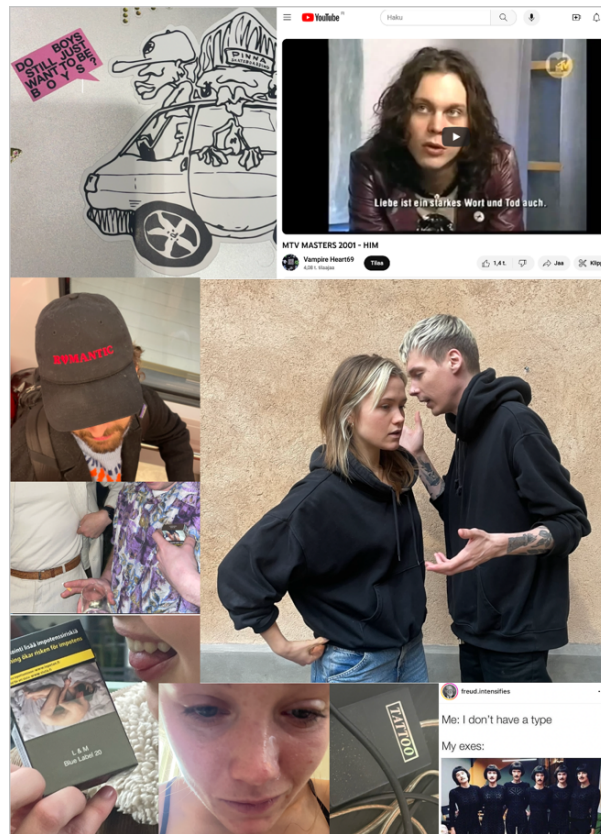


# The Boy Study

## APPENDIX<sup>1</sup> A: THESIS

CORINNE MUSTONEN



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<sup>1</sup> SOMETHING ADDITIONAL, WHETHER IT IS A PHYSICAL ORGAN IN THE BODY, EXTRA MATERIAL IN A BOOK, OR SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION IN A RESEARCH DOCUMENT.

**SAMMANDRAG**

DATUM:

<b>FÖRFATTARE</b> Corinne Mustonen	<b>UTBILDNINGS- ELLER MAGISTERPROGRAM</b> Magisterstudier i Skådespelarkonst (på svenska)
<b>DEN SKRIFTLIGA DELENS/AVHANDLINGENS TITEL</b> The Boy Study - Appendix A: Thesis	<b>DET SKRIFTLIGA ARBETETS SIDANTAL (INKLUSIVE BILAGOR)</b> 58s. + 10s.
<b>DET KONSTNÄRLIGA/ KONSTNÄRLIGT-PEDAGOGISKA ARBETETS TITEL</b> Liisa Pentti +Co & Sirius Teatern: Fraudulent Light – and the Epidemy of Oblivion. Premiere 4/11/2022 Universum teatern, Helsinki  Den konstnärliga delen är en produktion av Teaterhögskolan <input type="checkbox"/> Den konstnärliga delen är inte en produktion av Teaterhögskolan (avtal om upphovsrättigheterna har gjorts) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Det finns ingen inspelning av den konstnärliga delen <input type="checkbox"/>	
<p>I det här lärdomsprovet organiserar jag mina tankar kring att uppträda och mina tankar kring killar (boys).</p> <p>Jag valde det mest uråldrade konceptet jag kunde tänka mig: <i>Boys will be boys</i>. Sedan studerade jag killar i deras naturliga habitat, i romantiska relationer, genom att dejta dem - i en strävan att hitta något lite mer progressivt.</p> <p>Det här lärdomsprovet är ett kollage, en samling citat, texter och essäer, som antingen ingår i, eller kretsar kring en performativ studie om vita cis-män som och identifierar sig som killar.</p> <p>Lärdomsprovet utforskar självpositionering, närhet och direkta påståenden som tekniker och metoder för uppträdande och skapande. Studien leker med alla verktyg tills hands, från flirt till kalkylering. I lärdomsprovet används det engelska språket inte som ett kolonialistiskt och patriarkalt neutralt medel, utan snarare som ett lite rostigt och fjantigt, men ändå formbart verktyg, som böjer sig enligt innehållets önsningar och behov.</p> <p><i>The Boy Study</i> är ett konstnärligt projekt, där jag under 18 månader har dejtat 18 olika killar och skrivit fältanteckningar om hur dejterna gick. I det här lärdomsprovet delar jag med mig några av dessa anteckningar, bland många andra anteckningar, som ett försök att kontextualisera mitt konstnärliga arbete och vad jag har lärt mig under mina studier.</p> <p>Observera att detta inte är <i>The Boy Study</i>, detta är en bilaga till studien, detta är ett lärdomsprov.</p> <p>Men du kommer nog att få en del av kärleken, förlusten, förödmjukelsen, ömheten och de smutsiga dikterna här också.</p>	
<b>ÄMNESORD</b> Performing, art, boys, study,	

**ABSTRACT**

DATE:

<b>AUTHOR</b> Corinne Mustonen	<b>MASTER'S OR OTHER DEGREE PROGRAMME</b> Master in Acting in Swedish
<b>TITLE OF THE WRITTEN COMPONENT/THESIS</b> The Boy Study – Appendix A: Thesis	<b>NUMBER OF PAGES + APPENDICES IN THE WRITTEN COMPONENT</b> E.g. 58 pages + 10 pages
<b>TITLE OF THE ARTISTIC/ ARTISTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL WORK</b> Liisa Pentti +Co & Sirius Teatern: Fraudulent Light – and the Epidemy of Oblivion. Premiere 4/11/2022 Universum, Helsinki.  The artistic work is produced by the Theatre Academy. <input type="checkbox"/> The artistic work is not produced by the Theatre Academy (copyright matters have been agreed upon). <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> There is no recording available for the artistic work. <input type="checkbox"/>	
<p>In this thesis I am organizing my thoughts on performing and my thoughts on boys.</p> <p>I took the most outdated concept that I could imagine: <i>Boys will be boys</i>. I then studied and cross-examined the boys in their most natural habitat, in romantic relations, through dating them - in a quest to find out if there were any more progressive notations to be discovered.</p> <p>This thesis is a collage, a collection of quotations, dialogues, texts and essays that are either included in, or circle around, a performative study on white cis-male adults, that identify as boys. It is investigating methods of positioning oneself, negotiating proximity and making statements, as techniques for performing. It plays with all tools at sight, from flirting to calculating. It neglects the English language as colonially and patriarchally neutral, and rather approaches it as a bit of a silly and rusty, yet malleable, tool, that bends to varying shapes and forms depending on the desires of the content.</p> <p><i>The Boy Study</i> is an artistic project, in which I have during 18 months been dating 18 boys and written field notes on how the dates went. In this thesis, I share some of those notes, among many other notes, as an attempt to contextualize my artistic work and what I have learned throughout my studies.</p> <p>Please note, that this is not <i>The Boy Study</i>, this is an appendix to it, this is a thesis.</p> <p>But you will get some of the love, loss, humiliation, tenderness, and dirty poems here as well.</p>	
<b>KEYWORDS</b> Performing, art, boys, study,	

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## 1. READING GUIDE

### 1.1 Reading guide: How to see and how to sew

*It is a provocative landscape, hard to define and easy to feel.*

*Within the Grand Canyon, I feel my whole body in relationship with Earth; she is laid open and inviting. As I work hard to go deeper, my defenses dissolve, and I am vulnerable and receptive. Receptivity facilitates identification; I often find myself spontaneously identifying with much that I see, and much that I see is absolutely gorgeous.*

*It is powerful medicine, particularly in an age of disembodiment and disenchantment.*

Laura Sewall, Skill of ecological perception. 1999

*In my childhood I was always told that a man can't look like a Christmas tree.  
But then I realized that I'm actually the one with the sewing machine,  
and I can make a man look like a Christmas tree.  
So, I did.*

Juha Vehmaanperä, to me, yesterday.

## 1.2 Reading guide: Author<sup>2</sup>'s note

I have a lot of faith in you as an audience and as a reader. I hope that you have your own agenda for reading this, and your own relation to boys and to art. Feel free to draw any conclusions, that benefit you. In this thesis, true enough<sup>3</sup>, is good enough. And despite your level of interest in boys or in acting, I know that you have experienced the depths of love and loss and work and disease and old coffee and no oat milk and the beautiful spring-specific green and needing to book a hairdresser since May last year and running out of battery and running late and running in to a friend from high school and a grandmother passing away and having a little bit of money left in some back pocket and a smashed banana in your handbag – all, at once. And then you have been organizing that mess, that mess that is life, just as I am in this thesis, organizing, my thoughts on performing and my thoughts on boys.

This thesis won't be clean, it won't always know which direction it is speaking to, it will turn its back to its audience and then it will come so close, that it would lose all tension, had it been performing Shakespeare. It will not highlight what is the most important part or articulate the last word of each sentence. It will often speak too fast and too loud, and whisper and linger when in doubt. It is bothered and disturbed. It starts strong and ends fragile. It will play with all tools at sight, from flirting to calculating. It will neglect the English language as colonially and patriarchally neutral, and rather approach it as a bit rusty, yet malleable, tool, that bends to varying shapes and forms, depending on the desires of the content.

This is a collage, a collection of texts and essays, that are either included in, or circle around, a performative study on boys. It is investigating proximity. How close can you get? And how to get out of there? Where did you leave your self and do you even need to pick it up? Which performance tools to choose to get over a lover with no interest in love, or to graduate from a MA in acting with no interest in acting?

---

<sup>2</sup> Isn't the author already dead since 1967? No but really, this introduction might just be a whimsical rewriting of *La mort de l'auteur*. Barthes, Roland.

<sup>3</sup> Nick Cave talked about this with Sean O'Hagan, when speaking of poetic or metaphorical truth in art. He is so cute these days. Ghosteen is breathtaking,

And if you choose to read it all the way through, I hope you find your self in a state of oscillation that is corporeal rather than rational. I hope you understand less than you do now. Understanding is a way to confirm to rational conceptions that we already find possible<sup>4</sup> - for instance the idea of self as an independent and distinct entity<sup>5</sup> - and I don't think we should want to rely on those conceptions anymore. With the world burning, in various literate and illiterate ways<sup>6</sup> - we can no longer depend on our outdated and preconceived ideas, not in art, not in theater, and not in thesis's for acting.

So, I took the most outdated concept that I could imagine: *Boys will be boys*, and cross-examined the boys, through dating them, in a quest to find something a bit more progressive. My research question is: *Do boys still just want to be boys?*<sup>7</sup>

As I find it more urgent to disobey to other institutions and authorities<sup>8</sup>, than to the format of this thesis in acting; I will bend and I will compromise, I will take you by the hand, I will write in proper English and I will lead you to simple findings, I will write tools for acting and methods for performing. This kind of pedagogic metatalk is not my strongest quality, so feel free to draw parallels to acting and performing wherever you find them. And if this was too easy of a read, too structured and lame, simple and consistent, you can move on to *The Boy Study* in which *everything is written in affect*. But you'll get some of the love, loss, humiliation, tenderness, and dirty poems here as well. As this text is layered, fluffy and crumbles it's totally fine to only lick the cream of the top or to ruthlessly stick your fork straight through the moist core.

Enjoy!

Corinne

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<sup>4</sup> as described in Gilles Deleuze's essay "The Exhausted" in which he speaks of Samuel Beckett's work. He writes about exhausting all possible possibilities and through that get access to new possible possibilities. "Exhausting all possibilities precedes realization."

Also, *The Coming Boogie Woogie*, a glossary and guide published by the MA in Choreography in Stockholm 2012, says: GILLES DELEUZE. (pronunciation zheel dho-looz) "Person to be named as often as you can in performance contexts, speaking about your own work as well as others".

<sup>5</sup> Merriam Webster dictionary: "self is one's own person as distinct from all others".

<sup>6</sup> war, genocide, climate change, the rise of the right-wing politics, global economy about to collapse etc.

<sup>7</sup> This question I first saw on a sticker on a new friend's laptop.

<sup>8</sup> the Israeli State, the Russian State, the U.S Army (and government), the Ba'athist government, the Finnish right-wing government, neo-nazist parties all over Europe, to name a few.



### 1.3 Reading guide: Practically

Excerpts from *The Boy Study* are written in purple.

Quotes are written in blue.

And the black text is me, the author/performer/dancer/actor/writer/commentator, guiding<sup>9</sup> you through this.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.4 Reading guide: Carrierbag

Inspired by *The Carrierbag Theory of Fiction*<sup>11</sup> I invite you to read this thesis as a handbag or pouch filled with small and big remarks. I have gathered thoughts from field notes, essays, conversations, polemic responses, and emails. I write in dialogue<sup>12</sup> with quotes from my friends, my colleagues, my dreams, my mothers<sup>13</sup>, and my idols (artists, philosophers, popstars) between August 2022 and April 2024. Some of the materials appear in their original forms, others I have edited, klippa-klistra<sup>14</sup>, squeezed and lured in to fitting this format.

“...Fiction, however funny, is a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story. In it, as in all fiction, there is room enough to keep even Man where he belongs, in his place in the scheme of things; there is time enough to gather plenty of wild oats and sow them too, and sing to little Oom, and listen to Ool's joke, and watch newts, and still the story isn't over. Still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars. ...

...I'm not telling that story. We've heard it, we've all heard all about all the sticks spears

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<sup>9</sup> still, continuing the tradition of unreliable narrators. “Some Shakespearean characters could also be described as unreliable. Could we trust Hamlet, in his grief and paranoia, to tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth?” Jerico Writers asks the reader. Be cautious.

<sup>10</sup> *I write cursively sporadically, whenever I feel like it fits the mood.*

<sup>11</sup> by Ursula K le Guin. The essay has been central to artistic endeavours since I first heard it at the Carrierbag Festival, organized by the independent dance collective DANSEatelier in Copenhagen 2017.

<sup>12</sup> “Texts are not isolated entities but are interconnected through a network of references, and echoes.” Julia Kristeva on Intertextuality.

