

An investigation of the resources available for interpreting
visual cultural production related to male homosexuality
in Britain; 1940 to the present.

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that
appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to
the work of others.

Abstract

This thesis explores the changing theoretical and historical protocols for understanding the complex relationships between visual representation, masculinity and male sexual identity in Britain since World War II. Through oblique encounters with the work of Francis Bacon, Cecil Beaton, Keith Vaughan and David Hockney, detailed readings of popular fiction, literature and literary theory, research in the archives of *The Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (1955-7), analysis of British health and fitness magazines and a consideration of the spaces of male social and sexual encounter, historically based readings of written and visual representations of the male figure are formulated that circulate *Two Figures 1953* by Francis Bacon. These readings challenge a number of established approaches, including those that use the protocols of psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and certain forms of social/sexual politics and theory.

Dedicated to the life and memory of Joan Brazier.

My nan died just as I began to research this thesis, but if she had lived I know she would not have read it but would have been proud anyway. In memory of a special kind of love.

For my mum, Patricia Ofield, without whose example, support and love nothing would be imaginable.

For my partner, Anton Kerr, in recognition of the love and life that made this thesis possible, and put it in perspective.

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My sister and brother, Amanda and Guy, have been sources of knowledge and support for as long as I can remember; and lastly, but for this thesis most importantly, I would like to thank Mike Kan for his friendship, his specialised knowledges, his formidable skills and his time.

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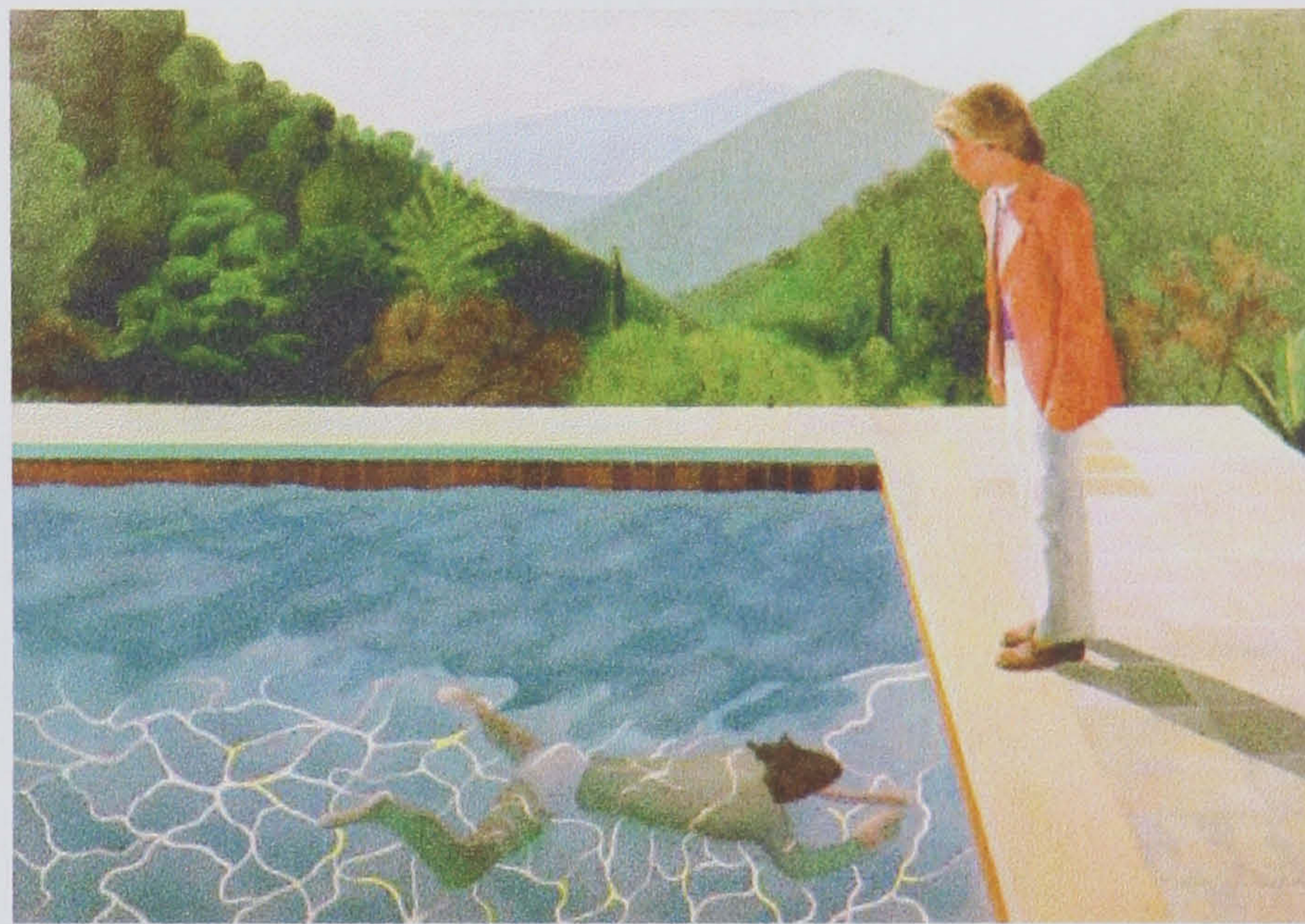


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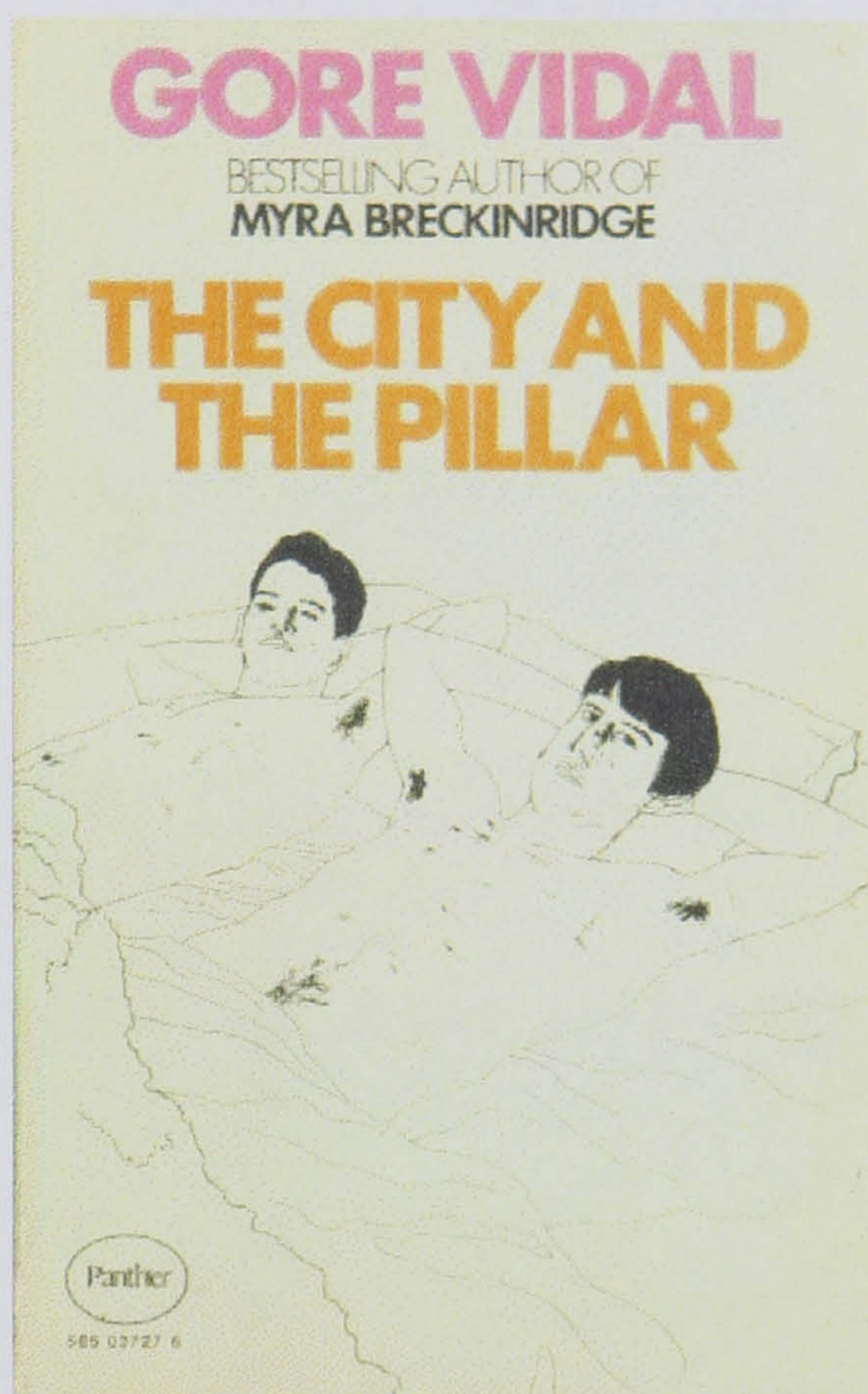


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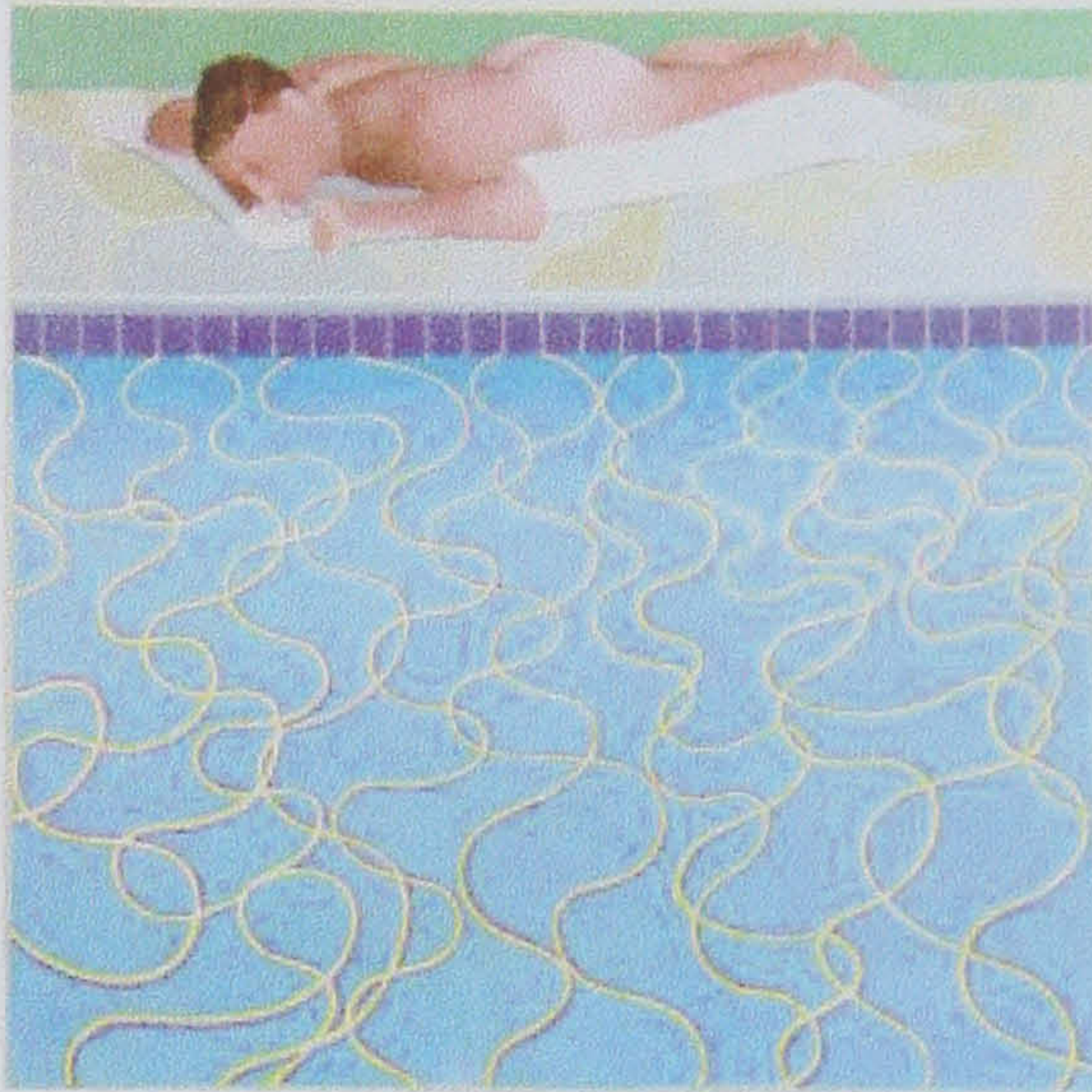


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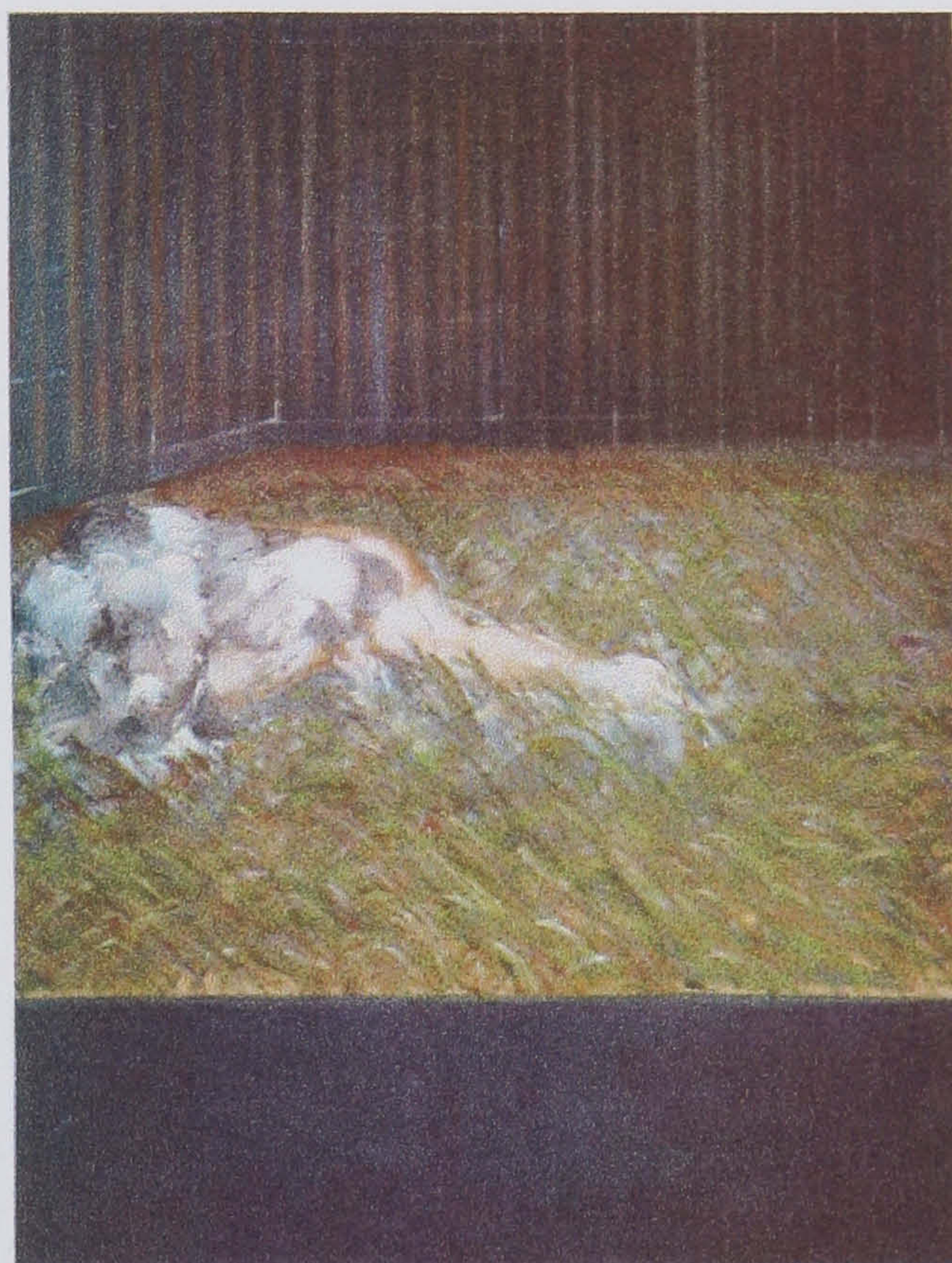


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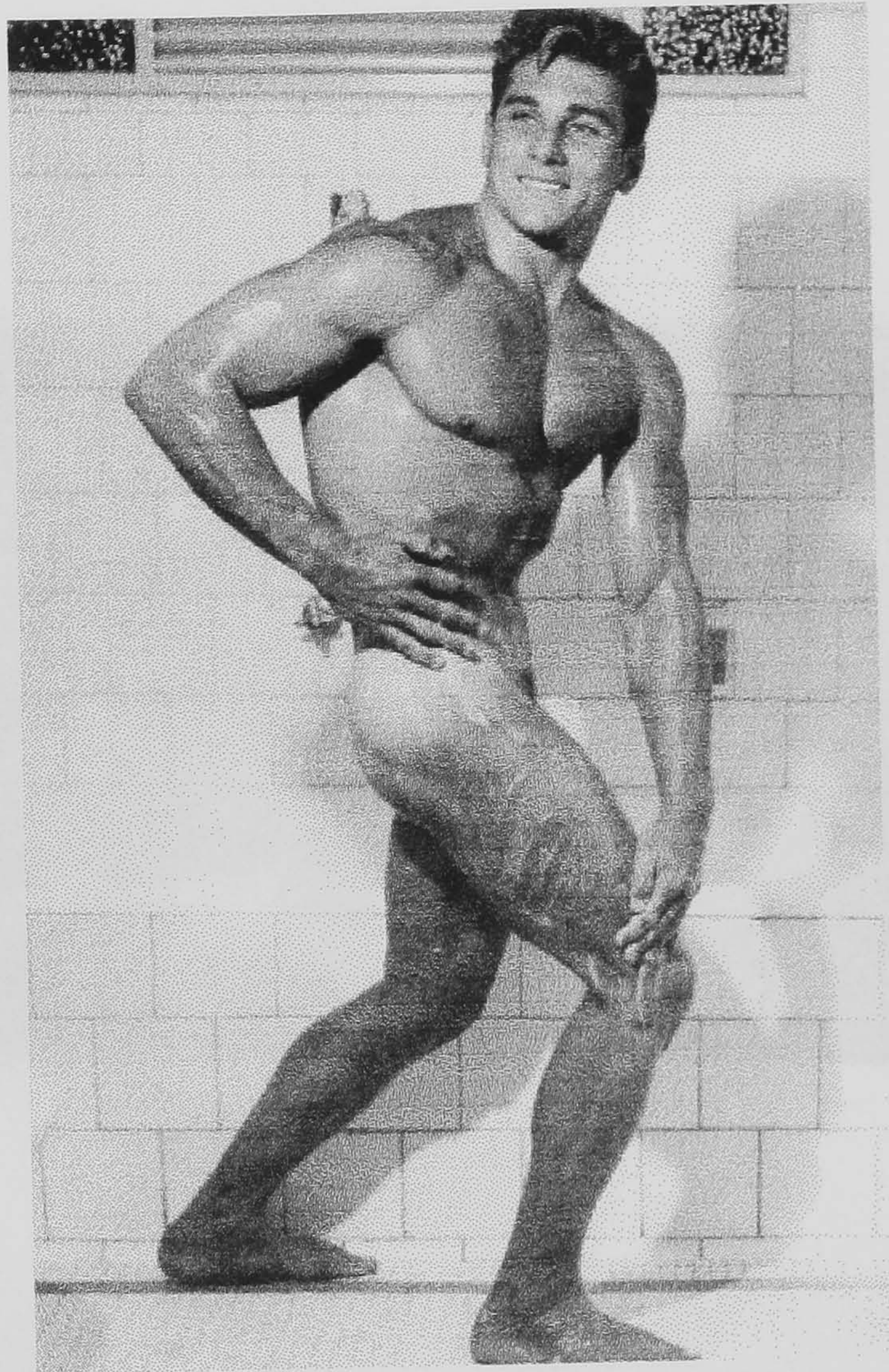


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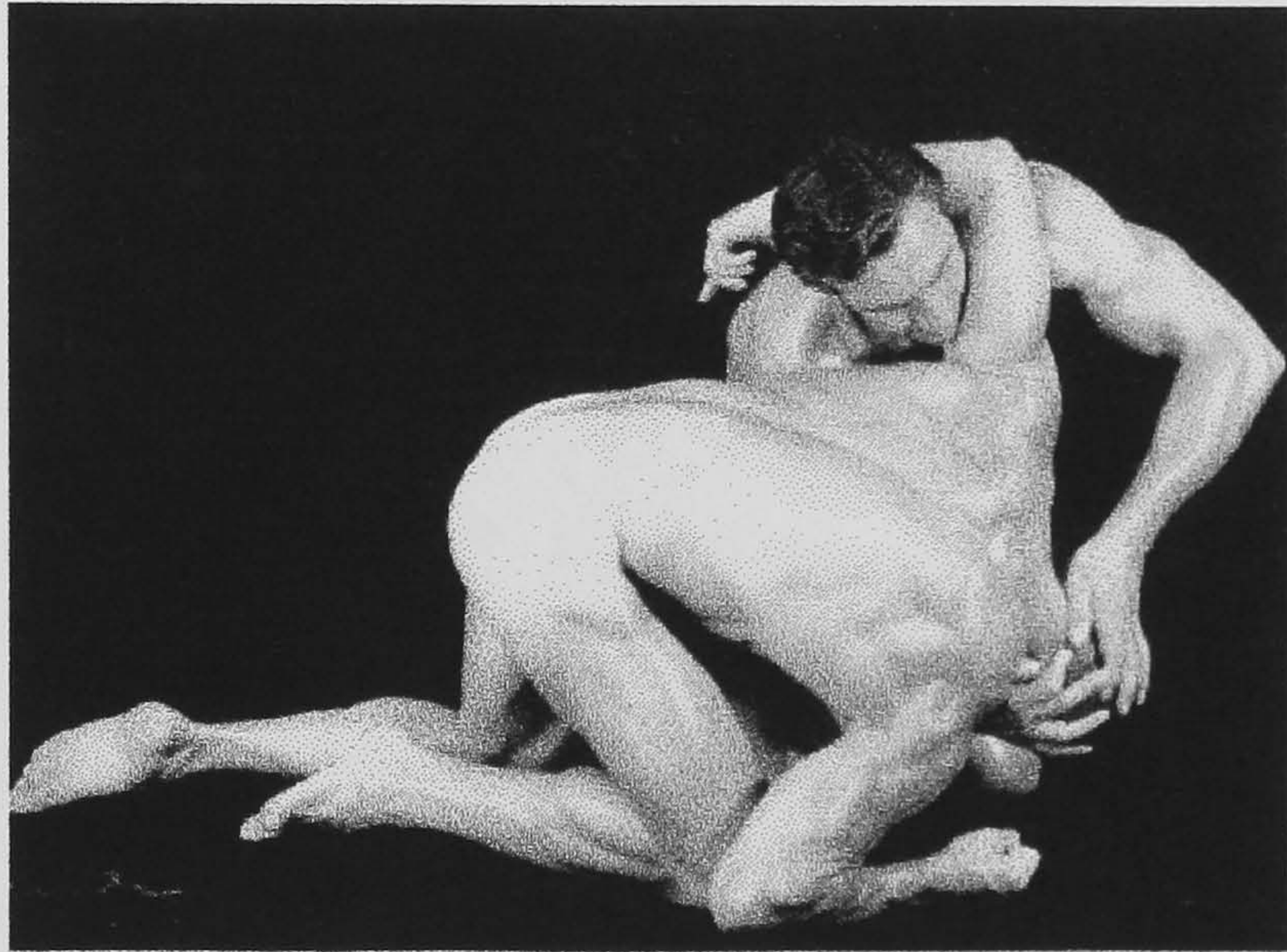


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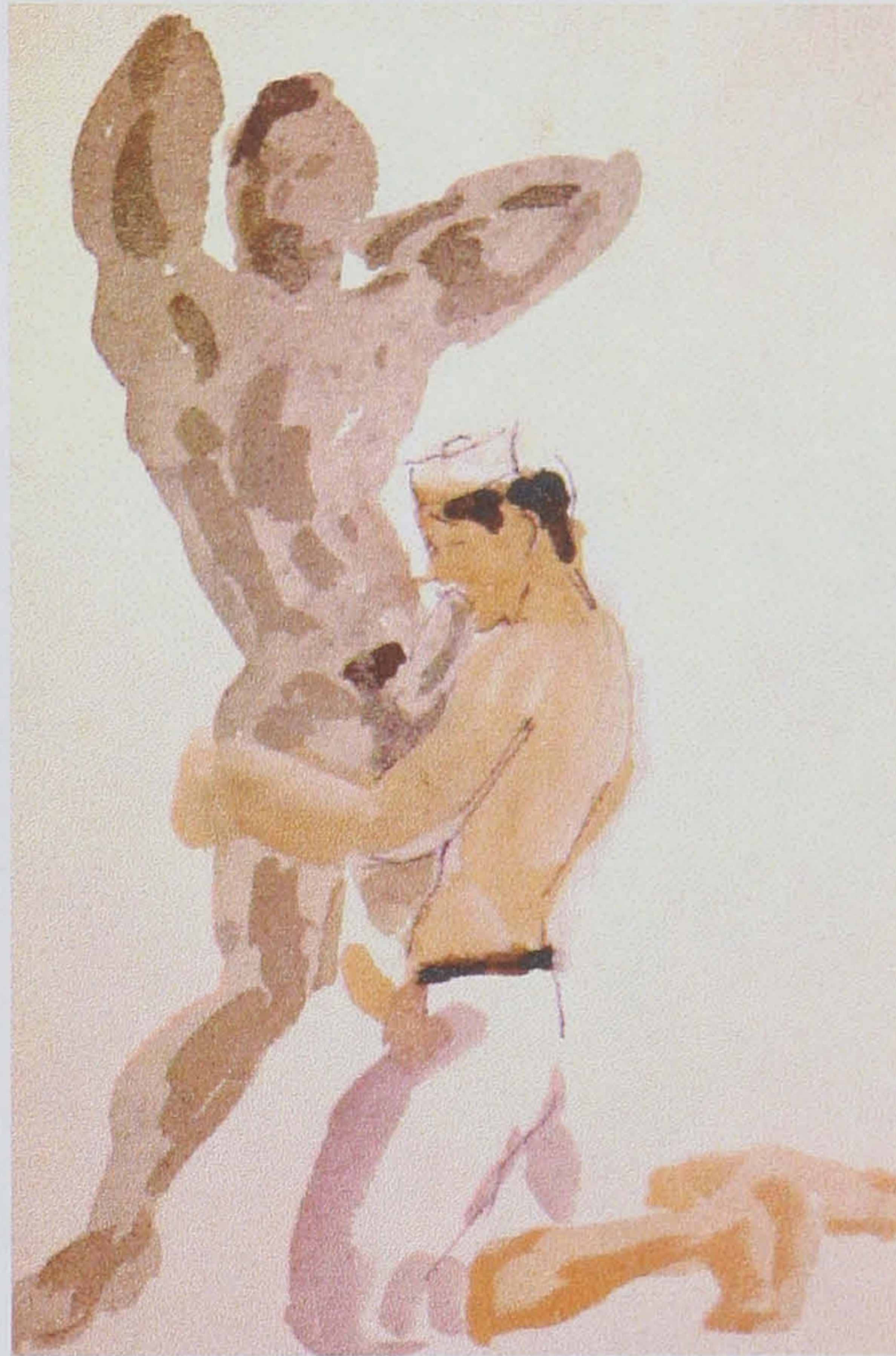


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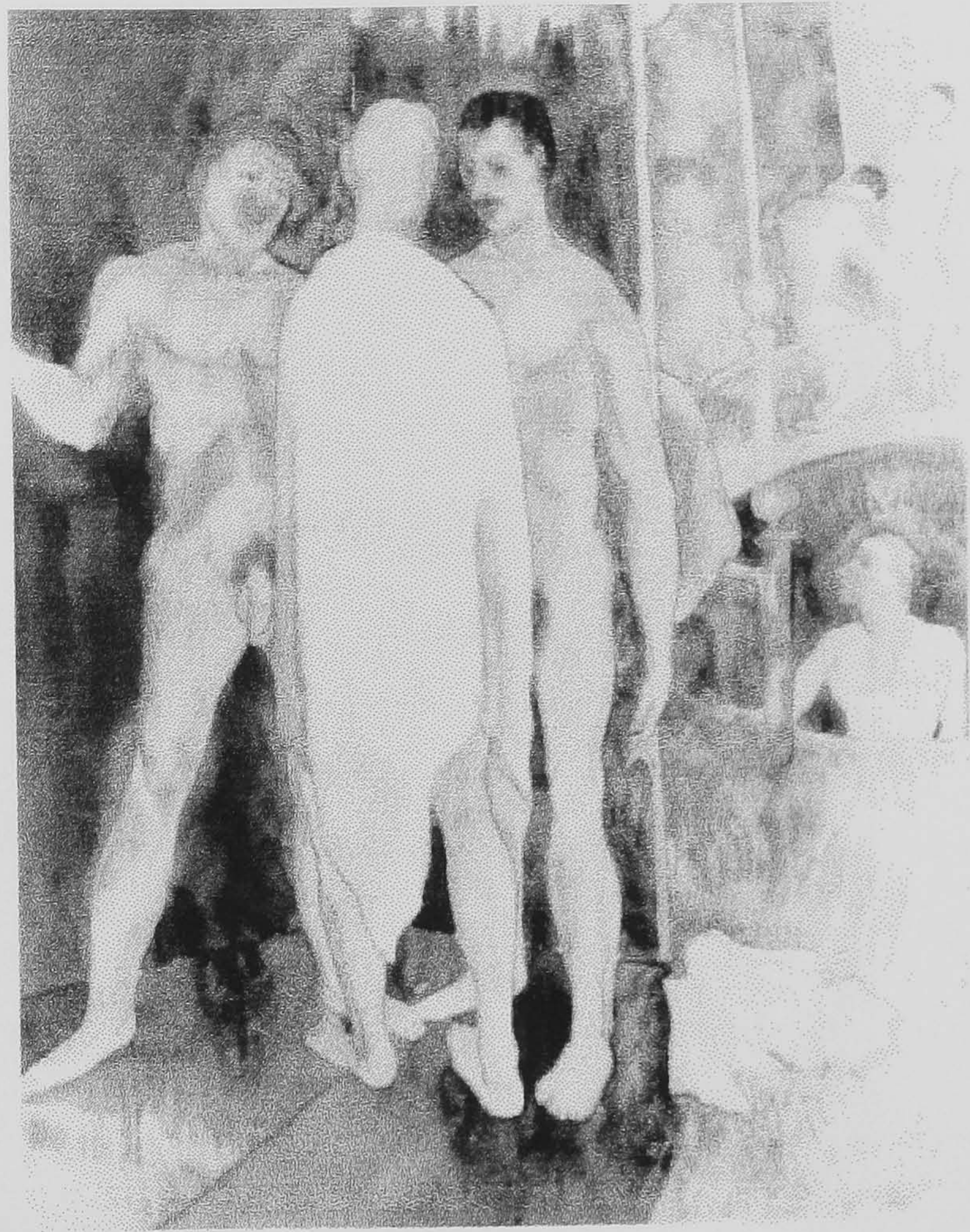


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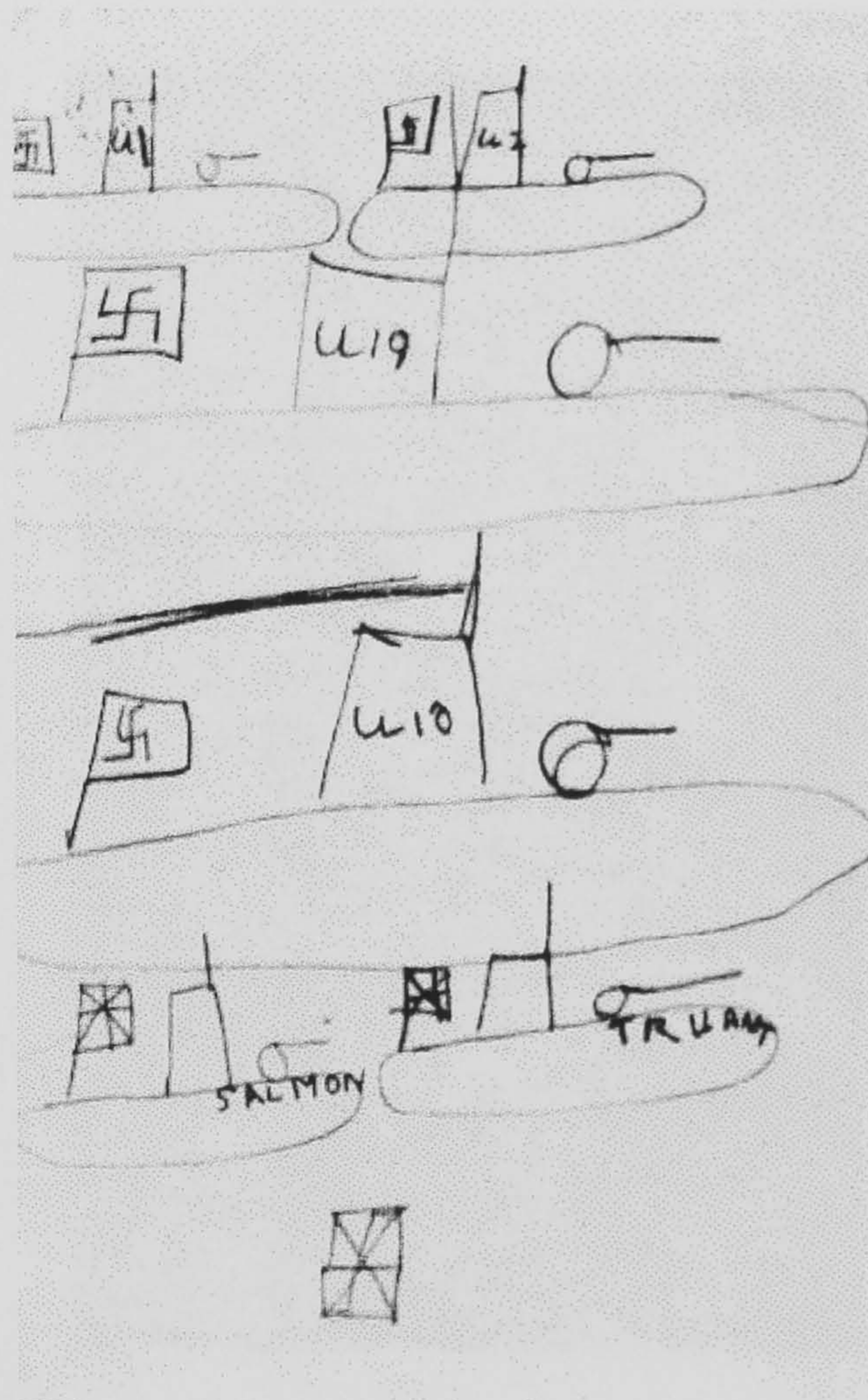


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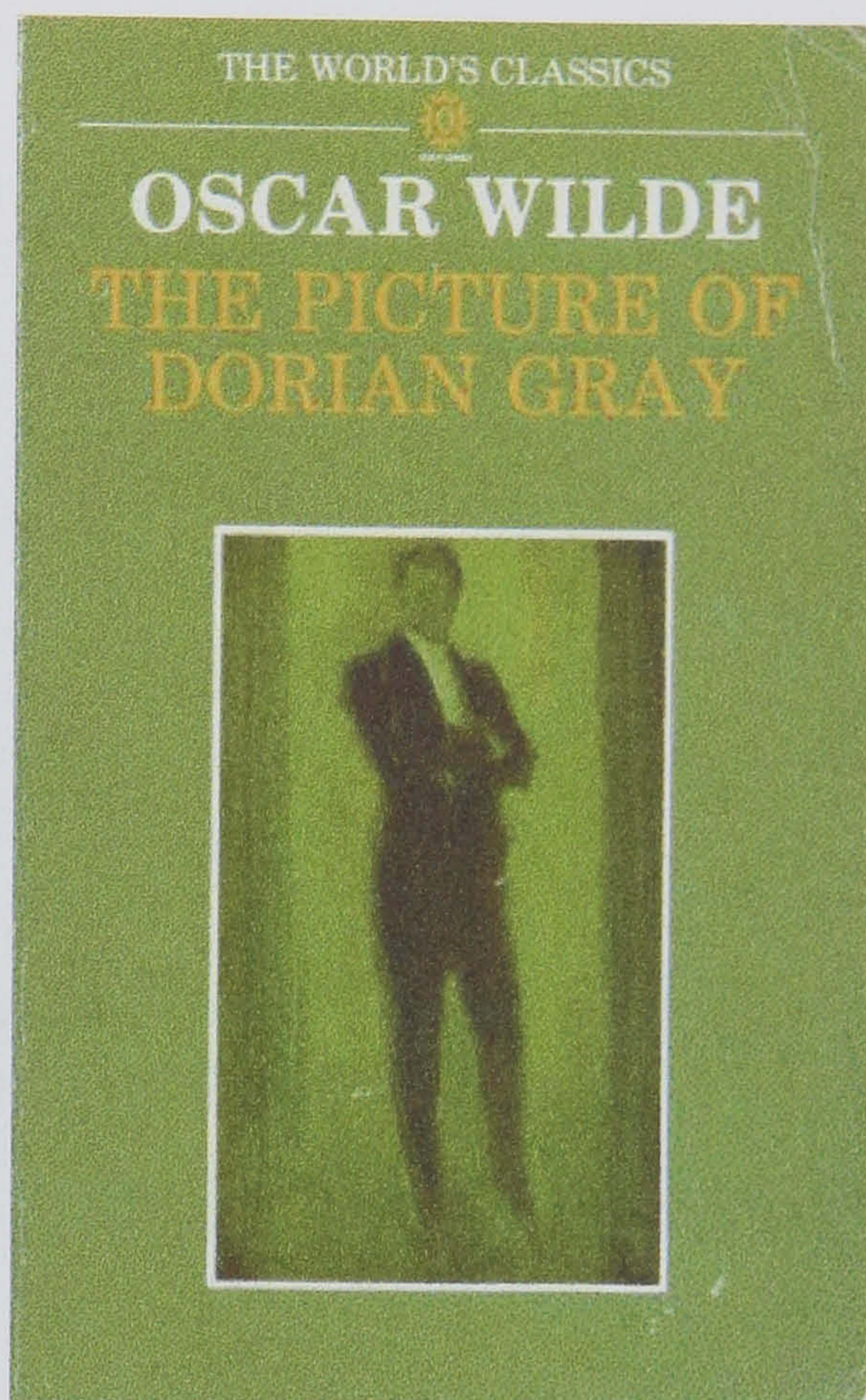


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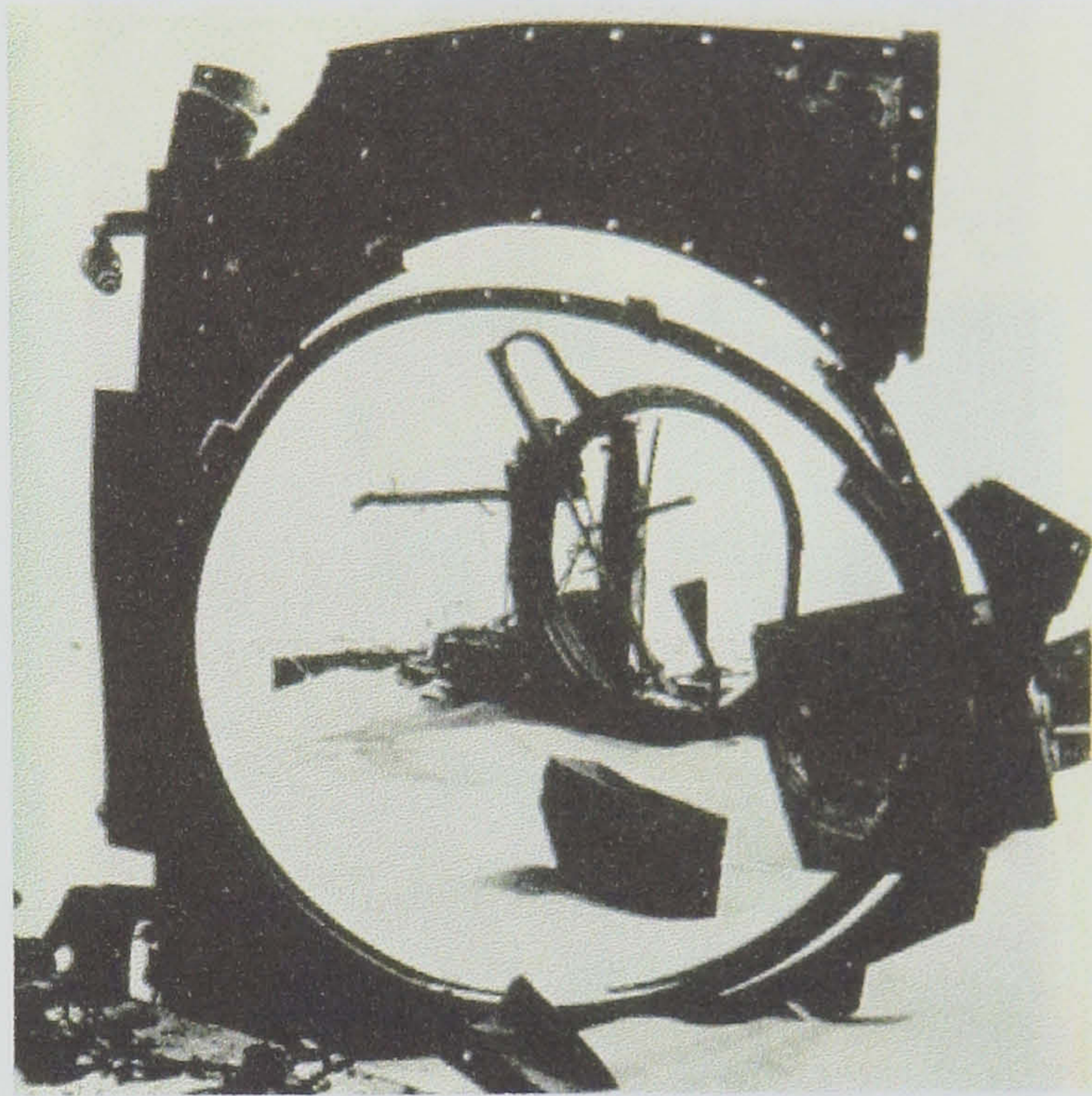


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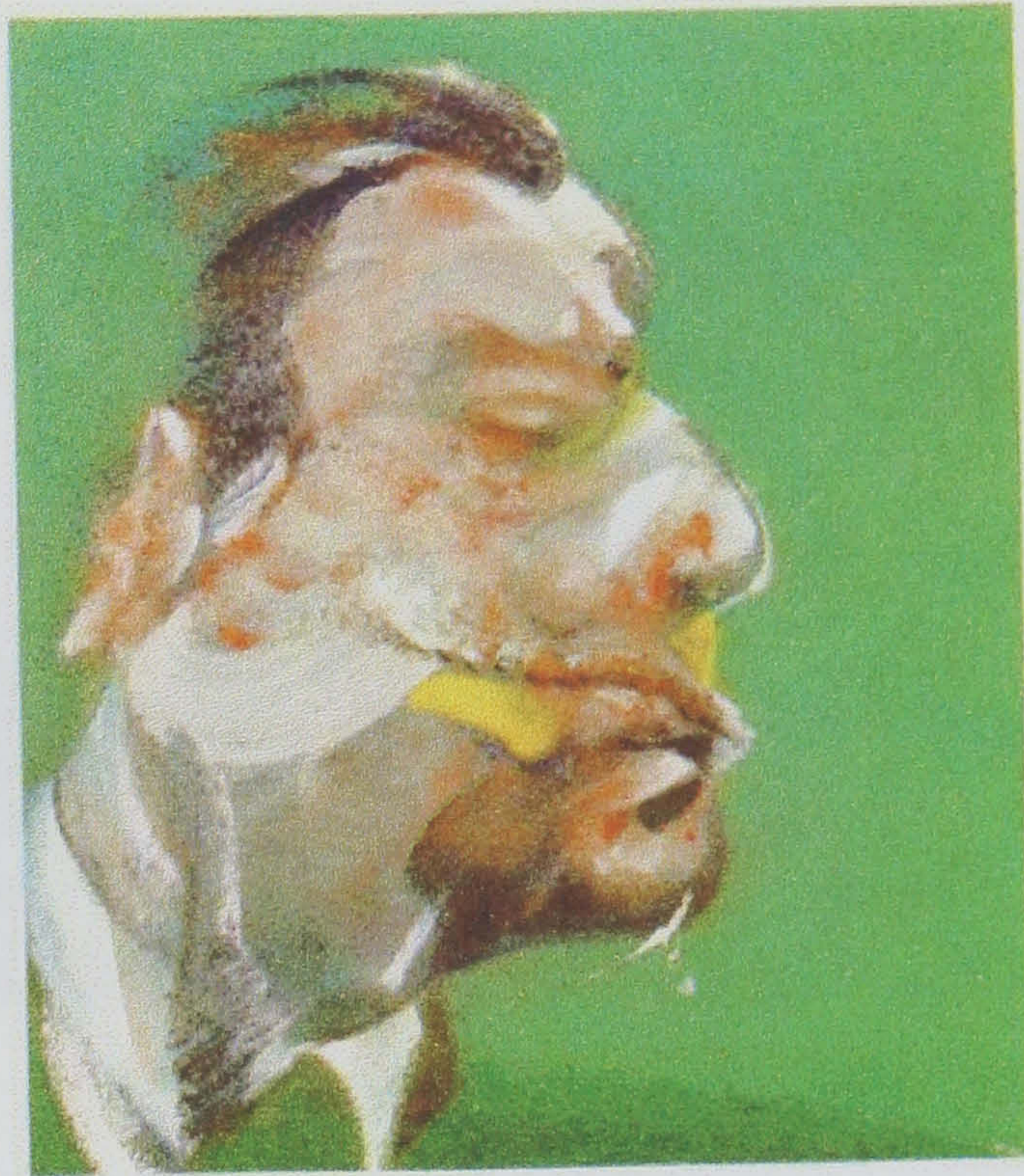


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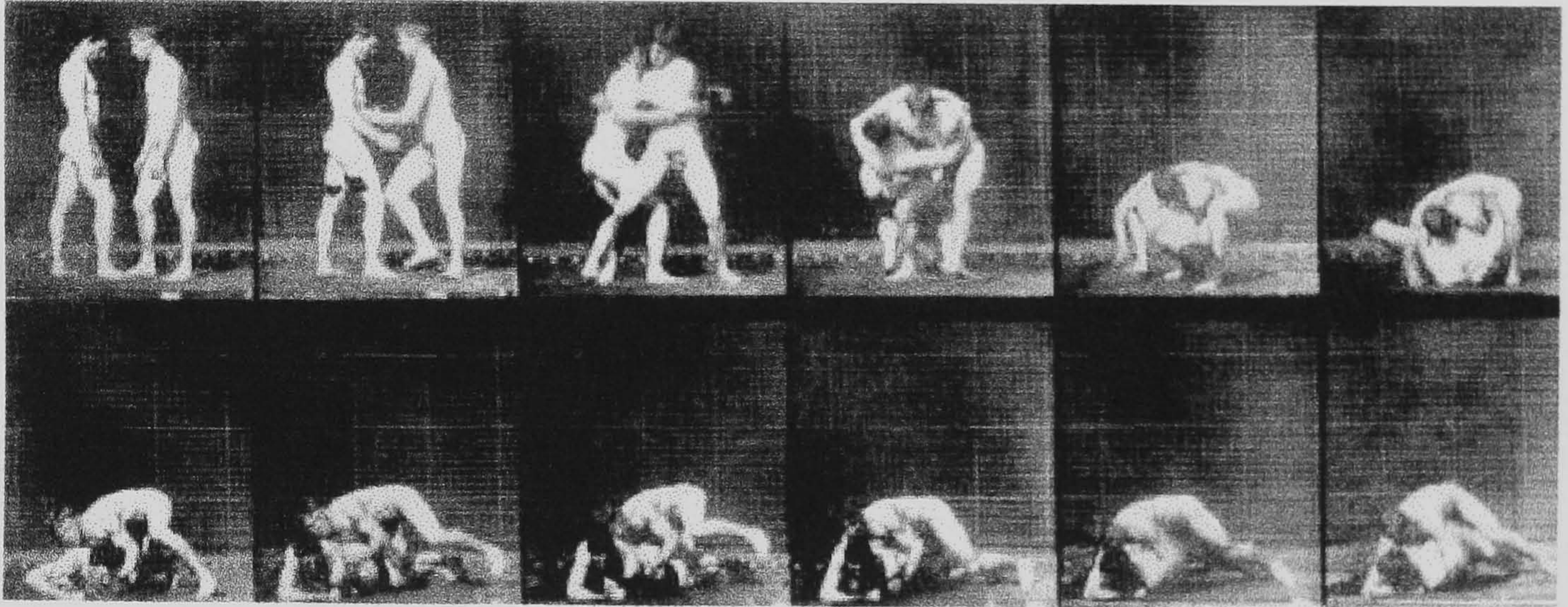


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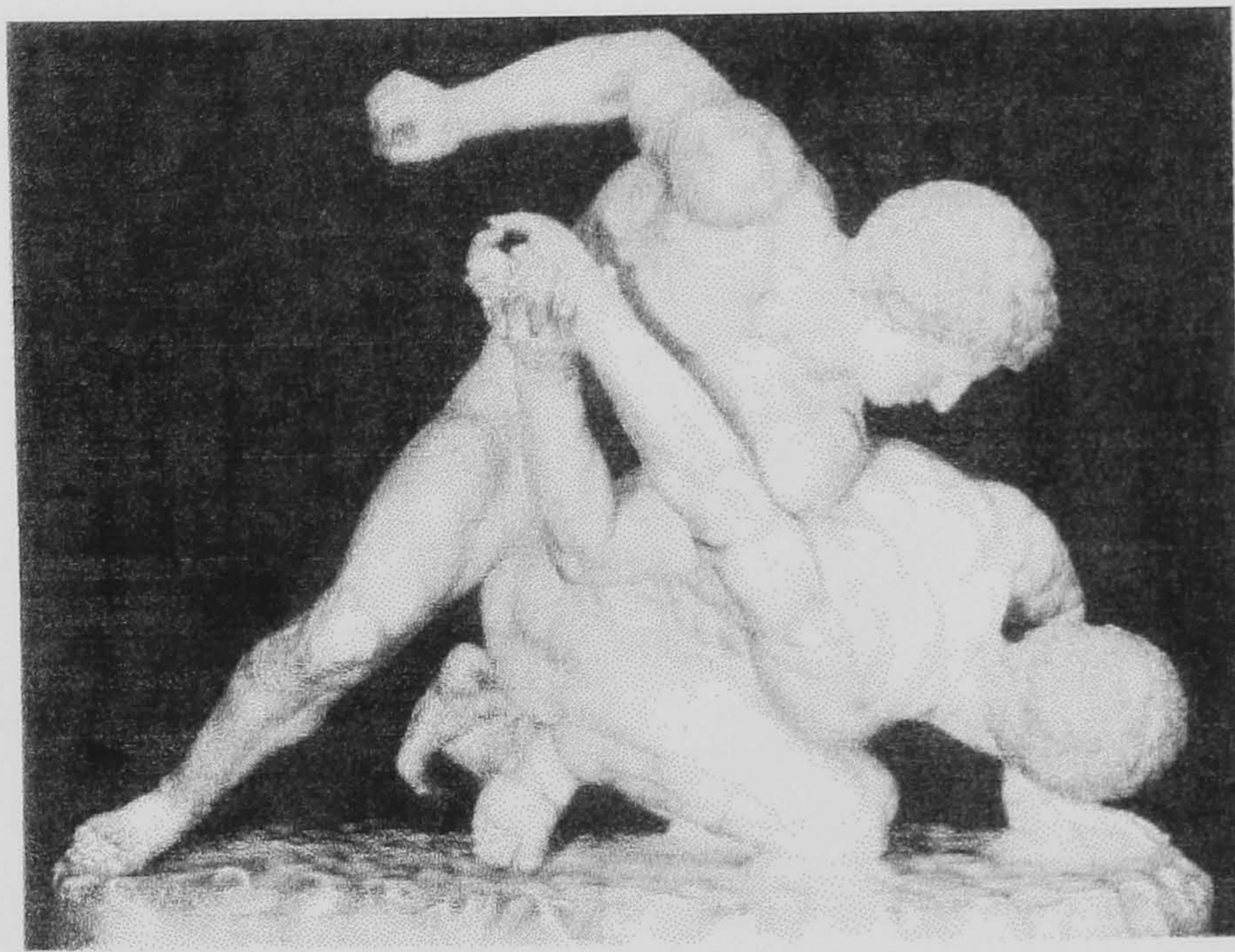


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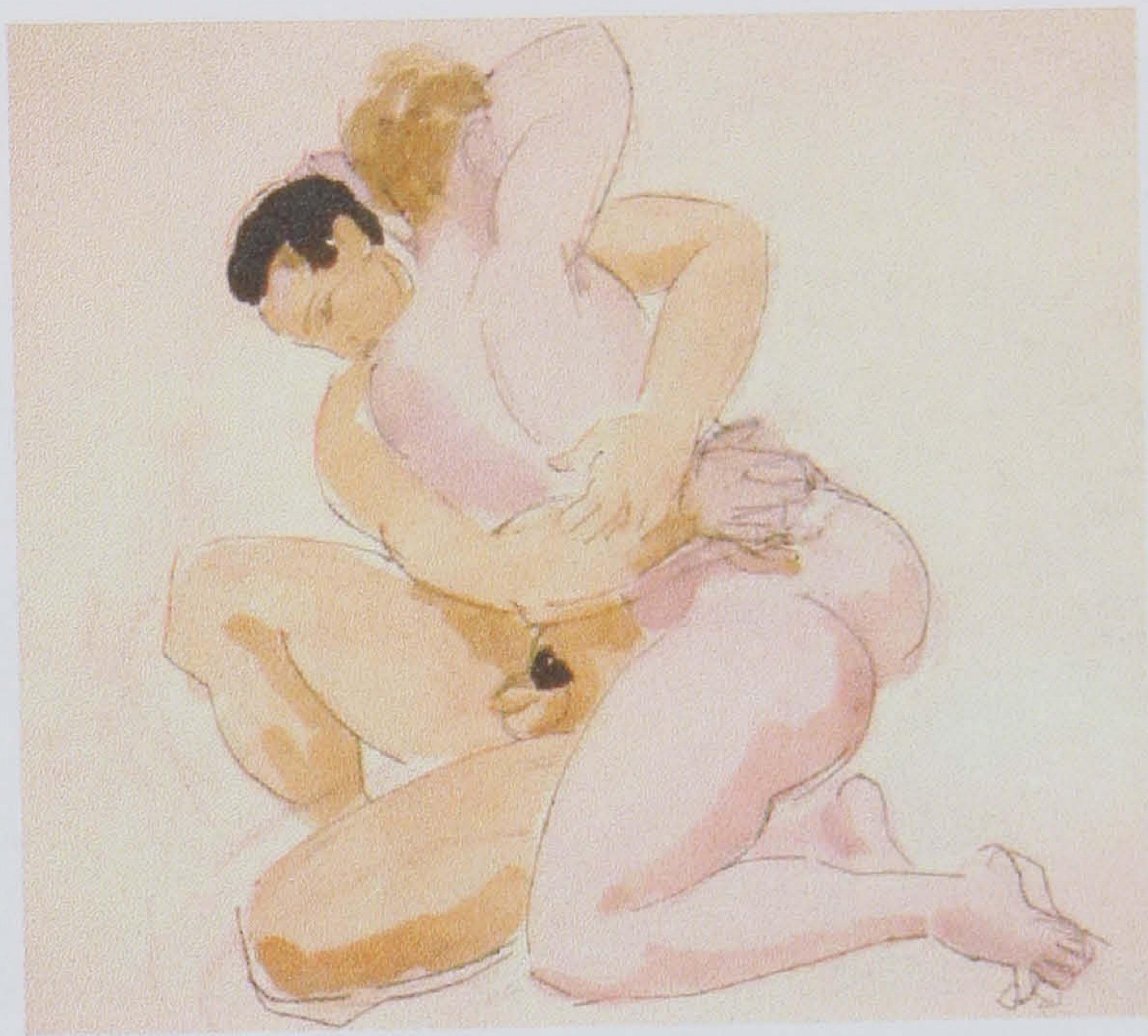


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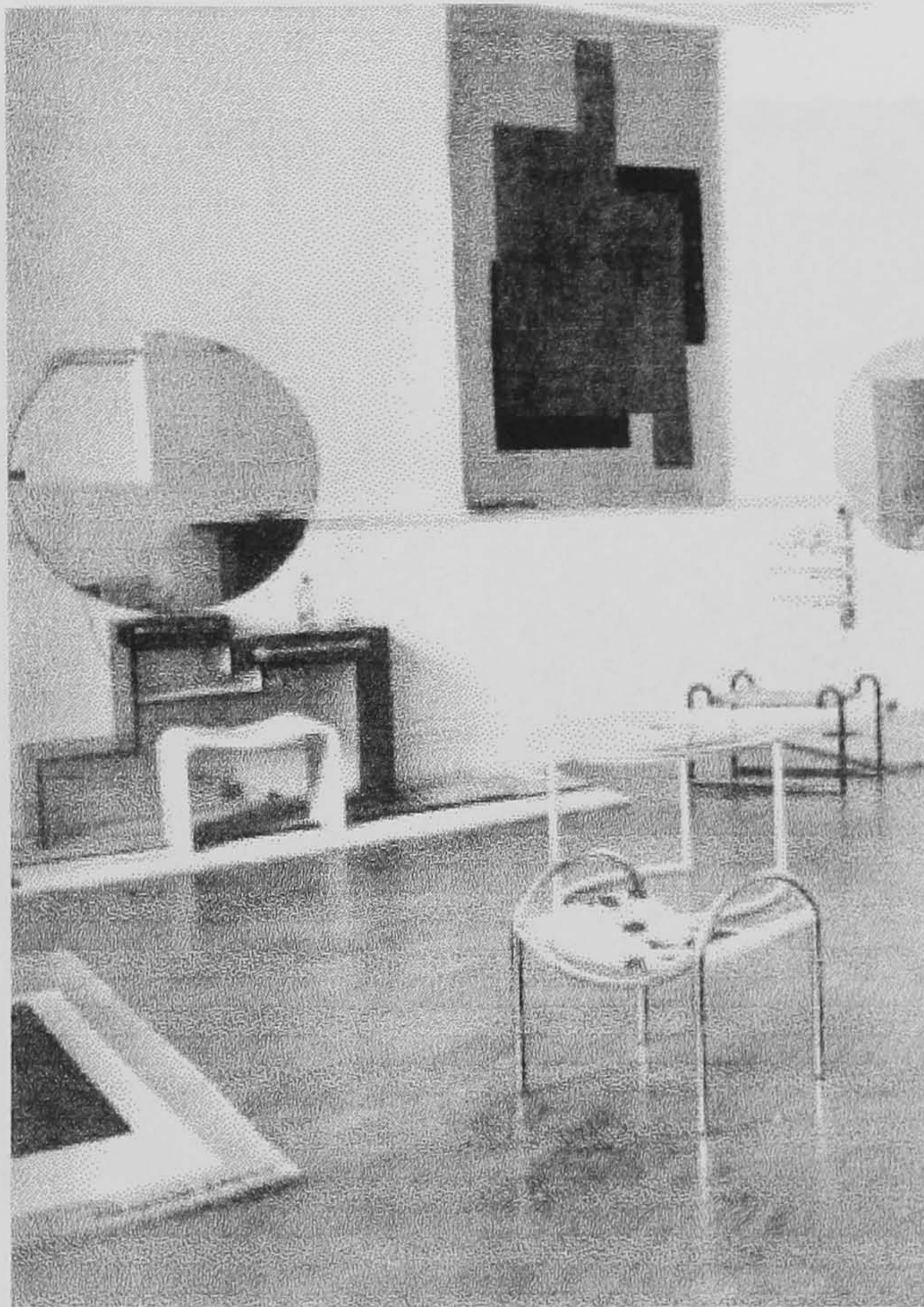


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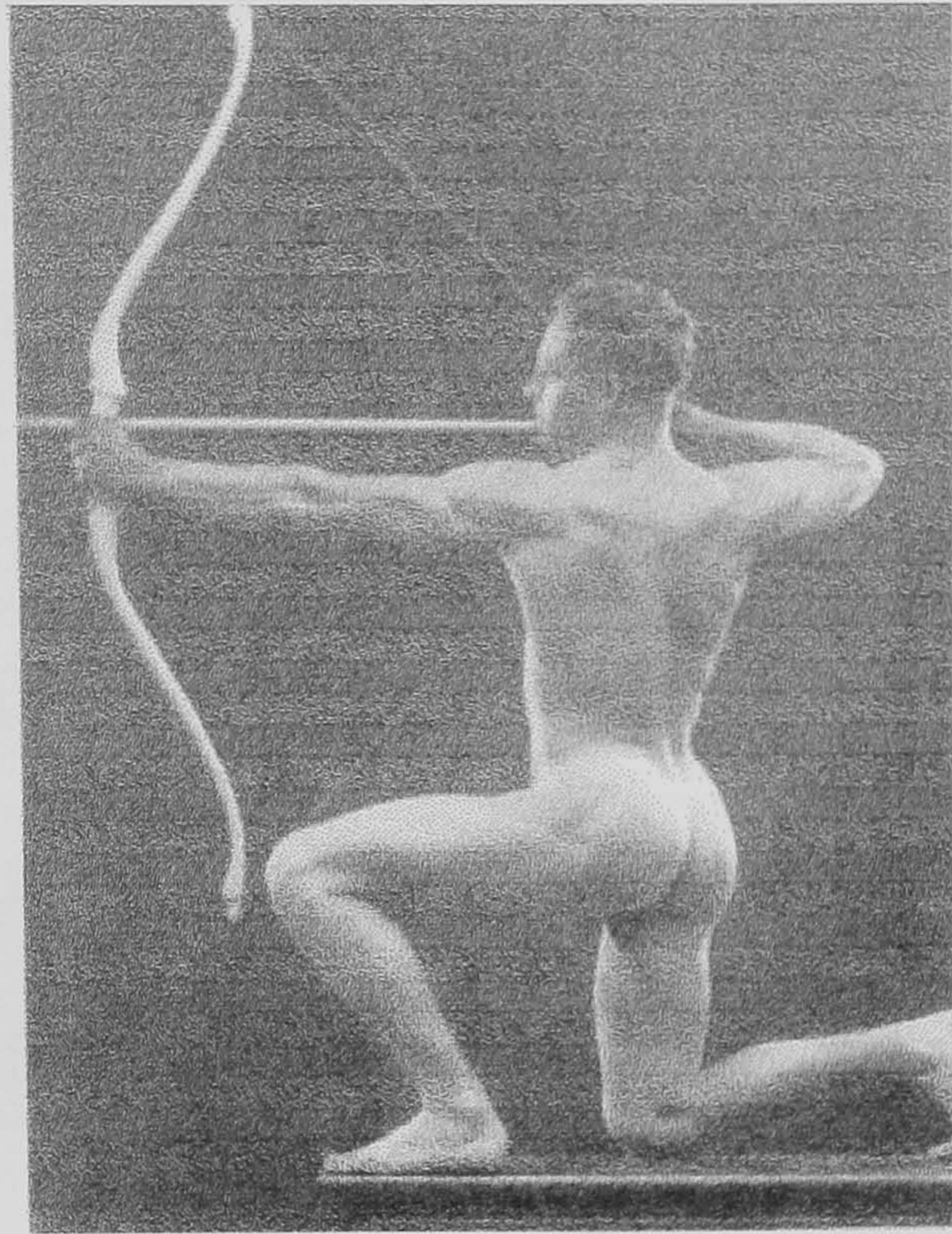
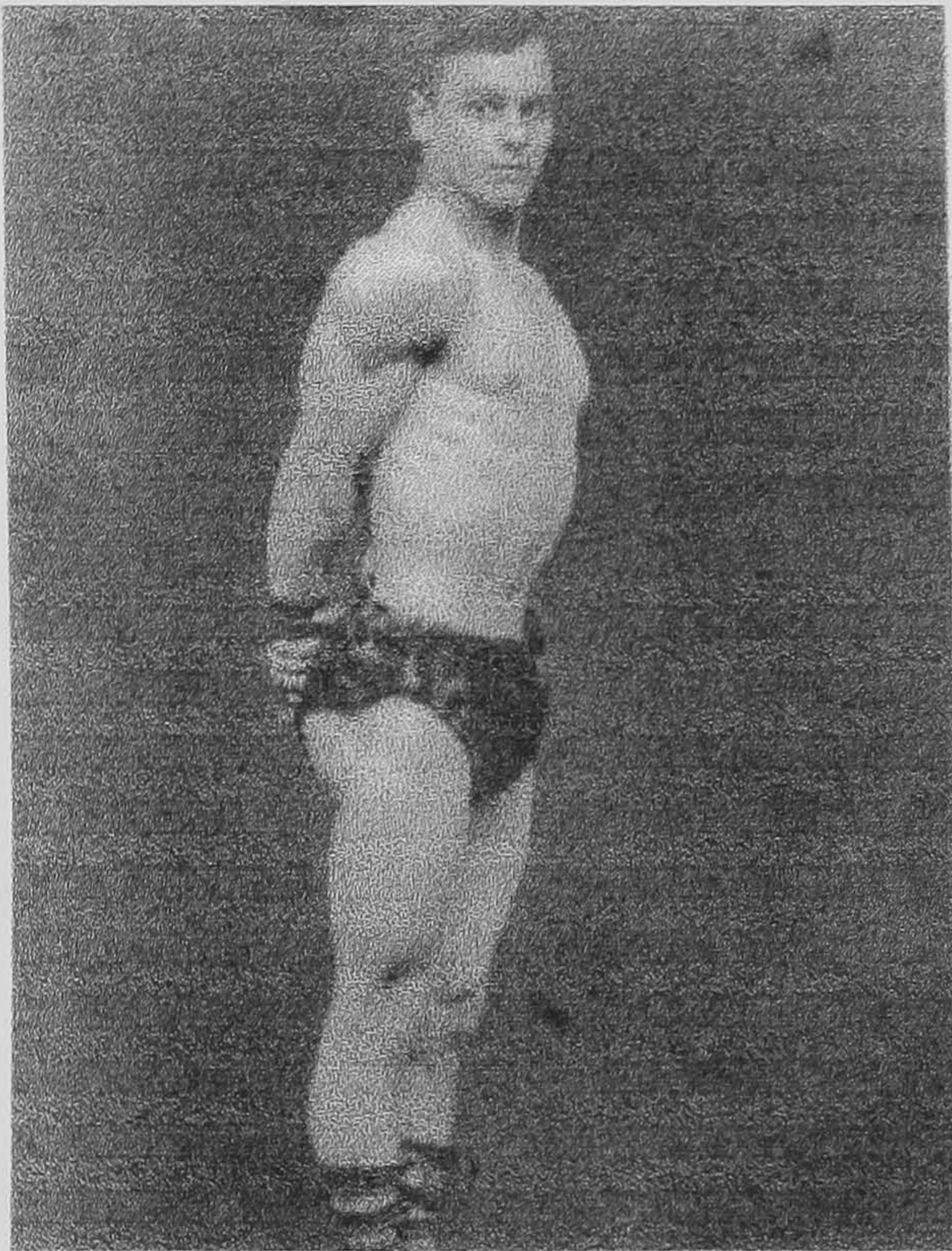


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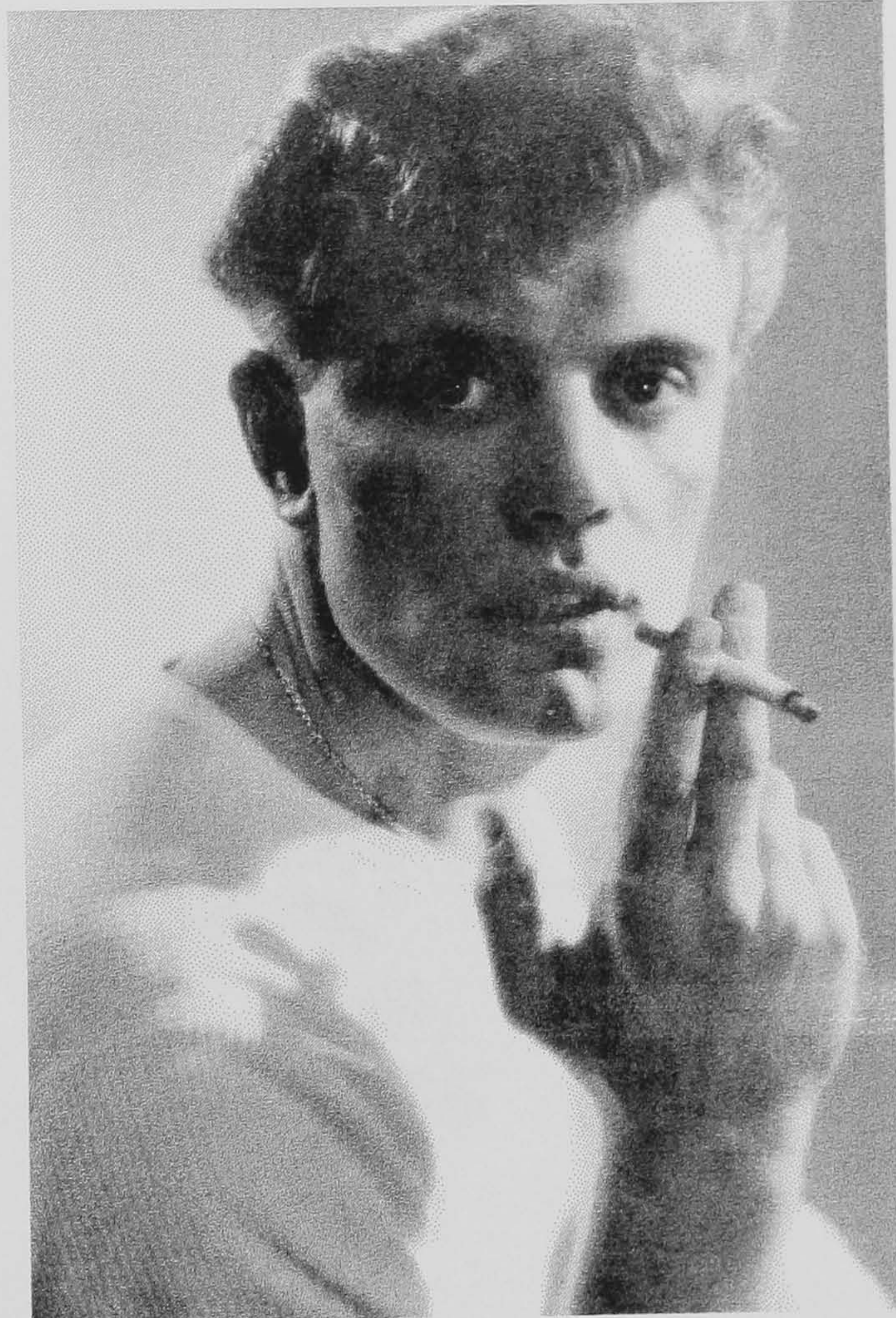


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made on the Continent
... Exclusively for **VINCE**

100% Cotton Summerweight FOLLOVER
in New fabric weight. 50/50 20's
and 22's. 22's. 22's. 22's. **42 -**
White. Available in 4 White, 20's. 20's. 20's.
20's. 20's. 20's. 20's. 20's. 20's.

