

## Caravan of Ascension

Collected writings from Dissertation – The Mirror and the Cross – Trance, Ritual and the Digital Medium.

Sans references.

BB2013

What specifically interests me is the journey of the trance/ritual through time, and its evolution conjunct with social change and media; from elemental/sacrificial communions, through to the 'magic mirror' of social networking.

I'm making it all up as I go along. As a ritual artist, I'm scrabbling through the debris of a cultural landfill, to uncover some sparkly remnants of spiritual value, and reworking them, hybridised, into some new form. Ritual artists are improvising for want of some long forgotten, or recently abused connection with the divine matrix. Now's a time when we can, potentially, write our own future.

I'm interested in art happenings that have an attached meaning; art rituals, to create metaphysical change, 'alchemical' art if you will. As a lifelong practitioner of cathartic art (mapping the dark), I find myself now turning, to make work that somehow has a wider meaning in the world; a better point, other than just to keep myself sane. Ritual art seems to deliver this catalytic nourishment in some ambiguously cosmic and metamorphic way.

My grandmothers' generation was straight-jacketed into definitions of hysteria by the medical system, and way before that women were burned as witches. This history of destroying the crazy woman; the woman who can trance, is rich with hanging, drugging, rape, circumcision, and electro convulsive therapy. The conquests, colonialism and religious oppression severed and suffocated any old lineage to magic and trance that society had. But she still gets out, old witchy. Peeking through the cracks of our genetic memory there is still a little hidden witchery to be found.

My work is sometimes very disembodied, subconscious, often disturbing. I used to have terrifying out of body experiences in my early teens, my father used to astrally project as a child, my sister has severe epilepsy; yet, we as a family, have no cultural rituals

with which to contain these bizarre experiences.

Ryan Trecartin, a contemporary American video artist whose movies seem to be streaming down the broadband direct from the future; an artist who makes bold references to trance states visually, and conceptually navigates ideas surrounding the psycho/cultural implications of the Internet. Trecartin says in interview-

***"You can't know the moment you're in... But interesting things occur when people try to define something before it's actually happened."*** (Kuang 2012.)

In *Vodou* ritual in Haiti ancestral spirits/deities are brought about to 'ride' the body human participant, then sometimes, the spirit is caught in a vase or bowl, to be taken elsewhere and laid to rest. (Deren.1953.)

What is the equivalent in our culture? What spirits do we evoke while playing 'Call of Duty'? For our eyes appear so empty while in that game that we must accept by becoming a vacuum nature will abhor us (and then fill us, with what?). Who is the God of the newsfeed? What living Gods abide in this new binary dimension?

*And where do you go, Chloe, when in the throws of one of your epileptic fits?*



As we spoke our dreams on the couch, we watched our dreams as we sat on the red velvet cinema seat. Out of the red of the development womb and into the black of another Cave; the Cinema, a night place of transportation. Magic will be told down a flickering beam in a dark room. Dali and his sliced eyeball, Cocteau and his Bête, America and King Kong, bombs, bombshells, Jung's archetypes, Marilyn, Elvis, Freuds' mothers penis. The still camera can be a soul thief, and the film camera can be a dream weaver. Hollywood is a dream factory, quite literally. Older people dream more in black and white. When I was talking to my performance artist friend (Beech 2012) she brought to my attention the idea of a simple graph- diagram, of what happens in film, it's the shape of a cross. The vertical line, represents the 3 dimensional space/time realities, that are captured by the film camera, and the horizontal line, represents the flat, 2 dimensional surface of the projected film, that we watch.

Maya Deren was a film theorist interested in film as a space/time medium, (Deren 2005), but what caught me, was her obsession with the symbolism of the Voudoun cross, used in rituals in Haiti. Here the vertical line, represented the hidden spiritual realm, beyond the veil of our physical reality; and the horizontal line, stood for our own corporeal world. As if, the physical world of our daily experience is only that flat, projected surface, that corresponds to the deeper 'other' realm.

These two hypothetical crosses fit quite neatly.

From this, we could start talking about parallel dimensions, and event horizons. Like the theory that the event horizon of a black hole, catches a smear of everything entering a black hole, so that, if you ever were sucked into one, you would be both at once dead inside the black hole, *and* a flat projected smear on the event horizon, that was having an experience of being alive (The Hawking Paradox, 2005).

Plato's realm of the forms refers to our perceived experience as just a mere projection. What we live, just a shadow cast on the wall of the cave from the light of the fire of the realm of the perfect, non-physical form. What role does art play in this shadow theatre of perception?

Voudoun is not doctrinal as Christianity seeks to be. The individual would have a direct experience of their own personal ancestral Lwa.

