

“We Exist”: Queer Photographic Nationalism(s) in Canada and Denmark

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Abstract

“We Exist”: Queer Photographic Nationalisms in Canada and Denmark Clinton Glenn

This thesis looks at the history of photography to examine how criminal and medical science has depicted bodies deemed deviant, and the ways in which queer bodies have been variously categorised and marginalised. I take two contemporary case studies as a way to address this complex and contradictory history, focusing on two major themes: photography as an apparatus of power, and queerness as continuously in flux and unstable. Contemporary photographers Charlotte Haslund-Christensen and JJ Levine respond to this history by subverting the relationship between photographer and subject, creating alternative visualisations of queer identities. Haslund-Christensen’s *WHO’S NEXT?* features forty-two photographs mimicking the visual composition of criminal mug-shots. Levine’s *Queer Portraits*, taken over nine years from 2006 to 2015, focuses on queer-identified individuals within the domestic sphere. Both series respond to the marginalisation of LGBTQ people in photographic history while staking out very different territory: *WHO’S NEXT?*, arguing against complacency in the face of potential state violence; and, *Queer Portraits*, depicting alternative queer existences and social spaces.

This thesis is divided into two parts, the first focusing on the history of photography and its use in categorising and documenting deviancy. In this, I argue that the camera as an apparatus of power produces the deviant bodies it claims to document. In searching for non-normative sexualities one must, as Dana Seitler notes, be attentive to both the absences in the visual record and archives that may not immediately be understood as queer. In part two, I focus on contemporary queer theory, in particular its political bent towards leftist, anti-capitalist politics. Here I question how the normalisation of LGBTQ individuals in western neoliberal states has been positioned as politically regressive versus queer activism, which advocates for alternative forms of social and political relationships framed outside of heteropatriarchy.

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Introduction

On 7 August 2013 an exhibition entitled *Gay Greenland* opened at *Norræna húsið* (*Nordic House*) in Reykjavík, Iceland as a part of *Hinsegin Dagar* (*Reykjavik Pride*). The exhibition featured portraits of self-identified gay Greenlanders taken during gay pride celebrations in the Greenlandic capital Nuuk in 2011 and 2012. Each image was accompanied by a brief quote from the participants in English, Icelandic, and Kalaallisut explaining why they felt proud of their sexual identities. By sheer coincidence I happened to be travelling around Iceland at the time and was fortunate enough to be able to attend the exhibition's opening. As I arrived at *Norræna húsið* I noticed an employee raising the flags of the Nordic countries and at the end of this process he raised a gay pride flag, explicitly linking the symbol of LGBTQ liberation to the nationalist symbols of each country [Figure 1].¹

What I found most striking about the exhibition itself was not its content or what it was stating, though arguably both are interesting; rather, I found that the desire to link two identities together – “gay” and “Greenland” – was much more intriguing. I began thinking more about the relationship between sexuality and institutional support, in particular the role that *Norræna húsið* played in staging the exhibition. The institution operates under the Nordic Council of Ministers, a constituent part of the Nordic Council, an international organization with an explicit mandate: “to foster and support cultural connections between Iceland and the other Nordic countries.”² The *Gay Greenland* project was produced with the support of *Nunani Avannarlerni Piorsarsimassutsikkuat Attaweqaat/Nordens Institut i Grønland* (*Nordic Institute in Greenland*, or *NAPA*), an organization directly controlled by the Nordic Council of Ministers that awards funding to cultural projects in Greenland.³ It has subsequently been staged in Copenhagen,

¹ The Nordic countries, as defined by The Nordic Council, include Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, as well as Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Åland. “The Nordic Council,” *Norden.org*, accessed 7 February 2016, <http://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council/bag-om-nordisk-raad/the-nordic-council/the-nordic-council>.

² “The Nordic House,” *Norræna Húsið*, accessed 7 February 2016, <http://nordichouse.is/um-husid/>.

³ *Gay Greenland* featured the direct involvement of photographer and director of *NAPA* Jørgen Chemnitz and Leise Johnsen during Nuuk Pride in 2011 and 2012.

Denmark in 2014 at *Nordatlantens Brygge*, a cultural institution with a focus on Icelandic, Greenlandic, and Faroese culture and art.⁴ As the program guide for *Hinsegin Dagar* noted:

Gay Greenland is an inspiring exhibition of new photography, documenting for the first time gay experiences in Greenland through visual medium. By juxtaposing images of faces and words, the exhibition exposes a silent, but strong minority that has remained hidden throughout Greenland's history.⁵

The project explicitly underlines the link between (in)visibility and gay identity within the frame of Greenlandic society. This will towards visibility is inherently linked to the notion of progression in gay rights, implicitly linked with gaining equality and a voice in Greenlandic society and claiming a place in its history.

Upon my return to Canada, I began to think about how to approach writing my Master's thesis and I kept coming back to the exhibition. As I reflected on it, a number of questions began to ring louder and louder in my head: how do photographic exhibitions staged as part of gay pride celebrations encode and/or reinforce conceptions of sexual difference within the scope of nationalism? How are marginalised histories and peoples incorporated into national narratives? And in what ways do they challenge nationalism's social and cultural instantiations? What role do LGBTQ people play in (re)presenting their identities and histories to the audiences for such exhibitions, particularly on an international stage? This thesis takes *Gay Greenland* as the starting point and inspiration for a larger conversation about contemporary practices of photographic portraiture. More specifically, the primary focus of this thesis are photographic practices and how they intersect with queerness, nationalism, and (re)presentation within the discursive frame of neoliberalism and late capitalism. It is my contention that LGBTQ identity cannot easily be detached from the social and political realm that encompasses national identity, and that queerness is both an effect and representation of specific forms of neoliberal permissiveness and social liberalism that is endemic to western democracies. This thesis takes two case studies as ways of working through and drawing out the challenges of the queer photographic subject from the perspective of photography as a medium and queer theory as a social and historically rooted discipline. I posit that the question of the visible queer subject in photography cannot be boiled down to a simple invisible/repression – visible/acceptance

⁴ "Gay Greenland – portrætter," *Nordatlantens Brygge*, <http://www.nordatlantens.dk/da/udstillinger/2014/gay-greenland/>.

⁵ "Hinsegin Grænland," *Hinsegin dagar í Reykjavík* (Reykjavík: Hinsegin dagar, 2013), 32.

opposition. Rather, when considering the erasure of queerness in photographic history and historiography, the desirability of remaining invisible cannot be discounted.⁶ I approach these issues through two theoretically framed parts.

Part One, “The Category is Photographic Realness,” examines the history of photography, in particular its links to medical science and criminology as a way to tease out the complicated field of representation. I explore how deviant bodies were first brought under the disciplinary power of the photographic apparatus in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the impact this had upon conceptions of sexuality. Important are Michel Foucault’s concepts of confession and panopticism as ways to analyse the rhetorical strategies being employed in two contemporary photographic case studies. Part Two, “Red/Blue Left/Right – Towards a Politics of Queerness,” places queerness as unstable, shifting, always in negotiation, and utopian in order to argue for queerness as a strategy to counter the normalising functions of neoliberalism and heteronormativity. Of particular importance is Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s proposition of queer world making and Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, both of which allow for a social space parallel to but in opposition to normativity. The latter half of Part Two considers how queer theory has evolved from its origins in intersectionality and coalitional politics to ask the question of whether its political promise has been exhausted. Returning to my case studies, I argue that queer leftist politics and its repeated critiques of homonationalism and neoliberalism creates a diametric opposition between “good queer” and “bad gay,” an opposition based more on queer theory’s will towards antinormativity than in the coalitional politics it claims to strive towards.

In order to examine the myriad issues surrounding questions of representation in photography, I have selected two contemporary photographic series as case studies precisely because they are embedded in questions of LGBTQ visibility, community, and identity politics. I initially came across Danish photographer Charlotte Haslund-Christensen’s work in *Fotografia*, an online photography magazine, in August of 2014.⁷ What struck me was the article’s bold,

⁶ Here I am inspired by Peggy Phelan’s *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, which I shall return to later in this text.

⁷ The original article consists of text from Charlotte Haslund-Christensen’s artist statement alongside a gallery of fifteen images from her *WHO’S NEXT?* series. “In Seventy-Six of the World’s Countries These People Would be Committing a Crime,” *Fotografia*, 7 August 2014, <http://fotografiamagazine.com/who-s-next-charlotte-hanslund-christensen/>.

striking title: “In Seventy-Six of the World’s Countries, These People Would Be Committing a Crime.” Just below the title sat a gallery of images, each similar to the previous, with all participants documented in the same way: first turned towards the camera and then in profile, mimicking the formal aesthetics of the mugshot. The accompanying text noted:

There are seventy-six countries around the world where law persecutes homosexuality; seventy-six countries (in some lists the number rises to eighty-one) where being gay or a transgender can lead to arrest. Inspired by these facts, Dane photographic artist Charlotte Haslund-Christensen created a provocative project called *Who’s Next?* It is a series of mugshots of homosexual men and women, taken in the actual grounds of Copenhagen’s Central Police Station.⁸

While the statistic noting the number of countries that criminalise same-sex activity was shocking, though not entirely surprising, what I found most intriguing and unsettling was the artist’s use of the mugshot aesthetic as a way to draw attention to LGBTQ rights. Given my own knowledge of the history of the mugshot, subverting its formal aesthetics in order to make a larger point about queer solidarity across borders struck me as particularly appropriate. As I later learned, the mugshots were taken in April 2009 after a group of more than forty self-identified LGBTQ individuals responded to a call through Haslund-Christensen’s social media accounts.⁹ Those that volunteered entered *Københavns Politigård* (Copenhagen Police Headquarters) where they were brought to the basement, stripped of personal possessions such as jewellery, earrings, and watches, fingerprinted, and then photographed. Haslund-Christensen acted as a police photographer as her assistant processed each volunteer. As a part of the process she did not speak, and each volunteer was treated as if they were actual criminals. For the final image, she sat in front of the camera and took her own mugshot [Figure 2].¹⁰

WHO’S NEXT? consists of a series of forty-two images, each 8 x 11 centimetres in size, shot using the film camera that the Copenhagen police used to process suspects who had been arrested.¹¹ In lieu of titles, each photograph is numbered in sequence beginning with #01 and ending with Haslund-Christensen’s own image, #42. The work has also been transformed into a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ As Haslund-Christensen stated when I interviewed her in August 2015, many of the participants were friends or acquaintances of the artist, though not all were well acquainted with her. Interview with the artist, August 24, 2015.

¹⁰ The artist noted that she had the full cooperation of the Police Department who gave her use of their processing room and photographic equipment provided she leave the room when actual criminals were brought in for processing. Ibid.

¹¹ Haslund-Christensen also has on-file all of the fingerprints that were taken during the project; however, due to security concerns they have not been publicly exhibited. Ibid.

small photo book box, launched during a solo exhibition held at the Hasselblad Foundation in Göteborg, Sweden in spring 2013.¹² The box has subsequently travelled to twenty-two countries around the world, including some of those that criminalise same-sex sexual activity including Morocco and Ghana, alongside countries where LGBT people have guaranteed civil rights such as Norway [Figures 3-5].¹³ As Haslund-Christensen has stated, the box travels with friends and acquaintances, many of whom work for non-governmental organisations and frequently travel to countries where homosexuality is punishable by jail time or execution.¹⁴ When approaching Haslund-Christensen's work, I began to formulate questions around queer visibility, solidarity across borders, the risk that one runs when travelling with the photo box, and the overall message of the series. Returning to photography as a medium, one particular question stuck out above all others: how do self-identified LGBTQ artists subvert photographic conventions, specifically those tied to histories of repression and violence, in order to open social and political space for queer resistance?

As a counter-point, I selected Montreal-based photographer JJ Levine's *Queer Portraits*, a photographic series shot over the course of nine years, from 2006 to 2015. At first glance the two series have very little in common. Whereas Haslund-Christensen's work is austere and clearly references the photographic mugshot, Levine's work is more intimate. The images in *Queer Portraits* are similar in style and content: an individual poses, their gaze directed towards the camera, and by extension the viewer, in a confrontational manner. Levine has stated: "I pretty much exclusively photograph the people I intimately interact with in my everyday gay life. I take pictures of my roommates, dates, lovers, siblings and friends."¹⁵ This level of intimacy between artist and subject allows the viewer to question the types of relationship that the photographs capture without explicitly stating the type of relationship Levine shares with the sitter. As implied in the title, many of the individuals in the series are queer, and a number identify as trans*, though the photographs do not necessarily make this explicit. Levine further

¹² "Opening: WHO'S NEXT?" *Hasselbladstiftelsen*, accessed 18 February 2015, <http://www.hasselbladfoundation.org/emailwebview/webview/109>.

¹³ Email from the artist, 10 November 2015.

¹⁴ The artist has acknowledged that she has relied primarily on her professional network of photojournalists and NGO workers in order to "smuggle" the box into various countries around the world. Interview with the artist, 24 August, 2015.

¹⁵ "Interview with JJ Levine," *Bodies of Work Magazine* (blog), 2012, <http://bodiesofworkmag.com/post/18108239574/jjlevine>.

reflects on the photographer's role, noting: "I believe that positioning myself with the context that I am working, is essential in exposing the power dynamic that exists between artist and subject in portraiture. I am not a voyeur but rather a participant in my queer community in Montreal and in these images."¹⁶ However, I believe Levine's *Queer Portraits* goes beyond the artist-subject power dynamic, exposing the delicate balance that an individual must maintain in representing marginalised individuals without removing their agency and voices.¹⁷

The placement of the person in the privatised space of the domestic is key. As Levine's artist statement explains: "[t]hese settings raise questions regarding private queer space as a realm for the development of community and the expression of genders and sexualities that are often marginalized within the public sphere."¹⁸ Unlike Haslund-Christensen's work, *Queer Portraits* depicts individuals with whom Levine has or had some sort of personal relationship. Levine constructed the images with the sitter's participation, though it is never made clear the extent to which these choices are made by the artist and/or the subject.¹⁹ The relationship between object(s) in these images can be read as an extension of the subject's identity as interpreted by the artist, particularly through compositional choices such as framing, lighting, and camera angle. For example, in the images *Jesse* (2010) [Figure 6], *Laura Boo* (2012) [Figure 7], and *Zoë* (2012) [Figure 8], the relationship between the individual and objects in the background are central in creating meaning for the viewer. In *Jesse*, the sitter is placed on their bed, with a stencil emblazoned with the words "Coeur d'or" positioned to their left. A straightforward reading of this image would associate the text with a positive reading of Jesse's personality, despite the neutral look on their face. *Laura Boo* features the titular subject seated in a large chair with a wall of clothing as a backdrop. The assumption here would be that Laura Boo collects vintage fashion. Finally, *Zoë*, is placed alongside a vinyl album tacked to the wall with the word "Danser" written in large red font. Whether Zoë is a dancer or a fan of vinyl is left

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Whether this is in fact successful in this series is a matter for debate. However, given that very few of the subjects have publicly spoken about the work, it would be a matter of personal conjecture to rush to any judgement. As such, this is a question I prefer to leave unresolved.

¹⁸ JJ Levine, "Artist Statement," *JJLevine.ca*, accessed 29 October 2015, <http://www.jjlevine.com/queer-portraits/>.

¹⁹ Matthew Hays, "JJ Levine's Powerful, Gender Busting Photography," *Vice.com*, 27 May, 2015. http://www.vice.com/en_ca/read/gendershake?utm_source=vicefbca.

up to the viewer. While these observations are simple, basic readings of the visual content of the photographs, they nevertheless lead the viewer to conclusions about the individuals they observe.

Queer Portraits also traces individuals over a period of time with a number of people showing up more than once throughout the series. One example is Johnny, who is shown inside posed on a couch in *Johnny* (2012), and is one year later seated outside on a spiral fire escape in *Johnny and Želi* (2013) [Figures 9-10]. In placing Johnny in the liminal space of the fire escape, Levine transgresses the private/public boundary of the domestic. The repetition of subjects is best illustrated in the self-portraits that Levine includes in the monograph for *Queer Portraits*, tracing their evolution in style and self-presentation over the course of the project. Although the temptation is to read these images as documentary in nature, the artist states otherwise: “While this project is a kind of archive of my life and the people in it, it’s also a record of the spaces I’ve inhabited, which set the scene for each portrait. These images document moments past—moments that were created for the camera—yet this is not a documentary project.”²⁰ In effect, these portraits represent the artist’s experiences of these spaces and their inhabitants rather than a documentary project. It is precisely because the images are staged, rather than taken *in medias res*, that we must approach them with a different critical eye.

Queer Portraits, much like *WHO’S NEXT?*, is not intended to be representational of any community as a distinct whole. As Levine explicitly states: “[t]his project has never been an attempt to represent or speak for any broader movement or community.”²¹ Likewise, this thesis does not intend to locate these works as representative of queer photographic practices as a whole, or to place them as exemplars of how photography has been used to capture queer existence. Rather, they represent two examples among a constellation of photographers and artists working at the intersections of identity and representation. Levine’s photographs are evidence of the performative through the series’ title itself. As art historian Erin Silver notes in “The Domestic Interiors of JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits*,” the title is inherently ambiguous: “[it] might read as both conservatively taxonomical and subversively performative; it describes little about what makes the portraits ‘queer,’ leaving it to the viewer to determine where the queerness

²⁰ JJ Levine, “Introduction,” in *Queer Portraits: 2006-2015*, by Levine (Montreal: JJ Levine, 2015): 13.

²¹ Ibid.

of the portrait lies.”²² Rather than explicitly reveal their queer identities, the viewer is left to contemplate whom it is they are seeing. The subjects are still, fixed in position, yet their identities change and shift depending on the audience. As Levine states: “each viewer brings their own history, context, and imagination into their viewing experience, whether that is one of identification or alienation. My sitters gaze out at the viewer with poise and awareness of looking and being looked at, always maintaining their steadfast presence within the frame.”²³ While photographs can be viewed as representative of reality, the encounter between the viewer and the art object is inevitably tied to its meaning and comprehension. Inevitably it is incumbent on the viewer to understand what they are looking at and to “read” the photographic subject. In the context of queer photography, this includes readings of gender, sex, and sexuality that are dependent the viewer’s conceptions of normativity.²⁴ This complex interaction between looking, judging, and queering is a central focus of this thesis, in particular Part Two. However, before I dive into the theoretical underpinnings that will inform the central argument herein, I will further elaborate on my motivation for bringing these two works together.

At this juncture I want to note my unease at being overtly critical of the works I examine herein. While I hope it is clear that I have a great deal of respect for both artists, the ways in which these photographs can be understood shifts and changes depending on the context in which they are displayed. While both Levine and Haslund-Christensen take pains to avoid their photographs being labelled documentary in nature, in their very inclusion in exhibitions, on photo blogs, and in articles in the mainstream press they do stand in for a larger queer community and how they come to be representative of a larger whole, regardless of intention. However, I am acutely aware of the dangers of placing these works as representative of anything other than artistic intent; this is a tension I continually address throughout this thesis. Over the course of the past year and a half as I have progressed with my thesis research, I have been asked

²² Erin Silver, “The Domestic Interiors of JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits*,” in *Queer Portraits: 2006-2015*, by JJ Levine (Montreal: JJ Levine, 2015): 186.