<sup>13</sup> birth mother, godmother, grandmothers, dance-moms and other motherly figures

<sup>14</sup> the term for copy-paste, but in Swedish it translates to cut-glue, which is closer to what I have been busy with.

and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news.” Ursula K Le Guin

### 1.5 Reading Guide: Thesis as form<sup>15</sup>

"The essay's innermost formal law is heresy<sup>16</sup>. As heretical, the essay once again becomes a possible form. Heresy is a centrifugal force which drives the work out of all traditional forms; it is a turnover in which content becomes form and vice versa." TW Adorno

I was supposed to write *The boy study* as my thesis. *The Boy Study*<sup>17</sup> is an art project, in which I have during 18 months been dating 18 different kinds of boys<sup>18</sup> and written field notes on exactly how the dates went. When I then tried to reformulate the notes into this thesis I realized that the format and requirements of writing a thesis in acting are too narrow for how performative<sup>19</sup> the study had become and the form it was desiring. The study has required my emotional commitment at all times. As the study evolved, questions of intimacy and proximity got more complicated, as spending time with boys made me question my own gender perception, made me fall in and out of love, and resulted in odd events and long-lasting friendships with many of the boys.

*This study is a literary project, where I deal with questions of proximity and identity through practicing artificial othering in intimate relations with different kinds of boys. I practice that proximity through force-matching the structure of an ethnographic study onto romantic relations, I claim my dairy notes as field notes, and my emotional*

---

<sup>15</sup> a reference to Essay as Form, TW Adorno.

<sup>16</sup> (the act of having) an opinion or belief that is the opposite of or against what is the official or popular opinion, or an action that shows that you have no respect for the official opinion. The Cambridge dictionary.

<sup>17</sup> that I will from now on also refer to as, the study.

<sup>18</sup> see page 25 for definition. bad boys, sad boys, soy boys etc.

<sup>19</sup> uffr tricky task to define performativity in the footnotes. I'll try. Performativity is often misused, at least during my studies at the theatre academy, and referred to as "something that is performed". Within conceptual dance this is frowned upon. During my first semester in dance performance studies, we read Austin, Derrida, and Butler, to understand that performativity is crucial, yet almost impossible to define. Austin referred to performative utterances, back in the days, as words that change and affect the world outside of the words. His classic example is "Will you marry me? Yes". Why I consider *The Boy Study* performative, is that a performative artwork is a work that affects its own medium and therefore changes throughout the process. I often think that after creating or witnessing something performative, I too, have changed. To me, these are the best kinds of performances. This is a very niche definition of the word within contemporary art. In activist circles, "Performative activism" is often used to call out someone for posing, rather than practically doing anything.

*commitment as research material. I wanted to question the positioning of the narrator, and an established understanding of what objective writing is; I wanted to write the truth, not from the outside, but from the inside.*

With the study ongoingly and fiercely intertwining my perception of boys and self, into layered and diverse, previously unimaginable, rhizomatic<sup>20</sup> maps, I also need to re-evaluate its original format. *The Boy Study* is most of all a literary study through which I question norms of accessible language. Through the study, I propose that poetic and associative texts, written in affect, can indeed be relatable and accessible, as they are more similar to the experience of existing as an emotional skinbag<sup>21</sup> than conservative academic rhetoric's<sup>22</sup> or chronological narration is.

“So when people say that poetry is a luxury, or an option, or for the educated middle classes, or that it shouldn't be read in school because it is irrelevant, or any of the strange and stupid things that are said about poetry and its place in our lives, I suspect that the people doing the saying have had things pretty easy. A tough life needs a tough language - and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers - a language powerful enough to say how it is. It isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place.” Jeanette Winterson

I did put all of my efforts into molding *The Boy Study* into this format. I even tried to claim it as an ethnographic study, but as this thesis has to be a proof of what I have learned, acting wise, I eventually realized that the presence of an observing “actor” would destroy my research material, and the juicy and colorful way that *The Boy Study* had informed my writing practice. The boy study is an attempt to write *it*, from many different angles and in many ways, but the aim of the study is not to write *about it*, which is the premise of writing a lärdomsprov<sup>23</sup> in acting. The field notes from *The Boy Study* delve between being the inside eye and the outside eye, always unsure of how and where to position themselves. To say; it was all an act, that the actor has all the time been

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<sup>20</sup> Haraway, Donna. *A Cyborg Manifesto*

<sup>21</sup> human

<sup>22</sup> here I'm referring to a scientific language that aims to be neutral, following a colonial, patriarchal canon. The requirements for a thesis in acting I will address in the next chapter.

<sup>23</sup> Proof of learning. It is called a thesis on Uniarts webpage in English, but these two titles have very different connotations. Despite that, I refer to this lärdomsprov as thesis throughout this thesis.

acting, would be diminishing towards the boys that I have been dating, and towards the potential performativity of the language in the field notes. *The Boy Study* will be published in a less rigorous and boring format elsewhere.

“And in that moment, I was like ooh, I was actually really surprised. I was like, OMG we have a heartbreak album here. And it’s really obvious. And I remember I was like I have two choices to do this, I would either choose to pretend that this was not the case or just go really melodramatic and do what the material wants me to do. And it was a tough choice, and I remember for like two months I couldn’t make up my mind for which way to go, and then in the end I decided ok I’m going to let the material get what it deserves, and at least try to be the best producer and arranger that I can, for this material. And maybe I will suffer as a person for that, because it is more painful for me, and my family, -- but I think I was writing in a sort of a language that I hope was graceful, that it wouldn’t hurt anyone.” Björk <sup>24</sup>

However, this thesis can be read as an appendix to *The Boy Study*; as an addition to it, a guidebook, a behind the scenes collage, a teaser trailer exclusively for people interested in reading about performing or acting<sup>25</sup>. Here you get the best parts of the study, plus a postmodern commentator. At times, this commentator of yours, actor if you want, will rest in the sidelines or rant in the footnotes, because some scenes are for the lights and the sounds and the text and the colleagues and the props and the boys too.

In this thesis, I will use *The Boy Study* to inspect my own methods and tools for acting and performing. I will do it in ways that I am currently busy with as an artist: by positioning myself, by making statements rather than asking questions<sup>26</sup>, and by force-matching seemingly irrelevant topics as a way to find new perspectives. I am trying a method where I don’t separate my artistic values from the contents, but rather trust that they will be informing everything that I write about. I intend to create a small universe

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<sup>24</sup> Björk speaking about returning to songs she had written over the past few years, and only then realizing that she had written a heartbreak album. This had not been her intention. Björk: Sonic Symbolism podcast.

<sup>25</sup> I respect that for some people reading about acting should be reading *thoughts on what acting is or could be*. This expression of me-techniques will not be presented in this thesis. But on page 45, you can find practical tips for actors.

<sup>26</sup> Inspired by Deborah Hay, the queen of questions. She arrived a dark Friday evening in November 2022 to the sports hall at the theater academy, stating: *I have stopped asking questions. I have asked enough.*

of its own, with an internal logic, that demonstrates where I am currently at, and what I have learned throughout my studies, as a performer, dancer, artist, writer, and actor.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. ON PROXIMITY <sup>28</sup>

29

I wrote four guides for reading, as an attempt to position myself. Where I position myself, which canon I come from, which reference I use and which angle I look from, define the way I act and perform. Throughout *The Boy Study* I have been practicing a way of seeing that recognizes that I am inevitably intertwined with my surroundings, bypassing my perceived idea of self, letting me fully engage with what is going on. It is influenced by ecological perception.



“ perceptual practices help us to extend our narrow experience of self and to experience sensuality, intimacy, and identification with the external world. Skillful perception is the practice of intentionally sensing with our eyes, pores, and hearts wide open.

It requires receptivity and the participation of our whole selves, despite the potential pain. It means fully witnessing both the magnificence and destruction of our Earth. It is allowing one's identity and boundaries to be permeable and flexible. I refer to this way of perceiving as ecological perception. Mindfulness and practice brought to the entirety of our sensory experience clearly serve to alter consciousness and behavior. Ecological perception is most essentially the perception of dynamic relationships.” Laura Sewall

I come from contemporary dance, and when I say come from, I mean that I spent 10 years obsessed and mesmerized by dance. I still am. Contemporary dance and

<sup>27</sup> I use these titles freely, shifting around depending on the context. They all inform each other, and the creative work feels similar to me, but of course there are particular canons and histories and burdens and prospects of each discipline. I try to be specific with my choices, even if I don't contextualize them further in the text.

<sup>28</sup> for the sake of meeting the requirements for this thesis, you can also read this part as my “performance practice”.

<sup>29</sup> Picture from my favorite dictionary *The Coming Boogie Woogie* and my hand holding it.

contemporary theatre are different disciplines because they have different histories, and different ghosts that haunt them.

*And I want to make art that corresponds with the contemporary times I want to make art that poses questions I want to make art that speaks for itself and I want to make art that is both rude and cute and kind and vulgar. I want to make art that encourages community I want to make art that is a part of a discourse, that proudly exists in dialogue with other art. I don't want to make anything new or unique I want to be one smashed pea in the peasoup. I want my performances to touch and be touched I want to place my traditional work in unhinged places and my unhinged work in traditional stages and I want everyone to feel welcome, but I don't need everyone to feel comfortable.*

I come from a craft that is based on learning. I have been presented with moves and techniques that I at first cannot do, and then get to repeat, and eventually learn to do. I also come from a discipline where the body is considered malleable and abundant. All the art I do, is corporeal, by which I mean, it derives from my body<sup>30</sup>.

My body is my medium for art, both as the craft and as the vessel. Because of this I often find myself getting too close to the work. My ideas of what I should be or how I should be or what I want gets in the way of the materials<sup>31</sup> at hand. This goes both ways: I often struggle with separating if my performing is bad, from having a bad day<sup>32</sup> and I get all kinds of physical infections, when a working group is dysfunctional. How I understand performing, is mainly to do things on stage, not to perform or represent doing things on stage. As an example, both stabbing myself and crying, or stabbing the air next to me and then crying, are as real events, they are just different actions with different consequences.<sup>33</sup> As I work in such close proximity to my bodymind I have been looking for tools to play with distance between my perceived self, and the work I do as an artist. Writing *The Boy study* was a structure I created for playing with that distance.

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<sup>30</sup> I do not confirm with the Cartesian body-mind split, but rather consider myself a bodymind. Here, Eleanor Bauer: "Every bodymind as a world within the world, is changing in concert with the world it inhabits and the worlds it encounters." I will use both the term body and bodymind throughout this text, to me they are the same.

<sup>31</sup> with materials I refer to both immaterial and material elements in an artwork, for instance a dance phrase, a table, a song, a script, a ghost

<sup>32</sup> PMS

<sup>33</sup> There still exists quite a strong acting/performance dichotomy where "real" events are being compared to representation of events. Herman Nyby opens this up nicely in their thesis, Gudinnan H.

## 2.1 On proximity: Temporary submission

With Temporary Submission<sup>34</sup> I propose that I can for a definite period of time practice submitting myself fully to whatever task, exercise, training, or performance I encounter. I momentarily let go of my own interests and desires and perceived self, and just do what I am asked to do.

As I am trained in *contemporary* dance and theater, where critique and disarming hierarchies and unhealthy power structures are central and welcome, I now trust that I have that perspective and can shelf it<sup>35</sup> for determined periods of time. This of course requires that the working environment is safe. There must be space to say; stop, I don't want to go any further. It also requires that someone is *in charge*. Being in charge is being an authority, but it also implies taking responsibility<sup>36</sup> and accountability<sup>37</sup>. I am traumatized<sup>38</sup> by working in seemingly flat structures. The constant worry and analysis of the group dynamics being equal (and they never are because a group without hierarchies or power dynamics doesn't exist<sup>39</sup>) eats up all the space for the craft and the work. I miss discipline, and I want people to step up to their positions. Creating safer spaces has been crucial and lifesaving, but at this point, I wish we would dare to proceed from facilitating to actually sharing knowledge, and by that I mean teaching and directing, and taking responsibility of what we choose to teach. <sup>40</sup> Most of my work as a performer and writer include shorter or longer terms of temporary submission. It is mainly a tool for positioning my self. Practically it is just to approach a task with "Ok, I'll do it, and then we see" before asking or demanding to understand why.

## 2.2 On proximity: Inside eye <sup>41</sup>

the inside eye is the opposite of "The outside eye". The outside eye sees the performance from the outside, from the perspective of the audience. The performer has

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<sup>34</sup> I first heard this in Anna Grip's "And then what? Fucked up ballet" – class. But when I brought it up in conversation a few years later she told me that she has never said it. But she said other great things, as for instance: you are many.

<sup>35</sup> hyllyttää. To let it rest.

<sup>36</sup> the ability to respond, said Chrysa Parkinson, and probably someone else before her that I can't remember.

<sup>37</sup> leadership is not only about exercising authority, it's also to actively care and support those under one's leadership. This corresponds with feminist principles of solidarity, aiming towards collective liberation.

<sup>38</sup> the word Trauma has suffered from some lexical inflation, but here I am actually referring to a case of unions being involved and contracts pulled and performances canceled and psychiatrists contacted.

<sup>39</sup> The Tyranny of Structurelessness. Freeman, Jo.

<sup>40</sup> this too, is a position of responsibility. Here too, I try to make statements. Statements engage critique/discussion.

<sup>41</sup> the notion of someone who is not involved in the artistic process giving an objective opinion. Outside Eye Project.

a specific competence which is understanding a performance from the inside. Each performance has their own logic and structure, both for the performer and the observer. Often, as the inside eye, I have a different experience of time than on the outside. It is common to call in an external outside eye to an artistic process, for instance a dramaturg, that visits and shares their perception of the work. I have lately been sharing my services as inside eye to solo performance makers. As they need to function both in the inside and the outside the performance they are making, it can be very helpful to hire someone to be in the inside for a while, performing the material, so that they can focus only on the outside aspects, such as dramaturgy, structure, timing, and spatial components.

### 2.3 On proximity: Writing<sup>42</sup>

I have found writing a great way to create a respectful distance<sup>43</sup> between my perceived self and the art I'm working on. I can use corporeal techniques of performing, for instance somatic exercises or voice work, simply as a tool for writing. I can lay in my bed in a fever, and still produce corporeal art, art that feels. So, I spent quite a big part of my MA studying writing.<sup>44</sup> I love that literature is a material artform, it remains. Previously I have only worked with ephemeral expressions, in which presence is crucial. Through writing I can practically work from a distance, both time- and space wise. Writing also includes reading.

In reading and writing, my main references are from postmodern (hysterical realism) and intersectional feminist literature. It is a privileged position to be so deeply rooted in *écriture féminine*<sup>45</sup> that I at times long away from it, seeking to position myself more patriarchally, on the outside. Sometimes I think I'm just writing pop songs, which isn't too bad, either. I like the challenge of trying to make universal sentences like "I love you" to actually feel like loving someone feels.