100% VINEY VACATION SLACKS. 100%
Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. **75 -**
Two tone. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton.
100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton.
100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton.

100% COTTON. 100% COTTON. 100% COTTON.
WILL BE SENT ON REQUEST.

VINCE MAN'S SHOP

100% COTTON. 100% COTTON. 100% COTTON.
100% COTTON. 100% COTTON. 100% COTTON.
100% COTTON. 100% COTTON. 100% COTTON.

VINCE Man's Shop, 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton. 100% Cotton.



GEORGE HUGHES

VINCE
STUDIO
OF PHYSIQUE
PHOTOGRAPHY

46 MANCHESTER ST.
BAKER ST., LONDON
W.1

Phone: WE1066 488

SPECIAL TERMS TO NABBA
MEMBERS

100% COTTON. 100% COTTON. 100% COTTON.

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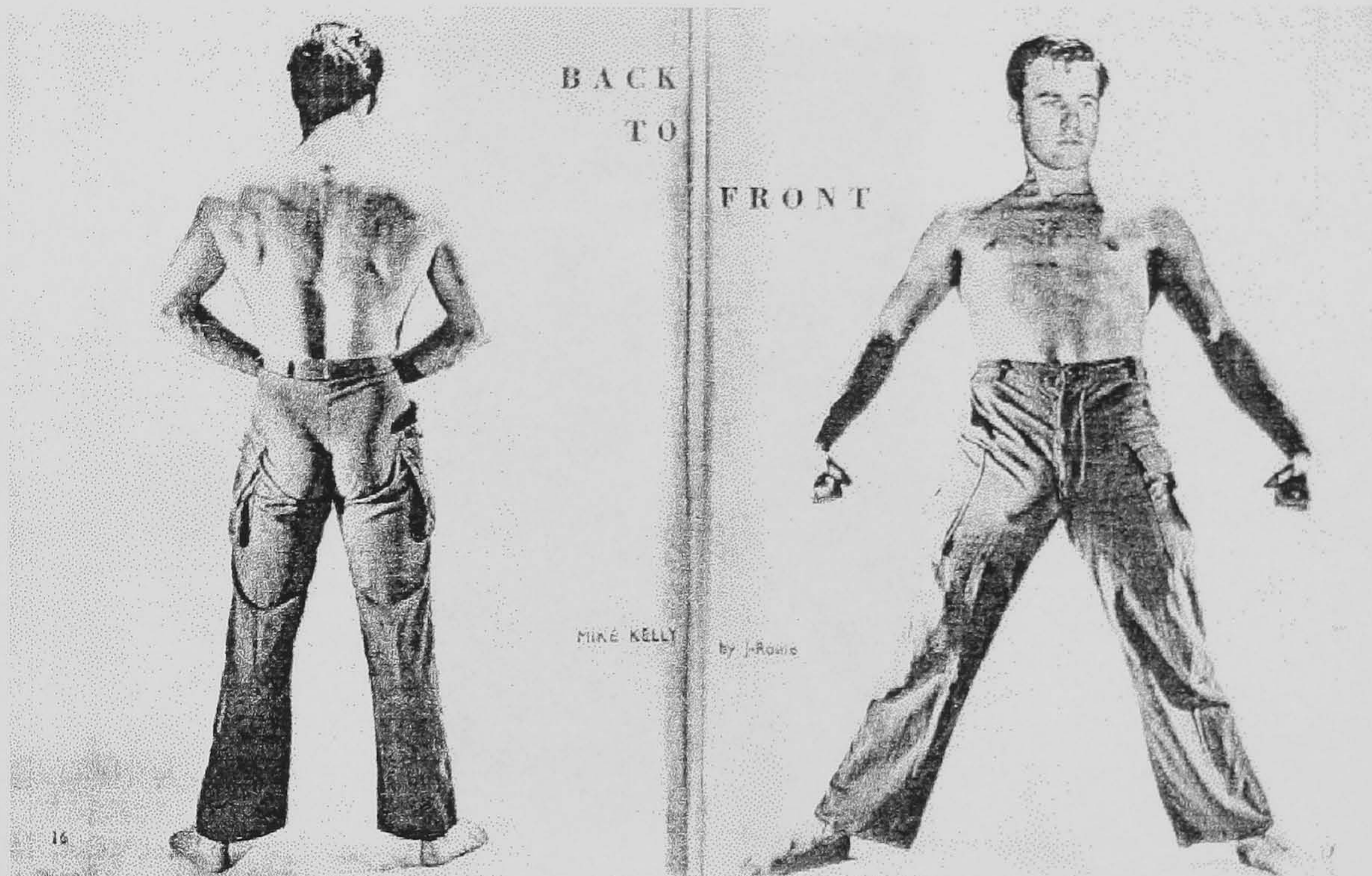


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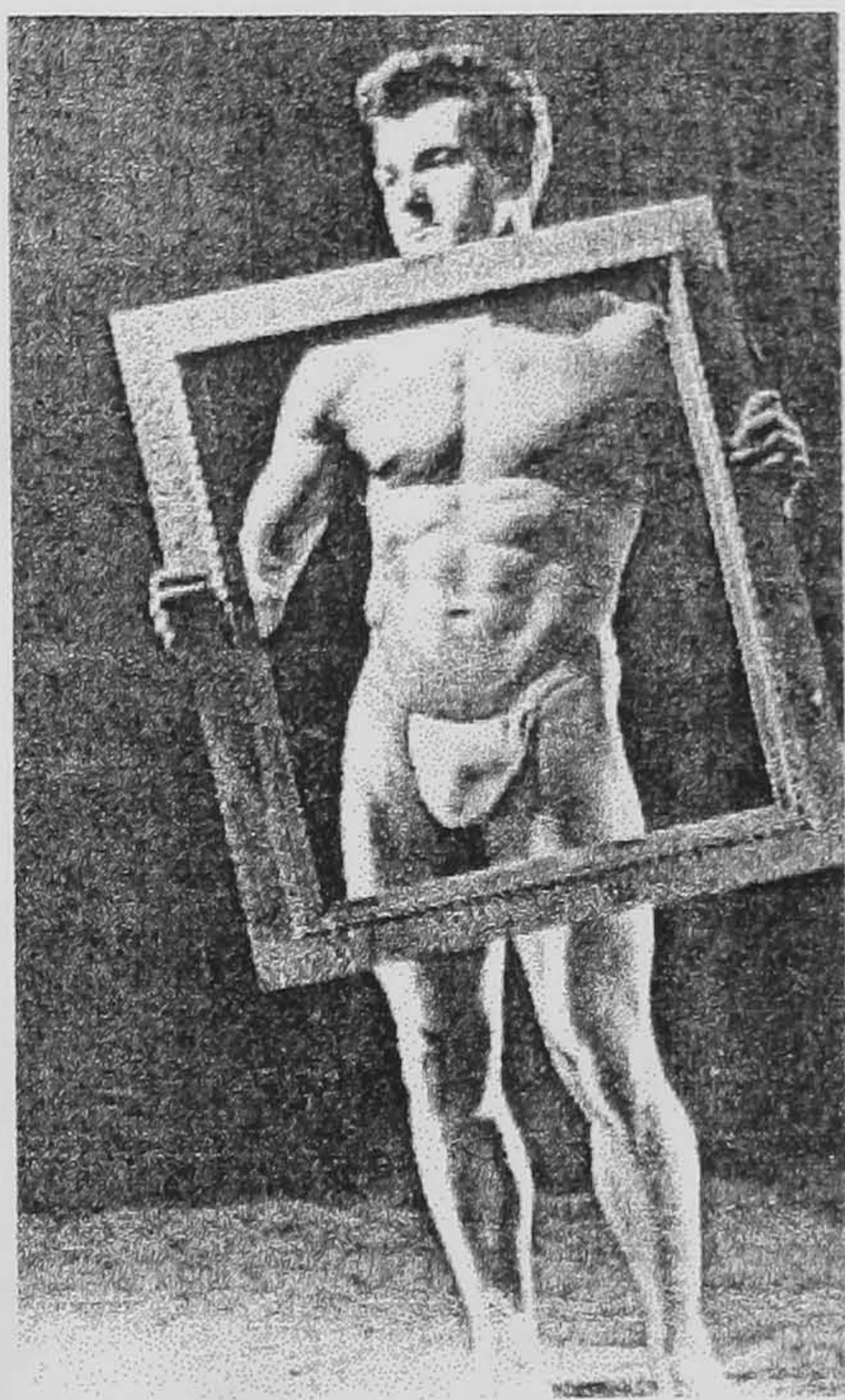


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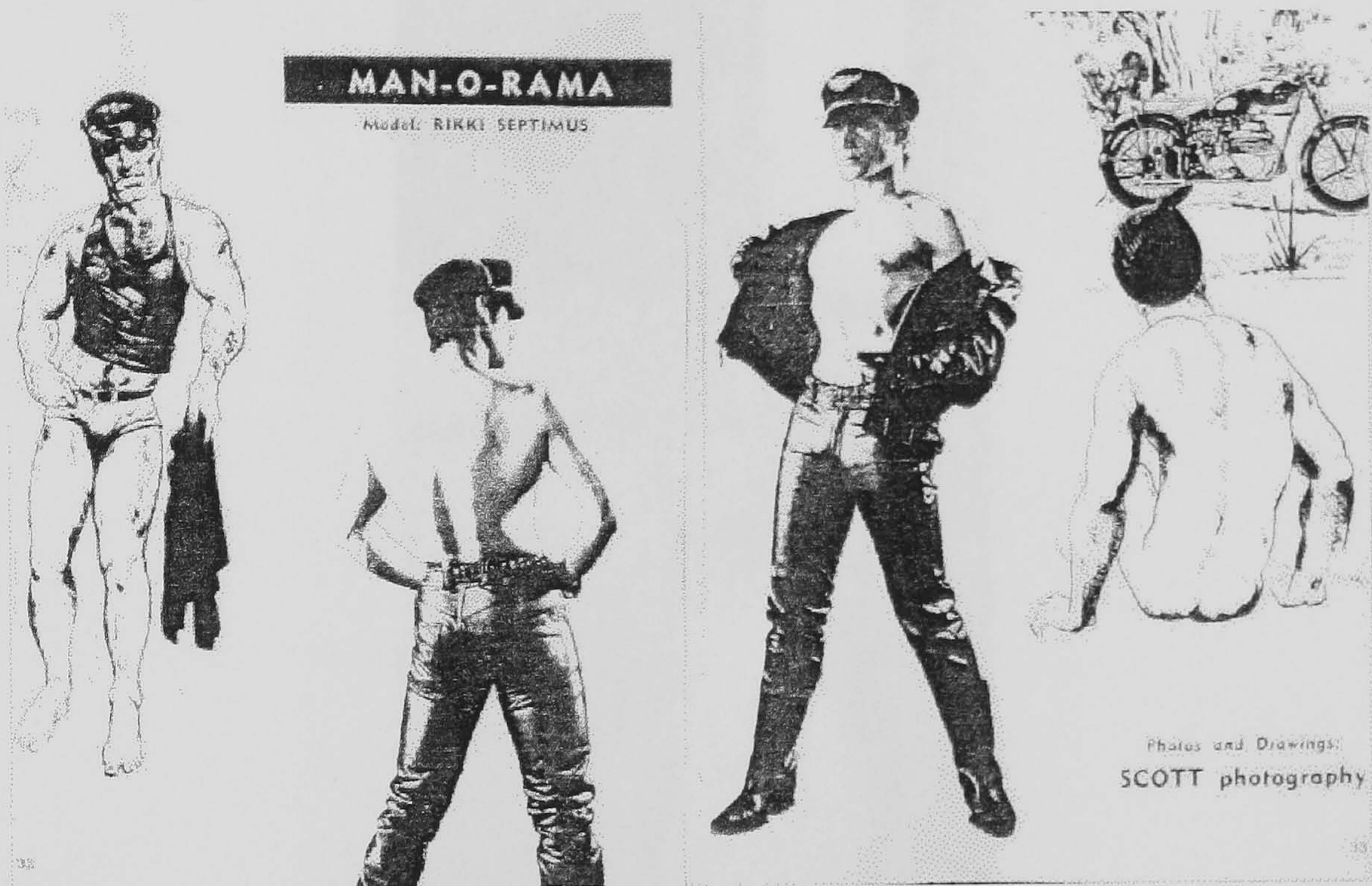


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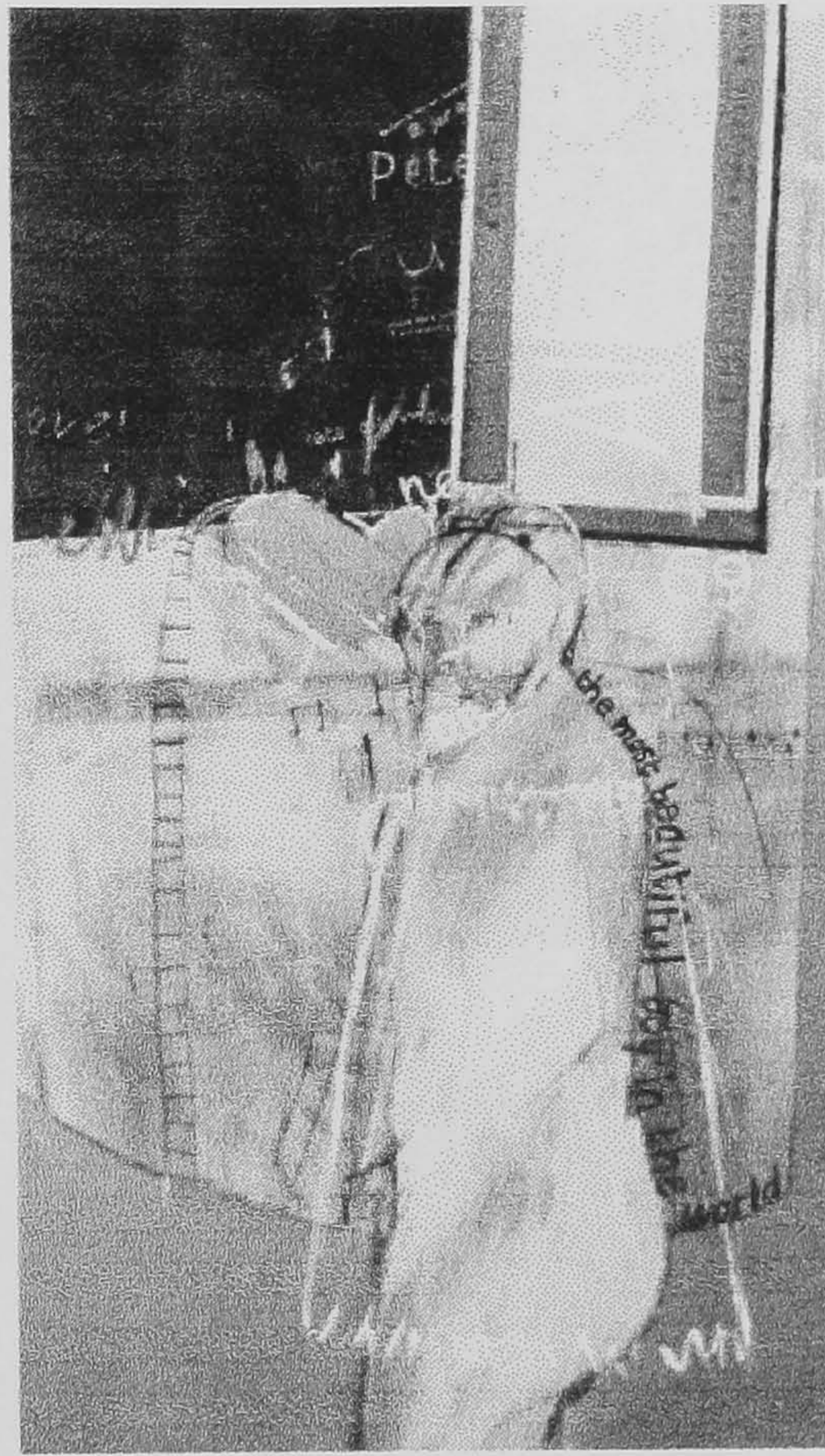


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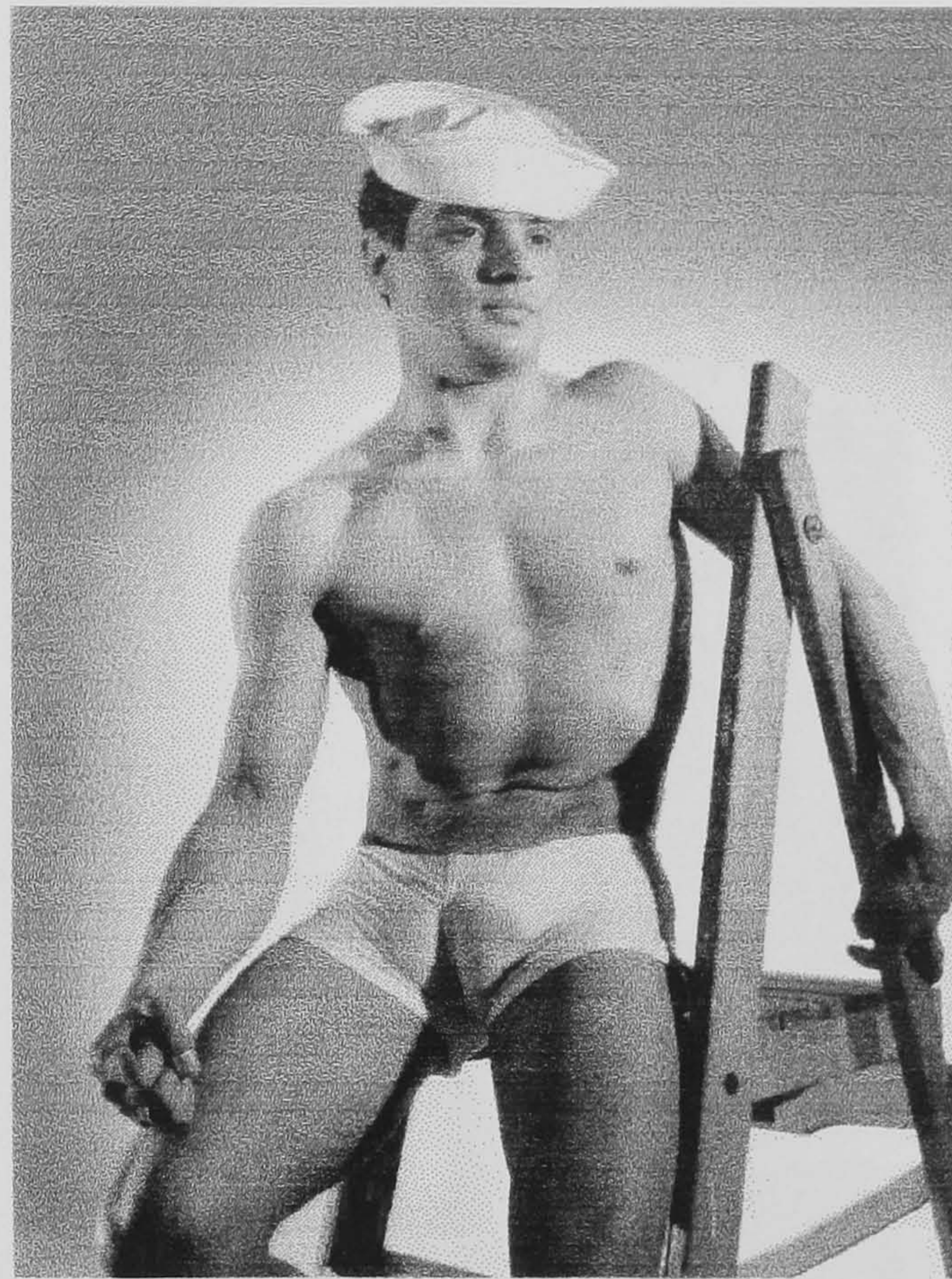


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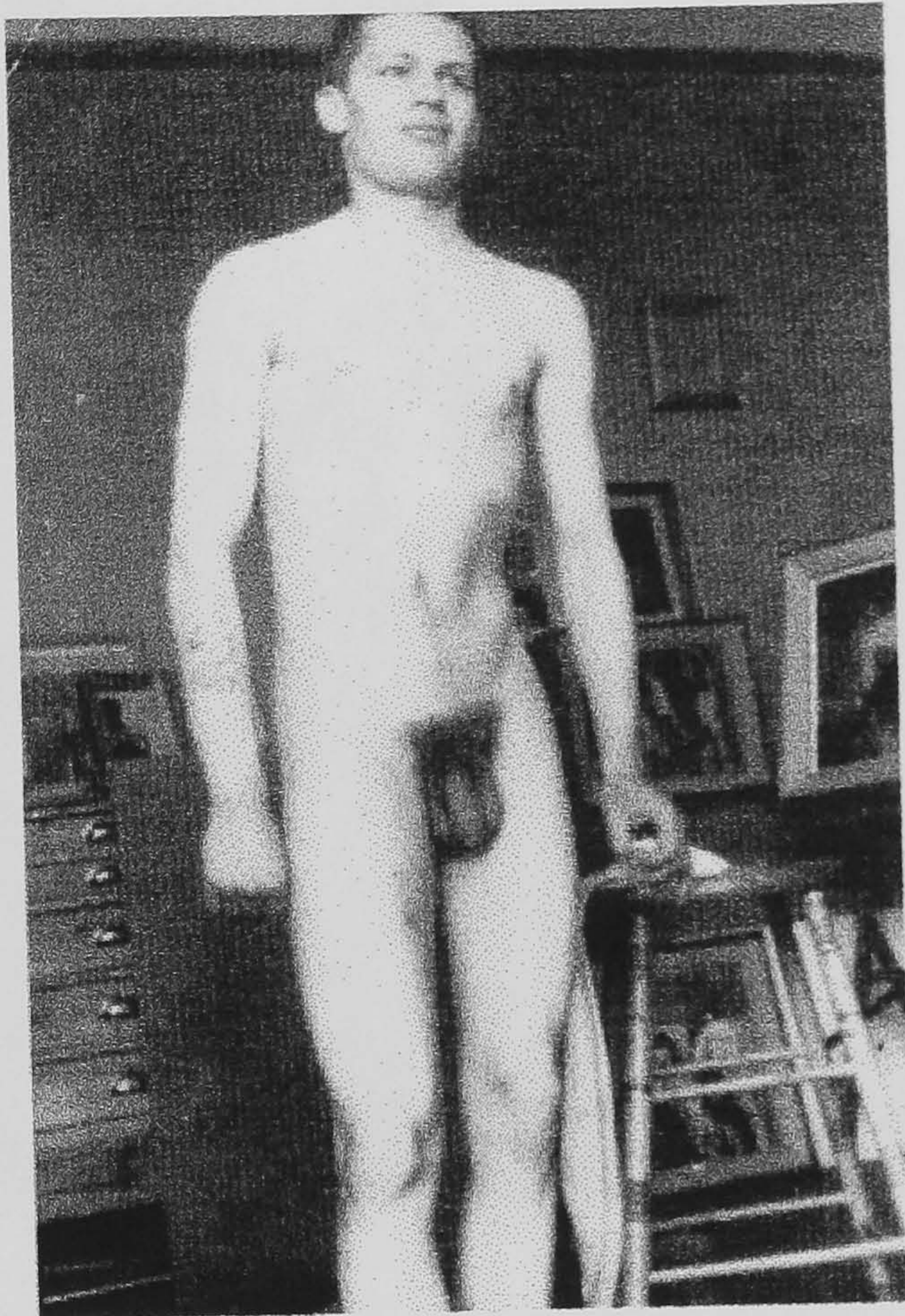


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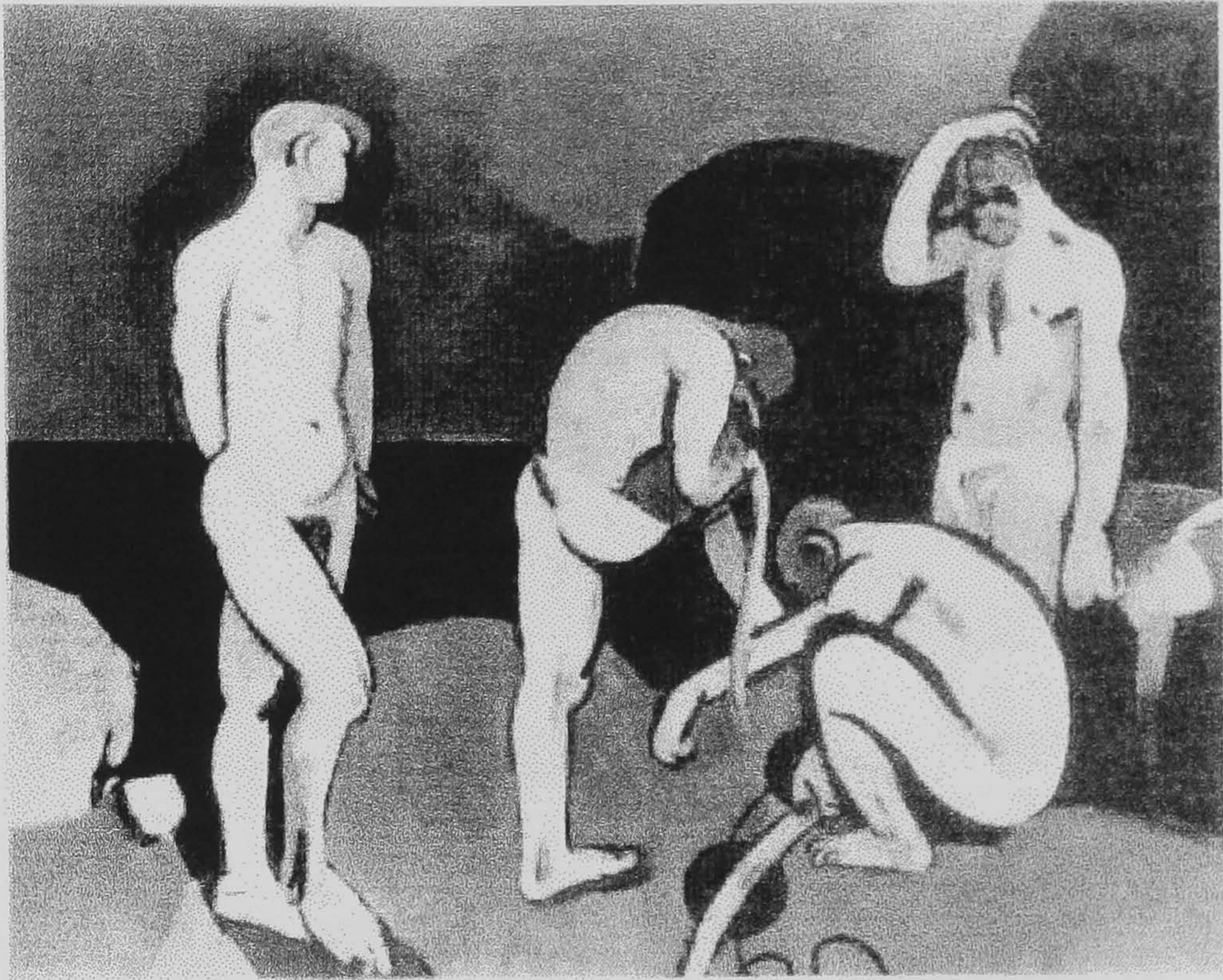


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Introduction

Coming Across David Hockney

There was a time when I knew what homosexuality looked like. And it looked like two boys who were about sixteen running up the stairs of the house that one of them lived in, into a bedroom, throwing themselves on to a bed and then, after some time of almost silence, just the sound of their breathing, one touching the other in such a way as to make the beginning possible, unmistakable, unavoidable.

Homosexuality started to look this way for me after reading *The Milkman's On His Way* by David Rees, a popular novel about "growing up gay", published by Gay Men's Press in 1982. Sometimes the two boys from the book looked like figures from a David Hockney painting. And, some fifteen years later, the paintings of David Hockney still play a part in how I imagine men. At about the same time as I was repeatedly re-reading my favourite scenes from *The Milkman's On His Way*, *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse*, which has David Hockney's 1971 painting *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* on its cover became a secret pleasure (figure 1). It's just possible that this cover had something to do with why and how David Hockney came to play a part in forming my fantasies. Of course, at the beginning of the 1980s the paintings, etchings and drawings of David Hockney illustrated homosexuality for many men. They did for 'Johnny', who in June of 1980 gave the man he lived with *72 Drawings by David Hockney* to mark their tenth day of living together:

June 1980
Darling Timmy,
I'm afraid I can't afford Champagne or Roses so this is just a little presentette to celebrate ten days of living together. I'll look forward to the next ten (thousand, million??) with equal excitement.
Lots & lots of love
Johnny XXXX.¹

I found *72 Drawings by David Hockney* with Johnny's poignant inscription in a second-hand book shop towards the end of writing this thesis. In Britain in the early 1980s a David Hockney drawing, etching or painting looked like the most appropriate representation

of homosexuality. When I came across Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, shortly after I became committed to flicking through the pages of *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse*, I knew from the cover that it was the kind of book I had recently started to search for in second-hand book shops.

The last few pages from the second chapter of Gore Vidal's novel, originally published in Britain in 1948 but revised in 1965, soon fused with the black and white etching, from David Hockney's *Illustrations for Fourteen Poems from C. P. Cavafy* (1966), on its cover (figure 2). Bob and Jim are engaging in some friendly and energetic wrestling in the open air next to a camp-fire:²

Abruptly, Bob pulled away. For a bold moment their eyes met. Then deliberately, gravely, Bob shut his eyes and Jim touched him, as he had done so many times in dreams, without words, without thought, without fear. When the eyes are shut, the true world begins.

As faces touched, Bob gave a shuddering sigh and gripped Jim tightly in his arms. Now they were complete, each became the other, as their bodies collided with a primal violence, like to like, metal to magnet, half to half and the whole restored.

So they met. Eyes tight shut against an irrelevant world. A wind warm and sudden shook all the trees, scattered the fire's ashes, threw shadows to the ground.³

For me, Bob and Jim became the two young men in David Hockney's etching, and merged with the two boys from *The Milkman's On His Way*. This fusion began to make sense alongside my favourite pages from *The Milkman's On His Way*, the cover and the contents of *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse*; and together they all became attached to my real and imagined diversions and delights; began to play a part among other visual and written texts, and everyday experiences, in forming the certain knowledges that enabled me to detect and recognise homosexuality.

In the early 1980s homosexuality was for me a textual practice, intimately connected to taking the tube to London and browsing, sometimes searching, perhaps cruising, new and second-hand book shops. I bought mostly fiction, but also spent hours pouring over pictures of naked or almost naked men in art and photography books, usually in the Arts Council book shop just down from Covent Garden

tube. Sometimes, like Neil Bartlett, I visited art galleries and museums:

When I was sixteen I used to come up here on the train to go to museums, to stand and look at pictures, and also to be looked at, picked up....⁴

If only; for me homosexuality remained a textual practice for quite some time, but:

It was becoming fairly clear then that I was homosexual by dint of reading Havelock Ellis, reading Edward Carpenter, reading Plato in particular.⁵

I didn't read Plato, Havelock Ellis or Edward Carpenter but, as with this young man in the 1930s, it was becoming fairly clear to me that "I was homosexual by dint of reading". Indeed I was becoming a 'homosexual' by travelling to London and browsing through book shops, sometimes following clues and finding what I was looking for, and at others just picking up whatever took my fancy. The books that I found, formed and made sense of my imaginary pleasures. During these forays, I developed my favourite routes in and around London's new and second hand book shops; which became my preferred routes of textual and sexual pleasure. I still use some of these routes. And I still search, browse and cruise, but now through catalogues, libraries and archives as well as second hand book shops, museums and art galleries, but now I sometimes have a professional purpose.

Research for this thesis has been sustained by regular and irregular textual and sexual forays into London's streets, shops, libraries and archives. Perhaps because I was already committed to the expectant pleasure of coming across what I didn't set out to find, I have become convinced that my own too certain knowledge of homosexuality has the potential to stymie research. Moreover, I've become convinced that knowing what homosexual subjects and subject matter look like, is one of the recurring hazards for any inquiry into homosexuality and its connections to cultural production. Sustained by secure knowledge, research all too easily becomes a matter of detection, and the formulating of explanations that account for the difference between what you know and what you find.

I have come to doubt the utility of interpretive theory prior to my arrival on the archival scene. In part because scenes of inquiry repeatedly evince no stable signified for the signifier 'homosexual', repeatedly demonstrating the potential to dispute and disarm the all too secure theoretical protocols and regimes of knowledge employed to make them make sense.

We can return to *The Milkman's On His Way* to consider the connections between how homosexuals look and how I developed a certain knowledge of homosexuality in the early 1980s. For, as the two boys called Ewan and Leslie race up those stairs and fall breathless onto Ewan's bed, understanding dawns for Ewan with the unexpected pleasure of his best friend's hand inside his shorts. For Ewan, but not for Leslie, this is a moment of revelation, a beginning, a touch soon followed by the sight of Leslie's erect and impressive cock. We should note that the event is not particularly important for Leslie and that he has his eyes closed; but Ewan wants to look, and so did I. And Ewan also wants to touch and kiss but doesn't. But still the encounter makes sense of his past and forms a future:

Now I knew. Knew for a certainty that I'd never enjoy it so much with a girl. It couldn't, it just wouldn't be possible. I wasn't in a 'phase'. I was homosexual. And always had been. And always would be.⁶

Clearly for Ewan what takes place between him and Leslie is an ontological event; a confirmation that turns real and imagined delights, dilemmas and diversions into expressions of homosexual subjectivity.

The connection between Ewan's ontological confirmation and the work of David Hockney is I believe, more than arbitrary. The homosexual pleasures of *The Milkman's On His Way* are formed from a language David Hockney knew well. Perhaps a language he played a part in establishing; he certainly used it to produce those paintings, etchings and drawings in the middle of the 1960s for which his name is now a synopsis (figure 3 & 4).

Ewan and Leslie swim and surf, develop and display their bodies, go to the gym and to the beach; they are young men who could easily become attached to an American dream. The connection between these two boys and the figures formed by David Hockney may be somewhat less than overdetermined; Ewan and Leslie could be drawn quite directly from a David Hockney painting. Or Ewan and Leslie may be associates of David Hockney's figures; connected by a shared commitment to the American physique magazines, the novels of John Rechy and eventual travel to California that determined the form of David Hockney's figures in the 1960s. However, the connections between Ewan and Leslie, *The Milkman's On His Way* and the figure and figurations of David Hockney may also be refracted through the politics and pleasures of gay liberation that coalesced in Britain in the early 1970s and instituted America as the site of untrammelled gay subjectivity and sexual freedom. Whichever, Ewan and Leslie are English versions of American models; a combination of physique, glamour, porn and politics; and look to me like figures from a David Hockney painting.

Now, despite my commitment to the irresolute personal pleasures of textual and sexual cruising, my research at its inception was fortified by a pretty secure understanding of how homosexuals look and make sense; I didn't allow my regular and irregular personal pleasures to encroach on my professional practice too much, or at least not too evidently. My research was described as the constitution and analysis of an archive of visual and written texts concerning the connections between visual culture and its interpretation. I set out in search of marginalised and hidden subjects and subject matter confident that between 1940 and the present day there was a story to tell about the formation, definition and visual representation of homosexual subjectivity, and its professional and popular interpretation. The well established narratives of personal and political liberation make it difficult to avoid writing a story in which more recognisable, more explicit, more coherent and more candid cultural forms are allied to the formation of homosexual or gay subjectivity. Whilst making sense of the connections between male homosexuality and cultural production in this way is not necessarily erroneous, 'coming-out' narratives of this kind are forceful and formative ways of understanding the

personal and political connections between the past, the present and the future, that run the risk of making too much sense.

The Milkman's On His Way by David Rees is a 'coming-out' story, that moves from the confusions of real and imagined delights and dilemmas to the formation of homosexual subjectivity. This kind of story is a powerful epistemology that regulates the fictional, theoretical and historical narratives that many men use to identify the social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures they come to call their own; and for a young man "growing up gay" in the early 1980s this form was influential, in practice and in theory. Many of the influential narratives of gay studies and queer theory are interested in locating political and personal moments of transition, that enable moves from confusion to clarity, before to after, darkness to light, and from nonsense to common sense. The figure and figurations of David Hockney have a privileged place in texts about British Art and British homosexuality, and are an integral part of 'common sense' associations between gay subjectivity and visual culture.

The figure and figurations of David Hockney appear in the chronicles of homosexual law reform and gay liberation, and in turn these narratives are regularly used to represent his work as the pictorial representative of confident, coherent and increasingly visible forms of homosexual subject matter. For example, in *Coming Out* by Jeffrey Weeks, his influential tracing of the "growth of a homosexual consciousness" from the late nineteenth century through to the end of the 1980s, David Hockney is represented as a symbol of burgeoning and increasingly visible social and sexual freedoms:

Not till the 1960s, with a vast increase in birth-control facilities and an apparently limitless vista of growing (if inflation fuelled) prosperity, did the 'new hedonism' become a dominant ideological presence. If a David Hockney could be a luminary of the 'swinging London' scene, how to explain his (homo)sexual lifestyle? For most homosexual media stars of the period, the question was evaded, either in an ostensibly shining virginity and a glowing religiosity, or in nervous breakdown. But if sexual pleasure was a desirable goal, how could homosexuals be excluded.⁷

Whilst this may not be inappropriate contextualisation of David Hockney and his work, it's also an example of the availability of his figure and figurations for inclusion somewhere towards the end

of narratives that trace the gradual development of homosexual subjectivity and subject matter. In texts that make a connection between art and homosexuality, of the British kind, the work of David Hockney repeatedly appears as the aesthetic representative of gay liberation.

In *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*, Andrew Sinclair uses David Hockney to compare the "candour" and clarity of his paintings in the 1960s, to the discreet "smudges" of Francis Bacon's in the early 1950s. For Andrew Sinclair the paintings of David Hockney and Francis Bacon are illustrations in a narrative that runs from the prosecutions of men for 'homosexual offences' in the early 1950s, to the partial legalisation of homosexuality in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. In this narrative, Francis Bacon and David Hockney are producers of the same subject in different forms, in a familiar story of sexual and aesthetic precedence and influence. The irresolutions of Francis Bacon's paintings are, according to Andrew Sinclair, the precursors of David Hockney's more explicit, more focused and more distinct presentations of homosexuality.

Andrew Sinclair's utilisation of David Hockney, forms and frames the figure and figurations of Francis Bacon, turning *Two Figures 1953* and *Figures in the Grass 1954* into symbols, perhaps symptoms, of when homosexuality had not realised a social or political form (figure 5 & 6). Framing the figure and figurations of Francis Bacon in this way may help to explain why, despite the wrestling of Bob and Jim in Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, homosexuality has never looked like a Francis Bacon painting to me, and why *Two Figures 1953* or *Two Figures in the Grass* have never played a part in my real or imagined delights and diversions. Unlike the work of David Hockney, Francis Bacon's paintings have never been amongst the mutable collection of pictures I carry in my erotic imaginary.

My and Andrew Sinclair's understanding of 'David Hockney' is shared by Edward Lucie Smith, who uses it to make sense of the figure and figurations of another British artist; Francis Bacon's contemporary, Keith Vaughan. In his introduction to *Keith Vaughan: Drawings of the Young Male*, Edward Lucie Smith describes the work of David Hockney as "a declaration of difference, a joyous celebration of

liberated sexuality", "domestic", "everyday", rejections of "homosexual guilt". Whereas:

Vaughan's paintings, unlike Hockney's, are the work of someone who feels himself to be an outsider, looking at actions, situations and relationships in which he cannot fully participate.⁸

In *At Your Own Risk* the British film-maker, theatre-designer and painter Derek Jarman proffers a similar understanding of 'David Hockney' that sustains the association between knowing and looking that I first came across in *The Milkman's On His Way*, just after Ewan became transfixed by the sight of Leslie's cock.

According to Derek Jarman, David Hockney's *Cavafy Etchings* of 1966 were "the leap forward into normality", and he recalls the "startling reality of lads I knew or recognised in bed together" (figure 2).⁹ However, according to Derek Jarman, his own film, *Sebastian*, represented the real breakthrough. Derek Jarman suggests, as Ewan realised and I came to know, that for a young man the clear sight of an erect cock can be the very epitome of homosexual visibility. Apparently "Ken's hard on" was the "pivot" of *Sebastian*:

Ken's cock appeared at the bottom of the frame and projected at 1:1.85 was not seen by the censor. The love scene was ecstatic. A generation went to see these nine minutes of a regular guy in a regular cinema.¹⁰

How could Ewan or I disagree with Derek Jarman? I had spent years cruising through book shops and flicking through books for explicit homosexual scenes, searching for written and pictorial representations of erect cocks, and hoping to catch a glimpse of a "regular guy's" dick. However, using a formula where the quintessence of assured gay subject matter is the clear delineation of a "regular" erect cock, requires that research is a search, followed by the provision of explanations that account for invisibility and irregularity. Or alternatively, 'queer theory' can provide a way of valuing the "anarchic" irregularities, blurs and transgressions of Francis Bacon's use of paint over the clear delineations of David Hockney:

We might say that domesticity, in Hockney's art, triumphs over sex, and as the senses give way to the sensible, gay and straight alike take their place in a social order that renders a too-frank sexuality anarchic.¹¹

However, this queer reversal of value for the different visual rhetorics of Francis Bacon and David Hockney reverses but retains the formula of clear or disturbed delineation. Repeatedly, comparisons of this kind require choices to be made between just two available options; visible and invisible, regular and irregular, before and after, margin and centre, transgress and conform, and a multitude of alternating possibilities.

Explanations of the invisibility or irregularity of homosexuality, often recommend a decisive moment of transition; from invisible to visible, from irregular to regular subjectivity and subject matter, exemplified by Ewan's realisation of his homosexual identity, induced by the touch of Leslie's hand and the sight of his cock. In accounts of British homosexuality, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act and the development of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s is one such moment, but for many investigators interested in the connections between homosexuality and cultural production the most popular moment of transition is the late nineteenth century. According to gay studies legend, at this moment some of the complexities and incoherencies of modernity were ordered by the institution of the male homosexual subject.

The late nineteenth century has the allure of uncertainty, and promises satisfying realisations of homosexual subjectivity and subject matter. Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* provides a puissant paradigm, and an almost unavoidable quotation; a foundation for the fast establishing disciplines of gay studies and queer theory:

As defined by the ancient civil and canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality...The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.¹²

Like Ewan's realisation of his homosexuality, Michel Foucault's quotation proffers a stable sense of the future. In a few complex and at times convincing texts, Michel Foucault's historical conception is fused with psychoanalytic understandings of homosexual subjectivity; a circular and consequently almost airtight association in which the personal and professional narratives of homosexual development instituted by psychoanalysis are aligned with the historical development of homosexual subjectivity.¹³ However, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has written convincingly of how personal and political realisations of this kind create all too coherent understandings of the social practices and sexual pleasures that we call 'homosexual' in the twentieth century. According to Eve Sedgwick, the production of "unidirectional narratives of supercession" ignore the "unrationalised co-existence" of different comprehensions and apprehensions within a "space of overlapping, contradictory and conflicting definitional forces."¹⁴ In a similar vein, Gayle Rubin in her influential 1984 essay 'Thinking Sex; Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', calls for a "descriptive and conceptual framework for thinking about sex and its politics" able to "build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history".¹⁵

In the descriptive and differential frameworks recommended by Eve Sedgwick and Gayle Rubin, 'homosexual' can signify a diverse and disparate range of meanings that do not adhere to strict theoretical divisions. As John Boswell has pointed out in his consideration of the theoretical 'debate' between sexual essentialists and social constructionists, historians and theorists who focus on the coherent construction of homosexual subjectivity at the end of the nineteenth century look like "extreme realists" when they assume that "modern homosexuality is not simply one of a series of conventions designated under the same rubric".¹⁶ Whilst John Boswell's essay is a critique of approaches that are often founded on Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, his wariness about the coherent creation of homosexual subjectivity seems to accord with Michel Foucault's ambition for 'micro' rather than 'macro' histories, able to account for the contingent articulation and comprehension of the acts and practitioners we now call 'homosexual'. As John Champagne points

out in *The Ethics of Marginality*, Michel Foucault's conception of the 'homosexual' "personage" is not concerned with the coherent creation of a positive homosexual subjectivity, but the complex and productive enacting of medical and juridical authority.¹⁷

Considered in this way, Michel Foucault's formulation of the 'homosexual' "personage" does not necessarily deny different enunciations and comprehensions of sexual practice, pleasure and personality, or offer the kind of epistemological stability that some historians and theorists seek.

Taken together, Eve Sedgwick's suggestion of an "incoherent dispensation", Gayle Rubin's call for "rich descriptions of sexuality", and John Boswell's warning that social constructionists can be ahistorical, suggest an approach that can, perhaps spuriously, be characterised as contingent reading, opposed to theoretical interpretation. My adopting of an approach of this kind in the following chapters is also influenced by investigations into the articulation and comprehension of 'homosexual' pleasures and practices within particular geographic environments, most particularly George Chauncey's 'contingent reading' of an inquiry into social and sexual practices at the Newport Naval Training Station in 1919-1920. In his essay 'Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era', George Chauncey writes:

Because the controversy brought so many groups of people - working- and middle-class gay- and straight-identified enlisted men, middle-class naval officers, ministers, and town officials - into conflict. A multiplicity of sexual discourses co-existed at a single moment in the civilian and naval seaport communities.¹⁸

George Chauncey's attention to the contingent enunciation of homosexual practices, pleasures and personas in this article, and in his 1994 book *Gay New York*, exemplifies an approach to research that doesn't depend upon recognising homosexual subjectivity or subject matter but requires attention to the complex articulation of social and sexual practices and pleasures that may or may not be designated 'homosexual'.

In adopting an approach of this kind, some 'macro' interpretations of the relationship between masculinity, male sexuality and cultural production are not utilised in this thesis. I don't make use of theoretical formulas that begin with an understanding of masculinity or sexual identity as inherently unstable, and then seek to associate this instability with cultural products. Abigail Solomon Godeau's *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* is a very recent example of an approach of this kind, in which eighteenth and nineteenth century visual texts are interpreted as representatives of either virile or effeminate forms of masculinity:

The question to be asked, therefore is why at a given point one model of masculinity may be privileged over the other, or alternatively, how the co-existence of both models conforms, or fails to conform to society's official prescriptions (and proscriptions), for its masculine norm.¹⁹

The risk of not utilising some major 'macro' models of gender and sexual difference, is to risk imputations of being apolitical, and throughout this thesis I do avoid adherence to political ethics and etiquettes that are founded on the apparent stability or instability of gender or sexual identity. However, a number of historians and theorists whose work is part of an explicit political project have been important to me; work without which this thesis would simply not have been possible. At one time or another I have found nearly all their work useful, but my research is not enacted in a political mode. Not because I don't believe that homosexual law reform, gay liberation and queer activism have achieved important social, political and aesthetic changes, and not because I have alternative commitments to forms of pleasure and practice that could be placed in opposition to these movements. The reason for pursuing my research in a different way is because I believe there is a mode of sexual and aesthetic pleasure and practice that can not be accommodated or viewed through political protocols committed to the promotion of particular kinds of subjectivity or subject matter, or their dissolution, and which understand producers and their products by their success or failure to form a subject that we can either recognise or disturb, and accommodate to a contemporary political project.

Doubts about the coherent creation and articulation of homosexual subjectivity may have been influential during my search for a research methodology because they provided support and encouragement for a process of exploration rather than theoretical interpretation or recognition. Indeed, these doubts were a way of justifying my sexual and textual cruising. Michel de Certeau's consideration of the "indirect" and "errant" trajectories" of the autistic children in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, struck a chord, and reminded me of how I had first moved through London's book shops before my knowledge of homosexuality had become all too certain:

As unrecognised producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices something that might be considered similar to the "wandering lines" ("*lignes d'err*") drawn by the autistic child studied by F. Deligny (17): "indirect" or "errant" trajectories obeying their own logic.²⁰

Michel de Certeau proposes a way of understanding "indirect" and "errant" trajectories as movements in and around the modern city.

Beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer.²¹

I began to wander through my archive, as I had wandered through the second-hand book shops of London almost sixteen years previously, not really knowing what I was about, but knowing I was up to something; picking up clues and becoming accustomed to the textual and sexual environment through which I moved. But I have to say, I was perennially anxious, convinced that my research should be more productive, and my approach more professional; less dependent upon luck and chance, on what or who turned up.

A couple of years after reading *The Milkman's On His Way* and finding Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, I came across *A Better Class of Blond* by David Rees and *Hemlock and After* by Angus Wilson. I had by this time become pretty adept at finding delight and diversion in London's second-hand book shops; I recall that the David Hockney

paintings on their covers caught my eye, and I recognised that they probably contained the kind of subject matter I was searching for.

Originally published in 1952, Angus Wilson's *Hemlock and After* was issued in 1979 with David Hockney's 1963 painting *Domestic Scene, Broadchalke, Wilts* on its cover. Now, I have to admit that this book remained unread on my shelves for quite some time; after a quick flick through its pages I realised it didn't contain the sexual and textual pleasures I had come to associate with David Hockney. I found more satisfaction in *A Better Class of Blond*. Published in 1985, this book is an account of a year David Rees, the author of *The Milkman's On His Way*, spent in San Francisco in the early 1980s. On its cover is a photograph from *A Bigger Splash*, Jack Hazan's film about David Hockney. David Rees writes with enthusiasm and graphic detail about the social and sexual practices and pleasures he finds in and around America. However, we can perhaps make an oblique connection between these practices and pleasures, representations of the figure and figurations of David Hockney, and a certain knowledge of how homosexuals look, by reading the author's response to hearing the voice of Quentin Crisp on the radio as he drives an American car down an American highway:

On the way home I listen to the old-fashioned, well modulated tones of Quentin Crisp on the car radio. His voice is British movie actor of 1930s vintage. Hostesses like to invite a few gay friends to their parties, he says. We're so well behaved. So amusing. Because we're an unpopular minority, we have to work extra hard to be accepted. That's why we don't cause problems and why we enjoy entertaining others.

Yuck! What century, what sort of closet, does he think we live in?²²

Clearly in 1985 David Rees knew what homosexuals should sound like and what they should say, even if he couldn't quite place Quentin Crisp's timbre correctly; Quentin Crisp's precise nasal elocutions would make no sense in a British film of the 1930s, he sounds nothing like Noel Coward. But according to his autobiography, *The Naked Civil Servant*, Quentin Crisp's voice did make sense on the streets and in the cafes of Soho. Before and after the Second World War, the now celebrated personality, writer and raconteur hung around the cafes of this area of London and briskly walked its streets in heels and full make-up. The answers to the rhetorical

questions posed by David Rees are 'this century' and 'no kind of closet'. It's important to point out that the protocol of perception used by David Rees obscures Quentin Crisp's social and sexual texture, and turns him into an abject closet queen. But Quentin Crisp's sexual persona was never hidden or so easy to define. Arrested for importuning in the 1940s his legal defence depended on his visibility and particular sexual texture:

I said that I dressed and lived in such a way that the whole world could see that I was homosexual but that this set me apart from the rest of humanity rather than making it easy for me to form contacts with it. Who, I asked the magistrate, could possibly hope to solicit anybody in broad daylight in a crowded London street looking as I did?²³

Like the debates Derek Jarman engaged in during the late 1960s on whether Quentin Crisp's powder blue hair rinse was a bad example, the certain knowledge of David Rees overshadows the social, sexual and physical environments in which Quentin Crisp made sense.²⁴ In his autobiography Quentin Crisp describes these environments and interpretations that ignore the articulation of these spaces and their sexual texture can look in comparison like crude expressions of visible and assertive forms of gay practice and pleasure that depend on an abject and repressive past for them to make sense. Now, I think the distaste David Rees expresses for Quentin Crisp is something like the disillusionment that prevented me from reading *Hemlock and After*, Angus Wilson's novel about the reformulation of social practices and sexual pleasures in the early 1950s.

I want to make almost nothing of how David Hockney's paintings are used to represent a book that was written before it was produced, because after all this may just be about the selling of old books to new audiences. But, taking *Hemlock and After* as an example, the social and sexual practices that we call 'homosexual' have changed a great deal between the original publication of this book in 1952, the painting of *Domestic Scene, Broadchalke, Wilts* in 1963, the edition that brought them together in 1979 and 1998 when this book sits on my desk. But a certain way of understanding the figure and figurations of David Hockney in the early 1980s obscured for me the differences between these times and places and represented, perhaps framed, them as simply opposed, repressed or liberated, kinds of

homosexual content in an ongoing and developmental narrative. Read in this light *Hemlock and After*, like Quentin Crisp, almost inevitably disappoints.

I'm not calling for a more appropriate choice of illustration for the cover of *Hemlock and After*, and I believe there are complex connections between its publication in 1952, David Hockney's 1963 painting, the 1970s and today. My point is that the history of 'homosexuality' is made up of temporal shifts and geographic displacements that are puzzling; in the words of Michel de Certeau, "errant", "indirect" and difficult to "administer", and may be impossible to comprehend with theoretical formulas that are overly composed. The damning and incorrect indictment of Quentin Crisp by David Rees, suggests that we need to find a way of looking at visual products, including Quentin Crisp, produced before the partial legalisation of homosexuality in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, without utilising the delimiting protocols of homosexual law reform and gay liberation; and most importantly for my project, without looking at them through a prism of critical and theoretical representations of the figure and figurations of David Hockney. For this reason, the painting that had never played a part in how I imagined homosexuality started to become the focus of my attention; *Two Figures 1953* by Francis Bacon.

Like me, Quentin Crisp walked the streets of London in a very particular way. Whilst our walks and routes may have nothing in common, I started to consider if my irresolute moves through an archive could provide a way of becoming acclimatised to the environments and objects I was interested in pursuing. I started to collect evidence, trying not to use what I knew about homosexuality but how I had come to know it. I started to cruise in and around my archive, sometimes following clues, at others just coming upon material, and at times simply having to make do with what I found. On occasions I moved erratically through a disparate accumulation of written and visual texts, losing my way, still hoping that they would eventually compose an archive that I could eventually subject to some serious analytical attention.

During one of my regular cruises through the second-hand book shops of London, now motivated by my research, I came across *Winger's Landfall* by Stuart Lauder. *Winger's Landfall* was first published in 1962, and is a novel about an amateur detective who may or may not be homosexual, and the meaning of a photograph that may or may not be homosexual subject matter. However, the mystery at the core of *Winger's Landfall* is not solved, and the meaning of the photograph is not resolved. Reading *Winger's Landfall* when I did, suggested that perhaps I didn't have to seek a resolution but could carry on cruising; carry on circulating the objects and subjects of my research. Of course, Stuart Lauder could have become my focus, but though I followed some clues and found further books he had written, I was resistant to finding out too much about him. My resistance was prefigured by the irresolutions of Stuart Lauder's novel. I didn't try and find out about Stuart Lauder and successfully resisted the delights of detection until almost the end of writing this thesis when my desire got the better of me one afternoon and through a series of phone calls to publishers and agents I found out that Stuart Lauder was the pseudonym for David Stuart Leslie. However, beyond this name, Stuart Lauder remains an unidentified subject. *Winger's Landfall* became my guide; I could search but not solve. I could be an amateur but must remain ultimately an unsuccessful detective. At some point during my research *Winger's Landfall* and Stuart Lauder's amateur detective fused with the figure and figurations of Roland Barthes.

Yet to proclaim yourself something is always to speak at the behest of a vengeful Other, to enter into his discourse, to argue with him, to seek from him a scrap of identity: "You are..." "Yes, I am..." Ultimately, the attribute is of no importance; what society will not tolerate is that I should be...*nothing*, or to be more exact, that the *something* that I am should be openly expressed as provisional, revocable, insignificant, inessential, in a word: irrelevant. Just say "I am," and you will be socially saved.

Unlike the fictional texts of Stuart Lauder, the theoretical texts of Roland Barthes make very few appearance in this thesis. Yet his texts, particularly *Camera Lucida*, *A Lover's Discourse* and *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* have sustained my research. Roland Barthes' conception of cruising, provides the basis of my approach:

Cruising is anti-natural, anti-repetition. Cruising is an act that repeats itself, but its catch is absolutely fresh.

That's why cruising is a notion I can easily move from the order of erotic quest, which is its origin, to the quest for texts, for example, or the search for novelistic features. What offers itself is the surprise of the 'first time'.²⁵

The figure and figurations of Roland Barthes, and particularly his conception of cruising, encouraged me to sustain what I had already been getting up to in my research; cruising second-hand book shops, libraries, catalogues, museums and art galleries, looking for pleasure and diversion, making sense from fragments, following threads, making connections, and producing scrapbooks. The importance of cruising for me as an approach to research is that you can never be quite sure if you'll find what you're looking for, or if you'll come across what you never knew you wanted, or even knew existed. Cruising is a productive rather than reductive process, and has an in-built potential for diversion, irregular connections and disorderly encounters.

When it comes to cruising I am a resolute amateur. That is not to say that cruising is the representative of 'amateur' as opposed to 'professional' approaches to research or sex. Some practitioners are professionals in its arts and set out on their forays well prepared and fully equipped. But my cruises are not so disciplined, and are at times somewhat random exploitations of the opportunities that present themselves. Again the work of Roland Barthes has enabled me to retain my amateur status:

The Amateur (someone who engages in painting, music, sport, science, without the spirit of mastery or competition), the Amateur renews his pleasure (*amator*: one who loves and loves again); he is anything but a hero (of creation, of performance); he established himself *graciously* (for nothing) in the signifier: in the immediately definitive substance of music, of painting; his praxis usually, involves no *rabato* (that theft of the object for the sake of the attribute); he will be perhaps - the counter-bourgeois artist.²⁶

I have attempted in writing this thesis not to produce an overly disciplined text. Whilst I don't utilise Roland Barthes' fragmentary presentation, my research was fragmentary, and cruisy, and amateur. Roland Barthes' conception of cruising provided a rationale for some quite arbitrary moves, particularly some quite

irregular and disorderly encounters between theoretical, fictional and historical texts. I firmly believe that an amateur's cruise is preferable to a professional process of detection. It's puzzling that many theorists who are ostensibly committed to making use of approaches that can be characterised as post-structuralist also produce overwhelmingly disciplined texts, accumulating evidence and deploying language in the formulation of airtight and indisputable arguments.

