

LIZZIE FITCH/ RYAN TRECARTIN

PRIORITY INNFIELD

2013

Priority Innfield was originally conceived for *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico* at the 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice, curated by Massimiliano Gioni and organized by the Venice Biennale.

The movie descriptions are adapted from Christopher Glazek's essay "The Past Is Another Los Angeles," originally published in the exhibition catalogue *Priority Innfield* (Zabludowicz Collection, 2014).

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10.02 — 12.21.2014
Zabludowicz Collection, London

02.05 — 04.24.2016
La Casa Encendida, Madrid

22.06 — 05.09.2016
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

[E] CENTER JENNY

CENTER JENNY is a crash after a drugged-out marathon and an attempt to pick up the pieces of a night (a life? a world?) that has gone terribly wrong. As the film begins, we stumble down a hallway getting pelted with fragments we cannot decipher. More moments please, bitches! a pair of girls cries out. We have a sickening feeling that much has already happened. Did our car get smashed? Did we fuck our best friend's father? Did we waive all of our rights on acid? Despite the film's title, our perspective is decidedly de-centred: no one's looking at the camera, and even the audio sounds like playback. We're stuck viewing the "making of" footage—the behind-the-scenes. *He's just playing a joke on you*, a character says, *no one else can see what you see*. We feel abused, but also that we've transgressed. I'm going to get in so much trouble, a girl in a pink sweatshirt worries. We're worried, too.

Slowly we get resocialized and reacquaint ourselves with the history of the world. We're at a university. We're rushing a sorority. We're getting quizzed about the human era—a time after dinosaurs became chickens but before humans became animations, and before animations became us. We're looking for sources and witnesses—who is Sara Source? Where did we come from? What is our name? We transfer our anxiety onto an ingenue redhead (played by Rachel Lord) who bears the brunt of a sadistically-framed—though actually quite tame—initiation ritual. "It's a big deal, we are going to be accessing the foundation of consciousness as a university," a teacher tells us. We're tripping as a group, but without the euphoria.

We learn there have been wars and revolutions. Some Jennys are bigger than others. "I'm privileged as fuck, get used to it," declares one. "My parents owned and funded the war," brags another. A third Jenny admits to having styled the war. "Did you see those weaponized earmuffs?" she asks. "Those weapons, those earmuffs? I saw them! I saw them!" Over time, the war becomes a nursery rhyme.

Behind every great fortune is a great crime. In *CENTER JENNY*, a retreat from utopia that presents a grim future grimly focused on the past, we are all guilty; we worry, though, that we'll never really know what happened or who was responsible. The possibility of a whodunit is excluded by our mishandling of cause and effect.

While *CENTER JENNY* is preoccupied with origins ("Sara Source"), it's also worried about end points. Some of us may have fought in the audience revolution and some of us may have weaponized earmuffs, but we all end up in Los Angeles, or, more specifically, we all end up on a fake TV set in a warehouse in Burbank, an eerie suburb that stands in approximate relation to LA as LA does to the world. There are no actual performers here, just stylists and stunt-chickens. Some provide mumbling vocals. Some perform feats of Parkour. Some draw all over us while we're still awake. We'll get through it, though. No nightmare can survive the sunrise.

Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin were both born in 1981, in Indiana and Texas, respectively. They graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design and currently live and work in Los Angeles. Since their much-noted participation in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, the two artists have produced an impressive number of projects, each more ambitious than the next. They have taken part in such major group shows as *Younger than Jesus* at the New Museum, New York (2009), and *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico* at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013). Their work has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2010), MoMA PS1, New York (2011), the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2011-2012) and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2014-2015).

Since meeting in 2000, Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin have established an expansive collaborative practice that includes video, sculpture, sound and installation. Their work considers the changing nature of interpersonal exchanges and relationships through an exploration of the way technology and the Internet have reordered human subjectivity—but before the effects of this ontological change have been fully assessed. As Trecartin says: "I love the idea of technology and culture moving faster than the understanding of those mediums by people."

