

Pablo Paillole Q&A with Nadir Project Space / Kitty Bew

Can you tell me a little bit about how *Things Are Improving* and *Toxic* both came about?

In the third year of my undergraduate studies I was looking at archives and found material online and was interested in how images drawn from political culture but also from popular culture and archival materials could collide. In *Things Are Improving* you find footage of both Teresa May and Monsieur Verdoux, a money-obsessed character played by Charlie Chaplin. Monsieur Verdoux was particularly interesting to me in terms of how it played with the idea of scandal and how scandal can populate political life. The clashing of all these images together - of Teresa and Verdoux - felt relevant to what was happening at the time. Editing them together was my way of processing what was on the news and making sense of the world in general. I was also interested in exhibiting them in a different way than they would have been seen conventionally.

Toxic takes the clashing of images to another level. I merged the classic Britney Spears pop song with the tension that had arisen between the US and North Korea in 2018. That particular relationship, and Donald Trump's visit with Kim Jong-un, felt like the definition of toxic. I thought it would be interesting to make a mash-up of all these ideas.

The film brings together a mixture of media, television and news clips, archival footage and your own filmed footage. What is your process?

The bringing together of unusual, disparate images is what interests me. The contrast between nightclub scenes and political interventions at the UN spoke to me in a way that I am really passionate about. I enjoyed this mixing of the popular and the political with the aim to create something else entirely.

I have an image bank of things gathered from YouTube which I use as a source for my work. I'm also always adding to my own image bank footage that I film myself, which I can then experiment with. I film a lot of festive, celebratory images including scenes from clubs or parties. It's in these moments of celebration that we forget about the political context, so I like to remind people of that political presence. If I'm out and about, I'll always film something with my phone that I find interesting. It tells you something about that frenetic moment in which it was made.

Is contemporary online culture and our relationship with screens - particularly in terms of how we consume images - relevant to your practice?

Absolutely. There's something about the way that we consume images in contemporary life that's so quick that you don't even have time to process the image before it changes to something else, something unrelated to the image that came before. You'll be looking at an image of Britney Spears, and then suddenly you're looking at the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Or even the experience of looking at two screens simultaneously. *Things Are Improving* also reflects the experience of flicking through your television channels. This overpowering and visually invasive stream of moving image.

You're working with some real serious issues about politics, fiction, meaning, but your approach seems to be through humour. To what extent do jokes play a role in your practice?

Humour is always there in some way. A lot of the time it's something that happens quite organically, mostly because of the type of footage I'm using. But I generally aim for an ambivalence in terms of the audience's reactions, a mixture of responses or feelings about the work.

Contemporary ideas of 'post-truth' and 'fake-news' are explored in your work. What is your interest in these phenomena?

The idea of fake news is at the very core of my practice. For me, I was politicised through watching the news in 2014-16 and the context of Brexit and Trump's election campaign. The disinformation that saturated these narratives has really fed into the work that I make. My most recent piece for example, *The Ecstasy of Communications*, is an allegory of Brexit tales as told through the lens of Faulty Towers. I think my practice could have only have come about within the context of these events.

Political leaders feature frequently in your works. What is it about these figures that you find so interesting?

I started looking at political leaders as being invested in some kind of performance, and the way in which they express themselves as highly scripted and rehearsed. And of course the narrative of these scripts changes for political convenience and political gain. Holding these figures to account through art and culture is something that is really important to me.