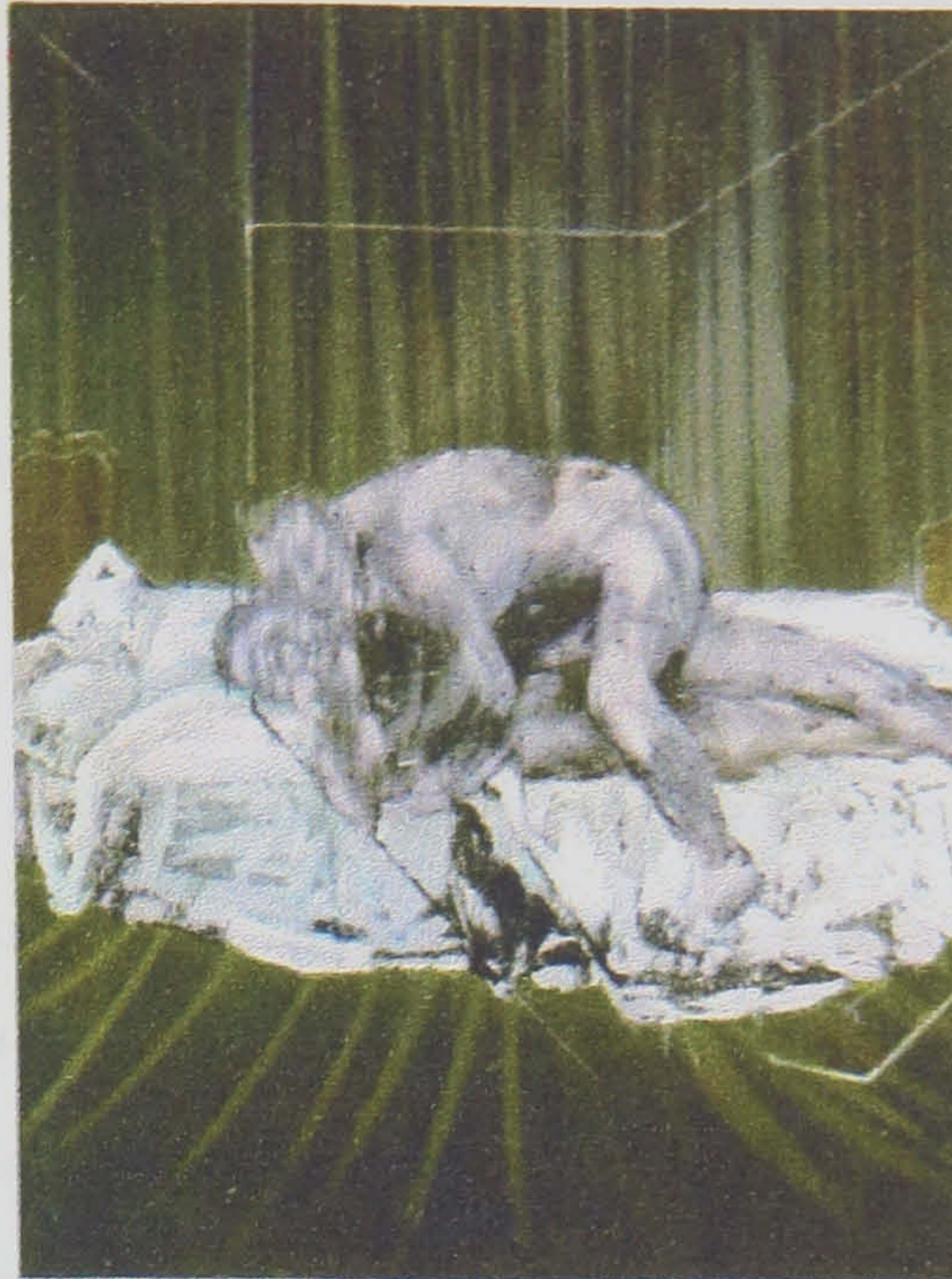
At an early stage of my research I was very influenced by *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Again the theoretical formulations of Gilles Deleuze make very few appearances, but their influence can be discerned in the moves I make and the approaches I adopt. However, though the work of Gilles Deleuze has been influential on my research methodology, I don't make use of his approach to Francis Bacon's paintings.²⁷ I am more interested in considering how Francis Bacon's paintings, particularly *Two Figures 1953*, may make different kinds of sense when theoretical approaches similar to those outlined in *Anti-Oedipus* and other works by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are adopted as research methodologies. Alongside Roland Barthes, other works by Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida have played important parts in sustaining my research and formulating my methodology, but their appearances in this text are ghostly rather than corporeal. These resources supported my research, but are not part of a search to find exemplary pictorial representatives of theory. It seems strange now that I spent so much time reading texts that can be characterised as post-structuralist and make so few references to them in this thesis, but they are I believe axiomatic. These theoretical resources provided me with a way of moving around an archive and supported the development of an approach that is not interested in 'making sense' according to a strict theoretical formula.

The alternative to making some kind of homosexual sense; to writing a coming out story, or even to making nonsense by writing a schizoid text structured by a desire for the unformed, the absolutely different, was to carry on doing what I had been up to for some time; to formulate a contextual environment around some figures and figurations. I have worked in such a way that sometimes I didn't

really know what I was up to, what I was looking for; perhaps becoming something of an hysteric; a disorienting process. To be honest, as with all cruises and cruisers, I have never been quite sure if I have been searching to find an object or a subject, or engaged in a productive process in which connections were created by movements in and around the places and spaces that make up my archive. The following five chapters can be read as individual cruises, and as one long cruise, in which subjects and objects appear and re-appear, disappear and return, as I wander and wonder around *Two Figures* 1953.

Introduction - Notes

- ¹David Hockney, *72 Drawings by David Hockney*.
- ²Gore Vidal, *The City and the Pillar*; revised edition, published by Panther with 'In Despair' from David Hockney's *Illustrations for Fourteen Poems from C. P. Cavafy* (1966) on the cover.
- ³Gore Vidal, *The City and the Pillar*, pp.24-5.
- ⁴Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man*, p.xix.
- ⁵Kevin Porter and Jeffrey Weeks, *Between the Acts*, p.110.
- ⁶David Rees, *The Milkman's On His Way*, p.21.
- ⁷Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.158.
- ⁸Edward Lucie Smith, *Keith Vaughan: Drawing of the Young Male*, p.6.
- ⁹Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, p.47.
- ¹⁰Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, p.84.
- ¹¹Kenneth E. Silver, 'Master Bedrooms, Master Narratives', in Christopher Reed ed., *Not At Home*, p.220.
- ¹²Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, p. 43. Few disciplined gay theoreticians resist the temptations of this quotation; and it is of course ironic that a discipline has been built on the back of Michel Foucault's inquiries into disciplinary regimes.
- ¹³I am here thinking of the work of Kaja Silverman, Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani.
- ¹⁴Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, pp.44-8.
- ¹⁵Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex; Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', from Abelove, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, p.9.
- ¹⁶John Boswell, 'Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories' from Duberman, *Hidden from History*, p.21.
- ¹⁷John Champagne, *The Ethics of Marginality*, pp.62-3.
- ¹⁸George Chauncey, 'Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War 1 Era', in Duberman, *Hidden from History*, p.303.
- ¹⁹Abigail Solomon Godeau, *Male Trouble*, p.26.
- ²⁰Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.xviii.
- ²¹Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.95.
- ²²David Rees, *A Better Class of Blond*, p.42.
- ²³Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*, p.168.
- ²⁴See Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*.
- ²⁵Roland Barthes, 'Twenty Key Words for Roland Barthes', in Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, p.231.
- ²⁶Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, p.52.
- ²⁷Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*.



Chapter One

Identifying Homosexual Subjects

When we look at *Two Figures 1953* (figure 5) by Francis Bacon what do we see? How do we make sense of this painting of two figures who may be wrestling, or may be having sex, on a bed that has been placed within a dark box, perhaps a room? Can we confidently identify what Francis Bacon's painting is about? Do the elements from which it is composed; the figures, the forms, the bed, the sheets, the headboard, the footboard, the dark striated ground, the chalk dry graphic lines that delineate the boxroom, the textures, the different applications of paint, the colours, the size, the title, the year it was painted, and the artist all neatly fit together to compose a coherent object? For the art historian who has set out to investigate the connections between visual culture and male homosexuality, do the different parts of the painting produce a meaning that can be confidently apprehended? And to discern what the painting is about, how closely do we need to look? Close enough to notice and enumerate details, but not so close that we lose sight of the whole scene? And will we find all we need to know on the surface of the painting, or must we search for evidence beyond the picture frame? Finally, if we assume that *Two Figures 1953* has something to do with male homosexuality, how can we use some of the currently available chronologies and conventions of gay studies to make Francis Bacon's painting make sense?

In *The Sexual Perspective* Emmanuel Cooper investigates some associations between art and homosexuality during the last 100 years. He traces a progression from political and pictorial forms of homosexuality that are obscure and discreet, repressed by the social and political environments in which they were produced, to forms determined in Britain by the legalisation of some sexual practices between men in the 1960s, gay liberation in the 1970s and queer activism in the 1980s and 1990s. According to Emmanuel Cooper, partial legalisation and the collective politicisation of gay and queer identity since the 1970s has enabled the production of indiscreet and liberated visual representations of male homosexuality that match the indiscreet and liberated subjectivities of their producers. The connection between homosexuality and art for Emmanuel Cooper is essentially expressive, and he sustains his approach with a quotation from Michail Alexander's article 'Homosexuality and the Arts'; first published in the *International Journal of Sexology* in 1954:

Nothing affects [the artist's] work in a more direct way than sex. It affects practically every aspect of art, may it be productive or reproductive art.¹

In *The Sexual Perspective* Emmanuel Cooper associates Francis Bacon's painting with the "spate of public prosecutions against homosexuals that reached a peak in 1953 and 1954", and places *Two Figures 1953* alongside a number of other representations of male homosexuality that appeared in public at around this time.² With further investigation, 1953 can look like a year when male homosexuality surfaced in many different places; particularly the press, the law courts, on the pages of some popular works of fiction and in a number of books and articles committed to examining homosexuality as a social and personal problem. Most notably, 1953 was punctuated by a series of high profile arrests, trials and convictions of men for what were increasingly described in court and in the press as 'homosexual offences'. These arrests, usually for either importuning or gross indecency, sometimes generated reports and articles in the national press. Though many trials and convictions didn't receive national exposure they were regularly reported in regional newspapers.³ These examples of homosexual exposure make it

tempting to suggest that Francis Bacon's painting is simply one visible citation of male homosexuality amongst many others.

According to Emmanuel Cooper, Francis Bacon's appropriation of the 'wrestling' figures in his painting from a series of sequential photographs produced by Eadweard Muybridge in the late nineteenth century, was in 1953 a "legitimate starting point" and a "necessary context" for the expression of male homosexuality. Emmanuel Cooper also remarks that *Two Figures 1953*, and its companion *Two Figures In the Grass 1954*, are the only examples of men 'wrestling' in Francis Bacon's paintings of the 1950s and 1960s, and that the artist doesn't return to painting figures of this kind until the early 1970s. In this way Francis Bacon's visible but discreet representations of homosexuality are almost imperceptibly attached to the well established narratives of homosexual law reform and gay liberation, that trace a sexual and aesthetic transition from repression to liberation. In Emmanuel Cooper's interpretation *Two Figures 1953* looks like an avant-garde augur of legalised homosexuality and liberated subjectivity and subject matter.

For an art historian interested in the connections between homosexuality and visual culture, with a working knowledge of the well established narratives of homosexual law reform and gay liberation, Emmanuel Cooper's interpretation of *Two Figures 1953* makes a particularly persuasive kind of common sense. But is this the same kind of sense that would have been produced or privileged in 1953? What were the kinds of sense formulated between *Two Figures 1953* and some of the viewers who saw it exhibited during the year of its production at the Hanover Gallery? How discreet was this painting of two men 'wrestling' on white sheets across the surface of a bed in a dark room? Would it have been recognised as a visual representation of homosexuality, discreet or indiscreet, by all its viewers? Most importantly, was making sense of *Two Figures*

or a process of attaching particular kinds of knowledge to the painting? According to Francis Bacon's biographer Michael Peppiatt, the owner of the Hanover Gallery, Erica Brausen, was pretty sure that nearly all those who saw *Two Figures 1953* would know what the two 'wrestling' figures may or may not be doing, and so hung it in

an "upstairs corner in her gallery".⁴ Whilst most of its viewers may have recognised what the figures in Francis Bacon's painting may be about, I'm not so sure that in 1953 they would all have called the painting or the practice 'homosexual'. If this is the case, what other kinds of sense could a viewer make of Francis Bacon's painting at this time?

In his biography of Francis Bacon, Daniel Farson suggests a different way of approaching *Two Figures 1953*. Rather than recognising, or exposing, the discreet but evident homosexuality of Francis Bacon's painting, Daniel Farson approaches it through the social and sexual geography he and Francis Bacon frequented after the Second World War. Daniel Farson's account of the social and sexual pleasures and practices that could be found in London, particularly around Soho and the East End, can assist in formulating an approach that casts some doubt on Emmanuel Cooper's interpretation of *Two Figures 1953* as simply a cipher of male homosexuality, and can also help to undermine over reliance on political and theoretical narratives and etiquettes that may have been either inchoate or unavailable in the early 1950s, and may not have been the privileged protocols through which Francis Bacon's painting made sense to some of its viewers.

In *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon* Daniel Farson places *Two Figures 1953* in the physical, social, sexual and aesthetic geography of what he calls "homosexual London". Writing in 1993, Daniel Farson describes this geography as a "furtive underworld" of pleasures and practices between men in public toilets and Turkish Baths, combined with more "gregarious" encounters in pubs and private clubs. He writes that Francis Bacon "stalked" the "sexual gymnasium of the city" between London's Soho and East End, seeking sexual encounters with guardsmen, married men, rough trade and sailors:⁵

The point is that Francis had no nerves. He felt no reservation whatsoever. He was the embodiment of all that was advantageous in being homosexual, and it has to be admitted that it frequently enhanced as well as shadowed our lives. Though he might have appeared effeminate as a youth, this was the effeminacy of leather. In spite of his exaggerated mannerisms, no one ever called him a queen. He moved alone, cutting his particular swath of calculated chaos, and his

homosexuality was an irreversible part of both his life and art.⁶ [my emphasis]

Daniel Farson's romantic, but also historically contingent interpretation of the associations between Francis Bacon's social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures, places *Two Figures 1953* within a contextual environment that can begin to guide an interpretation of the painting that doesn't seek to gauge its homosexual clarity or obscurity, or use it as an illustration in a narrative about homosexual law reform, or ascertain its utility for contemporary gay or queer theory. In an approach of this kind, making sense of *Two Figures 1953* is not necessarily a matter of identification, but can become a process of formulating a social, sexual and aesthetic environment made up of practices, pleasures, products and personas. When *Two Figures 1953* is approached through this contextual environment, it may make some very particular kinds of sense alongside sexual and textual fragments that can be used to form a framework.

It was whilst thinking about the different ways Emmanuel Cooper and Daniel Farson make sense of *Two Figures 1953*, and attempting to sketch a social history background for some of Francis Bacon's paintings, that I started to read the *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*; first published in 1957. The Committee was established under the auspices of the Home Office in 1954 to review the laws and practices relating to homosexuality and prostitution; it was chaired by Sir John Wolfenden, the Vice-Chancellor of Reading University, and soon became known as the Wolfenden Committee.⁷ The Wolfenden Committee was established by the Conservative Home Secretary Sir Maxwell Fyfe, in response to the visibility of 'homosexuals' in law courts and on the pages of the popular press, and was in part a reaction to anxieties that became attached to social practices and sexual pleasures between men in 1953 and early 1954. In the early 1950s homosexuality became the privileged representative of anxieties focused on the surpassing of the prevailing social and sexual orders. The Wolfenden Committee can also be understood as an official acknowledgement of a popularly held belief, promoted by the press and the police, that the escalating number of arrests and convictions for 'homosexual

offences' reflected an expansion in the number of men who engaged in practices and pleasures that were increasingly described in court and in the press as 'homosexual' and 'modern'.⁸

Members of the Wolfenden Committee, directed by their chairman Sir John Wolfenden, understood their task as the application of rational principles to comprehend homosexuality and prostitution, and the formulation of recommendations to solve these modern social problems. Throughout its deliberations the Committee demonstrated an almost unwavering confidence in the collection and collation of evidence, and their "dispassionate and impartial" process of examination, clarification, interpretation, formulation and conclusion. The Committee began their investigation of homosexuality by receiving and reading memorandums of evidence that discussed mostly male homosexuality, generally written by legal and medical experts and the representatives of official organisations, groups and institutions. Members of the Committee were encouraged by Sir John Wolfenden to set aside their everyday knowledges and prejudices and rely on the testimony of those individuals and representatives who were authorised to speak professionally of homosexual acts and homosexual subjects.

For at least two members of the Committee this embargo on personal knowledge served a useful purpose. At the beginning of the Committee's deliberations Sir John Wolfenden had apparently been aware of his son's 'homosexuality' for two years; but at no point did the pleasures and practices of Jeremy Wolfenden threaten or infringe on his father's and the Wolfenden Committee's task.⁹ For Goronwy Rees, Principal of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, it was important that his general knowledge of the sexual and political commitments of some young men he had known in the 1930s, and his particular friendship with the notorious spy and homosexual Guy Burgess who had defected to Russia in 1951, should remain secret. However, during 1956 it became apparent that Goronwy Rees was the anonymous author of articles published in the *People* during March and April, in which Guy Burgess was described as the author's "closest friend". It was consequently thought expedient by Sir John Wolfenden and the Home Office to quietly remove Goronwy Rees from the Committee. His removal was an attempt to prevent his close

friendship with Guy Burgess from undermining the Committee's recommendations, and challenging the ethical and responsible form of homosexuality on which their rationales were founded.

Whilst on one level my mentioning the personal knowledges of Sir John Wolfenden and Goronwy Rees is just interesting gossip and not entirely irrelevant background detail. On another level, these two items of information are examples of the circulation of different forms of knowledge, and the possibility of maintaining in one place, in one person, different but not necessarily incompatible understandings of sexual pleasures and social practices; understandings that could clearly be prevented from encroaching on one another's territory. Whilst we can not expect Sir John Wolfenden to have introduced his son's sexual diversions and delights into the Committee's discussions, it's important to be aware that he, and other members of the Committee, had knowledges of some men's regular and irregular recreations and routines, but were able to maintain a distance between their everyday apprehensions, and the professional and rational review of homosexuality on which they were engaged. I don't think we can judge this distinction of different forms of knowledge as simple hypocrisy, or make any ethical judgement of Sir John Wolfenden and Goronwy Rees. The distinction between professional and everyday knowledges exercised by some members of the Wolfenden Committee is an illustration of what could and should be said, where and by whom. It also introduces the possibility that at least some members of the Wolfenden Committee knew something other than could or need be said, and that some forms of knowledge didn't meet, let alone threaten one another during their deliberations. On occasions when it looked as though different comprehensions of 'homosexual' practices and pleasures may threaten or encroach on one another, it was possible for the Committee to return to their "dispassionate and impartial" ideals to authorise their ignoring, dismissing or resolving conflicts in favour of the professional, rational and streamlined forms of knowledge in which they placed their faith.

Over the three years of its existence the Wolfenden Committee met sixty times. The Committee first received and read written memorandums of evidence from institutions, groups and individuals,

and then held meetings and interviews with individuals and representatives. The Committee then spent eighteen months formulating their recommendations, writing and re-writing their rationales, and drafting and re-drafting the final report.

The process of collection, collation, examination, clarification, interpretation, formulation and conclusion, that produced the Wolfenden Report involved an almost overwhelming complexity of different and often disparate comprehensions of 'homosexual' practices, pleasures and personas. The Wolfenden Committee worked their way through a complexity and diversity of materials towards the production of professional comprehensions that would support their recommendations and rationales for a partial legalisation of some sexual practices between men. The Wolfenden Committee's main recommendations regarding homosexuality included:

(i) That homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private be no longer a criminal offence (paragraph 62).

(ii) That questions relating to "consent" and "in private" be decided by the same criteria as apply in the case of heterosexual acts between adults (paragraph 63, 64).

(iii) That the age of "adulthood for the purpose of the proposed change in the law is fixed at twenty-one (paragraph 71).¹⁰

According to the psychoanalyst Charles Berg, despite the commitment of the Wolfenden Committee to a professional, "dispassionate and impartial" process of investigation, a palpable anxiety can be discerned across the all too eloquent and smooth surface of the final Report and within the rationales which support the Committee's recommendations. In his 1959 book *Fear, Punishment, Anxiety and the Wolfenden Report*, Charles Berg proposed that not "the least danger of reading the Report is that it is so reasonably written", but on careful analysis it reveals itself to be:

...a series of platitudes chosen arbitrarily for the sake of arriving at decisions, worked over and through and through with so much obsessive examinations and re-examination that we gain the impression that everything possible has been taken into consideration, nothing has been left out, nobody could contribute any further item to the discussion, and therefore the conclusions and recommendations must be the ultimate truth.¹¹

Whilst I find Charles Berg's analysis convincing, one of the pitfalls of analysing the Wolfenden Report is to judge it according to the professional protocols its members utilised to direct their deliberations and which the Report played an important part in establishing in and around male homosexual subjectivity and subject matter. In readings of this kind the recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee are interpreted as though they were formulated by the application of rational principles, but were sometimes thwarted by irrational prejudices, and are judged as a combination of dispassionate liberal knowledges and conservative ignorances that could have been better or worse in different degrees. The Wolfenden Report is usually understood to be predominantly liberal and largely positive, but marred by prejudice. It's often suggested that the Committee was particularly prejudicial when it proposed setting the age of homosexual consent at twenty-one:

But it was at this point that the fragile consensus that united the members of the committee broke down and personal prejudice was allowed to triumph over rational considerations - this crucial issue fell victim to the British vice of compromise.¹²

Judgements like this engage with the Wolfenden Report on the reasonably stable epistemological ground that it played a part in creating. Estimations of the Wolfenden Report as a partial success or failure often disregard the ambitions that produced its recommendations and rationales. The principal ambition of the Committee was to formulate a coherent body of 'homosexual' knowledge by collecting, collating and interpreting a disparate and diverse archive, in order to sustain a consistent and co-operative homosexual subject. Judging the success or failure of the recommendations in the Report to legalise and liberate homosexuals, neglects the Committee's commitment to establishing viable sexual subjects.

The Wolfenden Report and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, that after ten years enacted some of the Report's recommendations, are often represented as intermediary stages in an ongoing, perhaps evolutionary, process of social liberalisation and a relaxation of restraints, comparable to concurrent changes in Britain's obscenity laws.¹³ In chronicles of homosexual law reform and gay liberation,

or general reviews of the social and sexual changes that transpired in Britain during the 1950s and 60s, the recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee are often represented as elements within an evolutionary expansion of liberal reforms, social justice, personal liberty and equality of opportunity. In his influential narrative of homosexual law reform and liberation, appropriately entitled *Coming Out*, Jeffrey Weeks describes the 1967 Sexual Offences Act as the "result of an evolution of attitudes which can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s". According to Jeffrey Weeks this evolution was caused by the dissolution of traditional social structures and determined by the expansion of Britain's consumer economy, full employment and an increase in the spending power and freedom of young people.¹⁴ Considering the Wolfenden Report and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act in this way turns them into symptoms, or representatives, of more fundamental social and sexual developments, and obscures their importance as significant sites where knowledges were produced, attached to pleasures and practices, and subsequently institutionalised.

In his book *The Homosexual(ity) of Law* Les Moran has recently proposed a reading of the Wolfenden Report and the "mechanisms" through which the Committee attempted to formulate a streamlined understanding of the connections between homosexual acts, homosexual offences and homosexual identity:

By these mechanisms the committee could recuperate and reinstall the idea that homosexuality was an ontological state peculiar to a distinctive, exceptional and aberrational class of persons, whose identity was made manifest in a strictly limited range of gestures or acts. In turn this might help to recover the importance of the conclusion that all homosexuals engage in homosexual acts, which suggests that the act is a manifestation of a specific identity: homosexuality.¹⁵

Whilst looking through the papers of the Wolfenden Committee at the Public Records Office it soon becomes apparent that formulating a coherent Report, a coherent body of information, and a coherent homosexual subject wasn't a straightforward task. The Wolfenden records evince an almost overwhelming complexity of conceptions, classifications, aetiologies, moralities, philosophies, formulations, taxonomies, typologies, principles, pleasures, practices and ethics. But from almost the very beginning of their

deliberations the Committee adopted a liberal and utilitarian axiom to guide their interpretation of the materials through which they were working. Their axiom was based on the relationship between the State and the individual proposed in the philosophy of John Stuart Mills:¹⁶

It is not, in our view, the function of the law to intervene in the private behaviour of citizens, or to seek to enforce any particular pattern of behaviour, further than is necessary to carry out the purposes we have outlined.¹⁷

According to the Committee the function of the law was to:

...preserve public order and decency, to protect the citizen from what is offensive or injurious, and to provide sufficient safeguards against exploitation and corruption of others, particularly those who are especially vulnerable because they are young, weak in body or mind, inexperienced, or in a state of special physical, official or economic dependence.¹⁸

The adoption of these principles required that sexual practices between men were fused to the rights and freedoms of a sincere sexual subject, and formulated as an intimate expression of homosexual subjectivity. It is evident when reading through the minutes of the Wolfenden Committee's meetings, that its most influential members, including Sir John Wolfenden, decided to recommend a partial legalisation of sexual practices between men from almost the very beginning of their deliberations. Once this decision was made, the process of sifting, editing and making sense of the complexities of evidence became the formulation of a convincing thesis, sustained by the construction of a reasonably direct link between homosexual practices and homosexual subjects. In formulating this link the Wolfenden Committee tried to insist that sexual practices were determined by an *a priori* sexual identity and that homosexual pleasures were an expression of homosexual subjectivity. As Les Moran has proposed, in attempting to formulate a series of direct and expressive connections between homosexual acts, homosexual offences and homosexual identity, the Committee had to grapple with evidence that disturbed the epistemological stability they were seeking. To sustain their recommendations it was necessary to tackle a number of disturbing exceptions. The exception which caused members of the Committee most anxiety were

sexual practices between men who for different reasons could not, with any interpretive confidence, be designated homosexual subjects. The Wolfenden Committee's recommendations can be interpreted as an insistence that social and sexual pleasures and practices between men were the product of a coherent, rational, and hopefully invisible form of homosexual subjectivity that could be professionally identified from its sexual and non-sexual expressions.¹⁹

The Wolfenden Committee's recommendations were sustained by the promotion of a discreet and discrete homosexual subject above the multiplicity of conceptions, classifications, aetiologies, moralities, philosophies, formulations, taxonomies, typologies, principles, pleasures, practices and ethics that made up the evidence before them. The process of formulating their recommendations and drafting the Report homogenised the diverse and differential evidence members of the Committee read and heard. The coherent, composed and conscientious form of homosexual subject promoted in the Report was later sustained by the Homosexual Law Reform Society, formed soon after the Wolfenden Report's publication to campaign for the implementation of its recommendations and the acceptance of its rationales. The Homosexual Law Reform Society utilised the same liberal and utilitarian conception of the relationship between the State and the individual subject that had provided the Committee with the philosophical axiom to support their work. However, in elaborating a heterosexualised form of homosexual subjectivity it was necessary for the Wolfenden Committee, and later the Homosexual Law Reform Society, to repress the social practices and sexual pleasures of certain and uncertain men that some memorandums and witnesses discussed.

Now, whilst reading through the Wolfenden Committee's records I became concerned that by identifying Francis Bacon's painting as a homosexual subject; discreet, repressed, thwarted, constrained or otherwise, I would be setting out on a professional project not unlike the Wolfenden Committee's; a "dispassionate and impartial" collection, collation, examination, clarification and interpretation of evidence that would enable me to formulate a coherent body of knowledge, and produce an identifiable homosexual subject or

homosexual subject matter. Emmanuel Cooper's understanding of the connection between homosexuality and art as essentially expressive, supported by Michail Alexander's 1954 article 'Homosexuality and the Arts', started to look as though it may depend upon a professional, rational and dispassionate formulation of homosexual subjectivity instituted through the publication and promotion of the Wolfenden Report.

In *The Homosexual(ity) of Law* Les Moran maintains that most of the evidence before the Wolfenden Committee sought "to name homosexuality by way of its causes and origins, its particular manifestations and its treatment". There was however some evidence, usually provided during meetings that members of the Committee held with individuals and representatives, that made sense of sexual practices between men not as expressions of an *a priori* identity but from their articulation within particular social, sexual and physical environments. The most detailed evidence of this kind was provided by the police and focused on London and the area in and around Soho. It is no coincidence that the approach of the police to sexual practices and pleasures between men is similar to Daniel Farson's contextualising of Francis Bacon's *Two Figures* 1953. Both of these approaches are committed to the articulation of pleasures and practices and the engaging in acts, that may or may not be 'homosexual', in particular social, sexual and physical geographies.

If we select some evidence from the Wolfenden papers that privilege the enunciation rather than interpretation of sexual practices between men, and then attach it perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, and even forcibly, to *Two Figures* 1953, it may be possible to relocate the site of inquiry away from the expressive paradigm of homosexual subjectivity instituted by the Wolfenden Report, to the complex of evidence which the Committee sterilised to formulate their recommendations. This may be a movement towards sexual pleasures that took place between men who did not necessarily identify themselves or their acts, their subjectivities or their subject matter, as 'homosexual'. But before doing this, it is important to recognise, in the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the "incoherent dispensation" of practices and pleasures in which the Wolfenden Committee worked to formulate their particularly professional

knowledge of the sexual acts of some men. The Wolfenden Committee began their deliberations in an unstable environment in which acts were not securely fused to social and sexual identities. This environment may have provided a context through which some viewers approached Francis Bacon's painting.

It is something of a convention for investigations into the sexual practices and pleasures of men after the Second World War to refer to Alfred Kinsey's book *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*; first published in 1948. Attention usually focuses on the number of 'homosexual' acts Alfred Kinsey discovered during his collection and collation of information, on his ordering of an individual's propensity for homosexual practice on a seven point scale and his suggestion that propensity changes over time and in different contexts. However, Alfred Kinsey's method of research was integral to the information he collected and collated, and his methodology may have disturbed those interpretive knowledges of male homosexuality whose *a priori* assumptions did not match his findings. Alfred Kinsey utilised a taxonomic approach to construct his research project:

Modern taxonomy is the product of an increasing awareness among biologists of the uniqueness of individuals, and of the wide range of variations which may occur in any population of individuals. The taxonomist is, therefore, primarily concerned with the measurement of variation in series of individuals which stand as representatives of the species in which he is interested.²⁰

Alfred Kinsey's taxonomic approach didn't insist that sexual acts were the expression of sexual identities, and attuned itself to the everyday complexity and texture of sexual pleasures:

Even the most experienced homosexual male may be inhibited from making all the contacts that are available because of preferences for particular sorts of partners. A male who has highly developed esthetic tastes, one who is emotionally very sensitive, one who over-reacts to situations that do not entirely please, one who develops a preference for a partner of a particular age or a particular social level, of a particular height or weight, with hair of a particular color, with particular genital qualities, or with other physical aspects - a male who refuses to have sexual relations except under particular circumstances, at particular hours of the day, and in particular sorts of environments - may turn down hundreds of opportunities for contact before he finds the one individual with whom he accepts a relation.²¹

Alongside Alfred Kinsey's commitment to sexual texture, *Two Figures* 1953 can begin to look like a very particular form of sexual and aesthetic pleasure, rather than simply a somewhat ambiguous homosexual subject. Alfred Kinsey's findings may have induced an affect on individuals, institutions and their orders of knowledge, similar to that described by Michel Foucault at the beginning of *The Order of Things*. Michel Foucault writes of the affect on him of reading a passage from Borges that quotes a "'certain Chinese encyclopaedia'" and its utterly unfamiliar taxonomy of animals:

...shattered...all the familiar landmarks of my thought - our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography - breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between Same and Other.²²

It seems convincing to suggest that the Wolfenden Committee was involved in taming the "wild profusion" and diversity of everyday sexual practices between men through the creation of a coherent homosexual subject, supported by recommendations that would establish an inviolable distinction between men who do and men who don't participate in sexual acts with other men. It has often been suggested that this distinction was established at the end of the nineteenth century, when according to Michel Foucault the homosexual "became a personage". But there seems no reason to assume that the availability of this designation within certain textual environments was accessible or applicable to all men who engaged in, or thought about, certain or uncertain acts with other men. It is important to realise that the rubric of homosexual subjectivity instituted in the Wolfenden Report sought to encompass many different systems and satisfactions in which meanings were produced by the complex cohabitation of professional and banal discourses, and also to realise this streamlining process of interpretation may not have been completely successful. The minutes of the Wolfenden Committee's meetings often record the frustrations of attempting to apply a systematic conceptual framework and language to the complex of practices and pleasures from which they were trying to formulate their recommendations and rationales:

Of course, as we have had bitter cause to know, we are bedevilled throughout all these discussions by these confounded words and having to try to pin a label to various types of thing where it is terribly hard to see where the boundaries come....²³

A brief look at just a couple of books that produced and promoted sexual knowledges on the border between professional disciplines and everyday understandings can confirm that in the early 1950s the contextual environment in which 'homosexual' practices made sense was a somewhat unstable epistemology.

After the Second World War the publication of accessible and widely available books concerned with the physical and sociological side of sex increased significantly. Many books that had been produced before and during the Second World War were revised in the light of new knowledges. According to Rodney Garland in his 1953 novel *The Heart in Exile*, "practically everybody above a certain level has read" "Havelock Ellis and Walker's *The Physiology of Sex* in the Penguin Edition".²⁴

Kenneth Walker's *The Physiology of Sex* was first published in 1940, and reprinted six times in its original edition during the following twelve years. In 1954 a revised edition was published, and some of the differences between this and the original can give an indication of how the knowledges used to make sense of 'homosexual' or 'inverted' practices were undergoing significant reformulation in the early years of the 1950s; and provide a small illustration of the epistemologically unstable, but not chaotic, contextual environment in which the Wolfenden Committee began its deliberations and where *Two Figures* 1953 may have made sense to at least some of its viewers.

As in the Wolfenden Report, it's possible to discern an anxiety in both editions of Kenneth Walker's book over the distinction between men who engage in sexual practices with men and those who are understood to be congenitally and permanently homosexual subjects. In the revised edition of his book Kenneth Walker attempts to establish an absolute distinction between practices and identity, and proposes that those men who are committed homosexual subjects

should be described as "inverts". Kenneth Walker makes a number of changes to the 1940 edition of *The Physiology of Sex* that seek to establish a coherent social and sexual subjectivity, with a minority status, for men committed to 'homosexual' pleasures. The most notable change is the movement of his discussion of homosexuality from the chapter entitled 'Sexual Behaviour', where it could be found in the 1940 edition, into a new chapter entitled 'The Problem of Homosexuality'. This move, combined with changes of tone, emphasis, arrangement of material and the addition of new information, reformulates Kenneth Walker's representation of homosexuality. Material from the original edition is edited, ordered and added to in such a way as to shift the earlier text's scientific and historical explanation of homosexuality onto an increasingly sociological and political framework. One of the important determinants of this change is Kenneth Walker's attempt to accommodate but also to stabilise the findings that Alfred Kinsey published in *Sexual Behaviour and the Human Male*, which somewhat displaces Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* as the privileged authority on male homosexuality.

In the 1954 edition of *The Physiology of Sex* Kenneth Walker writes that the research of Alfred Kinsey and the incidence of homosexual practices in America he uncovered, make it necessary to accept that "homosexual practices are common and are likely to remain so", and calls for a dispassionate review of homosexuality;

Homosexuality is so little understood by the public that even to-day it is difficult to discuss without running the risk of arousing hostility, facetiousness, or embarrassment. Yet homosexuality is not only the most clearly defined of all the sexual deviations, but it is by far the commonest.²⁵

Kenneth Walker's quite subtle but significant changes to his representation of homosexuality can suggest that at least some contextual environments within which 'homosexual' acts made sense changed between 1940 and 1954. More particularly, for a reader of both editions of *The Physiology of Sex* it may have been necessary to make some important adjustments to their interpretation of 'homosexual' pleasures and practices. If the reader was also a viewer of *Two Figures* 1953, these adjustments may have required them to change their view of Francis Bacon's painting.

The opening paragraph of the 1940 edition of *The Physiology of Sex* ends on a clear assertion of the abnormality of homosexuality:

Because the emotions that are associated with the urge are in every way similar to those experienced in heterosexual love, it provides higher satisfaction than that obtained from any other forms of deviation. Yet at the same time it must be regarded as a highly abnormal form of sexuality, since it excludes the primary end for which sex exists.²⁶

Whereas in the opening paragraphs of 1954 edition Kenneth Walker establishes that homosexuality is "normal behaviour amongst animals" and natural behaviour in "many civilisations". The "abnormality" of sexual acts between men in the 1940 edition is replaced by a formulation influenced by medical and popular psychology, and psychoanalysis, that interprets homosexual acts as a "sign of immaturity".

Western civilisation disapproves of homosexual practices in the male and female and it is entitled to do on the grounds that homosexuality is a sign of immaturity.²⁷

Kenneth Walker's revisions, including the movement from abnormality to immaturity, prepare the way for a new section in the 1954 edition of his book entitled 'The Invert's View of his own Disability'. Though Kenneth Walker argues for the legalisation of sexual practices between men in both editions of *The Physiology of Sex*, in this new section he argues against the recent arrests, trials and convictions of men for 'homosexual offences'. More notably the discussion of the social and legal situation of homosexuality is presented as the "inverts view", and affirms Kenneth Walker's representation of the 'invert' as an identifiable social subject, rather than the practitioner of a disparate range of abnormal homosexual acts.

A reader familiar with the 1940 edition of *The Physiology of Sex*, who was also familiar with *Two Figures 1953* by Francis Bacon, may have had to adjust their interpretation of the painting after reading the 1954 edition. When they first saw the painting in 1953 the viewer of *Two Figures 1953*, with a copy *The Physiology of Sex* close to hand, could have been pretty sure that they were looking at

the representation of a pretty abnormal act. Just a year later the two 'wrestling' figures may have started to look like homosexual subject matter, albeit immature, and the work of an identifiable homosexual subject or 'invert'. But more importantly for the viewer who was both sexually and aesthetically attracted to *Two Figures 1953*, the original edition of Kenneth Walker's book provided a perhaps familiar and exciting rationale founded on the authority of Havelock Ellis. This rationale would have been easy to attach to Francis Bacon's 'wrestling' figures for a viewer with some knowledge of the aesthetic and sexual connections between Ancient Greece and the Renaissance through the work of Havelock Ellis or perhaps his collaborator on *Sexual Inversion*, the author of *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, *A Problems in Modern Ethics* and *The Life of Michelangelo*, John Addington Symonds:²⁸

After the Renaissance, homosexuality flourished chiefly because it was a deviation to which intellectuals and artists were prone. Some of the greatest names on the scroll of artistic fame belong to those who were homosexuals, and it is amongst this class of person that the deviation still remains common. 'Artistic aptitude of one kind or another, and a love of music, are found among a large proportion of educated inverts, in my opinion as much as 68 percent' (Havelock Ellis).²⁹

However, the enticing possibility provided by an intertextual connection between *Two Figures 1953* and *The Physiology of Sex* and the combining of homosexuality and "artistic aptitude", is thwarted in the revised edition of Kenneth Walker's book:

True inversion is often associated with brilliant creative attainment and not infrequently linked with actual genius. Outstanding men of this kind attract followers and admirers and some of these disciples become so infatuated that they seek to imitate their leaders in every possible way, aping also their sexual behaviour. These imitators are usually either bisexual or heterosexual, and are only occasionally true inverts.³⁰

The potential to make an exciting identification between "exceptional ability" and homosexual practices is impeded, and art is represented as an alternative to homosexual practices, and art and artists as potentially seductive role models. In the 1954 edition of Kenneth Walker's book art becomes a way of sublimating and so preventing homosexual pleasures:

A youth's discovery that he is 'queer' and unlike other men often has the effect of driving him to seek distinction in other fields of endeavour so that he becomes a greater scholar, artist, writer or musician. By diverting his libido into these non-sexual channels he not only diminishes the need for finding a physical outlet for his abnormal desires, but also succeeds in regaining his own self respect.³¹

Through a series of interpretive manoeuvres not dissimilar to that of the Wolfenden Committee, Kenneth Walker works his towards making sense of the diversity of sexual pleasures and practices between men, made available by the work of Alfred Kinsey, towards a psychoanalytically inflected formulation of homosexual identity that attempts to interpret sexual and non-sexual acts as the representatives of an *a priori* sexual identity that can hopefully be sublimated.

But whilst the 1954 edition of *The Physiology of Sex* looks somewhat like a bricolage of inconclusive theoretical formulations, that Kenneth Walker attempted to sort with Peter Fletcher in their 1955 book *Sex and Society*, the Wolfenden Committee attempted to systematise and order the theoretical and physical environments where sexual practices between men took place and made sense. Whilst reading through the records of the Wolfenden Committee, the process of producing the Report looks like a formidable exercise in fusing interpretive knowledges to certain, and uncertain acts. The publication of the Report, the publicity their recommendations received, their promotion by the Homosexual Law Reform Society, and the enacting of their main recommendation for the legalisation of homosexual practices in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, all suggest that by end of the 1960s it would have been pretty difficult for a man to make sense of his participation in a sexual act with another men without reference to institutionalised conceptions of homosexual subjectivity. It is however, difficult to judge the influence of the Wolfenden Report and to establish the different comprehensions and apprehensions men attached to their everyday practices and pleasures. But just a few examples of anecdotal evidence can help to guard against over confident estimations and judgements; and also further undermine interpretations of visual texts that depend on the expressive protocols of homosexual subjectivity that were instituted

through the publication of the Wolfenden Report and have been utilised by, amongst many others, Emmanuel Cooper.

In his review of the trials for 'homosexual offences' that took place around Britain in 1953-4, Stuart Higgins has collected some important evidence that makes it possible to propose that men who engaged in sexual practices with other men at the beginning of the 1950s did not necessarily identify themselves as homosexual subjects. With reference to a case tried in Leeds that involved seventeen men from Rotherham, Stuart Higgins writes:

Many of those on trial found it difficult to articulate their experience. They had simply never put into words before what they had done, and certainly not for what would become a written statement to a court of law. William Maw, a thirty-nine year old labourer, said 'yes' he would make a statement but he warned the police that its contents were rude.³²

The seventeen men on trial pleaded guilty to a total of forty-one charges of "homosexual sex", including "several successive acts of fellatio" performed by one man "on a gang of his work mates", on the back seat of a coach, after a day trip to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Now, I don't want to suggest that the practices and pleasures of these men were meaningless, or that they were engaging in "timeless gestures".³³ My point is rather that the sense these men made of their acts may have been intimately allied to the languages and environments in which they took place; and these comprehension may have been difficult or impossible to articulate according to the languages and conventions of juridical process. Through the arrest, trial and conviction of these men the everyday and banal knowledges of social and sexual practice and pleasure may have been replaced with professional and institutionalised interpretations of homosexuality; a process of fusing acts to officially authorised knowledges. It's worth just considering what sense William Maw would have made of *Two Figures 1953*. Would William Maw have thought if he had come across Francis Bacon's painting that the two 'wrestling' figures were engaged in a "rude" but pleasurable practice? And after his trial, would he have recognised that these figures on a bed in a darkened room were committing a 'homosexual offence'? It's also possible of course, if we recall the work of Alfred Kinsey, that some detail of the scene

may not have corresponded to his own pleasures and therefore William Maw may not have been interested or really known what to make of Francis Bacon's painting. After all for William Maw, 'homosexual' pleasures may have had nothing to do with bedrooms or nudity or one other man, but about clothed encounters with his mates on the back seat of a coach after a day out in London.

If it's difficult or impossible to establish the multiplicity of resources available for making sense of sexual practices between men, it's also hard to ascertain the impact that the publication of the Wolfenden Report and the ten year campaign to change the law had on some men's everyday practices and pleasures. It's tempting to suggest that the Wolfenden Report and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act marked the end of banal understandings and interpretations, and utilise the Report's publication or the 1967 Sexual Offences Act as an absolute epistemological breaks.

The editors of *Between the Acts*, a series of interviews with men who may or may be homosexual, assert the importance of the Wolfenden Report and the period between its publication and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary provided by some men they interview. The editors write:

The scandals in the early 1950s, then the Wolfenden Report, followed by the ten year struggle to change the law, heralded a new period (though not one that was always perceived positively, or at all, by the people interviewed here).³⁴

The possibility that the Wolfenden Report was not "perceived positively, or at all" is more important than is indicated by the brackets placed around it. The anecdotal evidence of the interviews can act as an important check on the over confident and professional interpretation of the Report's influence furnished by the editors of *Between the Acts*. The evidence contained in a few of the interviews in this book suggest that the social and political teleology the editors assert did not necessarily have an impact on the everyday lives of some men. The interview entitled 'An Academic Life' affirms that it was possible to be unaffected by the Wolfenden Report and the campaign for liberal law reform sustained by the Homosexual Law Reform Society:

I remember reading in the paper about something called the Wolfenden Report on homosexuality but was not very curious about it. And certainly unaware of the political agitation in 1967, the campaign to change the Act.³⁵

The interview entitled 'A Public Servant's Life' suggests that it was possible to live through this period aware of the social and political changes, but believe they had very little to do with the pleasures and practices of an everyday life:

I was, I think, aware of changing opinions, in the wake of the Kinsey Report, for instance, or the Wolfenden proposals. But, there again I wonder if things have changed as much as people make out. I shouldn't have thought the change in the law affected people's lives much.³⁶

These fragments of anecdotal evidence propose that before and after the publication of the Wolfenden Report the sexual pleasures and practices that took place between men did not always fit the formulations the Committee adopted to sustain their recommendations and rationales, or fit into the forms of professional interpretation that utilise protocols the Wolfenden Report instituted in and around homosexual subjectivity and subject matter. During their meetings, the Wolfenden Committee tried to sort and rationalise different formulations of 'homosexual' practice and pleasure. However, at times during their discussions and deliberations it became obvious that some comprehensions of sexual acts between men were incommensurable. For example, the meeting between the Wolfenden Committee and Viscount Hailsham was an extended paradigm clash that demonstrates the disparate understandings of homosexuality from which the Committee were attempting to formulate a discreet and discrete homosexual subject. During the meeting Viscount Hailsham finds it simply impossible to imagine homosexual behaviour between two men of the same age:

I have never, I think, suggested that in the single act between two elderly homosexuals in private there is any social harm. It is an extremely rare occurrence, and the argument in my paper was not designed to show that on such rare occasions there is any social harm in the individual act.³⁷

Throughout the meeting Sir John Wolfenden attempts to focus Viscount Hailsham's attention on homosexual acts between men of the same age.

However, Viscount Hailsham insists upon retaining an understanding of homosexuality firmly attached to the attractions of young men and a significant difference of ages between partners. When Sir John Wolfenden proposes that the kind of homosexual encounter on which their deliberations are founded, and which has been repeatedly presented to the Committee, was a private relationship between men of equal age, Viscount Hailsham replies that he does not "believe a word of it".³⁸ Regarding the act of sodomy Viscount Hailsham is reported to have said:

I must say that the idea of two elderly sodomites seems to me more fanciful even than two elderly homosexuals. It seems utterly unreal that there should be two elderly sodomites quietly committing the full offence by themselves.³⁹

The model of homosexual encounter the Committee required to sustain their recommendation for a change in the law was based on two men of equal age, hopefully of the same class, engaging in private practices and pleasures. This formulation simply made no sense to Viscount Hailsham, whose form of homosexuality didn't comprehend the distinction between sexual acts and sexual identities in the same way as the Committee. In the final Report homosexuality is understood as a "state" or "condition" which can be latent, expressed or sublimated and the Committee attempted to establish that the propensity does not necessarily lead to "homosexual behaviour" and if it does this might not necessarily be a "homosexual offence". This protocol is necessary to construct a form of private and ideally sublimated form of homosexuality to sustain the Committee's recommendation for partial legalisation. Viscount Hailsham refuses these distinctions and insists on using the word 'homosexual' to "mean anybody who does an act of sex gratification with his own sex rather than a person who feels the inclination to do so but does not do it".

Whilst Viscount Hailsham's understanding of sexual practices looks to be based on an Ancient Greek model of pederasty, probably the product of a classical education, his conception of homosexuality as a practice rather than a coherent and expressive identity was more attuned to the everyday pleasures of many men and the instability of the boundary between men who did and men who didn't engage in sexual

acts with one another. Though an exemplary example of politesse, the encounter between the Committee and Viscount Hailsham was a paradigm clash, in part because Viscount Hailsham's understanding of homosexuality as a seductive practice threatened the identificatory stability the Committee required to hold their recommendations and rationales together. Viscount Hailsham repudiated any inherently stable and expressive conception of homosexual identity, and somewhat surprisingly ended up looking more like a sexual taxonomist akin to Alfred Kinsey.

The Wolfenden Committee's members formed their conception of homosexual subjectivity by repeatedly circulating their anxieties concerning sexual encounters between men. They were particularly anxious about social and sexual encounters between men of different ages, and the potential for adolescent boys to be distracted from passing through a temporary phase of homosexuality on their way towards heterosexuality. Like Viscount Hailsham some members of the Committee often worried that the evident attractions of young men, particularly those on National Service, made them particularly vulnerable to seductive advances. At times members of the Committee attached this worry to their anxiety about relationships between men of different classes, and the attractions of young working class men, and men in uniform. This conjunction of anxieties often manifested itself as an anxiety focused on the seductive potential of gifts and financial inducement, and the attractions of men who were not recognisably homosexual according to the Committee's protocol, but had a history of engaging in sexual acts for money, particularly guardsmen and sailors. In turn this anxiety sometimes became apparent during discussions about the allure of uniforms, and requests for assurances that particular uniforms were not the cause of homosexual desire. Whilst the Committee's recommendations sought to represent a stable homosexual subject, their anxieties repeatedly demonstrated a belief in the instability and diversity of homosexual practices and pleasures.

The Committee were particularly anxious about encounters between men who couldn't be identified as homosexual subjects. This anxiety sometimes became apparent during discussions about how homosexual men identified one another; discussions that had a barely concealed

subtext of guarding 'normal' men against unwanted, or more worryingly wanted, attentions of other men. This anxiety often went hand in hand with discussions about the social and sexual order of the modern metropolis that focused on public toilets, public parks and certain areas of London, particularly Soho. However, whilst the Committee was committed to identifying homosexual subjects, they were also concerned that homosexuals should not be visible in public places, and that heterosexual order should be maintained. The Committee often discussed how to survey sites of sexual encounter and were concerned about the availability of sexual practices and pleasures in public places, particularly toilets and parks. To deal with their anxieties the Committee attempted to formulate recommendations and institute provisions that insisted only confirmed and committed homosexual subjects engaged 'homosexual' pleasures.

The eventual strategy of the Committee to deal with their collection of anxieties, was the formulation of a discrete and discreet homosexual subject, and the formulation of recommendations to prevent all pleasures and practices between men that did not make sense under their rubric of homosexual subjectivity. The Committee were directed by their anxieties to set the age of homosexual consent at twenty-one. Once the Committee had accepted the medical and psychoanalytic conception of the instability of adolescent sexuality, they were led to recommend that young men should not take part in sexual practices until they were fully aware of the implications of becoming a committed homosexual subject. Again the Committee's anxieties demonstrated their awareness of the mutability and diversity of sexual practices, and so required the institution of a measure to encourage the production of a coherent and co-operative homosexual subject.

During their meeting with witnesses the Wolfenden Committee interviewed three men who identified themselves as homosexual subjects; Peter Wildeblood, Patrick Trevor Roper and Carl Winter. During their meetings with these three men members of the Committee had the opportunity to exercise and assuage their anxieties.

Peter Wildeblood was arrested in January 1954 alongside Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and Michael Pitt Rivers, after two RAF servicemen, Edward McNally and John Reynolds, turned Queen's evidence. Sentenced to 18 months at the Winchester Assizes after the most widely reported trial for 'homosexual offences' of the 1950s. Released in 1955, Peter Wildeblood published a book about his life, arrest, imprisonment and opinions on homosexuality entitled *Against the Law*. Jeffrey Weeks begins his chapter in *Coming Out* about the 1950s with this quotation from Peter Wildeblood's book:

In the last few years there has been much discussion of this question, and many authoritative men and women have given their views about the prevalence, nature, prevention, punishment, and cure of homosexuality. There have not, I think, been any among them who could say, as I do now: "I am a Homosexual".⁴⁰

In *Against the Law* Peter Wildeblood proclaims his homosexual identity, and interprets the social visibility imposed on him through his arrest, trial and conviction, and their reporting in the press, as a new found freedom to be what he really is and always has been. Peter Wildeblood was eager to appear before the Committee to present his insight into homosexuality and himself as the representative of discrete and discreet homosexuals. In his meeting with the Wolfenden Committee, Peter Wildeblood attempted to assuage their anxieties and present himself as a form of homosexual distinct from men who are attracted to boys and adolescents, and different from visibly effeminate queens, like Quentin Crisp:

Question: Are they the people who congregate together outside, frequently in restaurants or places of that kind?

Answer: I think they probably do. I rather tend to avoid people like that because I think the responsibility is so great with the attitude to the effeminate.⁴¹

When asked if the discretion of homosexual was due to the present illegality of sexual practices between men, Peter Wildeblood replied that perhaps "the effect of the law being what it is makes them more discreet, but of course it also makes them more furtive and unreliable in all sorts of ways":

Question: I was only thinking that if the law were to be altered in that way, then there would perhaps be more public...

Answer: Not by that group. In other countries I do not think they are more noticeable than they are here.⁴²

After attempting to assuage the Committee's anxieties over homosexual discretion, Peter Wildeblood was questioned by Mr. Adair about proselytising:

Question: In the first paragraph at the top of page three you indicate that there is no question of proselytising - that implies a definite method of getting in contact, does it not?

Answer: Yes, I suppose so. What exactly do you mean.

Question: I mean is it suggested that they can pick out these men from what you call a normal man, without difficulty?

Answer: Yes.

Canon Demant: Oh, yes!

Answer: I think a homosexual can always distinguish another homosexual. I do not know how it is done, but it is a kind of instinct.⁴³

The Committee then moved on to consider buggery, and Peter Wildeblood confirmed that this act "is just one of the various forms" of homosexual pleasure. The discussion then turned to the age of consent, and Peter Wildeblood suggested the Committee should "fix the age, I think, at which people are confirmed in their ways". The meeting ended on a discussion between Peter Wildeblood and Mr. Adair about the attractions of sailors, guardsmen and their uniforms:

Question: Would you think that there is anything in a suggestion which is made in certain quarters that there is a special attraction in the naval uniform, square rig?

Answer: There are people who are attracted to uniforms of all sorts but I should not have thought it was anything to do with the uniform itself. I know people do consort with naval men in the same way as they do with Guardsmen. I think this is because they are available, not because of any particular attraction. A great many of the male prostitutes of the kind I mentioned, the perverted kind, are not homosexual but will do anything for money and they are often to be found in the Guards and in the Navy to some extent.

Question: You mean they are members of the Guards?

Answer: Or naval ratings, yes.

Question: So that instead of the attraction being to the square rig it is from the square rig.

Answer: Yes,⁴⁴

In response to each of the Committee's questions Peter Wildeblood attempted to elaborate a coherent and co-operative form of homosexual subject that could be distinguished from their anxieties, and supported the replacement of a complex of different practices and pleasures with a rationalised homosexual subjectivity. According to Peter Wildeblood particular kinds of social and sexual practice and pleasure between men were the representatives of a larger and more comprehensive designation. Forms of practice motivated by the pleasures of particular acts, including buggery, or particular places, or governed by the attractions of particular kinds and classes of men, or the allure of uniforms, or any complex combination of these attributes, became during Peter Wildeblood's evidence, the epiphenomenal expressions of a more fundamental homosexual subject. We can understand this process as the degradation of sexual texture. But Peter Wildeblood's evidence to the Committee was somewhat disingenuous, in *Against the Law*, and particularly in his next book *A Way of Life*, he demonstrates a keen awareness of the texture of social practices and sexual pleasures between men in the 1950s, and repeatedly creates erotic scenarios between men of different classes and kinds in very particular environments, that he only distances himself from at the very last minute in order to maintain his homosexual discretion.⁴⁵

For the art historian generally interested in the connections between homosexuality and visual culture, and particularly interested in *Two Figures 1953*, the shift from sexual texture to the identification of homosexual subjects and subject matter is very important. Using the protocols of the Wolfenden Committee, supported by Peter Wildeblood, we may identify the whole of *Two Figure 1953* as a somewhat discrete homosexual subject. However this identification may obscure its particular sexual textual, and how its figures, forms, details, colours and textures may individually or in different collective permutations have something to do with

the social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures and practices that took place between men in the 1950s.

The Committee's meeting with Patrick Trevor Roper and Carl Winter covered some of the same ground as their meeting with Peter Wildeblood. However these two witnesses were less committed to formulating a coherent homosexual subject to assuage the Committee's anxieties; they both talked at some length of their potential to move across the borders of social class and because of their homosexuality "not adhere to ordinary social prejudices and distinctions":

...there is no fixed social pattern. Necessarily one moves in a certain pattern geographically as much as anything else, so that some people are more in a position to find that their friends have been blackmailed or indeed for their friends to communicate their troubles by the accident of their social environment which of course, as Mr. White says does not follow a pattern but nevertheless has necessary limits.⁴⁶

The evidence provided by Patrick Trevor Roper and Carl Winter, particularly their discussion of social practices and sexual pleasures taking place within social and geographic environments, recalls Daniel Farson's contextualisation of *Two Figures* 1953. Evidence of this kind is important as it's not possible to attach the figure and figurations of Francis Bacon to the social and political movements that were founded on homosexual subjectivity. As we have seen some subjects, and so some subject matter, were not touched by the 'developments' of law reform instituted by the Wolfenden Report, or interested in gay liberation, and maintained an association to the untidy complexities of social practices and sexual pleasures the Committee attempted to rationalise.

Apparently Francis Bacon once said laughingly to Daniel Farson, although I think we can take him seriously, "I really hate gays". This, combined with just a couple of other fragment of anecdotal evidence can be used to maintain a distance between Francis Bacon and homosexual law reform and gay liberation. Alfred Hecht, framer of Francis Bacon's paintings, played a part in the Homosexual Law Reform Society.⁴⁷ In the early 1960s Alfred Hecht tried to organise an art auction to raise money for the Society, and though he

requested a painting from the sometimes generous Francis Bacon, no contribution was forthcoming. We can distance Francis Bacon and his painting *Two Figures 1953* from the social and political changes that the Wolfenden Committee recommended a little further by turning to Antony Grey, the Secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society.⁴⁸ In his account of the campaign for homosexual law reform Antony Grey makes a distinction between the social, sexual and physical environments in which Francis Bacon found his everyday pleasure and the rationale of the campaign to change the law:

Homosexual men were smothered by this blanket of silence and lived in an atmosphere of secrecy, of insecurity and frequently of considerable ignorance. Knowing about the existence, location and extent of the underworld of 'friendly' pubs and other meeting places was a matter initially of chance, fuelled by individual enterprise and often by social class....it is hard for anyone now aged under fifty to imagine what living in this oppressive atmosphere was like. While some of the more robust took it (like the wartime blitz) fatalistically in their stride, believing that you simply had to carry on regardless until the blow fell, which it would do anyway 'if your number was on it,' more timid souls (of whom I was one) were overcast by a constant cloud of apprehensive fear.⁴⁹

According to Daniel Farson, Francis Bacon was "robust".

In London the "underworld of 'friendly' pubs and other meeting places" was predominantly located in and around Soho and Fitzrovia.⁵⁰ By the beginning of the 1950s this area of London was popularly established as the 'Square Mile of Vice', and a space where the mythologies and realities of organised crime and Bohemia co-existed with a number of immigrant communities and irregular sexualities. Within this social, social and geographic environment Francis Bacon found his everyday pleasure and it is the encounter between this space and the deliberations of the Wolfenden Committee which may provide the real potential to associate the figure and figurations of Francis Bacon to the deliberations of the Committee and their Report.

Soho was provided with criminal and sexual glamour through reports in the press, 'serious' social investigations and news-stand novels, like Josh Wingrave's *Backstreets of Soho* and *A Room in Soho*; all of which helped to establish Soho as the place to find 'queer' men.

A young fellow with a weak, effeminate face and green corduroys was at another table....⁵¹

In Arthur Tietzen's serious but sensational book *Soho: London's Vicious Circle*, published in 1956, couched in the language of social interest and law reform, this area of London is represented as almost fatally attractive:

When Harry came out of gaol, the chances were that he did not go straight home to his family, but made his way to Soho, where his gang had its headquarters in that squalid back alley of vice that lurks beyond the bright lights of Piccadilly Circus. For there, behind the "Hub of the World" dominated by Eros, lies that haunt of the race gangs, prostitutes, homosexuals, dope peddlers, lesbians, white slave racketeers of every description.⁵²

In many texts written in the 1950s Soho is represented as the apotheosis of all that is not family and not a part of the authorised circuits of social and sexual production, a space within the productive and reproductive city mythologised as a threat and scandal that demanded the hygienic attention of the authorities.

To investigate the myths and realities of Soho for men interested in social and sexual practices with other men, we can return to the work of Peter Wildeblood. Not *Against the Law*, but his second book, *A Way of Life*. In *A Way of Life* Peter Wildeblood provides an account of Soho that locates it in opposition to London's productive and reproductive social and sexual geographies. According to Peter Wildeblood, a young man called Gordon Poole learns the sites and protocols of male encounter in a terminus between urban and suburban life, Waterloo Station, as he watches a sailor pick-up a man in the buffet. Almost every evening Gordon "has a few drinks" at the buffet "before catching a train home", to his wife, Elise. By watching the sailor's encounter, Gordon learns that Soho is the place where he can find what he doesn't quite yet know he is looking for, the place to explore his inarticulate curiosity.

On the following Saturday Gordon take a bus to Shaftesbury Avenue and walks towards Soho Square to find the Foul Anchor, whose name alone is enough to make it clear that this is a queer pub. Gordon stays in the bar watching and tuning in to all that is going on

until eleven o'clock; but it is only when he leaves and walks the streets of Soho that he starts to understand what he's up to and what he wants:

Why had he come here, to walk alone through the streets, instead of staying at home where he belonged, with Elise? But he knew that it was not Elise whom he wanted now. Somewhere, in this dark city, with a stranger, he would find the bitter pleasure that he craved.⁵³

It is this potential for the streets of the metropolis, and most particularly Soho, to provide a seductive and formative social and sexual encounter between men that the Wolfenden Committee was interested in preventing; its implicit strategy was modernisation. The Wolfenden Committee's attempt to clean-up the definitional complexity of social and sexual practices and pleasure between men repeatedly became allied to the modernisation of the built environment, a project that often focused on the modernisation of public toilets. According to Arthur Tietzen, Soho required modernisation to solve its social problems.

But the architects and planners could transform Soho from an ancient to a modern Bohemia without loss to its character. In doing so they could eliminate the underworld dens, the garrets and alleys that exist solely for stinking men, prostitutes, perverts, speilers and pimps.⁵⁴

Anyway, Gordon walks the streets of London towards Paddington Station where he notices he's being followed by a man. He stops and stands in front of a window displaying wireless sets and their hire-purchase terms and as the man comes to a standstill beside him Gordon begins the routine he watched the sailor perform in the buffet at Waterloo. From this window displaying the material goods of modern consumption and the mode of their easy acquisition, Gordon and the tall, attractive stranger walk to a boarding-house in Sussex Gardens. In a room on the second floor Gordon looks for the first time at a man's naked body and believes it to be "something to desire and fear, an instrument of tenderness and annihilation whose purposes he could not know":

The light burned all night, looking down upon the bed like the fiery eye of an angel.⁵⁵

As they wrestled upon the double divan. Perhaps just like the 'wrestling' men in *Two Figures 1953* by Francis Bacon (figure 5).

In accord with the ethical standards that Peter Wildeblood presented in *Against the Law*, and in both his written and oral evidence to the Wolfenden Committee, Gordon eventually rejects the unproductive comfort of strangers and returns to his wife and child:

It was hard to believe that he had suffered the doubts and degradations which he had described; on the surface, Gordon Poole was a well adjusted, successful young business man, indistinguishable from thousands of others whom one sees every morning, going home to their wives and children.⁵⁶

Gordon's eventual downfall is caused by his friendship with a young employee. Patrick lives with a man in what could look like the ideal form of homosexual relationship the Wolfenden Committee presented in their Report. Gordon is touched by the possibility of two men sharing one another's lives:

His own experience, as he now realised quite clearly, had been based on mere selfish desire - a meeting of two strangers in a darkened room, in which neither showed any mercy or consideration for the other. This was something new: impossible, perhaps, but worth thinking about all the same.⁵⁷

But Patrick's homosexuality is not quite discreet enough. His partner is an older man who buys him gifts, and they live together in an expensive flat with brocade curtains and Regency striped wallpaper. The curtains and the wallpaper are the final clues that a fellow employee requires to report Patrick's suspicious circumstances to the owner of the shop where he and Gordon work. Patrick and Gordon are immediately sacked, and it appears as though homosexual subjects can not be accommodated within the heterocratic structures of production, consumption and exchange. The struggle to find some form of accommodation, or some kind of accommodating form, was perhaps the Wolfenden Committee's ambition.⁵⁸

Alongside its rationalisation of homosexual practices and pleasures, the Wolfenden Committee understood its function as the tidying of public places, particularly Soho. The order of public places was of paramount importance to the Committee's members, who understood the

laws function as the preservation of public order and decency. In the case of homosexuality, the Committee's anxieties focused on particular public toilets, parks and the streets of Soho. The Committee received evidence from a number of sources regarding the "problems" of importuning, gross indecency and cottaging. The most comprehensive evidence was provided by the police.

