

# HATEFUCKING



S I M O N   G E N N A R D

1

Nothing is more boring to write about than sex, yet I keep doing it. When I do, it's always about someone else's sex – whether as a puzzle, or a project, or as something which troubles the understanding of an object. Sex is a problem—something invested with optimism, disappointment, embarrassment. I'm protected, usually, by the adoption of a distant third person. I reveal something of myself in the objects I choose to linger on – where my commitments lie, the kinds of erotic attachments I hold, what bothers me. Writing is a negotiation between self-revelation and withholding. There's grace in the backspace.

2

A collaborative project such as this one upsets that. I'm forced to assume a more vulnerable position than I otherwise would. Working with a close friend – one whose intellectual, political and erotic attachments overlap with mine in certain ways, but diverge in others – tests the limits of both work and friendship. I alter my pace – usually slow, restless, simmering – to account for his – avoidance, distraction, beautiful outbursts. I stutter; testing out words, sentences, forms, before I feel I'm ready, hoping we remain broadly in the same realm of thinking and making; hoping that we remain somewhat in proximity while leaving room for thought to move around, shake itself out.

3

Robbie's work is an anchor for questions that aren't yet formed in the real. I'm thinking about sexuality and ambivalence; about sexuality as an interruptive, disorientating and distressing thing; and about its unhappy relationship to projects of liberation – both historically and in the present. As much as queer sex is an animating force for an unfinished project of emancipation, it is all too easily captured by a liberal

Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, *The Hundreds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 28

rhetoric of inclusion that robs whatever transformative potential it once held in the service of a bland, if slightly fruitier, status quo.

4 In life, though, sex is mostly a chore. Either too much, or not enough, or not quite satisfying. Never quite what it could be. Bound, as well, in a cocktail of over-work, over-drinking, low self-esteem, depression, medication. Men bore me, or else they terrify me, or else they stay past their welcome. It's true, I guess, when Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman call sex an "intentisified encounter with what disorganises accustomed ways of being." But, when applied practically, they sound so dramatic.

5 The breakdown, seven months ago, of my six-year mostly-monogamous relationship was supposed to usher in a personal sexual renaissance. I was unleashed upon the world without burdens or obligations, free to explore appetites my ex-boyfriend couldn't satisfy, and discover appetites I didn't yet know I had. What unfolded, in reality, was a mild addiction to the anguish and validation offered by sex apps, and a series of encounters each awkward, embarrassing, abject and tender in its own way. Like the man who, somehow, revealed to me he was the treasurer of my friend's grandma's church. I had to swallow laughter as we fucked as I kept imagining this man on Sunday morning, talking politely to this mild old woman whom I've never met, but whose impeccable house I've been in many times. Or the man who, despite admirable efforts, couldn't get hard because, he eventually said, "he felt bad about his boyfriend." Or the threesome during which, after two of us resigned ourselves to the fact that we weren't going to come, watched in stunned silence as the third jacked himself off with such vigour and desperation that the thick globs which did eventually spout onto his stomach seemed, more than anything else, forlorn with wasted effort. Does the end ever justify the means? Or the hungover Sunday morning hookup, which turned

Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or The Unbearable* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 11

into a Sunday afternoon beer, which turned into dinner, which led to the two of us, full and satisfied, falling asleep in his hotel before he caught a plane to leave the country forever. I don't remember his name.

6 Very early, I learned that the fleeting affirmation that accompanies the knowledge of my desirability is infinitely preferable to the act itself. I convinced myself this discovery was attributable to break up feelings. I was convinced that, after at least a year of feeling entirely sexless, too comfortable in old habits with someone too familiar to find myself aroused or arousable, suffocated by an intimacy that offered so much of everything all the time., afflicted with countless well-timed phantom headaches, to be desired at all was to be part of the world once more. I told flatmate this. She swiftly disabused me, told me that everyone prefers being the object of someone else's fantasy to the administration and vulnerability of sex.