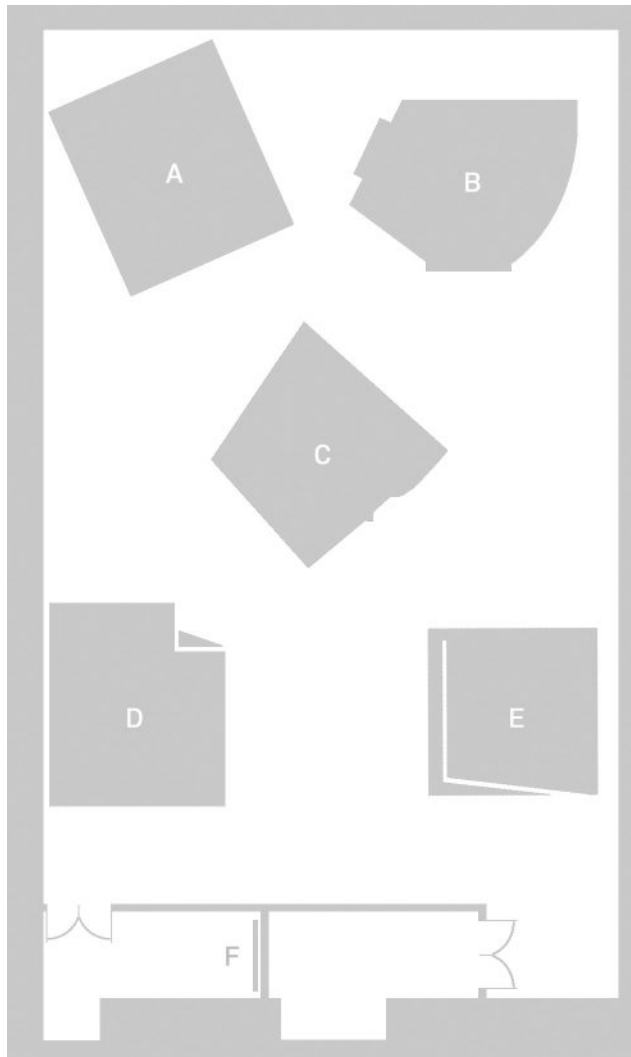
Priority Innfield is a "sculptural theatre" containing four movies and an ambient sound track presented in five pavilions. The movies, *Junior War*, *Comma Boat*, *CENTER JENNY* and *Item Falls* (all from 2013), unfold at a furious pace. Shot in a direct, quasi-amateur style, the movies are set in a post-human future where identity construction, deconstruction and reconstruction take on a new importance in establishing individuals in the social order. This new world is characterized by a form of performativity where attitudes are linked to an awareness of being seen or watched. Actors carry cameras and dialogue is spoken in an almost "meta" mode of delivery, creating a particularly self-conscious brand of theatricality.

Each movie is an episode in a pseudo-science-fiction narrative that invents the history of a future civilization based on a disjointed rewriting of the theories of evolution. *Junior War* acts as prologue: it comprises footage filmed by Trecartin in the late 1990s—a time that predates the culture of instantaneous sharing of the events that make up our lives—when the artist was still in high school in Ohio. It documents the excesses of adolescent rituals. The movie thus sets the tone and positions Trecartin as both observer and participant. This dual role is foregrounded in *Comma Boat*, which takes place on a movie set with Trecartin playing the part of a dictatorial, neurotic filmmaker, furiously directing his apathetic actors. *CENTER JENNY* and *Item Falls* are similarly set in this post-human future where, in a dystopian university whose operational logic the artists liken to that of a video game, students (all called Jenny) are trying to learn about the "human past" in an attempt to navigate the stratified social system.

Developing specific settings for showing the movies is a recurring strategy in the artists' work. The pavilions in *Priority Innfield* were fabricated while the movies were being shot, and are informed by their themes and visual elements. Both the movie sets and the pavilions were inspired by various kinds of public, domestic and institutional spaces, like high school stadiums, public parks, bathrooms and patios. The movie sets are somewhat abstract and come off as deterministic, but in a very counter-intuitive way: they are the setting for an exuberant, sometimes deeply agitated form of release as much as they establish controlling boundaries for the action. In the gallery space, the pavilions serve as viewing areas and/or observational platforms, and broadcast the ambient sound track. Also exhibited in a neighbouring projection area is a compilation of the original movie credit sequences which detail the numerous character names and affinities that populate the *Priority Innfield* narrative.

By presenting the movies as installations, Fitch and Trecartin create an immersive yet open experience in a unified, controlled space, sealed off from the rest of the world—all the better to underscore the phenomenological and semantic shifts that lie at the heart of their work.

