

Lexie Owen
Statement of Practice May 2020

My current research is primarily concerned with support structures and networks of care. Rooted in my subject position as a femme-identifying queer feminist, this work is deeply informed by the expanded personal networks of support I experience and interact with in my daily life. I work in an interdisciplinary and site responsive manner with past project outcomes including site-specific installations, sculptural works, performances, publications and exhibition making. Fluctuating between curatorial and artistic modes of production, I am not interested in picking a position or defining a singular mode of output, but rather creating space for multiplicity within my work.

I am specifically interested in self-organized communities and what I have come to term distributed cultural production, or the cultural properties groups make for themselves, outside of dominant aesthetic regimes and the interests of late-capitalist production. I look for the networks of care and support structures that develop within the specificities of place or shared interest/need, finding within them potential grounds for the development of remarkable counter-hegemonic social relations.

Past investigations have looked at caretaking labour as a catalyst for community engagement, the social functions of the corner store, the self-organized economies that develop in parallel to large-scale annual events and the way specific communities adopt and adapt dominant cultural practices. In the context of my MFA studies this research is becoming increasingly more personal, and situated in my own subject position. From the shopping mall to the nail salon to online forums sharing fan-fiction I am developing works that address sites typically feminized and disregarded as 'shallow' or 'vain,' contemplating their importance for femme and queer-femme communities, reclaiming them as critical sites for inquiry and the development of supportive structures.

My MFA research also includes significant attention to my working methodologies, as I continue to hone and develop strategies for artistic research that reflect my interests, engage with communities in an ethically sound manner, and remain porous enough to allow for a variety of co-contributors. In this light I am working towards a written thesis that investigates the relationship between agricultural practices, fermentation processes and the way we think about socially engaged art - using these biological processes as a map for artistic practices, specifically in terms of productivity and authorship. When a field is fallow it appears unproductive, but in actuality there are complex biological interactions happening within the soil, making it ready to produce. What appears "unproductive" to one way of thinking is a vital part of the process of "being" productive. When we make a sourdough starter we are merely creating the right environmental conditions for the ever and always present catalyst – yeast. The transformative component is always already present, in situ – it only needs a little encouragement to create its effect. These processes have become a critical way to think through the practice I have developed over the past 5 years, offering a lens to consider distributed authorship and the necessity of slowness in creating works that engage with communities at a deep level.

In this light, for my Masters Project 1 I have developed a curatorial proposition, *20 / 45 / 45 / 45 / 90 / 20*, that shapes itself around the sourdough bread making process. Denoting the "fallow" moments in the process of making sourdough, the project's title references the intervals of time between inputs of careful labour while making bread.

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With a group of participant co-producers *20 / 45 / 45 / 45 / 90 / 20* will fill these pauses with activities drawn from the bread-making process. Creating an environment for exchange the work approximates touch through the sharing of tactile processes at a distance. *20 / 45 / 45 / 45 / 90 / 20* creates an intimate public of co-producers, and will engage with larger audiences through the production of a zine which will include instructions for bread baking as well as documentation of the activities performed during the fallow moments.

The participant co-producers of *20 / 45 / 45 / 45 / 90 / 20* are spread across Europe and North America, and include Vancouver based curator and artist Katie Belcher, Toronto based artist Andrea Creamer, Oslo based artist Tuva Langfeldt, and Vancouver based cultural producer Patrick McNabb. Each participant is given free reign to lead the group through any activity they choose, with the prompt of the bread making process as a start. Throughout the day we will spend 5 hours together, mixing and tending our dough and participating in actions, gestures, readings and lectures together across distance.

20 / 45 / 45 / 45 / 90 / 20 creates a collective environment for sharing, or to borrow a line of thinking from Feminist writer Chris Kraus, a utopic moment. Kraus muses on the temporality of collective action in "The Failed Collective," the final essay in her 2011 collection *Where Art Belongs*: "There is no such thing as a *failed* utopian community; or, if the collective is an experiment in shared time, how can time fail? A great sense of failure couches every success. YES and SO WHAT? Is That All There Is To It? What goal do you imply with the phrase, "failed collective?" Utopia- static and therefore unreal- is never the point. Collectivity arranges itself around a desire for something, to produce something, to become something else (and who cares what else?) beyond its individual members"¹. Here Kraus describes with perfect clarity what I am ultimately interested in exploring in my practice, what I find in the structures for support and care I seek to identify, the communities I work with and the collective actions I participate in: the potential for otherways of being together, otherways of organizing, otherways of knowing.

The notion of "otherways" or Kraus' "something else" are necessarily both frustratingly vague and excitingly (terrifyingly) open. I say necessarily because this openness is key to the forms of collectivity that interest me. The collective is not perfect, and should never aim to be; through Kraus' logic it should never strive to become a totalizing force, but rather revel in its temporality. In his 2006 polemic *The Politics of Small Gestures* theorist and critic Mika Hannula considers collectivity in a similar vein- for Hannula as well, it is not a totalizing idea, but rather an accepting space for the meeting of diverse singularities², a space that recognizes the non-translatibility of singular experience but strives to be together anyways, not to seek a form of consensus but rather to create space for productive misunderstandings. For Hannula, "that 'something' is what makes the act or event worthwhile, it is the core content of the activity. It does not exist in abstraction of the situation in which it becomes that very 'something.' That 'something' exists only for the duration of the rhizomatic practice, in its action."³

So here is where my practice is sitting today, somewhere between Kraus' *Failed Collective* and Hannula's *Small Gesture*. But what is the value of the failed utopia and the productive misunderstanding? What does being together do? What is the

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consequence of a gesture so temporal its product exists only in its enaction? How do these generative failures and small acts become something beyond themselves?

These questions seem unanswerable, or perhaps unproductive to answer, as any attempt to fully reconcile the value or consequence of such acts seems to foreclose their generative possibilities. Ultimately these actions are grounded in hope, or perhaps more accurately what author Alexandra Rowland terms “hopepunk.” For Rowland, “Hopepunk says, “No, I don’t accept that. Go fuck yourself: The glass is half-full.” YEAH, we’re all a messy mix of good and bad, flaws and virtues. We’ve all been mean and petty and cruel, but (and here’s the important part) we’ve also been soft and forgiving and KIND. Hopepunk says that kindness and softness doesn’t equal weakness, and that in this world of brutal cynicism and nihilism, being kind is a *political act*. An act of *rebellion*.”⁴

End Notes

¹ Kraus, Chris. “The Failed Collective.” Where Art Belongs.

² Hannula, Mika. The Politics of Small Gestures. p48. Here Hannula is borrowing from Deleuze and Guttari: “We need to recall the source of the definition of singularity. For Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari (1988), singularity defines the mode of being of an entity as singular to its own logic of appearance and existence. The singularity of an identity detaches itself from the specificity of an identity that is claimed to be specific to its own place. Here the attraction to singularity and away from specific identity for Deleuze & Guttari... is that the idea that, while a specific identity is always bound to a physical location in a space, singular identity escapes these hindrances and is therefore allowed to develop into something else.”

³ Ibid, p45

⁴ <https://ariaste.tumblr.com/post/163500138919/ariaste-the-opposite-of-grimdark-is-hopepunk>