²³ Levine, “Introduction,” 13.

²⁴ Here I refer to Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson’s conception of normativity as a norm by which identity formations are contrasted, but rarely do they take the position of the norm. Rather, “normativity is a structure of proliferations: some of these normative proliferations duplicate already existing terms, some twist those terms or minimize or amplify or warp them. None of them definitively breaks with the systematicity that they are; nor are they events that are predetermined and therefore knowable in advance. To think statistically again: norms are stochastic. Norms generate not sovereignties, but overdetermined relationalities.” Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, “Introduction: Antinormativity’s Queer Conventions,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (May 2015): 17.

by a number of people why compare these two artists and their works? Initially I formulated my response as follows: both countries are social democracies with strong traditions of enshrining equal rights within the political system: in Denmark through amendments to the Danish constitution; and, in Canada through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Both countries have a recent history of being socially liberal, with same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination laws, and a space within public life for out LGBTQ individuals.²⁵ However, this answer has never quite satisfied me. In a social and historical moment when mainstream LGBTQ rights organisations have been cast by queer theorist Lisa Duggan as “homonormative,”²⁶ I will interrogate this form of politics that pits social integration through neoliberalism against progressive leftist politics rooted in anti-capitalist and utopian idealism. While I return to this link between homonormativity and neoliberalism in Part Two, I acknowledge how contemporary queer theorists have linked this will towards equality under the auspices of the state as inherently assimilationist and depoliticized. In effect, the rhetoric of mainstream LGBT rights groups has been reductively positioned as solely concerned with marriage, adoption, and consumerism, whereas queer theory and activism can be understood as articulating an anti-capitalist and intersectional model of politics.

In this respect I view Charlotte Haslund-Christensen’s mugshots as a warning against complacency, particularly in this political moment where the rise of far-right nationalist parties in Scandinavia, such as the *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People’s Party) in Denmark, are threatening to destabilise the political order. As a counterpoint, JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits* demarcate social, cultural, and private space for queers separate from a heteronormative public sphere; rather, these portraits represent the act of what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner call “making a queer world,” intimately tied to “the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation.

²⁵ This is not to say that all individuals across the LGBTQ spectrum have full civil rights. Transgender people, for example, continually face obstacles within the legal and medical fields in both Canada and Denmark. For an example of the current state of trans* rights in Denmark, see: Tobias Raun, “The ‘Caspian Case’ and its Aftermath: Transgender People’s Use of Facebook to Engage Discriminatory Mainstream News Coverage in Denmark,” in *New Dimensions of Diversity in Nordic Culture and Society*, eds. Jenny Björklund and Ursula Lindqvist (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016): 79-101.

²⁶ Duggan defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” See: Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50-51.

These intimacies *do* bear a necessary relation to a counterpublic—an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relationship.”²⁷ While Berlant and Warner focus on breaking out of domesticity as an effect and reflexion of heterosexual culture and its ties to normative relationship forms, in the case of Levine’s work their formulation still bears certain weight. These images, as the artist notes, represent an “attempt to honour alternative relationships and non-traditional ideas of beauty and desire, as they pertain to [their] experience.”²⁸ The domestic space, rather than representing the space of heteropatriarchy, is reconfigured as a queer space, one in which alternative queer relationships and subjects assert their existence. In effect, *Queer Portraits* “might thus work to turn normative familial expectations of reproductive lineage, authority, and power on their heads in setting out new models of care, love, affinity, and preservation.”²⁹ I return to this point in Part Two, where I discuss the creation of queer worlds and heterotopia through Levine’s portraits. But what exactly do I mean by queer? And how is it being used within this thesis?

At this juncture it is useful to both situate myself in relation to my thesis research and to draw attention to the terminology used herein. I identify as queer and genderqueer, and my sexual and gender identities are intimately tied to the research I conduct. I approach this research as a single individual that identifies as a member of the queer community in Montreal, and my social location within this community inevitably has an impact on the type of research I conduct and the readings produced herein. I am also not a native Danish speaker, though during the process of researching and writing this thesis I have been learning Danish as a way to engage with texts in their original language. However, with this comes limitations – there are sources which are inaccessible to me at this moment. Within the context of this thesis I have chosen not to interview the participants of these photographic series. This has been done for both practical reasons and the risk that certain voices may end up standing for the whole. I acknowledge that there is political power in allowing the subjects of these works their own voice; however, a study of participant reactions falls outside the scope of this thesis. I did conduct an interview with Charlotte Haslund-Christensen in Copenhagen and include information from our conversation where pertinent. I was unable to interview JJ Levine due to conflicting schedules, and recognise

²⁷ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 558.

²⁸ Levine, “Preface,” 13.

²⁹ Silver also notes the ways in which photography is taken up by Sara Ahmed to point towards proper orientations such as reproduction, marriage, and the like. Silver, “The Domestic Interiors of JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits*,” 186.

that this places limitations on some of my insights into their work. To compensate I refer to a number of interviews Levine has participated in and to the monograph for *Queer Portraits* for contextual information as required.

Furthermore, I want to draw attention to how identity labels such as queer, transgender, trans*, and personal pronouns are important to those who use them. Wherever possible I defer to the artists and their subjects in terms of how they self-identify. I am cognizant of the challenges in deploying the term queer, which historically has been used as a slur against LGBT individuals in much of the English speaking world, and has been taken up critically in an academic context.³⁰ In the body of this thesis, I refrain from using the terms “gay” or “homosexual” unless appropriate to the historical context in which they are deployed. In most instances, I use these terms to refer to sexual identities as opposed to behaviours and I defer to the individuals and organisations that I speak about when using identity labels.³¹ Examples include references to gay rights organisations and gay pride events – they use the term in their own self-identification. In the historical context, the terms gay and lesbian are linked together in the context of the gay rights movement. It would be problematic to label them as queer retroactively, given that queer theory and activism arose during the HIV/AIDS pandemic of the 1980s and 90s. In contrast, I view queer as a critical, deconstructive term, one meant to trouble simple sexual and gender dichotomies. As David Halperin notes in *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*:

As the very word implies, ‘queer’ does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without essence.³²

³⁰ Teresa de Lauretis’s essay “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities” is the origin point for the use of “queer” within queer theory. Queer theory as an alternative “to the ‘lesbian and gay’ of the [essay’s] subtitle, is intended to mark a certain critical distance from the latter, by now established and convenient formula.” De Lauretis uses queer theory as a way to challenge the essentialising tendencies of gay and lesbian studies to privilege white gay males while failing to be critical of the epistemological categories that uphold such discursive formations. Teresa de Lauretis, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (1991): iv-v.

³¹ Here I draw upon Michel Foucault’s delineation between acts corralled under the term “sodomy” and the identity of homosexuality, as well as Jeffrey Weeks’ discussion of the social construction and constitution of homosexuality in medical and psychiatric communities. See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 42-43; Jeffrey Weeks, “The Construction of Homosexuality,” in *Sex, Politics, & Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, by Weeks (Harlow, UK: Longman Group, 1989), 96-121.

³² Emphasis comes from the original text. See: David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

In Halperin's view, queer theory's power comes from the oppositional stance it takes to the normative. In using queer as a critical and discursive term, contentious categories such as gender and sexuality are thrown into relief, particularly in the ways that they are inculcated in propping up structures of heteronormativity. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner set out in "Sex in Public," heteronormativity is not strictly a set of social practices that privileges heterosexual relationships; rather, it is all encompassing. They state:

Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture.³³

This culture, which they refer to as "heterosexual culture," permeates all aspects of social and political life. In contrast, they position queer theory and queer culture as "not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture."³⁴ Berlant and Warner call for a reshaped social field that is not predicated on heterosexuality as the marker by which all other relations are judged. These possibilities that they speak of are continually unfolding, unknowable in advance, and utopian in ambition. Here I want to acknowledge the situated-ness of these texts in relation to more contemporary queer theory. De Lauretis coined the term "queer theory" in 1991 in a special edition of the feminist journal *differences* as a contrast to the field of gay and lesbian studies that existed in a number of academic institutions.³⁵ Berlant and Warner's seminal "Sex in Public" was written in reaction to the closure of a number of businesses that targeted gay men in New York City during the early 1990s, stating that the "result will be a sense of isolation and diminished expectations for queer life, as well as an attenuated capacity for political community [...] The impact of the sexual purification of New York will fall unequally on those who already have fewest publicly

³³ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," 554-555.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 548.

³⁵ As De Lauretis notes, the special edition of *differences* came out of a conference at UC Santa Cruz in 1990. According to her, "the work of the conference was intended to articulate the terms in which lesbian and gay sexualities may be understood and imaged as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization, counteracting dominant discourses with other constructions of the subject in culture." De Lauretis, "Queer Theory," iii.

accessible resources.”³⁶ Halperin’s *St. Foucault* existed as a reaction to the uptake of Foucault in queer theory. Much of Halperin’s text does the work of restating and correcting various understandings of Foucault’s work, in particular the many misreadings of his work before turning to what he sees as key to queer theory’s will towards alternative modes of life and social relations.³⁷ Taken together, these texts represent the reactions of various sexual cultures that were under siege, not just by right wing demagogues but also through the loss of countless people to HIV/AIDS. They exemplify the desire to shift away from simply documenting gay and lesbian history towards disassembling the social structures that upheld white heteropatriarchy in society and allowed for government indifference and outright hostility since the beginning of the AIDS pandemic.

They were also writing towards the end of the so-called “Culture Wars,” in which U.S. Republicans in the House of Representatives and Senate were deriding numerous artists and academics as pornographers and amoral. While this is still an occurrence today,³⁸ the political climate is considerably different, with austerity, climate change, and globalisation taking up the majority of space in public debate.³⁹ HIV/AIDS, which had such a devastating impact during the period, is now only a topic of debate when it comes to access to medication, the criminalisation of HIV non-disclosure, or the impact of PrEP on the gay community. Representations of HIV/AIDS in mainstream media have all but disappeared. Queer theory has since been taken up in a number of academic discourses and is regularly taught in universities in various sexuality studies programs. Contemporary scholars have reacted to this idealisation of early queer theory in what can be viewed as a reflexive moment far removed from the social and political climate of its origins. As Robin Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson note in the introduction to the May 2015

³⁶ Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 552.

³⁷ As Halperin notes, “Foucault strongly resisted any attempt to construct abstract ideals against which political change would have to be measured or to prescribe ethical criteria for governing the political actions of others.” Rather, he argued for the democratisation of knowledge, allowing someone else to speak and choosing to keep silent and not intervene. “He believed that a progressive politics needed, not a vision of what should be, but a sense of what was intolerable and an historical analysis that could help determine possible strategies in political struggles.” Halperin, *St. Foucault*, 53-54.

³⁸ Here I am explicitly referencing the controversy that surrounded the exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute in 2010.

³⁹ Lisa Duggan foreshadows this development in the introduction to *The Twilight of Equality? Progressive texts that exemplify these concerns include, among others: Naomi Klein, This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2014); Owen Jones, *The Establishment: And how they get away with it* (London: Penguin Books, 2014); and, Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

issue of *Differences* entitled “Queer Theory without Antinormativity,” many queer scholars including David Halperin shared an “[investment] in queer inquiry as a mode of critical resistance: against conceptual closure, institutional domestication, the predications of identity, and the normativity of political thought.”⁴⁰ This form of antinormativity became axiomatic to most queer scholarship, positioning queer as resistance to the normative. In the same journal issue Annemarie Jagose argues that “despite its much-flaunted anti-identitarianism, queer theory’s definitional commitment to the antinormative risks reifying antinormativity as a proto-identity or identity-effect.”⁴¹ In effect, antinormativity becomes institutionalised in queer discourse as the central nexus point from which queer critiques originate. Instead of breaking down the structures upon which the normative is reified as the default, antinormativity becomes its own relational field in binary opposition to normativity. I wish to make clear that I believe there are valid points to be made from both perspectives. However, I tend to agree with the critiques of queer theory’s reliance on antinormativity as proscriptive at best and alienating at worst. Rather than taking the perspective that queer politics should exist outside of and apart from hetero and homonormative social formations, I view queer theory as productive when it acknowledges just how heteronormativity structures all social relations as Wiegman and Wilson point out, rather than a rule under which heterosexual bodies and relationships are classified. As they note,

[A]ntinormative stances project stability and immobility onto normativity. In doing so, they generate much of the political tyranny they claim belongs (over there) to regimes of normativity. For in taking a stand against normativity, antinormative analyses must reduce the intricate dynamics of norms to a set of rules and coercions that everyone ought, rightly, to contest.⁴²

In effect, antinormativity ignores the ways in which the normative is pliable, contestable, and changeable, instead reinforcing a dynamic where normative and antinormative are pit against one another in binary opposition, rather than trying to deconstruct how normativity can be subverted and challenged. I recognise the tensions that lie in between these discursive viewpoints and will return to the question of queer politics towards the end of Part Two.

⁴⁰ Wiegman and Wilson, “Introduction,” 5.

⁴¹ Annemarie Jagose, “The Trouble with Antinormativity,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (May 2015): 43.

⁴² Wiegman and Wilson, “Introduction,” 13.

As a means to move into the first part of this thesis, I wish to pose a few questions: what makes art queer? Can art in fact *be* queer? And if so, *what* makes it queer? As Richard Meyer notes in the introduction to *Outlaw Representations: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*, the problem of looking at “the concept of ‘homosexuality in art’ is that it tends to collapse the sexual identity of an artist with the content of his or her work.”⁴³ Instead, Meyer argues, scholars must “move beyond an interpretive model that locates homosexuality as an effect of biography on the one hand and iconography, and on the other as a theme (or scene) that marks the life and work of particular artists.”⁴⁴ While I refrain from using the term homosexuality, particularly in relation to my case studies, Meyer points to an important way of engaging with art that may be viewed as queer. He challenges the conflation of the work with the artist, noting that one must not assume that because an artist was homosexual their oeuvre must reflect this; rather, the scholar must argue for *why* such questions are relevant lines of enquiry.⁴⁵ It is not simply enough to locate queerness within the artist’s biography or lived experience, but to engage with the work on multiple levels, balancing the artist’s identity with the visual field of the work. I would also argue that one must consider the affective response of the audience, in particular queer spectators who may have an overt affinity with the content of a work, as part and parcel of its social meaning. A shift in context, a shift in audience, as I argue throughout this thesis, will have a dramatic impact on meaning. However, as the reaction of the viewer cannot be anticipated in advance, I cannot predict how they will respond to a work. Rather than attempt to sketch out all the possible responses to these case studies, I acknowledge that there are many alternate readings and reactions other than those posed herein.⁴⁶

⁴³ Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representations: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ In this I am particularly inspired by Amelia Jones’s propositions that “there is no ‘object itself’ that is not entangled in what we *believe* about the artist or agent we believe to have produced it, whether or not we read, ask, or otherwise research about the artist’s biographical trajectory or identifications.” The viewer brings different forms of knowledge based on interpretation and belief to the table that help to structure any reading that is produced through the act of looking at the art object. Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 2012), 137.

Part One: The Category is Photographic Realness

Queer is more transgressive, more audacious, tougher, unsafe, unapologetic. And, it seems to me, more open, more comprehensive. Queer is hungry, insatiable. It doesn't have a look, a size, a sex. Queer resists boundaries and refuses to be narrowly defined. Which is why, more often than not these days, queer absorbs and appreciates gay, embracing both Cecil Beaton and Peter Hujar, Duane Michals and Wolfgang Tillmans, Wilhelm von Gloeden and Ryan McGinley, Berenice Abbott and Zanele Muholi. And because queer doesn't care who you're sleeping with, it takes in Larry Clark, Nan Goldin, and Katy Grannan too. Like the photographs I couldn't get out of my head, queer is unsettling and exciting and unforgettable. It bites hard and won't let go. - Vince Aletti⁴⁷

As a way of sketching out the relationship between queerness and art this section takes as its starting point contemporary scholarship that addresses how self-identified LGBTQ artists, curators, and scholars have been implicated in the creation of critical literature on photography and photographic practices. In the past two years a number of books and journals have been published and exhibitions held that look at how queer identity and art intersect in interesting and contradictory ways. A key example is the exhibition *What it Means to be Seen: Photography and Queer Visibility*, which was guest curated by Sophie Hackett and held at the Ryerson Image Centre (RIC) in Toronto during the summer of 2014. The exhibition consisted of archival photographs from the 1930s and 40s, the early days of the lesbian and gay liberation movement in the 1960s and 70s, and up to the contemporary moment and focused on the question of visibility.⁴⁸ As Hackett states in the accompanying exhibition catalogue:

Basement parties and street demonstrations, police mug shots and intimate portraits of couples, battered or diseased bodies and parading exhibitionists—these images express joy and rage, they forge impressions of depraved illegality or benign normality, and they situate gayness in attitude or in the flesh.⁴⁹

What is important to point out in Hackett's statement is the way in which "gayness" is linked to attitude as well as being marked on the body. The interplay between gesture and materiality,

⁴⁷ Vince Aletti, "Words: Queer Photography?" *Aperture* 218 (Spring 2015): 27.

⁴⁸ Paul Roth, director of the Ryerson Image Centre, reinforces this theme of visibility when he remarks: "Journalists, artists, amateurs, and activists have used photography to build and sustain social bonds by sharing private experience, recording and preserving history, and celebrating sexuality and gender identities constrained by dominant social mores and legal prohibition – in other words, revealing what might otherwise be hidden from sight." Paul Roth, "Director's Forward," in *What it Means to be Seen: Photography and Queer Visibility/Zanele Muholi: Faces and Phases*, (Toronto: Ryerson Image Centre, 2014), 1.

⁴⁹ Sophie Hackett, "What It Means to be Seen: Photography and Queer Visibility," in *What it Means to be Seen: Photography and Queer Visibility/Zanele Muholi: Faces and Phases*, (Toronto: Ryerson Image Centre, 2014), 9.

between performance and visibility is inherent to understanding the ways that the assertion of sexual difference is not simply located in the artistic act, but also through curatorial practice involving photographic archives. The exhibition took place as Toronto hosted World Pride in June 2014, explicitly linking queerness within the institutional confines of the university art gallery to its manifestations on the physical, public space of the street. Ryerson University's geographical location on the southern edge of the Church-Wellesley Village, the traditional stomping grounds for the gay community in Toronto, should also not be overlooked.

