

PACITTI COMPANY THINK TANK

PAST EVENTS RESOURCE

This FREE download refers to:

SALON: ON OBSESSION LAUREN BARRI HOLSTEIN

Source: <http://www.pacitticompany.com/event/on-obsession/>

GENERAL THINK TANK INFORMATION

Housed within the specially refurbished Victorian Wing of the Ipswich Museum and Art School Gallery, the Pacitti Company Think Tank is a building-based resource for the ongoing exploration and study of live performance and radical praxis. Pacitti Company welcomes broad audiences at the Think Tank, to a curated rolling programme of local, national and international events. These activate thinking and discussion around live art, performance and wider cultural topics. The Think Tank offers accessible, affordable public events, led by artists and experts from a range of diverse fields. These events and sessions are recorded by various means, so that a cumulative body of research and knowledge extends beyond the experiences of those present, into territories that serve researchers, students, archivists, practitioners and policy makers.

CONDITIONS OF USE FOR THIS DOCUMENT

This document has been made public to aid individuals in their own study and research. It has been shared in good faith that it will not be used for commercial purposes or exploited for financial gain. We strongly advise you not to plagiarise any materials used within this document, and the intellectual property of the authors will be defended vigorously if the need arises.

All opinions expressed in material contained within this document and those of the authors and artists and not necessarily those of the publishers. Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders but if any have been inadvertently overlooked please let us know via the address below.

The Think Tank programme and Past Events Resource are produced in house as initiatives of Pacitti Company. www.pacitticompany.com

For any further information please contact thinktank@pacitticompany.com

PACITTI COMPANY THINK TANK

PAST EVENTS RESOURCE

OBSESSION ON TALK

LAUREN BARRI HOLSTEIN

My work is obsessive in many ways – as am I.

My passion for the work is borderline pathological.

My process and the thought and theory behind the work is anal and all-consuming – what I simply call thorough, but others might call crazy.

The choices I make about everything the audience sees, hears, experiences are meticulously selected– despite their haphazard appearance.

I could talk about the obsessive quality of my work's relationship to appropriation and the history of feminist performance.

I could talk about the compulsive nature of some of my strategies – repetition, prolongation, failure.

I could talk about my obsession with myself and my gorgeous vagina.

But I'm going to talk specifically about the relationship between 2 particular strategies present in many of my works. The first is the persistence in inhabiting ready-made sites of femininity. The second is the persistence in, very literally, interrupting those occupancies. I'm interested in dissatisfaction as a strategy. And I'll hopefully explain why as I continue.

PACITTI COMPANY THINK TANK

PAST EVENTS RESOURCE

How 2 Become 1 (2011)

I use a culturally-coded, easily accessible metaphor – i.e. hen = bride/mother, free-flying bird = independent woman. I then try to fulfil that metaphor so insistently, so desperately, sincerely, excessively, and so literally, that the metaphor implodes on itself.

I lay a dozen eggs out of my vagina, I learn to fly, I take a prego test, etc. I very literally try to inhabit this culturally coded site of femininity.

In most versions of this show, I fly off the stage, as in the video you've just seen, leaving the audience in a state of ambiguity – have I succeeded in becoming 'one'? am I the ultimate bride/hen/independent woman/free-flying bird? Also lending itself towards this question mark is the fact that while I complete all of my tasks, each one lends itself to failure in some way – I'm not really flying, the pregnancy test is negative- so there's a sort of question mark here.

The last time I did the show – SPILL 2011- I was so sick of the show and this woman and the attempt to become her that I completely interrupted the show, and therefore this woman I was inhabiting, and kicked everyone out. Of course, whether that's still part of the narrative of the work is up to you.

Cupcake (2013)

In October 2012, in the midst of preparing for the preview of our latest, and most spectacular show, *Splat!*, InBetween Time Festival asked us to present at the Arnolfini Auditorium in Bristol in just 3 months time. Originally they'd asked for *Splat!*, which was due to premiere at the Barbican as the opening for SPILL Festival of Performance in April. As *Splat!* was contracted to the Barbican, we decided instead to use the opportunity to re-hash an old show that we had never

PACITTI COMPANY THINK TANK

PAST EVENTS RESOURCE

really finished, and had never really liked – *How to Become a Cupcake*. Unfortunately, all we could think about was *Splat!*.

On February 15th, 2013, The Famous attempts to turn herself into a cupcake – a non-nutritious, unnecessary fetishizable piece of fluff. I melt a twister popsicle in my vagina with a hairdryer while upside down in a split – for 10 minutes – I try to become a mango while I simultaneously eat it – But given that the company and I were not-so-interested in this concept anymore, the only option left to us was to destroy the show in its making.

As the cupcake narrative of the show develops, it was constantly interrupted by things ‘outside the show’ – particularly, another show... *Splat!* With the other performers wandering up to the microphone – starting to tell people what an amazing show we made for them. But it’s not this one. Telling them the tickets are for sale, etc. passing out flyers for *splat* in the middle of a cupcake scene. Then, by the end... this is what happened

Why this is important:

These moments of repetition, in their repeated success and failure, evoke both disappointment and pleasure. To cut a song off in the middle, as I do with every pop song in the show, before I’ve ‘succeeded’ in singing it completely and thereby fulfilling the role of the suffering/fetishized/incomplete/etc. woman described by its lyrics, renders an affective disappointment. That I inevitably fail to finish the show at all, and that I fail to finish it as ‘the cupcake’ I’ve promised I’d become, produces an unsatisfactory conclusion to what the night has promised. Those repetitive disruptions, and those repetitive failures, inevitably eclipse the possibility of ‘the show’ ever fulfilling itself. And yet it keeps trying.