The memorandum of evidence provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Sir John Nott Bower, gave the Wolfenden Committee an account of sexual practices which we could simply attach to Francis Bacon's form of sexual and aesthetic pleasure to establish an approach to *Two Figures* 1953. A reading of this kind could have been produced by a viewer with certain and uncertain knowledges of the sexual practices and pleasures that took place between some men in and around Soho in the 1950s. Sir John Nott Bower's memorandum provides a great deal of detail concerning sexual acts between men. Apparently the offence of gross indecency usually took place in public lavatories and public house toilets with no attendant, and usually involved two men masturbating one another. According to the memorandum men who take part in these practices come from all walks of life, and the act often takes place without a word being spoken. Most notably the memorandum suggests that:

The two men are sometimes of different types, the waiter for example and a professional man.⁵⁹

The memorandum reports that sometimes a particular lavatory becomes "notorious as a rendezvous where perverts indulge in gross indecency and special attention has to be given to it", usually provided by plain clothes policemen.⁶⁰ The memorandum details a public toilet in Greenford, West London, where in 1953 "a hole about 2" square" was cut in one of the partitions between two WC cubicles, and after surveillance by the police a number of men were arrested. Apparently, even after the local authority lined the partitions with zinc the hole was cut again. According to the memorandum similar practices had taken place in the same year at Victoria Station. The police are aware that the hole is both for passing notes to arrange meetings and to enable physical contact. The police also detail the protocols of 'cottaging', "the normal method is as follows":

A man enters the lavatory, occupies a stall next to another man, exposes himself towards the other man leaning back slightly from his stall, then looks down into the stall occupied by the other man, then smiles up into the other man's face. If the other man ignores his attentions, the importuner turns to the man on the other side of him, or, if needs be, changes his stall. Usually the importuner makes prolonged visits to the lavatory, say a quarter of an hour to twenty minutes, often changing his stall two or three times, and in many cases, several visits are made over a period of about an hour, either to the one lavatory, or to several lavatories of the same reputation.⁶¹

The memorandum mentions that importuners come from all professions, but it is particularly noted that many are employed in "quasi domestic occupations, e.g. waiter, kitchen porter, barmen and chefs".⁶² Sir John Nott Bower's memorandum also mentions the prosecution of the licensee of premises on Rupert Street in Soho, where during a four day period of observation the police witnessed "conduct of the most offensive nature". At the end of his memorandum Sir John Nott Bower opposes a change in the law, fearing that it would encourage the spread of practices beyond the areas identified on a map that he provides. This map of London pin-points the places where in 1953 men were arrested for importuning and gross indecency. These arrests were mostly confined to a small number of well known public toilets, often in clusters around underground and railway stations, including South Kensington, Piccadilly and Victoria, and many of these public toilets were small iron-work structures sited away from main streets and thoroughfares. Arrests were also made in public parks, particularly after dark in Hyde Park around the Serpentine.

Needless to say details of these practices don't find their way into the Wolfenden Report. The representation of sexual pleasures and practices provided by Sir John Nott Bower is quite different to that which the Wolfenden Committee presented to support their recommendations and rationales. Evidence of this kind gleaned from papers in the Wolfenden archive reveal that sexual encounters between men in the 1950s were geographically ordered, made up of very particular locations, practices and protocols, and involved very particular types and classes of men.

As well as receiving evidence from the Commissioner of Police, the Committee interviewed two police constables who provided details of the sexual practices that took place in the Mayfair and Soho areas of London. According to the two constables, these areas are frequented by "two very different sorts of homosexuals". Practices in the Mayfair area take place predominantly during the lunch hour of staff who work in the offices there, and are accommodated to the rhythms of the productive modern metropolis:

In the Mayfair area there are three urinals that are quite famous throughout the world. They are Providence Court, the urinal attached to the public house in George Yard, and the Three Kings Yard urinal which is by the Standard Motor Company's showroom at the back of Grosvenor Square. Invariably these people we follow do the run between these three urinals, one, two, three and back again until they meet someone who is willing to fall in with their wishes and away they go.⁶³

According to the police constables these excursions were for meeting men rather than for engaging in sexual acts:

They just meet someone who is of the same way of thinking as themselves, who is willing to try that sort of thing, and they make an arrangement to go for a drink or to go to their flat later on in the evening. It has happened to me dozens of times. They come up and say "Are you interested in this sort of thing?" and I can honestly say "Yes" and an arrangement is made, but I don't keep it that is the only thing.⁶⁴

Neither of the police constables represent the sexual acts in Mayfair as the sole preserve of men who can be clearly identified as homosexual subjects. However, in Soho, according to the police constables, "you are more inclined to get the criminal type of homosexual", who "makes himself up with cosmetics, adopts feminine behaviour". The constables are well aware of the protocols of encounter, "A certain look", and provide evidence that whilst men who take part in these social and sexual exchanges are "from all walks of life" they believe them to be particularly popular with those men "from any occupation or profession that has an air of artificiality about it, like the acting profession, the creative professions like hairdressers and dress designers." The constables also provide information concerning the location, design and lighting of public urinals:

The average person in London doesn't know of the urinals. They are out of the way, and I think that is the trouble. They get washed out once very early in the morning and they are left unattended throughout the day. There is only room for six at the most in the biggest one, and except for people who work immediately near there and use them, they are not so well patronised as they would be if they were in a more obvious position in the main street....The lighting in the evenings leaves a lot to be desired. Most of them now are lit by electricity, but it is still not enough. It is still dim in there, and that is conducive to these people carrying on their practices. Some in the Soho area are lit by gas, and at the first opportunity someone puts the gas out.⁶⁵

At times during the deliberations of the Committee this particular kind of public urinal become the focus of their attention, and the architectural representative of sexual practice they sought to prevent. Like Soho, particular public urinals seemed to the Committee to have the potential to introduce men to sexual practices, which in their view, should only be available to committed, co-operative and determined homosexuals subjects.

I do think in the City of Westminster, which is my area, they might do something about these horrible lavatories. There are four, if not five, frequented by these people. Instead of being decent, well lit, large places, they are miserable little "black holes of Calcutta", black in the middle of the day and just the place for these fellow to meet.⁶⁶

It was repeatedly suggested to the Committee that one way of solving the problem of men engaging in sexual acts with men in public toilets was an increase in police surveillance, or the provision of an attendant, improved lighting, re-location and modernisation. Montgomery H. Hyde in his 1970 book, *The Other Love*, provides information given to him by an "elderly homosexual" which highlights the importance of these urinals to a particular form of social and sexual practice between men:

These small urinals were, in many ways, the most important meeting places for homosexuals of all and every kind. Always open, usually unattended, and consisting of a small number of stalls over the sides of which it was quite easy to spy and get a sight of one's neighbours cock, they were ideally built for the gratification of the voyeur's sexual itch. Very frequently the sides of the stalls were covered with graffiti and randy writing, which served to excite the urinating frequenter. It was pleasant indeed to add to the writing and suggest meeting someone for sexual purposes and, in due course, see if someone had added to one's own writing and suggested a meeting.⁶⁷

The Other Love was the last serious investigations of homosexuality for many years that would dedicate a section to the pleasures and practices of cottaging.

When one considers the numbers of men, not by any means all homosexuals, who used these small urinals, it is almost certain these graffiti and suggestive writing and appointments introduced hundreds of so-called 'normal' men to the pleasures of homosexual gratification, and to an easy way of making a few extra pounds to add to their wage packets.⁶⁸

Tom Driberg, Labour MP, journalist and professional cruiser and cottager, writes a similar account of the importance of these public urinals in his posthumous autobiography *Ruling Passions*. Tom Driberg, friend of Francis Bacon, writes about a circuit of pleasure, moving between the urinals in and around the Soho area of London. Like Francis Bacon, Tom Driberg cannot not be attached to the law reform movement or gay liberation, and like Francis Bacon, he found his pleasure in the social and sexual networks of Soho:

I hankered after London, in particular after Soho, and most of all I craved a certain deep and dark doorway in Rupert Street, in which I had stood for hours at a time enjoying the quick embraces and gropings of other young layabouts - an even more dangerous and therefore more thrilling, alternative to the simple urinals ('cottages') then plentiful in the mews and alleys of West London. Why municipal vandals should have thought it necessary to destroy so many of them I do not know: I suppose it is one expression of anti-homosexual prejudice. Yet no homo, cottage-cruising, ever prevented a hetero from merely urinating; while to do one's rounds of the cottages - the alley by the Astoria, the dog-leg lane opposite the Garrick Club, the one near the Ivy, the one off Wardour Street, the narrow passage by the Coliseum, ending up always in Of Alley, off Villiers Street - provided homos, not all of whom are given to rougher sports, with healthy exercise.⁶⁹

Tom Driberg provides confirmation of the importance of a particular kind of public urinal, not just as discrete locations, but as experiential interiors which were intrinsically attached to the sexual practices that took place within them. The map provided by the police combined with the information given by the "elderly homosexual" and Tom Driberg creates a cartography which can which can be placed over London's conventional geography. The urban environment is re-formed into particular routes and locations, walked and inhabited by men seeking, or coming across, pleasure with

other men. These routes and locations become synonymous with very particular forms of sexual encounter and practice. A complex arrangement of morphemes form a sexual syntax, which co-exists with other, perhaps more productive, uses of the urban environment. Importantly, for both history and theory, this sexual map or syntax is not hidden, or marginal, or underneath, but co-exists and interacts in the same space, at the same time and sometimes in accord with the same rhythms as other uses of the city.

Finally, all we have to propose to re-locate the site of inquiry away from simply identifying *Two Figures 1953* as a homosexual subject, is that Francis Bacon's painting may have made sense to some viewers who came across it in an upstairs room at the Hanover Gallery in 1953, from in and around this sexual geography. Viewers with knowledge of the social and sexual cartography of London, perhaps detectives of different kinds or avid cruisers like Tom Driberg, may have considered *Two Figures 1953* in association with some of the practices, pleasures, places and personas the Wolfenden Committee sought to rationalise, identify, modernise and clearly delineate during their deliberations. Just some viewers of *Two Figures 1953* may have thought the two figures 'wrestling' on the bed, like Gordon Poole and the attractive stranger he met around Paddington Station, had detected one another on the streets of Soho, or in a public toilet, and immediately retired to a boarding house, or arranged to meet one another after work, perhaps for some sexual practice that they may or may not have called 'homosexual'.

Chapter One - Notes

¹Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective*, p.xvi. Suzanne Kappeler's review of *The Sexual Perspective* in *Ten:8*, 26, pp.64-66. Emmanuel Cooper's book has been an important resource for my interest in the associations between male homosexuality and art since its first publication in 1986, and a constant companion during a number of years of research. In this thesis I repeatedly use *The Sexual Perspective*, and other works by Emmanuel Cooper, as alternatives to my own approach; but they must be understood as texts that have quite literally enabled me to do something else, and without them this thesis would not have been conceived. I do not want my repeated references to the texts of Emmanuel Cooper to be understood as anything other than a respectful difference of opinion.

²Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective*, p.229.

³Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship*, pp.179-239

⁴Michael Peppiatt, *Anatomy of an Enigma*, p.161. Also, Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon*, p.213.

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- ⁵Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon*, p.23.
- ⁶Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon*, p.24.
- ⁷Membership of the Wolfenden Committee: Sir John Wolfenden (chairman), Vice-Chancellor of Reading University; James Adair, Scottish solicitor and former Procurator Fiscal of Glasgow; Mrs. Mary Cohen, Vice-President, Scottish Association of Mixed Clubs and Girls Clubs, and Vice-President, City of Glasgow Girl Guides; Dr. Desmond Curran, Consultant Psychiatrist at St. George's Hospital, Tooting; Revd. Victor Dement, Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford; Kenneth Diplock, barrister, Recorder of Oxford, appointed a judge in Queen's Bench in 1956; Sir Hugh Linstead, Conservative MP for Putney, pharmaceutical chemist and barrister; The Marquess of Lothian, junior minister at the Foreign Office; Mrs Kathleen Lovibond, chairman of Uxbridge juvenile court; Victor Mischcon, solicitor and Labour leader of the Greater London Council; Goronwy Rees, Principal of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth; Revd. R. T. Scott, Scottish Presbyterian minister; Lady Stopford, doctor and magistrate, wife of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester; W. T. Wells, Labour MP for Walsall, 1945-74, barrister; Dr. Joseph Whitby, GP in north London with psychiatric experience. Details from Patrick Higgins, *The Homosexual Dictatorship*, p.322.
- ⁸For a review of arrests for homosexual offences at the beginning of the 1950s and a discussion of whether they were part of an orchestrated campaign see Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship*. Also see Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law*; Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*; Stephen Jeffery Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*; and Les Moran; *The Homosexual(ity) of Law*.
- ⁹Sebastian Faulks, *The Fatal Englishman*, pp.209-307, and Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship*, pp.86-88.
- ¹⁰Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, p.115 (paragraph 355).
- ¹¹Charles Berg, *Fear, Punishment, Anxiety and the Wolfenden Report*, p.44.
- ¹²Stephen Jeffery Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*, p.30.
- ¹³For a discussion of the associations between homosexual law reform and gay liberation see Jeffrey Week, *Coming Out*; and Stephen Jeffery Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*.
- ¹⁴Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp.157-167.
- ¹⁵Les Moran, *The Homosexual(ity) of Law*, p.95.
- ¹⁶Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.171.
- ¹⁷Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, p.10 (paragraph 14).
- ¹⁸Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, pp.9-10 (paragraph 13).
- ¹⁹For a discussion of how contemporary gay identity was structured by the Wolfenden Report, axiomatic to this thesis, see Frank Mort, 'Sexuality: Regulation and Contestation', in Gay Left Collective, *Homosexuality Power and Politics*.
- ²⁰Alfred Charles Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, p.17.
- ²¹Alfred Charles Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, p.632.
- ²²Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.xv.
- ²³PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/39, Transcription of meeting with Clifford Allen, Eustace Chesser, R. Sessions Hodge, p.7.
- ²⁴Rodney Garland, *the Heart in Exile*, p.47.
- ²⁵Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex* (1954), p.149.
- ²⁶Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex* (1940), p.129.
- ²⁷Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex* (1954), p.149.
- ²⁸Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) and John Addington Symonds (1840-93) worked together on *Sexual Inversion*, first published 1897. Havelock

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Ellis remained the recognised British authority on homosexuality until after the Second World War. For evidence of the formative influence of the work of Havelock Ellis see the interviews in Kevin Porter and Jeffrey Weeks eds, *Between the Act*.

²⁹Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex* (1940), pp.129-130.

³⁰Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex* (1954), p.157.

³¹Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex* (1954), pp.161-2.

³²Stuart Higgins, *The Homosexual Dictatorship*, p.216.

³³Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, p.32. "So it was that our society - and it was doubtless the first in history to take such measures - assembled around these timeless gestures, these barely furtive pleasures between simple-minded adults and alert children, a whole machinery for speechifying, analysing and investigating."

³⁴Porter and Weeks, *Between the Acts*, p.4.

³⁵Porter and Weeks, *Between the Acts*, p.68.

³⁶Porter and Weeks, *Between the Acts*, p.115.

³⁷PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/53, Transcription of meeting with the Viscount Hailsham, p.16.

³⁸PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/53, Transcription of meeting with the Viscount Hailsham, p.16.

³⁹PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/53, Transcription of meeting with the Viscount Hailsham, p.28.

⁴⁰Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.156.

⁴¹PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/24, Transcription of meeting with Mr. Peter Wildeblood, p.4.

⁴²PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/24, Transcription of meeting with Mr. Peter Wildeblood, p.9.

⁴³PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/24, Transcription of meeting with Mr. Peter Wildeblood, p.10.

⁴⁴PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/24, Transcription of meeting with Mr. Peter Wildeblood, p.27.

⁴⁵Peter Wildeblood, *A Way of Life*, pp 110-116.

⁴⁶PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/12, Transcription of meeting with 'Doctor' and 'Mr. White', p.4. 'Doctor' was Patrick Trevor-Roper - distinguished eye consultant, and 'Mr White' was Carl Winter - Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁴⁷For details of Alfred Hecht's involvement in the Homosexual Law Reform Society see Antony Grey, *Quest for Justice*; and Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*.

⁴⁸The 'Homosexual Law Reform Society' was established in 1958 to campaign for the recommendations contained in the Wolfenden Report. Kenneth Walker was its first chairman, and the other original members included A. E. Dyson, Ambrose Appelbe, Canon John Collins, Victor Gollancz, Jacquetta Hawkes, Dr. W. Lindesay Neustatter, C. H. Rolph, Stephen Spender, Dr. E. B. Strauss and the Rt. Hon. Kenneth Younger, MP. Antony Grey was appointed the Secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Albany Trust in 1962. For details of the Society and the campaign to change the law see Antony Grey, *Quest for Justice*.

⁴⁹Antony Grey, *Quest for Justice*, p.20.

⁵⁰For a detailed consideration of the historical and contemporary associations between male homosexuality and Soho see Frank Mort, *Culture of Consumption*.

⁵¹Josh Wingrave, *Backstreets of Soho*, p.34.

⁵²Arthur Tietzen, *Soho: London's Vicious Circle*, p.11.

⁵³Peter Wildeblood, *A Way of Life*, pp.40-41.

⁵⁴Arthur Tietzen, *Soho: London's Vicious Circle*, p.146.

⁵⁵Peter Wildeblood, *A Way of Life*, p.42.

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⁵⁶Peter Wildeblood, *A Way of Life*, p.43-4.

⁵⁷Peter Wildeblood, *A Way of Life*, p.45.

⁵⁸For another fictional account of the fraught association between the heterocratic systems of consumption, production and exchange, and homosexuality see Martyn Goff, *The Youngest Director*.

⁵⁹PRO HO 345/7 CHP/10, Memorandum by Sir John Nott-Bower, KCVO, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, 22 November 1954.

⁶⁰PRO HO 345/7 CHP/10, Memorandum by Sir John Nott-Bower, KCVO, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, 22 November 1954.

⁶¹PRO HO 345/7 CHP/10, Memorandum by Sir John Nott-Bower, KCVO, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, 22 November 1954.

⁶²PRO HO 345/7 CHP/10, Memorandum by Sir John Nott-Bower, KCVO, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, 22 November 1954.

⁶³PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/10, Transcription of meeting with two police officers from B Division and C Division, London Metropolitan Police.

⁶⁴PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/10, Transcription of meeting with two police officers from B Division and C Division, London Metropolitan Police.

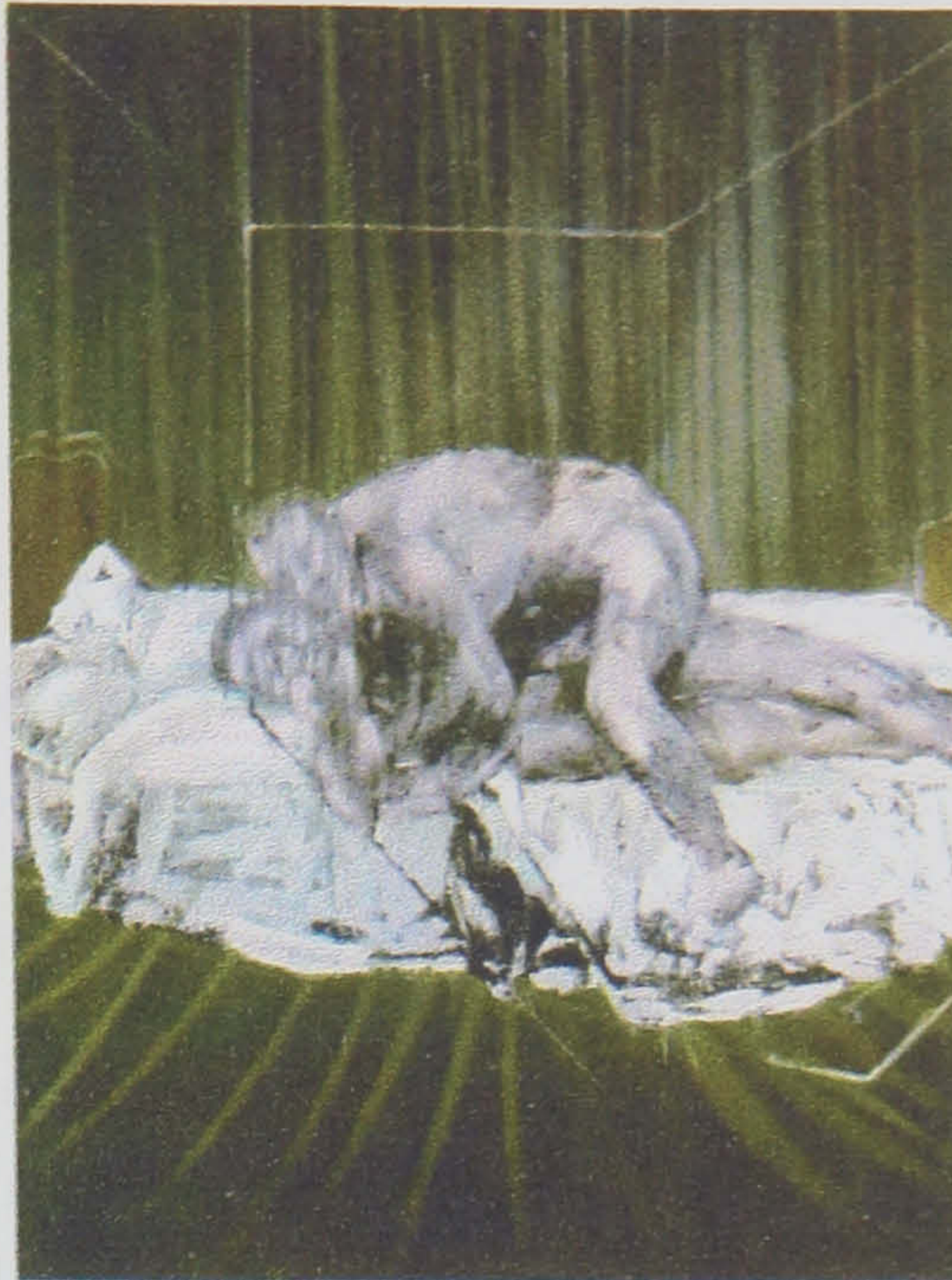
⁶⁵PRO HO 345/12 CHP/TRANS/10, Transcription of meeting with two police officers from B Division and C Division, London Metropolitan Police.

⁶⁶PRO HO 347/7, Memorandum from Mr. Paul Bennett, Metropolitan Magistrate, Marlborough Street.

⁶⁷H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love*, p.205.

⁶⁸H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love*, pp.205-6.

⁶⁹Tom Driberg, *Ruling Passion*, p.88.



Chapter 2

Cruising in Theory

I came across *Winger's Landfall* by Stuart Lauder during one of my regular forays in one or other of London's second-hand book shops.¹ For many years excursions of this kind had been an intimate part of my regular and irregular sexual and textual pleasures. As with Gordon Poole, from Peter Wildeblood's *A Way of Life*, whose inarticulate curiosity lead him to Soho, I hadn't set out in search of anything in particular, but I was looking for something, and *Winger's Landfall* certainly looked interesting enough to pick-up and purchase. *Winger's Landfall* was originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode in 1962, but the second-hand copy I came across was published by Panther in 1966.

When I found *Winger's Landfall* I was pretty familiar with quite a few stories about social and sexual pleasures and practices between men, and particularly *au fait* with the narratives of homosexual law reform and gay liberation. I had read a lot of fictional, political and theoretical books about men coming to know and liberate their homosexuality that traced an individual's or group's progress from isolation and obscurity to community and clarity. *Winger's Landfall* is not a narrative of this kind; it's a detective story which promises a denouement that never transpires.

A young man called Danny disappears overboard a merchant navy ship somewhere between Australia and Britain, and for a while the cause of his mysterious death hinges on the significance of a photograph. However, the mystery remains unresolved and the photograph's meaning remains unclear. For an art historian interested in the associations between visual culture and the pleasures and practices of some men, who may or may not be 'homosexual', a detective story that fails to identify the meaning of a photograph, and whose hero strenuously resists being identified as "queer", was an opportunity too good to miss.

Harry Shears, the hero of *Winger's Landfall*, is determined to find out why Danny died. Danny was Harry's younger half-brother, and for a while when growing up together in the East End of London, they had been close. Harry had "grown up loving Danny", but joined the merchant navy as a bell-boy to "get away from home, and from his growing involvement in Danny's misery, as much as to avoid the call-up"; and he stayed in the merchant navy as a waiter, or 'winger', "because by then his tastes had matured, and society's watchdogs ashore were on the look-out for him".

Danny and his mum escape from Britain too by emigrating to Australia, and this is where Harry and Danny meet up again and begin to plan a romantic future together, "somewhere outback beyond the mountains on undeveloped soil". Before beginning their new life, Danny takes a trip to London to visit his Dad, returning to Australia as a bell-boy aboard a merchant navy ship. According to Harry, Danny on his return no longer had any "inclination to pay off and start their long-planned venture beyond the mountains". Danny takes to being bell-boy and each time he returns to Australia he and Harry are more distant. Then Danny's mum receives the letter that informs her and Harry of Danny's mysterious death, lost overboard.

So Harry signs on to Danny's old ship, the *Cyclamen*, as a winger to try and find out if Danny jumped, or slipped or was thrown overboard. According to Richard Hauser in *The Homosexual Society*, also published in 1962, sexual pleasures and practices between men were "rampant" on some merchant navy ships. Richard Hauser might

have been thinking about the *Cyclamen* when he provided these accounts of life onboard:

'The X (a passenger ship) is a floating brothel. So are the Y and Z and a number of others. You must be a queer if you want to sign on as a member of the crew. Then it's easy as pie. Everybody knows and everybody does it. Certain types of jobs which bring you into contact with passengers pay off handsomely, especially after the Red Sea. But in the XX (another ship) if you put one foot wrong you are out. It's funny, the ships look alike but in one everything is allowed - in the other you can't even walk with mincing steps without being fired.'

'The boys want you in a ship but not on land; they don't want to know you on land when they go home to their girls or their wives or, in foreign parts, to some brothel. At sea they court you.'²

In *Who's A Pretty Boy Then?*, James Gardiner writes, and provides photographic evidence, that the merchant navy "provided a happy little haven: a well paid job as a steward, cruises to far away places, lots of sex, and an excuse ('entertaining the passengers') for dragging up on a regular basis" (figure 7); but where the crew is quartered in the bow of the ship, the fo'c'sle, of the *Cyclamen* isn't simply a happy "haven". It's a sexually indeterminate space, a social and sexual economy and community where sexual practices and pleasures take place between men who may or may not be homosexuals, queers or queens.³

Harry sets about his investigation maintaining a detective's distance from the ship's crew and the complex social and sexual life of the fo'c'sle; searching for clues and carefully guarding himself against being designated "queer":

Harry frowned at his image, studying the drawn cheeks, freckled forehead, the thin lips, the expressionless pale eyes. No, nothing there to hint at anything. No clues at all.⁴

The times when Harry comes closest to being designated "queer" are marked by references to Oscar Wilde. At Harry's first audience with Diamond Lil, the ship's most sophisticated and glamorous drag queen, he lets slip a quote from *The Importance of Being Earnest*:

That had been a nasty slip up, quoting from Oscar Wilde. As good as a password.⁵

A little later Bernard Norrie, the focus of Harry's suspicions, comments:

You never seem to get your persona quite right. You're supposed to give me quotations from strip cartoons, not oblique references to Oscar Wilde.⁶

It's difficult for the reader of *Winger's Landfall* to be sure if Harry is in disguise, an undercover queer 'detective', or if his careful avoidance of being identified, his commitment to not fit in and the distance he maintains from the geography through which he moves and searches for clues, constitutes his particular kind of social and sexual pleasure. Harry is part undercover detective and part "lone wolf", cruising the ship in search of clues to solve the mystery of Danny's death, gradually becoming attuned but then attached to the circuits of social and sexual delights and distractions of the *Cyclamen*.⁷

Harry eventually finds the clue that he has been looking for in Bernard Norrie's locker. Bernard Norrie is the unofficial guardian to the ship's bell-boys, and so already a well established figure of sexual suspicion, and Harry finds a photograph of Danny; "an ordinary snapshot, postcard sized taken in brilliant sunlight, the shadows sharp and compact".

Now, it's important to recognise that Harry is a pretty careful reader of visual images, who could teach all sorts of professional detectives a thing or two:

A white rail crossed the centre of the view, with Danny sitting upon it, one foot on deck, one raised on a bar, hands spread out, arms braced, shoulders slightly hunched, flattening his torso and stretching his ribs, hair falling down to his nose, shadowing half his smile. A towel hung on the rail under his hand. He was naked.⁸

Harry understands the pleasures and perils of interpretation, and knows that though a snapshot of a naked young man relaxing in the bright sunlight of an exotic location may be suspicious, it does not constitute proof of any impropriety:

As such photographs went, no doubt it was innocuous enough. It would depend upon what use was made of it. There was no evidence that Bernard had taken it, or why he should have done so, if indeed he had. His possession of it chimed in well enough with his "welfare officer" attitude towards the lads. One could, obscenely, imagine him slobbering over it; but that was, to be honest, no more than a perverted wishful-thinking.

Harry, as a pretty sophisticated reader of signs and interpreter of images, realises that the photograph does not make sense in and of itself, but that its meaning depends upon its place within the social and sexual geography of the *Cyclamen*. Harry is also smart enough to realise that his reading of the "snapshot" is not innocent but determined by "wishful-thinking". However, like so many detectives, he can't resist the temptations of collecting circumstantial evidence, and he starts to use the contents of Bernard's locker to make a case against him:⁹

No colours at all, not so much as a stripe in a shirt or a contrasting clock on the black or grey socks. The short white raincoat was the only exoticism - an odd choice, perhaps for his age group.

Bernard's locker contains no conclusive proof, but from its contents it appears that "Bernard must cut quite a distinguished figure ashore", particularly when wearing his short white raincoat. Harry muses that perhaps Bernard's short "modish" hairstyle is an important "clue"; and of course a carefully groomed and well dressed middle aged man, with a commitment to the welfare of adolescents, not to mention pictures in his locker of them naked, was a well established figure of suspicion by 1962; sustained by over ten years of high profile reports in the popular press of arrests, trials and conviction for 'homosexual offences'. But as Harry sets about investigating what Bernard's interest in the welfare of the bell-boys entails, he becomes increasingly attached to the social and sexual world of the *Cyclamen*, and increasingly uncertain of the part he may have played in Danny's death.

To further his investigation and find out what goes on during the mysterious meetings between Bernard and the bell-boys that take place onboard the ship and during shore leave, Harry attaches himself to a young bell-boy called 'Prince', whose real name is also Danny. Harry becomes increasingly attached to 'Prince', the new

Danny, and starts to lose the distance of a detective, and becomes covertly embroiled in, perhaps seduced by, the social and sexual world of the fo'c'sle. Harry and 'Prince' start to meet more by design than accident in and around the ship, and begin a relationship of glances and clandestine encounters.

Harry becomes sure that the solution to the mystery of Danny's death will be found at the site where the photograph was taken. Following Prince on shore leave in Colombo he comes across seven naked bell-boys "splashing about" in the circular swimming pool of a house whose "modernity blended unobtrusively" with the landscape. But even this scene, which like the found photograph of Danny is reminiscent of some photographs that could be found in British and particularly American physique magazines during the 1950s and early 1960s, and prescient of some David Hockney paintings, brings Harry no closer to finding out why Danny died. Bernard explains that his motivations are religious rather than sexual, but Harry isn't convinced.

The sexual pleasures of *Winger's Landfall* depend on attaching the all male environment of the fo'c'sle, and the photograph of Danny, to the all male environment of British and American physique magazines published in the 1950s. Harry and Prince watch one another in the showers hoping for a moment alone (figure 8); ambiguous scenes that in 1962 made sense alongside the indeterminate photographs that could be found in physique publications. The association between physique magazines and *Winger's Landfall* becomes clear when Harry wrestles with the former guardsmen Marty in and around the ship's swimming pool (figure 9), and when he reflects that Marty would have been just the type to be seduced by a physique photographer:

Typical exploitation of simple brawn by guileful brain. Marty was just the type to fall for it. As no doubt he'd have fallen for all the usual gambits in the Guards. My, what big muscles! Did I mention that I'm a physique photographer? You must come down to my studio...Having a little party tonight. Yes, he knew the score, that one.¹⁰

Harry and Marty are just the kind of men who caused members of the Wolfenden Committee such anxiety; men who refuse to be identified as

homosexual subjects. The fo'c'sle also looks like an indeterminate social and sexual space that the Wolfenden Committee would have wanted to survey.

The narrative of *Winger's Landfall* is motivated by a similar desire to the Wolfenden Report. Harry searches for clues hoping to identify the found photograph of Danny as the representative of "impropriety"; an identifiable example of homosexual subject matter. However, *Winger's Landfall* thwarts the narrative and epistemological stability that the Wolfenden Committee attempted to establish, and the novel works its way towards its inconclusive conclusion. On the way responsibility for Danny's death shifts between Harry and Bernard.

For a while Harry believes, encouraged by Bernard, that his possessive desire for Danny was in some mysterious way the cause of his death. But by the end of the book it looks like Danny's death was due to a series of epileptic fits encouraged by Bernard as signs of religious fervour. Danny's epilepsy is a possibility beyond the frame of the narrative until the final few pages. The narrative ends with Harry's arrest in a pub with a "fairly notorious "cottage"", though not for a 'homosexual offence' but for punching Bernard and accidentally killing him. The novel closes with Harry falling to the floor in epileptic convulsions. Whilst Harry is arrested he is not identified, and though he ends up in prison he remains a "lone wolf" rather than an identifiable homosexual subject .

Neither Harry, the found photograph of Danny, or *Winger's Landfall* can be identified as homosexual subjects, or subject matter, with any interpretive confidence. For the art historian interested in the association between visual culture and unspecified sexual pleasures between men, *Winger's Landfall* is an intriguing text, and Harry Shears a fascinating figure. Harry's avoidance of homosexual identification, his careful reading but the eventual indeterminate significance of the found photograph of Danny, the narrative movement towards a solution of the mystery surrounding Danny's death and the final thwarting of any conclusion, the unstable ethics, and most particularly the consonance between Harry's moves as an amateur

detective and a "lone wolf" cruising the social and sexual geography of the fo'c'sle, suggest that fictional Harry Shears is not unlike the theoretical Roland Barthes.

Harry Shears would have induced definitional anxieties for members of the Wolfenden Committee, who would have sought to identify or prevent his particular kind of pleasures and practice. The figure and figurations of Roland Barthes have caused similar anxieties and definitional dilemmas for a few disciplined practitioners of gay and queer politics and theory.¹¹ Like Harry Shears, the figure and figurations of Roland Barthes, resist homosexual identification:

Yet to proclaim yourself something is always to speak at the behest of a vengeful Other, to enter into his discourse, to argue with him, to seek from him a scrap of identity: "You are..." "Yes, I am..." Ultimately, the attribute is of no importance; what society will not tolerate is that I should be...*nothing*, or to be more exact, that the *something* that I am should be openly expressed as provisional, revocable, insignificant, inessential, in a word: irrelevant. Just say "I am," and you will be socially saved.

Just a year before the publication of *Winger's Landfall*, Basil Dearden's film *Victim* made the prevailing ethical and political insistence on homosexual identification perfectly clear.¹² This British film, starring Dirk Bogarde alongside a collection of familiar British actors, followed the recommendations and rationales of the Wolfenden Report and was an explicit attempt to forge a climate that would enable the eventual legalisation of some sexual practices between men. Like *Winger's Landfall*, the narrative of *Victim* is motivated by a somewhat ambiguous photograph which may or may not be a representation of homosexuality. In *Victim* the photograph is of two fully clothed men, the lawyer Melville Farr and 'Boy' Barrett. At no point during this film does the audience see the ambiguous photograph which apparently could not prove any impropriety but is still used to blackmail 'Boy' Barrett until his suicide.

As in *Winger's Landfall* the meaning of the photograph depends on the what is "made of it". However, unlike the narrative of *Winger's Landfall* the process of detection in *Victim*, in accord with the ambitions of the Wolfenden Committee, reveals that the photograph is

really a representation of what its rhetorics only suggest; an identifiable representative of an encounter between two homosexual subjects, and consequently homosexual subject matter.

However, before its denouement, *Victim* offers some indeterminate pleasures similar to those of *Winger's Landfall*. For a while the lawyer turned amateur detective Melville Farr, played by Dirk Bogarde, pursues the blackmailers without identifying himself as a homosexual subject. Melville Farr moves through the social, sexual and physical geography of those men who are committed to practices and pleasures with other men, dodging imputations about his own subjectivity. But eventually it becomes impossible to avoid identifying himself, and he confesses to his wife that he loved 'Boy' Barrett, and subjects himself to a homosexual identification.¹³

Melville Farr's personal confession will be followed by a very public identification of himself as a homosexual after the film ends, when he does the decent thing and gives evidence against the blackmailers at their trial. Unlike Harry Shears, Melville Farr is not allowed to avoid a juridical identification of his particular kind of homosexual practice and pleasure. Like Peter Wildeblood, Melville Farr is forced to identify himself as a homosexual in court; but what was an unavoidable legal process in 1954 has become an ethical choice by 1961, and the opportunity for Melville Farr to represent himself as a discreet and discrete homosexual, who will, if he can only get a grip sublimate his homosexuality and return to his wife.

The approaches of both Harry Shears and Roland Barthes to making sense of photographs, and the definitional anxiety that they both are capable of inducing in disciplined and expressive models of homosexual subjectivity, can suggest a theoretical approach to *Two Figures 1953*. As I proposed in chapter one, Francis Bacon's painting may not simply be an ambiguous representation of homosexuality that requires some professional attention to clarify or identify what it is about. It may be something of an imposition to apply the designation 'homosexual' to some subject matter, or some subjects, in the early 1950s when such an identification was

either inchoate, not readily available or if applied did not make sense of some subjects and some objects.

However, if this is the case, the art historian interested in the association between male homosexuality and visual cultural production may have a problem; detection and identification are the tried and tested methods of research. But if Francis Bacon's painting may make sense when approached through Soho in the 1950s, just before two men wrestling on a bed became an expression of homosexual subjectivity, it's important to consider how an art historian could set foot in the "square mile of vice".

Of course the ever ready option is to set out like a detective, to create a dossier from bits and pieces of evidence and then attach it to the painting using some strong-arm interpretive tactics to make it make sense. But if the art historian walks in and around the precincts of Soho in this way he risks following in the footsteps of the two 1950s policemen we have already met giving evidence to the Wolfenden Committee. An approach of this kind risks complicity with all the legal, medical and educational disciplines that, with the support of reports and articles in the popular press, sought to identify homosexual subjects in the 1950s.

The identification of homosexual subjects and the processes of detection are so closely imbricated with one another, that it may be impossible to not set foot in Soho in pursuit of Francis Bacon's painting like a plain-clothes detective walking around the narrow streets and alleyways, hanging around public toilets, listening in on conversations in pubs and clubs, making notes, and looking for clues that will lead to an arrest.

However, as Harry Shears certainly knew, and Roland Barthes too, the practices and pleasures of the plain-clothes detective can look uncannily like those of men who cruise the streets of Soho attuned or tuning in to the social and sexual dangers and delights to be found in and around this district. The differences and similarities between detection and cruising suggests an approach to Francis Bacon's painting that isn't simply an alternative to the processes of detection and identification, but is rather the adoption of a

somewhat different mode of making sense, of moving in and around the Soho, and in and around my archive.

The ambiguous pictorial sign of social and sexual practices and pleasures between men animates professional projects of homosexual identification. The shift between ambiguous acts, practices and pleasures to the certainties of identification often directs approaches to cultural products that are suspected of having had some association with male homosexuality. In these approaches the protocols of detection are often put to good use, and whilst these protocols may be unavoidable, I want to consider another way to set foot in 1950s Soho. I want to cruise Soho and my archive like Roland Barthes sometimes cruised Paris and sometimes cruised texts, and Harry Shear cruised the fo'c'sle of the *Cyclamen*, part detective and part sexual "lone wolf".¹⁴

Medical and juridical detection, sexual pleasures and practices between men, and photographs were intimately associated with one another during the 1950s; and in the year Francis Bacon produced *Two Figures 1953*, a number of arrests for 'homosexual offences' strengthened these associations. As we have seen, 1953 was punctuated by reports in the popular press of a number of high profile arrests, trials and convictions for 'homosexual offences', which may or may not have been the result of an orchestrated campaign.¹⁵ The year began with the arrest of the Labour MP William Field in January for persistent importuning in Piccadilly Circus, closely followed by the arrest of the author Rupert Croft-Cooke for an offence involving a couple of sailors he met in a London pub and invited to spend the weekend at his country home. In October the actor Sir John Gielgud was arrested for persistent importuning in a public toilet in Chelsea, and most notably, in the same month Scotland Yard announced that Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and the film director Kenneth Hume were to be arrested.

Lord Montagu was arrested and tried in 1953, but the jury were unable to reach a verdict on the charges brought against him.¹⁶ He was then re-arrested in January of 1954, alongside Michael Pitt-Rivers and Peter Wildeblood, after two RAF servicemen, Edward McNally and John Reynolds, agreed to give evidence against them in

return for immunity from prosecution. These arrests lead to the most widely reported prosecution for 'homosexual offences' of the 1950s. As with many trials for 'homosexual offences', photographs played an important part in this case as evidence and proof of "impropriety". During the trial a snapshot of John Reynolds found by the police whilst searching the flat of Michael Pitt Rivers, and taken during a weekend stay at a beach hut with the accused and Edward McNally, was used as evidence of impropriety, and described as "a sexy photograph of Reynolds" by the prosecution.¹⁷ One result of this kind of interest in evidence of homosexuality was to instil in some men fear of imminent arrest that sometimes lead them to destroy or hide the written and pictorial evidence of their pleasures and practices.¹⁸ In his autobiography, *An Immaculate Mistake*, the writer Paul Bailey describes how as an adolescent in the early 1950s he hid pictures of men in his copy of the collected poems of John Donne:

I never stoop'd so low, as they
Which on an eye, cheeke, lip, can prey...

I read, stooping low to admire his eyes, cheeks, lips, neck, shoulders, chest and arms - all that was gloriously visible - of Marlon Brando. I kept his treasured photograph, torn from a film magazine, in my Oxford edition of the poems of John Donne, where I knew it would be safe.¹⁹

Early in their courtship, my sister had left her wallet on the front-room table. Besides money, it contained photographs - one of our father, and three of Cliff [her boyfriend]. In two of these, Cliff was standing on the deck of his [merchant navy] ship, wearing nothing but swimming trunks. The snapshots were almost identical. My heart beat fast as I stole the slightly more revealing photograph and slipped it into the inside pocket of my blazer.

Late that night, I transferred it to the safest of my hiding places - the Oxford edition of Donne's poems.²⁰

In their search for proof of illegal acts in the 1950s, detectives of different kinds scrutinised men and their belongings. Many different clues, bits and pieces of evidence became the tell-tale signs or symptoms of homosexuality. Evidence of different kinds was accumulated, collated and interpreted in order to make an arrest, promote a prosecution and support a diagnosis. Photographs played an important part in the symbiotic processes of detection and concealment. For the art historian engaged on an investigation into

the associations between visual culture and sexual pleasures between men, acts of concealment are fuel to detection, and an investigation soon becomes a search to find what has been concealed, and a series of frustrations haunted by photographs that have been hidden or destroyed, and thwarted by the unavailability of images that were used to support a legal prosecution or a medical diagnosis but that now languish in official files; physically unavailable and beyond interpretation. And as Harry Shears knew the photographs that one gets to see but don't really know, or don't have a clue how they make sense, are equally frustrating.

Looking for artists and images that have been forgotten, marginalised or deliberately obscured is one way for the art historian interested in the associations between social, sexual and aesthetic practices and pleasures to go about their profession. Locating personal and private pictures of famous artists suspected of 'homosexuality' is a popular approach to this kind of investigation. The subsequent publication of an artist's private pictures is one way of identifying their homosexuality and establishing the relationship between their sexual and aesthetic pleasures and practices. Gay Men's Press have published a few books of this kind, but none are quite as satisfying as *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant* which provides numerous examples of male nudes, men touching, wrestling, sucking and fucking, that were produced by the Bloomsbury artist throughout his career. The book provides ample proof of an intimate knowledge of sexual pleasures between men, enough to satisfy the interests of any professional inquisitor. However, just for good measure, the visual evidence is bolstered by an introduction that associates Duncan Grant's sketches to the paintings, etchings and drawings of the exemplary gay artist, David Hockney; an association that almost always guarantees to establish proof of 'homosexuality'. In his introduction Douglas Blair Turnbaugh writes:

Through his art, in these images, Duncan Grant bequeaths to anybody with liberated common sense this golden fleece, this legacy of interpretation of his consciously personal, original experience. What incredible power these fragile, vulnerable images hold for us today. It is a legacy of optimism and hope in time of despair. Against the evil of ignorance which the AIDS epidemic enforces, here is evidence which interprets a gay life experience as good, normal, beautiful, fun, human,

loving. Few artists at any time in the Judaeo-Christian period have had the courage, or perhaps the experience, to make these statements. (David Hockney, born in 1937, is of course the happy exception, a gay hero who picks up the torch from Duncan Grant.)²¹ [my emphasis]

For the professional detective, an unambiguous representation of an explicit sexual men between men is conclusive proof that they have found what they have been hoping and searching for. Any further consideration of the representation's sexual texture; the enunciation of the sexual and textual act, or the contextual environment in which it may be located, could be interesting background and epiphenomenal detail but is really of little consequence, and is certainly not the point of the picture.

For example, Duncan Grant's swift ball-point sketch *Sailor Fellating a Nude* (figure 10) can easily become an unambiguous abstraction of homosexuality if we focus on the nude's cock in the sailor's mouth and insist that this part of the picture represents the whole. However, Duncan Grant's sketch could be read as a dense condensation of social and sexual practices between two men of different races, types, forms, compartments, and perhaps classes that makes particular kinds of sense in and around a sexual and contextual archive made up art objects, popular images and everyday pleasures. Disciplined and professional attention to the point of contact between the lips of the kneeling 'sailor' and the cock of the standing 'nude' however, enable the sketch to be viewed as epiphenomenon of homosexual content; sexual texture is displaced and replaced by an interpretation with all the virtues of common sense.

The touch of the sailor's lips on the nude's cock could be described as an insistent and culturally overdetermined 'punctum', so comprehensively maintained as the point of professional attention that it is difficult to focus on any other part of Duncan Grant's sketch. For many disciplines this touch would be *prima facie* evidence of homosexuality. Indeed the sight of an erect cock, let alone the sight of one man's lips caressing the cock of another, is proof enough to constitute an official identification and a homosexual offence, and would need to be obscured for a prosecution to be confidently avoided. The commitment of gay liberation to

'coming out' and ending social and sexual invisibility and censorship, retains and sustains the legal and disciplinary importance of explicit sexual acts between men, and invigorates the point of contact between the 'sailor's' lips and the 'nude's' cock in Duncan Grant's sketch. Without conclusive proof of physical contact of this kind, it's more difficult to sustain a conviction, of the legal, political, theoretical or psychoanalytic kind. But it's not impossible, as many men can testify, and the resolution of ambiguity is an impetus to sexual and textual detection.

The Heart in Exile by Rodney Garland was published in the same year that Francis Bacon painted *Two Figures* 1953, and like *Winger's Landfall* and *Victim* is a detective story sustained by a photograph that requires investigation. Rodney Garland's novel is an exemplary example of the intimate associations between the identification of visual texts, particularly photographs, the mechanisms of legal and psychoanalytic detection and sexual pleasures between men in the 1950s.

The hero of *The Heart In Exile's* is Dr. Anthony Page, a psychoanalyst who turns amateur detective to solve the mystery surrounding Julian Leclerc's suicide. Anthony and Julian were lovers for a summer before the war, but then lost touch. In the intervening years they have come across one another in one or other of the pubs or clubs that make up what Dr. Page calls the homosexual "underworld". Dr. Page reads about Julian's death in the papers, but a week later is visited by Julian's fiancé who, believing that the association between Dr. Page and Julian was professional, asks if he knows any reasons why her future husband killed himself. Dr. Page doesn't tell Ann Hewitt what he knows about Julian, but he proposes to take on the case, not as a psychoanalyst, but as an amateur detective. Like Harry Shears and Roland Barthes, Dr. Anthony Page is both detective, and a practitioner of 'homosexual' pleasures.

The investigation begins with a search of Julian's flat. According to Dr. Page, at first glance there looked to be no clues to Julian's homosexuality and no clues that can help to solve the mystery of his suicide; no address book; no letters or personal photographs and we

should note for future reference no photographs of young men in "Graeco-Roman poses with oil on the body". Like so many men in the 1950s, Julian had been scrupulous in hiding or disposing of the evidence of his 'homosexuality'. In fact there looks to be nothing in the flat to suggest that Julian Leclerc was anything other than an ordinary former guardsman turned solicitor about to marry the young woman whose photograph on the mantelpiece Dr. Page notices just before the one object that doesn't fit the harmony of the scene catches his eye; a cigarette box, "shiny metal, cheap, shoddy and with a jazzy design, the kind of thing one might win at a fun fair":

Nothing could have been more out of place in this conservative, reticent room with its Cecil Aldins, its country suits, its Harrow and Guards ties. It seemed obvious that someone had given it to Julian and that he had kept it for emotional reasons.²²

This "out of place" object is the one clue with the potential to suggest that Julian had a secret. Dr. Page finds more conclusive proof where his training in psychoanalysis should have lead him straight away. The vital clue to solve the mystery of Julian's suicide is found (re)pressed behind the photograph of the young woman he was just about to marry. As Dr. Page takes the photograph of Julian's fiancé from its frame with the intention of returning it to Ann, a photograph of a young man falls to the ground and immediately becomes the cornerstone of Dr. Page's investigation, and identifying the young man the key to its solution. Dr. Anthony Page, psychoanalyst turned amateur detective and practitioner of 'homosexual' pleasures, enters the social and sexual "underworld" of London searching to identify the young man whose photograph he now carries in his pocket. Like Harry Shears and Roland Barthes, Dr. Page is an amateur detective with an insider's knowledge; but unlike Roland Barthes, he is confident that he can find a solution.

The combination of psychoanalysis and amateur detection in *The Heart in Exile*, and there use to identify the young man in the photograph, is redolent of Carlo Ginzburg's essay *Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes*, and his analysis of the shared disciplinary commitments of criminal detection, psychoanalysis and art history. Carlo Ginzburg investigates the commitments of these disciplines to the potential of "tiny details" to provide a "key to a deeper reality,

inaccessible by other methods". For the art historian thinking about visual culture and sexual pleasures between men, Carlo Ginzburg's essay easily evokes that moment in Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century when the nexus of these three disciplines coalesced to provide a way of understanding social and sexual practices and pleasures between men who could just about call themselves and their acts 'homosexual'.

For the resolutely superficial investigator, this evocation of the nineteenth century economy of social practices and sexual pleasures, can be supported by an almost unavoidable suspicion, supported by reading Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, about the true nature of the relationship between those other two confirmed and somewhat ambiguous bachelors of the late nineteenth century, Sherlock Holmes and his close friend Dr. Watson.²³ Of course the connections between detection, homosexuality and art history also bring to mind the work of Sigmund Freud, most particularly his essay *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*. It is also impossible not to mention the work of John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis, who in the late nineteenth century brought together understandings of sexual and aesthetic pleasures from the disciplines of medicine and art history. These connections also bring to mind innumerable legal, medical and theoretical investigations of the sexual and textual pleasures and practices of Oscar Wilde, including both his own example of homosexual detection *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, and his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Today the figure and figurations of Oscar Wilde are prime examples of a tendency for disciplined theoreticians and investigators, committed to explicating the connections between homosexual subjectivity and subject matter, to focus on a small selection of late nineteenth and early twentieth century texts which are thought to be ambiguous and in need of the attentions of "qualified mystery-solvers", like Dr. Anthony Page.²⁴ A quick look at a couple of recent investigations of putative connections between visual texts and 'homosexuality' will demonstrate how this detective mode of interpretation is put into practice on visual texts that are initially represented as ambiguous

Jonathan Weinburg's interpretation of paintings and sketches by the American artist Charles Demuth is sustained by a belief in the coherent establishment of homosexual subjectivity at the beginning of the twentieth century; consequently Charles Demuth's work can be understood as expressions of a repressed homosexual subjectivity and sub-culture. I'm not so sure. According to Jonathan Weinburg, 'ambiguity' functions in the work of Charles Demuth "as a kind of filter, allowing the initiated into a world of forbidden pleasures, while locking out those who know nothing about such practices." This understanding of some cultural products as necessarily coded, encourages the professional fixer of meaning to become a specialised form of code breaker. In this case, Jonathan Weinburg's deciphering of Charles Demuth's paintings requires the detective to enter the social and physical environments of their production and consumption in search of evidence that can turn the picture from code to plain text and resolve their ambiguity.

However, Jonathan Weinburg's conception of Charles Demuth's work as disguised expressions of homosexuality is utterly dependent upon knowing what homosexuality looks like if it's not in code. For example, in his 'cracking' of Charles Demuth's water-colour, *Turkish Bath Scene With Self-Portrait* (figure 11), Jonathan Weinburg's approach is reminiscent of an undercover detective's, perhaps the approach of an *agent provocateur*. Jonathan Weinburg enters the scene aiming to identify it as homosexual subject matter; he collects evidence, interprets clues, makes inferences and provokes the figure with his back towards the viewer to drop his towel, turn around and provide a clear view of what he, the detective, suspects is going on. Jonathan Weinburg follows his provocative interpretation with a plea for improved lighting, reminiscent of both the Wolfenden Committee's discussion of public toilets and the clear delineation of homosexual subjects and gay liberation's commitment to visibility:

Finally, there are the extraordinary red washes Demuth uses to color the central figures, which give their bodies an unnatural, almost sinister cast. It is clear that we are faced not with an innocent encounter but the performance or planning of an act that is forbidden by the prevailing legal and moral standards of the society.

At this point Jonathan Weinberg's approach looks less like a subtle act of provocation and incitement, and more like a police raid; the scene is flooded with interpretive daylight that promotes a process of homosexual identification and the theoretical production of an uncoded representation of homosexuality.

It's important to consider that the 'ambiguity' of *Turkish Bath Scene With Self-Portrait* may be an intimate part of the history of public baths as homosocial spaces that cannot be simply identified as one of a limited number of sites where homosexuality could be almost freely expressed. These sites of male encounter were also spaces in which irresolute and sometimes discreet practices and pleasures took place that could not necessarily be identified as 'homosexual'; places where sexuality was generated and not simply expressed.²⁵ The intimate associations between these social and sexual spaces, and forms of practice and pleasure between men that can not be understood by the designation 'homosexual', suggests that Charles Demuth's water-colour really doesn't need to be identified as an ambiguous representation of something that could be identified if considered in the clear light of day. Approaches of this kind, that promote their investigation according to the protocols of detection, make it clear that the gay art historian has the potential to become an *agent provocateur* and enter the historical archive attempting to provoke and incite homosexuality, and identify subjects and subject matter through the accumulation of scraps of evidence that will eventually sustain a homosexual conviction.

This sounds like a damning criticism, but it is not. Homosexual subjectivity makes very little sense without the protocols of detection. It may be quite impossible for the art historian, interested in the associations between visual culture and homosexuality, not to be something of an *agent provocateur*, a spy or professional code breaker; perhaps a cross between a plain clothes policeman hanging around a public toilet who starts to tune in and respond to the practices and pleasures he detects, the spy Guy Burgess and the code-breaker Alan Turing; and Harry Shears and Roland Barthes.²⁶

Of course the art historian has other options, they can set about their investigations like the psychoanalyst turned amateur detective Dr. Anthony Page, whose confidence in his own interpretations is almost overwhelming, making use of that specialised kind of detection and interpretation which is psychoanalysis. Ambiguity is the incitement of theoretical analysis, and once more the end of the nineteenth century is the place to find 'ambiguous' visual texts. *The Swimming Hole* by Thomas Eakins is a painting able to generate and sustain a great deal of analysis.²⁷

In his essay *Erotic Revision in Thomas Eakins's Narrative of Male Nudity*, Whitney Davis works like a kind of analyst and attempts to understand where "subjective sexuality" can be found within the frame of the painting. In a complex and somewhat overwrought essay, Whitney Davis elaborates a process of production for *The Swimming Hole* using the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, and formulates a linear archaeology that moves from the finished painting, through preliminary sketches to the initial, perhaps primal, preparatory photographs. Through the production of this archaeology Whitney Davis traces the gradual revision of "frontal genital nudity" from the end to the beginning of the painting's production. Whitney Davis, like Jonathan Weinberg and many other art historians who undertake similar projects, understands "frontal genital nudity" as the "maximum visibility of social relations in their hierarchically organised, erotic and sexual aspect".²⁸

Whitney Davis proposes that genital visibility, as the privileged representative of homosexual content, can be perceived in the finished painting's "imaginary dimension", somewhere around the distorted form of the diving figure's reflection. Apparently the failure of this reflection to conform to the painting's "science, order and unity" reveals "subjective sexuality" of the homosexual kind; symbolised, or symptomised, as genital visibility and physical contact. According to Whitney Davis, if the painting is turned on its head, the hand of the swimming figure, identified as the representative of the painter Thomas Eakins, reaches out to touch the distorted reflection of the diver's upper thigh, and the swimmer's gaze looks as though it's focused directly on the distorted reflection of the diver's genitals. If Jonathan

Weinberg's interpretation looked like a police raid, this appears to be a psychoanalyst's attempt to insist that an analysand's symptoms fit his theoretical formulations; the interpretation is only convincing if the premises on which it is based are accepted.

Whitney Davis is not unlike Dr. Anthony Page, and his interpretation of *The Swimming Hole* is similar to the fictional analyst's search of Julian Leclerc's flat. The clue that points towards homosexuality is revealed as a revolt against harmony, a "fissure" in order; and like Jonathan Weinburg's interpretation of the water-colours of Charles Demuth, the exemplary expression of homosexual content is for Whitney Davis the formulation of an unobscured view of a self evidently sexual act between men. Like any professional agent provocateur committed to creating evidence, proof of homosexuality requires getting a good look at the subject's cock. The interpretive confidence of Whitney Davis and Dr. Anthony Page, is sustained by the establishment of psychoanalytic protocols in and around homosexual subjectivity since its inception in the late nineteenth century; protocols that were given institutional encouragement after the Second World War, in Britain through the publication of the Wolfenden Report.

In his complex combining of historicism and hermeneutics, Whitney Davis doesn't really allow his historical research to disturb his theoretical interpretation too much, and in this respect his approach is not dissimilar to others that are also interested in the disruption, disintegration or dissolution of established pictorial orders, that use psychoanalytic protocols to make sense of visual texts. Jacques Lacan's interpretation of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* is just the most obvious and influential example. Whitney Davis turns his painting on its head to perceive a distorted shape, "a ghostly image outlined with bluish stripes" that "extends in a long arc coming forward toward the picture plane"; this interpretative move, and shape, is not unlike Jacques Lacan's interpretation of the anamorphic skull that floats in the foreground of Hans Holbein's painting. Like the cigarette box found in Julian Leclerc's flat, these figurations are examples of anamorphosis. According to Jacques Lacan they are perceptual disturbances that undermine our confidence in imaginary order.

In his introduction to the work of Jacques Lacan, Malcolm Bowie has expressed some reservations about his use of *The Ambassadors* that with few changes could be applied to many psychoanalytically inflected interpretations of visual texts, including the interpretation of *The Swimming Hole* by Whitney Davis:

And once Lacan has allegorised Holbein's detail in this fashion everything else in the painting can be spirited away. Its conceits and enigmas, its inventive interplay of surface and edge, colour and texture, are of no particular interest once a universal key to human vision has been found.²⁹

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic protocol of coherent form and its disruption is particularly important for any consideration of the associations between visual texts and male homosexuality. It's entirely appropriate for a psychoanalytic analysis committed to locating the point of "subjective sexuality", of the homosexual kind, in a visual or written text to attach itself to the part that disrupts and undermines established and institutionalised harmonies. Quite simply, the point is castration. About Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* Jacques Lacan writes:

All this shows that at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometral optics was an object of research, Holbein makes visible for us something that is simply the subject as annihilated - annihilated in the form that is, strictly speaking, the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* of castration, which for us, centres the whole organisation of the drives.³⁰

Psychoanalytic insistence that sexual practices and pleasures between men have ontological implications, has led to a number of theoretical and political appropriations that use psychoanalytic protocols to disturb and disrupt instituted authorities, and particular kinds of psychoanalytic practice, to coalesce around the point of castration. This is the point at which some gay theorists locate the potential of psychoanalysis to offer a kind of escape from its own constraining and disciplinary logics.

In the strict script of classical psychoanalysis the homosexual subject exists on the border of stable meaning, and in a very literal sense is formulated as an outlaw who confuses or refuses the

difference of the "to be" and "to have" of the Oedipal scenario's phallic economy. John Fletcher has written of how homosexuality is "classically defined by psychoanalysis as the refusal or disavowal of castration".³¹ According to Kenneth Lewes the Oedipal complex:

...marks the end of autoeroticism and narcissism and ushers in true object-relatedness. For Freud, it was abolished in the unconscious by the threat of castration, to survive only in traces in pathological psychic structures. Many of the arguments about the "unnaturalness" of homosexuality maintain that the persistence of homosexual object choice is prima facie evidence either that the Oedipal complex has not been worked through or that its experience was so traumatic that it caused a major psychosexual regression to a primitive pre-oedipal stage.³²

Gay, or perhaps queer, appropriations of psychoanalysis largely agree with psychoanalysts who understand homosexuality as "stemming from an essentially borderline personality structure with its characteristic primitive object relations", but value the proffered instability of subjectivity and an "unstable self structure" over the achievement of stable and heterosexual object choice. Kenneth Lewes has suggested "twelve possible resolutions of the Oedipus complex, in terms of sexual identity and object choice" which can contain homosexuality within the Oedipal structure. In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* Kaja Silverman proposes a similar accommodation of the homosexual subject within the Oedipal paradigm, in which she exploits the possibility that homosexuality is a matter of gender identification. The oscillation between being within or without the Oedipal scenario, accepting or disavowing its logics, is important for many contemporary cultural theorists interested in the connections between cultural products and male homosexuality.

Strategies of Deviance by Earl Jackson Jnr. is one of the most uncompromising examples of the appropriation of psychoanalytic protocols that locates gay subjectivity at the precise, but ambiguous, point of being within or being without the Oedipal scenario. Earl Jackson Jnr. proposes that gay subjectivity is a "double articulation", a "split vision", a subject "at once inside and outside the centre of power", caught between 'being' and 'having', subject and object, "phallic citizenship and sodomitical forfeiture". In this formulation gay subjectivity errs in favour of narcissistic rather than anaclitic object choice, is committed to

'for' rather than 'end' pleasure, and to the principle of pleasure rather than reality. In his complex, and surprisingly disciplined, application of a simple formula, Earl Jackson Jnr. values cultural products that are multiple, fragmented, partial, unfixed, "pulsative", "episodic", "stroboscopic" and "polycentric". Cultural products that come close to non-meaning are valued over those that insist on a singular and absolute comprehension. Earl Jackson Jnr. insists on a correlation between gay male subjectivity and the modern avant-garde text, and explores differences between stability and instability that can be found within the 'frame' of the cultural product.

In interpretive formulas like Earl Jackson's cultural products are conceived as illustrations of theoretical mechanisms. But ironically the theoretical formula doesn't impinge upon the approach to research, which remains an overwhelmingly disciplined process of academic detection. But we can turn to Sigmund Freud's *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* for an example of a somewhat less formulaic approach to interpretation.