Someone in *Vodou* culture would experience collective ritual for cultural events, and personal, direct experience of their specific deity via means of possession. Maybe this is the key to the fear that surrounds *Vodou*; that it offers as a religion, a path that directly connects the individual to the sacred as *experience*, rather than as a teaching or mode of ethics.

Video is *the* trash medium for fine artists. Video is for the multitudes. By its nature it combines the flat, square surface and colour possibilities of painting with the political/ cultural dimensions found in sculpture or performance art. Performance art is a transitional medium culminating in an event in real space/time. The flux nature of performance art has obvious benefits but creates obstacles for its creators, especially when it comes to getting paid or reaching a wide distribution.

Video/film artists have a lineage; Andy Warhol and his darlin' Little Joe, Laurie Anderson 'Oh Superman', George Kuchar, Jeff Keane, Kenneth Anger, Tony Owsler and balloon heads, Mike Kelly, Yayoi Kusamas' 'nude happenings', Tessa Hughes Freeland and her giant phallused Fawn, Nick Zed (War is Menstrual Envy), Beth B, Lydia Lunch and all the Cinema of Transgression bunch in the 80's. Harmony Korine and his incest and young girls, Chris Cunningham and perverse creatures in 'Rubber Johnny'. The list goes on. Cory Arcangel is the silver plinthead Gameboy of video art. Hacking 80s videogames and making them hip (I shot Andy Warhol) or mundane (Clouds). Even pop musicians are performance artists now - Gaga, Die Antwoord, Fever Ray. Sexy huh?

Video makes a 'thing' of performance art. Saying that, video has a 'thing' in itself. Many video artists use the 'magic of cinema', the creation of tricks and impressions that are created within the media itself. Ritual performance becomes alchemised in digital form. Video is like more like a trance, less like the dream of reel-film. Video is multidimension, digital, micro pixels, film is a beam on a surface. Video seems not sublimated but magnified, incorporating sound, light, layers, body, abstraction, projection, and dialogue. Video is fast; it's not real light even. It can belong in a gallery, in situ - projected onto the real world, a cinema, a Smartphone, a computer screen. Video art has a rich, recent history and In my opinion, its language webs with contemporary culture better than any other art medium.



Image: Still from Yayoi Kusamas' Self Obliteration

RYAN TRECARTIN : THE HYSTERIC HERMAPHRODITE AND THE TRANSUMER.

To watch the videos of Ryan Trecartin—"the most consequential artist to have emerged since the 1980s," per the *New Yorker*—is to be led out of a cave of ignorance by a queer, 30-year-old Socrates.

<http://nplusonemag.com/on-ryan-trecartin>

As the new cultural witchdoctor ie. The new major celebrity artist of the 21C, someone who will bring to light societies unspeakable realities, Ryan Trecartin encourages the audience to curate and create their own realities and interpretations of what's happening in his work.





*...Embedded in this approach is a fundamental shift in thinking.. influenced by the participatory and open state culture now takes, which at best can feel incredibly empowering.. and at worst can feel overwhelming and shallow...Trecartin visualises this overload, challenging viewers to “pick up and ride” the film at various stages and then jump off.*

Medium Living, Lauren Cornell – Ryan Trecartin Any Ever.

So now, who's riding who?

Ryan Trecartin makes movies that are all available online, on Youtube, Ubuweb. His works are scripted, though improvisation is encouraged around the structure. His main collaborator is Lizzie Fitch, who appears in most of his films under different guises, even his earliest most naïve pieces. Language structure is critical, he creates a new language. He works with a tight cast whose characters consistently re-emerge throughout his works. There is a constant conceptual continuity, though his works are non linear. His bi polar hyper real hypercolor creatures speak NY hipster, deepsouth queerboy, richkid on Ritalin, as if via texttalk, as if their brains are wired to blog, not talk.

Below are some examples of Trecartinisms.

‘Globalese’, ‘Transumer’ , ‘K-Coreas’ (to describe a group of corporate self rebranders.) ‘Tweens’, ‘You are getting predictive’, ‘It’s your life but better, with edits! With edits!’, ‘I’m gonna rebrand him’, ‘I’ve already died 7 times already’, ‘why do you want to divorce your birth parents?’ ‘CtlAltV my DNA’.



He also uses imagery of multidimensional astral plane hopping a lot. Things are speeding up now. We're here today. We're entering the Realm of I-Be-Area.

Is Ryan Trecartin into Voodoo? He did live in New Orleans! He's also a refugee, like Deren, after Hurricane Katrina. Born in Texas the same year as me, 1981. I'll bet he was brought up watching too much T.V, like we all were.

