

- Do you frequently use pop music in your performance work?
- Yes.
  
- Would you say you love pop culture?
- Yes.
  
- Would you say you hate pop culture?
- Yes.
  
- Do you have a love/hate relationship with using pop culture material in your work?
- It's a yes from us.

That's 4 YESes. We really deserve to be here.



All the usuals – stupification, mass sedation, objectification and commodification of bodies, perpetuation of heteronormative structures, you can be a star... blah blah blah.



Many of the usuals - collective reference, immediacy, accessibility, fun factor, cheap glamour, bad taste, catharsis, nostalgia, lightweight, you can be a star.

In performance, using 'pop' references to critique society is not new. You could say it's retro, derivative, passé, generic. Those are some of the things we love about it. It's always a cover-version of itself. It only knows how to emulate – work by numbers – press buttons – fill a mould. It is utterly hopeless and weak when it comes to having a claim on anything new. And for that we salute it and consider it an excellent vantage point from which to start work.

It's the '4 EVER' relationship between pop and irony that's difficult. While we find irony useful, we have been wondering if it's ever possible to uncouple it from pop. For example, it seems to us that if you play/use/reference a famous pop song on stage, you are (usually intentionally) creating a moment which brings notions of aspiration, attempt and the pathetic into the room. And as soon as we have amateurism and aspiration in the room, we probably have irony quite close by.

***Jen looks to camera and takes a drag on a talcum-powder cigarette, then brushes wig out of her eyes. Camera pans around the table – Hester is fiddling with her Giant Hamburger necklace and chewing the leg of a pair of huge glasses. XXXX is playing in the background. Most of the light comes from a Macbook Pro screen. Lucy looks to camera and takes lollipop out of mouth, then swigs Diet Coke. Slow zoom-in...***

*LM: An artist using pop in their work might think "I'm doing this to myself, I'm using these pop references ironically and I'm co-opting them. I know about the politics around this, so I can do this anyway". But the risk is we just want to be a pop-fantasised version of ourselves - we've actually got a secret desire to still be involved in that side of life and in that imagery, and maybe we all just need to stop revelling in it and giving ourselves an excuse to use it, because it buys into the biggest load of bullshit. 'Irony' can really be an excuse to -*

*HC: - just do the thing and enjoy the thing that you know there are problems with?*

*LM: Yeah.*

*JP: I think we have to be strict with ourselves. I remember when we first put music back into Big Hits, we put loads of tracks on and it was like a binge, because it was just so great to have it back. But we pared it down, and got very specific about the songs we use and why we play them. I think as long as everyone has a sense of 'why'...*

*HC: Okay, so with the rabbit in Big Hits...what's the function of that? You could say that is very 'pop culture' costume - it's in that aesthetic of trashy and tacky. It looks easy and immediate and synthetic. And cute. But why do we feel the need to have that there? Is it to undermine, so that even if Lucy is singing a great song strongly, the moment is always problematised?*

*JP: Yeah, because if it's not there it becomes very different. Unless you've got something there that personifies pop, and holds its hands up to the saccharine-ness of it, you've just got a half-naked man, and a woman singing a song really well. But the rabbit is there to enjoy itself too, and I think it's good to put that on stage.*

*HC: So that the show isn't raising an eyebrow at its own content all the time?*

*JP: Exactly.*

*LM: We talk about love/hate of pop culture, but in Big Hits, it is the hate that prevails, isn't it? I mean, is there a lot of love in that show, do you think, really?*

*HC: It feels like the hate of the love...Hating that one loves it. There's always the two sets of people in the room - there's those three people on stage and then there's GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN. You might think those three people on stage have big problems with what's going on, but GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN probably really love it.*

*LM: I don't think there's a lot of celebration in it at all.*

*HC: The fullness of your voice, of the rabbit costume, of the rejection and objectification of Craig - it's like, "seriously, are you going to treat him like that?"- the fullness and unapologetic nature of these moves, I think makes them quite celebratory. And when Jen starts off in the rabbit costume, she does some proper celebrating.*

*LM: But the rabbit is undermining the stage picture – it completely doesn't fit with the performance of the song – so it's not like it's just a celebration.*

*JP: The rabbit's dancing to the backing track, which, because it's a crappy track, is itself a huge thing that is already undermining the song. The rabbit's almost the visible part of the backing track.*

*HC: Yeah - the backing track is rubbish-quality, has no vocals, and plays through a rubbish PA. Which are all specific efforts to not have 'the epic pop song' fully in the room. There's this depressing thing, where you can know that no matter how carefully you craft something, what interesting conversations you have, or how much you really build something... it's always possible that if you just played a great pop song there, it would have the same effect –*

*JP: Or at least, it would be instantly accessible, that effect.*

*HC: And it would do the job you are striving to do with other things. And it can make you feel like, 'shall we stop?'*

***Silence. Jen walks over to window. Outside it's raining. Soft focus in foreground - Hester is redundantly pressing keys on the Macbook Pro. Camera goes wide as Lucy stands suddenly and karate kicks the table with her gold high heel - Diet Coke, lollipops, nail varnish and cables scatter in slow motion across the room. Close-up on Lucy's face as she gives the camera some Attitude. Sudden pullback – Hester and Jen are in formation with Lucy. Dance begins.***

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HC, LM, JP December 2012