

Helen Reed and Heidi Nagtegaal agree that it's intense.

TWIN TWIN PEAKS

Heidi I first met Helen at VIVO, during Signal and Noise 2009, when I visited the Mystic Pizza Occult Snack Den, a collaboration between Helen, Hannah Jickling and Jen Kovach. I couldn't keep myself away from the vegan pizza. It was the best pizza I have ever tasted. It was so good that I ate the crust before Helen could tell me to stop. Unbeknownst to me, as well as making a mean slice of pizza, they also offered crust readings. I ordered another slice.

I read about Helen's latest project, *Twin Twin Peaks*, around the time that it premiered at the Twin Peaks Festival in North Bend, WA, in July, 2009. When I contacted her in August, Helen was in the Yukon. She managed to secure an internet connection for this interview.

Heidi Are you there on *Twin Twin Peaks* business, or is this pure pleasure?

Helen No, not *Twin Twin Peaks* business. I am here to hang out with my partner and frequent collaborator, Hannah [Jickling], and her family. We are working on a project for the Yukon Arts Festival that involves incubating sour-dough culture in our armpits while canoeing the Yukon river from Minto to Dawson City for six days.

Heidi That's intense! *Twin Twin Peaks* just screened at the Seattle Art Gallery. How was that for you?

Helen It was great! It screened as part of the Twin Peaks Fan Festival in North Bend, Washington, which is one of the original shooting locations of *Twin Peaks*. There were three original cast members in the project, plus about 100 fans from the festival, and the *Twin Twin Peaks* cast and crew. The project has a relationship to the festival in that one of the script-writers, Amanda Hicks, organizes the Fan Fest.

Twin Twin Peaks is [the first episode of] a fan-written third season of *Twin Peaks*, so it continues many of the familiar *Twin Peaks* plot lines. The script was written by 12 *Twin Peaks* fans. Each fan would



write for one or two characters in the series, collaborating with the others on dialogue and action.

I found the script online while researching for another project. I contacted Amanda to see if I could produce the script as a video piece and she was really excited about it. From there, I cast 16 fans in the character roles. Then I shot the scenes in the original locations of *Twin Peaks*.

Heidi What was the most exciting part of the project for you?

Helen Shoot days were the best. The administration for the project was a little overwhelming—dealing with so many actors, crew members, and locations—but shoot days were an amazing relief.

Heidi Did the actors get to choose their own parts? How did it all come together?

Helen I put a call out to *Twin Peaks* fans through email, posters, and Craigslist. I also had it posted on a couple of *Twin Peaks* and David Lynch fan sites, which is where most of the interest came from in the end.

I had a production office for a few months and I invited people in to audition for roles. I auditioned over

“KEEP IT JUICY!!!”

30 people. Casting decisions were based on which character the fans were interested in playing and their level of enthusiasm, not necessarily on acting ability.

Heidi So there was a conscious choice to favour vibe over talent. How do you see the role of the amateur in *Twin Peaks*?

Helen Most people who auditioned were offered a role, but I wouldn't cast people if they were just doing it for acting experience and had no idea what *Twin Peaks* was. For me, what was important was the spirit of the original script, which was created out of a real sense of love for *Twin Peaks*, but also a real sense of frustration at the show being cancelled. The fans who wrote the script were interested in the world of *Twin Peaks* living on and in being able to participate in that world. I suppose it was an amateur project, in that nobody was making a living off of it.

Heidi But at the same time, it seems like there is an extreme sense of dedication and concern for the project. The auditions, the script itself, and the fact that no one was paid makes *Twin Peaks* even more devotional and sincere.

Helen Sincere is a good word. I think that was a quality I was really interested in. There's something about acting that is not polished, and a little bit awkward, that really appeals to me. It feels more real.

But a lot of the acting is actually very good. Honestly, I was a little surprised. But it totally makes sense because the actors had been studying the roles for so long through watching the television series that they knew, for example, what speech intonation Nadine Hurley would use when she was searching out her husband.

Heidi Sincerity is definitely key to *Twin Peaks*, along with a healthy dose of play. I really feel the project is stronger and more potent because of that.

Helen I'm not interested in being judgmental of fan culture. Mostly I find it exciting when people find a story that resonates for them.