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<sup>42</sup> my favorite authors: Tove Ditlevsen, Vigdis Hjorth, Caroline Ringskog-Ferrada Noli, Märta Tikkanen, Tone Schunnesson, Jeanette Winterson, Samira Elagoz, E.L.Karhu, Hito Steyerl, Toni Morrison, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

<sup>43</sup>An artistic advice from Chrysa Parkinson, when I was working alone, was to keep a respectful distance at all times to the work, rather than let my self get in the way of it, to see it outside of myself, no matter how embodied.

<sup>44</sup> with the MA in Dramaturgy, the MA in Writing and the BA in Contemporary Art Theory. The course "Ruumiillisuus ja kirjoittaminen" by Katariina Numminen has influenced the content and context of this thesis a lot.

<sup>45</sup> *Ecriture feminine* is a term by Helene Cixous in *The Laughter of the Medusa*. It is about writing that subverts binary oppositions such as masculine/feminine, rational/emotional and active/passive. It is fluid, sensual and emotional.



*I only write in affect. I want to highlight and problematize the generalizing and othering positioning of a seemingly neutral voice. I still find it urgent to question the neutral positioning in academic texts, the positioning of the observer, as well as I enjoy how the distance it creates helps me recognize behavioral patterns and re-occurring dynamics and structures. Aiming for neutrality also gives me a sense of power, but it gets boring with time.*

Choosing to write in English is also a method for distancing my self. I reclaim English to be a silly language that can be used and misused however one wishes<sup>46</sup>. English thought it won the race, when it became *The Universal Language*<sup>TM</sup>, but it also diminished to being common and simple and gentrified<sup>47</sup>. Or maybe it always was. When I write in English, I have a tremendous amount of freedom, as I don't find it precious or specific. It is the all-around-tool in the toolbox. With this said, I aim to be aware of when it is necessary to be precise with words<sup>48</sup>, and when I can fool around.

#### **2.4 On proximity: This is the end of my postmodern era**

As a last preparation before we get to *The Boy Study*, I will briefly discuss the presence and proximity of the self in postmodern, metamodern and new sincere art influences, mainly through comparing the use of irony. Staying true to the thematic of the study, I will visualize it with the help of Yung Lean's<sup>49</sup> profile pictures on Soundcloud and Spotify.

Postmodernism is both a style and a time-period<sup>50</sup> in art, and I mainly know it through the lens of contemporary dance in Scandinavia, where it has been very influential<sup>51</sup>. I have both studied and performed postmodern techniques. Postmodernism comments on modernism, it claims everything as fake and as constructed. It distances itself from mysticism and occultism and adds excessive layers of irony to keep itself safe from being stained by affection. In postmodernism, task-based performances, chance events,

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<sup>46</sup> Inspired by Hito Steyerl's epic International Disco Latin essay. Also, this commentary in the footnotes is inspired and influenced by Hito Steyerl. Finally, I get to mention her! I love her work!

<sup>47</sup> International Art English Gate; a critique on art publications recycling similar terminology clumsily, in the 90's.

<sup>48</sup> Like when Extinction Rebellion Finland had the PR phrase "Tell the truth" Without any further explanation. I thought it was some neo-nazist movement or a cult. Until I saw all of the wool balaclavas of course.

<sup>49</sup> [Yung Lean is a Swedish rapper and the face of the almighty Sadboys movement](#). Vogue Magazine

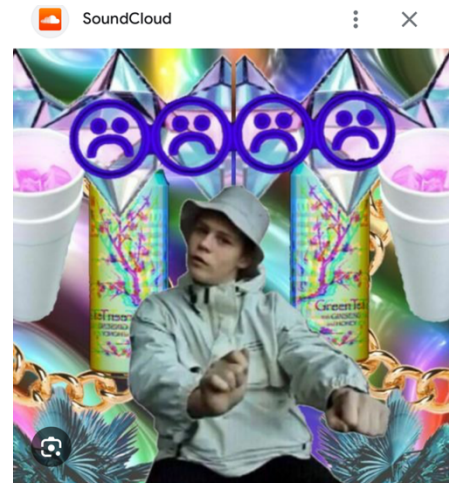
<sup>50</sup> 1960-1990, but still thriving.

<sup>51</sup> The whole dance department at Uniarts Helsinki is mainly focusing on postmodern dance.

happenings and score-writing thrive. Everybody's toolbox claims that all you need to do is to close your computer and go to the studio, to get the work done.<sup>52</sup> Funny.

Here, Postmodern Yung Lean 2013:

a whimsical collage of a young boy dancing, with the particular iced green tea, sad smileys, acid-infused colors, gold chains and overly edited palm trees, all presented in a cheap manner, in a seemingly chaotic order. Nothing in this photo is pretty in itself, it is the combination of silly, irregular things that creates the light and "nothing matters" kind of mood.



New Sincerity I first encountered as a term when I worked in the performance Huldra<sup>53</sup> in which I was a mythical forest creature. I have since then tried to claim my artistic work as new sincere. New sincerity uses all of the knowledge it has gained from post-modernism, but leaves out the meta layer, the outside commentator, and the ironic humor from the artworks. New sincere artworks are not afraid of being silly or naïve, they speak from their hearts with full expression. There is no distance to the material, the material is fully embodied. New sincerity is not commenting on what it is doing, but it fails in being completely sincere, as it has throughout history already gotten self-aware. You cannot know before you know, and the new sincere already knew.

Here, New sincere Yung Lean 2024:

A serious photo of a boy that could have been taken of one of the participants in Paradise Hotel or Jersey Shore. This could be a brat or bad boy. There are no background layers or silly smileys. He is dressed to kill. The tight-fitting leather jacket is sexually provocatively open, revealing skin and tattoos. The boy is posing unapologetically. He is in his feels.



<sup>52</sup> Eleanor Bauers Score. Everybody's Toolbox. Fluxus.

<sup>53</sup> Sara Grotenfelt's degree project created at TEAK during lock down, spring 2021. The working group consisted of me, Sara Grotenfelt, Sanni Kriikku, Saana Volanne and Eetu Palomäki.

Metamodern, is a contemporary art discourse that wobbles between the sincere and the ironic. As an observer of a metamodern work, you can't be sure whether someone is being serious or joking, the work floats between distancing itself with ironic humor (see Yung Lean below in bath cap) and then takes you off guard by exposing its true essence, openheartedly and vividly sharing its dreams and desires.

Here, Metamodern Yung Lean, in his Jonatan Leaonder96 phase. 2020:

A creative and multilayered picture that combines cool and aesthetically pleasing imagery, with a confident Jonatan posing in a bubbly bath. The boy is looking directly at the camera, wearing an untrendy bath cap and pearls. The layered editing hides a lot of the other images, which hints that the collage is “random” and quickly made. But the visuals of the picture in the front portrays a dark, romantic place, revealing depth and dedication.



These categories<sup>54</sup> are only one way to compare distances of self (irony vs authenticity), other examples could be:

punk vs bebop

camp vs Svenska Teatern

avant-garde vs Aki Kaurismäki aka nostalgic patriotism

kitsch vs haute couture

romance vs I Love Dick<sup>55</sup>

Ghosteen vs hyperpop

poetic formalism in minimalist conceptual contemporary dance vs musical

<sup>54</sup> this time you will have to ask a search-engine or chatbot for definitions yourself, I can't let dictionaries take over these footnotes completely. Also thank you OpenAI for all your help so far.

<sup>55</sup> If you are planning to recommend this book to me: I have read it, and I hate it. It is just about an old straight couple with nothing to do theorizing on potential desires. I long for riskier business.

### 3. THE BOY STUDY: HOW IT STARTED

#### 3.1 Disclosure on gender

Despite its name, this study does not confirm with binary genders. Gender is constructed and malleable<sup>56</sup> and, as an end goal completely useless and uninteresting. I recognize the value in building one's identity around being gender non-conforming, as the magnitude of existing and potential genders are not yet recognized in many contexts. Binary-critical identity-building might also influence others to question their assigned genders, which is always positive. In the political climate of today, with abortion being banned in many countries and states, transphobia<sup>57</sup> and homophobia<sup>58</sup> flourishing, and young men turning more and more conservative<sup>59</sup> I feel like I am obligated to write a 101 on gender<sup>60</sup>. But given the context of this being a thesis in a master's programme in acting, an artform that should be bothered with and continuously addressing questions of representations of bodies, I feel like here if anywhere, I could challenge the current discourse<sup>61</sup> in the Scandinavian performing art scene<sup>62</sup> and ask; why give a flying fuck<sup>63</sup> about gender?

” Äläkä vitsaile pelle vaan sano mikä estää enää olemasta ihan kaikki?” Risto

Why could we not all just be, whatever we wish to be, and move on to obsessing about other things. Of course this doesn't yet work on a national level, but on the stage, and with the words, we have the opportunity to create and propose alternative ways of being. I want that gender and sexuality could just be qualities that inform the work, that inform us, rather than being the content of the work, or what defines us. In my utopia the end goal<sup>64</sup> is that anyone could do art about anything. I know that structurally we

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<sup>56</sup> Some days I feel like I should just insist on being a woman, and using the pronoun she, so that not the only women that remain in five years or so, will be TERF's<sup>56</sup>. But that might just be some conservative or anxious side of myself taking over, like why wouldn't we all just be non-binary and happy?

<sup>57</sup> JK Rowling has really lost it.

<sup>58</sup> In YLE's poll a third of the voters said that they didn't vote for Pekka Haavisto in the presidential elections because of his sexual orientation/partner being a man. <https://yle.fi/a/74-20072623>

<sup>59</sup> A gap emerged between the value systems of young women and men, news article. <https://yle.fi/a/74-20073201>

<sup>60</sup> if you lack the basics and you're not much of a reader, watch Alok Menon's videos on Youtube, and Butler's, too.

<sup>61</sup>Thesis Grading: Pass with distinction. Requirement: The topic is pioneering or especially relevant to the field.

<sup>62</sup> where I have mainly worked (Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, now Reykjavik) since 2015

<sup>63</sup> I tried to find a cuter way to say this so, but the options *to give a rat's ass* or *to care a damn* were a bit too cute.

<sup>64</sup> it's not always about the journey or the process. Finish and polish your shit.

are still very far from that<sup>65</sup>, and that this new variation of self-obsession is well intended, but something is a bit uncanny when I have to expose and be busy with my sexual preferences and/or gender identity to get a job or a grant. I am specifically talking about gender, and not about other forms of structural oppression. Being a woman has for long been out of fashion, and I'm longing for a time where *being* any gender is out of fashion. Through this thesis I dismiss "gender as identity" and propose "gender as a non-defining quality".<sup>66</sup>

I don't want more queer spaces; I want more art spaces. Art is queer. I don't want spaces to *be* queer in. I want us to be *whatever* and do queer things, together.

“ Don't fence me in  
I wanna be big  
I'm born to be big, so don't fence me in  
I wanna be part of everyone and everything

I'm not in your scene  
That shit's limiting  
I like elements of everyone and everything

I'm free from a shackle, I'm free from a chain  
My body's just a body and my name's just a name.” - Amyl and The Sniffers

### 3.2 How it started: Working diary as thesis

When I started studying at the MA in Acting at the University of the Arts in Helsinki, I was quite early on introduced to thesis's written by previous acting-students. I was surprised and amused to find that many of the thesis's were in fact diaries. In these diaries, the actors were pondering for themselves, what acting might be to them. It is a common joke in the University of Arts, that all actor's thesis's start with "*I start writing. I ponder, what should I write about? I decide to write about acting. What is acting? I don't know*". This joke highlights a typical behavioral pattern of actors, that is to describe everything they are doing and thinking at all times, almost as a commentator for themselves. Despite finding this endless narration slightly frustrating, I understand it

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<sup>65</sup> especially when it comes to racism.

<sup>66</sup> This proved to be quite hard throughout the study! As the boys over and over again proved that they are still boys, in the words most traditional meaning, adolescent men. But more about this later.

and engage in that behavior myself, as those feelings and thoughts can be useful tools for performing. But mainly I got very inspired by the diary-like format. I too, wanted to write a dirty diary, a fake study. I wanted to emerge fully into this self-observing character, who could without any self-awareness call their thesis phenomenological research and then only refer to their own thoughts and experiences for 60 pages. I decided that I would write a pili-pali<sup>67</sup> thesis too. I would write a working diary, but I wouldn't write it about theater, no, I needed to write it about something way more absurd than that, and so I decided to write about on the most absurd thing I possibly could imagine. I would write a study on *boys*.

### 3.3 How it started: Lesbian dancers in Stockholm

I studied my BA in the Dance Performance programme at the Stockholm University of the Arts, graduating in 2019. At the time, the program had strong academic frameworks in feminist theory, social studies, and philosophy. On our first week, we read Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and Virginia Woolf.

During my studies in Stockholm, I was a lesbian, and all of my friends were lesbians, and having a boyfriend was the most embarrassing thing I could imagine. In our lesbian-leftwing-feminist-performance-art-bubble, we built enormous vaginas as scenography, we read manifestos on NO's<sup>68</sup>, domestic labour<sup>69</sup> and communism<sup>70</sup>. We sang Kate Bush and T.A.T.U in numerous Karaoke bars. We danced at Bitter Pills<sup>71</sup> and Secret Garden<sup>72</sup>. We skipped class for demonstrations and created wild sexual dances to Peaches on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March and made out with each other at parties. There were no boys in sight, and I couldn't imagine what they could be useful for. To be honest, I thought they had gone extinct.

Not a gaze or thought was wasted on boys. At most we were considering starting boybands ourselves. In fact, all that I wanted<sup>73</sup> was to be in a boyband with my lesbian friends. I planted a seed back then in that utopia, but it was more of a wet dream of

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<sup>67</sup> making pili-pali is the best method I know for getting to work. I always make pili-pali performances.

<sup>68</sup> No Manifesto. Yvonne Rainier 1964.

<sup>69</sup> MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART! Mierle Laderman Ukeles 1969.

<sup>70</sup> Manifesto of the Communist Party, Karl Marx 1848.

<sup>71</sup> the best queer bar. they had to close some years ago.

<sup>72</sup> strange gay night club, with aggressive security dudes.

<sup>73</sup> and still want.

being a boy rather than spending time with any boys. In the quest of becoming a boy, I started studying them.