I point this out as a way to acknowledge the links between gay pride, cultural production, and queer artists, who are often included in exhibitions that parallel pride celebrations or are included in its official programming. Both of my case studies have been involved in pride, with JJ Levine's work being showcased in *10x10* at the Gladstone Hotel during Toronto Pride in 2012 while Charlotte Haslund-Christensen's work was projected on screens as part of the main stage at Copenhagen Pride in 2010 [Figure 11].⁵⁰ After all, if pride is both the expression and celebration of sexual difference, how will future generations understand its importance if it is not documented? If we as queer people do not have a photographic record of our own history, how can we engage with and critique it in a meaningful manner? These brief examples underline the ways that photography and gay pride have been linked together in mutually supportive relationships.⁵¹

This section will first look at contemporary scholarship that addresses the question of queerness and the photographic apparatus through the lens of José Esteban Muñoz' conception of queerness as ephemera. Unlike heteronormativity, which is bound to the visible and the concrete, Muñoz positions ephemera as "all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and

⁵⁰ This topic is quite rich and deserves further research, however it remains outside the scope of this thesis. Of note is the key difference between these two examples. *10x10* is not a part of the cultural programming of Toronto Pride, but runs parallel to Pride's major events and typically wraps up in August. See: "About," *10x10 Photography Project*, accessed 2 May 2016, <https://10x10photographyproject.com/about/>. Haslund-Christensen's work was projected on the screen above Copenhagen Pride's main stage and her participation came about through a personal contact, rather than an application process. Interview with the artist, 24 August 2015.

⁵¹ I will, however, be pursuing research looking at the cultural programming of gay pride celebrations in the future.

specks of things.”⁵² In effect, queerness is enacted through performance and gesture and can only be read by those who are in the know. Sophie Hackett also acknowledges this connection between gesture, style, and understanding queerness as encoded: “[f]or those of us who identify as queer, reading subtle signs of others’ membership — be it short fingernails, the placement of a handkerchief, a look — has long been a necessary survival skill.”⁵³ The ability to read someone as queer, to see the codes and understand the signs, for Hackett, is tied to the danger of being outed, being made visible, but also comes with the possibility of reading correctly. These enactments have historically formed bonds between queer people precisely because they could exist on a register that was invisible to heteronormative society.

Following this I shift backwards to the late nineteenth century to examine the ways in which sexuality and deviant bodies were documented by the legal and medical systems. Both of my case studies respond to the history of criminality in photography, albeit in very different ways, so it is imperative to link the history of the visual form of the mugshot to their work. I will sketch out the ways that photography was used as an apparatus of power and surveillance, and how this invariably had an impact on those individuals deemed to be deviant. From there I return to the present day to examine how Levine and Haslund-Christensen’s work actively subvert and reconfigure the history of documentation, surveillance, and representation that can be found in the photographic medium. Using Michel Foucault’s concept of confession, I argue that both series respond to the act of confessing by subverting it, instead refusing to give up their secrets, to deny the viewer access to their identities. In doing so, they deny the productive power of knowledge and surveillance, instead affirming that queerness can neither be pinned down nor reduced to a simple portrait.

Contemporary Queer Portraiture

Artists such as David Wojnarowicz, Peter Hujar, Robert Mapplethorpe, Catherine Opie, Mark Morrisroe, Nan Goldin, and Zanele Muholi, among others, have turned the camera lens on themselves and their communities in order to document their lived experiences and sexual identities. Emily Roysdon, for example, creates a dual invocation of queer identity in her

⁵² José Esteban Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 8, no. 2 (1996): 10.

⁵³ Hackett, “What It Means to be Seen,” 21.

Untitled (David Wojnarowicz Project) series of 2001 to 2007 [Figure 12]. In this series she engages in a temporally queer dialogue with Wojnarowicz, who invoked his queer predecessor Arthur Rimbaud in his *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* series from the 1980s. This dialogue between past and present, invoking histories and genealogies that have otherwise been silenced, can be seen as an important part of contemporary queer photographic practices.⁵⁴ I bring up these examples in order to illustrate some of the work and scholarship produced over the past few decades and how many of these artists have and continue to inspire and influence my own academic interests. I also want to note my own implicit desire not to locate my case studies as exemplars or points of origin of any sort of queer photographic movement, which does not exist as a cohesive unified whole; rather, they are two of many examples of photographic practices exploring queer subjectivity and belong to a trajectory that began with sexual liberation movements during the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s, photographers such as David Wojnarowicz, Peter Hujar, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Nan Goldin, among others, turned their cameras on their communities and their own bodies, documenting LGBT lives and experiences, particularly in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Both Wojnarowicz and AA Bronson, for example, used photography to show the aftermath of the death of people with AIDS, with the former taking a shot of his one-time lover Hujar in the photograph *Untitled (Peter Hujar)* from 1988 and the latter capturing his colleague Felix Partz shortly after he passed away in the image entitled *Felix, June 5, 1994* (1994).⁵⁵ This act of turning the camera towards the self and one's community stands in stark contrast to the history of photography in criminology, medicine,

⁵⁴ Richard Meyer notes that Roysdon's invocation of Wojnarowicz "bespeaks both an embodied lesbian difference and a desire to create queer art across the divides of both gender and generation." Richard Meyer, "Words: Queer Photography?" *Aperture* 218 (Spring 2015): 29.

⁵⁵ AA Bronson and Felix Partz were members of the Canadian art collective General Idea, which effectively ended upon Partz' death. As AA Bronson noted in the passing of Partz, "Dear Felix, by the act of exhibiting this image in this exhibition I declare that we are no longer of one mind, one body. I return you to General Idea's world of mass media, there to function without me." See: "Collections: Felix, June 5, 1994," *National Gallery of Canada*, accessed 12 July 2016, <https://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artwork.php?mkey=96808>. For further reference to the impact that art, and in particular photography and video, had upon AIDS, activism, and the gay community, see: Simon Watney, "Ordinary Boys," in *Imagine Hope: AIDS and Gay Identity*, ed. Watney (London: Routledge, 2000), 27-34; Watney, "'Lifelike': imaging the bodies of people with AIDS," in *Imagine Hope: AIDS and Gay Identity*, ed. Watney (London: Routledge, 2000), 192-198; Watney, "Photography and AIDS," in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 173-192; Martha Gever, "Pictures of Sickness: Stuart Marshall's *Bright Eyes*," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 108-126; Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. Crimp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 237-271; and, Ted Gott, ed., *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994).

anthropology and similar disciplines, where knowledge was produced through observation and hypothesis, often to the detriment of those being documented.

The argument that I am making here is not to place Levine and Haslund-Christensen as contemporary inheritors of these complex and divergent legacies, but rather that they build upon histories of queer art and the agency that queer artists have taken for themselves, a field which that is increasingly becoming an object of critical study. In the past two years, for example, two major photographic publications, *Aperture* and *Photography and Culture*, have brought together the terms “queer” and “photography” to interrogate how they intersect in the visual field. In a short essay for the Spring 2015 edition of *Aperture*, succinctly titled “Queer Photography?” photographer Catherine Opie opines: “Queer photographers these days are not necessarily identifying in singular identity terms; they are more interested in being part of a political discourse about how radically life has changed over the past three decades for queers.”⁵⁶ For Opie, queerness is not a singular subject position or artistic approach. Instead, queer photographers and photographers working queerly are not simply responding to debates around identity politics, but many are refusing the label of queer altogether. Opie asserts that this systematic refusal can be linked to more radical politics, such as queer critiques of gay marriage; however, there are still practical reasons for entering into state-sanctioned matrimony.⁵⁷ The editors of the same issue of *Aperture* also point out how South African photographer Zanele Muholi’s work, which depicts lesbian communities in her home country, responds to that of Joan E. Biren, an artist who took her lesbian sideshows across the United States and Canada in the 1980s.⁵⁸ Like Roysdon, Muholi responds to a queer predecessor in her work; however, regardless of sexual identity one must address the role that influence and inspiration play in contemporary photographic practices.

Similarly, the editors of the November 2014 issue of *Photography and Culture* grapple with a number of these questions. In their editorial, “Queering Photography,” Elspeth Brown, Bruno Ceschel, and Sara Davidmann discuss the ways in which their own queerness has been

⁵⁶ Catherine Opie, “Words: Queer Photography?” *Aperture* 218 (Spring 2015): 30.

⁵⁷ Opie notes her own impending nuptials, stating: “marriage is still a contract that has advantages set by the federal government.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Incidentally, Muholi’s work was included as part of WorldPride 2014 in Toronto under the exhibition title *Faces and Phases*. Editors, “Editors’ Note: Queer,” *Aperture* 218 (Spring 2015): 13.

bound up with the “the power of desire” in the visual image.⁵⁹ Davidmann further notes that “[w]hile mainstream visual culture tends to reiterate the female/male dichotomy, visual imagery beyond polarized identities and relationships makes space for other ways of being.”⁶⁰

Photography, therefore, holds promise for so many precisely because it can be manipulated to show different worlds, to explore different identities, and to allow for social space for those who might otherwise be left silent.

What is common among these photographers is their desire to produce work against the backdrop of historical discourses that has left little room for queers to produce their own representations, instead placing them as the object of criminal and medical discourses. However, queerness itself is not necessarily an innate characteristic immediately perceptible through physical markers such as skin colour, but rather through body language and bodily enactments between desiring subjects. As curator and artist sol legault⁶¹ points out in the exhibition catalogue for *What it Means to Be Seen*:

Queer culture has been built around body language and self-presentation, with signs, signals, and the eye honed to register them as queer [...] This is especially true of trans experience, where gender incongruity with the mainstream imposes a practiced attentiveness to not only primary gender cues like clothing, but to posture, movement, language, speech, touch.⁶²

In effect, queer culture has been built around the ability to read queerness in behaviour, body language, comportment, speech, and dress. Hal Fischer’s 1977 photo book *Gay Semiotics*, for example, looked at the ways that gay men in the Castro District of San Francisco enacted their sexuality through such visual markers as earrings, handkerchiefs in back pockets, and leather wear.⁶³ This is not to say that queerness exists solely on a level of performance or subtle encoding through clothing and jewellery; rather, queerness is dynamic and meant to be interacted with and understood by those who are in the know.

⁵⁹ Bruno Ceschel uses this phrase to describe an event when he was young where he tore pages from a magazine (featuring...?) and hid them. For him, this “hormonal earthquake” was tied to the idea of queerness as hidden, as evidenced by his later hiding those same pages in his room. Elspeth H. Brown, Bruno Ceschel, and Sara Davidmann, “Queering Photography: Introduction.” *Photography and Culture* 7, no. 3 (November 2014): 235.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁶¹ Legault stylises their name in lower case letters.

⁶² sol legault, “Trigger Warning: Breaching the Photographic Surface,” in *What it Means to be Seen: Photography and Queer Visibility/Zanele Muholi: Faces and Phases*, (Toronto: Ryerson Image Centre, 2014), 29.

⁶³ Fischer revisits his series in an interview with Julia Bryan-Wilson in the “Queer” issue of *Aperture*. See: Julia Bryan-Wilson and Hal Fischer, “Gay Semiotics Revisited,” *Aperture* 218 (Spring 2015): 32-39.

When positioning Haslund-Christensen's and Levine's work in relation to contemporary queer photography, it should be noted that they emerge from different perspectives and have different points of reference. Haslund-Christensen's work can be compared to that of photographers including August Sander (1876-1964) and Jacob Riis (1849-1914), who both focused on photography as a means of social reform.⁶⁴ Her work also reacts directly to the history of the mugshot, particularly in its institutionalisation in criminology as will be discussed later on. However, it is not my intention to position her as a queer successor to these aforementioned artists or their visual forms. Haslund-Christensen has a background in documentary photography and photojournalism, and her situatedness in both discursive realms inherently influences the type of work she produces and the aesthetic choices she makes.⁶⁵ In contrast, Levine's *Queer Portraits* have much more in common with the work of artists including Del LaGrace Volcano, Diane Arbus, and Nan Goldin.⁶⁶ In the queer issue of *Photography and Culture* Levine acknowledges how Del Lagrace Volcano's images, in particular *Teddy Boy Berlin, 1988*, helped to inspire some of their thinking regarding the possibilities of agency in portraying trans* individuals in photography.⁶⁷ While the temptation to place Levine as part of a queer genealogy is there, this simplistic reduction to trajectories of inspiration and inheritance of aesthetic praxis is problematic.

As Griselda Pollock notes in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Arts Histories*, the construction of genealogies based on master-apprentice relationships reifies patriarchy as the defining process through which artistic expression transmitted. This, for Pollock, has the effect of excluding women artists from the art historical canon precisely because

⁶⁴ Haslund-Christensen has acknowledged the influence of early photoethnography, particularly that of August Sander, on her work including *WHO'S NEXT?* and her series *Natives: The Danes* (see Figure 14). Interview with the artist, 24 August 2015.

⁶⁵ Interview with the artist, 24 August 2015.

⁶⁶ Of the comparison to Arbus and Goldin, Levine notes: "I think anyone photographing queer and trans people today will be compared to artists like Diane Arbus and Nan Goldin—both of whom I consider to be incredible photographers, but whose process and experience I do not connect with at all." Hayes, "JJ Levine's Powerful, Gender-Busting Photos," n.pag.

⁶⁷ Levine further explains, "For me, and I suspect for the artists who paved my way, self-representation through photography and bodily self-determination are inextricably bound together. Which is to say that exploring our own identities and those of the ones we love enables us to celebrate our difference—an idea that continues to feel radical even as it transcends time and place." JJ Levine, "Whipping the Binary," *Photography and Culture* 7, no. 3 (November 2014): 304.

of their exclusion from traditional forms of artistic training.⁶⁸ While Pollock refers specifically to women artists from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century, the point is particularly valid in this situation. If we are to position Haslund-Christensen and Levine's work within a broader canon of photographic history, we must remain cautious not to give too much weight to influence and inspiration to the detriment of their own desires, praxes, and social locations. Heather Love takes up the relationship between queerness and the past, querying:

How are we to reconcile the image of the queer past as glorious procession with its image as a scene of shame, violence, and secrecy? For modern queer subjects, it has been difficult to disentangle these two aspects of the history of sexuality: The shameful and the magnificent, the spectacular and the damned.⁶⁹

In order to orient these two artists in relation to the past, it is important to reassert the tension between freedom to (queerly) express individual identity within the frame of the photograph and the historical signifiers that they reference. In particular, Haslund-Christensen's work illustrates how quickly agency can shift: from freely volunteering to sit for a mugshot in the name of art to the coercive act of being processed and photographed as a criminal. However, queerness is not necessarily marked on the materiality of the body, but exists in actions or gestures that are to be read by those who are aware of their meanings.

José Esteban Muñoz argues that queerness lies in the ephemera of everyday existence and it is precisely because of this that queerness often fails the test of academic rigours because it does not provide empirical evidence. As he states, "[e]vidence's limit becomes clearly visible when we attempt to describe and imagine contemporary identities that do not fit into a single pre-established archive of evidence."⁷⁰ Therefore, in order to counteract the oppressive and silencing nature of academic research, one must give credence and weight to those practices that may otherwise fall outside of the scope of scholarly enquiry. Furthermore, Muñoz posits queerness as enacted through encoded performances that are to be read while simultaneously refusing access to those who would seek to destroy its ontological formations:

Thus, I want to propose queerness as a possibility, a sense of self-knowing, a mode of sociality and relationality. Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to

⁶⁸ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Arts Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999): 2-38.

⁶⁹ Heather Love, "The Art of Losing," in *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive*, eds. by Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley, and Louise Wothers (Copenhagen: Kunsthallen Nikolaj, 2009), 70.

⁷⁰ Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 9.

do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility [...] Queer acts, like queer performances, and various performances of queerness, stand as evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities.⁷¹

For Muñoz, ephemera points to the temporal nature of queerness: as soon as it appears it is gone. Reading for queer lives and understanding the codes requires a much more complex set of tools, different pedagogy, and alternative understandings of what is deemed as evidence, than what empiricism offers the researcher. Rather than focus on visual evidence, what can be tested, measured, understood under the guise of objectivity, Muñoz argues for a different way of understanding queerness. He continues: “Ephemera includes traces of lived experience and performances of lived experience, maintaining experiential politics and urgencies long after these structures of feeling have been lived.”⁷² In effect, ephemera and its enactments are not simply gestures but are affective; they circulate between bodies and are picked up by queers in a multitude of ways. The problem for photography, then, is the relationship not just between the photograph and its referent, but also between what it captures and what it purports to represent. If there is an inherent link between the photograph as visual evidence and the documentation of something or someone, what can be said when queerness does not lend itself so easily to being captured within the photographic frame?

This relationship between the photograph and the referent, the physical image and that which it seeks to capture, has been addressed by a number of photographic theorists. While North American and Western European photographic theory and history has developed since the late 1960s; Denmark is a different story. Danish photographic historical Mette Sandbye points out two key reasons why Denmark has lagged behind: one, “the lack of tradition and previous works to criticize or to compare with”; and two, “the object is much more diffuse, widespread and hard to define compared with, for instance, literature.”⁷³ She further notes that this has shifted recently, with exhibitions, curators, and photographic historians being attentive to how, in

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

⁷² Ibid., 10-11.

⁷³ Mette Sandbye, “Making Visible: Thoughts on the First Danish History of Photography,” *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 74, no. 2 (2005): 70.

building a Danish photographic history, they are also a way of building a national history.⁷⁴ The debate over photographic realism, which has existed in photographic theory for decades, has only been written about in the Danish context over the past twenty years. For example, Jan-Erik Lundström addresses the question of whether the photograph can truly capture “the real” in his essay “Realism, Photography and Visual Culture.”⁷⁵ He states:

Realism is to represent by way of resemblance, with the intention of proposing something about the world. Realism is representation plus belief. Realism is contention plus worldview. Reflection and intervention. To be a realist is then not only to represent, but also to suggest, propose, put forth, demonstrate, claim, acclaim.⁷⁶

In effect, realism is not simply a reproduction by photographic means of what the camera sees, but is combined with a belief of what that actually represents. Lundström further notes that the mechanical form of the camera, “decenters the eye, takes the place of the eye, acting autonomously of it; the human agent is made redundant, overtaken by a lifeless machine.”⁷⁷ Precisely because of the mechanical means by which the photograph is taken, the resulting image is detached from the subjectivity of the photographer. Realism is thus tied to the perception that the camera as a mechanical device is impartial; what it represents is what it is able to capture, either on film or via a digital sensor. However, this does not necessarily mean that the photographer has no impact on the image, how it functions, and its aesthetic framing.

While realism may appear to be a well-trodden debate, whether the photograph in fact represents a referent, the power that images have in the contemporary world, in documentary photography and photojournalism demands that this debate be re-visited. I posit that it remains unresolved precisely because of the demands placed on photography as a medium: to capture what the camera sees, and to do so in an objective manner. If we are to approach photography queerly, the question of realism needs to be dealt with precisely because queerness relies not on tangible, visible evidence of its existence as Muñoz notes, but on performances and codes that

⁷⁴ Of note is that Sandbye co-edited the first comprehensive history of Danish photography, which was only released in 2004. See: Mette Sandbye and Gitte Pedersen eds., *Dansk fotografi historie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2004). Ibid., 69-70.

