means of images and cinematography pieces that both catch the attention and give a deep mental understanding. We, WA "Sphere" (Ukraine, Kharkiv), consider it an honor that Kharkiv and our organization became a part of the exhibition's *State of Mind* network.

Sphere, Women's Organization (www.sphere.in.ua)

Kiev Lezzie Think Tank

Location: Art Arsenal, Kiev, Ukraine

Date: Sep 13, 2009

Hosting: Insight

Number of participants: 7

Duration: 1+1 hour

The Lezzie Think Tank was held next to *State of Mind* as an open event at Gogolfest. The host organization selected to regroup the topics to themes. Each group made a public presentation of the discussions in the group. The questions and notes from it became an integrated part of the installation.

Insight is a non-governmental LGBTQ organization (www.insight-ukraine.org).

Minsk Lezzie Think Tank

Location: Y – Gallery for Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus

Date: Mar 6, 2010

Workshop Moderators: Annica Karlsson Rixon and Anna Viola Hallberg

Translators: Tanya Uhortseva and Anna Sunny

Number of participants: 19

Duration: 1+1 hour

On the contact trip to Minsk in February 2009 we initiated a collaboration with a group of young women who were in the process of forming a queer activist group. For various reasons (political in combination with personal) they had given up their ambitions when we came to exhibit about a year later. Organizing in Belarus is very difficult. We ended up hosting this event ourselves. In spite of the difficulties to find a partner for the event, we had several queer groupings distributing information as well as participating. This was the first and only LTT in which gay men and trans women took part. The workshop was divided into three groups. One or two people from each group did a presentation of the discussion afterwards.

Salzburg Lezzie Think Tank

Location: FOTOHOF, Salzburg, Austria

Date: Aug 7, 2011

Number of participants: 0 (cancelled)

On the contact trip to Salzburg in May 2011 we had a meeting with the leader of a local LGBT organization who was about to quit and be replaced by a new. We never managed to get in touch with the new person, but went back to the office in July to put up a poster with info about the LTT, as well as at a local queer bar and some other places. Nobody showed up for the event. The reason for this “failure” was later explained by different people as an expression of Salzburg being a conservative and closeted city. Others claimed that it was about timing, that the event was taking place when everyone was on vacation. We ended up having an interesting “private” LTT with two women the day after, a couple, with whom we sat down and talked for a whole evening. These two women would not come to an LTT event since they did not want to risk being exposed as they were not openly queer because of their professional positions. They formulated the following questions for Berkeley:

Are you part of the (lgbtq) community?

If you are, what does it mean to you personally?

What constitutes an lgbt community?

What are the political disputes of the lgbt community?

How has the concept of the lgbt community changed?

Who sets the agenda for the lgbt issues?

Berkeley Lezzie Think Tank

Location: Worth Ryder Art Gallery, UC Berkeley, California, USA

Date: Oct 5, 2011

Hosting: Sexualities and Socialisms Working Group, UC Berkeley (<http://townsend-center.berkeley.edu>)

Number of participants: 4

Duration: 1 hour

Socialisms and Sexualities is a working group at the interdisciplinary Doreen B. Townsend Center for Humanities, University of California Berkeley. It was organized by Anastasia Kayiatos and co-founded by Nina Aron and serves to explore the intersections of sexuality and socialist studies. The LTT in Berkeley took the form of a discussion between Kayiatos, Aron, and the artists. The LTT in Berkeley was the last workshop and no new questions were formulated.

Townsend Center Working Groups bring together faculty and graduate students from various fields and departments with shared research interests (www.townsendcenter.berkeley.edu).

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