In *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*, Sigmund Freud suggests a form of engagement with a visual text that simultaneously provides a disciplined formula for its decoding and also demonstrates an encounter that, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, "does not close explanation off, but rather opens it to a whole density of meaning". Of Sigmund Freud's *The Moses of Michelangelo*, Paul Ricoeur writes:

An endless commentary opens up, which, far from reducing the enigma, multiplies it. Is this not an admission that the psychoanalysis of art is interminable?³³

Sigmund Freud's interpretation of Leonardo da Vinci's memory in which a bird flies down to his cradle, opens his mouth and strikes him on his lips with its tail, has two modes of analysis.³⁴ In one mode the condensations and displacements of the memory, interpreted as a phantasy, are mapped through a centrifugal encompassing of a diverse range of theoretical and historical materials; in a co-existing mode a centripetal movement insists that the "real content" of the phantasy is "passive" homosexuality, originally determined by

the absence of Leonardo da Vinci's father during the early years of his childhood, and the consequent over-indulgent care he received from his mother. It's important to note that the content of the memory is founded on the point of contact between the birds tail and the mouth of the young Leonardo da Vinci's, and that this part of the memory is an expression of a "passive homosexual phantasy". This proposition suggests that Sigmund Freud's essay could be a pretext for other examples of detection and interpretation that focus on similar visible contact points or 'punctums'.

Anyway, the archaeological fixing of the phantasy to the events of Leonardo da Vinci's childhood is a narrative of development and a model for the resolution of mysteries. However, the alternative is to follow Paul Ricoeur and take a look at how Sigmund Freud associates the memory with some of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings; a form of association that questions the simple choice between stability and instability, visibility and invisibility, that have so far looked like the only theoretical option available for considering the relationship between sexual pleasures and visual texts.

Sigmund Freud suggests that it is the 'smile' that associates Leonardo da Vinci's memory to his paintings. In a certain light, the 'smile' can be interpreted as a part object that represents the over indulgent maternal care that Leonardo da Vinci received in his early years due to his father's absence, and therefore the visual symptom of the artists passive homosexuality. Paul Ricoeur has pointed out however, that in Sigmund Freud's archaeology the 'smile' is not simply a part that represents a whole, and not a metaphor or symptom or simple repetition. Of the 'smile' in Leonardo da Vinci's *John the Baptist and Bacchus* Sigmund Freud writes:

The figures are still androgynous, but no longer in the sense of the vulture fantasy. They are beautiful youths of feminine delicacy and with effeminate forms; they do not cast their eyes down, but gaze in mysterious triumph, as if they knew of a great achievement of happiness, about which silence must be kept. The familiar smile of fascination leads one to guess that it is a secret of love. It is possible that in these figures Leonardo has denied the unhappiness of his erotic life and has triumphed over it in his art, by representing the wishes of the boy, infatuated with his mother, as fulfilled in

this blissful union of male and female natures.³⁵ [my emphasis]

Paul Ricoeur explore what Sigmund Freud may have meant by "denied" and "triumphed over" in the final sentence of this quotation, and suggests that Leonardo da Vinci's later paintings may be "something other than a mere repetition of the fantasy, an exhibition of desire, a simple bringing to light of what was hidden".³⁶ According to Paul Ricoeur it looks as though for Leonardo da Vinci something has changed, and that the vertical and absolute attachment of the 'smile' to the past has become detached and diffused, come to be located in and amongst other signs in a different context. The cultural product for Paul Ricoeur is both "symptom" and "cure", and the movement of sublimation in which the sexual drive is "diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim", particularly "artistic creation and intellectual inquiry", is a movement that promotes "new meanings by mobilising old energies initially invested in archaic figures".

Psychoanalysis thus invites us to move from a first and purely reductive reading to a second reading of cultural phenomena. The task of that second reading is not so much to unmask the repressed and the agency of repression in order to show what lies behind the masks, as to set free the interplay of references between signs: having set out to find the absent reality signified by desire - the smile of the lost mother - we are referred back by this very absence, to the unreal smile of the Gioconda. The only thing that gains a presence in the artist's fantasies is the work of art; and the reality thus conferred upon them is the reality of the work of art within a world of culture.³⁷

Paul Ricoeur's proposition of a choice between vertical interpretation and what may be understood as the mapping of an overdetermined "interplay" of signs, is located at a very particular moment in French intellectual history. Paul Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay On Interpretation* was written in conjunction with encounters with Jacques Lacan's weekly Seminar.³⁸ So was *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.³⁹ Before taking a look at the influential *Anti-Oedipus*, I want to take a short excursus through the work of the pioneer of child psychoanalysis Melanie Klein.

In the twelfth session of her four month analysis of the ten year old Richard, that began in 1939, Melanie Klein brought "pencils,

crayons, and a pad of writing paper" into the room and placed them on a table. During the session Richard produced three drawings and Melanie Klein asked Richard what his drawings were about (figure 12). Melanie Klein reports that this is what Richard said:

Richard said there was an attack going on, but he did not know who would attack first, *Salmon* or the U Boat. He pointed at U102 and said that 10 was his age; and to U16 he associated the age of John Wilson [also in analysis with Melanie Klein]. He was surprised when he realised the unconscious meaning of these numbers and extremely interested to find that drawing could be a means of expressing unconscious thoughts.⁴⁰

Melanie Klein provides Richard with interpretations of his drawings in much the same way as she provides interpretations of his play. Parts of the Richard's drawings become symbols for himself and his family. For example:

Mrs K. interpreted that the British represented his own family and that he had already recognised that he not only loved and wished to protect but also wished to attack them (Split in the ego); this appeared from the drawings where he was allied with John, who also partly stood for his brother. But since John was being analysed by *Mrs K.*, he appeared as an ally against her whenever Richard felt towards her the same hostility as he experienced towards his family. *Mrs K.* reminded him how upset he had been when the little girl had taken him for an Italian (Tenth Session) and that she had interpreted that he felt so strongly about that because it meant being treacherous towards the British - his parents. The British *Truant* and *Sunfish* represented his parents whom he, together with John (standing for Paul), attacked.⁴¹

In this interpretation Melanie Klein provides Richard with symbolic representatives for parts of his drawings, and her provision of these symbolic interpretations allays his anxieties about the confusing and conflicted world in which he lived in 1939. Figures within Richard's drawings are utilised as representatives of a more fundamental drama that provides a framework for the professional fixer of meaning, Melanie Klein, to produce particular kinds of sense.

Leo Bersani has noted that Melanie Klein, in her 1923 essay *Early Analysis*, presents a conception of sublimation similar to that of Paul Ricoeur's in *Freud and Philosophy*; a conception that may undermine her disciplined interpretation of Richard's drawings. In *The Pleasure of Intelligence* Leo Bersani proposes that sublimation

in *Early Analysis* is not a "substitutive formation for some original (but now repressed) pleasure-situation", but that "sexuality provides the energy of sublimated interests without defining their terms". The connection that Melanie Klein makes in *Early Analysis* between psychoanalysis, anxiety and the modern city is of particular interest:

Hitherto he had been free from anxiety, but during the analysis intense anxiety made its appearance and was analytically resolved. In the last stage of this analysis a phobia of street-boys manifested. This was connected with the fact that he had repeatedly been molested by boys in the streets. He displayed fear of them and finally could not be persuaded to go into the street alone. I could not get at this phobia analytically, because for external reasons the analysis could not be continued, but I learnt that, soon after we broke it off, the phobia completely disappeared and was succeeded by a peculiar pleasure in roaming about.⁴²

The pleasure in roaming, free from anxiety, is not unlike the metonymic slide of sublimation suggested by Paul Ricoeur and Leo Bersani in his reading of Melanie Klein's *Early Analysis*, and evokes the intimate relationship between homosexuality, psychoanalysis and modernity that Michel Foucault argues for in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, and which Henning Bech has recently explored in *When Men Meet*, in which he argues a case for understanding male homosexual subjectivity and modernity as coextensive and intimately imbricated.

In *Anti-Oedipus* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari propose that Melanie Klein's later work, in which parts of practice and pleasure are metaphoric representations of the dramas of early infancy, is involved in the repressive project of psychoanalytic interpretation. But they also suggest that her conception of 'partial objects' has the potential to "blow up all of Oedipus and totally demolish its ridiculous claim to represent the unconscious".⁴³

According to Melanie Klein the infants first attachments are to 'part objects', the first of which is the breast. The infant's attachment is initially propped on hunger but through a contiguous and metonymic connection slides "from the milk to the breast as its symbol", and the practice and pleasure of suckling becomes separated from nutrition. According to Jean Laplanche the world remains

partial until "the total object - the mother as person - begins to emerge".⁴⁴ According to Jacques Lacan this imaginary cohering of the child's world takes place through the acquisition of symbolic language. In *Anti-Oedipus* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari formulate a conception of desire as production, that retains and sustains the unrepresentative metonymic, contiguous and contingent slide of desire across part objects, fragments, scraps, bits and pieces. Of the young child's experience of his world, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write:

The small child lives with his family around the clock; but within the bosom of this family, and from the very first days of his life, he immediately begins having an amazing non familial experience that psychoanalysis has completely failed to take into account.⁴⁵

Rather than understanding desire as a process of expression, it is presented in *Anti-Oedipus* as a productive and ongoing metonymic attachment to parts that do not represent the whole parental and gendered objects of the Oedipal scenario, but moves across fragments enmeshed within the complexities of social, geographic, political and economic worlds.

We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers. We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity.⁴⁶

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari associate their formulation of desire as production with the psychoanalytic formulas of Jacques Lacan, and his conception of the *objet a*. In a footnote the authors of *Anti-Oedipus* point out the oscillation in Jacques Lacan's conception of desire between the *objet a* "as a desiring-machine, which defines desire in terms of real production" and the "great Other", the phallic signifier, "which reintroduces a certain notion of lack"; an alternation that can be understood in linguistic terms as a movement between metonymy and metaphor. But in *Anti-Oedipus* desire is not dualistic, and does not move between opposing poles but is produced within a singular, monistic and immanent space that

has no absolute boundaries or singular perimeter, like a precinct of the modern city.⁴⁷

The potential of *Anti-Oedipus* for gay theory has been explored by Guy Hocquenghem in *Homosexual Desire*, the influential precursor of a number of approaches that utilise psychoanalytic protocols to represent the homosexual as a borderline psychotic subject. In *Homosexual Desire* a connection between desire, homosexuality and modernity is formulated that attaches gay cruising to "the schizophrenic out for a walk", the alternative presented in *Anti-Oedipus* to the "neurotic lying on the analyst's couch". Guy Hocquenghem's describes gay cruising like this:

In truth, the pick-up machine is not concerned with names or sexes. The drift where all encounters become possible is the moment in which desire produces and feels no guilt. Anyone who has witnessed the strange balletic quality of a regular homosexual pick-up haunt will be deeply attuned to Proust's description of the innocence of flowers.⁴⁸

Though this understanding of cruising is appealing, and not unlike Roland Barthes, who also read *Anti-Oedipus*, it is too abstract, too romantic.

In his use of Melanie Klein's *Early Analysis*, Leo Bersani imagines:

...an erotic art independent of the anxieties inherent in desire. No longer a corrective replay of anxious fantasy, such an art would re-instate a curiously disinterested mode of desire for objects, a mode of excitement which far from investing them with symbolic significance, would enhance their specificity and thereby fortify their resistance to the violence of symbolic intent.⁴⁹

This idea of sublimation in which the specificity of partial objects is enhanced, offers a way of reading cultural products that does not simply oscillate between stability and disruption. However, Leo Bersani's work can offer little further help in formulating an alternative to a dualistic paradigm that can pay historical attention to the movement of desire across partial objects.

Now, after our theoretical excursus, we could call it a cruise, we can return to Francis Bacon's painting, and just wonder what sense we can make of his two 'wrestling' figures. It's certainly possible

that *Two Figures 1953* could be the kind of avant-garde text of which Earl Jackson Jnr. would approve. Francis Bacon's painting doesn't look to be harmonious, and the different parts of the painting may not produce just one kind of identifiable sense. But *Two Figures 1953* does make some sense, and whilst this may be multiple, it does not necessarily represent multiplicity, unfixity and indeterminacy.

We could of course leave these two 'wrestlers' alone, and not interpret or identify what they are about. Leo Bersani's recent encounter with Michel Foucault may help. This encounter, in his latest book *Homos*, provides an important example of the dangers of interpretation and the capacity for psychoanalysis to obscure sexual texture.

In *Homos* Leo Bersani can't resist the temptation to interpret a scene that Michel Foucault suggests requires no form of professional intervention. Michel Foucault presents two happy gay men on the streets of the city:

People can tolerate two homosexuals they see leaving together, but if the next day they're smiling, holding hands and tenderly embracing one another, they can't be forgiven. It is not the departure for pleasure that is intolerable, it is waking up happy.⁵⁰

Leo Bersani simply can't leave these two guys alone and decides to "conjecture about how they spent the night". It serves our purpose to just imagine that these two happy gays on the street are the same two guys as appear in Francis Bacon's painting, and that they spent the night involved in some pretty vigorous 'wrestling'.

Using Michel Foucault's interest in the practices of S/M, Leo Bersani decides that these happy gays have spent the night involved in practices and pleasures of the S/M kind. But S/M does not mean the same to Michel Foucault as it does to Leo Bersani.⁵¹ For Michel Foucault S/M is a formal practice; part of the changing economy of some men's pleasures and social relations that he discerned was taking place in a particular place at a particular time.⁵² But for Leo Bersani, actually a pretty professional fixer of meaning more akin to Dr. A. Page than Harry Shears or Roland Barthes, S/M is the expression of "psychoanalytic truth". In a move of quite alarming

confidence and interpretive violence, Leo Bersani makes his point stick by suggesting that Michel Foucault's practical approach to S/M is unable to explain why these pleasures are susceptible to the signs and symbols of Nazism. We're really not too far away from Francis Bacon at this point. It has been suggested that the passionate perhaps violent texture of his paintings may be related to his own interest in extreme sexual sensations, and also some interpreters of his paintings have found it difficult to deal with his use of Nazi symbols.⁵³

Anyway, the importance of S/M for Leo Bersani is not its potential to produce new forms of social and political practice and pleasure, but its demonstration of "the continuity between political structures of oppression and the body's erotic economy", no problem, but apparently "S/M is the extravagantly fantasmatic logos of the psyche". As in Guy Hocquenghem's formulation of cruising, Leo Bersani creates an abstraction that can suck out the texture and particularity of any social, sexual and aesthetic practice or pleasure; ignoring the codes of comportments, dress, rituals, acts, moves, modes, languages and indeed the whole complex of differential metonymies, partial objects, bits and pieces, scraps and fragments that are brought together differently, in different times and different places, to form social, sexual and aesthetic delights and diversions between men.

Leo Bersani really subjects the differential economy of S/M practices to the violence of symbolic interpretation. Guy Hocquenghem's abstraction of cruising from its particular time and place enacts a similar kind of interpretive violence. Leo Bersani's reading of S/M can evoke the warning contained in the opening sentence of Jacques Derrida's reading of Jacques Lacan's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*:

Psychoanalysis, supposedly, is found.⁵⁴

Through the processes of revealing, unmasking, denuding, deciphering, psychoanalysis finds itself.

By denuding the meaning behind the formal disguise, by undoing the work, analytic deciphering exhibits the primary content beneath the secondary revision.⁵⁵

The truth that is found by Jacques Lacan in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, according to Jacques Derrida, is a formal truth that has no need to deal with the contextual environments in which the object of analysis is located and makes its particular kinds of sense. According to Jacques Derrida the object or subject undergoing analysis is taken from its contextual place and analysed in the professional and sterile environment of the analyst's office, where truth is absence, lack, castration, "castration as truth":

By determining the place of the lack, the topos of that which is lacking from its place, and in constituting it as a fixed centre, Lacan is indeed proposing, at the same as a truth - discourse, a discourse on the truth of the purloined letter as the truth of *The Purloined Letter*.⁵⁶

Jacques Derrida argues that Jacques Lacan frames *The Purloined Letter* and imposes a limit upon its "disseminal structure". According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jacques Derrida's form of deconstruction also has the potential to obscure the texture of texts, especially when used as a tool that represents the homosexual subject as the deconstructor *par excellence*.⁵⁷ However, metonymic moves of productive desire, dissemination, cruising, anxiety free pleasure in roaming through places and texts, all take place within very particular social, geographic, political, economic and contextual environments that provide a cartography through which to walk, a pattern, a kind of structure that is utterly particular and in which the difference between opposing forces certainly play a part, but do not bifurcate the whole available geographic or archival space. Space of this kind can be understood as a singular but differential place, a geographic area, like Soho, whose boundary is unclear and permeable.

An exploration of the historical contingencies of cruising can at this point be formulated through an encounter with the figure and figurations of Oscar Wilde. Oscar Wilde is something of a problem for contemporary gay studies. Just like *The Swimming Hole* by Thomas Eakins, the ambiguity of the figure and figurations of Oscar Wilde

call out for some kind of resolution and generate innumerable projects of interpretation. Neil Bartlett has demonstrated the ambivalence of 'Oscar Wilde', especially when perceived using the protocols of contemporary gay politics and theory, particularly of the British literary kind.⁵⁸ Often these approaches insist on making a choice between 'Oscar Wilde' as perversely subversive and dissident or ultimately reactionary and complicit with the social order.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out that the "gay possibility" of Oscar Wilde seems to hinge upon understanding him and his texts as "the perfect fulfilment of a modernist or post-modern project of meaning-destabilisation and identity-destabilisation", a kind of Jacques Derrida or Jacques Lacan "avant la lettre".⁵⁹ In 'Tales Of The Avunculate', Eve Sedgwick refuses to situate her reading of *The Importance Of Being Earnest* between the poles of stability and instability, sameness and difference. Rather than interpreting Oscar Wilde's play according to an oscillation determined by its denouement, when the name of the father returns to its proper place and order is restored, Eve Sedgwick pays attention to the aunts, uncles and cousins in the text. In this re-focusing of attention she moves away from the streamlined protocols of psychoanalysis and some forms of post-structuralism, towards the production of a map of contingent connections that can establish another "gay possibility". Eve Sedgwick's attention to the aunts and uncles of the play is a refusal to produce an interpretation between the poles of dissidence and complicity, destabilisation and stability; an explicit refusal of classic psychoanalysis, an alternative to dualistic interpretation and an approach somewhat similar to that of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*.

This kind of approach can be taken to *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*, perhaps an unavoidable point of reference for any investigation into the associations between the social, sexual and aesthetic pleasure and practices of some men, especially an investigation haunted by hidden pictures.

During each of Oscar Wilde's trials *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* was used as evidence against him.⁶⁰ So, the possibility of a cultural

product being an expression of homosexual subjectivity was promoted in the popular press, at a time often represented as formative for the realisation of homosexual subjectivity. Of course it was the book itself that provided the pretext for this possibility. Basil Hallward, the painter of Dorian Gray's portrait, fears that the "curious idolatry" he feels for his subject will be expressed through his painting and become apparent in public. For this reason he decides that the portrait can not be placed on exhibition. But a little later on Basil Hallward changes his mind and decides his "curious idolatry" is quite separate from the form of his painting:⁶¹

Even now I cannot help feeling that it is a mistake to think that the passion one feels in creation ever really shows in the work one creates. Art is always more abstract than we fancy. Form and colour tell us of form and colour - that is all.⁶²

Basil Hallward's change of heart is not unlike the defence of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that Oscar Wilde attempted but didn't pull off during his trial.⁶³ The trials of Oscar Wilde were an exercising of the mechanisms established towards the end of the nineteenth century to create a homosexual subject capable of expression, and so a subject available to professional interpretation and identification from its expressive representatives by detectives of many different kinds. However, the relationships around the portrait deserve some resolutely superficial attention, as it is not only Basil's and Oscar Wilde's dilemma about the meaning of modern art that is of interest here.

Basil Hallward probably wasn't the first painter to ask a beautiful young man to pose for him and not the last to enjoy dressing him up in costumes; but it is interesting that it's a painting of Dorian not in the "costume of dead ages" but in his "own dress" and his "own time" that Basil finds the most appropriate expression of his "idolatry". Dorian, the portrait, is a modern and realistic figure, a figuring of the modern, certainly nothing like a painting by Lord Leighton more like one by James McNeill Whistler (figure 13).⁶⁴ It is a modern figure that excites Basil, and it is a figuring of the modern that provides Dorian with a fashionable image, rather than an imago.⁶⁵

As we will soon find out, Dorian Gray certainly wasn't the last young man who found access to the pleasures of the city by posing for a portrait. Becoming the object of an artist's interest was for many young men an escape from the everyday routines of modern life at the end of the nineteenth century and has remained so throughout the twentieth century. For young men who suspected that the modern city had something more to offer, but were unsure as to what it was or where to find it, the helping hand of an artist, or a collector of art, or men, could be useful.

Almost immediately after Dorian meets the eloquent Lord Henry Wotton, who wants, at the very least, to buy the portrait that Dorian has just seen for the first time, Dorian's out in the city ready to partake of its pleasures. Dorian Gray experiences a "wild desire to know everything about life", and he explores this across the geographic and social spaces of the modern city, made available to him by the seductive words of Lord Henry Wotton, combined with an image of himself as a subject, provided by his portrait, able to cruise through all precincts . This new found excitement for life and its pleasures is a characteristic response to the nineteenth century urban environment:

I felt that this grey, monstrous London of ours, with its myriad of people, its sordid sinners and its splendid sins, as you once phrased it, must have something in store for me. I fancied a thousand things. The mere danger gave me a sense of delight...I don't know what I expected, but I went out and wondered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy street and black, grassless squares.⁶⁶

Dorian Gray's roaming of the street for pleasure recalls Melanie Klein's patient, who once he is free from analysis is out in the city no longer worrying about being molested by boys. It could be said that the potential of the modern city to excite in this way requires the whole panoply of detective methodologies to control and contain it. It could also be said that these institutional discourses are an incitement and excitement.

I have suggested that the structures of homosexual identity were not insistent and unavoidable in Britain until the 1950s, but the

experience of London described in *The Picture Of Dorian Gray* provided a pretext that survived until the 1960s. Not only a geography of pleasure but also a range of practices, forms of behaviour, roles, compartments and interests that were a part of the changing rubric that 'homosexual' sometimes signifies. A rubric that includes the relationship between the male artist, the male model and the male collector of art.

It would be possible to understand Dorian's movement through the city as an example of Guy Hocquenghem's kind of cruising, and once more to make the neat attachment of Oscar Wilde to post-structuralist theory. Or Dorian could be an outlaw who refuses the disciplinary strictures of psychoanalysis and wanders leisurely through the productive city moving against and around the circuits of production, consumption and exchange; a deconstructive figure perhaps. And indeed this abstract link of the city to post-structuralist theory is attractive and not irrelevant. But Dorian's is not an abstract cruise, it has an insistency, a repetition, a pattern, it is not pure difference, but has a quite definite form. Dorian moves from the pleasures at the centre of London to those in the East End.

To him life itself was the first, the greatest of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation. Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment universal, and Dandyism, which in its own way, is an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty, had of course their fascination for him.⁶⁷

The geographic pattern of Dorian Gray's unspecified pleasures is an insistent and repeated movement from the centre of town towards Whitechapel and Limehouse, which over fifty years later as we know, was an established part of many men's everyday pleasure, including that of Francis Bacon. By the end of the 1950s this pleasure is firmly established as an epiphenomenon of homosexuality. But this map, and this particular cruise, is one of the gay possibilities of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a possibility that refuses to be seduced and identified by the streamlined attractions of theoretical interpretation. This movement is also part of the possibility of *Two Figures* that will in subsequent chapters be attached to the practices, pleasures and personas that can be found in sexual and

textual space between the East and West End of London. In these chapter we will no longer have to consider Francis Bacon's painting as a complete picture, a whole object, but can consider it as a number of inter-connected, puzzled, 'part objects' to be attached to other written and visual texts in a productive move across the sexual and textual geography of London in the 1950s.

This could be the end of this chapter, and the transition to the chapter three would be fairly smooth, beginning as it does with how the figure and figurations of Oscar Wilde were utilised to make sexual and aesthetic sense after the Second World War. However, it's difficult to be sure when cruising, in theory, should end; and its often tempting to take one last look, walk one more circuit, and hang around for one more encounter. It's worth hanging around for just long enough to take a look at a page from the scrapbook of Montague Glover (figure 14).

The private photographs of Montague Glover are important examples of the associations between popular and aesthetic visual texts and social practices and sexual pleasures between men that took place before and during the Second World War. These private photographs published in *A Class Apart* are an intimate document of everyday social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures. They are a kind of photographic cruise through the spaces of male encounter; attentive to different parts and types of men, their costumes, comportments and the environments in which they made sense.

This page from Montague Glover's scrapbook is testimony to the importance of fragmentary private collections and collations of written and visual texts. Scrapbooks are often made up from assortments of 'partial objects' taken from different sources and brought together to formulate particular kinds of sexual and aesthetic sense for their producers. The sense of this page from Montague Glover's scrapbook is not singular, but determined by irregular movements between the bits and pieces from which it is produced. It's not that this informal pictorial product, made for pleasure and made up of bits and pieces taken from newspapers and magazines, should be esteemed for its fragmentation and multiplicity; it is valuable because of the very particular meanings

that may be made by moving between and around each of its elements; and in the relationship of these elements to those on other pages, in other books and in other places. We will return to some of the 'partial objects' from which this scrapbook page is constituted in later chapters, but for now its evident potential for centrifugal interpretation is a model that can be reapplied to *Two Figures 1953*.

Chapter Two - Notes

¹I later came across *Winger's Landfall* in Simon Shepherd's, *Because We're Queers*, p.143.

²Richard Hauser, *The Homosexual Society*, pp.77-8.

³James Gardiner, *Who's A Pretty Boy Then?*, p.106.

⁴Stuart Lauder, *Winger's Landfall*, p.30.

⁵Stuart Lauder, *Winger's Landfall*, p.31.

⁶Stuart Lauder, *Winger's landfall*, p.163.

⁷The concept of 'tuning' can be found in Henning Bech, '(Tele)urban Eroticism', *Parallax 2*, pp.89-100; and the association between homosexual subjectivity and modern environments is explored in Henning Bech, *When Men Meet*.

⁸Stuart Lauder, *Winger's Landfall*, p.80.

⁹Les Moran, *The Homosexual(ity) of Law*, p.122.

¹⁰Stuart Lauder, *Winger's Landfall*, p.60.

¹¹For attempts to get to theoretical grips with Roland Barthes' social and sexual pleasures see D. A. Miller, *Bringing out Roland Barthes*; and Andreas Bjonerud, 'OUTING BARTHES: Barthes and the Quest(ion) of (a Gay) Identity Politics'.

¹²For a somewhat different reading of *Victim* see Richard Dyer, 'Victim: hegemonic project', in Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images*; see also Andy Medhurst, 'Victim: Text as Context' in *Screen 25* (4/5).

¹³According to most accounts of the making of *Victim* the scene in which Melville Farr identifies himself as a homosexual subject was not part of the original script but suggested and written by Dirk Bogarde.

¹⁴For an account of Roland Barthes' social and sexual pleasures and his cruising of the streets of Paris see Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes: A Biography*. For interpretations of the differences and similarities between the social and sexual pleasures of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault see David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*; and Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*.

¹⁵Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship*, pp.247-266.

¹⁶For details of the Montagu-Wildeblood case see Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law*; Stephen Jeffery-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*; and Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship*.

¹⁷Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship*, pp.239-240.

¹⁸The writer William Plomer destroyed all evidence of his social and sexual pleasures, including letters and photographs, after an encounter with the police during the war, for details see Peter F. Alexander, *William Plomer: A Biography*, p.245.

¹⁹Paul Bailey, *An Immaculate Mistake*, p.103.

²⁰Paul Bailey, *An Immaculate Mistake*, p.107.

²¹Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant*, p.11.

²²Rodney Garland, *The Heart In Exile*, p.52.

²³The somewhat ambiguous bachelors from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* are John Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff.

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²⁴Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.281.

²⁵For a series of considerations regarding the associations between homosexuality and urban environments, and a discussion in the introduction of urban spaces as 'generators' of sexuality, see Joel Sanders ed., *Architectures of Masculinity*; also David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Mapping Desire*. For an detailed discussion of the historical and contemporary relationship between homosexuality and Soho see Frank Mort, *Culture of Consumption*. For an exploration of homosexuality and the social and physical environments of modernity see Henning Beck, *When Men Meet*.

²⁶Guy Burgess (1911-63), English journalist, BBC producer and spy for the Soviet Union, defected in 1951. It's worth mentioning that Jeremy Wolfenden, son of Sir John Wolfenden, was a pall-bearer at his funeral, see Sebastian Faulks, *The Fatal Englishman* for further details. Alan Turing (1912-54), English scientist who broke the code of the German Enigma machines during the war, designer of early computers, was found guilty of an 'offence against morals' in 1952, underwent a year of being injected with female hormones, killed himself in 1954.

²⁷See Michael Hatt, 'The Male Body in Another Frame'.

²⁸Whitney Davis, 'Erotic Revisions in Thomas Eakins's Narratives of Male Nudity', p.323.

²⁹Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*, pp.173-4.

³⁰Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, pp.88-89

³¹John Fletcher, 'Freud and his uses: Psychoanalysis and gay theory', in Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis, *Coming on Strong*, p.101.

³²Kenneth Lewes, *Psychoanalysis and Male Homosexuality*, p.65.

³³Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p.170.

³⁴It's well known that Sigmund Freud's interpretation of Leonardo da Vinci's memory is based on a mis-translation, vulture should be kite. Viewed in a certain light this clearly undermines the interpretation, but also supports a centrifugal methodology which is about making connections rather than revealing hidden contents.

³⁵Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood', in Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature*, pp.210-211.

³⁶Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death and Psychoanalysis, and Seduction, Translation, Drives*, p.31 & p.169.

³⁷Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p.177.

³⁸For an interesting account of Jacques Lacan's weekly seminars see Stuart Schneiderman, *Jacques Lacan: The Death of an Intellectual Hero*.

³⁹Stuart Schneiderman, *Jacques Lacan: Death of an Intellectual Hero*, p.29.

⁴⁰Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, pp.56-7.

⁴¹Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, p.57.

⁴²Melanie Klein, 'Early Analysis', in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, p.92.

⁴³Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p.44.

⁴⁴Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p.19.

⁴⁵Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p.47.

⁴⁶Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p.42.

⁴⁷This conception of monistic and immanent physical and philosophic space was suggested by reading Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*; Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*; Christopher Norris, *Spinoza & the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*; and Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics of Spinoza: The Road to Inner Freedom*.

⁴⁸Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, p.131.

⁴⁹Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein*, p.22.

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⁵⁰Michel Foucault, 'Michel Foucault, le gai savoir', interview with Jean Le Bitoux, *Mec*, 5 (June 1988), 35; taken from Leo Bersani, *Homos*, p.77.

⁵¹John Champagne, *The Ethics of Marginality*, p.52.

⁵²See Leo Bersani, *Homos*.

⁵³Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*, p.202. "When Bacon was accused of making historical points by inserting the Nazi armband, he would not answer any more than the jesting Pilate. He merely said, 'I wanted to put an armband to break the continuity of the arm and to add that particular red round the arm.'"

⁵⁴Jacques Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', John P. Muller and William J Richardson, *The Purloined Poe*, p.173.

⁵⁵Jacques Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', John P. Muller and William J Richardson, *The Purloined Poe*, p.175.

⁵⁶Jacques Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', John P. Muller and William J Richardson, *The Purloined Poe*, p.185.

⁵⁷Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Tales of the Avunculate: The Importance of Being Earnest', in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p.52-72. At this point in her text Eve Sedgwick is referring to Christopher Craft's 'Alias Bunbury: Desire and Termination in *The Importance of Being Earnest*' (*Representations*, 31 (Summer 1990)), Joel Fineman's 'The Significance of Literature: *The Importance of Being Earnest*' (*October* 15: 79-90) and Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*.

⁵⁸Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? I am thing here of the British literary theorists Alan Sinfield, Joseph Bristow and Jonathan Dollimore. For an attempt to rectify Jonathan Dollimore's view of the figure and figurations of Oscar Wilde see Joseph Bristow, Effeminate England.*

⁵⁹Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p.55.

⁶⁰See Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*; and Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*.

⁶¹Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, pp.131-181.

⁶²Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p.115

⁶³For an account of Oscar Wilde's trials see H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*.

⁶⁴My image of Dorian Gray has undoubtedly been determined by the painting used for the cover of my copy of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; James McNeill Whistler's *A Man In Evening Dress* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

⁶⁵Lee Edelman, *Homographesis*, pp.15-20.

⁶⁶Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p.48.

⁶⁷Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p.129.



Chapter 3

The Dangers and Delights of Interior Design

"We were trying to describe the sunset," said Bernard, sighing. "Come on, Derek, we all know about your artistic sensibilities!"

"Unkind!" said Lil, pouting slightly. "That's the *other* ones, Bernard! When will you learn? The ones that go round saying 'Look at Shakespeare, Wilde, Gide'. All we have is dress sense, a passion for trivialities and an infallible memory for gossip."¹

Lil's separation of homosexuals into two types follows a formula that had been available in different forms in Britain throughout the twentieth century, but it became unavoidable after the Second World War. We've seen how in the 1950s a responsible and coherent homosexual subject was instituted to support the legalisation of some sexual practices between men. In the processes that promoted this coherent form of homosexuality, men like Lil who had "dress sense, a passion for trivialities and an infallible memory for gossip", were both rejected and sustained.² According to Lil, who is sometimes called Derek but more usually addressed as Diamond Lil, there are serious homosexuals with "artistic sensibilities", and there are men committed to everyday trivia, to fashion and to gossip. During the 1950s this formula was not only a way of sorting homosexuals, it could also used to sort artists, perhaps because the word 'artist' and the word 'homosexual' had the potential, sustained by the work of Havelock Ellis and Kenneth Walker, to support and

replace one another. The differences between serious and trivial homosexuals circulated in and around popular, sociological and medical texts; and the differences between art and decoration, art and illustration, art and fashion were discussed in articles, essays and books about modern art. It was therefore an ever ready possibility for a modern artist, like Francis Bacon, to be ordered using a formula similar to Diamond Lil's. For a modern artist, committed to social and sexual practices and pleasures with men, but who wanted to be taken seriously, there were in the early 1950s some quite obvious dangers.³

By the beginning of the 1950s Francis Bacon liked to be taken seriously as an artist; but some doubts were expressed around this time as to whether his paintings were serious works of modern art. These doubts may have had something to do with the unstable connections between modern art and the social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures of men in Britain after the Second World War. Whilst today it's easy to take Francis Bacon seriously as an artist, it's a little more difficult, according to Diamond Lil's formula, to take him seriously as a homosexual. Diamond Lil's formula became widely available at the beginning of the 1950s, and instituted through the publication of the *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* in 1957 and subsequently promoted by the Homosexual Law Reform Society until 1967. However, Francis Bacon's social and sexual practices, pleasures and persona did not conform to the proprieties of coherent and ethical homosexual identity ordered by the Report, and this may be a clue to help explain doubts about the seriousness of his paintings and the difficulty of attaching them to some definitions of modern art.

In *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*, Andrew Sinclair writes about Francis Bacon painting the portrait of the photographer and designer Cecil Beaton, and utilises Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to make sense of the encounter.⁴ Throughout his biography of Francis Bacon, Andrew Sinclair uses a formula similar to Diamond Lil's, and repeatedly deploys 'Oscar Wilde' to maintain his representation of Francis Bacon as a serious artist, and a serious homosexual in some way attached to the processes of homosexual law reform and gay liberation. Since the Second World

War 'Oscar Wilde' has performed this kind of function and has been successively the representative of homosexual law reform, an exemplar of gay liberation and the core of gay studies and queer theory. But in using Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to order the encounter between Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton, Andrew Sinclair adopts a dangerous strategy; one that could disturb the serious "artistic sensibilities" of the rehabilitated 'Oscar Wilde', undermine Francis Bacon as a serious homosexual and question his standing as a serious modern artist.⁵

In his account of the encounter, Andrew Sinclair characterises Cecil Beaton as a vain producer of "flattering photographic portraits" and Francis Bacon as an artist able to see through superficial surfaces and find the "the essence within":

He took out of Beaton what he saw in him, and set that on canvas. Beaton was the last man to see the flaws in his own nature, the vanity that denied growing aged, the greed and commercial instinct that he hid beneath his urbane wit, and the skull that certainly lay under the last of his hair.⁶

Andrew Sinclair uses Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Basil Hallward's eventually hideous portrait of Dorian, as a model for the encounter between Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton. Of Francis Bacon's portraits in general, Andrew Sinclair writes:

He saw his models in their inner turmoil, already attacked by stress and decay, somewhat as in the process of the magic portrait of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's tale, where the flesh remained perfect and the portrait of the real man showed the ravages of time.⁷

Whilst his use of Oscar Wilde's novel can probably be traced to 'Francis Bacon, full face and in profile' by the French writer Michel Leiris⁸, Andrew Sinclair's assigning of the role of Dorian Gray to Cecil Beaton depends upon the popular characterisation that ageing homosexuals who take an interest in their appearance risk. In his 1962 book, *The Homosexual Society*, Arnold Hauser writes:

The picture of Dorian Gray brings home the futility of the homosexual's desire to stay eternally young. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with physical attractiveness persists. Homosexuals are obsessed with their bodies and are usually dapper and fastidious. Argument is usually most spirited when it concerns the cut and style of clothes and it is a matter of

general observation that they are usually better dressed than the average heterosexual.⁹

So turning Cecil Beaton into Dorian Gray is easy. However, turning Francis Bacon into the serious artist whose commitment to ethical behaviour separates him from Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton isn't so sustainable; therefore Andrew Sinclair seeks to establish a number of other oppositions between Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton. Francis Bacon becomes "the younger artist"¹⁰, the "beautiful decorations" of Cecil Beaton's home are compared to the "shambles" of Francis Bacon's studio, Cecil Beaton's shock when shown the finished portrait confirms his vanity and Francis Bacon's destruction of the painting is used to demonstrate that he "did not mind wasting his time", and to contrast Cecil Beaton's interest in the portrait's value with Francis Bacon's indifference. According to Andrew Sinclair the encounter is an illustration of Francis Bacon's "flirtation" with and "contempt" for the "*beau monde*". Simple then, a meeting between opposites ordered by the ethical trajectory of Oscar Wilde's novel.

However, in choosing to set up Cecil Beaton in this way, Andrew Sinclair unavoidably evokes another 'Oscar Wilde'. Oscar Wilde was, and is, an important resource for those men with a passion for trivia who may consider themselves aesthetes rather than artists. The connection between Cecil Beaton and Oscar Wilde is both a matter of historical record and popular mythology. During the years Cecil Beaton spent at Cambridge University in the 1920s he was a member of the aesthetic set for whom Oscar Wilde was a formative influence.¹¹ Cecil Beaton is also one of a number of men that are popularly established as the inheritors of Oscar Wilde's legacy.¹² The danger for Andrew Sinclair, as Neil Bartlett has pointed out, is that 'Oscar Wilde' is an equivocal signifier that's easy to place on either side of formulations that look to be as simple as Diamond Lil's.¹³ By ordering the encounter between Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton as a choice between two 'Oscar Wildes', Andrew Sinclair risks his representation of Francis Bacon. The risk can only be worth taking if it's necessary to clarify the difference between Francis Bacon and those artists like Cecil Beaton, and sometimes like Oscar Wilde, who can not be taken seriously. The surprising implication

of this train of thought is that there may be some residual problem in taking Francis Bacon seriously as an artist and that the difference between him and those men with a "passion for trivialities" may not be as clear as Andrew Sinclair would have us believe.

However, if we read reviews and criticisms of their work there looks to be no problem in keeping Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton apart, and it's easy to assign them opposed places in Diamond Lil's formula. Francis Bacon's paintings are often understood to be about the horrors of the real world, whereas Cecil Beaton's photographs, drawings and designs are usually considered as illustrations or decorations that avoid reality, and deal in romantic appearances, fantastic surfaces and theatrical illusions. The words regularly used to describe Francis Bacon's paintings include 'stark', 'horror', 'turbulent', 'violence', 'direct' and 'emotion'. Whereas those used to describe the work of Cecil Beaton include 'superficial', 'indulgence', 'romantic', 'illusion', 'stylish', 'fantasy', 'gentle' and 'camp'.¹⁴ Even when Cecil Beaton's subject is serious it's said that he's only interested in superficial forms. Of Cecil Beaton's war photographs (figure 15) Emmanuel Cooper has written:

The debris of war, of wrecked tanks, abandoned equipment and the remains of aircraft carefully silhouetted against bright skies or stretches of desert conjure up the acceptable face of the destruction of war. There is little evidence of injury, of messy wounds or smashed bodies in his photographs and in their unreality they continue his reluctance to 'engage' with the pain and anguish of life.¹⁵

Just over thirty pages later in his book *The Sexual Perspective* Emmanuel Cooper writes about Francis Bacon's paintings:

The violence of the emotions and the violence of our times (the violence of reality) has rarely been expressed so forcibly and so powerfully, as through his distorted forms and swift brush strokes in the series of paintings produced in 1972-3.¹⁶

Emmanuel Cooper's understanding of both Cecil Beaton and Francis Bacon is exemplary. The British painter Patrick Proctor agrees with Emmanuel Cooper's assessment of his friend Cecil Beaton and writes

that he had "great talent" for "copying superficial things".¹⁷ In *On Photography* Susan Sontag writes of Cecil Beaton's "Surrealist influenced" photographs in a similar way:

By setting his subjects - see the photographs he took of Edith Sitwell in 1927, of Cocteau in 1936 - in fanciful, luxurious decors, Beaton turns them into over explicit, unconvincing effigies.¹⁸

Philip Core, the artist and author of *Camp: The Lie That Tells The Truth*, has written that Cecil Beaton was "less avant-garde than instinctively at the height of fashion". Clearly Cecil Beaton is not an artist to be taken seriously. Recent critical opinion of Francis Bacon is almost as airtight. Francis Bacon has received much more critical and theoretical attention and there seems little doubt today that his paintings are serious examples of modern art.

Since *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* was put on exhibition at the Lefevre Gallery in 1945, Francis Bacon has received his fair share of serious attention, and a critical, theoretical and biographical consensus now orders nearly all understandings of him and his paintings. This consensus was put in place by Francis Bacon, who with the help of friends and admirers, built and successfully maintained an interpretive frame around his paintings.¹⁹ David Sylvester's *Interviews with Francis Bacon* has become the place to begin any serious look at the figure and figurations of this artist and his work.

In these talks with David Sylvester, Francis Bacon often mentions the disruption of order by accident, the rational by the irrational, narrative by sensation, and illustration by a use of paint that directly affects the "nervous system"; and repeatedly insists that this is the point of his paintings. The insistence that Francis Bacon's sensational paintings are not about narration or illustration is firmly established as a prerequisite for any serious critical or theoretical attention; and his paintings are repeatedly understood as rational forms disordered and disturbed by irrational and non-referential shapes or marks that are sometimes brought about by chance or devised accidents. The sometimes haphazard use of paint, alongside the perhaps random use of a diverse range of source

materials, the sustained questioning of the coherency of bodily forms, and the repeated inclusion of devices such as non-reflecting or distorting mirrors, all help to explain why the meeting between Francis Bacon's paintings and the protocols of post-structuralist theory is so satisfying.

Andrew Benjamin, Parveen Adams and Ernst Van Alphen have all recently taken Francis Bacon's paintings very seriously and suggested that they are about the deformation, dissolution, disintegration, decomposition, deconstruction and detumescence of subjectivity; insisting that they question mastery and undermine traditional forms of rationality and order.²⁰ Each of these theoretical interpretations combine protocols that can be characterised as post-structuralist with Francis Bacon's understandings, taken from David Sylvester's book, of what his paintings are about. Dana Polan has pointed out how Gilles Deleuze in *Logique de la Sensation*, the text which establishes Francis Bacon's utility for post-structuralist theory most effectively, relies on David Sylvester's interviews and the artist's understanding of his paintings.²¹ This agreement between authorial intention and powerful theoretical protocols is difficult to resist, and also remarkably similar to how Francis Bacon's paintings were understood by critics in Britain in the 1940s and 50s.

In the 1950s Herbert Read wrote:

...these screaming faces, these headless bodies, these curtains drawn over some sinister scene, these animals in eternal pursuit of their own tails, this prelate in a crystal cage - all these symbols of a disintegrating world, of a paranoiac consciousness. It is a world in which the artist can find no status, no point of stability, no essential purpose.²²

Francis Bacon often suggested that his paintings were part of a shared experiment with new forms and new styles "that would render contemporary disorder", and sometimes made a direct connection to the work of T. S. Eliot. Ernst van Alphen considers that Francis Bacon's hostility towards narration and illustration can be understood in terms of the conventions of both modernism and postmodernism:

Bacon-as-modernist aesthetically focuses on perception while challenging its reliability, and Bacon-as-postmodernist philosophically continues to displace the loci of perception, so as to confuse its anchoring in the subject. As modernist, his paintings undermine the transparency of perception, and as post-modernist they decline to offer an alternative and to locate perception unambiguously in a stable body.²³

Anxiety over order and disorder does seem to have been particularly animate in Britain in the years that followed the Second World War. In 1953 the tension between the stabilities of the past and the instabilities of a modern future was palpable, and anxieties about order and disorder were played out in a broad range of cultural products. For example, somewhat capriciously comparing Francis Bacon's *Two Figures 1953* to Isaiah Berlin's *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, published in 1953, seems a structural possibility. Isaiah Berlin, liberal philosopher and founder member of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, begins his essay on Tolstoy's view of history by explaining that when they set about historical research, hedgehogs and foxes have very different approaches. Apparently hedgehogs know "one big thing" and they organise their understanding through a "single central vision"; their process of research is centripetal. Whereas the work of foxes is scattered, diffused and fragmented and doesn't just make one kind of sense; their research process is centrifugal. In Britain in the 1950s it was easy to attach Francis Bacon's paintings to formulas of this kind, and to understand his paintings as representatives of the modern world's disorder and chaos.

The consensus surrounding Francis Bacon's paintings is very tempting, particularly if we want to attach them to anxieties in and around some men's social practices and sexual pleasures in the early 1950s. As we have seen, 1953 was a year when anxiety about the disruption of traditional rationales by modern sensations became attached to some men's sexual acts and invigorated a popular process of identifying, perhaps creating, male homosexual subjects. Francis Bacon's *Two Figures 1953* (figure 5) or *Two Figures in the Grass 1954* (figure 6) could easily be illustrations of the confusions and anxieties of this historical moment. Identifying these paintings in this way not only risks turning them into simple illustrations of

history but also of a certain kind of complicity with the medical, legal and popular processes that sought to identify homosexual subjects in the 1950s. Perhaps one of the reasons that the protocols of post-structuralist theory attach themselves so easily to Francis Bacon's paintings is due to a shared investment in ways of taking social, sexual and aesthetic practices between men seriously instituted after the Second World War. Like psychoanalysis, a great deal of post-structuralist theory has explicit or implicit investments in the potential of certain and uncertain sexual practices and pleasures between men to seriously undermine hegemonic orders. Whilst post-structuralist theory questions the coherency of identity, it often takes the ontological connection between sexual practices and subjectivity very seriously indeed.

However, the continuity of connection between Francis Bacon's understanding of his paintings, critical reception of his work in Britain after the Second World War and post-structuralist interpretations is a little disquieting. Each of these ways of taking Francis Bacon's paintings seriously is structurally dependent upon disregarding, or not knowing, doubts about their seriousness. The consensus is less overwhelming if the attachment of Francis Bacon to some theoretical protocols produced in France after the Second World War is considered as, at least in part, the result of social connections that can trace interpretations of Francis Bacon's paintings back to his own way of taking them seriously; back to his insistence that they were more than illustrations and decorations. These connections could include: David Sylvester's friendship with Francis Bacon and his access to some of the influential men and women from the arts and intellectual circles of Paris in the 1950s and 60s ; Francis Bacon's attendance at Sonia Orwell's parties where men and women from the arts and intellectual worlds of Britain and France often mixed; and Francis Bacon's friendship with Michel Leiris.²⁴ These just possible connections are important because they suggest that the attachment of Francis Bacon's paintings to post-structuralist theory is not a natural correspondence, but established by complex social, sexual and textual connections.

However, doubts about the seriousness of Francis Bacon's paintings are more interesting than the established consensus. More interesting to me because they suggest a much closer connection between Francis Bacon's paintings and kinds of art and forms of homosexuality that were not considered seriously in Britain in the 1950s, and almost incidentally, may help to formulate a critique of post-structuralist approaches to 'homosexuality' and cultural production. In Stephen Spender's *The Struggle of the Modern* it's possible to catch a glimpse of why Francis Bacon's paintings may not have been considered serious examples of modern art. Stephen Spender bases his discussion of distortion in modern literature and the visual arts on conversations he had with Henry Moore and Francis Bacon:

...distortion is a way of expressing the felt truth of the relationship of the subjective artist to the objective reality in this time.²⁵

The painting simply exists, it is not an expression of anything except the event of the painter doing something with material in his hand on it. (If the metaphor sounds onanistic, perhaps it is meant to do so. One is put in mind of a sexual act which produces a stain but does not result in a birth.)²⁶

...Francis Bacon whose paintings, in addition to having their technical qualities which are entirely modern are literary in the sense of providing criticism of their contemporary subjects and in using distortion, in the treatment of human figures, to suggest a cruelly compressed terrifying narrative.²⁷

The place from which to doubt the seriousness of Francis Bacon's paintings can found between the second and third quotation. The danger is that Francis Bacon's paintings, perhaps all modern paintings, can not be taken seriously because they do not represent or produce or reproduce or express "anything", but "simply exist" as surfaces on which the painter puts paint to please himself. This anxiety over the unproductive pleasures of modern art and onanism evokes the homosexual revenant.

Stephen Spender quickly redeems Francis Bacon's paintings from this understanding of modern art as unproductive; though his "technical qualities" are "entirely modern" his paintings are also productively critical.²⁸ In 1952 John Berger wasn't entirely convinced about the

ethical productivity of Francis Bacon's paintings and during a panel discussion at the ICA he is reported to have expressed some concern about their absence of "moral indignation". By 1972 John Berger had changed his opinion somewhat, but still he believed that:

Bacon questions nothing, unravels nothing. He accepts that the worst has happened.

...it becomes clear that you can live with the worst, that you can go on painting it again and again, that you can turn it into more and more elegant art, that you can put velvet and gold frames around it, that other people will buy it to hang on the walls of the rooms where they eat.

Bacon's art is essentially conformist.²⁹

Colin MacInnes, also a participant in the ICA panel discussion, made the connections between doubting the ethical purpose of Francis Bacon's paintings, their surfaces and a particular kind of social and sexual persona reminiscent of Cecil Beaton. According to Colin MacInnes, Francis Bacon was "the Norman Hartnell of the horror movement". Perhaps more than any other criticism, this identification of Francis Bacon's paintings with the Queen's couturier demonstrates how susceptible they were in the 1950s to imputations of superficiality, and how they may be identified with Diamond Lil; who is glamorous to his fingertips, would kill to be dressed by Norman Hartnell, may wear *Hartnell in Love* and is ever ready for Cecil Beaton to take his photograph. Towards the end of 1953 David Sylvester was clearly aware of how precariously balanced Francis Bacon's paintings could appear:

Bacon can, I think, be called a tragic painter because his figures - in his later works, at any rate - are not merely the victims of their anguished situation. They have an air of defiance in the face of destiny that is not only the product of the rather Edwardian sense of luxury with which he surrounds them, but because of the breadth and grandeur with which they are realised.³⁰

John Berger's reference to "elegant art", Colin MacInnes' introduction of Norman Hartnell and David Sylvester's suggestion of a "rather Edwardian sense of luxury", Cecil Beaton's acknowledged area of expertise, provide some idea as to why Francis Bacon was so concerned in the 1950s and 60s that his paintings were more than illustrations and decorations.

In the 1950s being 'modern', in a certain kind of way, and being the kind of artist and kind of homosexual that had a "passion for trivialities" were easy to attach to one another. Writing about homosexuality in *The Sunday Chronicle* in 1955 Barbara Cartland exclaimed, "It's topical! It's smart! It's modern!" and a number of fictional texts published around the beginning of the 1950s utilise homosexual figures as representatives of social change and disturbance.³¹

In her novel *The Echoing Grove*, Rosamond Lehmann powerfully establishes the connections between social practices and sexual pleasures between men, anxieties about the modern world, with just an intimation of how they may be attached to modern art and its potential for superficiality:

They got their rotting teeth in him. *They've* got the belts and ties and rings and bracelet watches. And all the words. *Avant garde* passwords. And the freedom of the hunting grounds. All the happy hunting grounds mapped out, combed over. Barracks, pubs, ports, tube stations, public lavatories. How could he possibly be missed! The classiest piece of goods on the market. Bought and paid for. A *whizzing* beauty! Really but really a knock-out. And really but really amoral and uncorrupted and out of the bottom drawer! A natural gangster, a natural innocent. A natural. An enemy of society. *Done time!* - actually done time - for housebreaking! *Actually actively anti-bourgeois.*³²

Rosamond Lehmann's shift from, perhaps vulgar, products of male consumption, "belts and ties and rings and bracelet watches", to "avant garde passwords" is highly suggestive in this staccato account of the social and physical geography of some men's everyday pleasures and practices; a geography that was a potent source of anxiety at the beginning of the 1950s and just about to be used as the necessary contrast for the promotion of an ethical form of homosexual subjectivity. The risks for modern art that are only just suggested in this the quotation from *The Echoing Grove* are ordered in Michael Nelson's *A Room in Chelsea Square*, a novel that returns us to a social world in which both Cecil Beaton and Francis Bacon played a part. This novel, first published anonymously in 1958, can help clarify the anxieties that touched Francis Bacon and his paintings at the beginning of the 1950s, and begins to explain

why he worked so hard to establish what his paintings were and were not about.

A Room In Chelsea Square is a thinly disguised fiction about the setting up of the serious British arts journal *Horizon*, established in 1940. The four main characters are Nicholas Milestone, Patrick, Ronnie Gras and Christopher Lyre; their real life equivalents are the book's author Michael Nelson, the modern art collector Peter Watson, the writer Cyril Connolly and the poet Stephen Spender. Peter Watson was the man Cecil Beaton loved and pursued through the 1930s and the financial backer of *Horizon*.³³ Michael Nelson turns the writer and editor Cyril Connolly and the writer and poet Stephen Spender into painters. According to Philip Core:

...one of the funniest of the novel's *roman-à-clef* aspects is the metamorphosis of writers into the appropriate kinds of painters. Thus it is not Spender's homosexual feelings Nelson satirises, but their particularly late-thirties intensity and gloom: not Connolly's heterosexuality, but its particular kind of flamboyant selfishness. To characterise these two attributes as those of a Sutherland/Freud/Keith Vaughan sort of painter and a Bérard/Dior/Beaton sort of fashion personality was a stroke of genius.³⁴

A Room in Chelsea Square proposes that the commitment of modern art to surfaces means that it risks not being taken seriously, and that a painting may be just another commodity circulating within the economy of some men's social and sexual diversions. Just like a small gold cigarette case a modern piece of art can be used to impress and hopefully seduce a young man. Patrick sends Nicholas Milestone an early etching by Pablo Picasso of "three young men, probably dancers, changing their clothes", and a gold cigarette case. Nicholas hangs this picture "for twenty-four hours against the mauve-flowered paper" of his room in a Rochester boarding house, but then places it in a trunk under his bed. Hidden under the bed the painting becomes one of the, perhaps almost indecent, pictures that had to be kept out of sight in the 1950s. Perhaps like so many hidden photographs, the etching by Pablo Picasso could become evidence of a homosexual offence, not just because it is a picture of three young male dancers changing their clothes, but because it is modern. An interest in modern art may be reason enough to suspect a young man.³⁵ But more importantly this etching by Pablo

Picasso is no longer in its proper place. Taken from the economy of modern art it becomes part of the economy of pleasures between men; its meaning as modern art fuses with a meaning forged by its use in a sexual exchange between two men of different ages and different classes. Modern art's commitment to form and surface drives a transference of meaning in which even an etching by Pablo Picasso, the most serious of modern artists, is not safe from appropriation.

Patrick is the embodiment of these risks of appropriation and of the associations between modern art and social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures between men. Throughout *A Room in Chelsea Square*, Patrick is either mildly irritated or incandescent because Nicholas can't make up his mind to be bought; he's probably available but he can't decide on a price. He is in fact one of those young men that caused members of the Wolfenden Committee so much anxiety; not a committed or identifiable homosexual but not adverse to the pleasures that Patrick can provide. Patrick makes no distinction between collecting modern art and collecting young men:

It was no good pretending that he was still young. Age was an inevitability that had to be faced. He didn't expect young men to be attracted by his looks anymore. But there was no reason why they shouldn't be nice to him for his money. That's to say, if they were going to reap the benefit of it. Nicholas didn't seem to have understood the position. He might be under the delusion that he was indispensable. Perhaps he didn't know that young men were like pictures you wanted to buy. You determined your top price. Beyond that you were not prepared to bid. Quite often you bought them well below your price.³⁶

For Patrick young men and modern art are decorative distractions and entertaining commodities:

"I never know what I like. I'm always buying pictures which I'm sure I'm going to be able to go on looking at forever. Then one sad morning I wake up to find they bore me. I don't expect we'll find anything this afternoon. Which is a pity. I do so desperately need something for the bathroom."³⁷

Both Patrick and Ronnie Gras have, in the words of Diamond Lil, "dress sense, a passion for trivialities and an infallible memory for gossip"; they also understand, and are committed to, the connection between art and interior design:

Nicholas followed Ronnie into the hall in the centre of which hung one of the largest crystal chandeliers that he had ever seen. Beneath it, standing on an ebony base, was the life-size statue of a man.

'How wonderful!' he exclaimed.

Ronnie did not know whether Nicholas was referring to the chandelier or the statue. But he was delighted by the unconcealed admiration in Nicholas's voice.³⁸

For Ronnie, there is no difference between a classical sculpture and a chandelier; he is, like Patrick, resolutely and unashamedly modern; they are both committed to surfaces and appearances, and understand that the most important value in the modern work is fiscal.³⁹ They are both representations of the risks and consuming pleasures of modernity that became such a source of anxiety in Britain in the 1950s; they are also both related to Lord Henry Wotton from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but with a financial rather than philosophic commitment to aestheticism. Moreover, *A Room in Chelsea Square* follows a similar ethical trajectory to Oscar Wilde's novel. It should be no surprise that it is Stephen Spender, in the guise of Christopher Lyre, who once again redeems modern art from the ignominy of decoration and aestheticism. It's obvious that Christopher Lyre is a serious painter because his studio is very messy:

The mantelpiece was thick with dust. The fire place was filled with rolled up pieces of paper and old cigarette packets. The bare boards were blotched with smears of paint. Stacks of canvases were piled against the walls.

"I suppose it's artistic," he said. "Not squalid enough though for a really great artist and hardly luxurious enough for a successful one."⁴⁰

Like Basil Hallward, Christopher Lyre paints the portrait of a very beautiful, nihilistic and modern young man. Painting the portrait of Michael, an ex-fighter pilot, is at first simply an excuse to be in his company and look at him; but after his death, a suicidal plane crash, Christopher completes the portrait:

"I finished it last night when I got back," said Christopher. "It's a different picture now. But it's true. Not many people are going to like it."

"It's wonderful. Just what I thought of him," said Nicholas.⁴¹

Christopher believes the painting will not be liked, though it may be appreciated, because it's no longer a decoration but a "true" work of modern art, whose meaning is beyond its superficial surface. Anxiety over the seriousness of Francis Bacon's paintings can be located somewhere in the space between Patrick and Christopher; and perhaps it's because Francis Bacon had once been a designer of furniture and interiors, and associated with men like Patrick, Ronnie and Cecil Beaton, that explains why he was so sensitive to the difference between art and decoration, and so sensitive to surfaces. Clearly Francis Bacon understood that one way of being a serious artist was to be like Christopher Lyre; a "squalid" studio and the production of paintings whose meanings were not superficial (figure 16).

The very real risk that modern art may be just decoration, thought of or used as a purely decorative commodity, was by the beginning of the 1950s long standing. According to Christopher Reed, the Bloomsbury Group made sense of the connections between modern art, decoration and aestheticism and combined them with a commitment to unorthodox social and sexual practices and pleasures.⁴² By 1913 however, when Wyndham Lewis broke with the Omega Workshop, these connections could be framed in such a way as to question Bloomsbury's seriousness by insisting upon a difference between aestheticism and the rough masculinity of "modern talent".⁴³ Debates over the difference between art and decoration were repeatedly engaged over the work of Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Bracque, and cubism in general, throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

For Cecil Beaton the connections between modern art, decoration and aestheticism provided some of the co-ordinates for his photography and design in the 1920s and 30s; and these connections, imprinted with the influence of Oscar Wilde, could intimately connect an interest in modern art to an aesthetic and modern way of life that included social and sexual practices and pleasures between men.

However, it's not only Cecil Beaton's commitment to aestheticism and decoration that prevents him from being taken seriously as a modern artist, but also the commercial use that he made of modern art forms. Like Patrick and Ronnie Gras, Cecil Beaton felt no need, before the Second World War, to make a distinction between art and commerce; he made money producing fashion illustrations, taking royal and society and fashion photographs, designing for the stage and film, and turning his interests into commercial ventures; his scrapbooks became successful books, as did the restoration and design of his home.⁴⁴ In 1948 Herbert Read made the dangers for serious modern art of decoration and commerce very clear:

A more insidious danger is a tendency towards a merely decorative function, and this type of cubism has, indeed, been exploited by industry, and 'cubist' wall-papers, 'cubist' linoleum, 'cubist' lamp-shades and 'cubist' electric fittings became a bourgeois fashion some twenty years ago...⁴⁵

Herbert Read compares this form of "vulgarisation" with a "progressive front" of artists who avoid "any temptation to be satisfied with a purely decorative function" and "go far beyond any decorative arrangement of shapes and colours". These were the temptations that Cecil Beaton found most difficult to resist. According to those who doubt the seriousness of his paintings, these are also temptations that attracted Francis Bacon.

In 1940 *Horizon* published Clement Greenberg's article 'Art and Kitsch':

Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money - not even their time.⁴⁶

As the quotation from Rosamond Lehman's *The Echoing Grove* suggested, and as a look at Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* will make apparent, the difference between decoration and art, or art and kitsch, was used at the beginning of the 1950s to order men's social practices and sexual and aesthetic pleasures with other men, to make sense of modern dangers and delights.

The Charioteer was first published in 1953, and the last book in which Mary Renault attempted to reconcile relationships between men to a contemporary setting. In *The Charioteer* an ethical form of social and sexual practice between men, whose pretext is *The Phaedrus of Plato*, is supported by the spectacle of an abject and decidedly modern form of homosexuality.

The Charioteer is about Laurie Odell's choosing between a relationship with Ralph Lanyon, whom he knew at public school, or Andrew, a young conscientious objector and hospital orderly. At school Ralph gave Laurie *The Phaedrus of Plato* just before he left under an ignominious cloud to join the Merchant Navy; Laurie keeps the book and it provides a form for his interest in men. Laurie meets Andrew whilst recovering in hospital from injuries he received at Dunkirk, where he was saved, though he didn't know it at the time, by Ralph.

Whereas Laurie and Andrew meet one another in the open air, the encounters between Laurie and Ralph take place in and around some very particular interiors. These interiors can help to suggest that doubts about Francis Bacon's paintings may be associated to the reformulation of some men's social practices and sexual pleasures after the Second World War. This is where Laurie finds himself just before he's invited to the party where he meets Ralph for what he believes to be the first time since school.

The All Clear went up just as they reached the pub. It was a large one, nastily modernised at vast expense. The chromium stools, the plastic leather, the sham parquet floor, and the fluorescent lighting which made everyone look jaundiced, caused him to expect that the beer too would turn out to be a chemical synthetic.⁴⁷

This is a "fringe" or queer pub, and Mary Renault uses the vulgarly modern interior, we could call it kitsch, as the improper place to locate the kind of effeminate and camp queer required as a contrast for her presentation of a form of social and sexual practice between men, erected on a public school reading of Ancient Greek texts. The room where the party takes place is not such a coherent sign.

Returning, Laurie began to take in the room. It contained a big white-painted cupboard (the toy cupboard, he thought at

once) and an old-fashioned nanny's rocking chair. There was also two divans covered with hessian and strewn with bright cotton cushions; a couple of modern Swedish chairs; one or two charming little pieces in old walnut; various poufs; a wooden black boy holding an ashtray; and a crayon drawing, literal and earnestly dull, of a sailor's head. Across the lower half of the big windows, rusty but still thick and strong, the nursery bars remained protectively fixed.⁴⁸

In its incoherencies, its eclecticism, this room is not unlike a Francis Bacon painting. Unlike the pub this room does not make just one kind of sense, and the reader of *The Charioteer* may at first be a little unsure as to what is meant by bringing these signs together. Of course making the room a former nursery is no accident, and fits in with popular and professional understandings of homosexual immaturity, and provides a contrast for the maturity of Laurie and Ralph. But what are we to make of the two hessian covered divans with bright coloured cushions and the Swedish chairs, modern but not vulgar? The drawing of the sailor is "earnestly dull", chosen for reasons other than quality, and the only items that meets with Laurie's approval are "two charming little pieces in old walnut". The room is shared by Alec and Sandy, and it is the difference between them that has determined the rooms eclecticism. Alec is "nice", according to Laurie, and Sandy is a camp hysteric whose attempted suicide ends the party. The grotesque incongruities of the suicide scene bring to mind Francis Bacon's biography, particularly the suicide of George Dyer, and any number of his paintings:

...the naked light from the open door of the bathroom seared the eyes....Laurie arriving last found them both kneeling over Sandy, who was lying on the bath mat with a dressing-gown thrown over his naked body. He was groaning, and showing the whites of his eyes. Round his left wrist was a tourniquet made of a folded handkerchief, a toothbrush, and a strip torn from a towel. The bath was half full of crimson water.

