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## It's not punishment, it's just whatever by Ajay RS Hothi



Ryan Trecartin likes the word 'movie', over film or video, because, etymologically, it is a derivation from the word 'move'. We can be clear that he is not one for inactivity. He has exhibited in almost fifty group shows, performances and screenings since 2005 (and in this I include [The Generational: Younger than Jesus](#) at The New Museum in 2009, shows at the Guggenheim Bilbao, ZKM Karlsruhe, The Saatchi Gallery and at the Whitney, Liverpool and Gwangju Biennials). His sixth solo show, Any Ever, opened at The Power Plant, Toronto, earlier this year before moving to [MOCA Los Angeles](#) and which in 2011 will tour to MOCA Miami, Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and MoMA PS1.

It would be task far beyond the word limit imposed here to analyse every element in Trecartin's movies; they have been described as 'frenetic', though this implies a frenzied loss of control and is I feel an inadequate descriptive term. His works are

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the visual representation of information overload, indicating two things: one, that the audience can only receive at least parts of his movies by some form of audiovisual osmosis and two, that Trecartin is very aware of the cultural symptoms of the twenty-first century. At an artist's talk prior to his solo show at The Power Plant, Trecartin said that "in two years time it (*the dialogue in his movies*) will seem slow". Spoken of in these terms, the world that Trecartin presents us with can be seen as little more than a dystopian reflection of our own; a generation of post-adolescents whose dreams of The Hills rapidly turn into a self-inflicted, real-world descent through Dante's nine circles of Hell, taking in Lust, Gluttony, Violence, Fraud and Treachery. The tragedy, at least in our world, is that though it is happening we do not know it.

His characters though are far more astute than to fall for that. They gleefully parade invented colloquialisms and turns of phrase in the first, second and third person and in the past, present and future tenses and yet have a clarity of speech which is direct, incisive and very funny. Bordering on the bawdy, it is never explicit. His characters revel in their world (and it is their world. Despite the similarities they really do not share it with us), are the kings and queens (mainly queens) of their world, this world of their own creation! This world, our own reflected in a funhouse mirror.

The curse of post-modernism is in the irony of being knowingly knowing; there is an inherent, but implicit, ironic satire when engaging with today's popular culture. Still we jump in, eagerly baptising ourselves immediately thereafter with a satisfied self-referentiality. Come off it. Post-modernism is dead, and irony is, like, totally naff.

Why exactly Trecartin excels in what he does is a broad question. His works are absolutely contemporary - so much of the now that they are almost of tomorrow. Surpassing completely the notion of post-modernism, a commitment to the concept of the author (in post-modernism, modernism after that and romanticism before that), Trecartin with long-term collaborator Lizzie Fitch are anonymous and non-hierarchic as actors and creators within and of their own world. The aim of the twenty-first century seems to be to make the (developed, at least) world flat. By having enabled new technologies to proliferate a homogenous media internationally, the culture that we inhabit has become the great leveller. Trecartin

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is making the distinction that he is specifically not sampling the many facets of our pop culture and reinterpreting it, building a manifest (knowing, ironic post-modern) work or series of works, nor what philosopher Alan Kirby calls 'pseudo-modernism', wherein the instantaneously generated (and, likewise, discarded), content becomes an important aspect of supposed 'factual' material.

Instead Trecartin gives us the theatre of the absurd. Irrational, floating in a recognisable but imcomprehensible universe. His characters seem to speak only in clichéd terms but their language is representative of a linguistic evolution of our own world, only at a more advanced level. It is a purposeful inversion of the decidedly modernist motif of elliptical language and while it may appear that they are imparting nothing of value, it is only because Trecartin is moving at a speed slightly closer to maximum velocity than the majority of his audiences ("I'm going to educate her Jesus fish and walk it the fuck out"). Neither are his characters simply flat stereotypes of our reality television shows, they are multi-layered composites of characters and characteristics that have become embedded within our multinational cultural consciousness.

Before we are made to ingest and decipher the cultural signifiers in Trecartin's work, he himself has been there. He has eaten at the same table, finished and digested what has been presented to him. He compresses this, extracting the vital, fundamental, alimentary ingredients before presenting us with a diamond. Or the excrement, I'm not quite sure. Perhaps I'm just a product of this particular world but there is not an artist's work right now that I would rather see.

**About the Author:** Ajay RS Hothi is a documentary filmmaker. He is a research student at the Royal College of Art, focussing on art writing and its relationship to gallery-based exhibition, and is currently manager of [tank.tv](http://tank.tv)