### **3.4 How it started: Having a boyfriend**

When I started The Boy Study, I had quite recently broken up with my boyfriend and felt like I had wasted two years of my life on being in a relationship with a boy. Throughout the two years I had spent an immense number of hours thinking about whether *we were right for each other* and whether *this is working* and on how to help him in his incapability to pursue daily practicalities. I called him in the morning to check if he'd woken up to make it to the dentist and bought him a calendar as a Christmas gift so that he wouldn't forget his deadlines and our dates. I had lured myself in to thinking that I didn't know how to live without him, and when we broke up, my broken heart hurt so much. I cried every night. Also, I was worried that he wouldn't survive without me. I met his friend (at this point also my friend) to tell him that I was worried about him, that I didn't think he'd manage. Our friend looked at me, laughed, and said; *babe, he's always been like that*. I couldn't believe this to be true. Until I realized that he has indeed always had a girlfriend, some girlfriend, doing my part. He truly didn't need to change, because someone else would always show up to do the part for him. He was a kind boy with a pretty face, and apparently, that was enough. What I was particularly interested in, was his positioning towards failure. In his lore, things kept happening to him. If he got fired from a job, the boss had been evil. If he didn't manage to return his thesis, it was because the University didn't inform him about the deadline in time, and he couldn't go to therapy because his therapist had gotten sick three years ago. Nothing was his fault, and there was nothing he could do about that.

As I then engaged more with boys, I realized that the pattern was reoccurring. They didn't feel responsible for what went on in their lives. And with that mindset, instead of trying to adapt themselves or develop, they had enormous capacity to focus on things outside of themselves: they read comic books and watched gigs on YouTube and talked about second world war and scrolled through the news all day. With these boys, I didn't talk about how I had handled a situation or how I could have done it differently, I talked

about events and hobbies outside of myself. This was mesmerizing to me. I too, wanted to study something outside of myself. So, I started studying the boys.

### **3.5 How it started: I don't know what acting is and I couldn't care less**

To me, acting is a tool, it is like a screwdriver, and surely, I must adapt which screwdriver I use and how to use it, but I don't find it helpful for screwing or building furniture to sit and stare at the screwdriver trying to define what it is and what it could be. I can only find alternative purposes for its existence, through using it.

I am interest in making art and particularly in spending time with the craft and the material. I want to get my hands dirty. My body and its corporeal expression are my main gateways for creating art, and so, acting to me is to place myself in places and do things in those places. I lend myself, I practice temporary submission, for the cause of creating contemporary art. The tools that I use for that vary between dancing, acting, and writing. But I must have something to screw that screwdriver in to. And so, I picked the boys, because no matter for how long or how intensely you screw them, they will persist to exist.

### **3.6 How it started: A little bit of institutional critique**

Since the first day of studies in the MA in Acting I have continuously been asked about my own acting practice, about my own relation to acting, about my approach - before I even had started acting. This led to a strange loop in which I endlessly tried to describe and define a practice that I didn't practice<sup>74</sup>. It is difficult to describe what I am doing if I never get to the doing. This is also why I can't write this thesis explicitly about acting, as I don't have an explicit acting practice, and I don't want to spend 60 pages in this self-imploding loop. All courses<sup>75</sup> that I have taken from my programme, have had our *selves* as actors as content or topic. I am trained as a dancer. I am trained to learn things, movements, or tasks outside of myself, through repeating them. In the beginning of the learning, I fail a lot. When I fail in a task, *I* am not a failure, I have simply failed at the thing that I am practicing. At the MA in Acting, where *I* am most often the thing that I

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<sup>74</sup> I tried exposing that I don't know what acting is, as I had never done it, but apparently all actors say that too so I still don't know what acting is but now I do know that I "shouldn't be so humble about my work".

<sup>75</sup> except one day with Rasmus Slätis when we were being lines in space. This was extraordinary.



am practicing or addressing, I never get the feedback that I have failed, or done something badly or wrong, because that would mean, that *I am* a failure. And it would be horrendous to tell an acting student that they are a failure. By this I want to say, that there is also a great relief and playfulness in saying that things and tasks can be done right or wrong, and good or bad. Because it gives the opportunity to try again and to do it better. I find this an optimistic approach. Throughout the studies I have missed learning things that are not about finding my personal artistic expression. I will even go as far as saying that always optimizing and aiming to develop one's conception of self<sup>76</sup>, is running a quest of neoliberal identity building: I must always work on myself, so that I eventually can turn that self into a currency. Not only is constantly focusing on finding one's own practice or true self a political stance, but it is also a style and a genre of performance. It is meta-theatre.<sup>77</sup>

Last December my classmates performed their Fritt Arbete<sup>78</sup> -works. They were amazing. I was impressed by all of them, so this is not a critique on the performances but an attempt at highlighting a clear thematic of the studies that is not outspoken in the study plan or in the study goals. The performances are described with 1-4 sentences in the festival catalogue, and here is a sentence from each of them<sup>79</sup>:

*I have made a space for **myself**.*

What you feel **yourself**

How would you describe **yourself** in a few words?

*This is about the **actress**.*

...that focuses on questions regarding home, rest, **identity** and nurture.

A performance about an **alter ego**.

to grow up and reconcile with **oneself**.

**I'm** soon finishing my master's degree....

It is about theater, **identity**, privilege, jealousy and egoism.

All of them refer to identity, self or the actor/performer who created the work as content. I am heavily influenced by this canon too<sup>80</sup>. But in spite of *The Boy Study* being autofictive, the point of departure and purpose of it was to write about something

<sup>76</sup> Eetu Virén and Jussi Vähämäki called this a *me-technique*, but they don't agree with my neoliberalism-argument.

<sup>77</sup> Self-referring theatre, a style where the actor breaks the fourth wall, by referring to themselves as actors.

<sup>78</sup> A course called "Free work" in which the students create solo or group performances themselves.

<sup>79</sup> It was 10 performances but one didn't have any description.

<sup>80</sup> this thesis has so many metalayers that I have lost my self somewhere on page 13

that exists outside of myself. I am not interested in myself as a topic. I find identity politics outdated and boring. I am here – no matter what – so I don't need to worry about myself not being a part of the art. My presence is inevitable; therefore, I choose to work with materials outside of myself. I needed the subject to be something that functions in ways, that I couldn't understand, but that I partly also wanted to become, to be able to play with proximity as technique, so, I started studying boys.

### 3.7 How it actually started

“It all started by accident. A vocation he whimsically decided to pursue after having seen a cool guy at a bar, who he felt needed to be filmed.” Samira Elagoz (on his work)

“It began as all important things begin - by chance.” Jeanette Winterson

## 4. THE BOY STUDY: METHODS AND PREMISES

### 4.1 What is a boy<sup>81</sup>

In this study, I use the term *boy* to describe an adult cis-male that identifies as some kind of a boy. Currently, the most common types of boys are *bad boys, mad boys, sad boys, soft boys, shy boys, gym boys, fuck boys, lost boys, soy boys, boy toys, skater boys, surfer boys, b-boys, it-boys and e-boys*. I started by dating boys that referred to themselves as boys, but later on as my boydar<sup>82</sup> got more precise, I also started to find and define the boys myself.

### 4.2 The White Boy Study

I have been indecisive on whether I should include the BIPOC<sup>83</sup> cis-males<sup>84</sup> that I have been dating during this period of time, as a part of *The Boy Study* or not. In the end, I

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<sup>81</sup> The traditional use of the word boy refers to a male child, from birth to adulthood. The term boy also refers to an immature male. It is also used to express intensity of feeling, to describe a male lover and a male pet. The word boy has also previously been used as an offensive way to describe an adult man of colour, and is a term expressive of racist condescension, a colonialist term to describe a black male servant. I didn't know this use of the term since this very last part of the study, and if I have understood correctly, it is completely outdated and out of use. I am not using or referring to that racist term in any section in *The Boy Study*.

<sup>82</sup> Appropriation of gaydar, which is a colloquialism referring to the intuitive ability of a person to assess others' sexual orientations as homosexual, bisexual or straight. Wikipedia

<sup>83</sup> Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

<sup>84</sup> cis describe individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

decided not to, since I am in the study practicing *artificial othering*<sup>85</sup>.

White boys are a group of people that confirm to all societal norms, they are part of all majorities, so, I can practice othering them as a writing technique for finding distance. The artificial aspect is crucial; I am not interested in repeating existing methods of oppression or confirming current power structures, quite the opposite, I am hoping that through *artificially othering* boys, who have historically never been considered *the other*, I could highlight the absurdity of viewing someone as *the other*. As BIPOC have been exotified and othered by us, white colonizers, throughout history and still today, there would be no artificial level to the othering. I have only dated two BIPOC cis-men throughout this period, so I cannot state this as a common, but the two of them did not confirm with enough of the defining qualities of a boy to be included in the study, especially not the ones that imply resigning from responsibility. Both were actively pursuing their desires and dreams, they were polite and generous and prioritized other people in their lives. So, I chose not to include the two of them in the study, as it is not a quantitative study on *all boys* but rather a literary project examining boy-qualities and my everchanging proximity to those. But it is a very important question to ask, why I have dated so few BIPOC boys. It might be because of internalized racism<sup>86</sup>, or because I spend a lot of time in environments and institutions that are upholding structures of white supremacy. It might also be, that they truly haven't been qualifying as *boys* in this study, that this indeed is *The White Boy Study*.

### 4.3 In this study, a boy <sup>87</sup>

- ◇ does not want to hurt you
- ◇ has been raised as a boy
- ◇ is a male aged between 24-42
- ◇ uses the pronoun "he", but "all pronouns are fine" really
- ◇ is normatively (in western beauty standards) considered beautiful and/or handsome
- ◇ loves his mom and meets her regularly for dinner that she has cooked

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<sup>85</sup> more about this on page 37

<sup>86</sup> Which I must continuously work on and become more aware of. All white people are racist, but that is not a reason or an excuse to not actively practice and study anti-racism!

<sup>87</sup> Throughout the study I have been asking and asked: what is a boy even? Some of these defining qualities are points of departure, and some are findings from the study. But if you do tick 10 or more boxes, you're most likely one of the boys!

- ◇ has a mom who is slightly worried about him
- ◇ is not afraid of giving you compliments regarding your looks, your art, or your presence, if he finds you attractive or if he wants you to find him attractive
- ◇ is afraid of being accused of sexual harassment
- ◇ always wanted to stay friends with his previous lovers, but some of them did not want to stay friends with him. He respects their decisions and has therefore never asked any of them why they no longer want to be friends with him.
- ◇ just wants to be a good guy
- ◇ is very busy, when he is busy or when he wants to stop seeing you but don't want to say it because he might still change his mind (tomorrow, or in a month)
- ◇ thinks saying sorry is the same as being sorry
- ◇ is easiest defined by the net of relations that he has built around himself, a net of female caretakers (moms, grandmoms, siblings, lovers, ex-lovers)
- ◇ does what he wants
- ◇ doesn't think doing what he wants has brought him to where he currently is in life
- ◇ builds his worldviews around on his own interests
- ◇ can easily replace a girlfriend with a new girlfriend
- ◇ ends up in relationships rather than starts them
- ◇ does not consider that if he forgets to do something, someone else will have to do it
- ◇ chills, and then somehow things just tend to happen to him
- ◇ is bisexual but only dates women
- ◇ has started to understand and listen to his own feelings
- ◇ does not understand that his behavior can affect other people's feelings
- ◇ embodies qualities of youthful masculinity
- ◇ trusts that things will always be organized, but doesn't bother to organize the things
- ◇ thinks mainly about things outside of himself (roman empire gate ie)

#### **4.4 The field: Straight dates**

As main research method I have been going on straight dates with 18 boys for the duration of 18 months. I consider straight dates to be fictionally framed spaces, similar to performances. Both carry historical weight and expectations of upholding tradition

and narration. They are set to happen at a certain time in a certain place, and the two parties participating are aware of those parameters. There are also certain qualities of seduction involved: we are here to entertain, to be entertained or to experience something we haven't before. We desire something new, a change in the daily hustle. In these framed spaces, I have the possibility to present certain sides of myself: I have the option to perform, even to act as someone else. To me, the dialogue and encounters that these fictional spaces enable, are exciting. The conversations that I have experienced in romantic dates have often gone very far into imaginative futures, or very deep into personal matters. Or they have been absurd and otherworldly. When dating, both parties are in the position of the observer and the observed<sup>88</sup>; both function as the inside eye.

#### 4.5 Ethics: Kiss, don't tell

The most common question I receive when I talk about this project is; do the boys know? And the most common answer I can give is, no.

Knowing about the study would have changed the boys' behavior, which would have affected the date. I *wanted* to go on all dates, because I felt attraction and wanted to get to know each boy. I didn't date them as an act, or as a performance, I dated them because I wanted to. This was the most important premise. Many of them I dated for longer, some of them I fell in love with, some of them I still can't stand, and some of them are now my friends. Later on in the study, I sometimes mentioned the study during the dates, but this complicated the setting; it was like crashing from a heartwarming new sincere<sup>89</sup> stage to a postmodern one without warning. I experienced that it added a metalayer to the being and between us; suddenly we behaved like two old couches in a murder scene, wrapped into Elmukelmu-plastic. We were polite in the knowing that every attempt to move or speak, would be closely observed and notated.

There is only one exception to this, when I dated a true postmodern artist who was very amused by this metalayer; he was comparing me to all kinds of pioneers of autofiction, saying the most hilarious things about boys and by that making sure his words would be

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<sup>88</sup> remark by actor and dear friend Daniel Virtanen, on a hike in Reykjadalur, April 2024.

<sup>89</sup> you should know these by now. Go recap on page 16.

quoted in my study and eventually outplayed me completely in my metamodern attempts by sending me a “I’m thinking about you” text message one Sunday evening. It broke my heart that I wasn’t thinking about him. I didn’t want to lose him, but this honesty he portrayed after all our ironic jokes, was too precious to meet with a lie.

With that said, the texts are based on real-life events, but none of the boys could be recognized from any of the texts or descriptions I publish here. I have changed details that are not relevant. In this thesis I have also chosen not to publish any explicit descriptions of illegal actions, substances, or harassment that I encountered.