7 Robbie's paintings conjure a hazy world of sexual possibility. Robbie treats the archive as a site for learning, and for play. All encounters with the archive are erotic encounters, to some extent; being bound up with a desire either to find oneself, or to confirm a hypothesis about the world and how it works. In previous works, Robbie has looked towards Bob Mizer's homoerotic *Physique Pictorial*, published from the 1950s as a physique magazine to evade censors and central to the formation of the gay beefcake aesthetic. Here, though, Robbie's objects are more recent and more ephemeral, belonging to a constantly accumulating and disappearing archive of amateur porn posted on OnlyFans and Twitter. These images play upon the cues and conventions of porn codified by people like Mizer, trading in an already established visual language of the erotic, but they do so knowingly. Robbie calls it a radical democratisation of the pornographic image. Without the need for expensive

equipment and elaborate crews, anyone with an iPhone can make themselves a star. The minimal investment required to produce this content leads, perhaps, to an expansion of the kinds of bodies considered sexy, and an expansion of the locales of sex; there's the bedroom, of course, but there's also a motorway, or a Walmart carpark.

8 Robbie's are faggy gestures. Domestic in scale, his paintings are rendered with broad strokes and limp lines. Glorious blocks of colour in place of fine detail. His paintings are an attempt to suspend cheap images that would be otherwise all too easily eclipsed in a medium once associated with the preservation and exaltation of that which is deemed important enough to be remembered, and to wrest painting from its historic associations with masculine heroism, nationalist propaganda, and modernist contemplation. He talks about them as drawings, in the same way that Wayne Koestenbaum talks about drawing as an erotic exercise – executed with haste and flippancy, thereby considered a “minor art.” Among the needs Koestenbaum claims that drawing can fulfil: “the need to use the hand;” “the need to sacrilize pathetic erotic errands;” “the need to say I have desired this;” “the need to flee into abstraction.”

9 OnlyFans, maybe, draws upon the transformative optimism that queer sex once held. Michel Foucault, in an 1981 interview with French magazine *Gai Pied*, claimed that sex among queer men might “yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized,” and, further, that the invention of such relations formed around pleasure and intimacy outside of heterosexual bonds might shatter mechanisms of subjugation and domination which need the heterosexual family for their reproduction. Or David M. Halperin, writing a decade and a half later, in his book *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, that queerness makes it possible

Wayne Koestenbaum, “On Doodles, Drawings, Pathetic Erotic Eraands, and Writing,” *My 1980s & other essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013), 188

Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” ed. Paul Rabinow, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 138

10 Already by the time he was writing, Muñoz's attachment to utopia was held tightly against the disappointments of what he terms “gay pragmatism.” For Muñoz, “gay pragmatism” is typified by the adoption of a political agenda organised around an anaemic liberalism, concentrating its efforts on making space for queers within the existing institutions of heteronormative capital – marriage, the police force, the military – at the expense of a more radical programme of social justice.

11 Robbie's figures aren't really here for us to identify with. Fleshy ghosts, lacking definition, facial expression – these figures exist outside of time and space, in a realm of pure abandon. In Robbie's queered timeline, Bob Mizer's models meet the stars of OnlyFans, who in turn meet porn producer Paul Morris caught with his left arm halfway inside Michel Foucault. Robbie's queerness, then, might align with Muñoz's – as a utopian force that eschews “straight time” in favour of mining the past for alternate forms of intimacy which flourished in inhospitable circumstances, mapping those moments in the future

David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62

José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia, The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 96