Suddenly he realised Ralph had taken off his glove....Not only the two last fingers were missing and half the second, but the outermost bone of the hand had gone too, taking with it the margin of the palm and narrowing it by an inch.⁴⁹

But this scene is not like the paintings Francis Bacon produced at the beginning of the 1950s; it's really the modern interiors that connect the queer fringe of *The Charioteer* to Francis Bacon's paintings, and to Cecil Beaton. This becomes clear when Ralph's

rooms are compared to the flat of his friend Bunny, whose name alone is enough to arouse suspicion. He's a nasty piece of work who tries to split up Laurie and Ralph. But first this is Ralph's room:

From the doorway, Laurie caught an undefinable, strangely familiar and nostalgic smell of shabbiness and simplicity....a positive kind of cleanness which lacked the institutional sour undertaste, a smell of scrubbed wood and beeswax and books.⁵⁰

And this is Bunny's living room:

It was hard to believe one was in the same building. The room had been, one could say, interior-decorated. There was a single picture, which was vorticist of a kind and had patently been chosen to match the colour scheme. A large number of glossy magazines were strewn about; but such books as could be seen looked as if people had left them behind and never missed them. The furniture was very low, with that overstated lounginess which rarely turns out to be physically comfortable. It was all very bright and sleek, and had the look of being kept under dust sheet except when open to the public.⁵¹

Even a vorticist picture, "of a kind", can be used to create the harmonies of a designed interior; no longer the secure representative of the rough masculinity of "modern talent" but a decorative distraction. The room is determined by the post-war domestication and popularisation of modern design, uncomfortable but "bright and sleek":

After nearly a minute's silence Ralph said awkwardly, "Bunny's fixed himself up nicely down here. I'm a dead loss at interiors and all that myself."

"Me too." He suspected that Ralph wished without disloyalty to disclaim the standard of taste around him. A leisured view of the room yielded so many awful little superfluties, so many whimsies and naughty-naughties, tassels and bits of chrome, that one recalled one's gaze shamefaced as if one had exposed the straits of the poor. Laurie remembered the room upstairs: the absence of all loose ornament, the mantelpiece firmly packed with books, the little shelf fixed to the wall over the bed; the smell of scrubbing-soap, the wood and brass polished as a seaman, not a landlady, does it; the single eighteenth-century colour print of a frigate under all sail.⁵²

Laurie's feelings about Bunny's room are not unlike interpretations of Francis Bacon's paintings that express doubts about their seriousness; too many decorative details and "little superfluties"; too designed, and too much attention to formal harmonies. Whilst

Bunny's flat, or the queer pub, or the room where the party was held, don't match *Two Figures 1953*, they do each share in the modern; and whilst Francis Bacon's figures wrestle on a bed with somewhat decorative head and foot boards, this only serves to highlight the sparse modern lines of the interior and the modern application of paint that makes up the painting's modern surface.

At an historical moment when commercial and kitsch forms of modern art could be allied to abject representations of male homosexual personas, it should be no surprise that Cecil Beaton started to find it a bit difficult to take himself seriously. Peter Watson, Patrick from *A Room in Chelsea Square*, became seriously committed to modern art and its institutions, but it seems that in the early years of the 1950s Cecil Beaton had some doubts about himself and yearned to be taken seriously as an artist.

In the same year that Francis Bacon painted *Two Figures 1953*, Cecil Beaton enrolled for two days a week as a painting student at the Slade School of Fine Art. 1953 is also the year that Francis Bacon is first mentioned in Cecil Beaton's published diaries. Cecil Beaton writes that he went to the ballet, then he met Francis Bacon with Lucian Freud at Wheeler's and from there they all went together to a party given by Anne Fleming for Cyril Connolly's fiftieth birthday. This diary entry is important because it demonstrates that Cecil Beaton and Francis Bacon were sometimes in the same place, with the same people, at the same time; and that Francis Bacon was at least sometimes associated with the social world of *A Room in Chelsea Square*, in which Cyril Connolly, the editor of *Horizon*, was played by Ronnie Gras.

So, socially Cecil Beaton and Francis Bacon were sometimes together, and they can both be found in Emmanuel Cooper's *The Sexual Perspective*. They don't meet however, but are kept apart by their inclusion in different chapters. Cecil Beaton can be found in "The Divided Subject", Francis Bacon in "Veiling the Image", and the Second World War comes between them. Placing Cecil Beaton before, and Francis Bacon after the war is one way of keeping these two artists, and these two men committed to social and sexual pleasures with other men, away from one another. Cecil Beaton was made

painfully aware of this during a conversation he had with a young man at the Slade in 1953.

If the conversation between Cecil Beaton and the anonymous young man is read in an uncertain light it sustains the ambiguous historical connection between art and sex on which this chapter depends:

Suddenly a young man of twenty-three (whom I am beginning to think of as a contemporary) said to me: "You don't know what you mean to our generation. You stand for all the gaiety and exuberance" (these not his words - I forget his) "of a period that seems so utterly remote to us: the personification of a life we all admire."⁵³

For the young man, as for Emmanuel Cooper, Cecil Beaton is part of an aesthetic past, and in 1953 the difference between the past and the future was especially marked. The Coronation, at which Cecil Beaton was the official photographer, is often understood as the end of post war austerity and the beginning of something new and modern. If the conversation between Cecil Beaton and the young man had been overheard by an informed listener they may have initially been unsure as to whether they were hearing a discussion about art or sex. To be really unsure they would need to know that the social set of which Cecil Beaton was a member before the war could describe both its art and sex as 'gay'; for this set it's often said that the war ended their aesthetic "gaiety and exuberance", and marked the beginning of their involvement in the modern world.

Having been made a part of the past, Cecil Beaton asked the young man his views "on contemporary artists such as Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon". Asked about Francis Bacon's "influence on the younger generation", the young man answered:

"They've had aesthetics, sensitivity, but never before a breaking down of all the rules and associations, a revolution in accepted creeds and standards of painting."⁵⁴

It's possible that the young man's references to "aesthetics", "sensitivity" and the "breaking down of the rules" could still be understood as a reference to sex rather than art. This seems sustainable if we consider that the young man may have seen Francis Bacon's painting *Two Figures* 1953 exhibited at the Hanover Gallery

earlier in the year, apparently in an upstairs room to avoid controversy and legal prosecution. It could be that after he viewed this painting, modern art and modern homosexuality attached themselves to one another.

It's just possible that when this young man went to look at *Two Figures 1953* he had a copy of *The Charioteer* with him. Armed with this popular and contemporary form of Ancient Greek ethics, the painting of two men wrestling may have looked like a most appropriate illustration; filling the gap when, towards the end of the book, Laurie and Ralph are in bed together, and Ralph demonstrates his enthusiasm and "considerable skill and experience".⁵⁵ The rooms do not quite match one another, Laurie and Ralph wrestle in the bedroom of Laurie's family home, but the modern room in the painting is a nice contemporary touch. It's true that the wrestling in the painting is rather vigorous, as is the use of paint, but this is all quite exciting in a modern kind of way. But perhaps just as everything seemed as though it was fitting together nicely, the young man recalled Sandy and Bunny from *The Charioteer*, and the modern rooms where they found their social and sexual diversions and delights. After recalling Sandy and Bunny, the young man may have felt that the painting didn't quite make sense; and perhaps as he considered the painting's surface, looking for clues, the head and foot boards of the bed caught his eye, and perhaps he began to wonder why Francis Bacon put this somewhat decorative bed in this modern room, and then before he could stop himself, he may have begun to look at the painting with an interior designer's eye.

The young man may have had more doubts about the painting if he had known that in the 1930s Cecil Beaton and Peter Watson had often wrestled with one another, once on a particularly decorative bed at Ashcombe, Cecil Beaton's home.⁵⁶ The young man probably didn't know about Francis Bacon's friendship with Cecil Beaton, or that before the war Francis Bacon was a designer of modern furniture and interiors. All of which may have made it difficult for him to take the painting seriously. It doesn't really matter. This young man is an art student, and so knows that he is looking at a modern painting, and understands that Francis Bacon included the rather elegant curves on each side for purely formal reasons, to balance

and order the picture, to make sense of the surface. The young man knows that Francis Bacon is a serious modern artist so the potential meanings of these marks are epiphenomenal, and not the real point of the picture, which is the "breaking down of all the rules and associations, a revolution in accepted creeds and standards of painting". Clearly the young man knows what to look at and what to ignore, and doesn't share in the doubts that some have expressed about Francis Bacon's paintings.

A few years after his encounter with the young man at the Slade, Cecil Beaton decided that he would like to have his portrait painted by his "good friend" Francis Bacon:

It would be pointless to sit to the usual portrait painter. But I did like the idea of Francis Bacon trying his hand at me.⁵⁷

Cecil Beaton considered that his portrait by the artist and designer Bebé (Christian) Bérard was his "definitive likeness":

It is as I would like always to be. Alas, twenty years have passed since then.⁵⁸

In 1957, at Cecil Beaton's request, Francis Bacon began a portrait, but after the first sitting Francis Bacon sent a telegram to cancel. Sittings began again in 1960 but, according to Cecil Beaton, "for anyone less tenacious than myself, there would never have been another". It's worth mentioning at this point that during the years that Cecil Beaton was in pursuit of Francis Bacon, David Sylvester expresses serious doubts about his paintings. In 1958 David Sylvester considered that Francis Bacon's work was "shockingly bad" and felt "totally disillusioned":

Of course it was childish to let that disillusion spread to everything he had done before, but at that moment and for nearly four years afterwards I felt his work to be incomprehensible and alienating: it seemed to me that it had become illustrational, charicatural, monstrous.⁵⁹

Perhaps Cecil Beaton pursued Francis Bacon because he wanted to be taken seriously, and he believed that a portrait by a serious modern artist may help. Cecil Beaton imagined his portrait "as a sort of

Sainsbury floating in stygian gloom", and so was just a little alarmed when Francis Bacon told him that the background was to be emerald green, to match the other paintings in his next exhibition (figure 17). Like Francis Bacon, Cecil Beaton liked a good match, and so he was a little worried "what an emerald green picture would look like" in any of his rooms.⁶⁰ But according to Cecil Beaton the sittings were a success and he very much enjoyed spending time with Francis Bacon.

As we have seen, there were reasons why Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton could enjoy associating with one another. Recently Emmanuel Cooper has described Francis Bacon in a way that brings him and Cecil Beaton much closer together; closer than his separation of them in *The Sexual Perspective*.

Bacon, a latter-day Edwardian gentleman, invariably smartly dressed, wealthy, debonair, bachelor and vaguely aristocratic....⁶¹

Emmanuel Cooper's characterisation of Francis Bacon causes him a few problems in using the resources of contemporary queer theory to make sense of his paintings. Queer theory's commitment to post-structuralist protocols makes it easy for Francis Bacon's paintings to be taken seriously as disruptions of established heterosexual orders. But taking Francis Bacon seriously in this way requires Emmanuel Cooper to draw a distinction between his paintings and his persona. According to Emmanuel Cooper, Francis Bacon was queer "in the old fashioned sense", when it "was a term of abuse"; was personally "reticent" about his homosexuality, but "totally uncompromising when he came to putting it on canvas." A distinction between artists and their art is no problem, there is of course no necessary connection between sexual practices and cultural products. But this particular distinction has in somewhat different forms been used repeatedly to take Francis Bacon's paintings seriously. Emmanuel Cooper replaces doubts about the seriousness of Francis Bacon's paintings with doubts about his persona.

Emmanuel Cooper's formulations is structurally similar to the difference between modern art and aestheticism that Andrew Sinclair repeatedly deployed to sustain his presentation of Francis Bacon as

a serious modern artist. As we have seen, it is also a distinction utilised around the beginning of the 1950s to sustain serious homosexual subjects, thought necessary for the legalisation of some sexual practices between men. Whilst, Emmanuel Cooper's understanding of queer culture is founded on the principle that individuals may choose "whatever sexuality they wish", he itemises a series of potential sexual subjects that suggest a commitment to the principles of sexual subjectivity that have ordered social and sexual practices and pleasures between men since the end of the Second World War.⁶² In both his understanding of "queer culture" and his understanding of Francis Bacon's paintings, Emmanuel Cooper doesn't account for the historical contingency of social practices and sexual pleasures, which may or may not be called homosexual, or gay, or queer; and how these are, and are not, associated with visual texts.

There is a structural similarity between how Francis Bacon has been taken seriously as an artist since the end of the Second World War, the creation of a serious homosexual subject in Britain during the 1950s, admiring post-structuralist interpretations of Francis Bacon's paintings and queer theory's commitment to the disruptive potential of some sexual practices between men. They are each forms of redemption that insist upon saving art, artists and sexual subjects that run the risk of not being taken seriously. Cecil Beaton is not beyond redemption. The theoretical resources of queer theory that make so much of 'camp' could easily be turned on him and his work.⁶³ But taking Cecil Beaton seriously isn't really the point, not the historical point anyway. Taking Cecil Beaton seriously in this way, can't quite comprehend the complex commitments of some men to very particular orders of pleasure, or the insistent attribution of serious and trivial designations to some men's sexual and aesthetic practices after the Second World War.

To make my point I need to return to Diamond Lil from *Winger's Landfall*. Diamond Lil is a figure whose style and comportment is dependent upon rhetorics used, and popularly established, in Cecil Beaton's designs for stage and film, his fashion and most importantly his royal photography; Diamond Lil is in fact a Cecil

Beaton queen, dressed to the nines in a "white clinging gown, white gloves, drop earrings, silver high heels, and what looked like a silver fox stole", ever ready to be photographed. He is part of the of the complex connection between aestheticism, theatre and the glamorous drag performers of the post war period.⁶⁴ Diamond Lil is not simply a useful type waiting to be appropriated by theory, be it 'queer', 'camp' or 'drag'. In theoretical and political appropriations men like Diamond Lil and Cecil Beaton are alternately rejected or redeemed, either abjected or turned into theoretically useful representatives of disorder.⁶⁵ But Diamond Lil demonstrates that the rhetorics used and promoted by Cecil Beaton also provided a visual vocabulary for the pleasures and practices of some men. Diamond Lil's attachment to Cecil Beaton suggests that the theoretical choice between social and sexual figures and figurations as sustaining or disturbing of social and sexual orders isn't always the only point.

What are we now to do with Francis Bacon's portrait of Cecil Beaton and its destruction soon after it was painted? I've suggested that perhaps Cecil Beaton pursued Francis Bacon because he wanted to be taken seriously. It does look like Cecil Beaton wanted to identify with, or be identified by Francis Bacon. In 1959 Cecil Beaton took some photographs of Francis Bacon in his "squalid" Battersea Studio (figure 16), and clearly identified him as a serious artist, even more serious than Christopher Lyre from *A Room in Chelsea Square*. Francis Bacon seems to have been happy with these photographs. So what, if anything, went wrong when he came to paint Cecil Beaton? And why did Cecil Beaton react in the way he did.

In front of me was an enormous, coloured strip-cartoon of a completely bald, dreadfully aged - nay senile businessman. The face was hardly recognisable as a face for it was disintegrating before your eyes, suffering from a severe case of elephantiasis: a swollen mass of raw meat and fatty tissues. The nose spread in many directions like a polyp but sagged finally over one cheek. The mouth looked like a painful boil about to burst. He wore a very sketchily dabbed-in suit of lavender blue. The hands were clasped and consisted of emerald green scratches that resembled claws. The dry painting of the body and hands was completely different from that of the wet, soggy head. The white background was thickly painted with a house painter's brush. It was dragged round the outer surface without any intention of cleaning up the shapes. The head and shoulders were outlined in a streaky wet slime.⁶⁶

For Cecil Beaton the painting quite literally did not make sense:

The brushwork, the textures, the draughtsmanship were against all the known rules.

And he was more than disappointed:

I came away crushed, staggered, and feeling quite a great sense of loss. The sittings had been harmonious; we had seemed to see eye to eye.⁶⁷

The portrait didn't make the kind of sense to Cecil Beaton that he could hang on the walls of any of his rooms. Cecil Beaton once said during an interview that he had always wanted to live a life in beautiful rooms, and for a life-long aesthete a portrait that rejected aestheticism was of very little use.⁶⁸

The explanation that I find most compelling is not that the portrait looked the way it did because Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton were so different, but because they were so similar. I feel led to conclude that Francis Bacon could not have produced the portrait that Cecil Beaton wanted because to do so would have involved taking the designer, decorator and aesthete seriously. According to David Sylvester, Francis Bacon's position as a serious modern artist at the end of the 1950s was not as secure as it had been, or as it would later become. As we have seen, doubts about the seriousness of Francis Bacon's paintings were regularly allayed by the interpretative insistence that they were more than illustrations and decorations. Perhaps therefore it was too risky to produce a public portrait that didn't make it clear that Francis Bacon could in no way be associated with Cecil Beaton's "passion for trivialities".

However, Francis Bacon rang Cecil Beaton and explained that he didn't want Cecil Beaton to have a painting he did not like. Cecil Beaton wrote in his diary that evening that he was sorry the canvas was "destroyed and that there is no visible result from all those delightful, interesting and rare mornings." But clearly Francis Bacon knew enough, and shared enough, to recognise that his painting was of no use to Cecil Beaton; and so its destruction may be understood as an act of courtesy, of understanding, between two men.

Another option is that the portrait was not really a very good painting. Due to his haphazard processes of production, Francis Bacon often produced paintings that he did not care about, and he often destroyed them. Cecil Beaton's response to his portrait may also be read as a critical reaction to the pictorial excesses in which Francis Bacon sometimes indulged. Perhaps the real reason that Cecil Beaton wanted a Francis Bacon painting was that he recognised that they are often very decorative and, as John Berger has pointed out, easy to live with. But if this was the case it was even more important that Francis Bacon should disappoint Cecil Beaton. Important that is if he wanted to continue to be taken seriously as a modern artist rather than a producer of a decorative painting that could become an integral part of the interior design of Cecil Beaton's home. None of these reasons for the portraits destruction seems anymore likely than the other, and that's how it should be; it would be wrong to redeem the painting with a serious and profound conclusion. Perhaps the portrait was destroyed simply because two men realised that it didn't make enough sense for either of them. If the meeting between Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton had been a sexual cruise, it would have been a vigorous pursuit followed by a somewhat disappointing encounter, that both men would have recognised wasn't quite what they were after.

Chapter Three - Notes

¹Stuart Lauder, *Winger's Landfall*, p.106.

²For an important early influence on the chapter see Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*.

³Perhaps for Francis Bacon these dangers were exemplified by the figure and figurations of the Neo-Romantic artist John Minton, who rivalled him as the doyen of Soho's art set in the early 1950s, but whose work was increasingly derided as illustrative; he committed suicide in 1957.

⁴Cecil Beaton (1902-80), photographer, stage and film designer. Official photographer at the Coronation in 1953. Set Designer for the stage production of *My Fair Lady* in 1956, and production designer of the film in 1964. The last film he designed was *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* with Barbra Streisand; *Diamond Lil* would have understood that this was a fitting finale.

⁵Michel Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face And In Profile*, p.26.

⁶Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*, p.159.

⁷Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*, p.178.

⁸Michael Leiris, 'Francis Bacon, full face and in profile', p.26.

⁹Richard Hauser, *The Homosexual Society*, p.138

¹⁰Francis Bacon was born in 1909 and Cecil Beaton in 1902.

¹¹For an account of Cecil Beaton's early years see his published diaries and his authorised biography by Hugo Vickers.

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¹²For an accurate understanding of the figure and figurations of Cecil Beaton see Philip Core, *Camp: The Lie That Tells The Truth*, p.29-32.

¹³In *Who Was That Man?*, Neil Bartlett explores but does not resolve 'Oscar Wilde'.

¹⁴These words were taken from a selection of reviews of Cecil Beaton's photographs.

¹⁵Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective*, p.192.

¹⁶Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective*, p.231.

¹⁷Patrick Procktor, *Self Portrait*, p.121.

¹⁸Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p.58.

¹⁹Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, p.96.

²⁰Andrew Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avante Garde*, pp.32-6.

Parveen Adams 'The Violence of Paint' in *The Body: Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts*, 1993, pp.52-60. Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*. Also John Russell, *Francis Bacon*; and Dawn Ades, *Web of Images*, in Dawn Ades and Andrew Forge, *Francis Bacon*.

²¹Dana Polan, 'Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation' in Constantin V. Boundas & Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, pp.229-254.

²²Herbert Read, *The Philosophy of Modern Art*, p.72.

²³Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, p.49.

²⁴David Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, p.58.

²⁵Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of The Modern*, p.89.

²⁶Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of The Modern*, p.203.

²⁷Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of The Modern*, p.206.

²⁸For a discussion of the connections between production, reproduction, waste and homosexuality see John Champagne, *The Ethics of Marginality*.

²⁹John Berger, 'The worst is not yet come (Francis Bacon)', in Barker, *Arts in Society*, pp.66-72.

³⁰David Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, p.58.

³¹For a consideration of the homosexual figure in literature after the Second World War see Alan Sinfield, *Literature and Politics of Culture in Post War Britain*; and also Paul Hammond, *Love Between Men in English Literature*.

³²Rosamond Lehmann, *The Echoing Grove*, p.179.

³³For further information on Peter Watson see Cecil Beaton's published diaries and his biography by Hugo Vickers. Also see Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place*.

³⁴Philip Core's introduction to Michael Nelson's, *A Room in Chelsea Square*, pp.iv-v.

³⁵See Alan Sinfield, *Literature and Politics of Culture in Post War Britain*.

³⁶Michael Nelson, *A Room in Chelsea Square*, p.89.

³⁷Michael Nelson, *A Room in Chelsea Square*, p.49.

³⁸Michael Nelson, *A Room in Chelsea Square*, p.92.

³⁹Henning Bech, *When Men Meet*.

⁴⁰Michael Nelson, *A Room in Chelsea Square*, pp.62-3

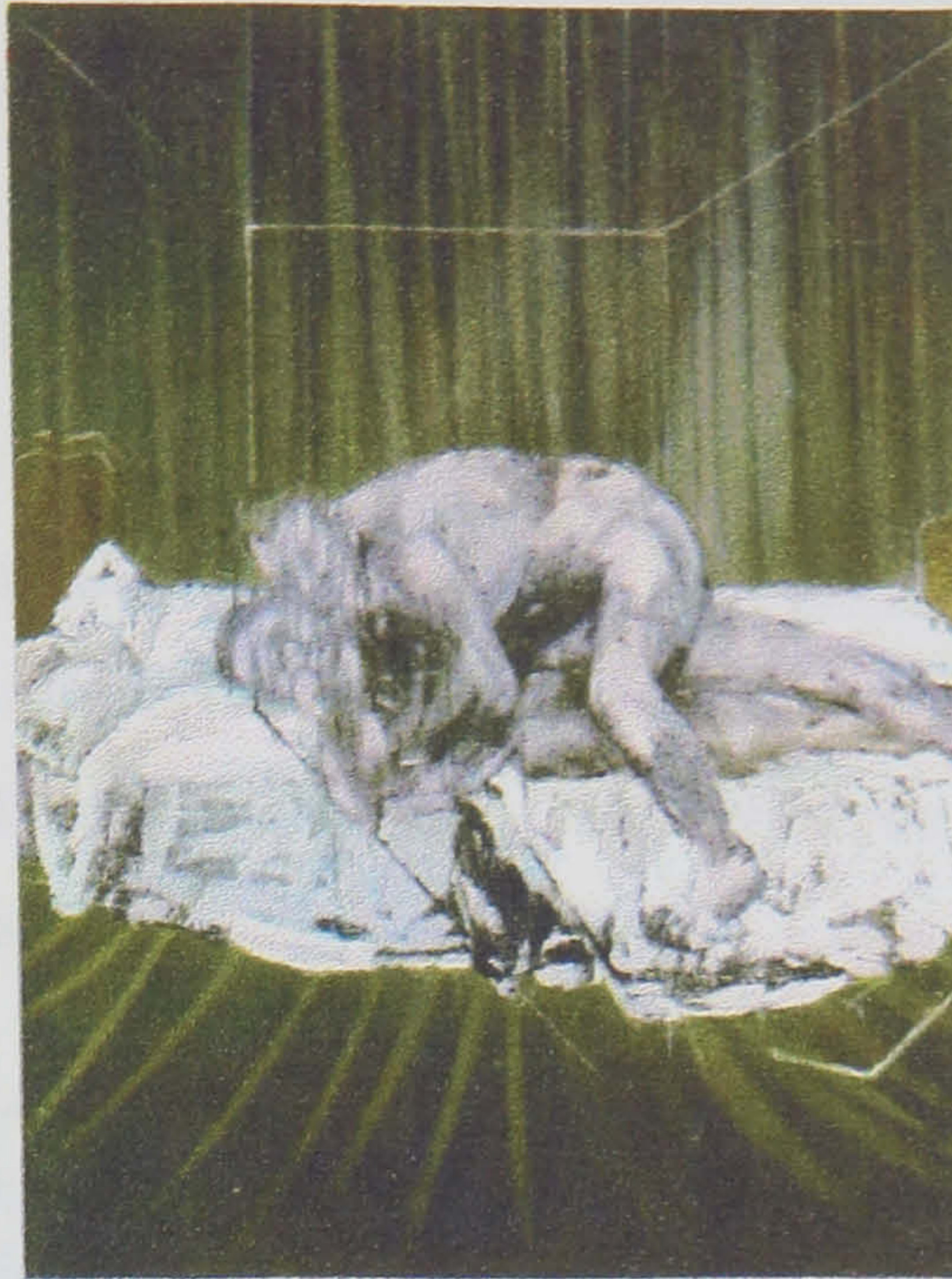
⁴¹Michael Nelson, *A Room in Chelsea Square*, p.176.

⁴²Christopher Reed, 'A Room of One's Own: The Bloomsbury Group's Creation of a Modernist Domesticity', in Christopher Reed, *Not at Home*. Also, Christopher Reed, 'Making History: The Bloomsbury Group's Construction of Aesthetic and Sexual Identity', *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 27 no. 1/2, 1994.

⁴³Lisa Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism', in *Differences*, Fall 1992, pp.1-37.

Chapter Three - Notes contd.

- ⁴⁴For details and interior pictures of Cecil Beaton's home see his book, *Ashcombe*.
- ⁴⁵Herbert Read, 'The Situation Of Art In Europe At The End Of The Second World War', in *The Philosophy of Modern Art*, p.50.
- ⁴⁶Clement Greenberg, 'Art and Kitsch', in *Horizon*, vol.1, no.4, pp.255-273.
- ⁴⁷Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.110.
- ⁴⁸Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.114-5.
- ⁴⁹Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.142-3.
- ⁵⁰Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.186.
- ⁵¹Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.192-3.
- ⁵²Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.194.
- ⁵³Richard Buckle, *Self Portrait with Friends*, p.276.
- ⁵⁴Richard Buckle, *Self Portrait with Friends*, p.276.
- ⁵⁵Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.292.
- ⁵⁶See Hugo Vickers, *Cecil Beaton*.
- ⁵⁷Richard Buckle, *Self Portrait with Friends*, p.321.
- ⁵⁸Richard Buckle, *Self Portrait with Friends*, p.321.
- ⁵⁹David Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, pp.18-19.
- ⁶⁰Richard Buckle, *Self Portrait with Friends*, p.323.
- ⁶¹Emmanuel Cooper, 'Queer spectacles', in Peter Horne and Reina Lewis, *Outlooks*, p.13.
- ⁶²Emmanuel Cooper, 'Queer spectacles', in Peter Horne and Reina Lewis, *Outlooks*, p.14.
- ⁶³For a comprehensive discussion of 'camp' see Moe Meyer ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*.
- ⁶⁴For the history of drag queens, including the glamorous drag acts of the 1950s and 1960s see Roger Baker, *Drag*. Also Danny La Rue, *From Drags to Riches*; and Peter Underwood, *Danny La Rue: Life's A Drag*.
- ⁶⁵See for example Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.
- ⁶⁶Richard Buckle, *Self Portrait with Friends*, p.326.
- ⁶⁷Richard Buckle, *Self Portrait with Friends*, p.326.
- ⁶⁸Boze Hadleigh, *Conversations with my Elders*, p.64.



Chapter 4

Wrestling with Francis Bacon

It's well established that one of the sources for Francis Bacon's painting *Two Figures* 1953 was a series of sequential photographs that Eadweard Muybridge took of two men wrestling (figure 18). Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of the human body in motion became an influential resource for visual artists from their first publication in America in the 1880s.¹ During an interview with David Sylvester in 1974 Francis Bacon mentioned that in some of his paintings it was difficult for him to distinguish the influence of Eadweard Muybridge from that of Michelangelo Buonarroti:

Actually, Michelangelo and Muybridge are mixed up in my mind together, and so I perhaps could learn about positions from Muybridge and learn about the ampleness, the grandeur of form from Michelangelo, and it would be very difficult for me to disentangle the influence of Muybridge and the influence of Michelangelo. But, of course, as most of my figures are taken from the male nude, I am sure that I have been influenced by the fact that Michelangelo made the most voluptuous male nudes in the plastic arts.²

John Russell has suggested that *Two Figures* 1953 may also have something to do with Gustave Courbet's *Le Sommeil* and a replica of a Greek third century bronze called *The Wrestlers* that can be found in the Uffizi in Florence (figure 19), but which apparently Francis Bacon never saw.³ Each of these influences and suggested sources retain and sustain Francis Bacon's painting within the established canons and traditional narratives of art history and criticism. It

is well known that Francis Bacon was committed to a number of artists and works of art that he believed to be great. However, he also had something of a passion for the popular and consumed the visual products of the everyday. The residue of his passion for popular imagery could be found on the walls and floor of the studio where he worked and on the surface of his paintings. In producing his paintings Francis Bacon often made somewhat random use of the visual detritus in which he lived. In 1974 Francis Bacon also said this to David Sylvester:

But I don't only look at Muybridge photographs of the figure. I look all the time at photographs in magazines of footballers, and boxers and all that kind of thing - especially boxers.⁴

And then when asked by David Sylvester if the figures that he painted had anything to do with the "appearance of specific people", Francis Bacon said:

Well, it's a complicated thing. I very often think of people's bodies that I've known, I think of the contours of those bodies that have particularly affected me, but then they're grafted very often onto Muybridge's bodies. I manipulate the Muybridge bodies into the form of the bodies I have known.⁵

So, according to Francis Bacon the figures in his paintings have something to do with the sequential photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, the work of Michelangelo Buonarroti, photographs found in magazines and the bodies of men he was familiar with. This bringing together of sources and influences suggests that *Two Figures 1953* can be viewed as a complex conjoining of the past and the present, and a site where a number of forms coincide. I have already suggested that 1953 was a year when perceived or contrived differences between old and new forms of 'homosexuality' became a propellant of public anxiety. The meeting between the past and present within the frame of *Two Figures 1953* may mean that this painting can be approached through the post war rearrangement of some men's social and sexual practices and pleasures.

Just a quick comparison of *Two Figures 1953* and Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of two men wrestling is enough to notice a number of differences between them; not only the different settings, and

Francis Bacon's inclusion of a bed, but differences in the form of the male figures. Francis Bacon's 'wrestlers' are created by the application of paint onto canvas that appears to have been applied pretty quickly. The painting's surface looks to be made up of different textures and thicknesses of pigment and in different parts of the canvas the paint is thin and translucent, sometimes just a stain; deep and viscous; chalky and applied just across the surface of a highly textured ground. The photographic figures are smooth, in focus, perhaps a little bleached but clearly defined. Whereas the painted figures are blurred, smeared and smudged, comprised of different textures and are in places indistinct from one another; they merge and blend. The figures in the photograph are clearly wrestling but it's a little difficult to discern what the painted figures are about. However, the interior setting, the bed, the swift and perhaps passionate application of paint, the merging of the figures and the suggestion of an erection almost at the centre of the painting really seem to resolve any possible ambiguity.⁶

Francis Bacon's figures are also positioned a little differently to any of the wrestlers from Eadweard Muybridge's sequential photographs. The bottom figure in the final photographs eventually lies facing the floor; but in Francis Bacon's painting the position of the bottom figure is unclear, but looks to be facing the picture plane. The heads of each of Francis Bacon's figures are also turned towards the viewer, they both have their mouths open, and their teeth on display. The painted 'wrestlers' are also quite noticeably thicker, more solid, more compact, rounder, perhaps fleshier; they also have noticeably short, dark, slicked back hair rather than the fringes of the figures in the photographs.

We know that all these differences could have been determined by the conjoined influence of Michelangelo Buonarroti and Francis Bacon's recollection of bodies he had known. A quick flick through any catalogue of Francis Bacon paintings confirms that nearly all his male figures are thickset, have short dark hair, usually slicked back, and if dressed often wear a dark smart suit. Clearly there was a type of male figure that Francis Bacon liked to paint, and the type of figures he painted are something like the three men who

successively played important parts in his life from the early 1950s onwards; Peter Lacy, George Dyer and John Edwards.

It's often been said that *Two Figures* 1953 was determined by Francis Bacon's relationship with Peter Lacy, which began around 1952, and that the application of paint in particular correlates to the intensity, passion and violence of what went on between them.⁷ But rather than abstracting the desire from their relationship and using it to connect the unruly application of paint and the distortions of form to the dissolutions of sexual *jouissance*, I want to begin from the differences between *Two Figures* 1953 and the wrestling photographs of Eadweard Muybridge and approach the painting from within a very particular geography of social and sexual practices, pleasures and personas. By approaching *Two Figures* 1953 in this way, it becomes an element within a dense and differential complex of social and sexual practices and images, that diffuse and rearrange the links between the paintings of Francis Bacon, the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge and the work of Michelangelo Buonarroti. In this approach I'm not seeking to remove Francis Bacon and his paintings from the narratives and conventions of art history and criticism but to modulate, rather than replace these knowledges, by attaching them to the social, sexual and aesthetic practices, pleasures and personas of some men in the 1950s.

More often than not Francis Bacon is represented as an original and international artist, whose paintings were influenced by great artists and canonical works of art. Sometimes he is considered alongside a selection of British artists, but this is usually just a brief discussion of the perhaps formative influence of Graham Sutherland, or a quick reference to the work of Henry Moore, perhaps a mention of his friendship with Lucien Freud, but more usually a brief citation of other artists who lived and worked in and around Soho after the Second World War.⁸ However, *Two Figures* 1953 may look like a particularly British cultural product when considered as a site where a number of visual vocabularies coincide and when placed alongside some men's sexual and aesthetic pleasures.

John Lehmann's 1976 autobiographical fiction *In the Purely Pagan Sense* has become something of a convention in writings about Francis

Bacon. In his biography *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, Michael Peppiatt uses a quotation from John Lehmann's book to attach Francis Bacon's paintings to his cruising of London's streets during the black-out:

I met several other guardsmen during that strange period when the bombing had not yet started and the black-out heightened the sense of adventure as one slipped into pub after pub. My sexual hunger was avid as it was with so many others at a time when death seemed to tease us with forebodings of liquidation in terrors still undeclared. One curious manifestation of this was the public urinals. As never before, and with the advantage of the black-out, a number of these, scattered all over London, became notorious for homosexual activities. Heaving bodies filled them, and it was often quite impossible for anyone who genuinely wanted to relieve himself to get in. In the darkness, exposed cocks were gripped by unknown hands, and hard erections thrust into others. Deep inside, trousers were forcibly - or rather tender-forcibly - loosened and the impatient erections plunged into unknown bodies, or invisible waiting lips.⁹ [my emphasis]

After the quotation from *In the Purely Pagan Sense* Michael Peppiatt writes:

Francis Bacon took full advantage of this aspect of London in wartime, but not just because casual sex was easier to come by. The chaos, and the sensation that people were living precariously from minute to minute, heightened his erotic interest. For Bacon, this was existence stripped to its essentials - the state he would attempt to capture above all in his paintings. What he sought was the nub, the core, the irreducible sum.¹⁰

In *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*, Andrew Sinclair uses the underlined section of the quotation from John Lehman's book a little differently:

The cauldron and melting-pot of Soho and Fitzrovia in the War led to intense friendships and passing encounters. The editor of *Penguin New Writing*, John Lehmann, plunged into the urban underworld that brought together soldiers and sailors and men of letters and artists in an erotic transience more charged than the bars and the sexual booths of Weimar Berlin.¹¹

Both Michael Peppiatt and Andrew Sinclair use John Lehmann's book to represent Francis Bacon as an artist committed to extreme sensations, in life and in paint. However, neither Michael Peppiatt or Andrew Sinclair exploit the potential of *In the Purely Pagan Sense* to help map out a very particular social, sexual and visual

geography through which to approach some of Francis Bacon's paintings. Initially two of the primary co-ordinates in this sexual and textual geography are 'class' and 'German modernism', and after the Second World these are subsumed by social and sexual sites of encounter that can be found in and between Soho and the East End of London. In this physical, social, sexual and textual geography Francis Bacon found his regular pleasure, and it is from within this space that I want to make my approach to *Two Figures 1953*. But to begin we need to leave the 1950s and return once more to the 1920s and 30s, leave Britain and spend just a little time in Germany.

In the Purely Pagan Sense is about Jack Marlowe's social but mostly sexual encounters with young working class men in Vienna, Berlin and London. Whilst Jack Marlowe's commitment to certain social and sexual geographies and certain kinds of men can't be attached to *Two Figures 1953* to form a seamless understanding, John Lehmann's book is one place to begin an inquiry into some cultural products and some sexual practices that can be placed alongside one another, and through this process of agglomeration formulate a kind of sense for Francis Bacon's painting.

Near the beginning of *In the Purely Pagan Sense*, Jack Marlowe attends a party with some "Bloomsbury people", in the company of a young painter called Duncan. It serves my purpose to believe that this young Bloomsbury painter is Duncan Grant, and that his drawings and coloured sketches of men wrestling (figure 20) may have something to do with *Two Figures 1953*.¹² It's possible to consider Francis Bacon's painting from within a very particular social, sexual and textual tradition that by the beginning of this century was able to imbue any image of two men wrestling with a powerful erotic charge. For some readers of Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds it was easy to mix Ancient Greek wrestling with forms of socialist and sexual politics that found pleasure in male comradeship and glamour in the figures of working class men.¹³ Whilst these potential determinants on Duncan Grant's drawings and coloured sketches of men wrestling are certainly not immaterial in this approach to *Two Figures 1953*, they need to be rearranged by following the narrative of *In the Purely Pagan Sense* and Jack Marlowe to Germany.¹⁴

Towards the end of the 1920s Bloomsbury was no longer the principal place where men like Jack Marlowe, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood and W. H. Auden made sense of their interest in art and their interest in men. In his 1951 autobiography *World Within World* Stephen Spender writes of the differences between the artists and writers in and around the Bloomsbury Group and those that came to prominence in the 1930s:

...Bloomsbury was like the last kick of an enlightened aristocratic tradition.¹⁵

Despite their Leftish sympathies the atmosphere of Bloomsbury was nevertheless snobbish. They were tolerant in their attitude towards sexual morals, scrupulous in their personal relationships with each other.¹⁶

To them [The Bloomsbury Group] there was something barbarous about our generation....A new generation had arisen which proclaimed that bourgeois civilisation was at an end, and which assumed the certainty of revolution, which took sides and which was exposed even within its arts to the flooding-in of outside public events, which cared but little for style and knew nothing of Paris.¹⁷

Coincidentally perhaps, Jack Marlowe leaves for Austria and then on to Germany after the end of his affair with Duncan, the young Bloomsbury painter:

In the mood of disillusionment that followed Duncan's break with me, it began to seem to me that there was something narrow and stifling, not merely about the Museum, but also about the intellectual world in which he lived. Brilliant and amusing people, yes, but too much of a hothouse atmosphere. I was, of course, influenced by the restless mood of that time of economic crisis and social confusion, which had already inspired several of my friends to pull up their roots in England and go abroad, not only for a complete change of scene but also to break away from their social background and find contact with other classes and other lives. Abroad, I vaguely imagined, I might also be able to solve my sexual problems.¹⁸

To investigate the changing associations between visual culture and the economy of some men's sexual practices and pleasures it's necessary to leave Britain in the company of men who looked to Germany in the 1930s for political, aesthetic and sexual excitement. In 1956, the year that he was quietly removed from the Wolfenden Committee, Goronwy Rees wrote in *Encounter*, edited by Stephen

Spender and Irving Kristol, of the attractions of Germany for some young men in the 1930s:

For politics were only a part of our infatuation with Germany. Weimar also represented to us all those experiments, in literature, in the theatre, in music, in education, and not least in sexual morals, which we would have liked to attempt in our own country but were so patently impossible in face of the massive and infuriating stupidity of the British middle classes.¹⁹

For both John Lehmann and Stephen Spender their departure from Bloomsbury and Britain, and their arrival in Germany in the early 1930s, enabled them to write about and experience the pleasures of unfamiliar cities and the excitements of social and sexual encounters with young and foreign working class men. Of the "terrifying mystery of cities" Stephen Spender writes:

...a great city is a kind of labyrinth within which at every moment of the day the most hidden wishes of every human being are performed by people who devote their whole existence to doing this and nothing else.²⁰

Stephen Spender's description of the modern city as a 'labyrinth' recalls Oscar Wilde's description of Dorian Gray's excitement at finding himself out and about in the East End of London at the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, Vienna, Hamburg, but Berlin in particular granted some men license to experience the city as they and Dorian Gray knew it was meant to be; modern, alien and exciting; and to engage in forms of social and sexual practice they felt to be either unavailable or impossible in Britain. For men like John Lehmann and Stephen Spender the excitements of foreign cities and sexual encounters with young men of different nationalities and different classes were so closely aligned as to be almost the same. In his published journals, diaries and fictions, Stephen Spender firmly fuses modernity, sexual practices and pleasures with men and German modernism.²¹ In *The Temple*, his fictional account of 1930s Germany, Stephen Spender writes about a young man called Paul looking at the modern photographs of a young German photographer called Joachim (figure 21):

One in particular struck Paul. It was a bather standing naked at the reed-fringed edge of a lake. The picture was taken slightly from below so that the torso, rising above the thighs, receded, and the whole body was seen, layer on layer

of hips and rib cage and shoulders, up to the towering head, with dark hair helmeted against a dark sky. V. shaped shadows of willow leaves fell like showers of arrows on San Sebastien, on the youth's sunlit breast and thighs.²²

The fictional encounter between Joachim and Paul in *The Temple* is based on a meeting between Stephen Spender and the photographer Herbert List. In his autobiography *World Within World*, published in 1951, Stephen Spender describes Joachim's, that is Herbert List's studio:

The room was L-shaped, so that one part of it could not be seen from the other. At each end were beds which were mattresses, and bare modernist tables and chairs made of tubes of steel and bent plywood. The main part of the room formed a large space which had been cleared for dancing. The room was lit by lamps of tubular and rectangular ground glass.²³

With very few changes this description could be applied to Francis Bacon's studio (figure 22) in the 1930s.²⁴

In 1928 Francis Bacon spent just two months in Berlin before moving on to Paris.²⁵ Whilst it's risky to make too much of this sojourn in a foreign city, it's just possible that the conjoining of sexual and aesthetic pleasures that some young men found in Weimar Germany influenced Francis Bacon, and that he started to associate social and sexual pleasures and practices between men with the pictorial forms, spatial arrangements and designs of German modernism. We know that when Francis Bacon returned to London he became a furniture and interior designer very much in debt to the Bauhaus. We also know that being modern and interested in design had something of an affinity with being interested in men during the 1930s.²⁶ Certainly for Stephen Spender the visual language of modernism was intimately associated with sexual pleasures between men, and he explicitly attaches Joachim's modern photographs to the modern design of his studio to a way of life, a 'design for living', he found in Germany at the beginning of the 1930s:

The photographs were like an enormous efflorescence of Joachim's taste for 'living', a great stream of magnificent young people, mostly young men, lying on the sand, standing with their heads enshadowed and pressed back as though leaning against the sun, rising from bulrushes and grasses, swimming in seas and rivers, laughing from verandas, embracing one another....About the appearance of them all and about the very

technique of the photography, there was the same glaze and gleam of the 'modern' as in the room itself and the people in it: something making them seem released and uninhibited yet anonymous, as they asserted themselves by the mere force of their undistinguishable instincts.²⁷

Rather than making too much of the two months that Francis Bacon spent in Berlin at the end of the 1920s, I'd like to establish a few possible connections between the forms of German modernism, Herbert List's photographs and Francis Bacon's paintings.

Herbert List's photographs, and Stephen Spender's descriptions of them, evoke both the naturist and physical culture movements that became so popular in Germany after the First World War, and particularly the physique and body building photographs (figures 23 & 24) that were published in books and magazines in Germany, Britain and the USA during the interwar years.²⁸ In these photographs the visual language of classicism are combined with a sometimes scientific interest in the modern male form. The scientific visual language used by Eadweard Muybridge provided a protocol for physique and body-building photographs that focused on the surfaces of male bodies placed in studios or simple scenic locations. Herbert List's commitment to male forms, combined with his explicit classical references, but most importantly his formal, simple and modern arrangements of pictorial space (figure 25) can connect physical culture photographs to Francis Bacon's painting.

Whilst Stephen Spender's fictional description of Herbert List's photograph doesn't come close to describing any Francis Bacon painting, Herbert List's commitment to surfaces and simple modern forms can be attached to the surface and arrangement of space within the frame of *Two Figures* 1953. It's been suggested that the formal structures of Francis Bacon's paintings owe something to the time he spent as a Bauhaus kind of designer, and the formal similarities between his studio in the 1930s and his paintings, Herbert List's studio and his photographs, could suggest a shared interest in the sexual and aesthetic formalities of German modernism.²⁹

However, it's certainly possible that this trip to Germany is a diversion and the connection between the visual vocabularies of

physical culture photographs and *Two Figures 1953* may be more direct. And it's also possible that physical culture photographs may act as mediators between the work of Walt Whitman, the social and sexual philosophies and politics of Edward Carpenter, the work of John Addington Symonds and Francis Bacon's painting; an approach that could bypass Bloomsbury and German modernism altogether. Whatever, each of these possible approaches to *Two Figures 1953* suggest associations between the social and sexual pleasures of modernity, modern photographic techniques, modern visual vocabularies, and sexual encounters between different kinds of men.

In *The Temple* Stephen Spender describes how the photograph that Joachim showed Paul becomes a template for Paul's consequent encounter with a young man called Lothar, and proposes that Paul's pleasure in taking a modern photograph is analogous to a sexual encounter:

He had invited him solely for the purpose of taking the photograph and, quite obviously, Lothar was delighted at the idea of being photographed. Lothar would have thought, however, that part of the deal was that he had been invited for sex.³⁰

Clearly Lothar is one of those young men who found pleasure at the end of a photographer's lens. It's apparent however, from the accounts of both Stephen Spender and John Lehmann of their time in Germany, that this modern form of pleasure is intimately attached to class difference, economic disparity and financial transactions between men of different classes, ages and nationalities.³¹ For Paul the historical affinity between paying to take the photograph of a young and foreign working class man and paying him for sex, invested modern photographs with an erotic intensity. This affinity between the visual vocabularies of modern photography and forms of sexual practice and pleasure available within the modern metropolis can be used to make sense of *Two Figures 1953* as a visual product attached to some men's class inflected social and sexual pleasures and practices.

It really would be pretty difficult to over-estimate the importance of class difference in the disposition of sexual encounters between men during the first fifty year of this century. Jack Marlowe

travelled to Germany with well established protocols that precluded sexual encounters with men of his own class:

I was obsessed by the desire to make love with boys of an entirely different class and background - that was the polarity that excited me, so much at that time and for many years to come.³²

And whilst he may have felt more at liberty to practice these protocols in foreign cities, he also returned to exercise them in the physical and social geographies of London. The attractions of working class men were invested in the articulations of class difference. In this regard one of the most neglected erotic figures of the twentieth century is the male servant or employee, whose eroticism depends on the social differences and economic disparities between classes.

In *The Times* and *New Statesman* advertisements appeared for male secretaries, valets, employees and companions that may have been as innocent as they looked, or were perhaps requests for sexual pleasures, practices and partners.³³ Throughout this century classified advertisements in newspapers and magazines have been important sites of male encounter and according to Michael Peppiatt, Francis Bacon knew and used the columns in *The Times* to advertise himself for both money and excitement as a "gentleman's companion".³⁴ Involvement on both sides of class determined forms of financial and sexual transaction was perhaps possible for an almost aristocratic, but often broke, Irishman who consequently may have had somewhat adaptable commitments to the British class system. However, Francis Bacon's movement across class boundaries doesn't diminish their significance but emphasises their importance for the disposition of social and sexual encounters between men.

On his return from Germany in 1932 it was possible for the by no means wealthy Stephen Spender to consider advertising for a paid companion and secretary:³⁵

I did not want to live alone and I did not consider marrying. I was in the mood when people advertise for a companion in the newspapers. I used to enquire of my friends of their friends in case they knew anyone suitable. So when by chance I met a young man who was unemployed, called Jimmy Younger, I asked him to live in my flat and work for me.³⁶

According to Stephen Spender in 1951, it was the difference of class between him and Jimmy Younger that provided the element of "mystery" that corresponded to a "difference of sex". In *World Within World* Stephen Spender proposes that it was not Jimmy's masculinity that attracted him but that he was in love "with his background, his soldiering, his working class home", a kind of romantic and erotic socialism that he attaches to a number of childhood experiences:

I was very close to certain emotions awakened in childhood by the workers, who to us seemed at the same time coarse, unclean, and yet with something about them of forbidden fruit, and also of warm heartedness which suddenly flashed across the cold gulf of class, secret and unspoken. As I write, many instances of this unfold before me in all their original unsullied excitement. One especially: of an air-raid alarm on the Norfolk coast when I was seven. A soldier carried me in his arms from our house at Sheringham to some dug out on the cliffs. As he did this, he held me to his heart with a simplicity which my parents with their fears for health and morals, and their view that any uninhibited feeling was dangerous, could scarcely show.³⁷

Stephen Spender's memory is, at least in part, formed from a complex of literary texts and political philosophies that explicitly combined, or implicitly enabled, the joining of political and erotic commitments to working class men, and charged class difference with a potent erotic intensity; an intensity that no longer made the same kind of sense to Stephen Spender after his disillusionment with Germany and communism after the Second World War.³⁸ For men like Stephen Spender, and also the Labour MP Tom Driberg, their socialist politics were an intimate part of their sexual practice, however for others the attractions of working class men were not attached to their collective social and political welfare.

According to all of his biographers Francis Bacon was committed to the myths and realities surrounding the attractions of working class men, but was not in the least interested in any forms of socialist politics. Like Jack Marlowe, Francis Bacon found his regular pleasures within particular physical, social and sexual geographies where certain working class archetypes could be found. Like Tom Driberg, Francis Bacon found social and sexual excitement around the West and East End of London, in the clubs of Soho and the pubs of

Limehouse and Whitechapel, with men at the centre and on the fringes of organised crime.

On his return from Berlin the fictional Jack Marlowe enjoyed the social and sexual perspectives of London with a new found confidence, a confidence in part sustained by maps the writer William Plomer gave John Lehmann to guide his explorations of London's sites of sexual encounter.³⁹ Though Jack Marlowe and Francis Bacon found their regular pleasures in different social and sexual environments, and were excited by different kinds of men, both of them could be found in one or other of the clubs that opened in and around Soho after the Second World War. Towards the end of *In the Purely Pagan Sense* Jack Marlowe visits two of these private members clubs.

The first club Jack Marlowe visits is called the Broody Goose and can be found at the top of a "narrow staircase in a seedy-looking building". The club is just one room and has a "kind of tawdry smartness":

There were several boys I judged to be between eighteen and twenty-three, obviously on the look out for gentlemen friends if not actually on the game, and a few other, older men, dressed casually, who it was difficult to place. One looked like a prize-fighter, another reminded me very strongly of a popular footballer, the others could have been actors, middle-aged businessmen, or journalists.⁴⁰

A couple of the boys attract Jack Marlowe's interest, and Francis Bacon may have been interested in them too. The first has "a broad cockney mouth, large dark eyes with long lashes, and a thick mop of black hair brushed straight back", which I guess may have caught Francis Bacon's eye. The second boy has a habit of "smiling and showing his teeth", and again Francis Bacon may have found them alluring or at least interesting.⁴¹ Each of the boys have something that would make sense in a Francis Bacon painting and taken together, the "black hair brushed straight back" and the displayed teeth can evoke *Two Figures* 1953. However, I guess these two boys are too young, and it's a little frustrating that we can't get a closer look at the prize-fighter or the middle-aged businessman; as

we know Francis Bacon was fascinated by boxers and men in dark smart suits.

At the second club the men are not quite so interesting and we only need to stay long enough to notice that the Alcibiades has "recently been done up" and that the iconographies of Ancient Greece are used to form the interior design of this new site of male encounter. The Alcibiades has "shaded lights on the walls dimly illuminating drawings of Greek youths in poses at the same time sentimental and provocative"; traces of John Addington Symonds. Near the beginning of *In the Purely Pagan Sense* John Lehmann discusses the formative influence that reading classical and literary texts had upon Jack Marlowe's interest in sexual practices and pleasures between men, and in these two clubs these influences have been reformulated. Whilst these places look new they are in part formed from established histories and tropologies, and whilst some of the men may be modern, others have a history. Somewhere around here *Two Figures* 1953 must make sense.

The Broody Goose is not unlike the Colony Room where Francis Bacon liked to spend time, and where in 1951 or 1952 he met Peter Lacy. According to Francis Bacon, Peter Lacy was "marvellous looking" and had an "extraordinary physique", perhaps not unlike the physique of the prize-fighter Jack Marlowe noticed at the Broody Goose. As we know, according to Daniel Farson, Francis Bacon described London's circuits of male encounter as the "sexual gymnasium of the city", and I believe we can take Francis Bacon's characterisation of the sexual geography of London quite literally and use it to approach *Two Figures* through a very particular economy of social and sexual pleasures and practices.

Our line of inquiry can be continued by meeting up with Dr. Anthony Page, the psychoanalyst turned amateur detective from Rodney Garland's 1953 novel *The Heart in Exile*, whom we first met in chapter two. When we were last in the company of Dr. Page he was searching Julian Leclerc's flat for clues to help explain his recent suicide, and he had just found a hidden photograph of a young man (re)pressed behind a framed photograph of Julian Leclerc's fiancé.

According to Dr. Page the young man in the photograph looked like this:

He was what in these days some people call the Butch Type, with a pleasant, open face, decidedly serious; a face which laughter sometimes doesn't suit. I had to discount the slight alarm in the eyes facing the camera lens, somewhere, I imagined, in the Charing Cross Road, but the eyes were light-coloured and large and I saw how long the eyelashes were and how generous the lines of the mouth. The nose was broad, very broad, almost flat in the middle.⁴²

The young man looks something like the first of the two boys that Jack Marlowe met at the Broody Goose, evidently John Lehmann and Rodney Garland are using similar conventions to describe the attractions of young working class men. The description of the mouth and nose in particular have an intensity due to a repetition within and beyond the covers of *The Heart in Exile*. It is important for us to notice that the photograph was taken by a professional photographer who was evidently familiar with the visual languages of modern masculine glamour. The photograph could have been taken by any number of photographers working in and around London in the 1950s, but perhaps it was taken by Hans Wild; he certainly knew a thing or two about the glamour of working class men. Apparently in Hans Wild's private album there were photographs he had taken of his idols, including the American actor Montgomery Clift (figure 26), alongside those of his working class lovers (figure 27).⁴³

According to Dr. Page:

...the young man looked post-war working class. Except for the features, he need not have been English. At first glance, he could have been any variation of Atlantic Youth - American, French, English, the prototype being Guy Madison or Burt Lancaster. Clearly, either he or the photographer had tried to give him the look of a popular young film star of the day.⁴⁴

The photograph is part of the 'Americanisation' of British culture in the 1950s, a product perhaps of the influence of American films on masculine comportments.⁴⁵ However, it's worth mentioning that most of the photographers qualified to produce this kind of image would also have taken photographs for the health, fitness, muscle and physique magazines that were published in America and Britain

after the Second World War. Dr. Page then notices the young man's hair-style:

It was true that the hair-style helped. I only saw the front, but I knew what the back must look like. It was a "snazzy" haircut - the sort that includes cut, shampoo and set - and his thick and rich, light-coloured hair lent itself perfectly for the purpose. There are only about a dozen hairdressers in London who understand the trick, one or two in seedy West End streets, the rest in Camden Town or Stoke Newington. They are expensive and there is usually a queue of cyclists and barrow-boys outside them.⁴⁶

The detailed attention Dr. Page gives to the young man's hair, its cut, cost and where it could be purchased, suggest that the photograph is part of the myths and realities surrounding the development of British youth culture and consumption during the 1950s.⁴⁷ After his analysis of the photograph Dr. Page concludes, in the way that detectives and professional psychoanalysts can, that the unknown young man is probably from London and almost certainly "normal":

He was the type some middle-class inverts look at on street corners with nostalgia, a type sometimes dangerous, but always uninhibited.⁴⁸

The nostalgic glance of "middle-class inverts" locates the young man and consequently his photograph in and around the history of social and sexual encounters between men of different classes; the young man is an established and recognisable working class archetype rearranged by American imports of masculine glamour.

The found photograph and *Two Figures 1953* are so different from one another that a comparison would make very little sense. The most that can be said is that the hairstyle of the unknown young man and the figures in Francis Bacon's painting may be similar. It also might not be beside the point to mention that Francis Bacon, Peter Lacy, and George Dyer in particular sported similar styles. But these are tenuous connections and perhaps quite unnecessary. The photograph and Francis Bacon's painting do make sense together within the contextual geography of *The Heart in Exile*.

After searching the flat, Dr. Page begins to search for the young man in London's 'homosexual' "underworld". But just before we follow Dr. Page it's important that we meet Terry, the young male nurse he employs as a receptionist and housekeeper. According to Dr. Page, Terry is a "recognisable invert", "the pleasant housewife type" who "had known what he was since childhood and accepted it"; "cheerful, hardworking and tidy, and not in the least neurotic." Terry is an important transitional figure, a conjoining of the past and present, whose attractions for Dr. Page are somewhere between those of a working class male servant or member of staff, and a homosexual subject and partner. Terry also swims and lifts weights three nights a week:

He was about five foot eight but his bones were large and constant exercise had brought out a nice, harmonious muscle development on his body. I had a suspicion that sooner or later the over-exercised muscles might attract fatty tissue. I dare say in ten or twenty years time he might look bloated, but, at least when I saw his naked forearms, his impressive biceps and deltoid, I was conscious of his potent attraction.⁴⁹

Terry is the embodiment of the importing of masculine forms and comportments from America into Britain during and after the Second World War. As I have suggested, one route for this influence was the availability in Britain of American health, fitness, muscle and physique magazines, and the publishing in British magazines of photographs from specialist American studios. These magazines influenced both the presentation and practice of some men's social and sexual pleasures. According to Dr. Page:

A considerable proportion of young homosexuals regularly went to gymnasia and swimming pools, not only to look at, or to try and establish contact with, attractive young men, but also to improve their own physique, and thereby their chances of success.⁵⁰

Whilst gymnasia and swimming pools are described in *The Heart in Exile* as part of a "new post-war trend", they have been important sites of male encounter and sexual production since the late nineteenth century. Terry is not simply modern, an example of a "new post-war trend", but like the young man in the photograph Dr. Page he is a figure invested within well established archetypes of

working class glamour, reformulated by the social and sexual changes of the post-war period.

By the 1950s the attractions of male servants no longer made quite the same kind of sense as they had in the 1930s, and sexual practices between men of different classes became fused to social anxieties about the order of the post-war world. According to Peter Wildeblood in 1955:

The homosexual world knows no such boundaries - which is precisely why it is so much hated and feared by many of our political die-hards.⁵¹

In *Against The Law* Peter Wildeblood understands the arrests of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu in 1953 and 1954 as the result of his insistent rejection "of the class system". The empirical truth of Peter Wildeblood's understanding is much less important than its popular availability in the 1950s to make sense of social and sexual practices between men. A little later in *Against The Law* Peter Wildeblood writes:

I shall probably be accused of letting my sexual preferences colour my social views, it will be said that my fondness for working people is due not so much to their excellence of character as to their physical attractiveness. There may be some truth in this, but I can only say that if homosexuality results in heightened awareness of social injustice, it is - in this way, if in no other - a force for good.⁵¹

In the years that immediately preceded the publication of Peter Wildeblood's book the popular press insisted that sexual practices between men of different classes were a threat to social order. This may be why Peter Wildeblood frames his "fondness" for the "physical attractiveness" of working class men with the possibility that homosexuality generates a "heightened awareness of social injustice". Of course, similar understandings of social practice and sexual pleasure between men of different classes had been available since the end of the nineteenth century, but by the middle of the 1950s they became an inaugural, though not long lasting, part of the process of creating an ethical and responsible homosexual subject able to sustain the arguments for homosexual law reform. However, in *The Heart in Exile* Rodney Garland does not, or perhaps in 1953 feels no need, to frame Dr. Page's interest in Terry in

quite the same way. Whilst Peter Wildeblood's ethical formulation is imminent it is not securely established, and it is this that makes *The Heart in Exile* such a useful text to place alongside *Two Figures 1953*. Dr. Page is very aware of the connection between Terry's "physical attractiveness" and his class:

I confess that the attraction was much stronger when I saw him doing the sort of work I would never have dreamed of asking him to do. When my charwomen left, he insisted on scrubbing the kitchen floor, kneeling on the rubber mat, bending over the mop in his singlet. One saw the servant's humility in the attitude. But one also saw the broad shoulders, the arched back with the freckled skin under the rebellious hair, and he would look up as I entered and give me a beautiful smile of his brown dog eyes and white teeth.

Terry is a figure where the past and the present coincide, not just a young and attractive working class man but not yet a homosexual subject; a paradigm for making sense of *Two Figures 1953*. The coincidence between the past and present of social and sexual practices between men of different classes becomes clear when Dr. Page meets John Tidpool MP at the House of Commons.

John Tidpool talks about Julian Leclerc's exclusive interest in working class men, and the times that he went with him "to the toughest spots in the East End", "frightfully low pubs, in Canning Town or Limehouse". It's hard to believe that John Tidpool isn't based on the Labour MP Tom Driberg, or perhaps the Conservative MP and Peer, Bob Boothby; both of whom were committed to social and sexual practices and pleasures with working class men in and around the West and East End of London.⁵² The discussion between Dr. Page and John Tidpool turns to the attractions of young working class men; their muscles, the dirt under their fingernails, their "apparent simplicity and straightforwardness", the uniforms they wear, their modern clothes and hair-styles, and the kinds of exercise they take:

..."they take an interest in their bodies. Go in for weight-lifting, expanders, bar-bells and the rest, and subscribe to health magazines. Till recently I hadn't realised there were so many of them....No one like us would go in for body-building".⁵³

And then John Tidpool compares the present with the past, and blames full employment for the sharp decline in the number of sexually available working class boys:

"And what's more tantalising is that the young worker today is so good looking, so well-built, well dressed...."⁵⁴

After his discussion with John Tidpool, Dr. Page pursues his investigation through the sexual "underworld" where before the war Julian Leclerc found his regular pleasure. Dr. Page is as excited by the East End of London as Julian, as excited as Dorian Gray. He is particularly thrilled by Islington, which for him is "a district that had always spelt mystery and magic", an area that he had invested with a "strange sense of romance", a place full of "secrets", some of which he had solved but others he dared not touch "for fear that the magic would vanish".⁵⁵ More than once Dr. Page mentions that he feels as though he is "living a novel", and he enters the "underworld" and the East End of London like Sherlock Holmes or a detective from a novel by Edgar Wallace.⁵⁶ For many men the novels of Conan Doyle and particularly Edgar Wallace, helped to invest and sustain the East End and working class districts of London with the glamour of unspecified vice and organised crime.

For men on the look out for social and sexual encounters with working class men it was easy to combine the excitements of crime and sex. Both Tom Driberg and Bob Boothby found social and sexual excitement in London's criminal underworld in the 1950s and 1960s, and so did Francis Bacon. On the fringes of organised crime in the East End of London, Francis Bacon found regular pleasure and two of the men who were to play important parts in his life, George Dyer and John Edwards.

Francis Bacon did not meet George Dyer until eleven years after he painted *Two Figures* 1953, but that does not preclude him from becoming part of the context for making sense of the painting. It's worth mentioning that whilst there are differences of age and class between George Dyer in 1964 and Francis Bacon's sexual partner in 1953, Peter Lacy, there are also some formal similarities. A visual archetype that almost perfectly fitted George Dyer existed in Francis Bacon's paintings before they met.

Around thirty years old at this time, Dyer was of medium height, with a compact, athletic build and (belying a docile, inwardly tormented nature) the air of a man who could land a decisive punch. He looked fit and masculine, with regular features and close cropped hair, and he dressed immaculately in white shirts, tightly knotted sober ties and the most conservative business suits - the uniform of the more successful crooks, like the Kray twins, whom he feared and admired.⁵⁷

I think it's possible to propose that the influences that helped to form parts of *Two Figures 1953* and George Dyer's body were the same.

