



Digital days

RYAN TRECARTIN'S 'ANY EVER'

Amy Karafin

opposite, top to bottom
Sibling Topics (section a), 2009
 HD video, 51 mins, 26 secs duration
 Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

K-CoreaINC.K (section a), 2009
 HD video, 33 mins, 5 secs duration
 Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

pages 294–5
Living Comp, 2011
 Unique sculptural theatre, 852 x 803 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York
 Photograph Matthew Septimus

SPENDING TIME AT RYAN TRECARTIN'S 'ANY EVER' IMPRESSES dreams. It may fill them with characters speaking in digitally manipulated voices, starting an 'offshore identity storage unit' or doing the splits. It alters consciousness too: for a while, the world outside looks more momentary, scattered and disposable in a way that is unsettling but familiar. The work has been described as extra-dimensional, and it does seem to exist in a different continuum – one that's both foreign and surprisingly intuitive.

Having recently travelled from New York's MoMA PS1 to the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 'Any Ever' is Trecartin's first large-scale museum show. The video artist is already familiar to New Yorkers for his precocious coups at the 2006 Whitney Biennial (where he debuted at the age of twenty-five) and the New Museum's 'The Generational: Younger Than Jesus' (2009), and the critical reception to his work has been one of bewildered adoration. While no-one can quite put their finger on what his artistic lineage is (Cindy Sherman's name crops up often) or what the work presages, the feeling is that Trecartin's films are at the brink of a new way of looking at things, that he's a herald for these digital days.

Trecartin's movies, as he calls them, are hard to describe. Nonlinear and manic, they're full of young androgynous people dressed up like ordinary, badly dressed people who have make-up or paint smeared on their faces. Characters seem mentally ill, developmentally disabled or hyper-teenaged. They say things that are almost logical and very familiar-sounding but remain ultimately meaningless – reminiscent of spam or snippets from an infomercial, mashed with tween slang and corporate jargon: 'let's couch this bird and first-person it'; 'her value proposition was really good'; 'I want whatever science is currently demonstrating; I'm really young and post-device'. Their voices are sped up, slowed down, altered as if by helium; they sing.

The hyperreal settings and objects – messy rooms in new apartments, a plastic bag full of garbage over the doorknob, a

tangle of extension cords – are the visual lint of modern life. What exists of a plot meanders and turns on itself. Clipped text messages and random words with deranged punctuation float over the screen, as does stock video footage of corporate-office scenes, women shopping or internet detritus. There are wigs, posters of white puppies, broken glass and a shirt that says 'I hate myself'. A typical montage might employ primitive special effects from the 1980s (Trecartin was born in 1981) and last for only a few seconds before it is refreshed into a new hyperactively collaged scene.

'Any Ever' consists of seven films in two diptychs: *P.opular S.ky (section ish)*, *Sibling Topics (section a)* and *K-CoreaINC.K (section a)* comprise *Trill-ogy Comp* (2009); while *The Re'Search*, *Roamie View: History Enhancement*, *Temp Stop* and *Ready* make up *Re'Search Wait'S* (2009–10). In reality, they share characters and revolve loosely around overlapping storylines – careers, paintings, vacations, meetings, parties, mobile phones – so that at times they feel indistinct.

Each movie is screened in its own room with an installation that echoes scenes from the film. IKEA furniture and pillows are strewn around, and seating – sofas atop elevated mattresses, reached by a pool ladder, for example – come affixed with thick headphones for viewers. Just as the films' characters and plots (such as they are) spill over into one another, so do the rooms, and you soon find that meandering through them creates new chronologies and stories. In a time of endless apps, and speculation about the future of media as something to engage with rather than consume, the arrangement suggests a future form of subjective film where the viewer becomes the director.

As it is, Trecartin is not the sole director of these films. He works with close collaborator Lizzie Fitch and other friends from his alma mater, the Rhode Island School of Design, together with reality-TV stars and professional child actors. (The films were shot in Miami, Florida, not too far from Disney World.) And although





opposite
Sibling Topics (section a), 2009
 HD video, 51 mins, 26 secs duration
 Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

the dialogue seems improvised or random, the films actually started with a script which quickly mutated in the process of collaboration. But language is the seed of the films. It's also what makes them funny; it gives them their punch and is the armature of their particular brand of nonsense.

Take JJ. In *Roamie View: History Enhancement* the androgynous off-kilter character (played by Trecartin) is painted and dressed in white, with blood-red marks on his neck, a blue tooth and a Bluetooth earpiece. When he speaks, he pauses in all the wrong places. 'I love this one?' he says, pointing to a poster of documents and photocopied dollar bills. 'Able calls it her "Disabilities Act" painting.' He points to another work: 'It's about how mail was a really cute idea.' And finally, to a large text about the American Constitution: 'And I thought that it would be neat and cute if someone took out all the times they say "people" or "humanity" and replaced it with "situations"'. And then, every reference to God, take it out and replace it with "the internet". And then play it over a house beat.' Later, one of his friends, who summons up JJ by pointing a drill at two mobile phones, says: 'I love redistributing myself to people who haven't learned about me yet', which Able (Fitch) echoes, sort of, in *K-CoreaINC.K (section a)*: 'I love being able to restep into my existence from the distance of other people's lives.' Her colleague, Mexico Korea (the hilarious artist and performer Raul de Nieves), meanwhile, told an earlier incarnation of herself: 'Don't be such an angry essay, Jessica, or I'll tune out, and buy a mean dog sign, and put it in front of all my communications.'

The absurd word sequences – and even JJ's artwork – call to mind the American avant-garde poetry movement Flarf, which began in 2000 using internet searches of random word combinations – along with spam titles, anagram calculators and other web-assisted word generators – to create horrible and unintentionally brilliant poetry. (To quote from Sharon Mesmer's

'Physical Graffiti': 'Oh! Oh!/ Your brain is eating my precious Bea Arthur!/ Also effluvial duct tape/ and Quality Entertainments.')

The randomness resembles that of Trecartin's visual and verbal poetics, both sourced, it would seem, from the internet's onslaught of material.

It's fitting that text, as the currency of the internet, would serve as the foundation of Trecartin's films which, in their pacing, simultaneity and jumpiness, are really set in a kind of online space-time. In *Roamie View: History Enhancement*, JJ even seems to be travelling *through* the internet – so much so that one recent visitor to 'Any Ever' joked: 'It's like a vision of the future if MySpace had taken over instead of Facebook.' And it's true that being at the show feels a little like being caught in the web – a place at once removed from reality and super-saturated with it, jumping about in a chronology of its own making that's also being constantly altered by millions of people. At the same time, it's like being in your head while surfing the internet. Here Trecartin is playing with how we register and express cultural information and, by extension, sensory experience; watching his videos is like watching a part of ourselves watching the minutiae of our constantly consuming culture.

It's a vision that's scary and unsettling: we recognise this realm, we spend increasing amounts of time there, and it's an eerie place. But it's also new, and its speed, its endless distractions and loops are seductive. The talk is slapstick, the characters self-involved and involving. 'Any Ever' is like a movie preview of our new and coming consciousness, and it may change the way we look at art. As Adobe says in *Sibling Topics (section a)*: 'I love the way you move, Timmy. It reminds me of the future.'

Ryan Trecartin: Any Ever, MoMA PS1, New York, 19 June – 3 September 2011; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 18 October 2011 – 8 January 2012.