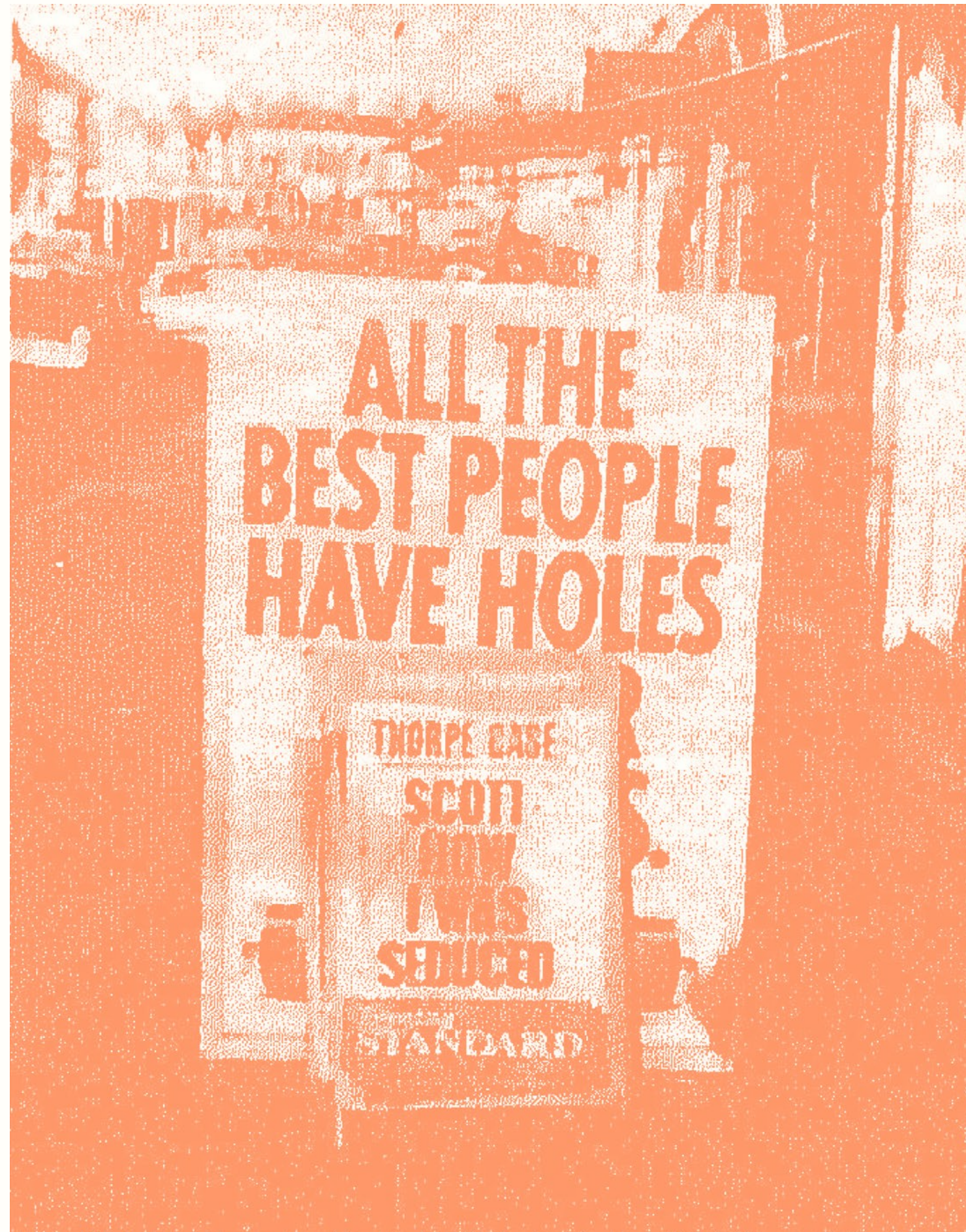
Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22





Image published  
alongside R.W.  
Steele's editorial "Not  
so gay," in *Salient*  
37, no. 38, 24 April,  
1972. Photographer  
unidentified.





Uncaptioned image  
published in *Pink  
Triangle*, 6 August  
1979. Photographer  
unidentified.



Flyer produced for  
"Dykecott" of National  
Gay Rights Coalition's  
protest march along  
Queen St, Tāmaki  
Makaurau, 28 March  
1980. Published in *Pink  
Triangle*, May 1980.