⁷⁵ Lundström’s essay was included in *Symbolic Imprints: Essays on Photography and Visual Culture*, one of the first major collections from Denmark (and published in English) to address the link between photography, realism, continental philosophy, and contemporary visual culture. See: Jan-Erik Lundström, “Realism, Photography and Visual Culture,” in *Symbolic Imprints: Essays on Photography and Visual Culture*, eds. Lars Kiel Bertelsen, Rude Gade, and Mette Sandbye (Aarhus, DK: Aarhus University Press, 1999), 61.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 59.

cannot be captured in the visual field. Here I am particularly inspired by Roland Barthes' conception of the *punctum*, the part of a photograph that impacts the viewer but cannot be described through simple linguistic terms. Barthes defines the *punctum* as the "sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that little accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."⁷⁸ He further explains that not all photographs contain *punctum* because "most provoke only a general and, so to speak, *polite* interest."⁷⁹ For Barthes, the *punctum* is the detail in a photograph that strikes the viewer but cannot be boiled down to simple aesthetic or artistic choices: it affects. He also describes the *punctum* as having a temporal dimension:

Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision oriented its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always miss its point of effect, the *punctum*.⁸⁰

Temporality, therefore, is key to understanding what Barthes is getting at. When we look at photographs, something about them will stick with us if it has a *punctum*; it will affect us in ways that may not be readily apparent at first, and continue to unsettle in a way that is separate from the semantic meanings of signs and signifiers in the image.⁸¹

Returning to Lundström's refutation of the photograph as a direct, neutral representation of the referent, he describes the point of encounter between the viewer and the work:

[A]s an encounter, not as a quality in a work of art, not even as a specific set of conventions for representation, neither as a judgement made by a view, but as a combination of the latter two: an intention to relate to realistic conventions and a viewer's experience that this has been successful. Such a view focuses on the production of meaning, on the act of interpretation. Moreover, it brings out not only what a work means, but also what it does.⁸²

⁷⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 27.

⁷⁹ Barthes contrasts the *punctum* with the *studium*, and he states "[t]o recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them [...] The *studium* is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, 'politeness') which allows me to discover the *Operator*, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them 'in reverse,' according to my will as a spectator." *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸¹ For further discussion of semiotic readings of images, see: Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text*, by Barthes, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 32-51.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 61.

In order to consider this relationship between the image and its referent as “realism,” we must consider how the viewer perceives it and whether it successfully conveys its message. Lundström notes how, in addressing photographic realism, critics connect two aspects of the image: one, “the indexical, the imprint, the photograph’s immediate contact with the things in the world; that the photograph, so to speak, not only images the world, but is also touched by it”; and two, “the iconic, that the photograph retains something of the direct visual experience of its referent.”⁸³ This encounter can be positioned as the photographic moment, the moment where light hits the sensor and leaves a trace of what which it, and by extension, the photographer, experiences. Much like Barthes’ conception of the *punctum*, Lundström positions the photographic moment as temporal. I shall return to the question of temporality in the second part of this thesis.

John Tagg also takes up this question of the relationship between the photograph and the referent, by looking at the indexicality of the photographic image. Rather than positioning the photographic encounter as both evidence of its capture and evidence of the experience, Tagg states that there is in fact no referent to which an image refers; rather, what exists is “a subtle web of discourse through which realism is enmeshed in a complex fabric of notions, representations, images, attitudes, gestures and modes of action which function as everyday know-how, ‘practical ideology’, norms within and through which people live their relation to the world.”⁸⁴ In effect, the photograph cannot be divorced from the discursive power that it entails, be it the ability to document historical moments or depict familial relations. In order to consider its relationship to reality, one must pick apart its functions within competing discourses. Realism, for Tagg, is not so much what the photograph is purported to represent and its relation to that which it captures, but rather is the symbolic power that it is given in various facets of social and historical contexts. While it may seem redundant to return to the question of realism, I view it as necessary in order to address the ways that photography produces what it claims to represent, rather than as a way to document what exists in the “real world.” In the scope of the work discussed herein, returning to well-trodden debates around the photographic referent and realism is not to beat a dead horse, but to acknowledge that the conversation is on-going and has taken on new importance in our current age of smartphones, Adobe Photoshop, and social media.

⁸³ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁴ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 100.

Visualising the Criminal

The origins of the dependency of medical and criminal sciences on the photographic medium, specifically as a means to legitimise their empirical findings, can be traced to the late nineteenth century. These disciplines “took both the body and its environment as their field, their domain of expertise, redefining the social as the object of their technical interventions.”⁸⁵ Photography enabled new forms of knowledge to be produced, allowing the researcher to gather evidence for, categorise, and reify understandings of the link between bodies and social or criminal deviancy. Returning to the question of realism, it becomes apparent that the discursive power of the photograph to depict *something* cannot be divorced from empirical forms that take the photograph as the ultimate justification for their observations and existence. In effect, these forms of scientific knowledge created the objects they claimed to be studying. This lies in stark contrast to contemporary queer theory that questions the very basis for epistemological construction of sexuality, gender, and sex, particularly in relation to the materialisation and performance of bodies.⁸⁶ Recognising this history gives context to what contemporary queer photographers have been attempting to respond to, and exemplifies ways in which they assert their own identity in a realm that had previously been closed to them.

Photographic historian Allan Sekula examines the connection between the photographic medium and social control under the guise of police surveillance, using two key examples from the late nineteenth century to illustrate this point. When discussing the synoptic tables of Alphonse Bertillon, which distinguished individuals based on physiognomic characteristics, and Francis Galton composite images created from individual photographs of criminals, Sekula argues that their ultimate goal was to determine visible, tangible links between physical characteristics of the face and the threat of criminality.⁸⁷ The key differences between their systems centres both on what they were attempting to achieve and how their work can be viewed through the instantiations of the archive. Bertillon’s synoptic tables, for example, were a system of categorisation that would allow the investigator to locate a potential criminal in a large archive

⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁶ Muñoz’ conception of ephemera, which opened the first part of this thesis, is a particular example. Another key text is Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*, in which she argues that gender, sex, and sexuality are all constituted in bodies through the repetition of and coherent of bodily norms driven by heteropatriarchy. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁸⁷ Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 55.

of images through the unique features of an individual's face. Galton, on the other hand, created composite images constructed from the layering of individual photographic negatives to determine how a person's cranial structure could determine their propensity towards criminal acts. Sekula states:

The projects of Bertillon and Galton constitute two methodological poles of the positivist attempts to define and regulate social deviance. Bertillon sought to individuate. His aims were practical and operational, a response to the demands of urban police work and the politics of fragmented class struggle during the Third Republic. Galton sought to visualize the generic evidence of hereditarian laws.⁸⁸

Galton's work, in particular, was shaped by eugenics and his desire to weed out those individuals who were considered a detriment to society. However, both were important in understanding the way that photography helped to institutionalise criminology as a science:

'Bertillon' survives in the operations of the national security state, in the condition of intensive and extensive surveillance that characterizes both everyday life and the geopolitical sphere. 'Galton' lives in the renewed authority of biological determinism, founded in the increased hegemony of the political Right in Western democracies.⁸⁹

In the context of this thesis I do not wish to overstate the impact of their work: neither artist has stated that they were in any way responding directly to Galton or Bertillon. However, both Levine and Haslund-Christensen have acknowledged the influence of the mugshot on their work, with the former discussing this during the launch of the monograph for *Queer Portraits* and the latter's work clearly using the mugshot as an aesthetic form in order to subvert and queer its potential.⁹⁰ The power of photography to determine deviancy and to classify those bodies based on physical characteristics points to much larger questions around the medium, in particular its ability to be representative, but in a form that is often treated as neutral, as objective, and reflective of reality *as is*, as opposed to how it structures what it depicts.

The form of the photographic portrait, as Tagg notes, was initially bound up in systems of consumption and wealth. Whereas prior to the invention of photography the sitter for the portrait would have had to have the money to pay an artist to paint their portrait and such an act would

⁸⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁹⁰ *Queer Portraits* was launched with a panel discussion at Article in Montreal, 27 May, 2015. The question of the mugshot came up and Levine was quick to affirm that the series was in part responding to that particular visual aesthetic.

have signalled their social status,⁹¹ the photograph began to open up portraiture to those who did not necessarily have the financial means. In 1888, George Eastman marketed his Kodak camera featuring flexible film and a film winder at ordinary individuals rather than professional and amateur photographers. Due to its ease of use, the medium opened up to a much broader audience that would not have had access to it prior.⁹² The portrait, for Tagg, was not simply a newly democratic medium: it took on its own specifications, its own style, and its own strictures. The shift away from the profile view, common in earlier forms of portraiture due to the technical limitations of the format, towards the frontal view resulted in new forms, styles, and codes of performance being established. Tagg describes the importance of the portrait as both documentation and evidence of individual identity:

The portrait is therefore a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity. But at the same time, it is also a commodity, a luxury, an adornment, ownership of which itself confers status [...] The production of portraits is, at once, the production of significations in which contending social classes claim presence in representation, and the production of *things* which may be possessed and for which there is a socially defined demand.⁹³

While Tagg specifically refers to the role that portraiture played in defining class structures in the late nineteenth century, his formulation of the role that it plays in “the inscription of social identity” is apt for the case studies being discussed. In Haslund-Christensen’s work, the contemporary viewer automatically associates the aesthetic form of the mugshot with criminality because of its familiarity. With regards to the domestic spaces of Levine’s portraits, the viewer decodes the interiors precisely because they can identify the objects that are seen, the clothes that the person wears, and the small glimpses of interior spaces, in order to make a determination of who the person is and what social status they may or may not have. Whether or not these judgements are valid can be debated; rather, the process by which such conclusions rely on visual codes of portraiture is more valuable. The frontal view of these portraits, unlike the profile view, is heavily encoded with the act of self-presentation precisely because the subject confronts the viewer with their gaze.

⁹¹ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 37.

⁹² Tagg further explains Eastman’s marketing process, noting: “With the slogan ‘You Press the Button and We Do the Rest’, the Kodak brought photography to millions through a fully industrialised process of production. Instead of going to a professional portraitist, people without training or skill now took pictures of themselves and kept the intimate, informal, or ill-composed results in family albums.” *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

However, in their discussions of the disciplinary power of photography, Sekula and Tagg do not consider the ways in which such images can be viewed as subtly encoded with conceptions of deviant sexualities. In contrast, Dana Seitler looks to the sexual silences present in the histories of physiognomy, psychology, criminality and the photographic image her essay “Queer Physiognomies; Or, How Many Ways Can We Do the History of Sexuality?” In attempting to mine the photographic archives for distinct collections of sexual otherness, she states that the search for queerness often comes up empty. The reasoning behind this, according to Seitler, has less to do with an absence of such sexualised bodies, and is reflective of a “gestural turn to the early sciences as if they were a stable site of power/knowledge production for homosexual identity.”⁹⁴ She argues that instead of viewing these fields as stable and coherent, criminology and medical science should be viewed as messy, contradictory, and inherently intertwined. Sexology, which was in its infancy at the time, was bound up in these competing discourses and any attempt to delineate one from the other denies the ways in which they often reinforced or contradicted one another. She posits that “queer physiognomies” require “we forgo the paradigmatic guarantees that the emergence of ‘the homosexual body’ seem to offer and to understand these queer physiognomies not as stable identity categories or knowable images, but as perverse composites.”⁹⁵

Furthermore, the researcher must be careful to understand that “many of the images of the sexual degenerate, homosexual, or pervert existed indiscriminately among other examples of perceived degeneracy and deviance from this period,” and these discourses must be understood through their impact upon one another.⁹⁶ Sexology, and by extension sexual bodies, fell within competing discourses of criminology, psychology, and medicine, rather than a discrete visual field delineating sexual practices from one another. In attempting to locate discrete archives of sexualised bodies, Seitler continues: “Not only do we avoid or dismiss significant archives in the annals of our perverse histories, we forget the fundamental principle of queer reading strategies: the technique of readings for sexual silences and queer presences in texts where we do not necessarily expect them, but where they so powerfully resonate.”⁹⁷ In effect, Seitler is arguing

⁹⁴ Dana Seitler, “Queer Physiognomies; Or, How Many Ways Can We Do The History Of Sexuality?” *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 78-79.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

for a methodological approach of examining visible evidence for the absences that are not readily apparent at first, while also acknowledging the ways in which photography produces the bodies it claims to document and classify. These absences can be pinpointed in the contradictory ways in which sexuality is lumped into other categorisations, while also pointing out the numerous problems of approaching photography within the frame of photographic realism. While Seitler's thesis holds up if one restricts their research to an Anglo-American context, she overlooks one particularly important example: the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Science)* founded by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld in Berlin in 1919.

As Thomas Waugh describes in *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Film and Photography from Their Beginnings to Stonewall*, Hirschfeld's institute served a dual function: one, as a centre for documenting forms of sexual difference through photography; and two, as a way for homosexual men who were also sexologists such as Hirschfeld to understand themselves.⁹⁸ This represents an inversion of the medical gaze, shifting it from the auspices of the medical "expert" who would examine and document "the other" to those who were both the object of study and the producers of that knowledge. Hirschfeld and his *Institut* were also heavily involved in social reform through efforts to repeal Paragraph 175, the section of the German Penal Code that forbade sexual activity between men.⁹⁹ A large part of this movement was tied to his research into different forms of sexuality, from transvestism to hermaphroditism, all of which Hirschfeld documented in numerous publications. For example, his *Geschlechtskunde (Sexology)*, a major sexual encyclopedia illustrated with photographs, "envision[ed] homosexual bodies and sexualities as points within a cosmic mosaic of sexual and cultural practices, bodies and sexualities."¹⁰⁰ While Hirschfeld's work could be seen as a homosexual attempting to take agency through collecting and social reform, it was still very much tied up with the idea that photographic evidence of sexual difference was in fact empirical, impartial, and could be used in

⁹⁸ Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Film and Photography from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 378.

⁹⁹ I examine the impact of Paragraph 175 in an article published in 2014 that explicitly responds to issues of restitution following the Second World War. Robert Beachy also examines the impact that Hirschfeld's institute had on sexological research in his 2014 book *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity*. See: Clinton Glenn and Braden Scott, "The Homosexual and State Repression in the Rise of National Socialism: Rupturing the Discursive Frame of Provenance Research," *Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History* XI (2014): 158-193; Robert Beachy, "Weimar Sexual Reform and the Institute for Sexual Science," in *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity*, by Beachy (New York: Knopf, 2014), 160-186.

¹⁰⁰ Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 384.

a benevolent manner. Inevitably the photographs that Hirschfeld produced and collected had the effect of drawing out and delineating differing sexualised bodies that previously had remained discrete or hidden.

While this brief reference to Hirschfeld's *Institut* may seem tangential to the central discussion herein, of note is Hirschfeld's impact on social reform in Denmark during the 1920s. As Wilhelm von Rosen explains, the conception of homosexuality as a congenital condition was explicitly tied to the work of German sexologists including Hirschfeld, and these discourses were taken up in the debate on the sodomy statute and its repeal in the first two decades of the twentieth century.¹⁰¹ Unlike in Germany, where Hirschfeld's reform movement was unsuccessful, the influence of his work made the repeal of the sodomy statute inevitable, though it took until 1930 for it to finally be repealed.¹⁰² While there is no direct evidence to suggest that Hirschfeld's publications and photographic archives had any impact on the parliamentarians and medical experts involved in the repeal effort, the act of making visible the sexual "other" in order to prompt social reform cannot be overlooked.

More contemporary examples of visualising queer bodies do exist and have been referenced by scholars. For example, the crime scene photographer Weegee (Arthur Fellig) has been pointed to by a number of sources. In *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* Richard Meyer discusses how Weegee's photographs positioned gender non-conformity not only as criminal but also as a spectacle. In using the example of Weegee's photograph entitled *Transvestite/The Gay Deceiver* [Figure 13],¹⁰³ Meyer references the "disciplinary force of the police" alongside of the resistance of the individual: "[t]he drag queen stages his emergence from the paddy wagon as an occasion for

¹⁰¹ The statute in the Danish Penal Code was inherited from an earlier law entitled King Christian the Fifth's Danish Law, which was instituted during the dual monarchy of Denmark and Norway in 1683. The updated text, promulgated in 1866, stated: "Intercourse against nature is punished by work in a house of correction." Jens Rydström and Kati Mustola, *Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal Law in Scandinavia, 1842-1999*, eds. Rydström and Mustola (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007), 257.

¹⁰² Wilhelm von Rosen, "Denmark 1866-1976: From Sodomy to Modernity," in *Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal Law in Scandinavia, 1842-1999*, eds. Jens Rydström and Kati Mustola (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007), 61-71.

¹⁰³ Of note are the ways in which two categories, transvestite and gay, are homogenised through this title. Most sources refer to the photograph as *The Gay Deceiver* though the Getty Museum, which exhibited the photograph in a major retrospective of Weegee's crime scene photography in 2005, refers to the image as *Transvestite/The Gay Deceiver*. The International Center of Photography, which holds the original image as well as the copyright, simply refers to it under the generic title *Man Arrested for Cross-Dressing, New York*.

self-display rather than public disgrace, as a moment of posing rather than punishment.”¹⁰⁴ Writing in the exhibition catalogue for *What it Means to Be Seen: Photography and Queer Visibility*, Sophie Hackett also points out that “the public presence of queers has been and remains a challenge, a challenge often marked by the subject’s overt defiance of the situation by playing to the photographer”¹⁰⁵ This act of “overt defiance” that makes *Transvestite/The Gay Deceiver* a touchstone for both Meyer and Hackett points to a much larger issue at play in this form of photography: the “other” speaking back, subverting the disciplinary gaze of the camera by performing and revelling in their other-ness. This is precisely the argument that I wish to make with regards to JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits* and Charlotte Haslund-Christensen’s *WHO’S NEXT?*: they represent positions that have otherwise been marginalised or disciplined through the photographic apparatus, despite major advancements in LGBTQ rights in Canada and Denmark.¹⁰⁶

Power, Panopticism, and Queer Worlds

In spite of this I do not wish to position either case study as an exercise in documentary photography; rather, they exist as performative works that were staged for the camera. This is not to say that documentary photography and photoethnography do not have an impact on how these works can be understood. Haslund-Christensen has also previously worked with documentary as a photographic mode in her 2008 series *Natives: The Danes*.¹⁰⁷ This project’s visual form is heavily indebted to the work of individuals such as Danish-American photographer Jacob Riis and August Sander who in the early twentieth century documented various “types” of Germans in order to spur social reform.¹⁰⁸ As Abigail Solomon-Godeau explains in “Who is Speaking

¹⁰⁴ Meyer, *Outlaw Representations*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Hackett, “What It Means to be Seen,” 14-15.

¹⁰⁶ While major advancements have been made, full equality has not been reached in either country. I briefly discuss the uneven application of rights and lived experiences of LGBTQ people, particularly in relation to the national narratives of liberal openness in both countries in the Introduction and the final section of Part Two of this thesis.

¹⁰⁷ For this project, Haslund-Christensen dressed up as an explorer, which was a subtle nod to her grandfather who explored Mongolia in the early twentieth-century, and captured images of Danish people in their everyday surroundings. For an example from *Natives: The Danes*, see Figure 14. Charlotte Haslund-Christensen, in discussion with the author, 24 August 2015.