Mark Lanctôt, Curator
Musée d'art contemporain
de Montréal



- [A] *Priority Innfield (Way)*, 2013
Exhibiting **Comma Boat**
(HD video, 31 min 23 s)
- [B] *Priority Innfield (Pole)*, 2013
Exhibiting **Item Falls**
(HD video, 21 min 5 s)
- [C] *Priority Innfield (Tilt)*, 2013
Exhibiting **Wake**
(Ambient soundtrack, 41 min 3 s)
- [D] *Priority Innfield (Villa)*, 2013
Exhibiting **Junior War**
(HD video, 24 min 15 s)
- [E] *Priority Innfield (Fence)*, 2013
Exhibiting **CENTER JENNY**
(HD video, 50 min 6 s)
- [F] *Priority Innfield (Credits)*, 2014
(HD video, 9 min 27 s)

[A] COMMA BOAT

In *Comma Boat*, we're stuck in a mock-authoritarian fantasy—a power trip. The film centres around a director-character played by Trecartin who oscillates between feelings of omnipotence and self-doubt. As if a post-human, post-gendered reincarnation of the Fellini character in *8 1/2*, the director gloats and frets about professional and ethical transgressions. “I know I lied to get ahead,” he admits at one point. “I’ve made up so many different alphabets just to get ahead in my field.” The director is fancier now, but the fear nags that he might be “repeating” himself “like a dumb soldier ova and ova and ova and ova.” The meta-connection to the artist’s own career, while obvious, is also a decoy. All art, at some level, is about the artist. Here, reflexivity is the surface level, providing a decodable veneer that encases something more unsettling and complex.

If *CENTER JENNY* sounds an alarm about the artist’s complicity and helplessness within a system of indecipherable tribal rituals, and, more broadly, about any individual’s powerlessness with respect to historical change, *Comma Boat* raises the possibility that these worries are essentially bullshit—convenient red herrings that disguise a deeper, more terrible truth: that in fact we have been in control all along, that we’ve stage-managed every aspect of this dream, and that our actions have not only damaged our own lives, but potentially the lives of others as well.

Arbitrary power is a reality in *Comma Boat*, but it’s also a joke. “I’m going to name a daycare after her,” the director proclaims as punishment for an underling who uses words he doesn’t understand, “but it’s going to be very gas-chamber oriented. Like, you’ll go in, but you won’t come out.” These are idle threats—the director is needling, but the subordinates are hardly cowering. “I’m going to put you at the end of a pier,” he says soon after, “and you’re going to stay there forever. I’m not going to do anything, you’re just going to stay there.” The pier scheme could be a piece of Warholian performance art, but no one seems to take the director too seriously.

As with the rest of *Priority Innfield*, literal performance is delayed or refracted into pre- and post-production. A group of singers seems to be continually testing levels—reliably affirming they sound “real good”—without ever beginning the music video they’re filming. The director rants about a rental boat—“One of the most significant things about being on this particular boat is that it’s summer time on cement”—but we never set sail.

Along with his fear of not being filmed, procreation is special concern for the director. “There used to be a moment in time where people would peck on the lips and people would give them awards because of this thing ... cinematic things.” The director forces a sea punk girl to make out with a boy—and then castigates them for being disgusting and “forgetting to pull out.” “Ew, you’re gonna start a family!” he chides.

The film suggests that the director can no longer be educated. He has entered a fantasy world and won’t come out. The predicament is summed up by a voice-over by the singer Lauren Devine: “What you gonna say now, you’re too late now, I’m in LA now.”

[B] ITEM FALLS

In *Item Falls*, we are peaking. We start out at a casting call, but before long we’re firmly in the grip of hallucination, shedding our anxieties and evidently regressing to the animation era, a time when stunt chickens were mere chicklets. Friendly archetypes float in and out of what seems like our bedroom. The red-headed Jenny has returned, but this time she’s squeaky and trusting. Unlike in *CENTER JENNY*, here our perspective is literally centred. The camera seems to be the in middle of the room, which is good, because we’re too blissed out to move. Luckily, our hallucinations look directly at us.

