

## Part 1: The Space We Make

tiny creatures is  
a desire to find a way to live our own way  
to have a sense of community  
to see each other while on earth,  
to share our lives, our pain, our talents, our thoughts,  
to capture a moment in time that will be lost or forgotten,  
and to package it with beauty, love, pain, and all that we can feel as humans

– Janet Kim, *Tiny Creatures Manifesto*, 2007 (from Chris Kraus's *You Are Invited to Be the Last Tiny Creature*, 2011)

The Nightingale is a large building on Milwaukee Avenue, a few blocks south of Division Street. To me, it is home, all three floors and the roof: space to stretch, space to think, space to do nothing. It has tall and virtually unusable shelves, weird triangle corners, noises that I'll never know, and a newly all white tiled bathroom circa *2001: A Space Odyssey*. That's where my shower is, which is probably my most beloved corner of the house. To most people who enter the space, it appears to be one big room, with a kitchen, and a bathroom with no lock. You come in from icy Chicago, hand someone 0to5to7to10 dollars, sit in a painfully uncomfortable metal folding chair and watch a screening of experimental or otherwise unseen film and video (which will inevitably start 20 minutes late). This place, in this it-ness of itself, and more importantly, the People of the Nightingale, have carried me through years of tears and laughter, and I am forever indebted to be able to hold such a special shimmering thing.

The Nightingale started out for me as that big room that most people see, when I was 22 and the world felt infinitely terrifying, and like nothing that I deserved. I remember asking Christy LeMaster (Founding Director) if she would give me a Nightingale internship—she let out one of her full-room-filling laughs and said something, like, “We don't do that here, but by all means, help if you'd like to”. I fell in love with being loved by the Nightingale. From screenings to friendsgivings, sitting on the porch with Sally drinking Hennessey and talking too late, knowing that almost every time I entered I would be offered a plate of Christy's spaghetti with meat sauce (in which you really can taste her *deep* care). When Christy decided to move on physically (but not spiritually) from the space, I inherited her role of Director, Chief Spaghetti Offer-er. The Nightingale is an odd thing to inherit, and over the past two years of grad school, with a full time job and other commitments, I found it very difficult to feel like I wasn't failing this place.

The idealism of DIY culture is not what appealed to me about the Nightingale, or any other apartment/gallery/bedroom/cinema/underground/exhibition space that there ever was. I was a teenager in Portland, Oregon during the mid-2000's, so I learned early on that DIY doesn't equal utopian. Instead, it smells like moldy basement, PBR, shitty people, and shittier weed. A DIY space, at best, can be a caring and supportive environment—yet also cliquy—and at worst, bid for cultural power on behalf of it's organizers. DIY doesn't equate to anything, but rather presents a place where people can meet and connect, where things can happen, and that measures up to something.

I find it pressingly important to have spaces to meet outside of traditional institutions restricted by scheduling, politics, and their bottom lines. Although I believe that running a DIY venue is counter-institutional in many ways, the space will ultimately become an institution within the community it serves, and that creates a heavy load of responsibility. Thinking a DIY space can be utopic is misguided, instead, I would push for a DIY space to be seen as an anti-utopia—not a bad place, not an un-utopia, an *anti*-utopia, pushing against the idea that utopic communities can exist in the artworld, or that they need to. I've learned many things at the Nightingale, but the most important thing is that you can get real, tangible things done if it doesn't need to be perfect, and not being perfect doesn't equal a scapegoat for bad production either. In my inheritance of this place, I intend the Nightingale to be a platform above all else—a room where if you want to invest the time, you can make magic, love, and absolutely no money.

## **Part 2: The Work We Need (Reanimated Images)**

Because of my interest in bottom-up politics, or power-bottom politics (shout out 2 Kristi McGuire), the artwork I want to see succeed in the world also comes from this place of making space for yourself. When I saw Sondra Perry climb to the top of a ladder at the Gene Siskel Film Center last year as part of Conversations at the Edge, I thought: "This. Is. It." This is not only the art I want to see, this is *\*the only\** art I want to see. Sondra Perry is a feminist new media artist who isn't making feminist new media art; she's making Sondra Perry art. Her performance last year at was the best use of a movie theater I've ever seen (and I live in a movie theater). Perry's work transformed the cinema into an electrifyingly mutable and communal space; the audience experienced the work as she did. Using collaged video, sound, and online elements, she crafted a delicately woven web of people, places, and objects. Deeply personal and based in familial relationships, Perry's piece *Lineage for a Multiple-Monitor Workstation: Number One* (2015-17) especially struck me. A multichannel, multimedia video-performance, *Lineage* records the artists' family members cooking at their grandmothers house and performing for one another, talking, and posing outside the front of the house, all while wearing neon green balaclava masks. Perry talks over parts of the woven pieces of video, describing people and their actions,

