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Ryan Trecartin: Displaying Video Art on Early Web 2.0 Spaces

Ryan Trecartin is an American contemporary artist born in 1981 in Texas. Trecartin studied film/video/animation at Rhode Island School of Design in 2000 and graduated with his BFA in 2004. Since then, he has been uploading works of video art to platforms on the internet, such as YouTube, UbuWeb, and more. Trecartin is one of, if not the first artist, to use YouTube as a mode of delivery for his work. His choices around displaying his work were unique, however this factor would set his work apart from other video art of the time. Ryan Trecartin uses Web 2.0 spaces, such as YouTube, Vimeo, and UbuWeb, as a mode of delivery, which helps the perception of formal qualities within his video artwork.

Ryan Trecartin's early body of work primarily existed on viewing platforms across the internet. One of Trecartin's earliest works, *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004) was his thesis project when graduating from his BFA program and predates YouTube just short of two years. First, Trecartin passed around copies of the video on DVDs, but then released the video on YouTube after its creation. The video itself contains a jumbled narrative and unique costuming choices, one of which being Trecartin himself dressed in a long purple wig with patterned leggings and a pink crop top. Trecartin, aka Skippy, is the main character of the story being told in the piece. Skippy goes on an interesting adventure, meeting many new and eccentric characters along the way. There is so much happening within the video that it is hard to register all the names and faces and actions that are on screen. In an exhibition setting, this work may be

hard to read, especially if you walk in on a random segment of it and decide not to stay and watch. Also, the overwhelming nature of the video could be hard to handle, especially if it is the only thing you have to focus on, and the only way to escape is to completely step away from the work. Trecartin's use of screen writing, mise-en-scene, and structuring do not seem to be ideal for something shown in a gallery, which may be why he decided to use other forms of delivery.

(Tommy Chat Just E-mailed Me.) (2006) came next after *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004). *(Tommy Chat Just E-mailed Me.)* (2006) was released on YouTube and is one of Trecartin's most popular works from the time. The video follows four unique characters, Tommy, Tammy, Beth, and Pam. Pam, Tammy, and Tom are all three played by Trecartin, who switches his clothes and makeup to conform to both masculine and feminine character identities. The story follows the characters around as they babble to each other and spend time on their computers and phones, even though they're just contacting each other. They use their computers to google random questions, and it is very obvious that Trecartin is aiming to comment on the increasing influence and use of digital technology. Trecartin's exploration of Web 2.0 spaces with *(Tommy Chat Just E-mailed Me.)* (2006) is an interesting one. The plot and techniques used in *(Tommy Chat Just E-mailed Me.)* (2006) are somehow even more disorienting and postcinematic than *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004), but the work was still received pretty well on YouTube. It was even the beginning of a new type of internet culture, something we had never experienced before. Trecartin has started to prove a point – successful video art can exist on spaces online and does need a formal exhibition or gallery to be seen.

To say that Ryan Trecartin's video work uses an overload of information and oversharing, especially within his script writing, is an understatement. Trecartin walks a fine line in his video work, pushing the boundaries of what is considered “too much” information. The amount of

information in his work is a lot, but I also find myself struggling to look away. I am fascinated by everything happening within the videos, and I feel obligated as a viewer to keep up with the hectic performance being given. The overuse of information within Trecartin's work serves a purpose. By using concepts of maximalism and oversharing/overuse of information, Trecartin is representing the amount of information and media our internet holds, how we interact with it as a culture, and the impact it has on our everyday lives. In a profile written on Trecartin and his body of work, Calvin Tompkins states, "His work is not about technology or social media, he has said, but about how the Internet changes the way we relate to the world and to one another, and his videos are rooted in the very world these changes have brought about" (Tompkins 3). His thoughts on digital media and technology and how we, as a culture, interact with the internet and digital media are certainly well represented and communicated within his work.

Ryan Trecartin's choice of delivery for his work is the first of its kind. Instead of applying for exhibitions or trying to find places to screen his work, Trecartin used the internet to his advantage when displaying his video work. Spaces for video sharing, also referred to as "Web 2.0 spaces" were newer when Trecartin was beginning to make video work, and his choice to upload his work online was a smart one. The postcinematic techniques and DIY (Do it yourself) feeling of his videos helps them to fit perfectly into the Web 2.0 space. In an interview Trecartin did with Jennifer Lange at the Wexner Center for the Arts, he says, "I think web 2.0 spaces relate tremendously to the logic and structures of physical space and plot sculpting in the movies. So I think it's an appropriate home that brings out a quality in the work that you may look over in the gallery" (Trecartin 2008). Trecartin's use of these formal qualities and postcinematic techniques are better suited to be displayed in a Web 2.0 space, and it seems he has considered this since the beginning of his career. If I were old enough to stumble across his work while exploring youtube

in the early 2000's, I'm sure I would have found this endlessly entertaining. I still find it very entertaining now, and am inspired by him as an artist, but I'm sure it was something else back when video art and Web 2.0 spaces were still new and shiny.

Ryan Trecartin uses Web 2.0 spaces, such as YouTube, Vimeo, and UbuWeb, as a mode of delivery, which helps the perception of formal qualities within his video work. In *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004), we are taken through a story with crazy twists and turns. In an exhibition setting, the overwhelming nature of the video could be hard to handle, which is why it works better in a space that exists online, for people to watch and take in at their own rate. (*Tommy Chat Just E-mailed Me.*) (2006) came next after *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004) and was one of Trecartins first works that he released in the Web 2.0 space. (*Tommy Chat Just E-mailed Me.*) (2006) was like something we had never experienced before, but it was extremely successful existing in an online space. The overuse of information within Trecartin's work serves a purpose, one that speaks on the internet and how we interact with it. Additionally, Trecartin was a digital-era pioneer for using Web 2.0 spaces for his video art, and many would take inspiration from his work and create their own. Trecartin's use of formal qualities and postcinematic techniques are better suited to exist in a Web 2.0 space, and I am glad he decided to utilize Web 2.0 spaces for showing pieces of his art.

Notes

1. “Interview with Director Ryan Trecartin.” n.d. Wexner Center for the Arts.
<https://wexarts.org/blog/interview-director-ryan-trecartin>.
2. Tomkins, Calvin. n.d. “Experimental People.” The New Yorker.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/24/experimental-people>.