#### **4.6 Where have all the bad boys gone?**

This is a qualitative study, not a quantitative study. During 18 months I dated 18 boys. This is a coincidence. I didn’t have any certain amount that I was aiming for but often, especially when being heart broken, I felt a pressure to start dating again to finish the study, and my studies. The most important requirement for dating was that I wanted to go on the date. And of course, that the boy wanted to go on the date with me. At times I tried to broaden the spectrum of boys, by looking for specific types of boys<sup>90</sup> that I hadn’t dated yet, but this often led to me losing interest. I mainly did this by using dating apps. Despite my efforts, it was absolutely impossible to find a bad boy. They might indeed have gone extinct, or then they don’t like my style. At times I lost motivation, so I took a break or met some old boy, but I do have quite a low threshold for dating as I find it so brave to personally ask someone out on a date. Most often if someone would ask me, I would go and find out. I committed to this study like to any of my artistic projects, but I also gave it the time it needed, so that I could truly work from desire. I executed this study part-time, in addition to working as a performer and studying. Towards the end of the study, I started feeling numb and disappointed or frustrated after the dates, and certainly lost some boundaries in the search for content. When I realized this<sup>91</sup> I stopped the research phase.

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<sup>90</sup> All you need to do to find a skater boy is to go to the park. Or find another skater boy. They reside in local habitats and move in packs.

<sup>91</sup> I didn’t realize anything. My friend said, [no more boys](#). I love my friends.

## 5. THE BOY STUDY

### 5.1 The boys in the study<sup>92</sup>

0. Boyfriend
1. Soft boy
2. Mad boy
3. Sad boy
4. Boy at the art market
5. Shy boy
6. BDSM Boy
7. The-boy-that-shall-not-be-named
8. Polyamorous boy
9. Pretty boy
10. Festival boy
11. Hippie boy
12. Skater boy
13. Fuckboy
14. American boy
15. Highschool love boy
16. Soccer boy
17. Ready-made boy
18. Swedish boy

### 5.2 Original boy texts

When I was done with the research phase, I gathered all 251 boy-related field notes from my computer and phone. As I started going through them I was surprised to find out that I had done very little of what I could traditionally consider “writing exactly what happened from beginning to end” which I thought I had done. Some dates were notated as 7 minutes in 8 pages, some month-long-romances in one sentence. Many of them were written in affect and many ended abruptly mid-sentence. Here are some:

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<sup>92</sup> executed 8/2022-2/2024



It's 9.13 – a strange time to wake up. it's also the third time for me today but the first one that has consequences. By consequences I mean responsibility. By responsibility I mean the ability to respond and by that I mean it's about time to get up. My lower back is sticky and moist from the bed sheets that I didn't change around 5 am when the mucus poured from my body towards the futon mattress I bought at futonoutlet.com and carried here together with the yango driver. I paid the driver 2,3 euros and gave him 5 more and felt like a colonial king. This was before yango got canceled but after my mom told me that she is prohibited to download the app to her work phone, so I should be careful. My mother warns me about favours from the Russian state and my grandmother warns me about tall boys in the night. This morning they're both in my bed. I guess some warnings don't change.

I once had a boyfriend, and it was sincerely and truthfully the first and last time for those kinds of manic hobbies. The most similar experience I have is from 2 months of intense Muay Thai boxing training with Timo. I simply couldn't stop hitting him. In the boyfriend case I simply couldn't stop explaining myself. After both periods, I was bruised and exhausted but in very different ways.

To avoid this futon mattress of my dreams sucking up too much mucus I had laid three layers of bed sheets. First, the duvet cover I found in my dead grandmothers closet this Christmas when I was hiding from grandpa's suicidal thoughts. It is a perfect linen, It has light brown, minimalist flowers and looks exactly like the person I would like to be. It has holes in both ends which means that whatever you put inside will eventually slip out from the other side. The other one I received from my previous roommate because it was stained with either period blood or some other sort of blood.

These proactive efforts remained unnoticed by all gods. Every linen was throughout and through in wet. I guess that's what happens to sinners - as they can't keep their secrets they wake up in their own secretions.

There are no clean sheets left.



Through the holes of my grandmothers broken linen, that I had expected to keep the boys away, I look at your pretty little face and think it's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. This is not a new thought. As many young emerging artists, I tend to listen to podcasts about consciousness and once I heard that 98% of our thoughts repeat themselves throughout the day.

I know, that this particular thought, is produced by the hormones, of course I do. I know I'm fucked when the boy doesn't smell bad in the morning. Estrogen dominates all forms of life, I mean, it creates life (in general and in particular, my life). So how could I not submit to that? when I even manage to be submissive to this pretty little face.

It's a skill, I guess. Competence. Temporary submission.

I'm late for technosomatics TM. That's all right, since no one expected me to come anyway. I kiss the skin on your forehead, that you claim to be atopic, and yet my lips are so much drier. My skin flakes meeting yours, as a thin protective layer, I inherited this flaking skin from my grandmother as a precautionary measure, merely even visible, to keep me at a grain's distance from the boys. I'm like a pastry made butter dough, freshly baked from the oven. Dry, fragile, puffy and when you lick the outermost layer, very likely to fall apart



*And I would like to write about how the hot water sprinkled my fingers how brutally the screw penetrated the wooden structure holding it in place holding it under control holding*

*And I would like to write about how finding your own movement or your own voice is a philosophical trend that if there's nothing to emancipate from emancipation becomes a measure of control a desired outcome and I would like to write about how difficult it is to let oneself change to let oneself recognize this is not what I want to let one's self be, for a little while*

*And I would like to write about the sea cracking up the water pouring on top of the shallow rests of ice of the crackling sound and how that crackling sound overruled my thoughts of you*



*in love and out and on off and out of love 'in*

*crush on me crushing you crushing on you crushing me desire as key I'm curious about  
your toothpaste routine show me how you smear rub brush blush  
open your mouth I try one finger two finger fingering three*

*must love and be loved must love and be loved must  
heart break is kind of a holy day enter through the vein, exit in pain no sorry I meant  
the artery.*

*follow the main stream*

*it will take you to a place where many fools have been  
pulsating openings estrogen endocrines  
welcome into the cave of second wave feminists  
they will tell you it's hard to exist  
but listen closely to secretaries  
see, you are just like them, historical, taking notes, writing "poems" they have secret  
airy diaries filled with spells and*

*JUST LIKE THAT THE BOYS ARE BACK*

*it's exhausting I thought they'd gone extinct  
I thought we were all queer and happy out here????? the boys are not even bad they're  
just plain sad.*

*and my grandmother shouts, boys need our help  
and my other one says run, scream, evade for your health  
and my mom goes wait and see, you're just like me  
you'll pick the maddest one and before you know it, you'll be three  
and I say no moms you don't understand the boys have gotten way out of hand my latest  
heartache  
is from one who cooks oatmeal in Gatorade*

*it has truly gone too far*

*they are visiting my dreams playing lover, you should've come over on acoustic guitars*

*I need to rest*

*I need to be at my fittest, bestest, hottest to finally find a funky dandy butch*

*to build me a nest!*

*I lay down in bed*

*- exorcise all acoustic songs out of my head -*

*I soften my sphincter I open my heart baby girl – it's about time*

*to depart*



*And I will write exactly how it was exactly how it felt when he touched me for the first time when he pulled me closer to him, lifting me, just slightly shifting me, closer to him. I'm traveling his skin with my dry fingertips up and down the spine up and down the collarbone passing cavities in the chest squeezing softly o sorry you don't like that. Grabbing curling waves of the neck closer closer look at me you little slut closer but do not touch. The vibrating warmth of his lips in front of mine but where am I? no? really? One could presume the experienced I is placed somewhere in the ribcage mine is in the lips, in the wet line inside the lips I meet the world by kissing. Tasting sucking licking all of your face pore by pore a mosaic of spit here here here don't you dare forget the soft spot behind the ear. Years of anticipation years of lingering I didn't know I wanted you this much. Only twice have I dreamt of this only twice have I woken up wet from your touch only twice before and so many times from now on. These touches are mine. I can replay them like I replay Formidable on youtube over and over again getting me as wet everytime and somehow fooling myself to think it was remarkable makes me want you even more. But there was nothing remarkable about these events they were just a little bit forbidden. How can something this casual become so romantic. Romance like this is for the ego. My ego lingers in memories knowing this was the best we will ever*

*get. It is an enormous grief. It is the grief of potential love. Losing it before it even emerged, letting love slip without even trying to catch it. You let it slip. I was here waiting. Yes, I have to admit that I was here waiting. I wait no more. I purified myself by the guard in the catholic church who got upset when the priest couldn't forgive my sins. What a relief to still be a sinner. He knew I was a fraud. Good priest, bad Corinne. But he supported me on my journey of faith with practical tips like saying you can't just walk in to any church on a sunday afternoon expecting to be forgiven.*



I can't stop staring at the sign next to your face. your ONLINE symbol and your nosering and those tired eyes they catch me off guard and your words too they make me drip out of my skin shell they soften my edges they smoothen my curves they howl Please fill me come inside of me come closer. Don't sweat leave no traces vanish like all those other soft tissues. Place your hand around my scapula penetrate beneath it with your salad fingers you probably play the piano no what more deeper just like that one more repetition similar satisfaction as 83 burpees in a minute you're done within a minute wait what I still needed you to draw my veins around the hipbone softly gently barely even reaching then to place your middle finger in my mouth just placing it there letting it rest don't move don't you dare penetrate just let me suck you dry and wet again it's ridiculous how you paint your nails thinking it will remove testosterone thinking it will make you more like me. Pastel colors coral and the mix between green and blue these days brown is my favorite color you know the deep dark brown that invites you in that makes you feel like you belong that surrounds and softens that lingers please stay. Linger with me hang around just like your online symbol in the chat when I look at it time stops, you're here I imagine you here even when you're sending letters to your other lovers I manifest you all the lovers in the world I have no choice how could I not share something this magnificent and still I wish you'd be writing to me. I want your forearm against my collarbone pressing down deeper deeper deeper I need you to drip your saliva on to my tongue, no spitting just dripping like you couldn't resist it like it wasn't a choice like you didn't have the option but to

And I want you to want me. be quiet. Repeat it until I come. Please. I need you to swipe my lower lip with your tongue. Repeatedly. grab my pelvis squeeze the bones of my bowls, making me clearer sharper here I'm right here you can draw my outlines with your eyes, yet I have no idea where you begin. There's no end I stopped time when I started looking at your online sign.



Here is a cute picture I drew.



It is a decapitated angel. Send it on to all of your friends so it will brighten their day like it did yours! If you don't,

you will be visited by a boy from your teenage fever he will not come empty handed he arrives with ananas light long drinks and shaken beers and packs of condoms that will never be opened cause they're a bit uncomfortable and orthorexia for years and hands that grab your head too hard and hours of sitting on a bed behind his gaming chair watching him shoot people or "make beats" and cruise over half-naked girls with animated cars or YouTube videos of deadly skinny popstars you'll wait for hours and days and weeks for soccer practice or band camp or boys nights to end always hesitating before you press send. he's a sight for sore eyes wearing paul frank and converse, hair sticking straight up in the air if you poke your finger on it, you'll fall asleep for a hundred years. Sometimes he gets up from his chair rubs the hand through the hair and disappears.

he returns with noodles for one – oh, you're still here.

he's really busy today you follow the green dot above his name he's constantly online waiting for someone edgier responding to messages about friends who've been charged with rape or hate and laughing at their silly mistakes. he keeps saying you're too much too much to touch he'll tell you to calm down to go home cause mom will come over with clean bed sheets and meat and anxiety pills. he really wants to be a good boy, but just not today, cause today is not a good day, at least not for you to stay. but he truly does like you a lot like why are you so insecure? he will send you a message or you can just send him one so he can ignore it haha. you won't know if he's turning thirteen or thirty tomorrow but you can still get out of there if you share! this message!! nineteen angels are watching over you, only if you share!!! not joking. Pass this message on.

please don't ignore it. you are being tested and angels are going to fix two big things tonight in your favor. drop everything and pass it on TOMORROW WILL BE THE BEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE. DON'T BREAK THIS. SEND THIS TO 14 FRIENDS IN 10 MINUTES IT'S NOT THAT HARD. WHOEVER SENT THIS TO YOU MUST CARE ABOUT YOU

if you send it to zero people you will never get out of the bed of this boy!!!!I do not remove this message!!!! It really works!!!! At 19:00 tonight the angels are coming. Have a nice day!!!



*For, I am once again staring at the never-ending issue of oppression. I am staring at the patriarchy. And when I look at it from even further away. When I look at the pattern, the trail that I have created, leaving crumbs of my trust behind every door that the boys closed (or left half-open, and went back to bed) I observe myself crumbling to pieces. I see a chain of crushes that keep crushing me. And I observe myself turning in, turning away from welcoming what I don't yet recognize. I see myself becoming afraid of falling in love. Afraid of opening up. Afraid of others. I see myself othering. And that is dangerous – these boys make me dangerous.*

*But I also see myself leaning on to my friends. Closer to their hearts. When I place my ear by their lips they whisper about boys, about what boys did to them: about what they do to them, at work, in the club, at home, in the nights, in their relationships and on the streets. And I thought we had passed gender. I thought I could write this study, as some comic relief – as something a little bit out of place, out of time – since we're finally all queer and happy out there - but I am devastated to find,*

*that boys have indeed decided to remain boys.*

*And somehow the saddest part of it all is that I have been lucky. Nothing bad has happened. Nothing really bad. But these boys keep stealing my thoughts. They keep stealing my time that I could spend dancing or laughing or singing. They steal my trust and my naïve vibe. During work and leisure, I ponder on their behavior. When I run in the forests and swim in the seas I wonder if they think of me. They don't. They create,*

*when I wonder. They produce, when I ponder. I'm like all the women before me, I'm historical, I'm a secretary.*

*At times I have received strength from this study. It has given me resilience. I have sustained in undesired company for longer, for content. I have learned to think that this too, is worth my time, since I can write from it. And staying has gotten me into curious places and dirty homes. And with this study, I have managed to keep the boys close. Some of them return as friends or colleagues, when they realize, that they too, have been used. That they are not the only bad ones, the only sad ones.*

*But what if I didn't write about boys or feelings or power? Imagine the things I could write about? Dynamite and birds and volcanoes and girls!!! I don't want to feel power. It's thrilling, but I don't need it. I don't do anything with it. I rather sustain. I go for a walk. I drink coffee. I talk with my roommate about listening. I stretch. I call my best friends. And maybe at its best, these boys have functioned as some kind of glue for those relations. Sometimes I only go on dates so that I can call girls the day after and tell them exactly how it went. I describe to them, in detail, these silly creatures, that should have gone extinct. I describe their behavioral patterns and mating rituals and my friends respond, "THAT'S BONKERS" and I sigh, right! It was, bonkers. Right. I'm all right. They're bonkers. But I wonder when I will get to develop in relationships. When I can start loving and stop consulting? When I can start blooming instead of retracting and comforting. Of course, I already know. It will be when I finally stop being a shitty lesbian and start dating people I admire.*



### **5.3 Boy texts written as ethnographer, as boy texts are expected to be**

In my attempt to organize the field notes, I tried an ethnographic positioning. The idea came from one of the boys, when I told him that I am writing about him. *Oh, is it like an autoethnographic study? They're really problematic.* He said. *Sure,* I answered to the hungover reinterpretation of Gollum, lying in a clump-formation in my bed; *And so are you.* And that is how I chose to adapt a problematic structure on problematic research subjects. I wrote alternative boy studies, in which I wrote about the boys, as if I

wouldn't have been affected by them myself. I call it *Artificial*<sup>93</sup> *othering*<sup>94</sup>. It is only possible to practice on groups of people that are currently not, and have not historically been, structurally othered or exotified. I wanted to write about the boys as the other, as something alien, something outside of myself that I could not understand. This was often also the case; that I couldn't understand how they functioned. This is generally a problematic stance to take, but as the boys in this study are the norm, and very privileged in many ways, I don't see this as a problem, rather as quite a nice writing task. With that said, my intention is not to hurt or humiliate anyone. That is why I write about all the boys anonymously.