## DYKECOTT

LESBIANS ARE WITHDRAWING FROM THIS MARCH BECAUSE:

1. THE STATED AIMS OF THIS MARCH ARE TO ATTRACT CLOSET MALE GAYS.
2. CONTRARY TO PRE-ADVERTISING, THE ORGANISERS ARE NOT 'ANGRY' AND DO NOT INTEND TO BE 'OFFENSIVE'.
3. THE ORGANISERS ARE ONLY PREPARED TO USE LESBIAN POWER, NOT TO PROMOTE LESBIAN ISSUES.
4. GAY MEN WANT TO RELEGATE LESBIANS TO THE BACKGROUND AS 'SUPPORTERS' OF THEIR ISSUES.
5. CARNIVAL PARADES WILL DO NOTHING TOWARDS ACHIEVING 'GAY RIGHTS'.
6. LESBIANS ARE NO LONGER PREPARED TO DISSIPATE THEIR ENERGIES ON LIMITED GOALS SUCH AS 'LAW REFORM' WHILE THE REAL-ISSUES LESBIAN CUSTODY, SEXISM, HETEROSEXISM & PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION REMAIN TO BE FOUGHT.



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Auckland Pride  
security staff handle  
Emilie Rākete following  
No Pride in Prisons'  
protest of the event,  
2015.



tense. But let's not say this kind of queerness is entirely redemptive. To position queerness' potential as belonging to the future is to acknowledge that it lacks something in the present. And it really is lacking.

12

Once, in a moment of weakness and mercy, I let a man stay the night. In the morning, he revealed to me that he was a Tory by complaining loudly about the Island Bay cycleway. Which quickly turned into him lecturing me about personal responsibility, which, in turn, turned to him telling me at length about the self-regulating powers of the market. Always polite, I made up some excuse about having to meet someone in order to get him to leave.

13

An image, barely remembered, but potent. A shaky cellphone video taken shortly after No Pride in Prisons' (now known as People Against Prisons Aotearoa) peaceful interruption of the 2015 Auckland Pride Parade, protesting the inclusion of Corrections Staff in the event. Emilie Rāketē, one of the protestors, is being restrained on the ground by a police officer; occasionally, she howls in pain; her arm has been fractured by security staff. Heather Carnegie, then president of the Gay Auckland Business Association, stands over Rāketē. Dressed in practical trousers and a shiny silver button up, Carnegie bends down, close to Rāketē's face, scolds her, grabs her hair, dresses her down. At another moment, not captured in this particular video, Carnegie grabs the cellphone of a filming bystander, and throws it on the road. There's a viciousness in Carnegie's performance, as if stunned, wounded, by the audacity of anyone who might think to interrupt the day's proceedings. Lingering on this moment might risk dramatising it – but sometimes an event, however brief, illustrates a problem so precisely as to risk spilling into parody. Here, the uneasy coalition between queerness, capital and respectability encounters a queerness that remains committed to a radical programme of justice. The former, maybe aware

Kiran Foster, "Police handling the injured Māori trans woman protestor on the ground, Auckland Pride Parade 2015," *Youtube*, 21 February 2015, accessed 20 July 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-JXr-JdynBM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-JXr-JdynBM).

No Pride in Prisons, "Group Demands Resignation of GABA President," *Scoop*, 24 February 2015, accessed 20 July 2019, [www.community.scoop.co.nz/2015/02/group-demands-resignation-of-gaba-president](http://www.community.scoop.co.nz/2015/02/group-demands-resignation-of-gaba-president).

that its ethical claims are dubious at best, knows no response but violence.

