

Significant Others

Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's new video addresses a very old problem **BY CHRIS CHANG**

vision

Witness a day in the life of an artist couple: they rise and prepare themselves and their two young children for the quotidian routine. Highlights include getting dressed, a mid-morning coffeehouse hook-up (the topic of conversation being mild displeasure with a therapist), playground playtime with the offspring, dinner for two at a quiet restaurant ("do we really have to go to your parents?"), and then back home to bed. To add a little personal color the artists are seen at work: one sequence involves a friend visiting their studio for a friendly critique (two new collaborative digital paintings are in the spotlight); another follows routine day-job activity at a college (the artists make the rounds of student workspaces offering advice and encouragement). The academic segment might be mistaken for some kind of *Project Artschool*—although it completely lacks the requisite emotional sadism that reality television demands. In fact, all the events that make up this particular day are borderline banal. This is the sort of uneventful 24 hours Jack Bauer would kill for.

What makes Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's 15-minute video *I'll Replace You* unique, and a bit unsettling, is the fact that the main cast of two has been expanded to 50. And they are all stars—not extras. (The work debuted last December at Postmasters Gallery.

Go to postmastersart.com for more info.) After an open call, professional actors were hired to play either Jennifer or Kevin. Specifically, they were cast in one of the roles that make up the McCoy's individual, yet socially dependent, totality (spouse, parent, friend, artist, teacher, etc.). Each "scene" was shot with each designated surrogate,

and then, in the editing process, the mini-multitude began to cohere into a (almost) singular self. While we glimpse repetitive actions—in which different people, for example, are seen opening the same door—the overall aim is a paradoxical form of continuity (bringing to mind the multiple actors playing singular characters in Todd Solondz's *Palindromes*

and Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There*.) What better way to replicate the splintered and prismatic subjectivity of waking life than to hire a bunch of strangers to portray it?

The impetus behind the McCoy's video seems conceptually benign, but there's a latent tautological undercurrent: people without significant others fantasize about having them; people with significant others fantasize about other significant others; artists and writers (not to mention psychiatrists and lawyers) have much expounded on this phenomenon. In the McCoy's treatment—call it their alternate reality—the problem of "novelty" and "thrill" has been mitigated through a seemingly endless array of continuous otherness.

But the statement "I will replace you" can hardly be read as neutral. Or can it? "In many of our projects," says Jennifer, "we choose titles that are multivalent. In this case it is an invitation, as much as a threat . . . It's threatening in that someone, like a babysitter or a substitute teacher, will take on your responsibilities. They might do a better job, might permanently replace you, and might show you up . . . There is a feeling that we are all the same, not just replaceable but interchangeable. Again in the [video's] parent parts and the teacher parts, there's the pressure of the next generation waiting to step into our roles." That's a perfectly copasetic response when dealing with someone whose role is defined by a contract of specific services. But it raises the obvious question: what happens in the event that a real McCoy, so to speak, informs the other, "I'll replace you." "We'll see about that," says Kevin. "I wouldn't notice for a couple of weeks," replies Jennifer. □