*to take that ancient manifestation (boys) and define it in a reducing way that it has rarely been defined as and with that definition study the subject, not as individual but as a phenomenon - as an attempt to reduce the subjectivity from which these boys perceive themselves and have generally always been perceived (as central). To claim that, to me, you are all simply a matter to be studied. I simplify and categorize, I fill excel sheets of flesh and behavioral patterns and silly thoughts, first to gain agency and then as an artistic intervention.*

Here are some of the descriptions:

### 3. Sad Boy

He is skinny and wobbles on the dancefloor next to my friend, his long fingers doing tip-tap-tip-tap to Britney's Toxic. When everyone else starts cleaning the space he wanders around seemingly gathering cans, without touching any of the cans. On our first date, I tell him that I have heard bad things about him. He gets very sad. I get scared, I had no idea boys could be this fragile. I apologize and hope this won't last the whole evening. Later that evening, he asks me to marry him. We are laying on the cliffs behind Linnanmäki and I tell him that surely I could but it's not a profitable deal for me, as my grandfather is rich. He is drunk and smokes cigarettes and keeps offering me

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<sup>93</sup> "something that is not occurring naturally or lacking in genuineness or authenticity". OpenAI.

<sup>94</sup> "[Social and discursive practices in which certain groups are excluded, positioning them as "other" or different from the norm](#)" Spivak, In *Other Worlds*. Historically this othering has had very heavy, even dehumanizing consequences. In this thesis, I intend to use the word as simply looking at someone as "other" from the norm, to see if it can in any way become performative, when the person I'm seeing as "the other" is the norm.



everything he has. He is very nervous. He is about to move abroad. I am surprised to find that he lives in a fancy apartment, which his parents own. He is witty; but he is wrong about Walter Benjamin belonging to the Frankfurt School. He is often asking for approval, asking if I like him, asking if I want to see him again. Then he disappears. One day I see him and take him off guard with a “you didn’t answer my text”. He is happy to see me. He is always happy to see me, but keeps disappearing, which is inconvenient as I needed a fast-paced, practical romance to get over someone else. I give him a cheap lighter from S-market with small hearts on it before he leaves. Today we are friends, and he doesn’t disappear anymore.

## 2. Mad Boy

I want the mad boy in a mad way. He speaks about David Foster Wallace and autoethnography. He finds it problematic that some American researcher has made an autoethnographic study on Japanese child pornography, which he says is basically an excuse for the researcher to watch Japanese child pornography. He masters a funny dance move, where his knees go in every possible direction. He thinks my friend is rude and stupid, and that my ex-boyfriend is pathetic. He has seen me before, and thought then that I was a drug addict. He lives in a big apartment alone. He keeps asking me who I am and telling me that I have a beautiful body. He has a very childish face. He then reminds me, that he has a deep inner darkness that he must deal with, and that I shall not disturb him.

## 8. Polyamorous boy

We meet at a place that used to be trendy some five years ago. I still like going there, because it is free and they have a nice terrace. He did look better on his pictures, but he is cute and asks a lot of questions. He’s wearing some sort of a cropped jumper and tells me that he’s been very nervous about the date. Why? I asked. Oh, I haven’t been dating for some time. A few hours in he starts talking about his guinea pig. That he has a small guinea pig. I’m confused, how is it possible, when you travel so much for work? Well, my partner takes care of it. Oh, you have a partner, yes, since 5 years. We are

polyamorous. He then gives me a lecture on what it means to be polyamorous, as if it was a minority of some sort, and not a choice. He talks about the importance of communication; there is no problem if you just communicate all of the time, it takes a lot of learning, he explains. To me, finding a polyamorous lover seems perfect on paper. I like the idea of someone who plans ahead when and where to meet so that I wouldn't need to be available too often. This setting also protects from the risks of losing oneself in one lover. But whenever I meet someone polyamorous, the poly-talk takes up too much space. Quotes from the Ethical Slut and notes on communication expand endlessly, like a pizza-dough in a horror movie for kids, until there's no space left for attraction or excitement. Without exception I end up being intertwined in some strange web of hippies with hurt feelings. All of my functioning romantic relations have always been open and light, but it's not a part of my identity. I just happen to love my friends more than any of my lovers, and I find the potential crushes of daily life irresistible.

He says he drinks too much when he feels too much. He truly is a fast-paced drinker, I think he is on his sixth drink when I've just ordered my third one. It's close to midnight and he tells me that he has to make an important phone call. When he returns, he says he forgot to mention that he has to go home, immediately, because he has to work early the next morning. I'm confused why he didn't bring this up earlier. We start walking in the same direction. He's wobbling, and I'm more drunk than I want to be. I feel that my consumption of alcohol has gone to waste, as I wanted to have sex and had been preparing myself emotionally for that the whole evening. I had even come to terms with the cropped jumper. We hug goodbye, and I never hear of him again.

## 5. Shy boy

He has tiny tattoos all over his hands and at least five different Instagram accounts. He's seemingly nervous, drumming his fingers on tables, chairs, screens, cans, my hands. He watches Youtube-videos of skinny daughters of rockstars, and gigs of their dead fathers. He doesn't listen, but he gives compliments. He has always slept badly. He rarely eats, but if he eats he eats porridge, and he prepares it by pouring boiling water over oats. He only buys the blue brand with a teddybear on it, as that is what his ex used to buy. They no longer talk, she apparently got traumatized by him falling in love with his best friend. He then got traumatized from traumatizing her and left this best friend. He

doesn't have any money, but his bedside table is full of nicotine products and autobiographies by Patty Smith and Nick Cave. When we first met, he was reading Curt Cobain's memoir. The first thing he said to me was a quote from that book: Fuck, fuck, fuck. Which is exactly what I thought when I found him in my bed the morning after our first date, and he wasn't ugly at all, and I didn't want him to leave. He was kind and kissed softly. His eyes are light and their lids are pointing slightly downwards, making him look like he needs you. When I saw him in the company of other people, I couldn't understand how he could be sweet to me. He didn't want to touch me, he thought I wanted too much all the time, he thought I was too much all the time. Socially he is awkward, but he has a cute smile and he takes everything he ever can get; from drugs to library books. He then got very busy, and when I left abroad for months, he never asked me if I was planning to come back home. He is the only one of the boys that ever admitted that I wasn't in any way special to him, that he has been treating all of his previous lovers like he treated me. Leaving us hanging. He was special to me. He still is, maybe just as a reminder.

He says that he wants to be my friend. He rarely does what he says.

These descriptions are included in the process of *The Boy Study*, but for what I wished the study to be, writing wise, they feel too general and dry. When I think of proximity I feel that the middle ground where I take one step aside and simply describe what happened or how someone is, is not relatable. It is a safe position, a position where I as the author face no risk. It is a position where nothing happens to me. I long to get closer: so close that I lose the whole picture, that all I can do is describe how something feels. So close that there are only precise bodily actions and reactions, and common affect-loaded phrases like I love you or I want you, left. I believe, that the private is the public, because I trust that we have all been there, a bit too close, a bit too involved, to be able to *write about* or to *other*, no matter how artificial the attempt. And then I want to be, in the far far distance, the structural one, where I see all of the patterns and structures unfolding. When I see them, I can change them. But the one step aside, to keep my self safe, is not a space where I want to create art from.

“it's like she picks up a thing, and then she makes it into something that stops feeling from the inside to the outside. She makes music that feels like it comes from the outside

and in, if you know what I mean. She takes what's outside and puts it in, instead of taking what's inside and telling about that. That's why it feels like something is wrong, but you don't know what it is. She ticks all of the boxes, everything is right and it's cool and it's trendy and it's her, but somehow the premise for what art is, is gone, which is: someone says something that is true to themselves.” Liv Strömqvist<sup>95</sup>

So, to not get too comfortable or too deep in my feels<sup>96</sup>, I took one step further away, to the side, to turn these notions of boys into practical and easily applicable tips for acting. I could write about performing gender or acting out or emotional labor, but I prefer staying with the craft, and I am running out of pages. Instead of expanded notions on choreography<sup>97</sup> I present:

## 6. CONDENSED NOTIONS ON ACTING, BOY BY BOY

6.0 My brother said this to me after the breakup: “but isn't it great that you believed it all. Wouldn't it be way worse if you would always be scared of being fooled and expecting the worst of everyone.” This might be the most important tool; to stay naïve, curious, and playful. Open heart, soft sphincter - let's go!

6.1 Crush efficiently. You get lots of energy if you find someone to be attracted to in the space you are in. If you are edging on a burnout or didn't sleep the night before a premiere: find someone hot in the audience and impress them. Be careful though how you act out on it. Often the chase is better than the catch.

6.2 Some boys think they want you when they in fact just want their ex back. There is nothing you can do about this. Play it cool. Look at videos of the director's previous work, adapt techniques and styles from the director's own aesthetic to whatever “improvised, new, unseen, free, devised” method they are asking you to explore.

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<sup>95</sup> commenting on Beyoncé's new album Cowboy Carter in the podcast En Varg Söker sin Podd in conversation with Caroline Rinskog Ferrada-Noli – Queen Jolene 11/4/2024

<sup>96</sup> When something brings you deep into your emotions. by Cheerxm March 12, 2017 Urban dictionary

<sup>97</sup> Expanded notions of choreography is a discourse that encourages perceiving everything as choreographies. In 2010 or so, It took the dances out from the studios and black boxes, which was fresh, but it also tends to make the dance vague. If everything is choreography then also nothing is choreography. Now, in 2024, I think it's time to get back to the specific, tender and crafty.

Become what they used to have, with minimal effort. This way you can save energy to start a hobby and fulfill your desires outside of work.

6.3 Sometimes it is worth giving a genre a second chance, with a newfound distance. They might re-appear when you least expect them and treat you better than ever before. I currently apply this to Musicals, Horror Shows, Romance and sad boys (as friends).

6.4 When you ask something loud and clear, you will get a response: and that is what allows you to move on. Only do this once you are done daydreaming. Even if you get no response at all, you have done what you can. This is applicable for dream jobs as well. I often write choreographers and directors that I would like to work with them, it is humbling, but at least I have done my part and can move on.

6.5 You cannot choose who you fall in love with, but you can choose who you spend your time with. If boys are acting in alien ways; leave them or use them as your muse. This boy evoked many new nuances of emotions in me, that I have since then often used on stage. I just think about something that happened to recreate a feeling or a mood when performing. As I went abroad this boy transformed into a simulacra<sup>98</sup>, into a version of him that no longer has an original. I then used this half-imaginary boy as a source for many of my writings. If I needed to direct my thoughts towards someone, it would be this fantasy boy. He is my muse. He has great taste in art.

6.6 if a boy asks you to marry him on the first date, make sure to film it and sell it to Kiasma<sup>99</sup> as a historical re-enactment of Austin's performative Utterance. Position it as institutional critique (hox marriage is an institution, don't go too close with questioning contemporary art museums as institutions upholding exclusivity). Then spin it a bit by referring to hyperreality and AI and claim that words have lost all meaning. Get married to the boy in the opening night. Actually, if this particular sad boy happens to be reading this, I could still be up for it. It would be great for his career.

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<sup>98</sup> This is a central element in Baudrillard's saturation theory. Baudrillard argues that imagery, especially online, has become as real as the originals of the images. A Simulacra has no longer any original, the image has become an original of itself.

<sup>99</sup> biggest and most well-known contemporary art museum in Finland

We could even take it one step further and name it something like: *Marriage as in institution*<sup>100</sup> and organize a huge wedding in Kiasma instead of an opening night. We could then spend our honeymoon in the Kiasma theater, with a performance as result. This could be a comment on the precarities of being a freelancer - a freelancer is never truly free - Or we could just put up a Puppycam<sup>101</sup> and make it a more common critique on surveillance capitalism<sup>102</sup>.

One shyboy asked me to marry him on our first date as well, but him I cannot marry because he has no money and daddy issues. Pick your long-term artistic commitments wisely.

6.7 If you get great conceptual performance ideas that include a boy, don't send them 11 messages about it in the night so that it is the first thing they see in the morning. Same goes for art designers (light, sound, scenography, costume), take it when you meet. Boys and designers don't exist before 11 am, they are sleepy and grumpy, and will most likely not agree to marrying you in a museum or bringing in the theater smoke already from the end of the first scene.

6.8 Relationships and art projects will be formed through what the content and context requires, if you allow them to. Keep options open for turning a lover into a friend or an autoethnographic study into a poetry collection. This will allow the material to bloom and release space for other lovers and projects. Rely on the knowledge you have gained from previous relationships and creative processes, to make informed decisions regarding form.

6.9 Sometimes this re-formatting is painful, and you must kill many of your darlings and desires on the way.

6.10 If you want actual tips and tools, call a mom or a grandma (doesn't need to be yours):

“ Sleep on it, before you act on it.” Mom

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<sup>100</sup> see: marriage is an institution

<sup>101</sup> YLE Pentulive is a 24/7 livestream of puppies growing up.