In most books about the East End gangsters Ronnie and Reggie Kray there is a photograph of them as boxers when they were young.⁵⁸ I have already mentioned that the gyms and athletic clubs of East London have been important sites of social and sexual encounter for men throughout this century.⁵⁹ But, as Terry exemplifies and John Tidpool explains, these sites and the men who used them were reformulated, at least in part, by the availability of American health, fitness, muscle and physique magazines in Britain from the early 1950s onwards. To enable a final approach to *Two Figures 1953*, I think we can surmise from George Dyer's admiration for Ronnie and Reggie Kray, that he may have spent some time in an East End gym, boxing and forming his body in the early 1950s and may have taken an interest in, or at least a look at, some of the same British and American health, fitness, muscle and physique magazines that Francis Bacon could have been looking at, or may have littered the floor of his studio, when he painted *Two Figures 1953*. On the pages of these magazines, past and present comportments of working class masculinity coincide, many of the threads that have run through this chapter meet, and Francis Bacon's commitment to circuits of sexual encounter in the "sexual gymnasium of the city" makes a very particular kind of sense.

If *Two Figures 1953* is approached from the pages of some British and American health, fitness, muscle and physique magazines the influences that Francis Bacon discussed with David Sylvester in 1974 are no longer only involved in the narratives and conventions of art history and criticism.

By the early 1950s the scientific visual language that Eadweard Muybridge utilised in his sequential photographs was an established constituent in the conventions of muscle and physique photography. The figure and figurations of Michelangelo Buonarroti played an important part in forming the poses and rationales of muscle and physique photographs and magazines. Of course, 'Michelangelo Buonarroti' had been making particular kinds of sexual sense for quite some time, at least since the end of the nineteenth century and the publication in 1893 of John Addington Symond's biography *The Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti*. In 1951 Stephen Spender wrote this about his emotional commitment when he was a young man to the figure and figurations of Michelangelo Buonarroti :

To state my taste for poetry, painting, and friends at this time was an act of passionate self revelation. One day, in the fruit garden of a house in Surrey, I told Caroline that I liked Michelangelo and the Elgin Marbles. It was the trembling revelation of a terrifying truth.⁶⁰

In his autobiography *The Naked Civil Servant* Quentin Crisp, who like Francis Bacon walked the streets of Soho in the 1950s, writes about his appreciation of Michelangelo Buonarroti, his favourite artist:

Michelangelo worked from within. He described not the delights of touching or seeing a man but the excitement of being man. Every stroke he made spoke of the pleasures of exerting, restraining and putting to the utmost use the divine gravity-resisting machine.⁶¹

Whilst Quentin Crisp's appreciation sustains Michelangelo Buonarroti as a serious artist, his ambition for his own practice as an artist's model locates the figure and figurations of Michelangelo Buonarroti in and around the popular and banal forms of visual representation that could be found on and between the covers of muscle and physique magazines in the 1950's. Like many male models, Quentin Crisp was "was determined to be as Sistine as hell".⁶²

In muscle and physique magazines the figure and figurations of Michelangelo Buonarroti were an integral part of their social, sexual and aesthetic texture by the 1950s; not simply a way of justifying the publication of nude or nearly nude male figures. Men who bought muscle and physique magazines were able to understand their social, sexual and aesthetic interest in themselves and other

men through a mediated connection to the texts and contexts of the Italian Renaissance and Ancient Greece. In Britain throughout the 1950s John S. Barrington, working under the pseudonym of John Paington, published a number of books and magazines that established an association between art and physique photography.⁶³ In the July 1957 edition of his male art magazine *MAN-ifique*, John Paington published the following editorial:

Finally, we have 'elected' a spiritual Editorial Board comprising Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Praxiteles, Polykleitos, Blake, Flandrin, Fuseli, Gamelin and Rodin: ONLY WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN GOOD ENOUGH FOR THOSE MASTERS IS NOW GOOD ENOUGH FOR US AND OUR READERS!⁶⁴

Whilst, the direct influence of American physique magazines on the public and private work of many artists is well known, very little attention has been given to British magazines of the late 1940s and 1950s. These magazines are importance sites where male figures made sense in the 1950s, but they were also, like gymnasiums, important sites of male encounter.

The British magazine *Vigour*, subtitled 'The Vitality Magazine', was first published in 1946 and initially made up of articles on health, fitness and training, muscle and physique competition results, profiles of competition participants, and a few British rather than American muscle and physique photographs. The photographs were usually of men who belonged to gymnasiums or weight-training clubs in working-class areas, often London's East End. That these photographs were captioned with the name of the individual, their club and its location may have been an integral part of their appeal for men committed to the myths and realities that surrounded and saturated the figures of working class men:

An unusual pose by Ron Saunders, a member of the Bethnal Green Weightlifting Club, of light, but shapely build, Ron gains a Highly Commended Diploma in Britain's Perfect Man Contest.⁶⁵

During *Vigour's* first year of publication photographs of men who belonged to British gyms and clubs appeared alongside photographs from American photographic studios that specialised in muscle and physique photography, and the third issue of *Vigour* was published with a physique photograph on its cover. By the publication of the

seventh magazine in July of 1946 the pre-paid advertisements column towards the end of the magazine was being used by men to make contacts with other men with similar interests:

Reader, keen on Boxing and Wrestling, would like to hear from others similarly interested - Write: Box No 1003, Vigour Press, Ltd.⁶⁶

During the first year of publication *Vigour* moved from looking like a general fitness magazine to increasingly concentrating on physique competition results and photographs. Alongside the results of physique posing competitions were articles giving advice to competition participants. Each month *Vigour* held its own physique competition, and the winning entry was published alongside a detailed critique of both the photograph and pose.

In October of 1946 the first advertisement for the 'American Body Building Service' was published in the pre-paid advertisements column, and gave the name of John Valentine and an address in Leeds. The 'American Body Building Service' is one of the specific routes through which masculine compartments were imported into Britain. In the same issue of *Vigour* the following pre-paid advertisement was also published:

Reader with Athletic Figure. Would consider posing for Artist-Sculpturer. Box 1360.⁶⁷

Throughout its first year of publication *Vigour* could be confidently characterised as a general health and fitness magazine, and in the December 1946 issue an advert appeared for the Royal Navy, and didn't look out of place. Throughout 1947 however, the focus of the magazine moved increasingly towards physique photography and a number of advertisements for photographic studios located in Britain and America specialising in physique poses began to appear. In February 1947 an advertisement for the Royal Marines with the caption, "The Smartest Uniform Out, Sir!", appeared alongside an advertisement for Al Urban's photographic studio in Chicago.

In July of 1947 the following pre-paid advertisement was published:

Young Ex Sailor, shortly departing to Singapore, would like to hear from same. Interests: General PT, posing and sunbathing - write to Box 1981.⁶⁸

And in September:

Young Man (19), living Hastings (often in London), would like hear from other young men keen on PC. Would like to hear from overseas readers of *Vigour*. Also would pose for amateur photographer. All letters answered.⁶⁹

By the end of 1947 the pre-paid advertisements had become an established site of male encounter, and the number of personal advertisements steadily increased from issue to issue. Like the advertisements published in the classified columns of *The Times* or the *New Statesman* the advertisements in *Vigour* were ambiguous, and the very real possibility that they meant simply what they said must be kept in place. This possibility co-exists with their potential to be advertisements for sexual encounters. *Vigour* is not really a magazine for men interested in men that requires decoding to understand what it's about, but a text that should remain irresolute.

Towards the end of 1947 the number of pre-paid adverts that included interests beyond the focus of the magazine began to increase. The following advertisement appeared in December 1947 :

Ex RAF Pilot, 23, wishes to correspond with other male reader. PC, posing, music, photography, arts - Box No. 2341.⁷⁰

In 1948 *Vigour* was given a new subtitle: 'Incorporating The World of Weights and The London and District Weight Lifting League Bulletin', and was presented as the official organ of the 'British Amateur Weightlifter Association', the 'Australian Weightlifters' Federation' and the 'Australian Amateur Weightlifters' Association'; the editors were named as John Barr and Henry J Atkin. Alongside this boosting of the magazine's institutional legitimacy there continued to be advertisements for specialist physique photographic studios and for film processing that promised a confidential service. The personal advertisements continued to increase through 1948, regularly providing details of interests beyond those of the

magazine. For example in April of 1948 this advertisement was published:

Young Ex Serviceman, now travelling Suffolk, Norfolk, Notts, Lincs and Yorkshire, would like to contact Service or ex Service men in these areas interested in Swimming, PC, Wrestling, Posing, Music, Sports. View to meeting on visits. Also similar as holiday companions Whitsun and Summer on Broads or Continent, share driving. Photos, etc, exchanged - Box No 2591.⁷¹

In May of 1948:

Two Young Male Readers seek two male companions to share holiday bungalow on East Coast, 3rd.-17th. July. Interests - general.

In July of 1948 the following collection of pre-paid advertisements were published:

Male Reader would like to pose for amateur photographer or artists.

Reader keen on weight-lifting, posing, sunbathing, seeks companion for camping holiday in South France, August.

Youth (20). Student desire employment during summer holidays. Anything considered.

Overseas Reader would like to correspond with male readers outside Great Britain. Interests: Weights, Naturism, Physique Photography. Correspondence in English or French.

Amateur photographer wishes to contact posing enthusiasts in Aldershot and Guildford area.

Pose photographs of well developed youths aged 15-20 years required.

Wanted. Good pose photographs of youths and young men.

Gentleman offers holiday accommodation, Devonshire. Swimming, Naturism, Sunbathing, Theatres, Cinemas. Coloured guests welcomed.

Young Man, 29, starting physique course, anxious to contact other Londoners similar age, keen on posing, art, disciplined training. Please send photograph and physique details. Reply Guaranteed.

A few pose photographs for sale 1/6d. each. Parcels of assorted American magazines, 10/- including postage.

WANTED PHYSIQUE PHOTOS. For anyone sending a clear physique photograph of himself and his exact height and weight (both taken stripped) will, in exchange, compute and mail the

required body measurements for theoretically perfect proportions for the given weight and height.

Chesty Young Man would like to meet another specialising in chest development living near London or Harrow.⁷²

From around the middle of 1949 the appearance of personal pre-paid advertisements becomes irregular. But adverts similar to this one published in January do continue to appear:

Youth (21). Recently moved to Southampton. Would like to hear from and meet other interested in Wrestling, Naturism, Swimming and posing. Reply Guaranteed.⁷³

Adverts continue to include details of interests other than those represented on the pages of the magazine, and continue to sustain the association between art and physique photography. The following advertisement was published in February of 1949:

Youth (London) WANTED to sit for artist, occasional hours, evening or weekends, letter only. Howard Bliss, 31, Collingham Road, SW5.⁷⁴

And this one appeared in March of the same year:

Keen Amateur Wrestler wishes to contact others with similar interests in Essex or London Area - Box 3496.⁷⁵

Advertisements of this kind appeared in *Vigour* throughout 1949 and 1950. The following advertisement appeared in May of 1951:

PHYSICULTURALIST, 30, Single, educated, many varied capabilities and interests from Arts to farming, antiques to psychology, interior décor to psychotherapy, requires remunerative occupation. Extremely adaptable. Excellent Swimmer. Fond travel, adventure, outdoor life. Anything considered - Box LL. Vigour Press Ltd, 106 Kensington Church Street, London, W8

In 1952 John Valentine's advertisement for the American magazine *Physique Pictorial* appeared for the first time:

Athletic Model Guild (Los Angeles) World Famous Photos now available - Send 1/9d for their winter edition of *Physique Pictorial* catalogue to: John Valentine (AMG Dept), 23, Deanswood Drive, Moorhouse, Leeds.

John Valentine's advertisement for *Physique Pictorial* and *Athletic Model Guild* appeared throughout 1953. It's worth mentioning that *Physique Pictorial* and its companion *Athletic Model Guild* were famous for photographs of men wrestling (figure 9). This advertisement for a wrestling partner appeared in *Vigour's* pre-paid advertisements column in the same year that Francis Bacon painted *Two Figures 1953*:

Wrestling practice wanted by inexperienced ten-stone near York, Reply R.G. c/o Vigour Magazine, Please State Fee.

Taken together this selection of advertisements from the pre-paid column of *Vigour* between 1946 and 1953 formulate a contextual collage for making sense of *Two Figures 1953*.

Vigour and its pre-paid advertisements can be used to place Francis Bacon's painting within a tradition of popular representations of men 'wrestling' that may or may not be sexual acts, and may or may not be art. Whilst *Two Figures 1953* does not exactly match the rhetorics of any image published in *Vigour*, the mixture of references on the pages of *Vigour* to Ancient Greece, famous works of art and artists including Michelangelo Buonarroti, modern and scientific visual languages like those utilised by Eadweard Muybridge, naturism and physical culture, the physical development and attractions of men, weightlifting clubs and gyms in the East End of London, and adverts requesting wrestling partners provides an interpretive context for Francis Bacon's painting. It's possible to simply attach a narrative to *Two Figures 1953* in which the couple 'wrestling' on the bed contact one another through a pre-paid advertisement *Vigour*. A story of this kind would bring together the mediated influence of established presentations of the male figure with one of the twentieth century's important sites of male encounter. Once more, a viewer of *Two Figures* who brought knowledge of the advertisements in *Vigour*, and other magazines, to the 1953 exhibition at the Hanover Gallery, could write this kind of story and make this kind of sense of the painting. And perhaps, but not necessarily, because of Francis Bacon's commitment to photographs in magazines, the pages of *Vigour* may have littered the floor of his studio and become part of the production of his painting.

There is however another magazine that can suggest a very particular contextualisation of *Two Figure 1953*. As I have already mentioned, John Russell has suggested that Francis Bacon's painting may have something to do with *The Wrestlers*, a replica of a Greek third century bronze that can be found in the Uffizi in Florence, but adds that Francis Bacon has never seen it. Photographs of classical and famous sculptures often appeared in physique magazines, including the *Discobolus* and Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker*, and a photograph of *The Wrestlers* was published a number of times on the pages of *Mat* magazine towards the end of the 1940s and at the beginning of the 1950s. The photograph first appeared in the second issue of the magazine alongside this text:

You are not expected to know the two protagonists. A model of two ancient Greek wrestlers. A sculpture in the Uffizi, Florence.⁷⁶

Issue number five of *Mat* had a photograph of *The Wrestlers* on its cover and the "Two Unknown Greek Protagonists" appear again in issue number two of volume three. It's just possible that Francis Bacon came across *The Wrestlers* on the pages of *Mat*; pages where the past and the present were conjoined.

The visual rhetorics of *Mat's* wrestling photographs are very different to the conventional visual languages of physique photography. Whilst physique photographs are static and use classical and statuesque forms and positions formulated for competitions, and are mostly set within studio locations to enable lighting that emphasises muscle definition; the wrestling photographs that appear in *Mat* are often action shots, blurred, grey and granular in texture. The form of the wrestlers in these photographs is also quite different to the figures of physique enthusiasts or weight lifters; heavier, broader, and with less muscle definition.

The articulation of Francis Bacon's figures in *Two Figures 1953* and other paintings comes closer to the photographs of wrestlers that can be found on the pages of *Mat* than the physique photographs in *Vigour*. Whilst I believe there is no real need to make a case for a complete match between Francis Bacon's painting and either wrestling

or physique photographs or to suggest further sources for *Two Figures*, the setting of the figures in Francis Bacon's painting is something like that of the stylised modern spaces of some physique photographs, whereas the figures are similar to action shots of wrestlers.

Mat was initially devoted to wrestling but at the end of the 1940s started to include an increasing number of physique photographs, and by the beginning of the 1950s *Mat* was publishing a high proportion of physique photographs and profiling physique photographers like "Vince of Manchester Street", "Britain's Greatest Physique Photographer". For a number of issues at the beginning of the 1950s *Mat* became a general interest men's magazine and included a section on films and film gossip. The cover design moved away from classical poses and the use of Ancient Greek references, and towards consciously modern design and typography. At the same time articles on sexual health and education were published, including 'Sex Education for the Young Man' and 'Can the Habit of Masturbation be Cured?'⁷⁷ *Mat's* shift of focus, change in content and design was an attempt to compete alongside a number of new magazines, British and American imports, like *Adonis*, *Body Beautiful* and *Male Classics*, that at the beginning of the 1950's focused on the male figure and were aimed at the burgeoning youth market.

In the same year that Francis Bacon painted *Two Figures* 1953 a new magazine entitled *Man's World* was launched. Until 1955 *Man's World* was very similar to *Mat* and *Vigour*, except that it always published a female figure on its cover. However, by 1955 the number of physique photographs had increased, a number of relaxed poses of male figure began to appear and the photograph on its cover changed to a male physique figure. Like *Vigour*, *Man's World* ran pre-paid advertisements, including those for "young men" seeking "holiday companions", "body-builders who want to enter into correspondence with the same", and men who wanted to pose for photographers. In *Man's World* physique photographs are increasingly described as "Male Art Photos", and advertisements appear for "Male Art Photography". *Man's World* also contains a number of photographs of men wrestling that follow similar conventions to the wrestling photographs from Athletic Model Guild found in the American *Physique Pictorial*. By

the end of 1955, advertisements begin to appear advertising posing pouches and other items of clothing, and in November and December adverts are published for "Lonblack Trousers", clothing attached to the name of photographic studio 'Lon of London', alongside an advertisement for the "The New Vince Casual Jacket - Vince Man's Shop - 5 Newburgh Street, Fouberts Place, Regent Street, London W1" (figure 28); a direct development of the physique photography of Bill Green.⁷⁸

Viewed from the pages of these magazine, *Two Figures 1953* looks to have been produced at a moment of gradual transition, in which the compartments of masculinity and the sites of representation, interpretation and encounter began to become identified with a recognisable community of men with shared social, sexual, commercial and aesthetic interests. At this moment well established forms of representation were reformulated, and Francis Bacon's painting seems to make a very particular kind of sense through its re-working of established conventions in a modern form around the beginning of this process of modernisation . Perhaps the most important comparison between Francis Bacon's painting and the photographs in *Vigour*, *Mat* and a number of other magazines of a similar kind published in Britain and America in the 1950s, is the combination of classical references within modern forms. Photographs on and between the covers of these magazines combined classical iconography with modern photographic techniques alongside modern typography and graphic design. In the early 1950s this combination was the established formula for representing males forms, figures and physiques. However, almost immediately after Francis Bacon produced *Two Figures 1953* this conjoining of the past and the present on the pages of physique magazines changed quite considerably; to the degree that if Francis Bacon's painting was viewed from the pages of some British and American magazines published in the mid-50s it would not have looked quite so daring, not quite so modern, and just a little out of date.

Chapter Four - Notes

¹For further information on the work of Eadweard Muybridge see Emmanuel Cooper, *Fully Exposed*; Whitney Davis, 'Erotic Revisions in Thomas Eakins's Narrative of Male Nudity'. For the connections between Eadweard Muybridge and Francis Bacon see John Russell,

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Francis Bacon; and Kenneth Silver, 'Master Bedrooms & Master Narratives: Home, Homosexuality, & Post-War Art', in Christopher Reed, *Not at Home*, pp.209-221.

²David Sylvester, *Brutality of Fact*, p.114.

³John Russell, *Francis Bacon*, p.96

⁴David Sylvester, *Brutality of Fact*, p.116.

⁵David Sylvester, *Brutality of Fact*, p.116.

⁶Kenneth Silver, 'Master Bedrooms & Master Narratives: Home, Homosexuality, & Post-War Art', in Christopher Reed, *Not at Home*, p.208. "Once in the bedroom, physical exertion becomes sex; camaraderie, or rivalry is made passionate; and spectatorship, which is at least offered the excuse of scientific observation in Muybridge, comes much closer to voyeurism."

⁷For details of Francis Bacon's relationship with Peter Lacy see Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*.

⁸See Francis Bacon's biographies, particularly Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*.

⁹John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense*, p. 128. Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, pp.79-80. Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His life and Violent Times*, p.90.

¹⁰Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, p.80.

¹¹Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His life and Violent Times*, p.90.

¹²Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant*.

¹³Walt Whitman (1819-1992), American poet and prose writer, see *Leaves of Grass* (1955), had a great influence on: Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), English writer and Utopian socialist; John Addington Symonds (1840-93), English writer, scholar, historian, poet, reviewer, essayist and pioneer of homosexual rights.

¹⁴Christopher Reed, '"A Room of One's Own": The Bloomsbury Group's Creation of a Modernist Domesticity', and by the same author 'Making History: The Bloomsbury Group's Construction of Aesthetic and Sexual Identity', *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol.27, no.1/2 (1994).

¹⁵Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.141.

¹⁶Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.141.

¹⁷Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.141-2.

¹⁸John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense*, p.40-41.

¹⁹Geronwy Rees, 'Innocent in Prussia', in Stephen Spender ed., *Encounters: An Anthology from the First Ten Years of 'Encounter' Magazine*, p.15.

²⁰Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.120.

²¹For a detailed consideration of the associations between homosexuality and modernity see Henning Bech, *Where Men Meet*.

²²Stephen Spender, *The Temple*, p.69.

²³Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.109.

²⁴The photographs of Francis Bacon's studio was published in *The Studio* in 1930.

²⁵For an account of Francis Bacon's time in Germany see Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*.

²⁶Stephen Spender's association of modernism and social practices and sexual pleasures between men in the 1930s seems to evoke the figure and figurations of Noel Coward. See Alan Sinfield, 'Private Lives/Public Theatre: Noel Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation', in *Representation* 36 (Fall 1991), pp.43-63.

²⁷Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.110.

²⁸For an introduction to physique and body building photographs see Emmanuel Cooper, *Fully Exposed*.

²⁹Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, p.30 & 47-7.

³⁰Stephen Spender, *The Temple*, p.148.

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³¹For another fictionalised account of Stephen Spender's life before the Second World War see David Leavitt, *While England Sleeps*.

³²John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense*, p.67.

³³For a brief account of prosecutions brought against for advertising in the classified adverts column of *Picture Show* in 1952 see Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship*, pp.188-9.

³⁴Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, p.55.

³⁵Accounts of the attractions of male members of staff can be found in the work of John Lehmann, J. R. Ackerley and William Plomer.

³⁶Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.175.

³⁷Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.184.

³⁸For a general discussion and impression of Stephen Spender's disillusionment with communism and Germany see his autobiography, *World Within World*.

³⁹These maps are mentioned in Peter F. Alexander, *William Plomer: A Biography*.

⁴⁰John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense*, p.211.

⁴¹John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense*, p.211.

⁴²Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, pp.52-3.

⁴³James Gardiner, *Who's A Pretty Boy Then?*, pp.104-5.

⁴⁴Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.53.

⁴⁵See Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*.

⁴⁶Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.53.

⁴⁷For discussions of the myths and realities surrounding youth consumption after the Second World War see Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*; Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*. Also see Mark Abrams *The Teenage Consumer*.

⁴⁸Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.53.

⁴⁹Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.179.

⁵⁰Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.136.

⁵¹Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law*, p.132.

⁵²Bob Boothby became Lord Boothby in 1958.

⁵³Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.98.

⁵⁴Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.100.

⁵⁵In 1953 Islington was a working class area just beginning to attract the interest of those men, like Peter Wildeblood, who were looking for large but affordable property, who may also have been attracted by this areas working-class glamour.

⁵⁶Edgar Wallace (1875-1932), English crime and gangster novelist. One of the most prolific novelists of the twentieth century, publishing more than 150 books. Wrote the script for *King Kong*.

⁵⁷Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, pp.211, 217-8 & 230.

⁵⁸Ronnie and Reggie Kray, British gangsters of the 1950s and 60s. Ronnie Kray was interested was very aware of the attractions of working class adolescents.

⁵⁹For a fictional account of the attractions of working class gyms before the Second World War see Alan Hollinghurst, *The Swimming Pool Library*. Also for a brief reference see E. M. Forster, *Maurice*.

⁶⁰Stephen Spender, *World Within World*, p.27.

⁶¹Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*, p.130-1.

⁶²Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*, p.131.

⁶³A John Paington is the pseudonym for the artist John S. Barrington. For further information see the recently published Rupert Smith, *Physique: The Life of John S Barrington* (Serpent's Tail, 1998). Published too recently for inclusion in this thesis.

⁶⁴MANifique, July 1957.

⁶⁵Vigour, May 1946.

⁶⁶Vigour, July 1946.

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⁶⁷*vigour*, October 1946

⁶⁸*vigour*, July 1947.

⁶⁹*vigour*, Sept. 1947.

⁷⁰*vigour*, December 1947.

⁷¹*vigour*, April 1948.

⁷²*vigour*, July 1948.

⁷³*vigour*, January 1949.

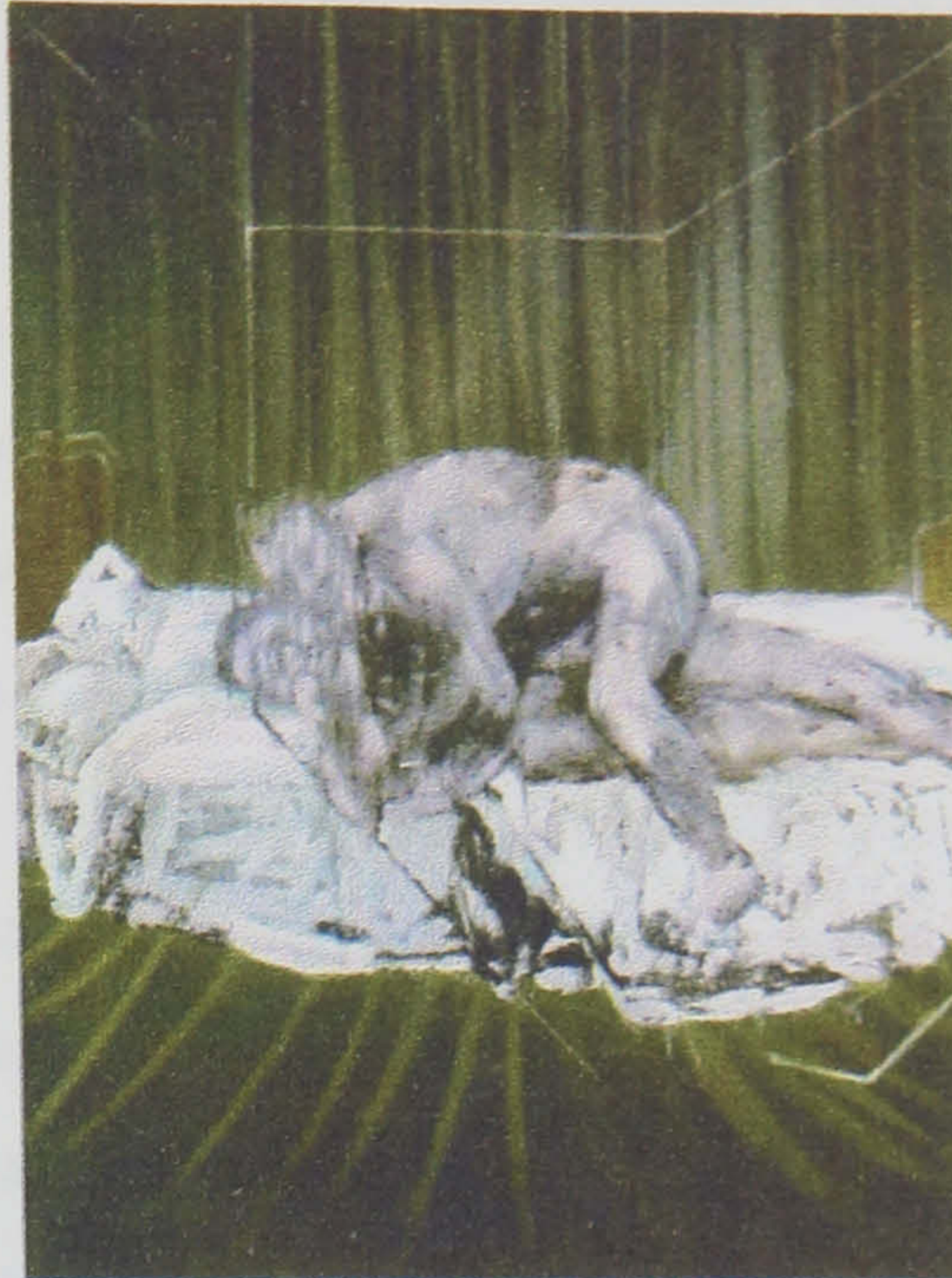
⁷⁴*vigour*, February 1949.

⁷⁵*vigour*, March 1949.

⁷⁶*Mat*, (vol.1, no.2).

⁷⁷*Mat*, (vol.3, no.12) and *Mat*, (vol.4, no.4).

⁷⁸For further information about Vince see Gardiner, *Who's A Pretty Boy Then?*; Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, p.155; and Nick Cohn, *Today There Are No Gentlemen* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971).



Chapter 5

Cruising Highgate Ponds and Borstal Boys

Following in the detective footsteps of Dr. Anthony Page from *The Heart in Exile*, I went in search of the young man whose photograph he found in Julian Leclerc's flat after his suicide; a photograph he then carried in his pocket as he searched for the young man through London's East End and 'homosexual' "underground". My search took me to the Hall Carpenter Archive at the London School of Economics, where I found just a few British and American muscle and physique magazines published in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the photographs and drawings from these magazines had been cut out, and maybe stuck on walls though more probably pasted into scrapbooks, perhaps like Montague Glover's (figure 14); but their remains had been kept and had found their way to this repository of homosexual law reform and gay liberation.¹

I decided to follow up these missing photographs and drawings, these clues, at the British Library. I worked my way through the catalogues searching for the same magazines I had come across at the Hall Carpenter Archive and other likely titles. I ordered anything and everything that looked interesting. When the magazines arrived I started to work my way through magazine after magazine; studying, but sometimes skimming and skipping; gazing and glancing; absorbed and bored; looking up and walking around; and sometimes frequenting the public toilets. (Luckily there were no mosquitoes to spray, it

would have been impolite to cut my nails, eating plums whilst reading isn't allowed, but I did keep my eye on the plumbing.²⁾ And then back to work. I began to cruise, page after page, title after title, from *Vigour* to *Man's World*, to *Tomorrow's Man*, to *Adonis*, to *Young Adonis*, to *Body Beautiful*, to *Male Classics*, to *Physique Pictorial*, to *Physique Artistry*, to *Vim*, to *Trim*, to *Man & Art*, to *MANual* and *MAN-ifique*. I moved in and around, forward and back, becoming increasingly convinced that these magazines were an important resource for constituting everyday male comportments, significant places for men interested in looking at men and creating their own male figures, and spaces where desires took shape; sites of production and seduction.

So I made notes, started to move systematically, ordered and analysed, recorded articles and adverts, surveyed photographs and illustrations, and recorded the names of editors, artists, photographers and models. But still, despite my discipline, I regularly lost sight of what I was about, and often found myself just marvelling at the forms and comportments of men; revelling in these American and British magazines, but unable to apprehend how their texture could be represented in any report I was able to write, or how the coincident pleasures of familiarity and unfamiliarity I felt when reading them could be conveyed. Not to mention the difficulties of comprehending the meanings readers made in and around these magazines when they were first published as they moved between articles and adverts, photographs and drawings, in just one magazine, and between magazines, and in the moves they made between these magazines and other written and visual texts, and the pleasures and practices of their everyday lives. Were these magazines one of the environments where for some men desire found its form? I'm sure some men opened them knowing they would find exactly what they wanted. But did others cruise through the pages of these magazines looking and not looking for something, knowing and not knowing what they were looking for and were waylaid, seduced, caught within a complex economy of identification and desire? And how did readers adjust, tune in or out, become accustomed or accommodated, to the differences and changes within and between magazines? Maybe the differences in and among these magazines seduced some men, reconfigured their desires, reformulated

the part objects of their everyday pleasures, provided them with what they hadn't wanted until they came across it. As I kept on moving from magazine to magazine, title to title, through the 1950s and towards the early 1960s it looked as though some of these magazines changed from heterosexual to homosexual. But I knew enough to realise that perhaps the magazines that I thought looked homosexual, just looked familiar, and those that looked straight, were just as queer.

At different times during my investigation it seemed possible to describe the textual geography through which I was cruising as homosocial, homoerotic and homosexual; and whilst sometimes these categories appeared to be eminently useful, at others they only obscured the sexual texture of these magazines. Perhaps understanding what these magazines were about can't be recognised by the attribution of a name, or the utility of a theoretical formula, the cracking of a code, the revealing of a concealed meaning, or even the careful matching up of particular readers to particular readings. In his approach to *The Swimming Hole* by Thomas Eakins, Michael Hatt has usefully suggested that the designation 'homoerotic' can be used "as a regulation of the boundary between homosocial and homosexual; a regulation that operates both internally and externally (that is, in both psychic and material terms)". According to Michael Hatt homoeroticism is the "mechanism by which the licit and the illicit, the sexually acceptable and the obscene are ostensibly kept apart". For Michael Hatt the homoerotic is both an "articulation" and prescription of desire:³

So, the homoerotic marks the visible boundary that divides the homosocial and homosexual; a steel frame that keeps one out and the other in. But, to identify this frame is to draw attention to, not simply the division, but the dangerous closeness of the social to the sexual.⁴

This should make it clear why it is so important to differentiate between the homosexual and the homoerotic as distinct categories; because, if we do not, then the homoerotic comes to stand for or anticipate the homosexual. Deconstructing the terms, then enables us to conceive the homoerotic as the process of finding a place for certain desires between men, not as an already formed desire looking for an object, but as a desire that emerges from or is actually shaped by a disciplinary frame or method of containment.⁵

Whilst moving through the magazines I had found, Michael Hatt's conception of social and sexual places of legitimate and illegitimate looking, where pleasures and practices "emerge" from movements in and around physical and textual environments that contain and excite desire made sense. Except at times I couldn't locate the "steel frame", the division between the social and sexual in these magazines. I then realised, according to Michael Hatt's formulation, that I was cruising through ambiguous homoeroticism, and that the distinction between the social and the sexual would depend upon the meanings made between these texts and their different consumers. Perhaps between some of the men who bought, read, and sometimes hid them, but also cut them up and pasted drawings and photographs in scrapbooks, and between the detectives of different kinds who found them, attached them to additional fragments of evidence and used their reconstruction to make a case or uphold a conviction.⁶

But what forms of pleasure and practice "emerge" from these social and sexual environments? What could it have meant to move between muscular, and sometimes oiled, embodiments of classical statuary; reconstructions of famous works of art and references to famous artists; traditional photographs of carefully articulated muscle and physique poses; discussions of proportion, geometry, rhythm and the scientific and aesthetic form of male figures; health and fitness articles and advice; and photographs of men in studios, or in the open air; in everyday and opulent interiors; alone, together or wrestling with friends; wearing posing pouches and parts of classical costume or uniforms; on beaches, by swimming pools and in showers; crew-cuts, white teeth, tattoos, and naked asses; and perhaps to look for pubic hair and half concealed erections (figure 29)?

What could it have meant to slip from sentimental sketches that evoke Ancient Greece, by Etienne, Quaintaince or the British artist David Angelo, to photographs taken by Tom Nichol of Scott Studios of the tough but angelic Don Farr, dressed in biker's boots, leather jacket and jockstrap, leaning against a motorbike with contrived menace. Or to look forward to photographs of a favourite model or the work of a preferred photographer; to read the brief biographies

of models; to notice adverts for artists and photographic studios and send for catalogues and place an order; and to find pleasure in some scenes and barely notice others?

And what did it mean to notice, or not notice, the changing forms and compartments of models; the shift towards increasingly modern and intimate photographs of the male figure; to look at male models with less muscle definition, who relaxed in front of the camera and smiled, and perhaps invited a different kind of admiration; to be aware of the trend towards modern graphic design, the manipulation of images, the use of montage and collage; and towards the end of the 1950s notice the introduction of a kind of sardonic humour that demonstrates an awareness of the pictorial and linguistic codes and conventions of muscle and physique photography (figure 30)? How could all of this make sense? And were the changes that took place between the early 1950s and the 1960s a coming out, or the composition of different forms of social practice and sexual pleasure?

In the 1950s physique magazines promoted modern male forms. In Britain two of the most influential magazines were *Adonis* and *Male Classics*. Both of these magazines tried to change the visual languages of male display, and the drawings and photographs they each published towards the end of the 1950s, appear to be shifting across the border from homoerotic to homosexual. But this recognition is not a judgement that takes into account the differential environments in which homosocial, homoerotic and homosexual meanings were made in the 1950s and early 1960s. It is of course possible that whilst the forms of men and magazines changed, their meanings remained fairly constant.

Adonis, subtitled "The Art Magazine of the Male Physique", was first published in 1955 by Weider Publications, the American publisher of muscle, health and fitness magazines for men and women. In the 1956 May/June issue of *Adonis* the following editorial by Joe Weider appeared:

Last year we turned the spotlight on another facet of bodybuilding, the more esthetic art of physique display as related to photography. This, as you know, is well covered in

Adonis and *Body Beautiful*. So popular have these magazines become, that they are re-published in Great Britain for distribution in Holland, France, Belgium, the Scandinavian countries and throughout the United Kingdom.⁷

Whilst still publishing a number of traditional muscle and physique photographs, *Adonis* proclaimed in its 1956 November/December issue a continuing movement away from the "static poses of yesteryear":

With the very first issue of *Adonis* we began to change the trend of muscular display, and since then we have made every effort to give you a monthly review of all that is new and interesting in photography...all that is new in bodybuilding and bodybuilders, and above all...new faces.⁸

In the same issue of *Adonis* the following advertisement appeared for a new magazine:

This new quarterly publication, consisting of 48 full page pictures PLUS cover in beautiful tone colours and printed on the finest paper. Each photographic study is truly a masterpiece of posing and lighting portraying the male figure at its classic best. Price 3/6d It's NEW! ALIVE! EXCITING! Obtainable at all news-stands or directly from MALE CLASSICS, 25 Wardour Street, London, W1.⁹

At the beginning of its third year of publication *Adonis* began to be published monthly rather than bi-monthly, and in 1957 *Adonis* moved to England from America:

Our best friends - those who read *Body Beautiful* and *Adonis* - will know that we have moved and your two favourite magazines will henceforward be published in England.¹⁰

Male Classics soon followed *Adonis* and established an editorial office on Wardour Street in Soho, and also began to work on modernising the codes and conventions of physique photography, and their graphic design. In *Male Classics* #14 an editorial entitled "The New Male Classics" appeared:

The pictures we nowadays publish in these pages, have moved on from the formal plain background, stiffly standing fig-leaf covered figure to the more lively, cheerful up-to-date bods whose jeans or posing briefs still grace physiques of virile excellence, but whose ease of posing shows how the modern bodybuilder's training can be put to use in the everyday existence of modern living.¹¹

In *Male Classics* #16 the modernisation of the magazine was reasserted through a change in editorial policy, that included giving the name of the magazine's editor, Al McDuffie, and updating its cover and some inside pages by using increasingly modern graphic design languages, and fewer serious classical references:

This issue of *Male Classics* marks a change in editorial policy, one of the many improvements which we hope to bring about. The front cover marks a complete break-away from the former designs as do various internal changes. We would like to hear from our various supporters as to what they would like to see us do in regards to improving *Male Classics*, we need your comments and ideas as a guide to future improvements. Please drop us a line.¹²

Over the next couple of years appeals to the readers of the magazine became a regular feature, alongside an ever increasing number of photographs that used the modern visual languages *Male Classics* were promoting, and the inclusion of references to the utility of a modern and cultivated male body for living a modern life.

Whilst it's not really possible to discuss the relationship between the magazine and its readers with any confidence, it can just be suggested that *Male Classics* played a part, alongside other physique magazines, most particularly the *American Physique Pictorial*, in actively creating a community of disparate readers who were able to recognise that they shared modern social, sexual, aesthetic and commercial pleasures and practices.

In *Male Classics* #22 yet another modernisation was announced:

Way back in the dear dark days beyond you know what, like before Steve Reeves made the loin cloth popular, evry fizeek mag was like evry other. There was Joe, Sam and Alvin; next month it was Sam, Alvin and Joe only in different pouches, and the month after, so help us, Alvin, Sam and Joe all on one picture - like you know it was monotonous.

On this dying scene we introduced MALE CLASSICS, like you know, man, it's the most, cause we don't dig that square fare, like we try to jazz it up a little with new faces allatime. Let the squares flip their wigs, photography that's real cool and noovah, and artwork that's the utmost.

Why not sound off, how's about a billet doux from you on the latest issue - do you relate.¹³

Whilst the covers and editorials of *Males Classics* and *Adonis* extolled the virtues of modern male figures and comportments, the inside of each magazines remained a complex combination of photographs, drawings and texts, that encouraged meanings to be formulated in and around the individual elements of one magazine, between magazines and beyond their covers. For a couple of years in the early 1960s, *Male Classics* exploited this disparity of visual codes and conventions, and began to use design techniques reminiscent of personal scrapbooks; photographs were cut-up, positioned somewhat haphazardly, and became elements within an almost amateur montage of written and visual texts, that often involved drawing directly onto photographs, or using them as almost, but not quite, harmonious elements within drawings (figure 31). These designs recall the process of textual appropriation many men used to produce their own scrapbooks, visual images and kinds of social, sexual and aesthetics pleasure. Montague Glover's scrapbook is one example, Cecil Beaton's could be another and of course Jack 'Boy' Barrett's from the 1961 British film *Victim* is one more. This scrapbook had to be retrieved from a public toilet by the police, and consisted of newspaper clippings of the fatally attractive lawyer Melville Farr, played by Dirk Bogarde. After the police pieced it together it would have been used as evidence against them both if 'Boy' had not committed suicide.

Sergeant Anderson brought the scrapbook in. He had made a pretty job with cello tape. "There's a little missing. But the gist of it is perfectly clear."¹⁴

It's possible to suggest that if we were interested in making an association between *Two Figures 1953* by Francis Bacon and the drawings, etchings and paintings David Hockney produced in the early 1960s, the scrapbook style appropriations of *Male Classics* may be a more interesting focus of attention than tracing a presumptive revelation of homosexual, or gay, content through the changing visual languages of physique photography. I have already mentioned that *Two Figures 1953* doesn't just make sense as a coded representation of homosexuality, and the formal disharmonies of this painting combined with the explicit appropriation of the wrestling figures from the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, suggest similarities between the production of the painting and the design

of *Male Classics* in the early 1960s. David Hockney's 1961 paintings, *The Most Beautiful Boy in the World* (figure 32) and *We Two Boys Together Clinging*, demonstrate a similar kind of production, whereby different textual and pictorial elements are pieced together in ways that don't insist that the individual bits and pieces, perhaps part objects, make just one kind of coherent sense, but enable different associations within and beyond the picture frame. Looked at in this light David Hockney's early paintings no longer appear to be isolated examples of pictorial homosexuality as is sometimes suggested, but make more interesting kinds of sense in and around a pretty crowded contextual environment. However, my point is not that *Adonis* or *Male Classics* played a part in determining or overdetermining David Hockney's paintings, though their commitment to modernising the visual languages of male display suggests they may have done; or that Francis Bacon was ahead of his time.

My point is that in the early 1960s *Male Classics* formalised in its design what many men interested in social, sexual, and aesthetic pleasures and practices had been up to for some time; making sense and pleasure from sticking together bits and pieces of written and visual text. It is important to realise however, that processes of attachment such as these had been encouraged by associations within and around the pages of physique magazines throughout the 1950s. Advertisements for the British visual artist David Angelo for example, regularly appeared on the pages of *Adonis* and *Male Classics*, including this one published in the July 1957 issue of *Adonis*:

Art
Old & New
BRANDO
DEAN
REEVES
Sculptured Heads plus Statues
& Paintings in Catalog 57
20 Photographs
Send 8/- to
Vulcan Studio, 60 Greek Street, London.¹⁵

Adverts of this kind encouraged connections and produced associations within and beyond the covers of the magazines in which they appeared. David Angelo's advertisement encourages connections

between the past and the present; between Marlon Brando, James Dean and the muscle and physique model Steve Reeves, Michelangelo Buonarroti and *David*; and between fine art, physique magazines, and American films. By sustaining these kinds of association, physique magazines provided opportunities for making sense of written and visual texts within complex intertextual environments.

It would be easy to dismiss the differences and similarities between the meanings that were made through these processes of association and connection, and to recommend that they simply made sense as variations on homosocial, homoerotic or homosexual themes. It was certainly possible for readers to make 'homosexual' sense of these associations and the contents of physique magazines with knowledges from beyond their covers; photographs and drawings may have been attached to comprehensions gleaned from the work of Havelock Ellis, or more probably books by Kenneth Walker, or perhaps from articles about homosexuality in the popular press, or from any number of other sources.

However, it would be hazardous to become overly schematic about these potential associations, as encounters between texts have a number of potential outcomes; attachment, oscillation, absorption, incompatibility, rejection, translation, decoding, seduction and production, to mention just a few. It is also imperative to maintain that the contents of magazines like *Adonis* and *Male Classics* were not just objects of interpretation, but active participants playing a part in making sense of other written and visual texts, and everyday practices and pleasures, through an innumerable number of relays, associations and processes of attachment.

In the 1950s perhaps the most famous American physique magazine *Physique Pictorial*, played an important role in Britain, alongside *Adonis* and *Male Classics*, in making connections, or establishing relays, between visual representations and certain and uncertain knowledges of social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures. As we know *Physique Pictorial* could be purchased in 1952, towards the end of its second year of publication, from John Valentine in Leeds.

In 1956 an editorial appeared in *Physique Pictorial* that made an explicit foray into the theoretical and practical debate concerning the distinction between homosocial and homosexual spaces, and it may be around this time, just a year before the publication of the Wolfenden Report, that the homoerotic ambiguity of physique magazines started to necessitate some kind of practical and theoretical resolution. Under the title of "Homosexuality and Body Building", the readers of *Physique Pictorial* in America and Britain had the opportunity to read:

In a recent issue, Iron Man magazine sounded the alarm that homosexuals are invading the bodybuilding field and that "this evil must be stamped out". While we do not claim the apparent intimate acquaintance with homosexuality of some of the editorial writers who seem to be preoccupied with the subject, we wonder if this quality is more found among bodybuilders than in any other segment of our population....At any rate, we wonder if really good people show prejudice against any minority group....So let us consider only what we have in common with one another and not seek to erect unnecessary barriers. And before attempting to condemn others for their particular "sins" which we do not share in, let us attend to putting our own life in exemplary order. We understand that those who want factual information about the so-called homosexual problem can get free literature without their name going on a mailing list by sending a large self-addressed stamped envelope to One...or Mattachine Review.¹⁶

For readers of *Physique Pictorial* this editorial encouraged a connection between homosexuality and the photographs and drawings found in muscle and physique magazines, and to make associations with other textual, or perhaps physical, environments committed to, or alarmed by, social and sexual pleasures and practices between men. Simply printing the word 'homosexual' on the pages of *Physique Pictorial* may have provided a reader with the opportunity to produce a whole new series of intertextual connections and knowledges. In the following issue of the magazine a number of letters were published about homosexuality and bodybuilding, and as with the request in *Male Classics* for readers to send in their ideas and opinions, these letters may have helped to formulate a collective association for its readers between the contents of the magazine, and social, sexual, and aesthetic pleasures that could now be designated 'homosexual'.

Whilst I don't want to conceive of an overly naive reader, I do think it's important to suggest that the pages of physique magazines were formative and experiential environments that provided the potential for readers to formulate sexual and aesthetic pleasures. It seems important not to lose sight of the possibility that readers of physique magazines may have been able to formulate practices and pleasures within their covers that were not attached to any formal knowledges of homosexuality. This is not the same as saying that these pleasures and practices were unregulated or purely textual, they may have been attached to forms of everyday knowledge and pleasure that made them make sense within certain and uncertain sites of male encounter.

Perhaps more than any other physique magazine *Physique Pictorial* demonstrated an awareness of being part of a textual and intertextual community. The pages of *Physique Pictorial* often demonstrated a knowledge of other physique magazines and an awareness of its readers, including those in Britain. In 1956 *Physique Pictorial* promoted the launch of the British magazine *MANifique* produced and edited by 'John Paington', the pseudonym of John S. Barrington, who was according to *Physique Pictorial* "one of England's most talented artists as well as an accomplished photographer".¹⁷ In 1957 *Physique Pictorial* promoted the work of Tom Nichol of Scott Studios, and published the following short story alongside some of his photographs:

John was sunning himself in London's beautiful Hyde Park by the Serpentine when he met the handsome young photographer Tom who does the beautiful photos for Scott Photos, 171 Holland Road, London, W14, England.

While John had done considerable fashion modelling in London, he did not consider himself qualified to be a physique model, when Tom insisted he gave in. The pictures reproduced here have already appeared in magazines all over Europe and the USA, and Tom's many other fine pictures have made the young traveller famous.¹⁸

For British readers of *Physique Pictorial* this promotion of Scott Studios had the potential to attach pleasures they found on the pages of physique magazines to those that could be found around the Serpentine in Hyde Park. For those readers who knew that Hyde Park was a site of male encounter, it would have been possible to attach

their knowledge to the photographs that appeared on the pages of *Physique Pictorial* and other magazines. Readers who had no idea of the pleasures and practices that took place in and around Hyde Park may have been intrigued by the story they had read, and could have taken a trip to check out if there was any connection to be made between the pleasures they found on the pages of *Physique Pictorial* and those around the Serpentine. If the reader of *Physique Pictorial* was familiar with the photographs supplied by Scott Studios to other magazines, including *Adonis* and *Male Classics*, they would be able to imagine any number of encounters between the "handsome young photographer" and his models. In *Male Classics* #17, photographs were published of "Britain's top model Dave West" by Tom Nichol accompanied by this text:

These photographs were taken by another equally rugged young bodybuilder from London - SCOTT.¹⁹

Now, whilst I sat in the British Library, working my way through piles of physique magazines systematically noting the articles, the photographs, the advertisements, the names of photographers and the names of models, I was at times distracted by imagining the "handsome young photographer" and "equally rugged" Tom from Scott Studios. And I began to cruise, again; photographers and models, models and artists, dressing up and posing, Basil Hallward dressing up Dorian Gray, Stephen Spender recreating the photographs of Herbert List, oscillating between the pleasures of looking and being looked at, and wondering why men posed, and what else went on between them and the men who photographed, painted or just looked at them. I started looking out for photographs from Scott Studios taken by Tom Nichol. They are almost always set within a photographic studio, sometimes with just one prop; a truncated classical pillar, a barrel, a packing case, a length of chain, a step ladder, or sometimes a motorbike. His male models usually wear either leather biker's gear, or parts of uniforms; often a sailor's cap, or a pair of very tight white shorts (figure 33). Don Farr became my favourite model, and I cruised through magazine after magazine hoping that he would turn up, and he did, sometimes.

After finishing my research at the British Library, I had no idea of what to do with my notes, so I put them aside. Every now and then I

revisited them, and wondered what to make of the complex texts through which I had systematically moved and sometimes randomly cruised; considering what sense to make of their almost overwhelming potential for intertextual connections. After finishing some other piece of research I would return to my notes, and the theoretical and practical pleasures of intertextuality would be re-invigorated. As I became less and less attached to the magazines and more and more attached to my notes, my intertextual revelries were set free amongst the pleasures and practices of my everyday life. I bought a camera, and walked in and around Hyde Park, feeling like a modern day Montague Glover or Tom Nichol. But I couldn't find young men to pose for me. I couldn't find, and didn't know how to recreate, the indeterminate homoerotic economies of homosocial or homosexual looking and being looked at that no longer existed around the Serpentine in Hyde Park or the ponds at Victoria Park in the East End; now full of ducks rather than young working class men.²⁰ It looked as though the ambiguous spaces of male encounter had disappeared. But then I found a Turkish Bath in Bethnal Green, and here in the steam, the heat, and the showers, my revelries of looking and being looked at started to make sense; a space of indeterminate practice and pleasure; a place of social and sexual encounter, perhaps something like the Serpentine in the 1950s where desultory surveillance made it easy to cross the line between homosocial and homosexual pleasures, and where at times there was not enough surveillance for the distinction to make much sense. And here I could think about Tom Nichol and Don Farr, whilst waiting to be offered a perhaps social, or perhaps sexual, massage.

One day I returned to my notes after some research around the British artist Keith Vaughan; a contemporary of Francis Bacon, friend of David Hockney, and I know he must have met Cecil Beaton at least once. Then, almost unbelievably, I came across the name of Johnny Walsh in an advert for a collection of photographs by Scott Studios; the kind of uncanny coincidence that feels more than coincidental and has the potential to redirect research.²¹ Johnny Walsh was the sometime lover of Keith Vaughan. Keith Vaughan took photographs of Johnny Walsh (figure 34), one of him standing naked in his studio, and drew his figure and sketched his portrait a number of times. As with Francis Bacon's painting and George Dyer's

figure and form, a prefiguration of Johnny Walsh existed in Keith Vaughan's paintings before they met in 1956. Johnny Walsh's figure would only make sense on the pages of a British physique magazine some time after the process of modernisation instituted by Adonis; he does not have a form that would have found a place in a muscle or physique magazine of the late 1940s or early 1950; well built but not well defined; modern and not classic.

All too neat then; and what is more, Johnny Walsh is not unlike the young man whose photograph Dr. Anthony Page found in Julian Leclerc's flat and carried in his pocket, not an exact match mind you, that would be too much to expect, but certainly a closer connection than any figure in a Francis Bacon painting; similar age, similar mouth, and a similar nose, but not really the same hair:

...his eyes were light-coloured and large and I saw how long the eyelashes were and how generous the lines of the mouth. the nose was broad, almost flat in the middle.²²

And then the anxiety that unavoidably accompanies such an uncanny coincidence kicked-in. Perhaps I'd been after the wrong man, the wrong artist, right from the start; looking at the wrong pictures and looking in the wrong places. Perhaps the subject of my research and thesis should have been Keith Vaughan, a painting by Keith Vaughan, rather than Francis Bacon. After all Keith Vaughan's paintings and drawings did, still do, have an important place in the art collections of many men committed to the associations between social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures.

I started to think that if my thesis was a reconstruction of evidence to sustain a conviction then perhaps I had framed the wrong artist, framed the wrong painting. My doubts became convictions when I started to consider approaching Keith Vaughan and his paintings, sketches and drawings through the contextual environments where I had located Francis Bacon and *Two Figures* 1953. When I re-read Keith Vaughan's published journals and noticed his commitment to connecting his social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures, I knew I had now found the right man, the right artist. Coming across Keith Vaughan in the company of two naked male models in Cecil Beaton's portrait of Patrick Procktor (figure 35), taken during one of the

private life drawing classes Patrick Procktor held at his home in Manchester Street, was just the kind of confirmation I was looking for.

I had to remind myself that my research and thesis were not intended to be the compilation of a dossier to sustain a conviction, but a sexual and textual cruise, in which the possibility of distraction and diversion, of making mistakes, of disappointing encounters, unexpected pleasures, and changing subjects, of following someone or something else, taking a different route around the same geography and finding oneself in new places, were all an integral part of the dangers and delights of cruising the archive, and the modern city.

Now, some of the texts through which I want to approach Keith Vaughan, are familiar ones; we have passed through them before. This time however they will provide us with routes to new places. And we may need to avoid some texts and some places, that have no place in my approach to Keith Vaughan. We will not find ourselves in and around the streets of London's East End; I can find no evidence that Keith Vaughan found his social, sexual or aesthetic pleasure there. He didn't accompany his friend the British artist John Minton to Limehouse for drawing and cruising, and only on occasions can Keith Vaughan be found in and around the streets of Soho, and then only as a tourist rather than a denizen.

Keith Vaughan is however, a little easier to attach to some of the texts, and some of the men, who have already appeared on these pages and played a part in formulating approaches to *Two Figures 1953*. Keith Vaughan for example, was more influenced by the writings of some members of the Bloomsbury Group than Francis Bacon ever was; particularly the writings of Roger Fry and Clive Bell on Paul Cézanne, and he read and enjoyed the novels of Virginia Woolf. Like Francis Bacon, Keith Vaughan enjoyed the work of T. S. Eliot, and though he liked the writings of W. H. Auden, he was most committed to the work of Stephen Spender. Stephen Spender's writings, alongside those of T. E. Lawrence, influenced Keith Vaughan's decision to begin writing his own journal, which he started at the beginning of the Second World War and kept, at times religiously and at others desultorily, until his suicide in 1977. Extracts from

these journals were first published in 1966, and re-published in 1989; augmented by a selection from his journals to cover the period between 1966 and 1977.

Keith Vaughan also contributed drawings and articles to *New Writing* and *Penguin New Writing*, both of which were edited by John Lehmann, and he and Keith Vaughan became and pretty much remained friends. In 1952, through John Lehmann, Keith Vaughan met the writer William Plomer, a close friend of J. R. Ackerley and the man who gave John Lehmann maps of London pinpointing the most exciting sites of male encounter. On the same occasion Keith Vaughan also met Christopher Isherwood and E. M. Forster:

Very enjoyable dinner party at Lehmann's with Christopher Isherwood, W. P. [William Plomer], John Morris, Johnny [John Minton], and E. M. Forster. W. P. impressed me as being the most poised, most balanced intelligence, no axes to grind, no grudges, very kindly and likeable, immensely sharp witted. Forster inclined to allow himself to be old - to be humoured. A slightly sad and childish old man, very likeable, but already a little apart from this age.²³

That's not all. During the Second World War, Keith Vaughan was introduced to Peter Watson, Cecil Beaton's infatuation, who we met in the guise of Patrick in *A Room in Chelsea Square*. By the time they met Peter Watson had become a serious collector of modern art, particularly British of the Neo-Romantic variety.²⁴ At Peter Watson's, Keith Vaughan was introduced to the artists Graham Sutherland, John Minton, Robert Colqhoun and Robert MacBryde. John Minton became a close friend and for a while they shared a flat. Graham Sutherland became something of a mentor, as he had also been to Francis Bacon for a brief period. Keith Vaughan's friendship with Graham Sutherland and John Minton, who in the early 1950s rivalled Francis Bacon as the doyen of Soho's sexual and aesthetic scene, may have brought Keith Vaughan and Francis Bacon together, but I can find no evidence that they ever met. Keith Vaughan was more attached to the networks that promoted and sustained artists who had some kind of commitment to social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures between men, whereas Francis Bacon remained somewhat aloof from this scene.²⁵

In the year before Francis Bacon painted *Two Figures 1953*, Keith Vaughan began to produce paintings of male figures assembling in the open air. *Two Figures 1953* and Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figures* (figure 36) were painted in the same year. Approaching the differences and similarities between these two paintings, can continue our inquiry into the associations between visual cultural production and the social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures and practices that took place between some of the men who hung around some homosocial, homoerotic or homosexual environments in the 1950s.

There are some quite obvious differences between Keith Vaughan's painting and *Two Figures 1953*. Keith Vaughan's figures are outside, whereas Francis Bacon's are set within a darkened interior. Keith Vaughan's figures do not touch and are contained by dark graphic outlines or contrasts, whereas Francis Bacon's are in places indistinct from one another. Keith Vaughan's male figures are longer and thinner than Francis Bacon's thick set 'wrestlers', although still well developed, and they look younger. It looks like Keith Vaughan applies paint carefully, evenly and steadily in brush strokes of equal length which unify the surface of the painting, and demonstrate no noticeable signs of re-working, and he favours balanced contrasts of blue/grey and ochre/yellow pigment that blend to grey/green. We could call Keith Vaughan's painting harmonious, and then formulate a comparison with the formal disharmonies of *Two Figures 1953*. In Francis Bacon's paintings different parts do not quite fit one another, and are formed from different applications of paint; the impasto bed placed upon the dark stained ground, the box room formed by chalk dry lines, the working and re-working of the figures, the disparities of scale, and the vertiginous placing of the 'wrestling' figures on the edge of the bed.

So, Francis Bacon's and Keith Vaughan's paintings are very different. But they are also somewhat similar. Most notably their shared insistence on a simple structure, a balance and a spatial order that coheres their modern form. It has also been suggested that Keith Vaughan's paintings, like Francis Bacon's, run the pictorial, and perhaps sexual, risk of looking like illustrations and decorations:

The drawbacks of such civilised habits to a painter of large oils is that they may get carried over into pedantry of handling on the canvas itself, and Vaughan likes, as a safeguard, to revert frequently to painting in gouache to achieve more spontaneous effects and quicken his response.²⁶

Until he stopped particularising, he would be merely embroidering or providing illustrations of his essential theme.²⁷

Emmanuel Cooper has compared Keith Vaughan's 1948 drawing of two men wrestling with *Two Figures* 1953, and intimated that some of the formal differences between these two pieces of work are the expression of sexual differences between their producers:

Vaughan's male figures, though often nude and placed side by side, rarely appear to have any intimate contact; each one seems complete. In *Wrestlers* 1948 (Piccadilly Gallery, London), though the two men are engaged in an activity in which bodily contact is essential, they seem to be pushing against contact. Their movements have the feel of exhaustion, as though the wrestling was taking place in a dream. As in Francis Bacon's treatment of the same subject painted in 1953 it is not clear whether the two men are wrestling sexually or in sport.²⁸

Just a few pages later in *The Sexual Perspective* Emmanuel Cooper describes *Two Figures* 1953 as a "painting of remarkable candour and completeness", and adds that the "activity of the figures" contrasts with Keith Vaughan's "more formal *Wrestlers*". A somewhat similar biographical interpretation of Keith Vaughan's drawing and paintings can be found in Edward Lucie Smith's introduction to *Keith Vaughan: Drawings of the Young Male*, where he suggests that Keith Vaughan's work expresses an "obsession" with the male nude that can not be found in the work of Francis Bacon or David Hockney. According to Edward Lucie Smith, unlike David Hockney's drawings, etchings and paintings, in Keith Vaughan's "guilt and longing are ever present". Edward Lucie Smith further suggests that Keith Vaughan's drawings "though extremely simple and rapid in technique are his most masterly" because they are "free of the inhibitions which sometimes cripple his painting".

Clearly these two interpretations of Keith Vaughan's drawing and paintings utilise the linear narratives of homosexual law reform and gay liberation, sustained by evidence selected from Keith Vaughan's published journals. In his published journals Keith Vaughan often

mentions his personal unhappiness and inability to find a fulfilling and equitable relationship with another man, and so it's easy to make use of selected sections from Keith Vaughan's published journals, in conjunction with the narratives of homosexual law reform and gay liberation that repeatedly represent the social and sexual pleasures and practices of men in the 1950s as abject, to formulate a compelling interpretation of his paintings as frustrated representations of homosexuality. But we can simply refuse to privilege the all too available trope of homosexual tragedy, and consider instead the form of Keith Vaughan's paintings and how they may make sense alongside *Two Figures 1953* and some everyday homosocial, homoerotic or homosexual pleasures and practices.

On just a few occasions Keith Vaughan mentions Francis Bacon in his published journals. In his journal entry for 27 January 1955, Keith Vaughan recounts a traumatic incident between Francis Bacon and the infatuated and subsequently devastated Dennis Williams:

It was moving to see how affected D. [Dennis Williams] was by the recollection of this incident. I felt how so easily I could occupy the same role in relation to him. His impressive dignity, his ardour and natural grace, his extraordinary physical beauty - supple - gentle - sensuous. 'He sees people as mountains of flesh', Dennis said. 'He is obsessed by this extraordinary capacity for flesh to breath, walk, talk.'²⁹

If Keith Vaughan seems to identify and compete with Francis Bacon in his recounting of this episode, it's worth mentioning that by 1955 Francis Bacon's success certainly overshadowed Keith Vaughan's. But my point is that Keith Vaughan looks to be aware that he and Francis Bacon could be sexually and aesthetically associated with one another. Earlier in his journal Keith Vaughan criticises Francis Bacon's "lack of permanent formal, classical values" and his "spiv-existentialist outlook on painting". In a journal entry in 1972 Keith Vaughan approves of an article by the art critic William Feaver in which he "demolished the reverential accolade that has built up round" Francis Bacon. Keith Vaughan commends William Feaver for saying "some sharp, accurate and penetrating things which certainly needed saying".

Keith Vaughan isn't the only person who perceived an aesthetic and sexual association between him and Francis Bacon. Though I suspect that Keith Vaughan's perception of the difference between him and Francis influenced Malcolm Yorke when he wrote:

Bacon is by temperament a gambler who likes to approach his raw canvas without the support of preliminary drawing and splash his paint with a freedom Vaughan never aspired to. Bacon also lacks reticence; his sexual obsessions and his lifestyle are out in the open, both in the pictures and the press. One can see why Vaughan found Bacon's debased creatures gibbering in harshly lit windowless rooms or crouched so little to his restrained tastes. His own work, where man stands outdoors with his dignity and body intact, could be seen as a direct reply to Bacon's. Vaughan's males were in search of love and integration, whereas Bacon's wallowed in their own degradation and disintegration.³⁰ [my emphasis]

As with Andrew Sinclair's interpretation of the encounter between Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton, Malcolm Yorke formulates a textual and sexual encounter between Keith Vaughan and Francis Bacon as a meeting between opposites and uses the same well established homosexual ethics instituted by the Wolfenden Report. Malcolm Yorke represents Keith Vaughan as a model of sexual and aesthetic restraint. According to David Thompson in 1962, almost certainly making an indirect reference to Francis Bacon, Keith Vaughan's paintings are "centuries away from modern angst and the modern inability to conceive of men in anything but a tortured, shattered, primitive or else flippant image". David Thompson believes that Keith Vaughan's paintings demonstrate an "essential respect for logic and order" and "human dignity". These liberal and humanist interpretations of Keith Vaughan's paintings clearly have something to do with the liberal and utilitarian philosophy that sustained the recommendations and rationales of the Wolfenden Report and the Homosexual Law Reform Society. Both Malcolm Yorke and David Thompson represent Keith Vaughan's paintings as the kind of homosexual subjects on which the arguments for law reform were founded, alongside Francis Bacon's as an abject but necessary comparison.