The driving force of our trip is a producer (played by Allison Powell) who seems to be coordinating auditions, which enable going from first-level basic to second-level stupid to level-centre. An Adele-like figure pops in from time to time—or is she the good witch of the north? As the film progresses, the producer shows off a boy band she has purchased, and mostly they seem really gay.

Since we’re having a peak experience, the big questions show up. Do we have free will? Is what we’re seeing real? What does it mean to be normal? “This is not a real chair,” we’re admonished at one point. “We animated it. It’s not really here.” Nothing quite makes sense, but it doesn’t matter. “One of the most significant things about my stunt chickens is that I deserve a solo,” says Jenny, who continues to muse about clubs and applications, but without the fear and regret that fuels *CENTER JENNY*.

Jenny makes various attempts at logical argumentation but gets distracted by her own words. “Some of my friends believe that I should be an eagle,” she asserts. “I believe that I’m grounded and that I should stay on the ground with the chicken, because chickens used to be dinosaurs. And it’s a fact. One of the most elegant things about fact is that I believe in them.” Her logical leaps take on a sharper edge when discussing her family. “My parents ran one of the last print magazines.... I was very generous to acknowledge the things that they did. It was a very common decision to make now. I fired them.” As with the rest of *Priority Innfield*, worries about the past and previous generations get tangled up in violent delusions. Later, a boy-band member is disturbed to notice his own armpit hair. “Oh no! Look at my armpit hair. Hence my airs, hence my synonym, hence my vibe, hence my arm!” The logical chain becomes a sort of failed genealogy. To the extent that the boy-band functions as a discrete gender, the speaker appears to be worried about becoming a man.

[D] JUNIOR WAR

In *Junior War*, a throng of high schoolers congregates at night for a party in the woods sometime in the year 2000. A band plays, the kids get drunk, the boys and girls tepidly flirt, and groups deploy into cars for the purpose of destroying mailboxes, tee-peeing houses, breaking lawn ornaments and sparring with the police. The film is composed entirely of footage Trecartin took during his senior year of high school in exurban Ohio; as such, it baits the viewer with genealogical significance. The film is incontrovertibly “source material”—dangling the possibility that we’ve finally unearthed “Sara Source”—but it’s also rigorously repurposed, just as any social media #tbt marks the present more reliably than it renders the past.

In the context of the tetralogy, *Junior War* looks like a time capsule from “the human era,” otherwise known as high school, where themes and phrases from the other three films—searching for keys, smashing, farting—uncannily recur. All of Trecartin’s trademarks are here—frenetic pacing, musical punctuation, carnivalesque destruction, adolescent dialect—but this time the Ryanverse is forged out of actual co-eds. “We found a golf ball, a tennis ball and a baseball,” a boy proudly declares, underlining the male brain’s infinite capacity for pointless taxonomy. Other teens display aptitude for legalism, complaining about a policeman who was “wrongfully accusing” and “didn’t have probable cause to fucking pull us over.” Another boy at odds with law enforcement combatively declares, “I’ve been riding these woods since I was three years old. I know all these woods! If anything I’m going that way,” yielding a stream of teen poetry whose peculiarity might go unnoticed but for its resonance with the rest of *Priority Innfield*’s unruly syntax.

Are these the formative experiences that gave rise, a decade later, to the artist Ryan Trecartin? To the extent that *Priority Innfield* is an exercise in retroreflection—in revisiting the past and also reshaping it—*Junior War* looks more like the diary of a time-traveler who has re-entered a historical moment and turbulently restructured it.

All remembering is editing—an attempt to create what scholars call a “usable past.” In *Junior War*, the editing is intentional and aggressive—but is the past it creates usable? Most of the footage is recorded in night vision, a style that recalls both *The Blair Witch Project*, which came out in 1999, a year before the footage was taken, and *Zero Dark Thirty*, which came out in 2012, a year before the footage was released. The youth in *Junior War* are expressly militarized, but they’re also innocents who venture into the woods in search of the supernatural.

The arrow of time—whichever direction it points—is fraught with guilt. To age is to decline: this we’re told. To trace is to blame: this we fear. To the extent that *Priority Innfield* confounds our understanding of sequencing, iteration, and cause and effect, it also lets us off the hook for crimes of chronology. By the end we may feel confused, exhausted and epistemologically spent, but we also feel exonerated. “Nothing is documented.” We all believe that, don’t we?