14

These ruptures are far from new. Impassioned arguments about the claims which should be made on behalf of queerness, which fights should be fought, and how to collectively address politics are as old as the organised queer movement itself. Ben Van Prehn's editorials in the early issues of *Gay Liberator*, the magazine published by the Gay Liberation Front from 1973, reveal a mounting frustration at the state of Liberation House, the building at 5 Princess St briefly occupied by the Front as its headquarters, as well as offering counselling services, and a coffee bar. "The building in Princess St has so much scope for an awful lot of activities," he writes, "but instead one only sees the crowd that only want an after hours drink, uses the place as a pickup joint or just makes a general nuisance of itself." Or the "Dykecott" of a march organised by National Gay Rights Coalition in 1980. Following weeks of tense meetings and renegotiations over the stated aims of the march, with the NGRC organisers, mostly men, advocating for a respectable strategy of encouraging queer men out of the closet, focussing their efforts on advocacy for Homosexual Law Reform, and the lesbian contingent agitating for a more radical program which took aim at police violence, lesbian custody, institutional misogyny. Eventually, the dykes pulled out. On the day of the march, they distributed flyers with a list of reasons for their withdrawal. Among them, "The organisers are only prepared to use lesbian power, not to promote lesbian issues," and "Carnival parades will do nothing towards achieving 'gay rights.'"

Ben van Prehn, "Editorial," *Gay Liberator* (September–October, 1973), 3

Judith and Lynne, "March Pathétique," *Pink Triangle* 11 (May, 1980), unpaginated

15

In an issue of *Salient* published in May 1974, then-editor R.W. Steele expands upon the magazine's position on the "gay movement." Steele offers a limp gesture of support to the Gay Liberation Front, which had formed in Tāmaki Makaurau two years prior after Ngahuia Te Awēkotuku was denied entry into the United States for being openly queer. "I support the gay movement," he writes, "primarily

as I am inclined to support most individuals or groups that are repressed, discriminated against, or otherwise abused by this bourgeois-value-dominated society.” He goes on to the criticise the group for their “distorted” language, devaluing, for instance, the original meaning of “gay” and “hopping on the ‘Liberation’ bandwagon,” before offering gays his sympathy for their “problems,” but, ultimately casting queerness as an unfortunate affliction experienced by unlucky individuals. “I’m by no means saying that gays should hide or suppress their feelings. If you’re ‘gay’ well sure, make the best of it and fight repression from the bourgeoisie, but to spread the idea that we’re all potentially bisexual and to give the illusion that the gay life is the good life is questionable, to say the least.”

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Steele’s position was not a unique one. The relationship between queerness and the left here and elsewhere was, for much of the 20th century, an unhappy one. Considered, for example, among the Surrealists and the figureheads of the May 1968 riots in Paris, a symptom of bourgeois individualism. More recently, Marxist geographer David Harvey has dismissed struggles for sexual liberation as a “demand for lifestyle diversification” at the expense of a collective politics based on class. Without any discernible class position, political coalitions formed on the basis of sex are cast, in this scheme, as an indulgence. It’s typical of a rift in the 1970s and beyond, between the Old and New Lefts, between an orthodox socialism and the momentum gathered by those with “special interests.”

17

In a letter published in the following week’s issue of *Salient*, Rae Dellaca offered a retort to Steele’s editorial. “If you’re campaigning for our right of ‘survival’ and ‘reasonable enjoyment of life,’ excuse our ingratitude when we chuck your charity and token broadmindedness right back in your face, I am not ‘a case study of the

R.W. Steele, “Not so gay,” *Salient* 37, no. 38 (24 April, 1972), unpaginated

Paul Clinton, Juliet Jacques, “It is Forbidden to Forbid: The Liberation of Desire in France After May 1968,” *Verso*, 12 July 2018, accessed 21 July 2019, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3924-it-is-forbidden-to-forbid-the-liberation-of-desire-in-france-after-may-1968>

quoted in Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 32

18

unfortunate results of the system we all live in’ – I’m no more unfortunate by definition than you and your heterosexual mates.” She goes on, “What’s wrong with ‘gayness’ as a long term way of life? Surely your lack of recommendation doesn’t stem from the fact that the gay lifestyle isn’t particularly amenable to the nuclear family, the pillar of the society you so intensely dislike.” Dellaca’s letter is funny, bitchy and scathing, and, vitally, casts queer liberation as about more than just sex, but the remaking of an entire field of relations of care, intimacy, and vulnerability.