¹⁰⁸ In referencing the work of Jacob Riis, Solomon-Godeau notes that his work must be understood “within the framework of reformist or ameliorative intent, encompassing issues such as public address, reception, dissemination, the notion of project or narrative rather than a single image, etc.” In effect, the images that make up Riis’ work cannot be separated out from the narrative and discursive intent of the series as they function within the public sphere, such as in the media or in an art gallery. See: Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Who Is Speaking Thus? Some

This? Some Questions About Documentary Photography,” documentary photography as a genre cannot be displaced from its social function. She states:

As part of a larger system of visual communication, as both a conduit and agent of ideology, purveyor of empirical evidence and visual ‘truths,’ documentary photography can be analysed as a sign system possessed of its own accretion of visual and signifying codes determining reception and instrumentality.¹⁰⁹

On a semiotic level, these images not only communicate visual information about a subject’s appearance, but are also tied up in systems of power, knowledge, and ideology that inform the impetus to document in the first place. Photography as a medium is not neutral, and she concludes that as researchers we must understand “photography’s textuality; its embeddedness within discursive or institutional systems that the photographer must try to comprehend in advance.”¹¹⁰ While this may amount to guesswork in attempting to understand how an artist and their practice are linked to the contexts in which they are working and to acknowledge the multiple ways that power plays out through the visual field.

John Tagg explicitly takes up this point by referencing Michel Foucault’s conceptualisation of power as positivist. In noting the ways that photography was used as a method to create and visualise deviancy rather than as a method of documentation, he states: “In fact, power produces. It produces reality. It produces domains of objects, institutions of language, rituals of truth.”¹¹¹ Through an explicit understanding of power as productive, photography is brought under the auspices of knowledge production rather than the objectivity of truth. Tagg continues:

What we have in this standardised image is more than a picture of a supposed criminal. It is a portrait of the product of the disciplinary method: the body made object; divided and studied; enclosed in a cellular structure of space whose architecture is the file-index; made docile and forced to yield up its truth; separated and individuated; subjected and made subject. When accumulated, such images amount to a new representation of society.¹¹²

Questions about Documentary Photography,” in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, by Solomon-Godeau (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 170-173.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 170.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 183.

¹¹¹ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 87.

¹¹² Ibid., 76.

Within the frame of the case studies presented in this thesis, they can be positioned as responding to this question of the productive nature of power vis-à-vis the photographic apparatus. However, two other concepts from Foucault are more appropriate in sketching out how their visual rhetoric functions: panopticism and confession.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Foucault describes Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as a prison based around architectural space that allow prisoners to be viewed at all times. This is connected to two principles, visible and unverifiable: "Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment."¹¹³ This dual operation, of the prisoner being made visible while unable to verify whether they are being observed resulted in the self-discipline of the individual. Due to the continual threat of being seen and caught, the subject would modify their behaviour to conform to what was expected of them:

He who is subjected to the field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjections.¹¹⁴

Through panopticism the subject conforms their behaviour in a much more powerful and less intrusive way than had they been physically punished. This shift in behaviour forces the individual to reform and conform, and for Foucault this stands as an example "of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form."¹¹⁵

Confession, much like the panopticon, acts as a form of soft power based on dialogue between the confessor and the expert who takes their testimony. Foucault notes that this process creates the "truth" of sex precisely because the individual has faith that the process will illuminate some inner reality of the self, while the professional interprets what is confessed:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the

¹¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 201.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile.¹¹⁶

This dynamic between speaker and recipient of this “truth” has the effect of producing that which it claims to seek out. Truth is placed as an effect and byproduct of confession rather than something it simply uncovers. Foucault concludes by noting “we demand that sex speak the truth [...] and we demand that it tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness.”¹¹⁷ The belief that confession uncovers and illuminates the inner psychic life of the individual is in fact false; rather, it is endemic to discourses in which sex and truth are linked through the act of one invoking the other.

Returning to my case studies, I argue that both use confession and panopticism as a way to destabilise the act of viewing the queer subject. Before I go into a visual analysis of just how this occurs in *Queer Portraits* and *WHO’S NEXT?*, I want to briefly outline the histories of surveillance and repression that LGBT people have faced in Canada and Denmark. It is imperative not to look at the two nations as the same in terms of how they have treated their sexual minorities because this is far from the truth. While both can be argued as sexually permissive in the contemporary moment, the trajectories that they took to get there are very different.

As I briefly mentioned earlier in this text, Denmark repealed its laws against same-sex activity between men in 1930. However, in the two decades following the Second World War repression returned in the form of police surveillance, crackdowns on prostitution, and unequal age of consent laws that predominantly targeted gay men. While there was a flourishing gay subculture in Copenhagen during this time, major police actions against *Forbundet af 1948*, one of the major homophile political organizations in the country, led to a subculture “pervaded by fear and a lasting sense of betrayal.”¹¹⁸ Criminal reforms in the 1960s meant that the purchasing of sex resulted in the disenfranchisement of a large number of gay men, those who were purported to be “free” under the guise of the socially liberal state. While the contemporary moment, in which same-sex marriage and joint adoption are available to LGBT Danes, is far removed from

¹¹⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 61-62.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹⁸ Von Rosen, “Denmark 1866-1976,” 76.

this history, it is worth noting that the liberalization of Danish society did not follow a neat and tidy trajectory after the decriminalization of sodomy.¹¹⁹ As much as rights can be given to specific populations, they can easily be rolled back due to changes in the political climate.

Peter Edelberg notes that advances towards full civil participations for LGBT Danes was not solely a narrative of normalisation and incorporation, but also represented a shift in subjectivities: “[e]ven though the social context has changed dramatically, what queer men want has changed even more.”¹²⁰ Whereas older generations of closeted gay men sought contact through cruising in parks and bathrooms and in the arms of rent boys, younger generations have focused on obtaining marriage and adoption rights. He also notes that the forms of queer activism present in the United States, intimately tied to harassment by the state, “made little sense in [Denmark] where the authorities openly supported gay and lesbian rights and the health authorities launched nationwide campaigns on HIV and AIDS. Historically, the struggles for gay and lesbian rights were as often with the authorities as against them.”¹²¹

In contrast, the Canadian context was quite different. As Gary Kinsman and Patricia Gentile note in *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation*, during the 1950s and 1960s men who engaged in homosexual activity were viewed as security risks by the Canadian state. They note that authorities viewed homosexuality as linked to deficiency of moral character and left the individual susceptible to blackmail by Soviet spies.¹²² However, much of the surveillance of gay men was limited to those in positions of power within the government and the military, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were more focused on identifying other possible homosexuals than bringing people in on charges.¹²³ This is not to say that individuals singled out as homosexuals were not persecuted; throughout their book Kinsman and Gentile look at a number of cases where men and women were identified, dismissed from their jobs, and threatened with public exposure.¹²⁴ However, the situation began to change after Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s famous proclamation “the state has no place in the bedrooms of the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 70-81.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 55.

¹²¹ Ibid., 69.

¹²² Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 2

¹²³ Ibid., 3-9.

¹²⁴ In particular, the chapters entitled “The Cold War against Queers: Social and Historical Contexts,” and “The Fruit Machine: Attempting to Detect Queers,” are quite explicit with the types of retribution homosexuals faced in the 1950s and 60s. Ibid., 53-114; 168-190.

nation” in 1967 and the subsequent reform to the Criminal Code two years later.¹²⁵ The contemporary situation in Canada is much like in Denmark: LGBT Canadians have full marriage and adoption rights and are protected against hate crimes and speech by non-discrimination laws. This is not to say that full equality has been achieved, particularly when trans* rights differ from province to province, but rather that the situation is less bleak than it has been in Canada’s past.

While it would be productive to do a comparative study of the differing conceptions of homosexuality in Canada and Denmark during the post-Second World War period, one obvious difference bears note: whereas Canadian authorities clearly linked homosexuality with communism, no such connection was drawn in Denmark. The reason for this was likely due to the fact that the Danish Communist Party was never outlawed and has at times been involved in forming governing coalitions.¹²⁶ In both cases, however, homosexuality was linked with the concept of degeneracy: in Denmark, homosexuals were singled out for corrupting youth through prostitution; in Canada, the persecution of homosexuals was linked to the state asserting proper gender roles and “the association of queerness with ‘deviant’ gender practices.”¹²⁷ Surveillance functioned to both contain the perceived social contagion and document those who were already lost causes.

I return to *Queer Portraits* and *WHO’S NEXT?* as examples of queers speaking back and subverting photographic codes. Whereas queer bodies had previously been brought under the gaze of authorities, these contemporary examples illustrate how queers talk back, both confessing the truth of themselves while refusing to name precisely how they are queer. Haslund-Christensen’s images position the subject as criminalised with the understanding that they are being documented solely because of their identity. But the viewer is never given confirmation of just whom it is they are seeing. The accompanying titles are numbers rather than names; these faces could be anyone. Rather than focus on the individual, *WHO’S NEXT?* speaks to an audience as part of a queer community while communicating a message of solidarity and collective memory.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 215.

¹²⁶ Von Rosen, “Denmark 1866-1976,” 72.

¹²⁷ See: Von Rosen, “Denmark 1866-1976,” 74-75; Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 53.

Unlike Haslund-Christensen's mugshots, Levine's portraits focus on the individual in relation to their personal, private space. Here it is useful to return to an excerpt from Levine's artist statement to tease out a number of threads that will be examined in Part Two of this thesis:

Each portrait is taken in a different domestic setting, characterized by saturated colours and often discursive backgrounds – using professional lighting and a medium format film camera, I create a studio within each home environment, and intentionally place every object that appears within the frame. These settings raise questions regarding private queer space as a realm for the development of community and the expression of genders and sexualities that are often marginalized within the public sphere. This intimate portrait series explores the relationship between photographer and subject and exposes the strong element of trust that exists between me and my friends as they appear in each photograph. I am interested in expressing fierceness, beauty, and resistance through the confrontational gaze of my subjects and the aesthetic of a queer subculture, a goal that underlies the series and my work as a whole.¹²⁸

As Levine describes, the domestic space is transformed from that of living and self-expression to the artist's studio, one where the photographer places their subject, chooses the objects in the frame, and snaps the photograph. However, the relationships that the photographs document remain obscured and as viewers, we are forced to guess what these individuals mean to Levine. As Johnny Forever Nawracaj points out in "Levine Has Kept Our Secrets: *Queer Portraits* as Ostensible Document," these images force the personal, the private, out into the public sphere to be consumed by a viewing audience:

As the act of photographing a person turns a private situation into something publically consumable, the opportunity for a subject to pose denies the viewer intimacy. It is as though knowledge of the eventual presence of strangers before the subject's gaze is crystallized in that subject's self-portrayal.¹²⁹

Much like the panoptic gaze instils conformity to institutional strictures, the camera forces the individual to perform their own identity with the implication that they will be consumed and judged by a public not yet known. Accompanying each image is a simple title, typically the name of the individual along with the year. These small linguistic clues, along with the materiality of

¹²⁸ JJ Levine, "Artist Statement," n.pag.

¹²⁹ Of note: Johnny Forever Nawracaj was the subject of two of Levine's portraits, as seen in Figures 9 and 10. I chose to include these images and quote Nawracaj's essay because they are available to the public, and as such note that I may be privileging their voice in this analysis. Johnny Forever Nawracaj, "Levine Has Kept Our Secrets: *Queer Portraits* as Ostensible Document," in *Queer Portraits: 2006-2015*, by JJ Levine (Montreal: JJ Levine, 2015): 25.

the domestic sphere in Levine's *Queer Portraits* help guide the viewer; however, we are not privy to entering these private spaces as anything other than voyeurs.

Part Two: Red/Blue Left/Right - Towards a Politics of Queerness

Instead we have been administered a kind of political sedative—we get marriage and the military, then we go home and cook dinner, forever. - Lisa Duggan¹³⁰

In her chapter entitled “Equality, Inc.” Lisa Duggan expends an enormous amount of energy ripping apart the contemporary lesbian and gay movement in the United States. She notes that under the formations of neoliberalism,¹³¹ what had previously been a radical activist movement tied to coalitional politics alongside feminism and black civil rights can now be viewed as drifting ever rightward with the twin goals of marriage equality and non-discrimination statutes. Whereas LGBT rights had been previously attacked by the Christian/Republican Right in the late 1980s, big business was no longer in the mode of discriminating, now appearing “in favor of an emergent rhetorical commitment to diversity, and to a narrow, formal, non-redistributive form of ‘equality’ politics for the new millennium.”¹³² For Duggan this represents a betrayal of what LGBT liberation strove to achieve, representing, “‘color-blind’ anti-affirmative action racial politics, conservative-liberation ‘equality feminism’, and gay ‘normality.’”¹³³

This part takes Duggan’s invective of marriage, military might, and domesticity as a starting point to examine two very different aspects of contemporary queer theory. I first return to the question of gender neutrality as raised by Jackson Davidow in relation to JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits*. I argue that Levine’s work can be viewed through Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s concept of “queer world building” and Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, expanding the visual frame to create a space of queerness that is not simply responsive to heteronormativity but also representative of queer futurity. Levine’s *Queer Portraits* can be read as representing a space of possibility for queer existence, one that is not contingent on reproducing heteronormativity in order to gain social acceptance.

¹³⁰ Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 62.

¹³¹ Duggan defines neoliberalism as political and economic policies promoted by both parties in the American government, invested “in the creation of a new vision of national and world order, a vision of competition, inequality, market ‘discipline,’ public austerity, and ‘law and order’” in order to roll back the welfare state instituted during Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal programs during the 1930s. Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, x.

¹³² In this instance, Duggan is referring to mainstream LGBT rights organisations such as the Human Rights Campaign that have bought into what she describes as “Neoliberalism’s emergent strategy for the new millennium: A new ‘equality’ politics compatible with a corporate world order.” In the context of Duggan’s work “queer” is linked with leftist anti-capitalist progressive politics in opposition to the normalisation of LGBT rights within neoliberalism. Ibid, 42.

¹³³ Ibid.

In contrast, Haslund-Christensen's work harkens back to the will towards intersectionality present in queer theory in its origins. To illustrate this point I look at *Lige Nu*, an exhibition held in various cities across Denmark in the summer of 2015 to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of amendments to the Danish constitution allowing women the right to vote. The exhibition featured a smaller selection of images from *WHO'S NEXT?* alongside works from four other photographers looking at the social realm in contemporary Denmark. I examine how the central focus on antinormativity in has lead to its instantiation as the definitional core of contemporary queer theory, and ask: What consequence does this have for queerness as political praxis? Can queer theory therefore be used in a productive way to examine and critique *Lige Nu*, an exhibition that is inherently bound up in the liberal logic of human rights and democratic participation? By way of concluding I offer an alternative to Duggan's formulations, challenging her assertion of normalised gays and lesbians as politically "bad" because of a desire to get married versus queer activists who are positioned as "good" because of their allegiance to anticapitalism and non-normative relationship forms. This reductive binary is far too simplistic and formulated through the prism of American political exceptionalism.¹³⁴ When looking at countries such as Canada and Denmark one must be attentive to how language, politics, and the uptake of queer theory have been and are distinct from that of the United States.

"The Other is You"¹³⁵

In returning to JJ Levine's *Queer Portraits*, it is important to look at the title to question its rhetorical function. Erin Silver's observation that the title is "both conservatively taxonomical and subversively performative,"¹³⁶ points out the oscillation inherent to the designation queer: it can be positioned as a fixed identity label, but at the same time it is dynamic and continually in negotiation. Amelia Jones also takes up this aspect of queerness in her formulation of queer

¹³⁴ Here I take Jasbir Puar's conception of exceptionalism, which she states "paradoxically signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority), suggesting a departure from yet mastery of linear teleologies of progress." In effect, American exceptionalism operates paradigmatically, positioning the United States at the apex of progress, thus becoming the yard stick by which all other nations are judged. I return to this in my discussion of *Lige Nu* and homonationalism towards the end of Part Two. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

¹³⁵ Amelia Jones refers to artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña's binary proposition in contemporary art as "the simplistic idea of the other as a projection of desires of the empowered self collapses into a free for all of mutual desires: the other is you." Gómez-Peña, quoted in: Jones, *Seeing Differently*, 63.

¹³⁶ Silver, "The Domestic Interiors of JJ Levine's *Queer Portraits*," 186.

feminist durationality. She states: “the key tension of any politics of identification – the tension between essentializing notions of a monolithic and homogenous coalition and an open-ended idea of identification as completely detached from actual subjects and bodies. This is the tension that must be maintained in any playing out of queer.”¹³⁷ The power of queerness lays both in its ability to live outside the norm and in the ways in which it is continually enacted. This section looks at how queer has been conceived of as unstable, neither here nor there, and “subversively performative,” to borrow Silver’s turn of phrase. First, I look at the ways in which queerness has been envisioned as more than simply a critique of heteronormativity, but also as an alternative form of social praxis, one whose instantiations are not found in mimicking the familial bonds of the nuclear family. Rather, queer finds its power in, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner state, “the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture.”¹³⁸ Second, I return to Jackson Davidow’s conception of queer neutrality that closed Part One to consider how JJ Levine’s portraits subvert the gaze of the viewer and force us to contemplate how it is that we identify those we see. Finally, I turn to Peggy Phelan’s notion of marked and unmarked bodies to postulate that the “queer” in *Queer Portraits* takes on another valence of meaning, particularly when revealing oneself can be a politically dangerous act.

Michael Warner states that because queers have historically and socially been marginalised, we continuously survey and judge the ways in which the social world is stacked against us; this process “tends to be reactive, fragmentary, and defensive, and leaves us perpetually at a disadvantage.”¹³⁹ This disadvantage, for Warner, is inherently bound up in the logics of heteronormativity, which, “thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist.”¹⁴⁰ However, Warner does not position queerness as akin to race or gender. Instead, it is a form of social relations built around different forms of community with shared goals, rather than shared identities. Writing in their article “Sex in Public,” Warner and Lauren Berlant point out the ways that public sexual culture

¹³⁷ Jones, *Seeing Differently*, 146.

¹³⁸ Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 548.

¹³⁹ Warner, “Introduction,” xiii.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xxi.

has been a key rallying point for queers; however, any attempt to define what queer culture is remains difficult:

They are paradigmatically trivialized as ‘lifestyle.’ But to understand them only as self-expression or as a demand for recognition would be to misrecognize the fundamentally unequal material conditions whereby the institutions of social reproduction are coupled to forms of hetero culture. Contexts of queer world making depend on parasitic and fugitive elaboration through gossip, dance clubs, softball leagues, and the phone-sex ads that increasingly are the commercial support for print-mediated left culture in general. Queer is difficult to entextualize *as* culture.¹⁴¹

Instead, Berlant and Warner argue for queer culture as “a world-making project” that is expansive, mapping out multiple social and political spaces, ways of being, and affective attachments to places that might otherwise not be conceived of as queer.¹⁴²

Berlant and Warner’s conception of queer as world-making is similar in scope to what Foucault argues for in “Friendship as a Way of Life.” Foucault outlines alternative forms of social relations build around “affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can’t allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force.”¹⁴³ These forms of relations differ from heteronormativity in that they are not inherently tied to reproduction, the nuclear family, bloodlines, and marriage; they also pose a threat to the very centrality of heterosexuality to society. This possibility is brought about precisely because of the different bonds Foucault observed among homosexual men. David Halperin qualifies Foucault’s argument, pointing out that he was not arguing for a return to classical Greek forms of love such as paederasty, but rather for a form of aesthesis, “[using] one’s relation to oneself as a potential resource with which to construct new modalities of subjective agency and new styles of personal life that may enable one to resist or even to escape one’s social and psychological determinations.”¹⁴⁴ Queerness as self-discipline serves as a form of enactment of the self, free from the strictures of heteronormativity.