and telling stories. The artist brings a ladder in front of the screen and leaves it there. A video starts in which Perry is on the phone with her grandmother. She asks her grandmother to sing a specific song for her: *The Guns of Brixton* by the Clash. The Roy Ayers song *Everybody Loves the Sunshine* plays off and on. When the audience has nearly forgotten the ladder, Perry walks over to it, climbs to the top, and scream-sings *4th of July* by Soundgarden. The imagery, the sounds, hearing Perry talk, everything about this video performance is so vivid and emotional. I found myself not only brought to tears, but big heavy weeps. This work not only discusses Black culture in America framed by politics and protest (which it does very effectively), but it also gives the viewer access to the artist's intimate relationships with her family, in which Perry lets us witness the deep care and trust between her relatives. This personal declaration of love makes the political statements within the work that much more relevant and moving.

Coming out of experiencing *Sondra*, I started thinking about this idea that I've come to call the Reanimated Image. To roughly define the application of this term, I look to works that comprise a radical and relevant cinema, a cinema of images without hierarchy: a femme-dominant, networked, remixed, and downloaded cinema. An entity created by—and reacting to—uncivil society, Reanimated Images are the Frankenstein's monster of moving-image art, sewn together through pieces of film history and shocked to life by the internet. Rejecting the traditional cinematic canon, its practitioners take its varied usable parts and strike out on their own. A revenge against film history's racism, misogyny, and heteronormativity, Reanimated Image artists have created a community of brilliant, angry, femme makers. The Reanimated Image is part of an alternative economy of images made by artists, in which experiences of living in the world, and in our bodies, are shared with their viewers.

The Reanimated Image refuses a true home other than with its maker, the works are gifted to us, and should not be taken lightly, they are tools towards greater understanding of why makers make. Building off the argument of Hito Steyerl's "In Defense of the Poor Image" (2009), one can think of Reanimated Images as the disbursement of the artist into the web-ether, in which the spaces they hold be they physical or uploaded, absorb something TRUE and REAL. They offer up an acute sense of the artist as they move about the world, not only through their dialogues and perspective, but their physicality as well.

Reanimated Images utilize the idea of power-bottom politics, made by majority femme artists, these images question the spaces they find themselves in, articulating not quite anti-institutional, but rather, a make-the-institution-work-for-you, dynamic. Reanimated Images tie into discussions of self-care and self-worth, they know the institution needs them as much as they need it.

### **Part 3a: When I said I wanted to sleep for a month I really didn't mean it like this**

*I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I said I didn't want to do that show. I'm really sorry I was bitchy when you came over because I was preoccupied with I don't remember what. Oh, and I'm sorry that I got mad at you for opening the cabinet, and I'm sorry that I didn't go buy beer that one time because I was pretty broke but it definitely would have made the mood nicer. I'm sorry that I didn't like your film. I'm sorry that I haven't scheduled another meeting, but I just also really can't make it to the Zoom screening tonight, because I just can't, and I'm sorry.*

### **Part 3b: Where We're At**

The Nightingale feels aggressively empty when few people are inside its walls for a long period of time. I used to relish the weeks when we didn't have a screening—time to stretch out and sit with myself, time to get work done. Now all I can feel is a biting lack of energy, a love-filled space demurring without loving bodies. I'm inundated everyday with streamables, Twitch-sitches, Zoom-a-thons, and pay-as-you-wills that disgorge some bits of screen-contained culture. Large and small art centers Zoom alike—there's a massive blanket laid out over the art world, under which everyone is confined to this specific infrastructure, which is both democratizing and demoralizing. Is this what contemporary corporate culture feels like? Something initiated with a promise of ease, ending in consequential loss of values. This type of democratization is ultimately the enemy of artistic thought. Considering how Reanimated Images use technology as a means to put ideas in a megaphone, I had high hopes for the virtual experience, but here now, while we're inside, I can't stand it.

In teasing apart why it feels so difficult to engage in critical work online (which was not meant to be online in the first place) I've come to this: what makes the experience of art interesting is to be in a room together to talk about it and to feel it together. The semiotics of the cinema are community specific, meaning we observe the screen together, soaking in each other's energy. The experience is different for everyone, so the ultimate effect is a together-alone-ness, specific to sitting in a dark room silently with others. When you sound check, you know that the film's audio will be quieter when there are people in the room—when sound bounces through bodies, it creates a softening effect. I don't want to watch experimental works on my laptop alone, without others to share space with.

What is potentially interesting and good about this new world is the accessibility and generosity of artwork. I believe the best thing we can take away from this realization that the norms of institutional practices are not necessarily set in stone, we can create our own realities with our work. How can we take note of this change and create better, more open futures for art? How

can we find alternative ways of engagement? Right now, the whole world is one open room, where anyone can create a new way of looking and thinking. Taking from the energetic exchanges of both Reanimated Images and the cinema, I want to push to create the systems we desire. I'm not sure how to put a ladder in front of the Zoom call just yet, but we really need to.