Equally, there is a pleasure in this repetitive unsatisfaction. The pleasure in watching a signifier fail to fulfil itself is at once devastating and utterly

PACITTI COMPANY THINK TANK

PAST EVENTS RESOURCE

reassuring– to watch me succeed in becoming the cupcake-woman would be far more devastating than seeing my endless fluctuation between my womanhood and the inevitably unattainable signifier– for it would demonstrate the success of a signifier, and therefore the failure of everything that falls around it. There is relief in that repetition. This process of failure and success, this process of repetition, activates the political space between a signifier and its referent– the space between an identity and the body pretending to fulfil it– the space in which a woman can fulfil her name and reject it, simultaneously. There is pleasure in performing, and, I speculate, in watching, that endless journey back and forth between success and failure, between reaching and rejecting.

The cycle of shuttling back and forth between ‘the show’ and ‘not-the-show’, between ‘woman’ and ‘not-woman’, reveals the pleasures and deaths inherent in the never-ending, unanswerable journey between a signifier and its referent – or between a name and that which it attempts, and fails, to represent. That this is a space in which a phenomenon repetitively loses and finds itself, reaches and rejects itself, is what makes this space endlessly politically potent and simultaneously nothing at all.

Splat! (2012)

In *Splat!*, I, as The Famous, along with my cast of faltering female clichés, try on a number of traumatic female identities, each of which are in some way discarded -- abandoned, rejected, forgotten about. But with each new attempt, the scene becomes more spectacular than the last, each identity-adoption an attempt to trump the previous, reaching towards, but never achieving, the goal of ultimate female victimhood. From disgruntled housewife, to hypersexual whore/witch/popstar, to domesticated animal -- through infantilized innocence, (hyper)horniness and the open wounds of suffering -- these various roles of traumatic female-ness are carefully chosen, but (seemingly) haphazardly tried on

PACITTI COMPANY THINK TANK

PAST EVENTS RESOURCE

and thrown off again, like cheap and ill-fitting clothes in the dressing rooms of Primark.

In this scene, the innocent, virginal, infantilized creature, undoes herself. Though I put on her outfitted identity, I just as brashly take it off. The quality of this appropriation, and others within the show, is somehow simultaneously violent and insouciant, perhaps both due, in part, to their fleeting temporality -- before I even pull the new identity over my ass and zip it up, I'm already ripping it off, busting out of it or sullyng it beyond recognition.

Each narrative that begins, each appropriation of identity, ends abruptly, and though the excess, spectacle and showtime-y extravagance escalates throughout the show, it all amounts to very little. Everything is cut short before it can resolve -- this incompleteness is what I call 'the blue-ball effect' -- cutting off the pleasure source before the satisfaction of 'completion'. Though the Bambi narrative returns with me hanging by my ankles twelve feet above the stage dripping ketchup-blood, I begin eating a burger and reading the budget of the show before any satisfaction of a resolved narrative can be felt. Equally, 'The Tale of Little Bitch', which I read earlier in the show from an excessively large storybook, again, ends abruptly, with 'The End' positioned in the middle of the story, the slamming shut of the book, and my moving on to the next performed narrative. At the end of each narrative, I neither die as the victim nor succeed via the acquisition of 'empowerment'. In the end, the audience isn't left with the satisfaction of the victim story, nor the affirmative survival story. That I need to be dragged off the stage in my refusal to end the show is an echo of my refusal to fulfil these 'complete' narratives of womanhood.

Why this is important to me:

So firstly, I'll explain that this work is developed very much in resistance to what I call 'pop-feminism's' reliance on the narrative of trauma and survival. Women are

PACITTI COMPANY THINK TANK

PAST EVENTS RESOURCE

very often represented as either just victims, or as those who are affirmed or empowered only after they've experienced a trauma. The notion, put forward in many sites of cultural representation – tv, film, advertising, women's magazines, etc., implies that a woman must always in some way be a victim – first and foremost- before she can claim her agency. Equally, the representation of 'successful' or 'empowered' women in these sources shows a woman whose identity cannot permit mess, failure, humiliation, disgust, etc. Once those things seep into that identity, she's automatically rendered a victim. So in Splat...

By refusing to satisfy the seemingly inevitable resolutions to the narratives I'm portraying in the work, I am positioning myself as ambiguously both and neither the victim and/or the affirmed woman of pop-feminism. This refusal makes these roles themselves exist in a liminal state; they are not whole, true, essential, as they are not completed. These roles are disintegrated by their irresolution. By 'blue-balling' these narratives, the female subjectivity at hand, here played out by me as The Famous, is punctured and fragmented. This fragmentation acts strategically as a mode of resistance to affirmation-based pop-feminism and its reliance on trauma. By disrupting and 'incompleting' the pop-feminist narratives of trauma and survival, the female subject I embody can be both traumatic and empowered, or neither; she can be both sincere and indifferent to the liminality of her position as both of these things. Instead of steeping the subject in victimhood, this strategy of incompleteness can produce an agency that allows for the integration of disintegration, or 'mess', into the symbolisation of the female subject. This subject's agency is enacted through her continued movement between identities, her never settling, never resolving, into a role that doesn't quite fit. This subject inherits an agency derived from her liminal affective position, from her resistance to settling, from her cyclical disintegration and irresolution. And in the end, her agency as a female subject integrates her disintegrative elements -- her failure, her mess, her irresoluteness become integral to her subjectivity. She may be a mess, but she isn't a victim.

THANK GOD. (Cuz that would be disgusting.)