I think that in a lot of recent media, fans have been portrayed as obsessive losers who need to get a life of their own. This is so bogus to me, because fan culture is about a deep engagement with cultural material—often a critical and subversive engagement—and for that reason it is totally exciting.

There's this guy, Randall Szott, who has a blog called *LeisureArts*. I met him in California a few months ago and he said something that I thought was great: “Art people are Trekkies too.” This makes so much sense to me. We are a community of invested people with a common knowledge and language.

There's lots of fan fiction out there to do with homoerotic desire. It's a whole genre. I like this. It's about extending a narrative towards your own desires which I think is really powerful. Often a mass-produced narrative is not completely satisfying for many audience members because it doesn't resonate on some levels. It feels important to me to write your own ideals and your own desires into cultural production.

Heidi Well put! *Twin Peaks* has a lot of playful moments in it. Despite being a serious film, the whole project is fun from start to finish. I think this comes from the fact that you are playing—with your own interests and with the interests of others—and celebrating it.

Helen Parts of it definitely felt playful. Other parts felt quite rigid, like adhering to the script. That is why I started creating the production notes for the website: so that I could branch out into different directions with the project and follow up on some interesting moments that occurred during the research and production stages.

For example, I met with a woman who had performed an exorcism on Sheryl Lee, the woman who played Laura Palmer, after *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* [the film prequel to the TV series,



released in 1992]. I found this really interesting, the way that her character had so fully inhabited her, so I wrote a little piece about it for the production notes.

Heidi Wow, that's an intense bit of trivia.

Helen Then she exorcised me! Because I had 24 inhabiting spirits.

Heidi What! Did you feel better afterward?

Helen The experience was pretty mellow. She basically talked the spirits out and sent them "into the light." I did feel different afterward, but she warned me that spirits come back very quickly.

Heidi The idea of possession is coming up again and again for me. The exorcism, for starters, but also the idea of fan culture and cult fandom, of actors getting really into their roles and viewers getting really into the characters.

Helen It also appears in the mythology of the television show. The possession of Leland Palmer by Bob, the mystical knowledge of the Log Lady's log, the dream detective work of Agent Cooper.

Heidi This issue of *Front* centres on the idea of play, or a playful attitude within art. Would you mind talking about how play comes into *Twin Twin Peaks*?

Helen Generally people approach fan projects with interest and intensity, but also with a real sense of fun and humour. Hannah and I recently had an opportunity to spend some time with the artist J. Morgan Puett, and she was talking about playfulness and whimsy as a lifestyle, and as its own form of rigor.

Heidi Play is interesting that way, in that you can be committedly playful, seriously playful.

Helen Humour, I think, is a nice way to engage an audience. Hannah and I are very interested in this idea of seriously committing to a playful practice.

Heidi Liz Magor said something about this. She said, when people get too tight about a project, all the juice leaves and the work becomes dry. You have to keep it juicy, she said. I feel you've succeeded in this.

Helen KEEP IT JUICY!!! I enjoy work that is cross-disciplinary, that can exist in multiple contexts. Recently I saw Mierle Laderman Ukeles give a talk. I thought that I knew what she did — Touch Sanitation — but when I saw her body of work I was blown away.



Helen Reed, foreground, on the set of *Twin Twin Peaks*

She actually has an office in the City of New York Sanitation Department, and she's had that office for over 30 years! She followed her interests and created a context for herself, which overlaps with an art context but also has an impact in this other community that she is deeply invested in, the sanitation workers of New York City.

Heidi What's in the future for *Twin Twin Peaks*? Any Vancouver dates?

Helen A couple of places in Vancouver have expressed some interest in screening *Twin Twin Peaks*. I'm waiting to hear a final answer on that. So I'm not sure yet, but it will screen somewhere, sometime soon!

I shot some stuff at the festival that I want to add to the final piece, and I also want to add a Log Lady intro. I am interested in submitting it to fan festivals, but also seeing if it can exist in a different context as well.

Heidi Other contexts like movie theatres? Guerrilla screenings in backyards on white sheets?

Helen I would be interested in trying to have it broadcast on a community cable vision channel, or doing an installation with the video plus lots of *Twin Peaks* fan paraphernalia, or putting together a program on fan films and having it exist as part of that.