<sup>102</sup> George Orwell, Jonathan Crary, and all the other anxious boys out there

“As long as you keep wondering, you develop.” Grandma 1

“Be careful with the boys.” Grandma 2

6.11 If you’re not sure if a script, a scene, or a boy is problematic, turn to your best friend. Try to describe exactly how it is, before expressing your concerns. If this friend truly is your best friend, and they truly didn’t find any problems in the matter, you’re probably having PMS.

6.12 *It is never too late to give in.*<sup>103</sup>

6.13 *The next project will always come.*<sup>104</sup> As a performer, make notes for yourself which practical things it is in a project, that makes you feel like you too, are doing a great job. This is valuable in the future! When you know how feeling good feels, you can recreate it. With this boy, I felt calm and safe, chill. I felt like I could very honestly tell him what was going on, and his behavior didn’t change radically as a consequence of that, because he was confident in himself. Only through this experience I understood in a corporeal way, just how bad some of the earlier dates had been.

*Similar calmness in my nervous system, in performance processes, often comes to me from total transparency. I often experience when working as a performer, that the director/choreographer speaks about exploration and freedom and finding new ways, but clearly has some predetermined aesthetical preferences that then override the newfound materials. This I no problem, if they are aware of it, but it gets very heavy as a performer to spend weeks on improvising, trying to guess, what the director likes. When that happens, I cannot as a performer prioritize the artwork. If a style, technique, or taste is articulated already before starting to work together, this is no problem. I also consider as a performer that it is partly my responsibility to get familiarized with the directors’ previous work, to know what kinds of performances they are making. When knowing the parameters, I can make informed decisions.*

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<sup>103</sup> quote by Anna Grip, in “And then what?” zine.

<sup>104</sup> I can’t remember which one of my optimistic colleagues said this.

*In fact, I have come to the exact same reasoning in the communication with many of the boys in the study. I repeatedly say that they can tell me everything they feel. That it is polite to tell me everything, including if they don't know how they feel, because then I get the agency to make informed decisions regarding if I want to continue seeing them or not.*

6.14 Things to say and ask before committing to a performance or a boy:

- What are you looking for?
- Are you aware that I work with many different people, I will not be available full-time, full-term?
- Are you interested in improvisation and physical performance or in building storylines and arcs?
- Do you need me to be available on the phone outside rehearsal hours?
- Will you be confident enough to tell me to be quiet, if I talk too much or seem too critical, and to tell me what you are desiring from me?

6.15 Art is for everyone, but not everyone is an artist.

6.16 I did not learn this from a boy but always write and sign a contract.

6.17 When I suggested to the festival boy that we could be friends, he answered that he already has enough friends. It was a no, that felt good and honest. Throughout my acting studies, I have said yes to too many things. I have not been able to prioritize, and I have been afraid to hurt someone if I say that I am not interested<sup>105</sup>. The outcome has often been worse; that I either get sick because of doing too many things or not sleeping, or that I have done the things badly. Since meeting the festival boy, I try to take a few second to think: do I really have time for this? Once I gave up my role as Julia in a little play and said I'd rather be the joker with no replicas. Instead of learning lines, I had a free night, that I can still remember. The new Julia was epic, and I got compliments for my joker too.

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<sup>105</sup> Of course, one has to work and do things to be able to stay alive, but here I'm talking more about these extra tasks/sidejobs/favours that are of similar value to you as some random date wanting to be your friend.



6.18 Position yourself. Whenever I have made pre-existing presumptions of how this person will be or how this working group will function, I have either gotten disappointed or been too wrapped up in my ideas, to see what potential the date/stage truly has.

6.19 I AM DRIVEN BY HORMONES THAT CIRCLE A MONTHLY AND DAILY CYCLE AND THEREFORE MY FEELINGS CAN NOT BE TRUSTED. I SHALL NOT TRUST HOW I FEEL ABOUT SOMETHING ESPECIALLY IF I FEEL SHITTY ABOUT SOMETHING THAT FELT GOOD YESTERDAY WITHOUT CONSIDERING: WHETHER I HAVE FORGOTTEN/CHOSEN TO EAT, SLEEP AND DRINK COFFEE. WHETHER I HAVE CONSUMED MEDICATION /INTOXICATION/SEXUAL OR OTHER HORMONE INFUSING/REDUCING SUBSTANCES OR ACTIVITIES. I SHALL ALWAYS CALCULATE HOW MANY DAYS SINCE MY OVULATION HAS PASSED BEFORE KILLING ANY OF MY DARLINGS. I SHALL NOT!!! MAKE ANY COMMITMENTS (OR SAY I LOVE YOU) WITHIN 1HOUR POST ORGASM.

6.20 It's never too late to approach someone and talk things through. And to apologize, but only if you are sorry and you know what you are apologizing for.

6.21 Don't fuck for content.<sup>106</sup>

6.22 Don't drink at the premiere.

## 7. FRIENDS

A crucial part of *The Boy study* became the conversations that I had about the boys with my friends. Also, a big part of my work as a performer and artist relies on the dialogues I have with my colleagues, whom most often are dear friends too. I feel like those discussions are the actual thing that I'm practicing. Those lifelong, feminine<sup>107</sup>, friendships are the stage and the art and the life, and dating boys is just gathering

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<sup>106</sup> Unless you want to.

<sup>107</sup> as a quality. Honest, fragile, emotional, abundant.

material to use as soil for those friendships to grow. Talking with my friends about what had happened and how it felt, was a central method in *The Boy Study*, both for the writing and for managing to keep dating boys. When I got too obsessed with my self, or lost perspective completely, they helped me back on track. Waking up next to a lover is nothing compared to waking up next to your best friend. Here is a discussion with a dear friend, from the study.

*C: But I still struggle with defining a boy. Somehow, I'm starting to realize that a boy is in fact defined by the people around him. The women in his life, including me, make it possible for him to be a boy, to behave like a boy, by taking care of his shit.*

*A: yes, the patriarchy<sup>108</sup>.*

*C. it's so sad, through dating these boys I'm becoming Simone de Beauvoir<sup>109</sup>. I didn't want this study to be about gender, but all I can think about is emotional labour. And all the new ways to resign from responsibility; like all those actor-boys going "I use all pronouns, doesn't really matter" and yet nothing in their behavior changes. But specific to these boys, that is not necessarily the case with men, is that they don't mind having all of these women taking care of them.*

*A: Now that I think about it, it's true that none of my (boy)lovers or boyfriends, have ever been afraid of becoming dependent on me. I'm always so worried about that, making sure that I stay independent, but it's like they don't even think about it. And that's the strange thing about this situation (talking about an ex that has said that he will withdraw from their common friend group, as he finds it difficult to be her friend, because he was still seeing her when he met his new girlfriend (of course without letting any of them now) and now his new girlfriend doesn't like my friend). **He** made the choice that **he** will now withdraw himself, after I had spent years trying to make our friendship work, and now **he** is still on a hiking trip with our common group of friends, and no one invited me so that it wouldn't become awkward. And he is there with his new*

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<sup>108</sup> who run the world? Rich white old men. Still. :-(

<sup>109</sup> A second wave feminist, who surely was important at her time, but is outdated today. Also a great writer. Here I refer to second wave feminism focusing on white women as the most oppressed group of people that must be saved. Which I do not agree with. It had just been a lot of boys behaving like boys lately.

*girlfriend, and it is so strange that he clearly still hasn't dealt with any of the problems that occurred in his behavior during our relationship – he just dived into a new relationship – and I am here pondering about these structures, without any relationship. And I am happy and relieved that we are no longer together, but this still makes me so sad. And I feel like I am risking losing those friends if I bring it up, because we don't meet that often anymore. And he feels like he is a good guy who has done the right thing.*

*C: That is sad. And I'm so sorry that you need to go through it. What is it with these boys, that they think that saying something is doing that something. They never do what they say? The boys really don't need to change, do they? Boys can be boys, as long as they want to, and why wouldn't they want to? All women I have ever dated have been gorgeous and kind and caring, and most of all safe. They boys don't risk anything when dating girls. And as sad as it is, at this point of the study, going on dates only feels like a burden and slightly dangerous. So, I think I am done with the research phase now.*

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

### 8.1 On sense and nonsense

#### 1. What senses do you use? <sup>110</sup>

I use attraction, a sense of belonging and longing, I use touch, seeing, hearing.

I use smell, a lot. I smell closely and repeatedly. I smell the neck and I smell the sweat in the armpits. If it doesn't smell bad, I know I've lost.

I sharpen my senses, to see, hear and feel everything. I use memory. I try to remember everything, and then I repeat it. I use my sense of timing, to be witty, I use my sense of humor, to be funny. I sense your interests, your needs, and your desires. I guess the problem is, I am sensing, and you are not. I sense what is the right thing to say and when. I sense what is the wrong thing to say but in the right way. I sense how you walk

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<sup>110</sup> Parkinson, Chrysa. *Art Practice as Eco-system Questionnaire*. I recommend answering this questionnaire to anyone trying to articulate their artistic endeavours.

and how you shiver, how you fix your hair and drum your fingers on your thigh. I sense your bones and the cavities surrounding them. I try to make sense of you. At this point, I have lost all sense of agency.

## **2. Which senses guide toward your interests?**

Mainly the smell. And desire. I have framed the research to be driven by desire and lust. Only if I want this, I can include it in the research. I frame myself as sensual. I listen to the music they like; I dress as they wish, I -

This is beside the point, but I have found a lot of common behaviors and ways of approaching my work and my romantic interests. The word romantic is wrong; I really talk about lust. I love everyone, but I only long for some of them. And others get stuck. Writing is soothing, my agency returns, as I remember that I can use all that happened and share it and one day someone might experience it too, and know, that they are not alone. In fact, now I know how boys function – and with that knowledge in mind, I can make choices regarding how to approach them.

I approach a new job like a boy in this project. I ponder on what they would like, how why, and when. How I should look. That I should fit. Then, in the rehearsal process, I use all my senses and common senses to try to figure out what they wish from me. I try to mold myself to fit the work, to fit their desires, to fit their dreams. Often they fall for me because I'm a professional at that. I even know how to make them think I'm in fact not molding for them. With you I failed. You simply didn't want me, no matter how I was. You also didn't care, how I was. It was the first time for me, that I could be whatever, and I guess you just liked some idea of me or whatever and then you moved on to other things. And I still can't comprehend it.

## **3. Which senses are unreliable or guide you into unsustainable activities?**

My feelings. They give content, but they drive me away from the study. As a starting point, I promised myself I would only engage in dates that I genuinely wanted to go on. But I was not supposed to become obsessed. I was not supposed to fall in love. Because then I stopped writing too. I stopped writing because I was humiliated by my own response and humiliated by the behavior I endured.

I have found many things. Many relatable breakup memes. Many thoughts on the need to prioritize myself. I'm astonished by this obsession. I guess that pondering takes me away from this study. It is true that I have thought about this person every day since that day. What a strange little brain? It forces some of my worst fears, my weakest points, and then makes me feel like there's nothing else I want.

I get in the way of you to not get in the way of myself. By you I mean the imaginary version of you, the original is somewhat average and trashy. Sadly, still cute.

It is easier to work when I don't care too much. Maybe this study is a way to care less or just enough, through dividing the attention. Through having another motive, a secret mission.

I find it difficult to draw conclusions on *The Boy Study*.

Like most artistic projects, it doesn't end on the last performance or date, and as I am writing this, I am still chatting with many of the boys. I'm sending them texts and asking how they think and feel about them. If it is ok, that I publish them. Today, one of these boys told me about how bad memories he has from my bed. *About when he fell and hit his face on the side of my bed and got a cut on his cheek and then he called his mom to ask if he should go to Haartman<sup>111</sup>. And that I had said, very seriously with slight panic in my voice, that I had promised myself no more boys. That I promised myself not to be taking boys to Haartman day and night anymore. That it must end now. Those were our best days. After those days everything went to shit, and I guess we're trying to sail on that sea of shits now. Figuring out how to be friends when you have been so hurt by each other. It's like playing Jenga, every tiny little mistake collapses the whole structure. I don't know if it's possible but somehow in these apocalyptic times it feels worth trying.*

This has most of all been an art project. Had it been an actual anthropological study on boys, I would have focused way more on the bad things that happened, like, sexual

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<sup>111</sup> nearest emergency room

harassments and overconsumption of illegal substances. That there are so many boys out there that are dangerous to themselves and others, and I have felt lucky, to not have been seriously assaulted or harmed during these 18 months. It is extremely sad that I feel lucky about that. But the patriarchy is still thriving.

As a thesis in acting, I could and I probably should write about emotional labor and about how the binary gender stereotypes often were repeated throughout the study, more or less in disguise. I should write about privilege, both mine and the boys. I should be comparing dating to acting. But for me, this is also an attempt to let the materials from *The Boy Study* speak for themselves, claiming that poetic language wouldn't always need to be explained and disclosed with a more proper language<sup>112</sup>. And it might fail and then you can email me and say that this is problematic<sup>113</sup>. But I will write a little bit about proximity, and about how the study kept expanding and leaking into all parts of my life<sup>114</sup>. These days I find myself in going out on boys' nights and making performances and excursions with them too. Often I am one of the boys.

I'm going to miss arriving to places and saying, *I came here to write about boys*. Or going, *sorry I can't join, I have to write about boys*. It is such a ridiculous thing to be doing. And it is a thing that most people who are or have been attracted to boys, have at some point been doing. So, in this study, I am to ridicule the boy. The boy as character, the boy as trope, the boy as something to desire. I write about boys, until I have exhausted writing about boys. Not only for me but for everyone. And then what's left, is just a term, some historical remains of a microgender, used in ancient sayings, similar to having a manflu. I often have a manflu. Maybe I could have boyblues. Or have bleached boyhair or be in a boymood. Today I did send a boymessage, it said: *Sorry, wrong number*. I sent it after having sent an embarrassing message and immediately deleted it.

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<sup>112</sup> which I'm already doing A LOT in this thesis. This thesis is my last meta-theatre, I promise.

<sup>113</sup> corinne.mustonen@outlook.com

<sup>114</sup> private message sent by @tjorinne 10/3/23 to @Heartagram on Instagram

Dear Ville Valo, I am writing you in English, since you are an international star, and I am writing my thesis in English. In my thesis, I study men that identify as boys. You are my biggest inspiration and I find that Ville Valo Suomen seksikkäin mies 1999-2001 is crucial for the modern boy. Back then you were so flirty and slightly feminine and quite kind, turning down sexist comments etc. Do you think this is accurate? How do you think Ville Valo of 1999-2001, formed the boys of today? What impact as role model and sex icon did you have in modern boys? Somehow, the young mediaversion of yourself, is crucial for this thesis, but I can't articulate why. Could you help me? Do you know why?