But sex keeps calling me back. Partly because historic projects of sexual liberation don’t always seem to know what to do with sex – especially in its more disruptive, antisocial manifestations. In the same issue of *Pink Triangle* which contained coverage of the Dykecott, Lindsay Taylor offers a tepid defence of cruising. Taylor begins by quoting an essay by Perry Brass, published in the now-forgotten collection *Out of the Closet*. Brass describes cruising as “that cruelest of human games,” going on to write, “Cruising is one of the great male chauvinist games ‘I can be tougher than you can be. I can hold out longer than you can hold out. I don’t need you.’” Countering Brass’ description of cruising as an aggressive, solipsistic practice, Taylor proposes thinking of cruising “dialectically.” He writes, “On the one hand, we recognise it to be a product of male sexuality at a particular time and place – and that as such it will disappear as our sexuality evolves into something different. On the other, I don’t believe that any gay man need beat his breast with guilt if he looks for his sexual partners in this way.” Though Taylor is sympathetic, cruising here is still a problem, a symptom of a social context which circumscribes queer sex to the edges of thought. He concedes, eventually, that cruising might enable forms of intimacy and reciprocity unimaginable in more polite sexual contexts, but the project of queer liberation for Taylor, and others like him, seems to be to move sex inside. He neglects what might be made

Raw Dellaca, “Fighting my ignorance too,” *Salient* 37, no. 9 (1 May, 1972), unpaginated

Lindsay Taylor, “Cruising,” *Pink Triangle* 11 (May, 1980), unpaginated

possible through sex without the promise of a future, or even the obligation to learn someone's name.

19

Back to me. Several times during my relationship, we discussed opening ourselves up. We both felt that, as queers, we had a political responsibility to experiment with forms of intimacy outside of the enclosure of the couple. Beyond a few ill-fated experiments, nothing ever eventuated. I'd seize up. Aware that the introduction of unknown factors into our union might risk rupturing the delicate space we'd carved for ourselves. Aware also that every one of our friends who'd opened up their relationship late in the game called it quits not long after. One or the other either finding someone more exciting, or else using the exercise to delay admitting, to themselves and everyone else, that they had become bored of each other. Resisting, for me, was probably an attempt to protract the claim I wanted to lay to another person. Why bring it up? Because looking for sex in the archive risks turning sex into an abstraction. Because whatever political currency or legibility sex may have, in intimate settings, it remains disorienting, disorganising, stressful, awkward. Whatever optimism might have been attached to it becomes difficult to sustain in the bedroom. Because if there's still work to do in reimagining intimacy, pleasure and their utility, such work requires a lot of difficult unlearning – a testing of boundaries, and learning when to recede back into oneself.

20

I don't believe in Robbie's paintings and that's why they appeal to me. Robbie trades in fantasy. And painting, only able to depict single moments at a time, operates with a narrative economy which, by necessity, has to omit foreplay. And with the omission foreplay comes the omission of the delicate fumbling involved in figuring out what one's partner or partners enjoy; with trying and failing to be with another person. There's one of his paintings by my bed. It's an older one, a Mizer image.

Against a lime green backdrop, a figure thrusts their cock into another figure's mouth. The top's hands are placed delicately on the bottom's pink head, the bottom's eyes, rendered as darked strokes on an otherwise almost featureless mass, are fixed on the top's member. It's a scene of pure ecstasy, a scene in which the whole world might consist of only these two figures fucking against green. I don't buy it. I don't buy it because I've never been in the state of pure abandon these two seem locked in. Even at my brightest moments, my mind wanders. With a cock in my mouth, there's always laundry to be done, emails to read, a gag reflex. What appeals to me in Robbie's painting is not that there may be redemption in his fantasies – not, that is, that they offer me a promise that if I keep trying I might one day reach the same state his figures are locked in. What appeals is knowing that, against the failures of sex, anybody is able to sustain these fantasies at all.



**HATEFUCKING**  
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