Foucault’s conception of heterotopia is useful here in order to tease out ways in which queerness can be enacted in a private, queer world without the fear or threat of repression from

¹⁴¹ Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 561.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life.” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. John Johnston (New York: The New Press, 1997), 136.

¹⁴⁴ Halperin, *St. Foucault*, 76.

the outside. Foucault defines heterotopia as “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.”¹⁴⁵ He further clarifies, noting that heterotopias mimic the function of mirrors: “From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.”¹⁴⁶ In occupying a heterotopic space, the individual is forced to confront their own absence in the social space of the real, while being able to critique it through the position of being “over there.”

In looking at the domestic spaces in *Queer Portraits*, the link between queerness and the private sphere is key. However, while the many of the photographs in the series are taken in the subjects’ own dwellings, this is not the case for all. As Levine explains:

It's true that I normally photograph people in their own homes. Occasionally, for logistical or aesthetic reasons, I'll do a shoot in a different location, but one familiar to the subject and to myself, for example a mutual friend's apartment, or my own, particularly if the person is visiting from out of town. The level of comfort that someone has in their own home, or a place where they are staying, comes through in the image.¹⁴⁷

I would argue that this does not deter from the overall message of the series precisely because we are not made aware of whose space they inhabit. Rather, we are confronted with a documentation of a person existing in a domestic space as a particular point in time; the ephemeral nature of inhabiting a space is what gives the series its thematic thrust. Levine further clarifies that “While this project is a kind of archive of my life and the people in it, it’s also a record of the spaces I’ve inhabited, which set the scene for each portrait.”¹⁴⁸ What the viewer thus witnesses is a moment of connection between the photographer and the photographed, and the way that the domestic interior and its material objects are entangled in such an encounter. These images depict alternative relationship formations not built on the nuclear, heterosexual family, but on community based on past histories, emotions, and life trajectories of which the audience is not privy.

It is also important to acknowledge the ways in which materiality is represented visually, from the furniture and decoration of these spaces to the clothing the subjects wear, and how this critiques ideas of gender and sexuality. Rather than cast these markers aside as secondary to the

¹⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 24.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁴⁷ Hays, “JJ Levine’s Powerful, Gender Busting Photography,” n.pag.

¹⁴⁸ Levine, “Introduction,” 13.

aesthetic forms of the photographs, I argue that they are part and parcel of the active experience of reading the images. In looking at the domestic space as connected to sexuality, John Potvin points out that “[s]exuality like any other modality of identity and subjectivity is an integral part of how we experience our design spaces and objects; to suggest otherwise only serves to perpetuate a long and seemingly passé trope of an increasingly claustrophobic closet.”¹⁴⁹ While in this instance Potvin is referring to design history’s glaring disconnect from queer theory, the point he makes is particularly appropriate to how the spaces within each portrait can be viewed. Rather than reading these spaces as evidence of conspicuous consumption and levels of taste, they can be viewed as actively reflecting the sexual and gendered identities of their inhabitants. Most importantly, the domestic sphere represents the desire to collect and display that goes beyond simply wanting a material object: the materiality of these objects build to form a portrait of their owner’s identity.¹⁵⁰

To return to an example used earlier in this thesis: *Laura Boo* [Figure 7]. The subject is seated in a chair, wearing a skirt. Behind her we see a number of frilly dresses and frocks hanging, though we are unable to view the full garment due to the cropping of the frame. However, in juxtaposing the figure with what is assumed to be her wardrobe, she can be connected to the traditional material markers of femininity. In other images, such as *Zoë* [Figure 8], the titular figure is dressed in more androgynous clothing, while in *Systems Horné* (2012) [Figure 15], the *systems* sit side by side in lingerie, clothing encoded with femininity and sexuality. However, clues such as facial, chest, and arm hair, along with the purposeful misspelling of “sisters” brushes off any easy understanding of how they present their genders. A number of images also feature individuals in various stages of undress, such as *Jesse* [Figure 6] who sits topless, or *Harry in the tub* (2013) [Figure 16], one of the few images that breaks with convention in the series, shifting from a frontal portrait to one taken from above. Here Harry’s naked body is situated in a bathtub, fully nude, with surgical scars visible on his chest. However, the representation of the naked, trans* body is not predicated on an understanding of what the

¹⁴⁹ John Potvin, “The Pink Elephant in the Room: What Ever Happened to Queer Theory in the Study of Interior Design 25 Years on?” *Journal of Interior Design* 41, no. 1 (2016): 5.

¹⁵⁰ Here I am particularly inspired by the introduction to John Potvin’s *Bachelors of a Different Sort*, where he points out that there “is a need to insert a broad definition of desire, pleasure and shame into the history of domestic interior design and the decorative arts.” John Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort: Queer Aesthetics, Material Culture and the Modern Interior in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 10.

scars mean, nor can this be reduced to voyeurism or fetishism. Instead, the photograph represents the agency of the subject and the trust they place in the artist, as well as the level of comfort of both individuals within these settings.¹⁵¹ Levine can also be placed within the frame of the photograph, despite only appearing in a few of the more than one hundred images. Their desire to create these images has as much to do with their relationships as it does in the acts of carving out social space for marginalised individuals that the series represents. Levine states: “I like the idea that portraiture confers importance on its subjects, and in photographing people who do not fit into mainstream, or what are generally considered culturally valuable representations of bodies, genders, and sexualities, I’m suggesting that we are important.”¹⁵²

Jackson Davidow points out the uneasy relationship between observing and identifying. It is because the people in Levine’s *Queer Portraits* never state their preferred pronouns, never give up their gender identifications, that the work unhinges the act of identification from the tyranny of heteronormativity. Davidow notes that the individuals appear as if about to speak:

Our pleasure here as spectators isn’t in the movement of the lips, but the anticipation of their movement and speech. Our pleasure lies in the waiting, the not quite knowing how the lips will move.¹⁵³

As they never do speak, we are kept in tension with the photographs: reading them, assuming that we know who we see, but with our assumptions unconfirmed. The idea that the images are in fact performances, as Erin Silver notes, “permit[s] queer subjects, historically hidden from view, to come into newly sharp focus by turning towards the background – backgrounds that are not societal givens, but that are chosen, built, and displayed by the sitter in a radical re-visioning of the possibilities of the domestic interior.”¹⁵⁴

Returning to these interiors, Dayna McLeod argues that they, “speak to the personality of the subject and symbolically represent the trusting, intimate relationship between subject and

¹⁵¹ While it is not apparent in this image, Harry is Levine’s boyfriend, which is made clear in other images in the series. Levine has also specified that in preparing the monograph for *Queer Portraits* that they contacted all of the models that they photographed to ask their permission to be published. Those that refused were not included in the final publication. Hays, “JJ Levine’s Powerful, Gender Busting Photography,” n.pag.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Jackson Davidow, “Beyond the Binary: The Gender Neutral in JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits*,” in *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*, eds. Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 314-315.

¹⁵⁴ Silver, “The Domestic Interiors of JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits*,” 187.

photographer because of their inherent meaning to both.”¹⁵⁵ I would also argue that these domestic spaces function both as a heterotopia and an act of queer world making. They exist as private, personal materialisations of the subjective self and assert their existence through the photographic form, pushing back at an otherwise indifferent or outright hostile outside world. As Potvin notes, we would do well to remember that the rise of the domestic interior “as the locus of true selfhood” was intimately tied to the rise in capitalism and “the development of modern sexual typologies” in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵⁶ If we are to view these domestic interiors as spaces of queer possibility, one must acknowledge that they are in many ways still implicated in the forces of capitalism and conspicuous consumption. This is not to say that the subjects can be reduced to the things they own; rather, in positioning specific forms of queer politics as anti-capitalist and antinormative, as I discuss later in this section, we must remain cognizant of the ways in which capitalism is engrained in everyday existence. As well, a number of images play with the idea of liminality, positioning subjects between the interior and exterior. For example, *Girlfriends* [Figure 17] and *Johnny and Želi* [Figure 10] place the subjects in spaces of movement and transition, neither inside nor outside. The former features the titular girlfriends on the threshold of an apartment, while the latter features the subject and their pet on a spiral fire escape common to many Montreal buildings. When looking at how they are posed, they confront the viewer as gatekeepers to their private, interior realms, refusing the viewer entry. Instead, they force us to consider what is and is not made available for public consumption within these portraits – and ultimately that which they, and Levine, have chosen to keep private.

In contrast, the use of the Police Station processing room in Haslund-Christensen’s series bears little resemblance to the domestic interiors of *Queer Portraits*. On a surface level one may be tempted to read the use of the room as subversively queer, with the photographer and the volunteers asserting their sexual identities in a space that had previously been used to repress and document them. However, this ignores the complex relationship that the state has had with LGBTQ individuals in Denmark. As Haslund-Christensen noted in my interview with her, the officers at the police station were friendly and helpful and gave her full access to the space rather

¹⁵⁵ Dayna McLeod, “Déjouer la matrice hétéronormative/Queering the Heteronormative Matrix,” *Ciel Variable* no. 88 (2011): 18.

¹⁵⁶ Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort*, 15.

than eyeing her project with suspicion.¹⁵⁷ This is not to say that the police in Copenhagen, or Denmark at large are fully committed to LGBTQ equality, as history has shown, but points to an (ongoing) ambivalent relationship between queers and the authorities that cannot be put down to simplistic oppositions.

Returning to the spaces in Levine's *Queer Portraits*, I do not wish to portray them as utopian in nature, separate from and unaffected by the outside world. The subjects of these photographs, while defined on some level by the spatial set-up of the domestic interior in each image, also enact their identities through the way they are posed in each image. However, how these images generate meaning can be interpreted in different ways. Davidow argues that the subjects share a similar neutral, blank expression, with their lips poised to speak—yet they do not. As the viewer we are able to look into their personal space and examine their bodies; however, we are “denied their preferred pronoun” and cannot fully identify whom we are seeing.¹⁵⁸ He further argues that the use of the neutral face, the neutral stare, forces the viewer “to think beyond the violent binaries of meaning,” and that this form of “neutral aesthetics is therefore deeply political, a provocation to the here and now that envisions and edges on a queer time and place.”¹⁵⁹ While I agree with Davidow that the refusal to vocalise their gendered identities is an inherently powerful aspect of the work, he ignores the specificity of the medium – the photograph – and the requisite silence of the still image. Had *Queer Portraits* been shot on video, the refusal to vocalise identity would be much more powerful. Davidow also forecloses other possible readings, particular with his assertion that each sitter has a neutral facial expression, privileging this aspect over the brightly coloured interiors of the individuals' homes and what this implies about their identities. As well, in looking through the numerous images included in the monograph for *Queer Portraits* I catch myself looking at people's faces trying to determine whether they are smiling, slightly perturbed, angry, or whether the expression is due to

¹⁵⁷ By way of an anecdote, my own experience of the LGBTQ community and their relationship with the police in Copenhagen comes from a tour I took during Copenhagen Pride in August 2015. The tour guide took us to Ørstedsparken, a known cruising ground, which in recent years had seen a number of gay bashings. The guide specifically stated that should anyone be attacked while cruising, call the police as they are there to help. The Copenhagen Gay Guide reiterates this point: “Be careful and don't hesitate to contact the police. Copenhagen Police are strongly committed in the fight against hate crimes.” Bert Svalebølle, ed., *Copenhagen Gay Guide 2015/2016* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, April 2015), 31.

¹⁵⁸ Davidow, “Beyond the Binary,” 311.

¹⁵⁹ Jackson Davidow, “Towards a Queer Neutral in Photography,” in *Queer Portraits: 2006-2015*, by Levine (Montreal: JJ Levine, 2015): 123.

the subjects holding uncomfortable poses with pain in their face; rarely do their faces look neutral to my eye. There is also the possibility that my own reading of the work is based on my emotional state, the time of day, and whether I recognise any of the individuals. This act of identifying just whom it is I am seeing is not static, but rather contingent on my own reading of facial expressions, material cues such as clothing and style, and potentially my own desire projected on to the subject.

For example, looking at *Laura Boo* [Figure 7], I am immediately drawn to the relationship between foreground and background, which cuts off the viewer from understanding the scale and shape of the room in which she sits. On the arm of her chair are her glasses; this enforces a distance between the subject and the photographer, calling into question what she can and cannot see. This extends outward to the viewer – we see her, but how confrontational can her gaze be if we are unsure of her eyesight? I am also drawn to the look on her face. Having seen the subject at a number of parties and events around Montreal, I immediately attempt to judge her emotions based on my own past experience of seeing her perform and speak in public. The position of her right arm on her hip, exposing the lines of her tattoo also draws my attention. I attempt to determine what the tattoo is, what the lines say about her personality, and that she is clearly presenting it to the viewer. Clothing, tattoos, piercing, all of these small material markers that exist in this photograph help to build a portrait of who she is, without fully exposing her identity to the viewer. We can attempt to read her, but there is never any confirmation that we are right.

In contrast, the shots of Johnny [Figures 9 and 10] function in a different way: as a viewer I am forced to reconcile two images of the same person separated by one year in time. In the first image, Johnny sits on a couch, legs stretched out to the side. Johnny wears tight gold lamé leggings and a frilly, sheer top. Immediately I read the clothing as feminine. In contrast, the second image features Johnny sitting on a fire escape, legs spread revealing a rip in their jeans with yellow macramé underwear poking out. Whereas the first image shows Johnny as more hesitant, barring the viewer from further examining their body with the placement of their legs, this image is much more confrontational. Johnny also presents as much more androgynous in this image, wearing a blazer and jeans, with a shaved head. In comparing the two images I am forced to ask how their identity has shifted in the intervening period between the two photographs. Can I, in fact, come to any sort of answer to this question based on a visual comparison between

photographs? And what does this say about the idea of identification as a process of comparison between points in time?

In challenging the propensity for viewers and critics to identify art's subjects, Amelia Jones takes up the unstable and temporal nature of queer to argue for a different way of seeing. Rather than relying on historical models of vision and perspective that privilege fixed ways of seeing and understanding art, she proffers queer feminist durationality as an alternative mode of seeing. This mode is defined as processual, "always already in negotiation and taking place across various modes of subjectification that are *interrelated* such as gender, sexuality, class, race, nation, ethnic, and religious identifications."¹⁶⁰ Rather than focusing on *identity* within the visual frame, she refers to *identification*, specifically through its temporal nature, as a way to interpret objects through a mode that is both subjective and processual. Jones suggests "inserting process and durationality into how we understand the meaning of subjects and artworks in the world is the crucial political gesture in revitalizing a new politics that acknowledges processes of identification at play in interpretation without reducing the world to simplistic binary categories of 'identity'."¹⁶¹ Queer feminist durationality would therefore be attentive to the absences in art historical discourse as feminist interventions in the field have pointed out, while acknowledging the unstable nature of identity, as in queerness, and the ways in which the temporal nature of identification structures the viewer's understanding of art. In the context of both JJ Levine and Charlotte Haslund-Christensen's series, it is useful to understand how their readings shift based on the viewer's own responses to the images. While my readings, which are bound to queer politics and photographic history, point towards one conclusion, I do recognise other possible or alternative understandings of their work.

As well, representation, particularly within the visual field, is not always desirable and in fact can put the individual at risk. As Peggy Phelan notes in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, representation itself is flawed in that it can never truly produce the real; rather, representation "always conveys more than it intends; and it is never totalizing."¹⁶² It is not simply a dynamic between the subject and the object, with one "recognising" or perceiving the other; it also involves the subject projecting difference onto the "Other," which is intrinsically

¹⁶⁰ Jones, *Seeing Differently*, 178.

¹⁶¹ Jones, *Seeing Differently*, 236.

¹⁶² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 2.

tioned to relations of power. In being made visible, the other becomes marked by difference. Phelan points out that there is power in remaining unmarked by the dominant: “the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal.”¹⁶³ She takes this a step further, invoking Lacan when she notes: “[v]isibility is a trap [...] it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession.”¹⁶⁴ However, visibility can also be politically seductive. She continues: “Yet it retains a certain political appeal. Visibility politics have practical consequences; a line can be drawn between a practice (getting someone seen or read) and a theory (if you are seen it is harder for ‘them’ to ignore you, to construct a punitive canon); the two can be reproductive.”¹⁶⁵ In making oneself visible, while potentially fraught with the possibility of being attacked or repressed, it becomes more difficult for one’s existence to be ignored or overlooked. JJ Levine’s *Queer Portraits* represent this ambivalence of visibility: in welcoming the viewer into their world, the subject is left open to scrutiny.

Of note is the ambivalence through which the domestic interiors of Levine’s portraits can be observed. While, as I argue, they can be conceived of as heterotopic spaces of queer world making, they can alternately be viewed through the perspective of consumption and self-presentation precisely because of the constructed nature of the photographs. The photographs are framed to include specific objects such as furniture, knick-knacks, clothing, photographs, and posters, and in doing so links the materiality of the lived environment to the sitter. This presupposes there is an audience that will and can identify the objects being seen and link them to various aspects of the sitter’s personality and identity. What remains invisible in this dynamic is the labour that was employed to create those objects, the labour that it took to purchase those objects, and how this defines the economic and social positions of the individual in each photograph. Given that *Queer Portraits* exists from a marginal perspective, questions around socio-economic status and precarious labour should be acknowledged, even though they may be outside the scope of this thesis.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 6

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 7

From a leftist, anti-capitalist perspective of theorists such as Duggan, the creation of identity through material objects such as clothing and furniture implicates the individual in the consumptive logics of capitalism. The larger argument for Duggan is concerned less with consumption and more on the “selling out” of identity politics by the progressive left, with its central focus on economic justice and dismantling neoliberalism in all its instantiations, in contrast to the rightward drift of mainstream LGBT rights organisations.¹⁶⁶ The problem with this form of queer political critique is that it inherently positions queer activism as outside, and counter to, capitalism, rather than being inculcated in the logics of neoliberalism and capitalism just as normativity is. It is all well and good to be critical of the ways in which consumer culture, the deteriorating social safety network, and laissez-faire capitalism have destroyed the promises of New Deal economic policy, but to position this form of leftist queer politics as outside ignores the ways in which it is dependent on and complicit in the logics of capitalism itself. For example, Duggan’s book was only available to an academic audience precisely because of the marketing and production capabilities of her publisher.¹⁶⁷

We must also be attentive to the political and historical location from which Duggan was writing her text. *The Twilight of Equality?* was released shortly after 9/11, before the 2008 market crash and subsequent imposition of austerity by western governments under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The aim of her work was to expose the “split within the progressive-left between so-called identity and cultural politics on the one side, and the mutating contemporary forms of left universalism, economism, and populism, on the other,” which has led to the fragmentation of identity politics within social movements.¹⁶⁸

Duggan notes that this split:

[C]alls for expansive democratic publicness, *combined* with arguments for forms of individual and group autonomy, attempt to redefine *equality, freedom, justice, and democracy* in ways that exceed their limited (neo)liberal meanings. They gesture away

¹⁶⁶ Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, xvi-xix.

