

CULTURE | By Felix Petty | 23 March 2016, 11:40am

performing ourselves: revisiting dorm daze with ed fornieles

Witchcraft, teen suicide, repressed homosexuality, love triangles, psychedelic drug parties in the woods... it can only be dorm daze.



In 2011, Ed Fornieles started Dorm Daze, a "Facebook Sitcom" in which the characters were crafted from real life Facebook profiles, played by actors who were left for three months to act out the lives of a group of college freshman at Berkeley, in California.

He created a Facebook group to house the free-ranging piece of performance art where the participants were free to inhabit their roles and live out their lives online. "I looked for groups of existing students at Berkeley with open profiles and then scraped all the information I could," Ed explains. "Images, likes, comments... these became the starting point for the person inhabiting the profile for the duration of the performance." All those American teen stereotypes are there; the jocks, weirdos, witches, frat boys, sorority girls. It's a piece about the way we perform our lives online, but equally, how much of what we perform online slips easily into stereotypes, and how online life has become the natural home for the drama of everyday.

"Whatever is popular is powerful," Ed Fornieles states. Dorm Daze was one of the first of a generation of works to use and utilise the power of social media in the creation of art. "Technology has changed the rules and art can leverage this shift to perform in new and different ways." To this end it's hard to overstate the importance of Dorm Daze in the development of post-internet art, one of the first artworks to push the new forms suddenly made available by the network into new

territories, holding a funhouse mirror up to life, reflecting life back in awkward and amusing and frightening shapes. It was not only a work about the network, but made by it; using the infrastructure of social media to comment on that very infrastructure; taking the networked, unreal, hyperreal, life and pushing it towards the limits of plausibility. Taking the elements of the traditional American college comedy (equal parts Animal House buffoonery to Rules Of Attraction bleak nihilism) and repositioning them for a digital age in a new home for American college drama to play out; amongst the private messages, public posts and image galleries of Facebook.

Since the performance concluded, Dorm Daze has lived many alternate lives; with Ed using the content the performance created in performances, other artworks and a novel; and now, a new sculptural piece, at the Zabłudowicz's Emotional Supply Chains, opening this week. It houses the archive of Dorm Daze, but also draws in new material, constantly updating with the lives of other college students in America. "Artists build machines," Ed says, "These machines end up coming down to a set of limitations and filters which reality can be passed through. The thing with the machine is if you get it right, anything in theory could be passed through it."

We caught up with the Los Angeles-based artist to revisit his work's many afterlives, five years since it was created.

Can you remember what your initial idea for Dorm Daze was?

I decided to look at life, not mine specifically or even the ones around me, but the most prevalent, the most culturally ubiquitous, because these strands are asserting the most pressure on everything; from how you self identify to how you define what is of value and generally make sense of the world.

I had a rough plan to extrapolate from different life moments, and the college experience seemed like a pivotal moment to play with as it's a transitional moment, where the participant is constantly asking themselves 'Who am I?' It's a question acted out through all these rituals and friendships, through body language, food and online messages.

Did anything totally unexpected happen during the performance?

The main focus was to create a platform that would self generate content. It was designed so that at the beginning, myself, or anyone else for that matter, would have no idea what it would look like at the end. I'm interested in these spiralling forms, which are both heavily crafted and chaotic at the same time. I'm suspicious of an author who leaves little space between plan and execution. I much prefer to build a structure that has a level of autonomy, the group will often produce something far more complex and compelling than the individual could ever.



Can you say a few things about the sculpture that will house Dorm Daze at The Zabłudowicz Collection?

This question makes me think of that scene in The Wolf Of Wall Street where Matthew McConaughey's character begins chanting to Leonardo DiCaprio over cocktails, as he describes what Wall Street is like. The totem is a summation of the performance, it's made of the remnants of both Animal House and Dorm Daze, although it contains much of Dorm Daze. It aggregates live off current college students on Facebook, and perhaps functions as portal to a college dimension, where everyone is forever 18 to 22, there is always a party and someone did something to someone and everyone is talking about it.

Do you think the meaning of the work has changed over time? What is left once the novelty of the medium is gone?

To some degrees this work, like all work, will age. Its form, language and aesthetic will date, but I see it shifting its meaning in tandem with its cultural form -- which is so strong -- that the process of an actual meaning shift is incredibly slow and elongated. There is also this element of the totem that feeds off images that current students are posting live, which both draws out formal shifts in what it is to be a student, and keeps it forever contemporary.

Would you describe it as a piece of performance art?