I then did a queer move and explained the situation, apologizing. The term boi has already been reclaimed by the queer community and is used in many different contexts. But I dream of the word boy being applicable to situations and moments of irresponsibility, rather than to form identities and entities with.

I no longer know, what is attraction and what is art. I no longer know if I am a boy or a girl. I no longer know where love ends, and friendship begins. And I still don't understand, how it is possible that everything keeps changing with time, without my engagement, with me observing and chilling somewhere in the sidelines. The boy study is a study on proximity, in which writing is my medium. In some ways, writing is performing, or at least it informs performing, just as the words, rhythms and meanings are informed by my corporeal experiences.

“I would say that you can be unknown even to yourself and you will never be ready. The strangeness in oneself does not vanish and that is comforting. This relates to my personal life and to work roles. Hanging out with strangeness helps to create connections. With my colleagues, we have pondered on the words *undra* (wonder) and *beundra* (admire) in Swedish and we have noticed that noticing admirable things happens through wondering about the unknown. It opens possibilities to living together.” Aune Kallinen<sup>115</sup>

## 8.2 Leftovers: New friends and diagnoses

Even as I am writing this, I'm chatting with many of the boys, asking if I can publish texts about them, talking about how things were and how things are today. Had it not been for this study, I would never have insisted on many of our relations like I did. I wouldn't had paid attention to communication, nor to my own behavior and to how it kept changing. I found a lot of distance and lightness, by telling them exactly how I felt. Eventually I didn't have that much to lose, after all, they were just boys, and they seemed to remain boys. Here's my latest conversation:

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<sup>115</sup> Aune Kallinen is my professor in acting and when I told them, quite stressed, that “I have no idea what acting is and I don't understand theater” they said; *me neither*. I guess that's where we're still at. Or at least I am.



me 16.12

is this ok?? I can edit and remove if not !

it is for my thesis and you are one of many boys and it will be read by like, 4 people.

you don't need to decide now.

these are quite exaggerated! I write in different styles and these are othering.

and of course anonymously

shyboy 17.02

I read it.

I feel like crying a bit.

but. I do recognize everything.

me 17.24

okei!!!! at this point I'm just trying to organize and edit all the mass of texts, so I don't really grasp when I'm being hurtful and when not, but I understand very well if I am hurting you with this. We can talk more when I get home! or earlier if it feels very bad. but in this thesis there won't be more materials of you, so if this is ok, I'd like to keep them there.

And I have been crying too!! I'm a geysir.

shyboy 17.30

I mean my own behavior. is what hurts.

I'm absolutely not going to start censoring anything you want to write.

But it feels sad to be me.

like, when I read these things.

I feel sad for you.

me 17.43

Yes. I was so sad back then. because I liked you so much.

but. now things are better than we ever could've imagined! right?

yay us?

shyboy 19.35

I believe you. that you were sad

shyboy 22.14

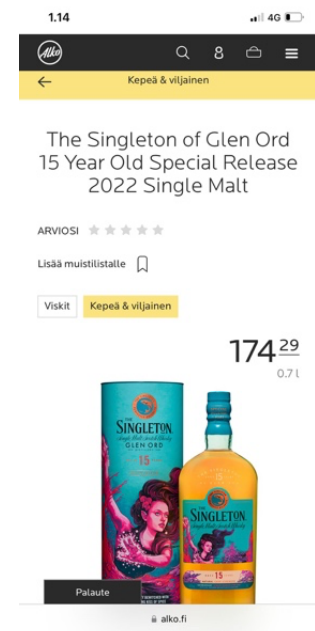
We stole a very expensive whiskey...

me 22.36

oho!!



116



117

<sup>116</sup> this is a meme by emotionalclub that I sent to all of the boys, when asking if I can publish texts that they could possibly recognize themselves in. It is important to me that they are not commonly recognizable in the descriptions. I also got an anxiety diagnosis towards the end of this study, so this is only a joke on myself.

<sup>117</sup> we had a three-hour time difference, therefore the screenshot says a different time.



### 8.3 Was this brave or just stupid?

When I started studying in the MA, I desired to make braver art. Since then, I have realized, that what I earlier misunderstood as being brave is just a question of style and medium. I could perform this naked covered in fake blood and sperm on stage, or I can write it here in my pajamas sipping chamomile tea after having gone for an afternoon walk with my grandmother, and both can equally exist within the realm of brave art.

Maybe the bravery can be tiny, and maybe the bravery is for me in intimacy, in saying, see, this is exactly how it went down. The bravery might also be in truly staying with the material, in admitting that the boys were only partly what I expected them to be. That the boys have taught me a lot about life and many of them have been sincere and honest to me. I think the bravery has also been in insisting on dialogue.

The bravery was also when one of the boys said; I have treated all my love interest as shitty as you. I see it now, all of them. In that way, no, you're not special. But I really want to make this friendship work. And even as he didn't make the friendship work, I truly think he wanted to. Him daring to be honest, despite acknowledging that what he says might hurt me, instead of just generally apologizing, gave me agency in making decisions regarding the future of our relationship. The fact that you haven't been special to someone doesn't mean that you couldn't become special to them, but now it is up to you to decide, what you want.

The bravery is also in accepting that how people see me is out of my control. I am shaken by the idea that most artists have parents. My job is strange, and I often have "open doors days" at work – seemingly inviting everyone<sup>118</sup>. I'm very afraid of my

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<sup>118</sup> I asked the "mikä meitä vaivaa" boys about this on email 19/11/2022: Sitten vielä toinen tärkeä kysymys sukulaissedistä yleisössä. Kun esiintyjäntöyön puolesta on välttämätöntä markkinoida omia töitään, jotta kukaan tulisi katsomaan. Niin miten olla saavutettava ja avoin ja kutsua kaikki mutta ei KAIKKIA. Olen naiivisti luottanut kepun "maalaisjärkeen" (siis luottanut siihen, että ne sedät luottaisivat) mutta nyt on jo kolmesti saapunut joku rändöm pano + sukulainen katsomaan minimalistista tanssia ja sitten vaatinut loputtomasti perusteluja sille miksi esitän minimalistista tanssia ja "mistä tässä nyt oikeasti on kyse" ja "onko tätä nyt tarkoitus ymmärtää". En jaksa vastata enkä jaksa esiintyä heille. Vielä hirveämpää on, kun he saapuvat perivoihin performansseihin ja pahastuvat. Itsehän tulivat paikalle. Olen rajoittanut näkyvyyttäni heiltä somessa jne, ei auta. En uskalla poistaa fb ystäväistä, joulut kun ovat jo sellaisinaan ankeita. Auttakaa pliiis, kuumat, viisaat kommunistit!!!

[Pontus Purokuru responded the same day: Mitä tulee sukulaissetiin yleisössä, kysyin Veikalta neuvoa:](#)

[12.25, 19.11.2022] Veikka Lahtinen: [eiks se anti holman vanha neuvo oo paras että saa tulla katsomaan mutta mitään selitystä ei ole velkaa, minä teen nyt näitä juttuja](#)

[12.26, 19.11.2022] Veikka Lahtinen: [kun se selitti että vanhemmat istuu takarivissä kun hän heiluu alasti lavalla](#)

loved ones thinking that I write and perform personal things<sup>119</sup> to complicate their lives, or to hurt them. For me, describing the most intimate experiences and events, is a technique for developing empathy and for meeting in the depths of friendship and shared experiences. I truly believe that the private<sup>120</sup> is public, and on that level all of this text is fiction, because it could be applicable on anyone. One day when I was particularly anxious about oversharing, as I had told my mom about this research (which I didn't intend to do) she later sent me an Instagram reel with a girl dancing in a leather jacket that said: "Every family needs a daughter who has her dad's temper <sup>121</sup>, mom's attitude, ain't scared to speak her mind, doesn't like being told what to do & loves too hard". I cried. The reel has 1,439 comments, and it has been shared thousands of times. But by sending it to me, to her daughter, she made the public private.

"We will arrive at the universal not by abandoning our particularity but by turning it into a way of reaching others, by virtue of that mysterious affinity which makes situations mutually understandable." Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Throughout The Boy Study I have loved and I have lost, and I have distanced myself from those loves and losses, as a technique, to be able to love and lose more. I have materialized and contextualized those loves and losses, by writing and performing; by feeling, noticing, theorizing, wondering, discussing, ridiculing, and mourning. I have lost my idea of self somewhere in that rotten bush in your garden and found my sanity three months later under someone else's bed. And I have come to the conclusion that I couldn't care less about what acting is, and I couldn't care less about what boys are. And this doesn't mean that I don't want them in my life, quite the opposite, I'm happy to keep them at a respectful distance, and when necessary, and at an inappropriate proximity.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> this thesis is not that explicit, I refer more broadly to my artistic work being out there for everyone to witness.

<sup>120</sup> not the mundane!! but the very private. the things that feel like they shouldn't be shared. like having cramps in your anus. I once wrote a poem about my anal cramps and turns out anal cramps are quite a common inconvenience.

<sup>121</sup> my dad has a very calm temper.

<sup>122</sup> as a side hustle, when I'm not dancing or dating gurlsss... rrrr

## GHOST THESIS

*It's not fair to write about any of you like I have done. This is a failure. It is othering and distancing, and it is not written from the heart it is written from the outside looking at the inside and being with you is the other way around. It is written with the presumption that this audience doesn't understand unless I articulate and refer to the oxford dictionary. it is written to an audience who loses tension who loses trust in me when I turn my back, when I don't speak louder, when I don't look at them between looking at my colleagues. It is written from above, as if I'd know more. It is pointing, clarifying, emphasizing, explaining. I don't believe in any of that, and I don't see any other option, than writing exactly how it went, not from the outside, not as the narrator. I call for love and loss and friendship and lust that denies all understanding of chronology and clarification. I call for art that is messy and loud and tiny and pathetic. I call for art that has no distance, that has no irony. Art that circludes<sup>123</sup> and penetrates. Art where I can leave my self on the shelf.*

I want it to be saturated. I want it to feel like it feels to kiss your neck lightly, knowing that you would rather be kissed by someone else. I want it to feel like waiting for months, and how you then called one night, and I found you on the kitchen floor wet of sweat and urine and I washed you so clean that even your tattoos faded. I counted your breaths all night, from one to eight like I have learned in dance class, and how I squeezed your cold hands with every number, hoping you wouldn't dissolve.

I want it to feel like it felt, when you touched me in the wrong place, in the wrong way, and I thought whatever I'm too tired to say no. I'm too tired to explain. I'll just go on to have it over with. And how every bit of my skin burned, how all oxygen retrieved halfway to the lungs and how I vanished when you screamed at me that no one has ever tricked you like this, that you haven't done anything wrong, that I lured you here. Somewhere in the distance your monologue echoed, you're cheap, you're trash, and I

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<sup>123</sup> Circlusion denotes the antonym of *penetration*. It refers to the same physical process, but from the opposite perspective. Penetration means pushing something—a shaft or a nipple—*into* something else—a ring or a tube. Circlusion means pushing something—a ring or a tube—*onto* something else—a nipple or a shaft. The ring and the tube are rendered active. That's all there is to it. Bini Adamczak, on circlusion.

understand why you are alone. And how I sat quietly on the cold floor of this strange room, with the door locked for forty-two more minutes, and how I was sure that you would be waiting for me outside. And even as you weren't I still thought that it would just have been easier to let you fulfill whatever you had come to fulfill, than to sit there feeling like a failed feminist.

And I wanted to write about the tension between my fingers and your wrist, and about the desire that I thought was gone. I didn't expect to ever desire anyone again, and then I desired you and how desiring you led me to losing ones I loved and how I didn't do anything wrong, because I couldn't know before I knew, and when I knew it was already too late. And then one day, you, your pretty face and your "darkness inside" walked into me, and said hi, as if we were friends, as if, every morning for the last six months, I hadn't been waking up to the attempts of my body exorcising your touch away, in spasms, cursing, it wasn't my fault it wasn't my fault it wasn't my fault it

And you, who said that you don't want anything special, that everything is fine, but when I couldn't give you any more than I could, when I said that it hurts too much, that I can't be the bigger person and I don't want to be the one for you, you disappeared. I hated myself for not loving you and you hated me for not loving you.

And how you couldn't understand how I could ask you, if you wanted to be with me, when you didn't even know, if you wanted to wake up at all, tomorrow morning. And how all I wanted to ask, was if you would like to kiss me. I had been gathering myself for hours, but then there was no self no more, there was just you, and your destructive thoughts, as usual. And then I told you for the first time I told you that you cannot say that to me. You cannot say that to me because I gave you so much, and I waited for so long, and I just wanted to ask, if you would like to kiss me, because you promised that you would always want to kiss me. Back when I was pretty, you said that you would always want me, that we would be together forever because you had never met anyone like me. And I sat quietly on your bed, and I was in love, and you said that you have to sleep, and that I have to leave. And I got up, and I took my boots and I fell back down, and I said, if I go now, we will never meet again and you nodded and you said good, I have already told you many times to leave.

And how I wish I could've loved you. How I wish I could've been excited to see you. I withdrew from your soft smiles and excited eyes. You invited me to your home and said, this is my love and here is my lust. You stood there between the kitchen chairs with your heart in your hand. And I wanted to be more I wanted to tell you how beautiful you were but that would only have made it worse so I instead I left your messages on read.

And how it felt when you pulled me close, to the closest place possible, my nose on your heart and my skull on your artery. You pulled me closer closer I traveled through your sternum I could hear your plasma dancing and your white blood cells rushing, always ready to rescue, as you held me there quietly drawing the outlines of my ears and how I still want to kiss you every time I see you, I want to kiss you first on the forehead and then on the throat and say I love you. I love you please don't die tonight, not here, not in this dirty bathroom, ok? But instead I say hey. it's good to see you. Take it easy tonight, ok?

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### Direct quotes in the text (in blue), by

Aune Kallinen  
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 Mom  
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### Photo credits

1. Boy Collage made by me.
2. Photo from The Coming Boogie Woogies, and my hand, taken by me.
3. Young Lean's profile picture, published on soundcloud 2013.
4. A screenshot of Young leans profile picture on Spotify, 2024.
5. A screenshot of jonathanleaonder96's profile picture on Spotify, 2022.
6. Screenshot of Meme by by emotionalclub in Instagram.
7. A photo sent to me by a boy, a screenshot from Alko's webpage.

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