His work certainly seems to be the outpourings of a vastly over stimulated soul. He is of the medium, the video/ the web; he has either conquered it, or at least surrendered entirely to its appetite.

*I love the idea of technology and culture moving faster than the understanding of these mediums by people. It's like the jumper being jumped before the onset of the 'jump'- and the whole world is doing that. -*

`Ryan Trecartin - When the Rainbow is an Option, Linda Norden. Ryan Trecartin Any Ever.

Ryan Trecartin is designing his own i phone app.

(<http://www.fastcodesign.com/1664522/meet-ryan-trecartin-arts-first-genius-of-the-youtube-age#1>)

He's the first 21C Artist. + He is mapping a new digital mode of thought expression and language. He's receiving the highest accolades from the harshest art world critics. He's redefining Warhol's factory process.

*I also find that people often read, reductively; the people I work with as a posse or collective, or that we have a Factory style relationship, which is very different from the way we actually collaborate.*

*-ryan trecartin*

His work is in keeping with this new 'create your own religion, be your own god' idea. Belief systems, gender and identity were once considered only authentic in their fixed state, now everything on the horizon is shifting. Its not a vertical/horizontal cross but an infinity grid of string theory. Maybe it's not just the ritual that we're improvising, but our own selves.

*I see it less as a lack of distinction in binary terms and more as an exploration of territories within infinite gender creation, individualisation and specificity. I imagine this as a type of multiplex space. I'm often interested in realities where gender takes a back seat to personality articulation. As people explore and expand into spaces that are not dependant on the body, but rather the mind,*

*the construction and use of one's personality can become the most defining aspect to identify. And the thing I love about personality is that it can be added to, changed or re-worked at will, while not being classified or grouped very easily.*

*Ryan Trecartin*

<http://moreintelligentlife.co.uk/blog/whitney-ford/qa-ryan-trecartin>

Like a Barbie doll with no genitalia.

Tweens are the new drag queens: though highly sexualized, they lack the equipment and perhaps even the inclination to make good on their erotic gestures.

<http://nplusonemag.com/on-ryan-trecartin>

There's no fucking in Ryan's films, but they're sinister, nightmarish. You are pelted with layers upon layers of plastic superficiality. The dimensional thought possibilities of social networking, self branding, child actors, adoption, 'clairvoying', IKEA. For all the psychedelic psychosis, the work is fragile, its obsessive; it's a highly functioning mind that's completely dysfunctional. It's the need to create one's own separate world, with characters and scripts and a new set of social rules. The characters are like broken CGI doll robots, that repeat repeat repeat new cyber gobbledygook, like somebody put all the ingredients of the modern west; all the speed, the consumption, the compulsions, plastic, wigs, vanity, the disjointed new ways of interrelationships, the corporate logos, someone took all this noise and haste and put it into a Formica flat pack snow globe and shook it really hard. It's complete immersion in total dysfunction; it's Babel.

Pharmakon Theory - Prof. Trish Lyons (touch me the TV made me sick) of the Royal College introduced me to an interesting theory, Pharmakon - in that to cure a poison you take a homeopathic dose of said poison. You embody it. Using digital and Internet as platforms for the depths of expression, the extremes of an artist's experience is like using the poison to cure the poison.

BROKEN REALITIES, THE BODY BETWEEN WORLDS

The body returning home - creating realms beyond dis-ease.

It's cliché for a reason, the tortured artist. Some days you sit at the bloody salty black roots of experience, you traverse the depths, you are lost and broken, nothing works, and nothing fits. Creative types are statistically more prone to mental illness. And there's a lovely word that fits with this state, *sehnsucht* - it means an indescribable feeling of loss and an unquenchable need for some ambiguous otherworldly home. Beyond their narcissism and ego there is



a terrible void, or a gap, where the artist never feels at home in the world, it's all too loud, too violent, too fucked up inside and out. Ana Mendieta, Kitty Huffman, Francesca Woodman and even Maya Deren and Ryan Trecartin are all artists that work with body and make imagery of the body disappearing, becoming other, finding a place beyond or within or returning to nature (or anti-nature in Trecartins case). Mendieta, Huffman and Woodman primarily explore cultural roots (or loss of) but also in a more profound sense work around themes of essentially becoming part of the natural environment, the naked body in nature, between states of being, that halfway point through the wall or door, the sehnsucht desire to go home wherever home may be. It's sad to think of Mendieta and Woodman and Deren at the last moments their final transitionary descent, falling back into the void, back into mother death, it's so heartbreakingly sad.