The online space has allowed performance art to change its dimensions; things can be played by larger amounts of people for longer periods of time. Also the nature of that time is different, it's layered on top of, or next to an everyday sense of time, it's meaning is entwined in a way that would have been more complicated to do before.

Dorm Daze also grew into a number of other projects, forming in its own way, a kind of network of artworks, and a dominant style in a



number of your works. There's a similarity between say Dorm Daze and New York New York Happy Happy, in a way there isn't between say Dorm Daze, and the current Instagram project.

Dorm Daze and Animal House helped me refine a mechanism, and perhaps an obsession. Other subsequent performances have expanded onto this territory, pushing or adding to different aspects of it. Each performance is concerned with identity and group formation, and what the pressures are that are being asserted in that process. All my work is perhaps an attempt to reveal to the participant or viewer that this going on in themselves in some way, creating a pocket of space to detach and observe themselves. I think this temporary point of detachment is super interesting and has contained within it a lot of potential, for both the individual taking control of the process, and perhaps modelling new ideas of the future.

Do you think the way we perform ourselves digitally has changed in the years that have passed since Dorm Daze?

We create and shape technology, but it also works the other way around, technology and our environment at large is shaping us. New technology is another way of saying new behaviours, so as our landscape shifts so does the performance. Dorm Daze was made in a time when the paradigm of social media had already taken route,

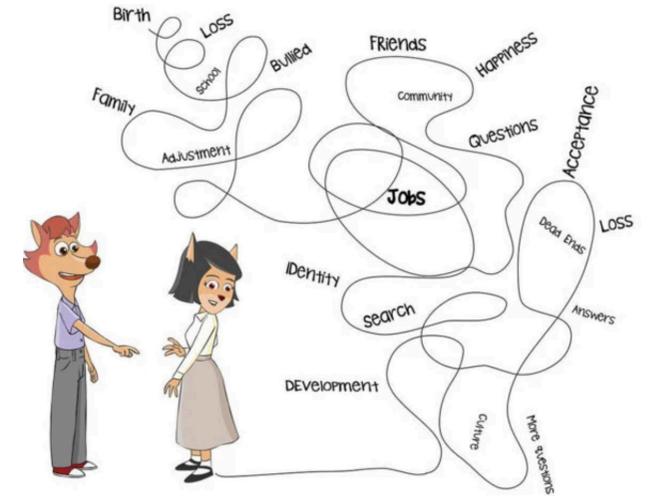
so the main thing to shift since then is frequency, which is why it's still feels very familiar.

Would you say Dorm Daze is interested in the way we perform ourselves digitally, or using the digital as a platform for performance art?

I like the phrase performing ourselves, it draws out this idea of self as somehow contained in actions, and not this internal monologue we all seem carry around in our heads. Ideology performs itself in this way, there is often a disconnect between internal intention and performed action, a conscious denial of how the body is performing itself.

The best example of this is people like you, Felix, and you, reading this interview, and myself, the hipster, the hipster as defined not necessarily by a well kept beard or taste in fine cider, but as an individual who denies consciously an identity 'I'm not a hipster' that they are performing all the time; somehow able to reconcile themselves as both a unique individual and as just another member of the group. This reconciliation is a key shift in how we perform ourselves perhaps...

One thing I'm interested in here is the relationship between the physical and digital, the network and the art object, in these and



other works around this time in your practice. I'm just wondering what your feelings about those relationships are now, how you feel that's changed within your practice?

I see them all existing in one network, all nodes that point to themselves in some way. That you make work to construct a world or dimension, and each aspect of it contribute to a larger picture, adding weight and texture and making it more habitable for the person who encounters it.

Dorm Daze also grew into a novel, which you made with Dean Kissick, what is your relationship as "the artist" to this work?

Dean is a close friend and has been a participant in most of my performances, helping to shape work. Collaborating with him on the book was easy as we were both authors of Dorm Daze in some way... even though I often construct the platform and direct to some degree, its always my desire to let go and just perform on the same level as everyone else. The performance was collaborative, an improvised film where all the actors are writers, cameramen, and directors. What is produced is a bank of content that can then be fed into any form, from sculpture to books to film to whatever, which is where I normally take control I suppose.

Do you have any favourite moments from the performance?

I have so many memories, I can look at photos or conversations and people, events, moments will flood back. It was an intense experience, where strange bonds were formed, the relationships on Dorm Daze were at times as sincere and as weighty as any relationships in everyday life. The obstacles, flirtations, grudges felt real, it was a heightened and accelerated reality that ran parallel to things.