These accounts of the sexual and aesthetic differences between Keith Vaughan and Francis Bacon, combined with Keith Vaughan's antipathy,

which may have been jealousy, make it somewhat perilous to suggest that there may be some sexual as well as aesthetic similarities between them. But alongside the structural similarity between *Two Figures 1953* and *Second Assembly of Figures*, there is a potential to bring them a little closer together if we make an approach through a sexual and textual environment that sustains some differences, without insisting that we make an ethical choice, and proposes some similarities, without suggesting that Keith Vaughan and Francis Bacon produced different forms of the same sexual subject matter.

Both *Two Figures 1953* and Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figures* are representations of the male figure that have something to do with sexual and aesthetic encounters between men that can be associated with modern photographs found in physique magazines; like the magazines where I first came across Johnny Walsh alongside innumerable examples of men wrestling. For a viewer in the 1950s, familiar with just a few physique magazines, the paintings of Keith Vaughan and Francis Bacon may not have looked so very different, certainly not completely different, and they really may have made some kind of sense alongside one another. However, just in case the connection appears to be somewhat tenuous, it's possible to make a case by first returning once again to just before the Second World War, to take a look at a few of Keith Vaughan's photographs; photographs that look as though they influenced his paintings throughout his career.

Keith Vaughan was a fan of the ballet, and as David Mellor has suggested in his article 'Francis Bacon: Affinities, Contexts and the British Tradition', one route that modern forms found their way into the "British pictorial imagination" was through stage design's for the ballet between 1910 and 1930.³¹ For many men the ballet was a site of social, sexual and aesthetic encounter, and a place where sexual pleasures could be attached to modern forms. In the early 1930s, whilst waiting to enjoy the social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures that the ballet afforded, Keith Vaughan met Harold Colebrook. According to Malcolm Yorke they were lovers for several years, even though "Keith's physical preference was always for younger working-class boys".³² At weekends Keith Vaughan and Harold Colebrook drove to Pagham, sometimes with Keith's brother and a

couple of young working class men, perhaps "Stan and Len from Kentish Town".³³ During the course of the weekend Keith Vaughan would often take photographs (figure 37) of them all playing, often naked, on the beach; not simple snapshots but carefully composed photographs that demonstrate a knowledge of the techniques and visual languages of modern photography and design, perhaps influenced by Keith Vaughan's commitment to the ballet. Whilst not as technically proficient as the photographs of Herbert List (figure 38), which had such an impact on Stephen Spender, there are some similarities of setting, composition, form and a shared sensitivity to conjoining the forms and surfaces of young working class men and with the forms and surfaces of modern photographs.

For Keith Vaughan, Pagham was an idyll. Perhaps a place of escape, where apparently before the Second World War it was possible to spend whole days without coming across another person. It is very tempting to presume that Keith Vaughan's photographs are discreet, but I really don't want to surmise that more went on between the boys on the beach at Pagham that we can see in the photographs. In fact when asked by the American playwright Edward Albee if the Pagham photographs reproduced in the 1966 publication of his journals were "discreetly" selected, Keith Vaughan tried to explain about "the complete innocence of those days". When the photographs were first taken, Keith Vaughan was able to show them to his mother, her friends and to colleagues at work, which may suggest that their visual rhetorics were securely homosocial, rather than homoerotic or homosexual, before the Second World War.

Viewed as a representation of escape, Keith Vaughan's Pagham photographs make some sense alongside the social, sexual and political traditions of rural romanticism; associating the writings of Edward Carpenter or A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* with Keith Vaughan's photographs, paintings and sketches seems perfectly legitimate.³⁴ I am however just a little more tempted by the work of E. M. Forster and the rural escapades and final escape in *Maurice*, his romantic novel of social and sexual pleasures and practices between men of different classes, and after all this connection is only slightly distanced from the writings of Edward Carpenter and A. E. Housman. In his 1960 terminal note to *Maurice*,

eventually published in 1971, E. M. Forster wrote that the book was a "direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter at Millthorpe" and the intense pleasures afforded by finding the hand of George Merrill, Edward Carpenter's working class lover, on his backside. The connection between Keith Vaughan and E. M. Forster is tempting not just because they met one another once, but also because Christopher Isherwood solidified the association when he gave E. M. Forster a small drawing of a "nude boy in a romantic surrounding" by Keith Vaughan for his birthday.³⁵

In the terminal note to *Maurice*, E. M. Forster writes that the book "belongs to the last moment of the 'greenwood':

Two great wars demanded and bequeathed regimentation which the public services adopted and extended, science lent her aid, and the wildness of our island, never extensive, was stamped upon and built over and patrolled in no time. There is no forest or fell to escape to today, no cave in which to curl up, no deserted valley for those who neither want to reform or corrupt society but to be left alone. People do still escape, one can see them any night at it in the films. But they are gangsters not outlaws, they can dodge civilisation because they are part of it.³⁶

E. M. Forster's distinction between outlaws and gangsters is a very tempting way to draw a distinction between Keith Vaughan's 'delightful' rural retreats and Francis Bacon's 'disturbing' paintings that seem to make sense in and around the modern metropolis. In E. M. Forster's book, Maurice and Clive, his Cambridge friends, enjoy a rural escapade the morning after they declare their love for one another. This escape is the dilute forerunner of Maurice's eventual escape into the "greenwood" with Clive's gamekeeper, Alex Scudder. Maurice and Clive escape into a Neo-Romantic landscape that is something like an early Keith Vaughan sketch or painting, though more reminiscent of the finely detailed etchings of his friend and one-time flat-mate John Minton; perhaps *Surrey Landscape* (1944) (figure 39) or *Landscape with Harvester Resting* (early 1940s). As Maurice and Clive escaped from Cambridge:³⁷

They cared for no one, they were outside of humanity, and death had it come, would only have continued their pursuit of a retreating horizon...the machine came to a standstill among the dark black fields. The song of the lark was heard....They were alone....They ate on a grassy embankment. Above them the

waters of a dyke moved imperceptibly, and reflected interminable willow trees. Man who had created the whole landscape was nowhere to be seen.³⁸

But I have my doubts that Keith Vaughan's paintings are simply attempts to escapes to the almost "greenwood". They are I believe, more modern and may make more sense in and around the interstices of the modern metropolis, and *Second Assembly of Figures* by Keith Vaughan may be more "gangster" than "outlaw" than it at first appears

Towards the end of Angus Wilson's *Hemlock and After*, published in 1952, the same year as Keith Vaughan started to produce his paintings of men assembling, it's suggested that the pastoral and comradely vocabularies of social practice and sexual pleasures between men, found in the writings of Edward Carpenter and A. E. Housman, are anachronisms in the modern world. Angus Wilson proposes that there is a new order of social and sexual pleasures and practices between men more attuned to the post-war world.³⁹

In *Hemlock and After*, after the death of the writer Bernard Sands, his young boyfriend Eric meets the Reverend Bill at the baths. Everything seems to be going swimmingly between them until Bill attempts to seduce Eric with a technique "derived from his own original experience. The Reverend Bill's experience issued from a very old-fashioned world of Edward Carpenter and the *Shropshire Lad*", and he combines these seductive languages with references to the art of Donatello, Michelangelo Buonarroti and "a little statuette he'd seen at Urbino, or was it Cremona?" Whilst Eric is at first pretty disposed to the Reverend Bill's attentions, once the seduction begins he can't prevent himself from giggling helplessly and is forced to make his excuses and leave, reflecting upon how much he and world have changed since he first met Bernard Sands.

The Charioteer by Mary Renault was published just a year after *Hemlock and After*, and in the same year that Keith Vaughan painted *Second Assembly of Figures* and Francis Bacon painted *Two Figures* 1953. Whilst the places where Laurie Odell meets Ralph Lanyon proved to be useful in making sense of Francis Bacon's painting, those where Laurie meets Andrew, the young hospital orderly and

conscientious objector, may make sense of Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figures*:

The orchard smelt of September and early dew; the grass in the deep light was now the colour of emerald. A blackbird, the last awake, was mediating aloud in a round, sweet whistle. Everything had the colours of farewell.⁴⁰

The declining sun was ripe and warm. Hips and haws shone like polished beads in the hedgerows; the damp mats of fallen leaves had a smoky, rusty smell....The blackberries tasted of frost and faint sun and smoke and purple leaves: sweet, childish and sad. Soon came the wood, with light edges of coppice, full of birds, and birches beyond; the golden leaves shook like sequins against the sky. Presently the path opened into a field of stoked barley.⁴¹

Once more this description of a rural idyll evokes the finely detailed etchings of John Minton more than the Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figures*. However the scene is also reminiscent of some sketches and paintings Keith Vaughan produced during and after the Second World War; *Dale Cottages* (1943) and most particularly *Green Pear Tree Figure* (1948) (figure 40). But as in *Hemlock and After*, the rural and pastoral idyll can not be sustained in the light of modern and metropolitan social and sexual pleasures and practices. Laurie eventually chooses Ralph over Andrew, and Mary Renault subsequently turns to Ancient Greece as the most appropriate place for her particular kind of encounters between men.

It would be too simple to suggest that Keith Vaughan's painting is a nostalgic yearning for the harmonies of an unavailable past, and that in contrast Francis Bacon's faces up to the modern and metropolitan realities of the present and future. Keith Vaughan's paintings may have something to do with a kind of escape to nature, but it may be a version of the natural that can be found within the modern metropolis; an escape that is more invested in the regulation of modern homoerotic, homosocial or homosexual spaces than in romantic rural escapades. But both of these investments can be explored if we approach Keith Vaughan's painting through the myths and realities of romantic comradeship that men like Keith Vaughan had read about and were able to experience in practice during the Second World War.

Keith Vaughan was intrigued by and committed to the poetic and fictional possibilities of male comradeship before he experienced them in practice. For some men the Second World War provided the opportunity to turn the pleasures of reading the poems of Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, or the writings of T. E. Lawrence, into reality. Before the war Keith Vaughan read T. E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and also managed to get his hands on a typewritten copy of *The Mint*, T. E. Lawrence's account of his time in the ranks of the RAF in the 1920s and 30s. On the 29 April in 1943 Keith Vaughan wrote in his journal:

Lawrence buries himself in the anonymous ranks of the RAF. Search for the delusive companionship of the simple. Lawrence knew it was a delusion....Remove the conditions and the bond vanishes. Meet the same people in different circumstances and they are strangers, each complete and compact and elusive.⁴²

In Keith Vaughan's published journals there are a number of written and pictorial representations of almost inadvertent intimacies between men; drawings of young men lighting one another's cigarettes, touching hands (figure 41) and simply sitting together, alongside romantic descriptions; like this one written on the 22 June 1940, the day he heard his brother had been killed:

His face young and strong and sad. His mouth always open a little. Lips that were never meant to feel each other. His hands that you keep looking at - big and straight and generous. His body is strong and harnessed over like a circus horse with brass and khaki; you felt you could love him? An impossible yearning to protect him - to put yourself between his clean body and the savage mechanism of destruction. Just to save this one fragment of earth's springtime from being stamped out utterly. But who are you to think that you can interfere.⁴³

We may want to describe Keith Vaughan's sketches and descriptions as homosocial or homoerotic, and as with his Pagham photographs, it's tempting to turn them into coded or discrete representations of homosexuality:

At about nine o'clock C. and I walked across to the cookhouse to see if we could find something to eat. It was full moon and the wind was pulling at the guy-ropes and the marquees were swaying like galleons. Inside, Bill was sitting in his shirt sleeves at the table writing. The lantern in front of him lit his face and arms and a strip of his shoulder with a deep bronze radiance. Other figures sat around in the shadows. The air was warm after the clear windy nights and

everywhere was the hum of conversation. We made tea and ate sausage rolls out of a box on the floor. The box was quite invisible and everyone tripped over it as they passed, but it never seemed to occur to anyone to pick it up. Presently Bill got up and stood away from the table by the fire and out of the light of the lantern. I stood near him drinking my tea which C. had brewed. C. moved about quickly collecting bread and bits of jam from various tins while the others sat around the table talking. I did not listen to what they were saying but looked at Bill once or twice and he smiled - the smile one gives when one wants to acknowledge the other person's presence. When the conversation began to get animated I walked towards the door so as not to be drawn into it. I was aware of that sense of magic, of something unique and unrepeatable that such moments can sometimes hold. Bill followed me and we walked out in to the sudden lustrous moonlight and fresh warm wind. The tents were like geometric impressions of mushrooms, hardly distinguishable from the colour of the dull grass. Clouds were mounted over the horizon, the rest of the sky was clear and star-lit. I put my arm round his shoulders, and he put his arm round my waist and we walked across the muddy grass back to the tent.⁴⁴

What happened next between Keith and Bill in the tent? Something or nothing? It's difficult to decide if Keith Vaughan's collection of written and visual texts are in and of themselves homoerotic, homosocial or homosexual according to the protocol outlined by Michael Hatt. They have the potential to fit each of these designations, and fixing on any one of them is almost certainly beside the point; their undecidability within a protocol of this kind is their importance. It may be difficult to make a decision about their designation because, as I have already suggested, social and sexual practices and pleasures between men in the 1940s were not securely attached to a coherent and readily recognisable homosexual subject.

The war provided environments for unspecified social and sexual pleasures between men both within the armed forces and on the streets of London, and also provided many of the mechanisms through which these pleasures and practices could be identified as homosexual.⁴⁵ Through the asking of questions about homosexuality during army medical examinations, pleasures and practices became fused to particular kinds of institutionalised knowledge. The removal of men from their everyday environments where social and sexual practices and pleasures between men may have had local and banal meanings also enabled acts to be designated 'homosexual' through different systems of institutionalised surveillance. It's

also possible that the sharing of knowledges between men created an elaborate intertextual environment in which new conceptions became attached to everyday routines and recreations. However, these possible fusions don't necessarily stabilise the meaning of Keith Vaughan's written and pictorial representations of intimacies between men, but can sustain an oscillation between homosocial and homosexual interpretation.

In her analysis of comradeship during the First World War, Joanna Bourke proposes that "male bonding was stimulated within the armed forces through drawing attention to the aesthetic beauty of the group", and that this mechanism was "adopted by a wide range of boys' clubs and organisations" to create associations between men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In an analysis reminiscent of Keith Vaughan's interpretation of T. E. Lawrence's *The Mint*, Joanna Bourke explores the contingency of male comradeship, and questions whether it was simply the result of the extreme conditions of war, and proposes alternatively that it was actively manufactured and consequently required surveillance and regulation. Joanna Bourke's account of the dangers and delights of male nudity in all male institutions provides an interesting contextualising of Keith Vaughan's paintings of men assembling, or simply hanging around together:

Uniforms were only one of the many techniques used to unite servicemen into an efficient unit. Another positive way that the armed forces attempted to stimulate *esprit de corps* was through public nudity. The parading of naked men began as soon as a man entered the recruiting office. Again, it is too easy to assume that this was simply a technique of humiliation....

Thus, the scout John Hargrave was asked to strip when he entered the Marleybone recruiting office. He relished the experience, recalling that the "smell of human sweat was overpowering in the little ante-room. Some of the men had hearts and anchors and ships and dancing-girls tattooed in blue on their chests and arms....Hargrave was proud of his body and more than happy to flaunt it in front of others. Once in the armed forces, this exposure of the stripped body occurred on an almost daily basis. Men walked about 'starkers' while their clothes were fumigated. They bathed together. It was a truly 'gladsome sight', Charlie May brooded, to watch hundreds of men 'stripped to the buff' digging in a trench: 'Big muscles and supple joints swelling and swinging with the rhythm of the pick.' Whether dressed or undressed, the aesthetics of military life could rouse men to intense feelings of *esprit de corps*.⁴⁶

Whilst Joanna Bourke's account of comradeship and male bonding during the First World War is distant in time from Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figures*, it's an important account of the social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures that influenced the texts he read before he experienced the Second World War. It's particularly relevant to the work of T. E. Lawrence whose account of his time in the RAF in the 1920s and 1930s makes very similar connections between the aesthetics of comradeship and *esprit de corps*. It is also axiomatic to my inquiry into the institution of homosexual subjectivity and subject matter that the possibility of an economy in and around the male figure similar to that which Joanna Bourke describes, was still available in particular places before, during and after the Second World War.

Stuart Lauder, author of *Winger's Landfall*, published *Camp Commander* in 1971; and it really may be important that this popular author, adept at evoking the complexities and irresolutions of social and sexual pleasures and practices between men in all male environments, chose to return to the Second World War and a time when sexual acts between men were illegal, when the definitional irregularities between sociality and sexuality looked as though they were just about to make sense through the assertion of a collective, politicised and liberated homosexual identity.

Once again the hero of Stuart Lauder's novel is a young man distanced from the all male environment in which he finds himself; but unlike Harry Shears from *Winger's Landfall*, Roger Gough is not a "lone-wolf" or any kind of investigator, but a cynical observer; "socially displaced" and determined to resist involvement" in the diversions and distractions that take place between the men of an RAF regiment billeted on a remote island around the end of the Second World War.

But Roger's distance is disturbed by the arrival of Blondie Parrish as he becomes all too aware of this young man's physical attractions. For the reader familiar with physique magazines of the 1950s and 60s, or perhaps even Keith Vaughan's published journal, *Camp Commander* provides a number of intertextual pleasures,

reminiscent of scenes from Stuart Lauder's previous book *Winger's Landfall*.

After Blondie Parrish appears "with a bang in Doodlebug alley", and just after Roger notices the "vivid blue flash of his eyes", Roger is ordered to search him:

Blondie lazily raised his arms, as if offering an embrace.
"Don't be shy," he said modestly. "I ain't a virgin."⁴⁷

Roger, "quivering with furious distaste", "inexpertly" runs his hand down Blondie's flanks to "his jutting backside" (figure 29).

He [Blondie] pinched his creases and drew his trousers tight as if being measured for a suit. I avoided that invitation....⁴⁸

Roger taps the outside of Blondie's tunic pockets, and then perhaps inadvertently, but noticeably, Blondie's knuckles touched Roger's thigh "in a gesture of complicity" (figure 41):

As though we were partners in some hideous joke on the whole bloody establishment of war.⁴⁹

Blondie soon becomes the fulcrum of social and sexual tensions that focus on, but radiate around, a triangular relationship between him, Roger and Squadron Leader Floss; an overweight, somewhat effeminate and ineffectual figure of fun in the eyes of the men he commands. Squadron Leader Floss either pursues Blondie, or is perhaps pursued by him. As more and more men become preoccupied with homosocial, or maybe homosexual, recreations and routines, the social and sexual tensions within the RAF regiment work their way towards a homosexual scandal, and an exemplary moment of homosexual identification and nomination.

Roger's reactions to Blondie's attractions may or may not be on the border between homosocial and homosexual; not as regular as they might be, but not so irregular that they can be confidently identified as homosexual according to the disciplinary protocols through which such an identification would make sense:

As we emerged, I glanced and saw Blondie helpfully soaping Elvin's back. It was the first time that I'd seen the white haired menace stripped off, and he was certainly quite a lad.⁵⁰

My reaction to Blondie, indeed, was something else that set me apart from the rest. He was a subtle irritant in the billet, the canteen, the mess-halls, and especially in the showers - I've never been partial to having my back soaped - but unexpectedly helpful about the office.⁵¹

The eventual scandal is precipitated by an inquiry established to investigate nude swimming at a discreet rock pool, the setting-up of a permanent beach patrol made up of the most attractive men hand-picked by Squadron Leader Floss, and the irregular and indiscreet habits of the men in Hut 21. As these amusements work their way towards an identifiable scandal, a scandal of identity, Roger becomes increasingly disturbed by Blondie's picturesque physique, and his "enviable teeth". Blondie and Roger circulate one another arousing unspecified tensions, which are brought to a head when Blondie refuses a promotion offered in return for giving evidence against Squadron Leader Floss; evidence which would include telling the official inquiry what they have been up to together. Blondie deserts his post and Roger tracks him down, and just before he forces him to return to camp and thwart the official inquiry by telling them that nothing had taken place between him and Squadron Leader Floss, Blondie attempts a seduction:

"But...what have I ever done to you, Rog?" He shook his head, his widened eyes catching the blaze of day. "Or is it what I haven't done?" His fingers closed on his belt buckle. "is that it?" he asked softly. "Well, you know I'd do anything for me mates."⁵²

Roger refuses Blondie, and the narrative refuses the seductive possibility of resolving the tensions between them with an identifiable act; thwarting the pleasures of this particular kind of narrative resolution.

However, like Keith Vaughan, Roger has realised that in this place of irresolute encounters between men, there is something he will miss:

Presently Elvin would be down from the officers' club, and we'd go for a shower, strip off and stretch out on our beds,

under the canopies of net, for a last cigarette before Lights Out.

I recognised, with a pang, that there was something here that I was going to miss.⁵³

In his journal in January 1942, Keith Vaughan wrote:

The best of the army is in the relationships which could only exist under these conditions.⁵⁴

Now, whilst Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figures* may make some kind of sense alongside these contextual forays in to the indefinite enunciations of male friendship and the potentially indeterminate male environments of the Second World War, they may not be the most appropriate locations, or the most appropriate men. Keith Vaughan's paintings of figures assembling can be approached through spaces where in the 1950s men met for apparent and no apparent reason.

In and around the physical geography of London, before and after the Second World War, there were a number of sites of male encounter. We have hung around some public toilets with Tom Driberg, cruised Soho and "the sexual gymnasium of the city" with Francis Bacon, walked through the sexual "underworld" and East End with Dr. Anthony Page, and been to some clubs with Jack Marlowe and John Lehmann. Keith Vaughan certainly knew some of these places. Though he was not a denizen of Soho he did according to Alan Ross, sometimes cruise its streets and find pleasure there and around Piccadilly Circus. But he also had commitments to other social and sexual spaces. If we glance, or gaze, at some of the young men Keith Vaughan sketched, I think it's clear he spent some time hanging around Turkish Baths (figure 42), but he also shared another site of male encounter with some of the literary figures he most admired.

As we know, the writer William Plomer was particularly familiar with sexual geography of London. He apparently acquired some of his knowledge from J. R. Ackerley, the writer and literary editor of *The Listener*, who told him about the bars around Knightsbridge, Victoria and the Edgware Road, where off-duty guardsmen could be picked up. J. R. Ackerley had no time for the "tatty pubs" of Soho, "the haunts of queens, prostitutes, pimps, pickpockets, pansies, debauched

service men, and detectives", or private members clubs, "smelly urinals", and didn't have the "necessary patience" for "swimming baths, youth hostels, YMCAs, working men's clubs, boy scout organisations" and the like. He did sometimes hang around Piccadilly Circus tube station but to little avail, and preferred the bars and environs of Hyde Park where he could find guardsmen drilled to obedient and professional perfection.⁵⁵ More importantly J. R. Ackerley and William Plomer wouldn't take a pick-up home if there was a handy park nearby.

London's parks were, and still are, important public sites of male encounter, as the Wolfenden Committee were very well aware. According to Douglas Plummer, who in his 1965 book *Queer People* utilises the disciplinary protocols formulated by the Wolfenden Committee and promoted by the Homosexual Law Reform Society, a minority of homosexuals seek "elusive excitement in public places", including:

...railway stations, Turkish baths, in places like Piccadilly Circus, in crowds, at bathing places (like the Serpentine Lido), on open spaces (such as Hyde Park and Hampstead Heath)....

And in this spaces, according to Douglas Plummer, homosexual "create serious social problems". Henning Bech has described urban parks as one of the concentrated environments of the modern metropolis, exemplary sites of male encounter, that combine the pleasures and perils of lawlessness and surveillance, and whose establishment was concurrent with urbanisation and "the formation of the homosexual":

The 'countryside' which formed the setting of the fictitious world in which homosexuality could be consummated was often precisely the country of the city, projected beyond the city.⁵⁶

As we know, the possibilities of parks, and the difficulty of their surveillance, caused a great deal of anxiety for the Wolfenden Committee and some of their witnesses. Their anxiety was induced at least in part because, like public toilets and the streets of Soho, parks had the potential to disrupt the protocols they were seeking to set in place; parks offered, offer, the seductive potential of sexual recreation between men without insisting they adopt a

homosexual subjectivity; they are physically and theoretically located within the interstices of the modern managed metropolis.

After the war the Conservative MP Ian Harvey moved to a bed-sitting room in Trevor Square, near the Household Cavalry Barracks in Knightsbridge. On his way home one night he noticed uniformed troopers wandering up and down, and then disappearing into the park. One night "out of curiosity", Ian Harvey entered the park and came upon a "veritable parade"; he was intrigued, and followed home by a guardsmen, who walked up and down the street where he lived for about five minutes, before returning to the park. A couple of weeks later, Ian Harvey revisited the park and fell into conversation with a trooper:

Neither of us had any illusions about the ultimate purpose of our conversation, and this was duly achieved. I never saw him again.⁵⁷

After this encounter, Ian Harvey became a regular, and found the area around the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens particularly pleasurable; that is until his arrest for a 'homosexual offence' in St. James' Park in 1958, which forced him to resign his seat and precipitated a scandal of homosexual identification.

Perhaps Keith Vaughan frequented some of these spaces of social and sexual encounter, though looking at his paintings and drawings I'm not convinced that guardsmen were his type. We do know that he hung around the men's enclosure at Highgate Ponds on Hampstead Heath, sometimes taking photographs, sometimes drawing (figure 43), and sometimes meeting men. The men's enclosure was a site of male encounter, where men hung around with and without purpose, where the distinction between the social and the sexual was unclear, and where looking at men could be legitimate but also run the risk of homosexual imputation.

In a letter to the poet James Kirkup in 1953, J. R. Ackerley mentions the young poet's "sordid adventure". Although James Kirkup can't remember the details he believes that it might have been a "run-in with a plain-clothes policeman at Marble Arch, or at the Hampstead Pond", a "favourite haunt" in the early 1950s "where one

was allowed to sunbathe naked in the all male-enclosure, a happy hunting ground for 'rough trade' - and for copper's narks":

I never entered the rather scummy water of the ponds but would lie in the shade as much as possible getting an indirect, subtle tan and watching the young body-building types and amateur boxers and the wide boys flexing their lats and waiting for a score.⁵⁸

The men's enclosure was just a short walk from where Keith Vaughan moved in 1952; around the same time as he began to produce his paintings of men assembling. It is here, in this ambiguous space of male recreation and encounter that these paintings of men hanging around together make sense as urban pastorals, and perhaps partial escapes, set within the geography of the modern metropolis. It is important to realise that not all parks are the same and that the male enclosure at Highgate Ponds is not simply a homosocial space, but as James Kirkup points out a social and sexual economy of male encounter and surveillance, where different types of men hung around, and perhaps of particular interest to Keith Vaughan a "happy hunting ground for rough trade".

It just so happens that Stuart Lauder, something of an expert on homosocial economics, and our favoured informant, has also written a fictional anthropology of the men's enclosure on Hampstead Heath. Stuart Lauder's novel *Break and Begin Again* was published in 1966, between *Winger's Landfall* and *Camp Commander*. Harry Shears and Diamond Lil from *Winger's Landfall* make guest appearances, but the main protagonists are Doc Brannigan, "a semi-invalid bachelor of private means", and Gary Meadows, for one summer the enclosure's athletic luminary, and now fast on his way to becoming a famous popular singer. Fortunately Doc Brannigan is a keen observer of what goes on and the opening page of *Break and Begin Again* provides a description of this site of irresolute socialities, that when placed alongside Keith Vaughan's painting provides a sense that's difficult to improve on:

Out beyond the allotments, the cemetery, and the railway sidings, there was an unexpected rise and fall of parkland, and, down in the hollow, that glistening oval of water. One of London's illimitable surprises; part of a lost river, threading its way through culverts under the city to reach the

Thames....It was several hundred yards to the men's enclosure beside the pool.

If you were so romantically inclined you might strain after a comparison with some Classical stadium, filled with insouciant Praxitilean gymnasts; but, under the insecure azure of an English summer, the effect was wanton and vaguely subversive.⁵⁹

According to Doc Brannigan the men's enclosure is ordered by unwritten rules, which any newcomer must learn. Apparently a line between the inner and outer door "divided" the space between "normal and abnormal", with a small neutral zone in the middle "for those unable to declare their interests". In this space you were liable to get "trampled under foot"; "a fitting penalty, perhaps, for uncertain loyalties". However, Doc Brannigan understands that "like much of the yard's miniculture, it was largely untrue and unfair", and that the actual division was "between those who wanted a quiet time and those who enjoyed a noisy one: and 'normality' however one measured it, was not subject to geographical isolation."⁶⁰

Like Keith Vaughan, Doc Brannigan could be described as a voyeur. But that's just one way of saying that they both liked to look at young men from the windows of their flats in Belsize Park:

A pleasant-looking youth comes up the road with two romping boxer dogs. My spirits lift a little at the sight. But as he approaches nearer my window, and I strain my eyes to absorb as much of the vision as possible, so my anxiety increases, almost to the point of panic, that he will suddenly look up and see the hideous Scrooge-like face staring at him.⁶¹

Doc isn't quite so sensitive, and first notices Gary Meadows, a tall fair haired young man, as he emerges from his rented room onto a small balcony directly opposite Doc's flat and in clear sight of his own balcony. Doc recognises Gary as the enclosures favourite athlete from the previous year. After watching Gary for some time an opportunity eventually presents itself for Doc to "cross the frontier" and introduce himself.

Doc invites Gary, and his friends, back to his "beautifully proportioned" drawing-room, which has "touches of magnificence in the architraves over the door", an impressive, if not examined too closely, "marble fireplace", and a "subtlety of colours" that "gave

the room at sunset, a shimmering insubstantiality like a reflection in a tarnished mirror: glowing amber, dusty pink and a hallucinatory trace of slate blue in the carpet"; "guilt and ivory"; "mirror and pendent crystal"; shades of Cecil Beaton, and certainly a suspicious attention to interior design.

Doc asks Gary if he's in the "wrestling game", and he answers that he's not. After their first meeting, Gary thinks Doc's "probably okay":

Certainly no sort of pouf, and never to be found in their company. Though, mind you, some of the toughest were definitely Stoke-on Trent: you only had to watch them wrestling.⁶²

Doc's question, and Gary's awareness of the ambiguities of wrestling may be a key moment of similarity and difference in a comparison of *Two Figures 1953* and Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figure*. Gary isn't interested and really have doesn't have the build for wrestling, and he knows that wrestling is suspiciously homoerotic. His awareness brings the paintings of Keith Vaughan and Francis Bacon a little closer together. They can perhaps be viewed as different enunciations of male sociality within the same enclosure, somewhere around but divided by the boundary between normal and abnormal, homosociality and homosexuality.

For a while Doc becomes Gary's self appointed counsellor, and they meet every now and then at the men's enclosure, sometimes by accident, and at others by design. As spring turns to summer, Gary starts to become a successful singer, and as the weather gets warmer the enclosure begins to fill up, and its irresolutions and tensions intensify:

The fair-weather crowd brought the birds of a brighter plumage; the professional athletes of that *demi-monde* where sport shaded off into show business, modelling, and flesh that plied for hire. Inevitably, an assortment of would-be hirers trailed them over the hill, but the yard maintained its own exacting vigilance. Indeed, Brannigan considered, one would need astounding luck or temerity to arrange an assignation here, policed as it was by the watchful eyes and wakeful ears of those to whom such matters were an offence to their virility. Sometimes, of a hot and crowded summer, the tensions rippled like muscle beneath the skin.⁶³

Now, Gary Meadows may have been Keith Vaughan's type; certainly the figures in his paintings are tall and thin, a little lanky, but well built, like Gary, like Johnny Walsh. Just a quick look at the sketches and paintings Keith Vaughan produced in the early 1950s is enough to see why Johnny Walsh caught his eye, and why Gary may have too. However, Keith Vaughan wasn't just attracted by Johnny's physique, but also his face, like that "of a young boxer, thick lips, cropped hair, eyes small, bright and deep set beneath wonderfully clear smooth brows".⁶⁴ If Dr. Anthony Page from *The Heart in Exile* had come across Johnny in the 'homosexual' "underground" he too may have had to take a second look, just to check he wasn't the young man whose photograph was in his pocket.

Keith Vaughan met Johnny Walsh at around the same time as his name appeared on the pages of *Adonis* magazine. In *Break and Begin Again*, Gary attracts but refuses the professional attentions of a physique photographer; René from Studio René. However Lance, a friend of Gary's from school and now an assistant in the men's clothes shop, something like *Vince Man's Shop* perhaps, where Gary gets his gear, has like Johnny Walsh, had a go at modelling, . Unlike Johnny, Lance looks like he's into "serious body-building", initially at the YMCA gym, but now at The Gentry Club, and my guess is that the editors of *Adonis* and *Male Classics* may have found his physique, and René's photographs, a little old-fashioned. Gary describes them like this:

...the usual thing; the usual physique-photograph conventions of a rather dainty athlete supporting himself on a studio pillar, enmeshed in a swathe of virgin fishnet, or toying with a length of aluminium chain. One or two were more for the private collector than the catalogue, but generally they were inoffensive, and as usual, more of a tribute to the camera than the barbells.⁶⁵

I guess that Lance would not have been Keith Vaughan's type; too classic, too well-defined, too thick-set, too clean-cut.

According to Malcolm Yorke, Johnny Walsh was rough trade, perhaps the same kind of "rough trade" that James Kirkup came across at the men's enclosure in the early 1950s. Apparently Johnny was able to fulfil Keith Vaughan's interest in "dangerous sex", and his physical

attractions were augmented by his criminality and his class. By all accounts he spent time in Pentonville Prison every year that Keith Vaughan knew him, and was a "pick-pocket, car thief, larcenist, ponce, con-merchant, exploiter of older homosexuals, and liable to turn destructive when drunk". Everything in fact that a reader of the brief biographies that often detailed the dissolute and criminal pursuits of models who appeared on the pages of *Physique Pictorial* could hope for and dream about.

Now, Johnny's class and criminality may be just the thing to bring Francis Bacon's and Keith Vaughan's paintings very close indeed, through their shared commitment to working class men on the criminal and gangster fringe of the modern metropolis. But there are also some important distinctions to be made, that maintain a distance between these two paintings and prevent them from collapsing into different forms of the same thing. Their differences may have something to do with the different sites of encounter where Francis Bacon and Keith Vaughan found their regular pleasures, and the different types of working class criminals they were attracted to. In considering this similarity and difference between these two paintings, their encounter starts to become somewhat unstable. Francis Bacon's *Two Figures* 1953 would normally be characterised as the more modern and disturbing, and Keith Vaughan's *Second Assembly of Figures* as the more traditional and committed to classical harmonies. However, if we consider the sexual and aesthetic form of the male figures in *Second Assembly of Figures* alongside the figure of Johnny Walsh, it may be possible to propose that Keith Vaughan's painting is more committed than *Two Figures* 1953 to modern sexual and aesthetic forms. The now irresolute encounter between the work of Francis Bacon and Keith Vaughan may further blur the distinctions between homoerotic, homosexual and homosocial environments, practices and representations.

Johnny Walsh may have existed on the criminal fringe, but he wasn't the same kind of criminal figure as George Dyer, or Ronnie and Reggie Kray. Johnny Walsh wasn't an East End gangster but a criminal figure much more in tune with the social and sexual anxieties of the modern world. Johnny Walsh was the kind of young man who caused the Wolfenden Committee, and many other professional

fixers of meaning, anxiety in the 1950s; a young man unwilling to make a commitment to productive or reproductive mandates, who had passed through some of the institutions the Wolfenden Committee thought may generate homosexuality, including Borstal and a number of prisons.

Prisons were, and still are, important sites of real and imagined sexual encounters, and prisoners play important roles in the real and imagined sexual and textual pleasures of many men. The brief biographies printed next to photographs of young men in the American magazine *Physique Pictorial*, repeatedly characterised them as dissolute and criminal youths who had just been released from, or would soon find themselves inside, a correctional facility of some kind. These imported young sociopaths may have played a part in forming the fantasies and realities of some men in Britain in the 1950s, alongside some home produced models. To consider the conjunction of British and American models of 'homosexual' criminality we can once more return to the surprisingly aware and graphic books of Peter Wildeblood.

Though Peter Wildeblood presented himself to the Wolfenden Committee as a discreet and discrete homosexual subject, disinterested in the complex sexual textures of the 'homosexual' economy. He was in fact attuned to the realities and fantasies of everyday life, as we already know from his account of Gordon Poole's sexual explorations of Soho and the streets of London. In his book *A Way of Life*, Peter Wildeblood also describes a young man called Sidney Crabtree:

With his large, square hands, broad shoulders and Hollywood haircut, he looked like a typical young labourer, and I was surprised when he greeted me in a voice that was almost pure BBC.⁶⁶

Sidney has spent time in prison, but his formative experiences began in Borstal. As the Wolfenden Committee feared, and many experts explained, in Borstal Sidney developed a taste for pleasures of the 'homosexual' kind. As with the more ambiguous scenarios in Stuart Lauder's *Winger's Landfall* and *Camp Commander*, Peter Wildeblood's account of Sidney Crabtree's encounter with a warder makes sense as

a continuation of scenes often suggested on the pages of *Physique Pictorial*:

'There was a warder called Prosser that we were all rather frightened of. He was about twenty-four, quite good-looking in an American sort of way; you know, a snub nose and big shoulders and short blond hair, with funny eyes that seemed to look right through you. Well, I got into trouble with him one day - it was nothing much really, but he shouted at me and I answered him back, which was a silly thing to do. He got me locked up in my cell, and that evening he came to see me.

'It was in the summer, and the cell was stifling hot, so I was sitting at the table with just a pair of pants on, trying to write a letter. Prosser came in and stood by the door. He started talking about how he was going to report me, and said that I was sure to be punished and so on, but I just sat there and didn't say anything, which annoyed him very much. He told me to stand up. I thought he was going to hit me, but he didn't, he just stood there looking at me. Then he said: "You know, you're not a bad-looking lad." And he came quite close, and smiled into my face.

'As I said, I was afraid of him, and I didn't quite know what to do. He put his arm round my shoulder, and I could feel his uniform sleeve rough against my bare skin. It was frightening, but somehow exciting at the same time; I didn't know what was going to happen next. I must have looked stupid, because he laughed, and suddenly he grabbed me tight and kissed me on the mouth. His tongue tasted of cigarettes and tea, and I could feel the buttons on his tunic pressing into my chest.

'Well, I suppose nobody enjoys the first time much. I thought I was going to die or something; he was very rough, and I was scared as hell. Afterwards I wanted to cry, and he gave me a packet of Woodbines to cheer me up.⁶⁷

Peter Wildeblood's erotically charged account of this sexual encounter can be combined with his more ethical treatment of prison erotics in *Against the Law*. In this book about his arrest, trial and conviction for a 'homosexual offence', Peter Wildeblood provides an account of a discreet relationship with a working class prisoner, Dan Starling; a figure formulated from the well established myths and realities surrounding the attractions of working class men. Dan Starling come from a broken home, "his father was a hopeless drunk", and his mother was "living with another man", and according to Peter Wildeblood he inevitably ended up in Borstal and then prison. Peter Wildeblood encourages Dan Starling to give up his life of crime, and through this process sucks out his criminal sexual texture, turning him into a possible homosexual partner and co-operative subject; more like Terry from the *Heart in Exile*, than a glamorous and

somewhat dangerous petty criminal like Johnny Walsh. Of his relationship with Dan Starling, Peter Wildeblood writes:

There was never any doubt in the minds of the other prisoners - or, for that matter, of the warders - as to the meaning of my friendship for Dan Starling. There was nothing physical in it, because there could not be; but it was a friendship a great deal less selfish and more true than a mere physical attachment would have been.⁶⁸

I suspect that Keith Vaughan's interest in Johnny Walsh was attuned to the physical attractions of an erotic figure that we may characterise as young, working class, criminal and rough trade, perhaps a sociopath, almost certainly a Borstal boy. In his journal on the 13 May 1960, Keith Vaughan writes about a report in the newspaper concerning the Home Secretary's regretful response to the sexual assault of three youths in Cardiff prison by two young cell mates:

And I am supposed, like any 'decent' member of society, to throw up my hands in outraged horror. Well I don't. I can think of nothing less shocking or harmful to anyone than five boys in a prison cell passing the time in a little vigorous and enjoyable sexual combat. Is one to believe that a boy of nineteen 'sentenced to Borstal' (i.e.. not exactly a milk-fed calf) could not, if he wished, defend himself against the advances of a boy one year older? What do people imagine by the term 'sexual assault' in such cases?⁶⁹

Clearly by 1960 Keith Vaughan was committed to the real and imagined attractions of young working class boys, who had been to Borstal. Arnold Hauser's *The Homosexual Society*, published in 1962, provides further evidence that this figure had by this time become firmly established in the panoply of available erotic types. As with so many serious books about homosexuality published in the 1950s and 1960s, Arnold Hauser's account of life in prison may have provided opportunities for some men to formulate and exercise an erotic imaginary, and perhaps by extension an erotic practice, devoted to all male homosocial environments and the sexual attraction of criminals and prisoners:

The Prison Queer often starts off in a juvenile institution where many things go on in the dormitories of which authorities suspect little, and know less. The good-looking young boy may be held down by some toughs and used as a surrogate for a girl time and again, without ever complaining to the authorities. He may find it pays him to have a

'protector' or he may prefer to use his sexual attraction to get benefits from a number of people.⁷⁰

More discreet and professional texts, like Kenneth Walker's *The Physiology of Sex* and the Wolfenden Report, also made men aware of the dangers and delights of prison and prisoners. The anxieties that permeated and circulated sites of certain and uncertain male encounter, combined with anxieties over the irresolute sexuality of adolescents and the dissolute sexuality of sociopaths, coalesced to create the Borstal boy as a potent erotic type, and made the places where they might hang out sites of sexual excitement and tension. According to Kenneth Walker:

...segregation of the sexes undoubtedly encourages homosexual fantasies and no better means could have been devised of preventing sexuality from finding its normal direction than sending a young homosexual man to prison.⁷¹

In *They Stand Apart*, a collection of legal, medical and sociological essay published in 1955, connections between the seductions of adolescents, the attractions of working class men and the perversions of sociopaths are sustained and perhaps invigorated. Viscount Hailsham's essay in this book is very similar to the evidence he gave to the Wolfenden Committee, repeating his belief that homosexuality is primarily a problem of homosexual seduction rather than of expressive sexual subjectivity. This belief, alongside W. Lindsay Neustatter's essay, *Homosexuality: The Medical Aspects*, sustains the attractions of prison and young prisoners as indeterminate environments and individuals, and forming the young adolescent criminal as a particularly exciting figure. W. Lindsay Neustatter writes:

I have had little first hand experience of prisons in this connection but I would add to the comments quoted above the plaintive remark of the wife of a homosexual, who had several terms of imprisonment, on his being sentenced again. She said. "He has always caused me the most terrible worry, but never have I had such a bad time as when he came out of prison the first time, and started inviting the dreadful youths he had met there to our house."⁷²

Johnny Walsh may have been just such a dreadful youth. According to Simon Raven in his account of the different kinds of male prostitute that could be found around Piccadilly Circus, where Keith Vaughan

sometimes found pleasure, the connection between these young male prostitutes is their family backgrounds:

Their family backgrounds, I think are important only so far as it is true to say, in all case, that they were in some sense unwanted in their homes - redundant nuisances, unloved and unloving.⁷³

According to Kenneth Walker and Peter Fletcher in *Sex and Society*:

These uncouth youths afford a striking contrast to the foregoing group in that they are quite insensitive, ill-educated, and without any feelings for other people. Homosexuals of this category are the products of poor homes and of parents as insensitive and amoral as themselves. Their sense of right and wrong is almost non-existent and they have no feelings of guilt about anything at all. Having passed from a preliminary training, first at home and then at approved schools, they graduate in prison where the environment is such that their strong homosexual leanings are rendered permanent and unchangeable.⁷⁴

For men intrigued or committed to sexual pleasures and practices with other men, professional anxiety about the effect of prisons certainly had the potential to invest this environment and the men who could be found there with an erotic charge; and perhaps encouraged them to seek other all male environments where similar types of men could be found. The figures in Keith Vaughan's paintings of men hanging around look young and could be adolescents, they are certainly not thick-set wrestlers like the favoured figures of Francis Bacon. Viewed alongside Johnny Walsh, and across the men's enclosure on Hampstead Heath where 'rough trade' could be found, we may just suggest that Keith Vaughan's figures are not classical youths, but are drawn from a modern taxonomy of erotic types who could be found on the pages of physique magazines, novels, and sociological texts. Looked at from the all male enclosure and the pages of physique magazines produced in the mid-50s, Keith Vaughan's painting appears to be more sexually modern than Francis Bacon's. But of course that's not quite the point. My point is that viewed from within this contextual environment these two paintings look to be different, but also somewhat similar, and it's easy to see how they might make sense together in a space where they could co-exist amongst other sexual and aesthetic pleasures, practices and personas.

Once I had read about the men's enclosure on Hampstead Heath as a site of irresolute encounters, I had to visit and spend some time there. It's not as irresolute as it once was, and the ambiguous space situated between the normal and abnormal is now firmly bifurcated by an iron clad fence. Whilst I am sure that this fence doesn't prevent irresolute pleasures and practices taking place, it forms an almost perfect definition of Michael Hatt's "steel frame"; the homoerotic border between the homosocial and the homosexual. So the men's enclosure may not be so irresolutely homoerotic as it once was, but it is still possible to hang out there without making a commitment to any kind of sexual subjectivity, and to engage in practices and pleasures without becoming a sexual subject. In fact the fence has a door, and it is possible to walk between the two spaces. Once inside the "abnormal" area, which is now designated for nude bathing, it's still not clear, like the adverts in *Vigour* in the 1950s, whether your interested in sunbathing, naturism, or the making of sexual contacts.

Chapter Five - Notes

¹The Hall-Carpenter Archive is predominantly housed in the library of the London School of Economics, but the press-cuttings collection can be found in the Art and Design Library at Middlesex University.

²A small homage to Roland Barthes, see Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, pp.71-2.

³Michael Hatt, 'The Male Body in Another Frame', p.13

⁴Michael Hatt, 'The Male Body in Another Frame', p.13.

⁵Michael Hatt, 'The Male Body in Another Frame', p.14.

⁶For an example of physique magazines being used as evidence of homosexuality see Les Moran, *The Homosexual(ity) of Law*, p.122.

⁷*Adonis*, 2/1 (May/June 1956).

⁸*Adonis*, 2/4 (November/December 1956).

⁹*Adonis*, 2/4 (November/December 1956).

¹⁰*Adonis*, 3/6 (October 1957).

¹¹*Male Classics*, #14.

¹²*Male Classics*, #16.

¹³*Male Classics*, #22.

¹⁴William Drummond, *Victim*, p.66.

¹⁵*Adonis*, 3/3 (July 1957)

¹⁶*Physique Pictorial*, vol.6, no.3.

¹⁷For brief details of the work of John S. Barrington see Emmanuel Cooper, *Fully Exposed*.

¹⁸*Physique Pictorial*, vol.7, no.2.

¹⁹*Male Classics*, #17.

²⁰Montague Glover's photographs of young working class at the pond in Victoria Park in the East End of London can be found in James Gardiner, *A Class Apart*.

²¹*Adonis*, vol.3, no.3.

Chapter Five - Notes contd.

- ²²Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile*, p.53.
- ²³Keith Vaughan, *Journals and Drawings*, p.130.
- ²⁴Information concerning English Neo-Romantic Art and Peter Watson from Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place*.
- ²⁵There is a thesis or book to be written about this group of men, that apparently Herbert Read described as the "homintern", see Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place*, p.157.
- ²⁶David Thompson, Catalogue To Keith Vaughan's retrospective exhibition, March-April 1962, Whitechapel Gallery, London, p.21.
- ²⁷David Thompson, Catalogue To Keith Vaughan's retrospective exhibition, March-April 1962, Whitechapel Gallery, London, p.21.
- ²⁸Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective*, pp.224, & 228-9.
- ²⁹Keith Vaughan, *Journals 1939-77*, p.99.
- ³⁰Malcolm Yorke, *Keith Vaughan, His Life and his Work*, pp.162-3.
- ³¹For a consideration of the associations between modern design, the ballet, the paintings of Francis Bacon and Keith Vaughan see David Mellor's 'Francis Bacon: Affinities, Contexts and the British Tradition' in Achille Bonito Oliva, *Figurabile: Francis Bacon*.
- ³²Malcolm Yorke, *Keith Vaughan, His Life and his Work*, p.47.
- ³³Malcolm Yorke, *Keith Vaughan, His Life and his Work*, p.47.
- ³⁴A. E. Housman (1859-1936), English poet.
- ³⁵Keith Vaughan, *Journals 1939-1977*, p.170.
- ³⁶E. M. Forster, *Maurice*, p.221 (Terminal Note)
- ³⁷Malcolm York, *The Spirit of Place*, p.177. "...peering into the lush foliage of Minton's *English Landscape* and *Surrey Landscape*, one realises they are inhabited not by idealised Kentish Yeomen but by twentieth-century male nudes."
- ³⁸E. M. Forster, *Maurice*, pp.72-73.
- ³⁹For a similar view see Stephen Spender's review of *The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman*, 'The Essential Housman, *Horizon*, vol.1, no.4 (April 1940).
- ⁴⁰Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.78.
- ⁴¹Mary Renault, *The Charioteer*, p.97.
- ⁴²Keith Vaughan, *Journals and Drawings*, p.54-6.
- ⁴³Keith Vaughan, *Journals and Drawings*, p.46.
- ⁴⁴Keith Vaughan, *Journals and Drawings*, p.46-9.
- ⁴⁵For accounts of the social and sexual pleasures that could be found on the streets of London during the war see Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*; John Lehman, *In the Purely Pagan Sense*; and some of the interviews in Kevin Porter & Jeffrey Weeks eds., *Between the Acts*.
- ⁴⁶Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p.129
- ⁴⁷Stuart Lauder, *Camp Commander*, p.7.
- ⁴⁸Stuart Lauder, *Camp Commander*, p.7.
- ⁴⁹Stuart Lauder, *Camp Commander*, p.7.
- ⁵⁰Stuart Lauder, *Camp Commander*, p.52.
- ⁵¹Stuart Lauder, *Camp Commander*, p.54.
- ⁵²Stuart Lauder, *Camp Commander*, p.199.
- ⁵³Stuart Lauder, *Camp Commander*, p.168.
- ⁵⁴Keith Vaughan, *Journals and Drawings*, p.50.
- ⁵⁵J. R. Ackerley, *My Father Myself*, pp.134-5.
- ⁵⁶Henning Bech, *When Men Meet*, p.149.
- ⁵⁷Ian Harvey, *To Fall Like Lucifer*, p.103.
- ⁵⁸James Kirkup, *A Poet Could Not But Be Gay*, p.118.
- ⁵⁹Stuart Lauder, *Break and Begin Again*, p.5.

Chapter Five - Notes contd.

- ⁶⁰Stuart Lauder, *Break and Begin Again*, p.13.
- ⁶¹Keith Vaughan, *Journal and Drawings*, p.150.
- ⁶²Stuart Lauder, *Break and Begin Again*, p.24.
- ⁶³Stuart Lauder, *Break and Begin Again*, p.51.
- ⁶⁴Malcolm Yorke, *Keith Vaughan: His Life and Work*, p.166.
- ⁶⁵Stuart Lauder, *Break and Begin Again*, pp. 151-2
- ⁶⁶Peter Wildeblood, *A Way of Life*, p.100.
- ⁶⁷Peter Wildeblood, *A Way of Life*, p.102.
- ⁶⁸Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law*, p.186.
- ⁶⁹Keith Vaughan, *Journals and Drawings*, p.171.
- ⁷⁰Arnold Hauser, *The Homosexual Society*, p.75.
- ⁷¹Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex*, p.151.
- ⁷²W, Lindsay Neustatter, 'Homosexuality: The Medical Aspects' in J. Tudor Rees and Harley V. Usill eds., *They Stand Apart*.
- ⁷³Simon Raven, 'Boys Will Be Boys', in *Encounter*, vol.XV, no.5 (November 1960), pp.19-24.
- ⁷⁴Kenneth Walker and Peter Fletcher, *Sex and Society*, pp.192-3.



Conclusion

Cruising Without End

We could stop here, or we could carry on. It can be difficult to decide when to end a cruise, both in practice and in theory. The possibility of carrying on or beginning again, from the same or a different place, is integral to the sexual and theoretical pleasures of cruising. As this thesis has been formulated as a number of cruises it would be an error to end with a definite conclusion; certainly a conclusion that looked as though it couldn't be revisited or readdressed, perhaps tomorrow. One of the pleasures of cruising, in practice and in theory, is the possibility of avoiding productive and reproductive commitments; the etiquettes of cruising exclude tying up subjects in such a way that prevents them from being untied, or identifying objects to arrest their meaning. The cruises that make up this thesis are of the circuitous variety; the kind that involve hanging around the same area, sometimes taking a new route, but repeatedly returning to the same place.

I hadn't intended to cruise when I began this journey, but I became distracted, and diverted from my orderly and methodical purpose. Ironically, I was seduced at the Public Records Office whilst reading through the papers of the Wolfenden Committee. I had set out with sharpened pencils and virgin notebooks to work my way through this archive. My intention was to sketch some social history as a background for paintings produced in the 1950s. But as

I worked my way through memorandum after memorandum, minute after minute, I began to be distracted by recurring subjects that started to make me wonder, and wander.

Whilst most of the papers in the Wolfenden archive systematically identify homosexual subjects, just a few minutes and memorandums refer to particular practices, pleasures, personas and places. As I became attuned to the contextual geography of the Wolfenden archive, I realised that alongside the dispassionate debates and impartial impressions were a series of anxieties. Whilst the Wolfenden Committee laboured their way towards recommending the legalisation of homosexual practices, they also tried to tidy a complex of irresolute resources. As I cruised through document after document I became attracted to subjects that evade identification and curious about places that are difficult to survey; subjects and spaces the Committee endeavoured to describe and delineate. I decided to forgo the disciplines of identification and detection the Wolfenden Report instituted in and around sexual subjectivity, and try to cruise irresolutely through the messy and unreconstituted sites of male encounter.

Contextual cruising seemed to offer a way of reviving the sexual texture of cultural products. In both its sexual and theoretical modes, cruising is a practice attuned to texture and nuance. But it is most importantly, and perhaps ironically, a productive rather than reductive process. Cruising can encompass ever wider areas, make new connections, encourage new associations, and become productively diverted and distracted from its purpose; this is its significance and excitement as a research methodology.

Cruising can also be boring, offers no guarantees, and can take you so far away from your original route you can't find your way home; following subjects that lead nowhere, or take you somewhere you can't comprehend. Cruising can be fatal; fatally distracting, but this may be an unavoidable risk of this compulsive process, which is not necessarily a compulsive search for a subject or object, but a compulsive commitment to unexpected and disorderly encounters.

In chapter two I tried to recreate the pleasures of chapter one. It was an attempt to repeat my cruise through the Wolfenden archive and the streets of Soho, and reiterate my pleasure in a different space; I covered different ground but ended in a similar place. These two cruises produced similar realisations; whilst art historians, detectives and psychoanalysts may seek to identify homosexual subjects, cruising suggests that associations between social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures are partial and irresolute; actualised in particular ways, in particular places, at particular times.

Cruising is committed to regulatory regimes, and whilst cruisers, in practice and in theory, may spend their time dodging the police forces of different persuasions, they don't seek to escape, but realise their commitments to the surveyed sites through which they seek their pleasure. Chapter two introduced the figure of the implicated detective. Dr. A. Page, Harry Shears and Roland Barthes are the products of regulation, and Harry wouldn't have it any other way. Each of these amateur detectives try to solve mysteries but realise that they are not innocent collectors, collators and interpreters of evidence, but implicated in the solutions they seek.

At the same time as professional fixers of meaning were instituting and exercising the convictions and professional disciplines of interpretation, amateurs of different kinds were undermining the distinction between detection and cruising; making their co-implication clear. Harry Shears in particular is a fictional and theoretical figure who implicitly understands the complexity of social, sexual and aesthetic relations in the modern metropolis; well aware of the modern world's potential for complex transferences of meaning that can question the distinction between detectives and cruisers. Harry Shear's is like an *agent provocateur* who begins to participate in the pleasures he provokes. During their deliberations the Wolfenden Committee demonstrated that they were well aware of the potential of the modern world to encourage this kind of transference.

Whilst clinical psychoanalysis can be very adept at dealing with the complexities of transference, in theory its protocols are often used to realise pre-determined solutions. The use of psychoanalytic

protocols for cultural interpretation is perhaps so unsatisfying because the positions of analyst and analysand are reversed; the analyst ends up doing all the talking, whilst the object or subject on the couch remains, like a classic psychoanalyst, enigmatically silent. Like Roland Barthes, Harry Shears is very well aware of the transferential potential of his investigation in to Danny's death, and aware of his commitment to the environment through which he pursues his investigation. But Harry starts to lose track of his investigation, and begins to believe he was responsible for Danny's death. As he and Bernard, the object of his suspicions, begin to coalesce, Harry can only restore order by throwing a killer punch.

To dodge the expressive protocols of psychoanalytic desire, chapter two ended by considering desire as production; desire spread out across the surfaces of the modern world, surfing the social, sexual, aesthetic and physical geographies of modernity. Perhaps these modern geographies can be understood as insistently transferential, providing innumerable opportunities for metonymic slides of meaning and irresolutions between subjects. However these slides take place, as Dorian Gray and Francis Bacon knew well, in particular, not essentially chaotic, patterned but mutable, locales.

Cruising through the theoretical resources that formed chapter two, I realised I didn't want to analyse subjects and objects and insist that they reveal their concealed, perhaps unconscious, homosexual contents. Nor did I want to engage in the kind of interpretation which proposes that all subjects, once in the hands of a professional, are queerer than they look. This thesis has in fact been determined by a commitment to not say certain things; to not produce certain meanings. In each of my contextual cruises I have tried to resist the temptation of going too far, taking the last step, making the final interpretive move. I have worked on the basis that the sense of what I was about would become apparent through the moves I made; my shifts of attention and emphasis, changes of subject, distractions and diversions. Working in this way, made the end of each cruise difficult to realise, but inconclusive endings are integral to the pleasures and perils of cruising in theory and in practice.

Towards the end of each cruise I tried to balance the necessity of ending with a realisation that meaning may not reside or be revealed at a narratives denouement. Not coming to satisfying conclusions may be a reasonable working definition of anxiety. However, looking back my cruises appear to be more disciplined than I envisaged. I have become committed to a very particular contextual environment, and whilst I may make some forays into unfamiliar territory I have walked and walked the same geography, meeting and re-meeting the same subjects and objects; turning but returning. My cruises are resolutely superficial in places, and more committed in others. Sometimes I skip over information which may require further investigation, and make connections that need further explanation. But that's the way with cruising; it's difficult to be sure if you're doing too much or not enough, being too obvious or too discreet, trying too hard or not hard enough. But with cruising there is always another chance, another opportunity, another day; my cruising continues from chapter to chapter; a number of encounters and perhaps 'micro' emissions.

If Cecil Beaton cruised Francis Bacon, it was perhaps the kind of unrelenting pursuit that can't be shaken off and finally can't be avoided. And if Cecil Beaton was the object of Francis Bacon's analytical attention, it was the kind of encounter where transference gets out of hand, and the subject and object, the analyst and analysand, become confused. According to Cecil Beaton, his encounter with Francis Bacon was initially pleasant, but had a messy and somewhat disturbing finale; it happens. Chapter three was an attempt to consider a sexual and aesthetic encounter between two men, who may or may not have been homosexual, without applying the ethical formula instituted by the Wolfenden Report, and was helped by that most sophisticated and astute of 'party-girls', Diamond Lil. Almost inevitably without this formula subjects and object became confused. It was after all a formula instituted to make distinctions and clear delineations, and without it subjects and objects can mingle. Resolutely superficial attention, of which Diamond Lil is an expert exponent, is alive to interconnections of this kind, and can consider subjects and objects without becoming distracted by the promise of profound meanings that may be found behind, beneath or in some other place.

During chapter three I tried not to take the figure and figurations of Francis Bacon, Cecil Beaton and Diamond Lil seriously, hoping to avoid any kind of redemption; including that form of redemption that esteems the unredeemable. But of course just writing this chapter turned the encounter between Cecil Beaton and Francis Bacon and the destroyed portrait into meaningful events; unavoidable perhaps, but I don't believe that either really meant much. But I hope this cruise helped *Two Figures 1953* to realise its potential as a decorative distraction; just the kind of thing Patrick or Ronnie from *A Room in Chelsea Square* would love, for a while, for the bathroom, until they felt in need of a change, and sold it for a tidy profit before moving on.

As we circulated Francis Bacon's painting, we also moved in and around 1953, through the 1950s, and towards the 60s. But just as I don't want to make special claims for the encounter between Francis Bacon and Cecil Beaton, nor do I want to redeem these years, despite their abjection in texts about homosexual law reform and gay liberation. I don't want to propose that the 1950s were less depressing and repressing for men who may or may not have been homosexual than is usually suggested; who knows how to make these judgements? I also don't want to suggest that this was a period marked by particularly intense anxieties, irresolutions or even a time of consequential change. Though these years look on the pages of this thesis to have been significant for the formulation of modern masculinities and sexualities, one of the benefits of cruising in theory is the realisation that all times and places are potentially meaningful. Like Francis Bacon's painting, 1953 was almost certainly no more important to the reformulation of social practices and sexual pleasures than many, or perhaps any, other year; it just looks that way in this thesis. 1953 was a year, and the 1950s a decade, as full as any other of sexual texture.

I have to admit, chapter four was just good luck. But the kind of luck that comes from just hanging around the same place for long enough. Killing some time at the British Library, between checking out the cafe and checking out the toilets, I started to cruise the catalogue, randomly typing in names and subject headings, just to

see what turned up. *Vigour* turned up; I ordered it and found the pre-paid adverts at the back, and realised I had stumbled across an a way of making sense of *Two Figures 1953*. What better context for this painting could there be than an advertisement for a wrestling partner published in the year it was produced? Chapter four ends with collection of adverts that can be placed alongside Francis Bacon's painting; sometimes collage is quite the best way of making sense, and over writing the connections can diminish the necessary 'play' on which these adverts, and Francis Bacon's painting, may depend.

The form of understanding produced in chapter four is not that different to chapter one; a view of *Two Figure 1953* from within and around a particular site of male encounter, conditioned by knowledges readers may have attached to Francis Bacon's painting around the time that it was produced. In the 1950s physique magazines were an important place where men made sense of their interest in themselves and other men, and it's just possible that these magazines and the advertisements that appeared on their pages played a part in the production of *Two Figures 1953*. Most importantly at the end of this cruise, the advertisements for wrestling partners and Francis Bacon's painting were not identified as really homosexual requests and representations; 'wrestling' remained a particular kind of social practice and sexual pleasure that can't be described as homosexual with any confidence, even when it takes place in a darkened room and on a bed.

In chapter five my cruising in theory became attached to Keith Vaughan's sexual and aesthetic cruising of the men's enclosure on Hampstead Heath in the early 1950s. The reason for this cruise, perhaps of each cruise, was to demonstrate the articulation of different but not opposed practices, pleasures and personas that co-exist in the same place at the same time.

If this thesis had been enacted in a political mode my point would be the importance of realising how the connection between sexual pleasures and social identities, invigorated and instituted in the 1950s, does not necessarily determine the productive and "errant" practices and pleasures people produce in their everyday lives.

Cruising areas are testimony to the impoverishment of the connection between sexual pleasures and social identities. These spaces are regularly used by men who understand themselves as sexual practitioners rather than social or political subjects, and decline to be designed by interpretive formulas. Only the regimes of knowledge that were promoted by the Wolfenden Report makes it possible to say with overwhelming confidence, and interpretive violence, that these men are really gay.

One purpose of the circuitous irresolutions of this thesis has been to explore sexual subjects and restore sexual texture, that may or may not make sense of *Two Figures 1953*. The Wolfenden Report, and its streamlined recommendations and rationales, alongside different kinds of interpretive theory and forms of sexual politics that simply assert or undermine subjectivity, have played a part in obscuring the associations between the sexual and aesthetic texture of the everyday. By repeatedly cruising around the same objects and subjects the differential patina and constitution of social, sexual and aesthetic pleasures has perhaps been made available but not forcibly apprehended. My 'conclusion' is another cruise, that picks up some points but offers no resolutions, except the delightful prospect of cruising without end.

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