¹⁶⁷ Interestingly enough, Duggan makes a similar criticism of Naomi Klein and how anti-corporate activism can easily be absorbed into corporate agendas (for example, through publishing contracts) and how Klein is not reflexive in her reductivist idea that identity politics groups simply wanted into the halls of power while failing to examine her own role as a journalist and a critic. I find it slightly ironic that Duggan, who is herself an academic within a major institution, points out these flaws in Klein’s work but fails to acknowledge how the same can be said for her own book, despite the clear disparities in reach and distribution between their works. *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

from *privatization* as an alibi for stark inequalities, and away from *personal responsibility* as an abdication of public, collective caretaking.”¹⁶⁹

However, this illustrates problem of how to mobilise these groups in the face of neoliberal opposition and silencing, the vast PR machines of corporations and political action committees. One wonders what Duggan would make of major social movements who have reacted to the failures of neoliberalism, such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and Senator Bernie Sanders run for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States this past year. As I will return to later in this section, the specificity of Duggan’s critique to the United States limits the applicability of her form of queer critique to other countries such as Canada and Denmark, regardless of the forms of neoliberal policies they have implemented.

I also agree with John Potvin’s assertion that Duggan’s reading of capitalism and consumption is far too reductive in its scope. As he states:

Unlike Duggan, I see neither consumption nor the domesticated and, for that matter, the designed interior as by-products of an atomization of queer identity but rather part of a long, proud, and critically absent history of the ways queers have organized their lives, produced meanings through ‘things,’ and forged alternative, creative communities for themselves.¹⁷⁰

While material objects are created within systems of production and labour, their uses are not predetermined in advance. For queers, as Potvin notes, these objects and the interiors in which they are placed represent spaces of possibility, tableaux onto which one can enact their identity away from the homophobic, exterior world. Objects and interiors, as much as they may represent purchasing power and social status, can also be subverted, shaped, and used in ways unexpected.

Lige Nu (Right Now)

On 4 June 2015, the exhibition *Lige Nu (Right Now)* opened in the courtyard in front of the *Folketing (Parliament)* at Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen [Figure 13]. Staged as a part of the centenary celebration of amendments to the Danish Constitution that gave women the right to vote and stand for election, *Lige Nu* featured works by five photographers, each addressing questions of equality and social justice in Denmark. Playing out in the background of the exhibition's opening was the Danish parliamentary election in which the left-red bloc was swept

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁷⁰ Potvin, “The Pink Elephant in the Room,” 8.

from power, and replaced by the blue-right bloc with the support of the far-right Danish People's Party. The ironic juxtaposition of an exhibition celebrating key tenets of human rights in Denmark sponsored by the outgoing culture minister with an incoming government supported by the xenophobic far right, can hardly be understated.

In the context of this thesis, *Lige Nu* represents an alternative form of social solidarity as exemplified through curatorial intention. A pared down version of Charlotte Haslund-Christensen's *WHO'S NEXT?* was included in the exhibition with the included images selected by the artist.¹⁷¹ *Lige Nu* was first staged in the Rigsdag Courtyard in front of the *Folketing*, though it was also conceived of as a travelling exhibition. Over the subsequent months it was also shown in various locations across Denmark, including Allinge, Århus, Odense, and Ålborg, before ending in Esbjerg on the western coast of Jylland in October.¹⁷² The accompanying websites and press releases all stressed that the exhibition both represented a celebration of the expansion of voting rights to women, among other constituencies, while also serving as a timely reminder of the role that active participation plays in Danish democracy. The official website for the anniversary, created by the Ministry for Children, Equality, Integration and Social Affairs, states:

The debate today is not only about the right to vote and securing democratic rights, it is also about everyday life – work, spare time, and family. The 100th anniversary helps to remind us that we must continue to strengthen and develop our democratic system. Where the gender equality debate in Denmark historically began as a fight for women's basic rights, today it is about women and men's equal opportunities to influence their own lives and participate in the society. This, in turn, creates a democratic society where all human resources [sic] are put into play.¹⁷³

The exhibition, created at the behest of the Ministry for Culture, responded to these questions of democratic participation and civil rights through the works that were included. Five major themes were outlined in *Lige Nu: Deltagelse (Participation)*, *Fællesskab (Fellowship)*, *Ildsjæle (Activists)*, *Ligestilling (Equal Rights)*, and *Rettigheder (Equality)*.¹⁷⁴ Each theme was assigned to a photographer, who responded with a photo series that addressed different aspects of

¹⁷¹ Haslund-Christensen has noted that officials from the Folketing wanted specific images of public figures to be included but she resisted out of fear that they may draw attention away from the message of the work. Interview with the artist, 24 August 2015.

¹⁷² Torstensen, Lone, "The Danish Parliament opens a photo exhibition," *Folketinget*, 4 June 2015, <http://www.thedanishparliament.dk/News/2015/06/photos.aspx>.

¹⁷³ "The 100th Anniversary," *100 året*, 15 January 2015, accessed 15 October 2015, <http://www.100aaret.dk/en/>

¹⁷⁴ Torstensen, "The Danish Parliament opens a photo exhibition," n.pag.

contemporary Danish society.¹⁷⁵ For example, under the theme of *Participation*, Sofie Amalie Klougart's images depicts asylum seekers at the Hyttebyen centre in Hjørring. The photographs document their day-to-day experience as they wait to hear the status of their applications to stay in Denmark [Figure 19]. Under the theme of *Fellowship*, Lærke Posselt's series depicts some of the different family formations present in contemporary Danish society. As noted in her artist statement, the Danish government recognises thirty-seven different family configurations from those headed by single parents, to blended families, interracial, and gay/lesbian households [Figure 20].¹⁷⁶

What is important to acknowledge is how the exhibition positions the works as a reflection of contemporary Danish society, calling the audience to question how equality and human rights are exercised in Denmark. As the exhibition's press release states:

Denmark took a great step forward with regard to social equality 100 years ago. We gained a new Constitutional Act, which ensured in earnest that representative government came closer to the ideal of genuine democracy. A number of ACTIVISTS, who refused to accept the idea that democracy was limited to so few people, headed the movement to amend the Constitutional Act. They wanted many more people to have equal RIGHTS and an equal opportunity to influence political decisions. The constitutional amendment of 1915 created greater EQUALITY between men and women as well as among various groups of the population. Women were included in the democratic process as were servants and others who were not householders. The number of people entitled to vote grew from 17.5 to 40.7 per cent of the population. More people were able to PARTICIPATE in and enjoy the benefits of democracy. It is this enlargement of our FELLOWSHIP, from the few to the many that we are celebrating in 2015. But how far have we come today? Are Danes equal now? Here and Now?¹⁷⁷

Within the rhetoric of the exhibition, the concluding statement, "Are Danes equal now? Here and Now?" is a lot less definitive than what one may be tempted to read it as. Rather than position Danish democracy as a beacon of openness and tolerance, it calls upon the viewer to question the structural inequalities in Danish society, particularly in relation to the artworks shown in the exhibition.

¹⁷⁵ According to the exhibition's academic consultant, Professor Mette Sandbye from the University of Copenhagen, the artists were selected based on a list of proposals from communications personnel in the *Folketing* and based on her own expertise in contemporary Danish photography. Sandbye, e-mail to the author, 12 December 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Also included were works by Maria Fonfara under the theme of *Activists*, which looked at volunteerism in Denmark, and under the theme of *Rights*, Kent Klich's work examined homelessness in Denmark See: *Lige Nu*, accessed 12 November 2015, <http://www.ligenu2015.dk/en>.

¹⁷⁷ Torstensen, n.pag.

Haslund-Christensen's *WHO'S NEXT?* was included in a truncated form under the theme of *Equal Rights*. A large didactic panel was placed alongside her photographs [Figures 21-22], containing a portion of her artist statement as well as the well-known poem, "First they came for the communists..." by Pastor Martin Niemöller, from which the series title takes its inspiration.¹⁷⁸ In transposing Niemöller's poem into the context of contemporary Danish society, the artist provokes LGBT Danes to stand in solidarity with queer communities elsewhere and reminds viewers of the dangers of complacency. A brief excerpt from the end of Haslund-Christensen's artist statement affirms this:

Homosexuality has been permitted in Denmark since 1930 but was only removed from the state register of psychiatric disorders in 1981. Being transgender is still on the official list of psychiatric diagnoses. Homosexuality is still illegal in 78 countries in the world, and homophobic hate crimes are committed almost daily in Denmark.¹⁷⁹

Through the invocation of repressive state power as it exists today, her work is as much a warning against complacency in the socially liberal environs of Denmark as it is a plea for solidarity amongst different social groups that make up Danish society.

However, when attempting to reconcile this form of solidarity politics to contemporary queer theory, I am inevitably left with a number of questions: How can queer theory be conceived of within a left-right political spectrum? What role does it have in political praxis? In the rush to critique and disassemble the superstructures that uphold white heteronormativity as the social default, does queer theory inadvertently cast the normative as ethically suspect and allied to the political right-wing? With the emergence of queer theory in the early 1990s, a number of scholars focused on the intersectional possibilities of queerness that were attuned to other valences of oppression, including class, gender, and race. As Teresa de Lauretis noted "the term 'Queer Theory' was arrived at in the effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them – or at the very least, problematize them."¹⁸⁰ Queer theory's promise was not in its refusal to ascribe to identitarian categorizations,

¹⁷⁸ The exhibition's academic consultant and the communications officers of the *Folketing* selected Haslund-Christensen's work for the exhibition. The artist also mentioned in our interview that her desire to use the Niemöller's poem as a part of the project occurred from its earliest instantiations. Interview with the artist, 24 August, 2015.

¹⁷⁹ *LigeNu.Dk*, n.pag.

¹⁸⁰ De Lauretis, "Queer Theory," v.

but rather its ability to trouble or “queer” the very epistemic foundations of those categories. Thus, the political potential for queer theory in praxis lay in its potentiality for forming the basis of coalitional politics built upon identifying *with* a cause or a goal, as opposed to identifying *as* a social category.

Annamarie Jagose notes that de Lauretis’ formulations on queer theory postulate it as something emergent rather than fully formed and present: “*Queer theory* is the name for a theory to come. It does not describe a substantive or even specifiable analytic schema, but is invocational, gesturing toward the possibility of its own future emergence.”¹⁸¹ Therefore, the foundational document that signalled the arrival of queer theory was predicated on the future possibility of an expansive scope of social and political enquiry that would supersede its origins in queerness as sexuality. Likewise, Warner points towards the tendency of certain forms of coalitional politics to be frequently focused on the idea of “common ground,” which he notes “has been assumed to be that of relatively dominant positions: whites, males, and middle-class activists of the United States.”¹⁸² In comparison, queer theory’s aspirations were firmly aimed at avoiding that trap. In shifting away from the identity label of gay towards queer, it represents, “among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal.”¹⁸³ The power of this disavowal of “regimes of the normal” means that queer protest and queer methodology relies on not only questioning the central figure of normativity, but also challenging the very basis of its foundation.¹⁸⁴

Judith Butler focuses in on the term queer and its political efficacy at any given moment. She states:

If the term “queer” is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflection and future imaginings, it will have to remain that which it is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes.¹⁸⁵

For Butler, the field that queer theory attempts to stake out is contingent on its temporal location in the present, and we can therefore never anticipate what terms may become in the future. Queer

¹⁸¹ Jagose, “The Trouble with Antinormativity,” 30.

¹⁸² Warner, “Introduction,” xvi.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

¹⁸⁵ Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ* 1, no. 1 (1993): 19.

may have to accede to new and different modes of thinking and doing, yet we cannot fully anticipate what those in fact may be.

Turning to the contemporary moment, the vitality of queer theory as both method and praxis is very much up in the air. Both Annamarie Jagose and Jasbir Puar have been critical of queer theory's uptake, but for different reasons. In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Puar locates homonationalism as a form of sexual exceptionalism in which queer individuals are incorporated into the western nation state, as a way to cordon off sexual citizenship to those bodies who are properly defined as belonging, and thus demarcating those bodies which do not. Puar defines sexual exceptionalism as follows:

At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism—the emergence of national homosexuality, what I term ‘homonationalism’—that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of the American empire. Further, this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects.¹⁸⁶

This opposition falls between white, secular hetero- and homosexuals, and those racialized bodies who are placed under the frame of homophobia and religious extremism. As she observes, the result is that queer Muslims are caught between religious communities, which are designated as homophobic, and queer secularism with its attendant racism.¹⁸⁷ However, Puar provides two major caveats with this formulation: one, homonationalism does not deny the daily existence of the violence queer people face; and two, homonationalism is not a homogenous force. Rather, homonationalisms “are partial, fragmentary, uneven formations, implicated in the pendular momentum of inclusion and exclusion, some dissipating as quickly as they appear.”¹⁸⁸

Puar further expands upon homonationalism, noting that it is not a form of white secularism, but is in fact inculcated with Christian values, thus placing itself in opposition to Islam. Moreover the “standard refrain” by which queer scholars position queerness as “inherently an outlaw to the nation-state,” is, in fact, false.¹⁸⁹ Puar positions queerness not outside, or in opposition to the western (neo)liberal nation-state, but rather within its discursive

¹⁸⁶ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Jasbir Puar, “Homonationalism As Assemblage: Viral Travels, Affective Sexualities,” *Jindal Global Law Review* 4, no. 2 (November 2013): 24.

frame; therefore it cannot divorce itself from that which it places under the frame of homonormativity or gay/lesbian social integration. Returning to *Lige Nu*, the inclusion of Haslund-Christensen's work can, on the surface, read as homonationalism in praxis. In linking LGBTQ rights to immigration, the family, and broader social issues such as homelessness, the rhetoric of the exhibition reads as one of promoting the Danish state as striving towards egalitarianism and equality. In asking, "Are Danes equal now? Here and now?" the exhibition asks the viewer to reflect on whether disparate minority groups have been successfully integrated under the sign of Danish identity and nationalism.

However, this does not address the overtly political nature of the exhibition itself. Haslund-Christensen has stated that in the process of selecting images from *WHO'S NEXT?*, she decided against including the image of Uffe Elbæk, leader of centre-left *Alternativet* [Figure 23].¹⁹⁰ Had his image been included it could have been taken as an endorsement of his candidacy in the elections that concluded during the exhibition's run. She further asserts that the crowds who visited the exhibition in the run-up to the election perceived the exhibition as being part of the political propaganda of the outgoing government, and had the weather been more cooperative on the day the election was held, the announcement of the results would have taken place across the *Riksdag* courtyard from *Lige Nu*, on the steps of the *Folketing*.¹⁹¹ The problem that I have with reading the exhibition as an exercise in homonationalism is that there is the assumption that it promotes Denmark as being at the forefront of LGBTQ rights. If we are to take the ambivalence of the curatorial statement at face value, it can be viewed as a critical interjection into the Danish political scene and a warning of extremism on either side of the political spectrum, rather than a promotion of Denmark as a queer utopia.¹⁹²

Annamarie Jagose is similarly critical of the impulse towards antinormativity in political orientations that queer theorists such as Duggan and Puar stake out. As she pointedly observes, the quick uptake of queer theory by those on the political left was caused precisely because of its

¹⁹⁰ Interview with the artist, 24 August, 2015.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Of note: at the time I visited the exhibition in August 2015 Copenhagen Pride was also being held. As part of the cultural programming, a series of debates were held, in English and Danish, looking at the state of LGBTQ rights in Denmark and around the world. Activists from Uganda, Kenya, and Pakistan were invited to participate, and a debates about homonationalism and pinkwashing were included. See: "Programm for Copenhagen Pride Week: 11 – 16 August," *Out and About* (August 2015): 38-46.

positioning of antinormative as being in opposition to heteropatriarchy and neoliberalism.¹⁹³ For Jagose, “[t]hese days it almost goes without saying that queer is conventionally understood to mean ‘antinormative,’ as can be seen in the thumbnail definitions that manage to insist, despite being whittled down to epistemological minimalism, on the primacy of queer’s opposition to normativity.”¹⁹⁴ While the antinormative wills towards a shattering of the superstructures that uphold heteronormativity, it has inadvertently become its own subject formation, its own style, its own ethics, and is just as prescriptive as normativity itself. Antinormativity has been constituted as an identity formation in its positioning in opposition to normativity and thus has become a victim of its own theoretical trappings.

From a theoretical standpoint, the binary that is created reinforces the divisions between what is considered normative and what is not, and represents failure to impact the social structures that uphold white heterosexist patriarchy. In creating an alternative, antinormative space, the normative is inadvertently reinforced, rather than being deconstructed. Tangible evidence of this can be found in the ways that queerness has been extended into the social and political sphere outside of academia. Examples include activist organisations such as the Pink Bloc and Queers Against Israeli Apartheid making very bold interjections into pride celebrations in Montreal and Toronto; alternative spaces and parties being created outside traditional gay villages, aimed at queer people of colour and trans communities; and arts, film, and political events such as *Pervers/cité* and *Radical Queer Semaine* in Montreal and *Copenhagen Queer Festival* and *MIX Copenhagen* existing as venues for activism, safer spaces for those marginalised in the gay and lesbian mainstream, and spaces for experimental film and art. By no means am I criticising these cultural and social instantiations of marginal communities; rather, I

¹⁹³ In the Scandinavian context, both Mathias Danbolt and Agnes Bolsø note how the leftist political elite and media proclaimed the death of queer theory in Norway, particularly between 2007 and 2010. Bolsø in particular explains that this was in large a reaction against the anti-essentialism of queer theory. Rather, the gay left has been driven by more pragmatic concerns around campaigns for physical and mental health and equality, which in large part rely on statistical data to coordinate governmental responses to homophobia and bias in bureaucratic institutions. The problem, she states, is that this has the effect of casting gays and lesbians a “victims” in need of saving by the benevolence of the Norwegian welfare state. While this example is specific to Norway, this is but one example of how queer’s antinormative stance is not necessarily taken up wholesale by the left in Scandinavia. See: Agnes Bolsø, “Mission Accomplished? Gay Elitism and the Constant Misery of a Minority.” *Trikster: Nordic Queer Journal* 1 (2008): n.pag. Mathias Danbolt, *Touching History: Art, Performance, and Politics in Queer Times* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bergen, 2010).

¹⁹⁴ Jagose, “The Trouble with Antinormativity,” 26.

wish to illustrate the ways that queer communities have created alternative spaces outside of, and in opposition to, the gay and lesbian mainstream that is viewed as oppressive and assimilationist.

Returning to Jagose's critiques of queer theory, she notes that in the rush to reject normativity, queer theorists have ignored the precise ways in which the normative functions not as the default: "norms are less something either to be proprietarily laid hold of or rejected than enabling switchpoints for a modern sexuality that routes itself through bodies, both individual and en masse."¹⁹⁵ In effect, it is these norms that enable sexuality to exist in the first place, as opposed to acting as constraints around specific ontological formations. What Jagose calls for is a critical genealogy of queer theory's foundational tenets, with particular attention paid to the centrality of the antinormative.

Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson are similarly critical of queer theory for its positioning of normativity as a hegemonic, unitary force. As they note: "The difficulty, as we see it, is that antinormative arguments—entrenched or *en passant*—tend to immobilize the activity of norms. By transmogrifying norms into rules and imperatives, antinormative stances dislodge a politics of motility and relationality in favour of a politics of insubordination."¹⁹⁶ The result is that queer theory's antinormative bent ignores the dynamic way in which normativity functions not as a complex, diverse series of social connections. For them, normativity is not necessarily the undergirding rule or hegemony by which heteropatriarchy is upheld as *the* default, but rather it is a median by which all social relations, even those on the margins, are compared and contrasted. Wiegman and Wilson conclude, "[i]n imagining the norm as a device that divides the world into centers and peripheries, antinormativity misses what is most engaging about a norm: that in collating the world, it gathers up everything. It transverses networks of differentiation; it values everything; it plays."¹⁹⁷ Antinormativity, therefore, has the potential to blind queer critical thought to the multiplicities of subject and social formations that are otherwise relegated to the normative. The centrality of antinormativity to the queer theoretical project reproduces precisely what it aspires to deconstruct: dichotomies and oppositions.

In sketching out these theoretical positions, my aim is to bring to light the disconnect that exists between queer theory and the lived experiences of those it purports to study and represent.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹⁶ Wiegman and Wilson, "Introduction," 14.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 17.

Jens Rydström notes in *Odd Couples: A History of Gay Marriage in Scandinavia* that as LGBTQ people gain social and political recognition, there is a specific price to be paid. While there are benefits of marriage for same-sex couples, including such things as inheritance rights and pensions, “the price for official recognition is a loss of cultural diversity and political significance. The more lesbians and gays become a part of the majority culture’s value system, the harder it is for them to criticize it.”¹⁹⁸ Assimilation and homogenisation are part and parcel of moving out of the shadows and into the political mainstream. While I might be tempted to return to Duggan’s warning of domestic hell, Rydström also points out another facet of the gay marriage debate that is little discussed in contemporary queer theory: that the debate has been formulated primarily from an American context, though the arguments being put forward mirror debates that had previously occurred in Europe.¹⁹⁹ Much like Duggan’s formulations around gay complicity in neoliberalism come from a U.S. perspective, Puar’s conception of homonationalism is similarly Anglo-American in focus. The lack of criticality that both Duggan and Puar bring to their social locations within the United States is problematic and deserves more critical attention. However, as Rydström points out, queer activism’s efforts “focus primarily on the loss of solidarity with other oppressed groups and criticize gay marriage for being a gay male middle-class project. One argument is that the political campaign for marriage takes activists’ time and energy away from other pressing issues such as health care and solidarity.”²⁰⁰ While it is easy to pick apart arguments against equal rights and to shun queers who decide to get married, it is much more difficult to work in solidarity with communities that are marginalised and otherwise silenced. Asserting hierarchies in which queer activism is placed as the top and “bad” queers as less than, assimilationist, or in collusion with neoliberalism, the result is shutting down of dialogue, discussion, and debate.

In returning to the position of Haslund-Christensen’s work in *Lige Nu*, it is this formation of solidarity across different points in the social world that is important to acknowledge. While one may be critical of the political intentions behind the exhibition, the warning behind *WHO’S NEXT?* is quite powerful in this respect. While queers have been given civil rights and in many respects are socially accepted, this does not represent a logical endgame in the fight for

¹⁹⁸ Jens Rydström, *Odd Couples: A History of Gay Marriage in Scandinavia* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2011), 14.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

liberation. Liberation occurs when everyone is free, and this means continuing to fight for others who have not been afforded the same rights and freedoms such as immigrants and asylum seekers. This political promise that originally appeared as part of queer theory appears to have never crossed over into political praxis. Matt Evans and Jennifer Cook point out this clear divide in “(Dis)ordering Queer Europe”:

It can be easier to fight for rights and equalities for a defined group of lesbians and gays than an amorphous band of queers. The former categorization can also more readily link to an international struggle. Queer can, meanwhile, seem rarified or trendy, better suited to the hallowed halls of academe or in the youth-oriented and increasingly commercialized ‘scene’.²⁰¹

Similar to what Jagose, Wiegman and Wilson argue, Evans and Cook point to the problems with queer theory as a whole: its lack of reflexivity. In my opinion, there is no either/or: queers can still get married and actively work towards making society a better place for immigrants, for women, for the multiplicity of identities that exist outside of white heteronormative patriarchy. Rather, there needs to be a movement to bridge the gap between the intellectual world of academia and the social world of activism.

²⁰¹ Matt Cook and Jennifer Evans, “Introduction: (Dis)ordering Queer Europe,” in *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945*, eds. Cook and Evans (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3.

Conclusion: “We Exist”

They’re walking around
Head full of sound
Acting like
We don’t exist
They walk in the room
And stare right through you
Talking like
We don’t exist
But we exist – Arcade Fire, “We Exist”²⁰²

As I sat down to formulate my thinking for this thesis, and in particular how to address the problem of giving it a title, I continually returned to the song “We Exist” from the Montreal-based band Arcade Fire’s fourth album, *Reflektor*. Music has always served as a catalyst for my thinking and I would be remiss if I did not take the opportunity to acknowledge this song as a point of inspiration for some of the questions I have posed over the two parts herein. “We Exist” centres on a conversation between a father and his gay son and explores homophobic undercurrents in contemporary society, particularly in relation to organised religion.²⁰³ While the accompanying music video has subsequently been derided for its casting of cisgender actor Andrew Garfield in a trans* role, and I by no means wish to speak to that controversy or to dismiss or diminish those criticisms, I do want to highlight something quite interesting within the lyrical context of the song. In its powerful invocation of the words “We Exist,” the song plays on the ambivalence of asserting one’s (queer) identity in the face of a homophobic society that would rather prefer the individual remain silent, or simply not exist. The declarative power of saying aloud that one exists can be explicitly linked to the assertions made in *WHO’S NEXT?* and *Queer Portraits*. The latter exemplifies the act of taking social space for oneself and one’s queer network, while the former explicitly reminds the (queer) viewer that political and legal rights can easily be taken away. Both projects speak towards the idea that solidarity among

²⁰² Arcade Fire, “We Exist.”

²⁰³ In an interview with *The Advocate* Win Butler, the lead singer and songwriter for Arcade Fire, notes that he wrote the song in reaction to his experiences in Jamaica, where he was able to meet with gay youth who had experienced these forms of violence and erasure based on their sexuality on a daily basis. Lucas Grindley, “Arcade Fire Interview: ‘We Exist’ Sends Message to the Mainstream,” *Advocate.com*, 24 May 2014, <http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/music/2014/05/24/arcade-fire-interview-we-exist-sends-message-mainstream>.

different communities and constituencies in the face of a world that would rather they not exist is more than desirable: *it is vital*.

Judith Butler speaks to the relationship between the speech act and the formation of the subject. She takes stock of the reality that language can be injurious to the subject, and queries why this is such. Butler states:

One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call.²⁰⁴

While the possibility of being marked out as different, and therefore opening oneself up to the possibility of verbal and physical violence marks the first part of this claim, much in the same way that Phelan speaks of the power of remaining unmarked, Butler's assertion that such marking of difference through language allows for "a certain possibility for social existence" is intriguing. What Butler is pointing to is the gesture by which the subject is brought into being: by being referred to in specific, and in this case derogatory, terms, the individual is marked out as existing as "the other." Furthermore, she explains that "[l]anguage sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a liberal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible."²⁰⁵ Butler places weight on this act of verbal recognition precisely because in order for the individual to function within a matrix of social relations, one needs to be brought into existence as "the other": "One comes to 'exist' by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*."²⁰⁶ Within this context, asserting one's existence using those injurious terms, one has the ability to subvert and perform that "otherness" as a political action. In effect, in stating that "We Exist" and taking on the mantle "queer," queer subjects push back and make space for themselves where they otherwise would remain silent.

What ultimately struck me most while engaging in my research is that the more I read, the more I spoke with people, and the more I broached these questions of representation, the

²⁰⁴ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

further away I found myself from any sort of resolution. The ways in which photographic portraiture functions on a social and metonymic level expose how photography is problematic as a form of visual communication: it runs the risk of (mis)representing the subject. Putting the question of linguistic specificity aside, I am intrigued in the ways that queer theory and queerness have circulated among different countries and the role that photography has played in promoting cross-cultural connections that might otherwise not exist. Returning to the exhibition which opened this thesis, *Gay Greenland*, its rhetorical function was not simply to argue for the existence of gay people in Greenland and to fold them into the social life of the country – rather, its power is gained through the recognition both inside and outside the country that LGBTQ people do exist and that they assert their identities in terms that can be understood in a transnational context. Queerness itself, though constricted and confined within the frame of western neoliberalism, has also expanded across borders through international tourism campaigns targeted at LGBTQ people, through gay pride celebrations, through viral media, and through the advocacy of organizations such as the Nordic Council of Ministers.

However, the act of recognition, as understood within the visual field, is not simply predicated on the circulation of images or individuals. Rather, the dynamic between subject and viewer is inherently caught up within this interplay of (mis)representation. In looking at the two case studies presented here, the act of recognition is a continuing dynamic that is inherently tied to social, cultural, and geographical context. For example, Haslund-Christensen featured a number of public figures in her work, including Uffe Elbæk [Figure 23]. While viewers outside of Denmark would most likely not recognise his face, many of the more politically attuned Danes would recognise him as the former culture minister under Helle Thorning-Schmidt's red/left bloc, and current leader of *Alternativet*. Elbæk in particular has acted as one of the more prominent opposition voices in the current parliament, reacting against the xenophobic rhetoric emanating from both sides of the political spectrum in Denmark.²⁰⁷ While one may be tempted to link Elbæk and his politically progressive stance on refugees to the promises of social solidarity represented by *Lige Nu*, once his image, and many of those in *WHO'S NEXT?* are removed from

²⁰⁷ Elbæk has been interviewed a number of times on the issue and published op-eds in a number of Denmark's periodicals. A key example, in which he calls for a shift in thinking towards a diverse Denmark based on solidarity amongst different communities, was released in July 2014. See: Uffe Elbæk, "I'm Sick and Tired of the Immigration Debate": MP," *TheLocal.Dk*, 8 July 2014, <http://www.thelocal.dk/20140708/im-sick-and-tired-of-the-immigration-debate-mp>.

their social context, they lose those multiple valences of meaning, those complexities of context. The same can be said for *Queer Portraits*. Included in the series is musician and author Rae Spoon, who over the last two years has become well known for both their music and the documentary *My Prairie Home*, which premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival [Figure 24]. As well, many of the individuals who participated in the project are active members of the queer community in Montreal and I have met a number of them on several occasions. While my own association with many of these people is only through brief acquaintances or tangential social connexions, I still recognise them precisely because of my own situated-ness within this particular artistic and activist milieu. When Levine's work circulates and is exhibited outside of Montreal, that act of recognition is all but foreclosed, save perhaps the image of Rae.

Returning to the idea of risk, a question was posed to me by Alice Ming Wai Jim about the risk of recognition. For example, what would happen if a border guard recognised Haslund-Christensen's photo box as it was entering a country? What would they think of the images that are very clearly representative of mugshots? What would happen if an official were to Google the project or artist's name, both of which are printed on the shiny black surface of the box? The simple answer is: I do not know. Haslund-Christensen stated in our interview that although some of the participants were nervous, they still travelled with the box to number of places where it is unsafe to publicly identify as LGBTQ.²⁰⁸ According to her, the box yet to cause a problem for its carrier. Given that the project is on going, there is a possibility that this may change in the future. A similar question can be posed when looking at how images circulate, either in print or via the Internet: what happens when they are misrepresented? What happens when they are no longer legible to specific audiences, where the social is stripped away and the faces staring back come to stand in solely as markers of queerness? Inevitably this is the risk that one faces when asserting identity, in choosing to move from the unmarked to the marked, from ephemera into permanence, from invisible to visible. This does not preclude a shift back to invisibility based upon factors such as social context, perceived dangers of being open, or a personal desire to remain hidden. This is a dynamic, continuing process.

²⁰⁸ The photo box has visited countries including Iraq, Morocco, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, China, Egypt, Dominican Republic, Swaziland, Ghana, South Sudan, and Afghanistan, which have varying laws repressing and punishing LGBTQ individuals. Interview with the artist, 24 August, 2015.

As I leave this thesis and move onto my doctoral research, I am left with a number of unexplored avenues of research. One major question I have been contemplating is whether there are forms of transnational queer identities and if so, what are the dynamics at play? While I cannot even begin to answer this question, I have an intriguing starting point to launch into my new research. Other questions include: are LGBTQ identities homogenised through the intersection of globalisation and cultural exchanges, or are these terms taken up in various ways and made local? What impact do migration, urbanisation, and globalisation have on how cultural producers self-identify as well as their artistic production? It is my hypothesis that there are a number of dynamics at play, on a geopolitical, cultural, and localised level, that are causing queerness to be shaped, changed, and reworked in ways that have yet to be seriously discussed in critical literature. While a number of scholars look at LGBT communities in Asia and Africa, the dynamics in the Nordic region do not receive the same attention.²⁰⁹ Returning to the case studies discussed herein, I want to conclude with a brief reference back to José Esteban Muñoz' concept of ephemera. *Queer Portraits* and *WHO'S NEXT?* both challenge and reaffirm Muñoz' central thesis: "Queer acts, like queer performances, and various performances of queerness, stand as evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities."²¹⁰ In making queerness visible while simultaneously refusing to reveal *how* they are queer, both photographers subvert the conventions of portraiture, those set on revealing the sitter's identity for all to discover.

²⁰⁹ One major project I have come across being conducted at Södertörn University in Sweden is titled "Queer(y)ing Kinship in the Baltic Region." Researchers Ulrika Dahl (Södertörn), Antu Sorainen (University of Helsinki) and Joanna Mizielińska (Polish Academy of Sciences) are examining questions around queer family ties and legal systems in the Baltic states, which is tangential to my dissertation research. Other scholars working in transnational queer studies include Martin Manalansan, Bobby Benedicto, and Jasbir Puar, to name a few. See: "Queer(y)ing Kinship in the Baltic Region," *Södertörn University | Stockholm*, https://www.sh.se/p3/ext/content.nsf/aget?openagent&key=projekt_page_eng_1383136094044.

²¹⁰ Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 6.

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Appendix



Figure 1. Flag raising at *Norræna húsið*, Reykjavík, Iceland. 8 August 2014. Photograph by the author.



Figure 2. Charlotte Haslund-Christensen, #42, archival ink print, 8 cm x 11 cm, 2009.



Figure 3. WHO'S NEXT? in Morocco. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4. WHO'S NEXT? in Ghana. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5. WHO'S NEXT? in Oslo, Norway. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6. JJ Levine, Jesse, 2010.



Figure 7. JJ Levine, Laura Boo, 2012.



Figure 8. JJ Levine, Zoë, 2012.



Figure 9. JJ Levine, Johnny, 2010.



Figure 10. JJ Levine, Johnny and Želi, 2013.



Figure 11. WHO'S NEXT? at Copenhagen Pride, 2012. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 12. Emily Roysdon, Untitled from Untitled (David Wojnarowicz Project), black and white photograph, 11 x 14 inches, 2001-2007.



Figure 13. Weegee (Arthur Fellig), Transvestite/The Gay Deceiver, gelatin silver print, c.1939 (negative)/1950 (print).

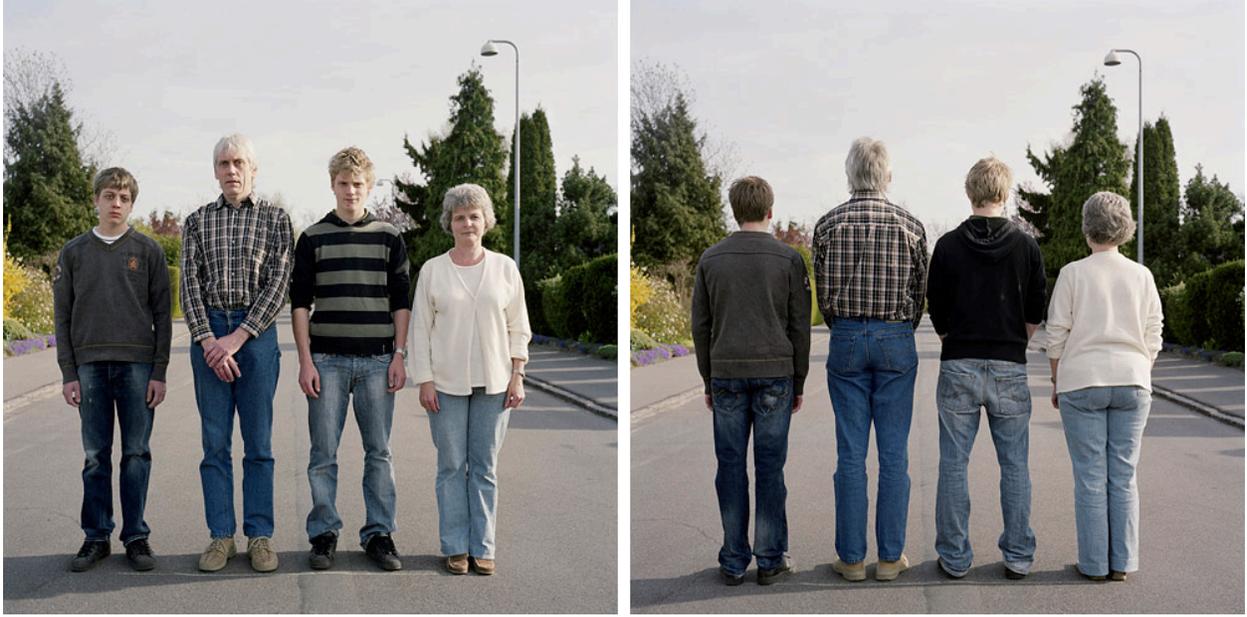


Figure 14. Charlotte Haslund-Christensen, *Natives of Naestved*, archival ink print, 2008.



Figure 15. JJ Levine, Systers Horné, 2012.



Figure 16. JJ Levine, Harry in the tub, 2013.



Figure 17. JJ Levine, Girlfriends, 2012.



Figure 18. Installation view of *Lige Nu*, Rigsdag Courtyard, Christianborg Palace, Copenhagen, Denmark. Image taken by the author, 13 August 2015.



Figure 19. Sofie Amalie Klougart, *Untitled* (from the series for the theme *Participation*), 2014. Image taken from the exhibition's website, *LigeNu2015.dk*.



Figure 20. Lærke Posselt, Mother and Mother with Child Fathered from an Anonymous Donor (from the series for the theme Fellowship), 2014. Image taken from the exhibition's website, LigeNu2015.dk.



Figure 21. Installation view of *WHO'S NEXT?* as a part of *Lige Nu*. Image taken by the author, 13 August 2015.



Figure 23. Charlotte Haslund-Christensen, #10, archival ink print, 8 x 11 cm, 2009. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 24. JJ Levine, Rae, 2012.