What is it like to be a feminist, a queer subject in postsocialist Eastern Europe? What does it mean to be still continuously cast as “lagging behind”, a belated copy of the West? How can engagement with the visual arts help to bridge the gap between how we live and how we represent this lived experience to ourselves?

This thesis is about the geopolitics of feminist knowledge and the role of the visual arts in conceiving and reconfiguring postsocialist feminist imaginaries. Its central concern is to contest the fantasy, prevalent within Western feminist theorizing, of a “lag” between Western and former Eastern Europe. The thesis explores these imaginaries on a micro scale, zooming in on the deeply personal and political artwork of a contemporary feminist and lesbian-identified Estonian artist, Anna-Stina Treumund. This partial and limited focus on Treumund's photographic self-portraiture enables us to look into the intensities and specificities of individual experience in postsocialist space. Throughout, the thesis evokes a whirling subject as a feminist figuration. This is simultaneously a reference to the embodied and the relational structure of knowledge-systems and world-making.

Drawing on postsocialist, postcolonial, queer and feminist visual culture studies, the author argues that Treumund's art is always already embedded in the local context, as it builds on and problematizes the existing discussions of feminist generations, theorizing, activism and art practices. Combining close readings of Treumund's artworks with contemporary theoretical debates in feminist studies, encounters with the artist and autobiographical narratives, this thesis asserts: there is no “lag”. More importantly, it is of utmost ethical and political importance to pay closer attention to geopolitical locatedness as an axis of difference that matters in contemporary feminist theorizing.

Redi Koobak is a researcher at Tema Genus, the Department of Thematic Studies – Gender Studies, Linköping University, Sweden. This is her doctoral thesis.
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