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## Sharon Hayes

BY NINA POWER

Studio Voltaire, London, UK

How have our feelings of proximity and distance changed? How have they been affected by technology? How is the discourse around sexuality and feminism today different to 50 years ago? 'In My Little Corner of the World, Anyone Would Love You', Sharon Hayes's moving and engrossing five-channel video installation at Studio Voltaire, her first UK solo exhibition, asks all these questions, but quietly. What do we see? A mix of portrait and landscape screens mounted on a plywood frame. On them, the rooms of a house: a bathroom, a bedroom, a kitchen, a living room, a study. People come and go, fetch glasses of water, knit, type, play records, make sandwiches. A script is read or, rather, multiple scripts are read, printed on different coloured paper. Thirteen readers: queer, gay, feminist, trans. These are letters and editorials from feminist, lesbian and effeminist publications from between 1955–77. But the distance between then and now is immense. The letters speak of yearning, isolation, desperation to be connected. They are political and angry: they speak of 'racist, sexist suburbia', of keeping men out of lesbian spaces: 'Politics is where it's at' reads one. Someone else writes in to ask, outraged and confused: how can a publication be just about lesbianism? Many of the letter-writers are profoundly lonely. The newsletters are the thread that sustains: please keep them coming!



Sharon Hayes, *In My Little Corner of the World, Anyone Would Love*, 2016, installation view at Studio Voltaire, London. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin; photograph: Andy Keate

As in much of her work, Hayes here is subtly drawing our attention to shifts in discourse while also drawing our attention to the limitations of the present. In the internet age, it is almost impossible to imagine what a monthly bulletin through the post might have meant for people's sense of belonging, for their sanity, for their feeling part of a community that would otherwise be largely hidden or obscured. The contemporary queer collective portrayed by Hayes, on the other hand, is domestic, connected, softly affectionate: a space of sharing. Machines circulate: a typewriter is moved from one room to another, someone reads their phone while sitting on the lid of the toilet, a stapler staples. A couple of cats wander in and out, someone is walking up and down the stairs. The reader is not always on screen, sometimes a reader speaks but we hear no sound, sometimes all the rooms are empty. There are lots of fold-up chairs, but the side of the bath will do equally. There is peace here, but the scripts are subversive. Eyebrows are raised at the mention of transvestism, some of the terms are off, outdated. And yet, when one letter rails against the racism of the gay movement and the sexism of everyday life, against heterosexual bias, something is rekindled: how is this not all still true?

Hayes's excellent work gives no easy answers. We may have destroyed distance, but there is underlying unease about the technology that enables this proximity. What kind of sexed and gendered subjects do different technologies create? 'Queer' may have been reclaimed, but what happens when sexuality becomes detached from politics? What does feminism mean in the wake of its mainstreaming? What is the current relationship between feminist and gay politics? Behind the screens, Hayes has reproduced pages from some of the publications. Lists of Gay Liberation Front meetings, little articles and rants, and touching small things. In one lost and found section, the following: 'Lost at Camden Disco on 18/10/72 A white sheepskin coat with orange paint on collar by a sister – it's the only coat she has for the winter and she is an unmarried mother.' Those watching the screens can see the legs of the readers standing behind the plywood structure, caught up in yesterday's version of Tumblr and WordPress and OkCupid. People come and go, and the room empties.

TANYA LEIGHTON



Sharon Hayes, *In My Little Corner of the World, Anyone Would Love You*, 2016, video still; performer: Swift Shuker. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin