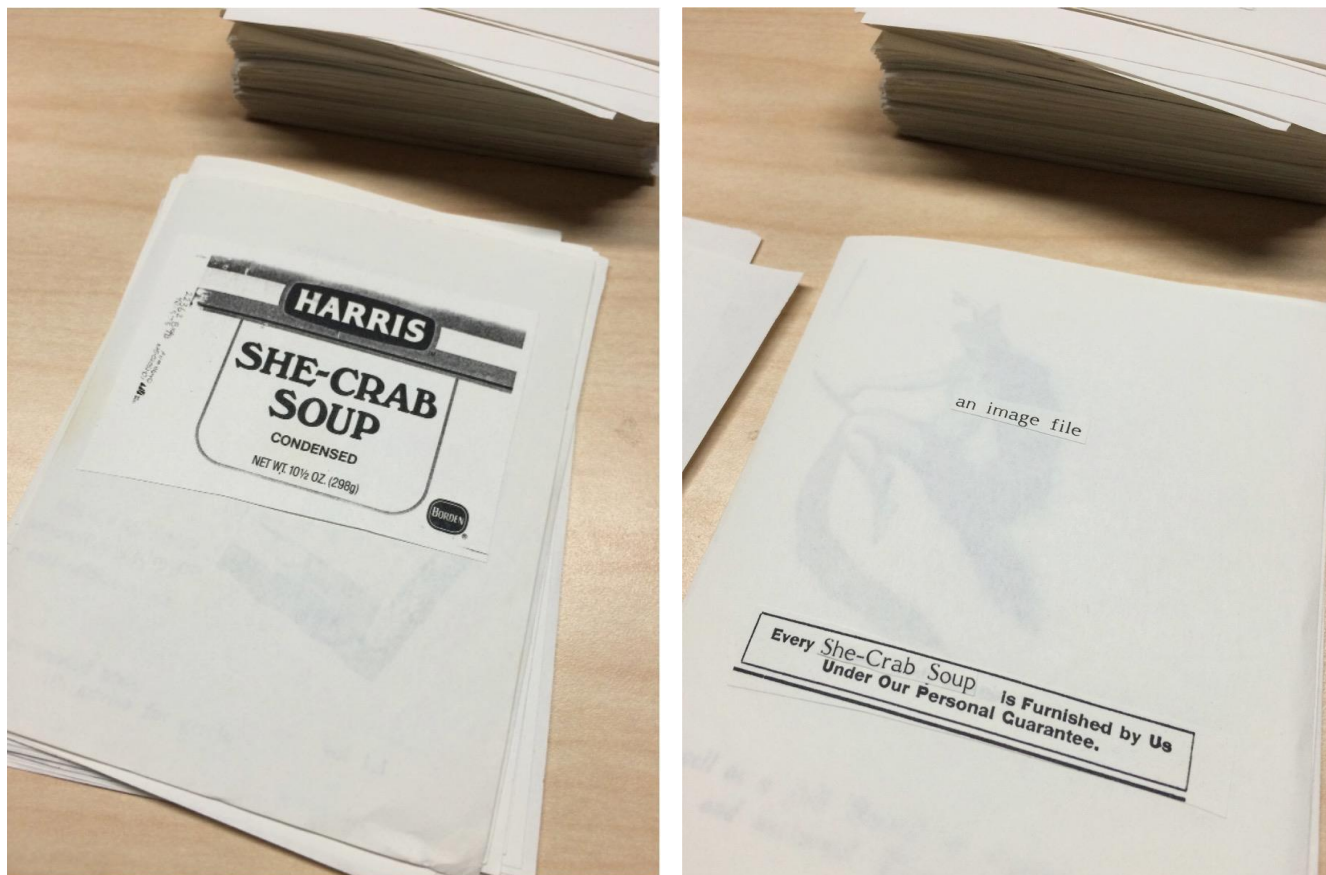


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Zine Pedagogies: Students as Critical Makers

by Jeanne Scheper



1. SALOMÉLIA PRODUCTIONS, *SHE-CRAB SOUP*. BALTIMORE, MARYLAND AND SOMERVILLE, MA, 1996. COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR

She-Crab Soup: The Remix

In the mid-1990s, I created a zine (a small hand-made chapbook) called *She-Crab Soup*—the title literally torn from a repurposed soup-can label hawking a regional delicacy from my hometown of Baltimore, Maryland. The label-turned-zine cover was intended as a queer and feminist repurposing, a sign of how gender and sexuality are a semiotic soup that can be playfully remixed through creative juxtaposition, flagrant rule-breaking, and surreal leaps of imagination. It is twenty-five years since I pasted together that first zine—clandestinely and after hours at work—performing an anti-capitalist slowdown in the time-honored tradition of what the zine *Sabotage* celebrates in its title: workplace sabotage (Duncombe). This is now my fifth year using zine-making as a DIY (do-it-yourself) tool for undergraduate student engagement at the University of California, Irvine (hereafter UCI), a large public research university that is increasingly first-generation serving, and federally recognized as Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American Pacific Islander-serving—and, therefore, an important institutional site for honoring students’ connections to what bell hooks calls “homeplace” and community-based knowledge systems and practices (hooks 42).

Zines—typically associated with small, hand-made, analog, low-cost, low-circulation publications—are frequently grounded in fandoms or networks organized around shared taste affinities, social identities, political imperatives, or quirky pleasures. An emphasis on collectivity lends zines, which are literally unbound (traditional zines are often made from a single folded sheet of paper), a metaphoric ethos of unboundedness. These “fanzines” or “zines” (a truncation of ‘magazine’) can be traced across multiple genealogies. The zine might be seen as kin to the little magazine explosion at the end of the nineteenth century, including women’s scrapbooks and political pamphlets, although their roots are commonly identified with the surge of science fiction fan magazines in the 1930s and 40s. In contemporary feminist circles, zines are known as an integral part of 1980s punk subcultures and underground music scenes. While some zines are still expressions of music fandom, others are more like confessional diaries, and still others are small manifestos filled with poetry, homemade comics, quotes, clippings, and photographs. Zines are strongly associated with “third wave” feminism, the feminist riot grrrl scene (which confronted sexism in the punk music scene) and the punk homocore scenes of the 1980s and 90s—with their militant gay activist toolkits for taking on government inaction and homophobia during the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. One of the most visible and impactful recent zine projects has been the [POC Zine Project](#) (POCZP) which aims to serve as a portal to zines by people of color and make them easier to find and share. There is, in fact, a robust tradition of “resistance to white dominance in the zine community” by people of color in the U.S. (Arroyo-Ramírez, et al. 109).

In the last ten years, zines have experienced a renaissance in the U.S. and globally, making them an

intriguingly reinvigorated pedagogical tool with potential applications in many learning contexts, from community-based activism to the university classroom. Zines are at heart an analog form, but one that shares many of the qualities of self-making, self-publishing, and participatory community-building across time and space that millennials and Generation Z associate with digital social media platforms. Since they are heavily visual, in addition to textual, and are rooted in personal expression and techniques of self-invention, zines resonate with the videos, posts, and memes of blogs, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Twitch, and other media for digital storytelling such as podcasts. Zines operate as a social medium strongly linked to free-play and the possibilities of creating communication across time and space and place. At the same time, analog zines remain unabashedly material, tactile, and sensual and resonate with the renaissance of “craft” culture and other contemporary versions of “DIY.”

I invite you to read this essay like a zine: make your own connections, enjoy the remix of voices—student, teacher, activist, zine-maker—and take in the different textures, tones, and images: theoretical, confessional, citational, critical, serious and playful. I open with five foundational principles that inform my approach to “critical zine-making” and then turn to what zines are, why zine-making fosters an “ethos” that is a particularly good fit for the feminist critical cultural studies classroom, and how I utilize zines in gender and sexuality studies classes to teach about the existence and value of community archival practices and queer history-making. By the end, I hope you approach the essay like a zinester: after exploring the different microcosms of zine archives, zine-making, and zine pedagogies, you are invited to re-fold these pages, make your own cuts and connections, take what works, bookmark the rest for later, and create your own zine worlds in the DIY spirit of skill-sharing.



2. STUDENTS IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS 2017, UC, IRVINE. PHOTO CREDIT: CHRISTINE KIM.

Five Key Principles: Towards a Critical Zine-Making Ethos

1. Repurposed Productivity

When I created *She-Crab Soup* in the mid-1990s, I was working in the spirit of what I considered a set of

underground community ethics that comprised what I convey to students now as an overall “critical zine-making ethos.” The first principle, **repurposed productivity**, derives from the material conditions of zine production: As indicated above, zine-making is frequently an unauthorized workplace activity. Zine-making can represent a form of work stoppage in the service of stealing back your mind-space and extracting resources for creative activity from the drudgery of nine-to-five wage-labor. For my students, this perhaps translates into stealing back agency from the neoliberal university.

To make my zine *She-Crab Soup*, I clandestinely snuck in afterhours to repurpose standard office workplace supplies—scissors, glue sticks, and tape—in the service of art and activism. I commandeered, like so many other Gen Xers, the photocopier, making dozens of unauthorized copies on standard 8 1/2 x 11 pages and folding each sheet into the tiny pages of a zine. I relished zine-making as a multi-valenced anarcho-queer act of resistance against capitalism—and in the service of reclaiming eros, in the Audre Lorde sense. In “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Lorde wrote, “The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment” (340). Zine-making is designed to be a wrench in that system. The corollary for students in the present—working their way through school or not—would be claiming for themselves the space of thinking, connecting, and critical-making outside both the frameworks that mandate university learning as an instrumental movement towards profit-driven productivity and the external drive to monetize themselves in the realm of social media self-marketing.

2. Critical Recycling

I was not alone in extracting creative life from the afterhours and downtime interstices of the workplace: a similar phenomenon was happening all across the United States, in the everynight life of the Kinko’s copy shop. In the late 1980s and 90s, copy shops made up what one blog remembers as “graveyard-shift salon(s)” (CrimethInc). The copy shops of this era constituted a serpentine network of workplace sabotage activity fueling everything from zine production to underground comics, militant political posters, and underground music fliers among a variety of anarchist and punk-inflected subcultures revolting against the social violence of this era including government inaction and corporate greed related to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the newly announced so-called “war on drugs,” and the overall militarism and carceral expansion of the Reagan-Bush years. These informal or underground networks strategically deployed the second principle of zine ethos that I like to share with my students—an aesthetic and political commitment to **critical recycling**. Using the excess images and detritus from dominant consumer culture, these makers repurposed mainstream materials from the margins,

creating spaces and tools for cultural revolt and imagining different futures.

Zines are often created in this way, by collaging or remixing everyday found images—magazine ads, food packaging, cartoons, newspapers, photographs. (Arguably, this assemblage aspect of zines is the precursor to today’s meme and video remix culture.) Materials are recycled—but not just materially re-purposed, they are re-valued conceptually, made to make meanings beyond or even in opposition to those originally intended.

In *She-Crab Soup*, for example, I surreally juxtaposed mundane images to create subversive, queer meanings and puns, retooling the normative gender images that surround us daily into new non-normative configurations and counter-discourses. A cartoon of a 50s housewife in an apron from an ad in a homemaking magazine is coupled with a comic-book cowgirl twirling a lasso to refashion an unexpected romantic or dominant/submissive lesbian coupling, in the tradition slash fiction. Where popular culture failed to deliver mimetic queer imaginaries and at a time when queer visibility (representational or in the streets) felt highly constrained and the target of incredible social violence, the possibilities for weaving genderqueer subtexts suddenly were liberated within the infinite imaginary space of the zine. Coupled with the exercise of what I would call “improper reception practices,” such images are sometimes legibly queer only to other queer readers. As I further queered inanimate objects, I created zones of desire and affect which might not even be legible to other queers. Perhaps these queered object lessons were versions of Guy Debord’s critique in *Society of the Spectacle*: challenging how capitalism relentlessly transfers our desires from humans to things and machines. Zines offer a space for radically free expression: of eros, libido, or non-normative affect. Traditional zines are composed of pages we can touch that are uncensored by the state, corporate capital, or social norms. Such playful juxtapositions and random or chance encounters echo the politics and practice of dada and surrealism in the early twentieth century or in more contemporary terms, the remix. My own practices were often tied to situationist notions of the *dérive* (playful “drifting” through spaces, alone or in small collectives). And they were deeply linked to the queer militant graphic activism of the 90s that infused groups like ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) whose visual activist affinity group Gran Fury retooled and critically recycled the language of advertising to create queer forms of agitprop. I introduce students to these histories through digital archives, such as [NYPL’s Gran Fury collection](#) or the [ACT UP Oral History Project](#). By sharing the ethos and skill-set of critical recycling, I encourage students to think about how they can critically re-appropriate, reuse, recycle, and remix popular and material culture to create their own unfettered meanings and rework the configurations of social space.

3. Anti-Copyright

She-Crab Soup was a deeply intimate, even secretive, zine—and importantly, remained anonymous and proudly anti-copyright. While I was the “maker,” I had no aspirations to be an auteur or profiteer. The third principle I share with

students is this ethos of **anti-copyright**. The anti-copyright ethos of zines refuses conventional conceptions of “intellectual property,” the logics of private property, and ownership of ideas. Ideas are not possessions, but rather are shared inheritances: collective archives, bits and pieces meant to be freely “stolen” and made available to others or repurposed.

In recent years, archivist Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez introduced students to the idea of [Creative Commons](#) licensing in our discussion of copyright, and now students are invited to consider the conditions under which they want to share their work (commercial use or not; derivative works or not; and so on)—including the choice of whether to use creative commons principals such as “ShareAlike” which allows sharing, but only if the new work is made available under the same creative commons license terms as their original work.

Zines are vital forms of communication and community formation that fall outside of dominant for-profit structures and monetization. This is another way students can consider what thinking critically looks like when freed from editorial, state, or corporate forms of censorship.

4. World-Making

Because my own zine, *She-Crab Soup*, was not widely distributed—perhaps making it a closer kin of the artist’s book—it might not appear to perform this vital function of zines: to build community across geographic distances and social affinities. But, in retrospect, I see that *She-Crab Soup* was a queer love letter to the future, my calling card into a world that didn’t exist then. *Then* was the 1990s—an era of queer politics steeped in “mourning and militancy” at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis and a climate Eve Sedgwick described at the time as a result of “unchallenged aegis of a culture’s desire that gay people not be” (Sedgwick 26). *Now* is the 2020s, a time when my students are pushing the boundaries of binary gender and rising up against anti-black violence and anti-immigration sentiment and policies—the afterlives of the earlier moment, which are being named and resisted in powerfully new ways now.

She-Crab Soup conjured epistolary magic in service of this future. Dear reader, this brings us to the fourth principle: **world-making**. *She-Crab Soup* was in fact “world-making” futures that I, as a young person in my 20s, was being told could not exist because of society’s genocidal fantasies—that gay people were non-reproductive or godless, that the black communities where I was raised in Baltimore, Maryland were self-destructive or without value. Zines are essential tools of the weak that not only speak back to power, but importantly produce “*activism and community through materiality*,” as the tagline for the POC Zine project says.

In my teaching, I have taken the truism that the humanities are a vital site for teaching “critical thinking” and cultivated and extended that idea through pedagogies of “critical making.” In the pages of a zine, students are communicating new knowledges gathered from their research while creating new worlds and futures for themselves and their communities. For the UCI students

that I have worked with over the last five years in this modality, zines represent an important practice for recognizing themselves as cultural producers, cultural makers, and lifelong learners. Their zines are a space in which they experience the joys and pleasures of artistic license. And the process is one in which students can unmake the logics of the neoliberal university that has monetized knowledge and production, and increasingly produced the logics of “students as passive consumers,” students as future capitalists, and of course, mostly, students as debtors with “mortgaged minds” (Scheper).

The world-making space of zines offers an alternative set of investments: it gives students permission to seize the tools of *thinking/conception*, *making/production*, and *sharing/distribution*. It gives license for uncensored and unfettered creative output (no editor, no publisher, no ratings system, no distributor, no likes and dislikes, etc.). And it promises access to audiences that are not necessarily circumscribed and defined by the existing social hierarchies, class-based access points, or even delineated in the usual demographic ways either in the classroom or on social media networks. As the third issue of *Riot Grrrl* put it, people started making zines because they were “tired of being written out—out of history, out of the ‘scene,’ out of our bodies” (quoted in Nguyen 175). Zines are the counter-archive, rich spaces for resistance and connection between outlaw and outsider subjects. And to take up that power is to produce counter-archives, to re-make histories, and to embrace the possibilities of scripting new worlds and futures.

5. DIY Skill-Sharing

Part of the community and future-building process in the feminist and queer studies classroom is to work against the received ways people are taught that knowledge is proprietary (as principle 3 observes), or that we are competing for scarce resources, or that we must hoard or covet what we know. If, as teachers, we can disrupt the circuits of power in the classroom, students and teachers can learn from each other in new ways. The hope is that everyone is equipped with tools that can be put into practice beyond the walls of the classroom and passed along to others. It is in this spirit of **DIY skill-sharing** that I offer up the story of *She-Crab Soup* and the five principles of zine ethos that I took away from my earlier experience of zine-making. I offer them as a gift in the spirit of zine “gift-economies” in the form of playful and serious pedagogical essay in the hopes of contributing to how we collectively describe not only the process, theory, and practice of pedagogical work, but how we convey the value of our labor as radical feminist and queer cultural studies scholars and teachers.

Teaching with Zines

Zine pedagogy provides an impetus for exercising and learning traditional collegiate skills like scholarly research, database searching, close reading, critical thinking, applied methods, and analytic writing. At the same time, zines do so by inviting students to assume the mantle of creative

cultural production as part of their engagement with feminist and queer epistemologies and their application of feminist and queer methodologies. Students use zines to shape knowledge frameworks and produce new knowledges at the same time. Once made, zines are meant to be distributed and then become about valuing, communicating, and translating ideas and information to people for whom those ideas and histories matter most. Rather than remaining passive consumers—or monetized creatives—in the classroom, zines emphasize student and community-centered critical and feminist pedagogical practices such as gift-economies and mutual aid that upend the neoliberal classroom (as articulated by bell hooks and Paulo Freire—or more recently Sarah Ahmed in *Living a Feminist Life* or Roxanne Gay in *Bad Feminist*). For gender and sexuality students, zines can serve as everyday interventions and sites of feminist critique that they can bring back into their own lived experiences and homeplaces. Students, attentive to structures of power both in and out of the classroom, are motivated to become actively engaged in social critique and social change as part of the conversations they care most about—beyond the classroom or university.

In sum, zines are particularly effective conduits for several important critical pedagogical values including ethical community-based research processes that value “subjugated” or non-expert knowledges, sustainable approaches to knowledge production, skill-sharing, information-sharing (anti-copyright; creative commons licensing), and participation in gift and mutual aid economies (made newly visible during COVID19 emergency remote learning conditions).

A Local History of Zine Culture

In 2015, UCI’s gender studies librarian Pauline Manaka connected the work she saw students producing in my gender studies classes to a new library initiative to create an annual Zine Fest and collect local zines. Born in South Africa, Manaka described herself as a product of the June 1976 Soweto Uprising, and she loved seeing students extend their library research into creative modes of critical engagement with social justice issues. Previously, Manaka had worked with students in my classes to develop research topics into creative performances, visual culture activism, or what I called “blueprints for social change.” The blueprints for social change assignment was inspired by a “liberating action” project first shared with me by Karl Bryant, a Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies professor at SUNY, New Paltz. Incorporating zine-making soon became a regular part of my pedagogical practice.

Christine Kim, the Public Services Assistant for Special Collections & Archives, had begun collecting materials at the [OC Zine Fest](#) and other local Orange County zine festivals, recognizing zines as essential tools for empowering local communities to preserve their own histories. The UCI Zine Fest resonated with and was coordinated with the existing International Open Access Week, a celebration of public access to information. I saw the invitation to collaborate as the best “flipped” learning opportunity one could wish for—student engagement spilling out of confines of the classroom and onto the steps of the library and into the community.

Hosting the Zine Fest outdoors at the library “gateway”—a public commons of sorts—ensured that zines were experienced as a medium that is public, collectively-driven, process-oriented, dialogic, engaging, and playful. This shifted the relationality between teacher/student towards a radical version of pedagogy understood as mutual learning, cooperative skill-sharing, and a dialogic process that students, librarians, archivists, and professors enter together with both seriousness and joy.



3. UCI ZINE FEST 2019. PHOTO CREDIT: UCI COMMUNICATIONS.

Zines as Community Archiving

Most of the students, I find, have never set foot in the library, let alone worked with unique physical and historical materials like those held in special collections. Collaborating with archivists and librarians to use primary source material was already an established part of my teaching practice. Our librarians’ commitment to community outreach and access quickly debunks any stuffy preconceptions of archives as guarded sites of elite power and privilege.

My aim is to create opportunities for students to make connections between primary source materials, archival ephemera, and their own lived experiences. Students identify topics that reflect their own interests and curiosity, and as often as not these reflect identity-based or community-based investments. Engaging with archives as community spaces enables students to draw on feminist theories of “situated knowledges,” “participatory action research,” and “engaged scholarship” as they look at materials. The aim is to present the zine assignment as a form of “critique-in-action”—a form of applied knowledge production. They are often surprised by what they find and the surprising personal connections they make to materials. Students produce zines that creatively re-present feminist and queer cultural studies ideas, using primary and secondary sources. Students are then invited to distribute and share that work with peers, bringing their own thinking back to the community of the classroom, but also to their home communities or chosen audiences. I see this as a methodological practice akin to teaching students ethical fieldwork practices—where academic resource extraction is redressed through sharing back findings in ways that are directed by and/or are a benefit to the communities who were the object of study. Students can use zine-making as

a microcosm for developing and practicing skills of building ethical relationships to subjects and objects of study and as a channel for sounding their own pedagogical voice.

Zines as Cultural Critique

One of the primary reasons I like to teach with zines is that for feminist cultural studies teaching purposes, zines often carry the weight and power of social critique associated with the alternative press, independent media, or underground media (manifestos, chapbooks, pamphlets), and certainly resonate with the growing popularity of comics and graphic novels. Zines can be understood as an extension of (and make a strong teaching complement to) the small publication practices that mobilized radical political thought during the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s including the Black Power, Chican@ Rights, and Indigenous Rights and gay liberation and women's rights movements (Zobl 3). These are a few of the reasons zines are celebrated in multidisciplinary institutional sites, such as my own, Gender and Sexuality Studies (Creasap 157).

Musician, zine writer, and more recently ceramicist Osa Atoe's *Shotgun Seamstress* is an iconic fanzine launched in 2006, "by, for and about black punks, queers, feminists, outsider artists and musicians." Osa explains in a 2012 interview with Elizabeth Stinson, "I wanted to provide images and writing that reinforced my own identity as a black, queer, punk musician and also that made D.I.Y. culture and anti-consumerist ideals accessible to other black people" (263). She describes *Shotgun Seamstress* as "an attempt to create community but in a non-geographical kind of way" (269). She describes her black punk community as international. "I write letters and e-mails and share two-hour-long phone calls with black punks in California, Illinois, Michigan, Quebec, London, and beyond" (269). She continues, "The point of making that zine wasn't to have more dialogue with white people. The point was to put all the emphasis and attention on black punks" [...] I think the main way that racism is incorporated into punk narratives and punk history is through omission" (263-67). Zines, to reiterate, are not only or primarily spaces of self-expression, but they are spaces of cultural critique, and that critique is not necessarily or only directed to sites of power (although it can be) as the primary interlocutors, rather these critiques are often simultaneously acts of unbounded community formation, and the interlocutors are those who have been similarly impacted by power.

While outside the scope of the present essay, it is important to note that zines are also not de facto radical progressive outlets. As the LIS Microaggressions collective cautions, "zines have historically overrepresented dominant white groups" (Arroyo-Ramírez et al 109). Eric Ward, writing for the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Report, argues: "From Skinhead literature to Skinhead zines, the struggle to define what it means to be a Skinhead is being fought out in black and white." There is, at the same time, as the LIS Microaggressions Project puts it, "a rich tradition of resistance to white dominance in the zine community embodied through zines created by and for people of color" (109). Zines, therefore, are a medium and a genre which can lend itself to different uses—and in fact, they are

presently being taken up as a powerful ground for ideological contestation. In this sense, the zine remains an important and still underexamined object of analysis for cultural studies.

"Taking up Space"

UCI student Zhen Morillo describes critical making as "creating a radical space that allows me to connect with the value and power of processing the ways I have felt alienated, minimized, and ostracized in heteronormative society. It allowed me to take up space." Zines offer this gift of "taking up space" while often being very small affairs. Whether the small, easily reproduced little "books" made from a single sheet of 8½ x 11 standard copy paper folded into 8 segments (instructions easily found on the web [in PDF form](#) (Anne Elizabeth Moore's classic has been translated into Arabic, Greek, German, Georgian, Khmer, Russian and Spanish) or in [YouTube instructional videos](#) like this inspired one from Asha Grant, Director of The Free Black Women's Library, L.A. and founder of The Salt Eaters Bookshop) or, of course, the new digital counterpart made from magazine publishing software such as Flipsnack or Canva, zines are often part of complex transnational networks that are still strongly tethered to ideas of the local. An essential ingredient of many zines is their tie to specific geographic spaces, in the form of celebration of communities of origin, and boosterism of the local. This is one of the reasons I was personally drawn to the form, as a Baltimore expatriate living in Southern California seeking affective tethers to my hometown. Zines can be sites of new global imaginaries or archives of over-looked or erased local histories. *Zero Zine* by OZONE collective (pronounced "Zero Zone,"), which comes out of Baltimore, pays attention to a previously obscured history of Korean culture in the Station North area of predominantly black Baltimore (Britto). Iconic political zines such as *Girl Germs* by Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe reflect ideas of the local through connections to specific cultural music scenes, in this case the riot grrrl movement of the Pacific Northwest and bands such as Bratmobile (*Girl Germs*) or *Bikini Kill*, a collaborative zine made alongside the band of the same name. Students can read digitized versions in several archives, including online at [Dig DC](#) The People's Archive at DC Public Library as these zines are also considered part of the local collections documenting punk shows in Washington, DC. In each of these examples, zines "represent," in the colloquial sense. They "represent well" everything from cities and to music fandoms to identities to feminist critique. And they "represent" in the political sense of speaking up for places, people, cultures, and scenes that are under-represented or minimized, as Zhen put it.

Radical Repositories

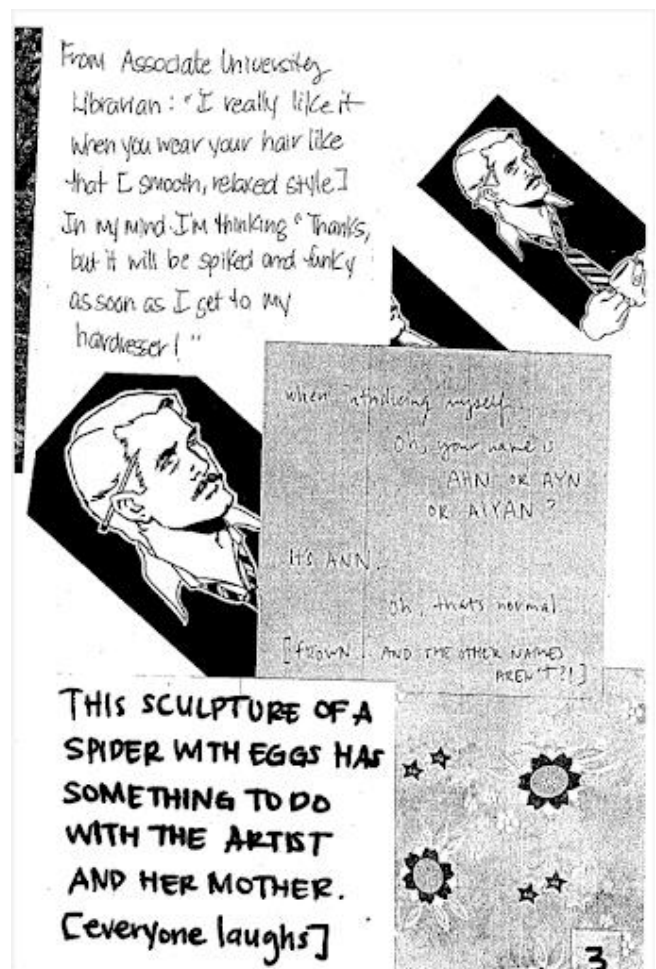
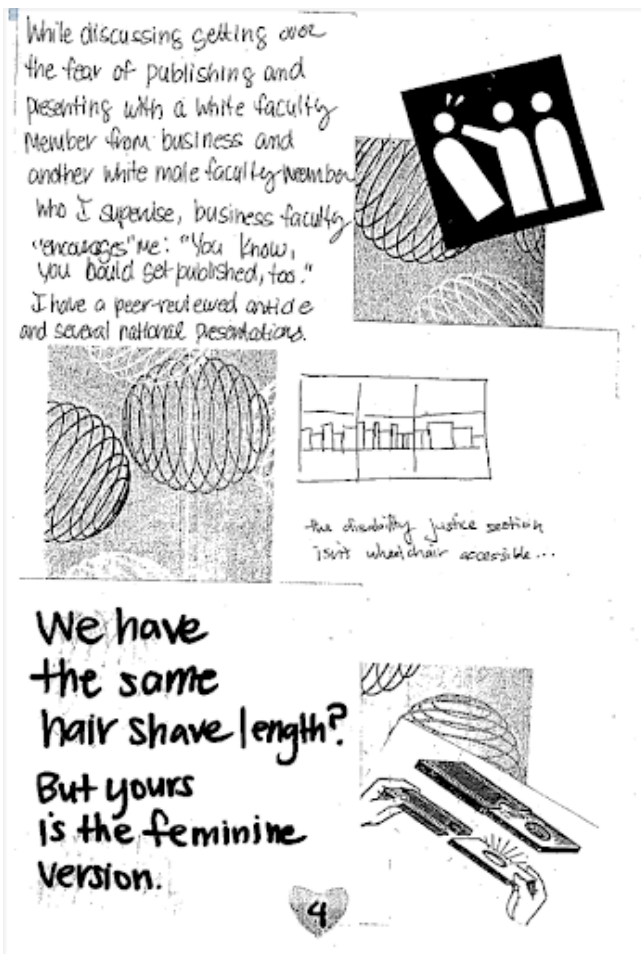
Zines are radical repositories—containers for the expression of fandoms, but also political affinities (for instance, bringing together those who have experienced sexual violence in resistance and healing), intersectional identities (a meeting place for queers of color), affective affinities (shared feelings for hometowns or diasporas), or shared modes of desire and sexual expression (connecting

same-gender loving, odd artefact collecting, or fetishistic sexual practices). Zines and zine communities are spaces for intersectional critiques of power left out of mainstream discourse, spaces for examining everything from ableism to heteropatriarchy to capitalism. Zines can be circulated for a variety of reasons, even becoming effective tools for political education, where shared experiences of injustice can be collectively accounted for and where the force of that documentation can be used as a tool for political change.

The Library Information Science or *LIS Microaggressions Zine* is an important accounting for microaggressions in the Library Information Sciences profession. By collecting sometimes anonymous and originally private instances of microaggressions, the zine was used to issue a call for a public accountability that included a "calling in," for dialogue and larger exploration of the subject of microaggressions." The creators explain the zine conveyed the "physical weight" of "collective microaggression experiences" and they extended their critical work through workshops that asked readers to engage in "active critical reflection and analysis" (Arroyo-Ramírez et al. 116-117; 122).

Beginning in Library Special Collections

I begin my courses by taking students in-person to visit [UCI's Special Collections & Archives](#) and the [Orange County & Southeast Asian Archive](#) (OC&SEAA) Center (except for remote teaching during COVID-19). In special collections, students are greeted by tables of zines, artists' books, political posters, social justice movement documents, and scrapbooks curated by the archivists. Depending on the course, students may see materials such as "This is an Emergency: A Reproductive Rights and gender justice portfolio" or three-dimensional assemblages that challenge the very idea of a "book," such as Mexican artist Yani Pecanin's *El tendadero* (2007)—a washboard covered in cloth mounted on a box with writing, buttons, pins, and sewing implements. Students are invited to look for intellectual content while also to engaging with the physicality of the objects and the relationship between materials, images, text, and context. I use theories of colonial and plantation archives to encourage students to examine not just the contents of archives, but consider the constitution of the archive itself, how desire and power informs its shape and chosen contents.



4. CYNTHIA MARI OROZCO & SIMONE FUJITA, EDs. *LIS MICROAGGRESSIONS ZINE*. MARCH/APRIL 2015, VOL. 1.1: 3-4.

Some of what students find is very local: There are collections related to political organizations and figures such as Christine Browning, a Senior Staff Psychologist for the Counseling Center at UCI and a founding advisory board member for the UC Irvine LGBTQ Resource Center; and Robert F. Gentry, the first openly gay elected official in southern California and first openly gay mayor in the state of California, who also served as Associate Dean of Students at UCI. Significantly, this collection of papers includes the hate mail he received, providing an opportunity to think about the importance of archiving something such as “hate mail.” Finally, students will discover zines made by former UCI students, which are now part of the collection. As Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez pointed out to students, UCI is not in a bubble—it is porous with the surrounding communities. She pushed me and the students to look more broadly at how we understand and define our community.

Students are invited to contextualize the objects and artefacts they examine by learning how to use finding aids and how to think critically about search terms as historical and contextual, using tools like [Homosaurus](#), an international linked database of vocabulary of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) terms that our subject librarian Melissa Beuoy introduced to us. (And they learn about the existence of subject librarians!)

I ask students before they leave special collections to take with them a “trace of the archives” in the form of an image taken on their phone or a quote they have written down from a primary source. Later, I ask them to



5. SCREENSHOTS OF INSTAGRAM POSTS BY HISTORIAN, BOOK DEALER, CURATOR, FOUNDED MEMBER OF THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY GERARD KOSKOVICH @GKOSKOVICH DEPICTING CROSS-DRESSING CIRCA 1900, EXAMPLES OF EPHEMERA USED BY STUDENTS FOR ZINE-MAKING. SEE WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/P/CLQUUTLBCYD/.



6. “BORN THIS WAY: PROUDLY TRANS, INTERSEX & 2-SPIRITI,” THE ARQUIVES DIGITAL EXHIBITIONS

incorporate this trace into their own zine. The idea is to have archival “ephemera” reappear materially in their own work, as a citation, an homage, a part of its DNA. This practice emphasizes research as a dialogic process and a process of producing genealogies of knowledge by weaving their primary sources into their own production. It is deeply tied to engaging with the “afterlives of archives” and ideas of how the past produces future possibilities. This practice of incorporation is a form of feminist citational practice as well. Examples of ephemera students have included are postcards or political buttons. See IMAGE 7 for how ephemera are incorporated in a student zine]. As they pull their materials and ideas together, I encourage students to approach zine-making as a form of critical curatorial practice.

Using Digital Zine Archives

Students can draw on and incorporate materials from online digital archives as well, including library special collections, individual zine sites, and community-based archives, many of which feature work by feminists, queer people, and trans people of color. This diversity is not an accidental fact or by pedagogical design; rather, it is a reflection of the fact that zines are especially meaningful for those individuals who do not find ourselves represented in the mainstream political or media landscape, or for those who find themselves written out of official histories or archives, or worse, who find only a toxic and distorted mirror there—where non-normative identities are routinely displayed as spectacle, as difference, as outsider, and therefore as less human.

Students can easily access the hand-drawn pages of zines through online projects such as the POC Zine Project, whose collections demonstrate how zines are important survival tools for marginalized, oppressed, or

disenfranchised communities and individuals or the [Barnard Zine Library](#) collection of zines on feminism and femme identity by people created by women, non-binary people, and people of all genders. They can also find them by visiting local independent bookstores, local libraries, or zine festivals. Zines become places for subversive interventions in the narratives of the dominant sphere or places for self-invention. Zines also tend to represent intersectional identities that are too often written out of mainstream media. For example, I have shown students a non-U.S. based zine which represented queer Islamic identity and experience. U.S. students found this a powerful example because they assumed that queerness and Islam do not intersect, especially in a way that celebrates those experiences. Significantly, when we reached out to the maker of this zine for this essay, they decided they did not want the zine reproduced or represented by name because they felt that the fact of online digital archiving had now produced new vulnerabilities for them that they perhaps had not anticipated or no longer felt comfortable with. This demonstrates how the personal and intimate engagements of zines are potent, but also raises important ethical questions for students to consider about vulnerabilities, power and access, especially as analog material is digitized.

Another example I give in class is to contrast zines' representations of disability with how ableism is perpetuated in mainstream popular culture. Students read [The Adventures of a Mis/identified Queer Crip](#), written by Ashley, a disability activist and self-identified queer Filipina with cerebral palsy. The title, which itself reclaims pejorative terms, is a powerful manifestation of practices of self-determination that DIY self-authorship can provide.

The author writes about a friend offering to help her set up her bedroom, so that she would be able to masturbate and experience sexuality from a space of self-love. She recounts that this was the first time that anyone had ever asked her about her sexual needs. "I've been like a saint, angelic," she explains. When such private revelations go public—even on a small scale—intimacy becomes a daring act of political resistance, in this case against the shame that a patriarchal and ableist society promotes when it desexualizes or idealizes people with disabilities. Her zine offers a powerful counterpoint to the hyper-idealized, super-heroic images of people with disabilities found, for example, in Toyota's Super Bowl ads featuring Paralympian Amy Purdy, which were widely [criticized by disability activists](#).

Feminist Critique and Zine Theory

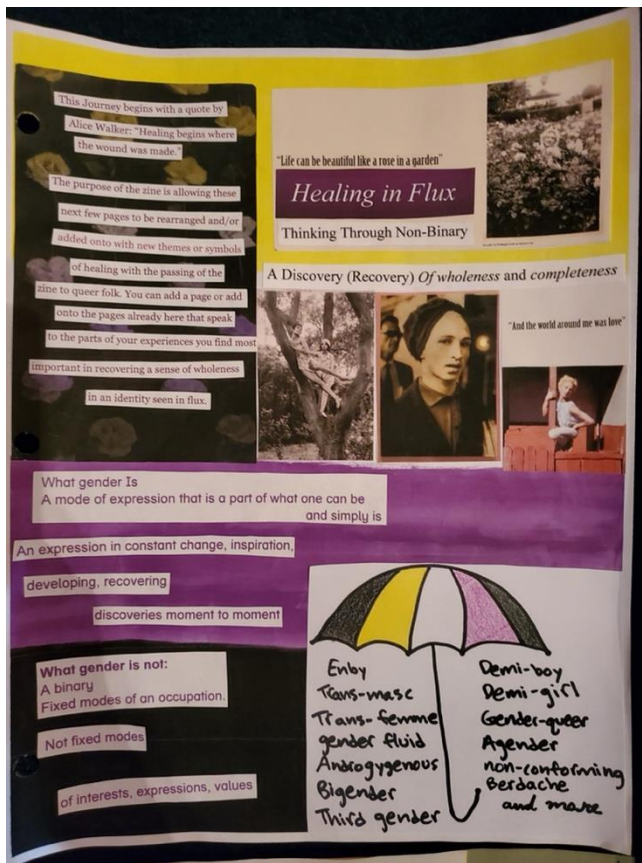
Scholar Mimi Nguyen, who has written key scholarly texts on feminism and zines from the perspective of a participant-observer, argues that zines have the potential to do important social political work through such excavations of experience as a social phenomenon. She explains, "Through the radical reinterpretation of individual experiences as social phenomena with histories and political consequences, and the subsequent rejection of these structural determinations, an individual might become a radical object of knowledge, a sovereign subject who tells the (albeit ever-changing) truth about herself in order to know herself and to be known by others" (175). The feminist

axiom "the personal is political" is reanimated by zine culture, which wrests gendered experience back from individual isolation, from shame, or from cooptation by consumer culture. Nguyen continues, "Tackling erotic knowledge and sexual abuse, compulsory heterosexuality and girl-girl intimacy, domestic abuse and domesticity, young women called attention to how such encounters, feelings, and memories that appear to be personal and self-referential, are also ideological and social" (177). This is feminist zine culture seen not only as a tool for self-expression (which is often the only thing they are assumed to be), but one in which self-expression and representation becomes social critique and social change.

Importantly, Nguyen extends her argument to turn that critical lens on the whiteness that powerfully structures underground scenes like Riot Grrrl even as they articulate themselves as counter-cultural. Nguyen's work is an important part of the required reading that I use when I teach about zines because it provides students a model of critical thinking that they can execute when making zines within a feminist or cultural studies course framework. Nguyen's work pushes them to move from personal expression towards structural critique and this becomes a significant part of the drafting process of the student made zines.

Conceptualizing Zines: *Healing In Flux*

This critical move from personal expression to structural critique is developed both rhetorically and conceptually—through a student's choices about format, genre, and the appearance of the zine. Zhená Morillo (they/them pronouns), a student in Queer Lives and Knowledges, wanted to convey the idea that individuals should be able to script their own gender. After brainstorming with me in office hours about their audience goals—who they wanted to speak to and why—they created a zine, *Healing in Flux* (2020) where the binding itself could be undone by the reader. Using a hole punch to create the binding (instead of the traditional folded zine) allowed the reader to add pages themselves, thus creating a space for the collective authorship of gender and what Zhená, returning as a guest speaker to address and skill-share with this Fall's class, described as "movement in the margins." Zhená describes choosing "to include movable margins and materials in my zine to express the experience of being able to be seen as whole, and yet capable of existing in constant change and inspiration—and making discoveries moment to moment that I wish for others to experience and explore." *Healing in Flux* incorporated images and words from primary sources such as *OUT!* magazine from the 1990s (sourced from the ProQuest [LGBT magazine archive](#)), images and writing by Kewpie, Daughter of District 6 (1942–2012) a South African drag performer, and zines like *Fierceness* (2011) from the [QZAP archive](#). Morillo reflects, "Each unique queer bit of memorabilia, ephemera, and material found in archives such as the Digital Transgender Archives and the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) allowed me to see the significance of cultivating a non-linear, relational, and unending process of what healing can mean to each transgender or non-binary identified person." Morillo explains how the zine leant itself

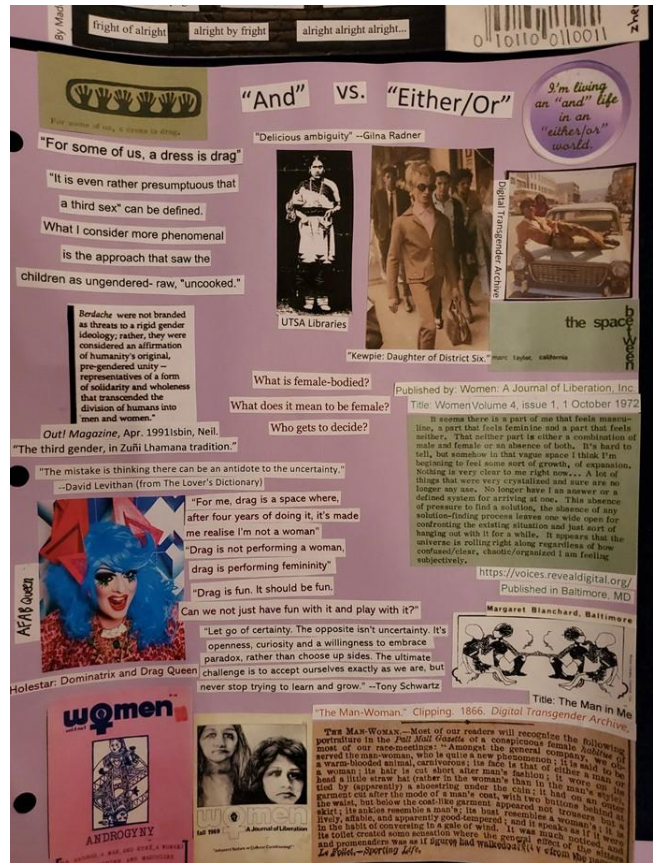


7. HEALING IN FLUX, ZHENA MORILLO, LOS ANGELES, 2020

to a healing modality through anachronistic experiences of time: "I chose the theme of healing to create a connection to the past where I could time travel and create a healing relationship with my own gender and sexuality by seeing different definitions, experiences, and voices of healing and identity." The next year, Morillo went on to an internship with UCI's Campus Assault Resources and Education office and spearheaded a collective to create a digital interactive zine that offers resources geared to trans and nonbinary people healing from sexual assault.

Cautionary Tales of Allyship and Other Rabbit Holes

When students desire to write or research as allies, zines offer an opportunity to teach a cautionary tale about the presumption of affinities, as Nguyen's critique shows. Nguyen created the celebrated *Evolution of a Race Riot* (1997) as an empowered and angry challenge to racism and white exclusionary practices in the riot grrrl scene. Her later scholarly work challenges the limits of experiential knowledge that comes from "a scene" that doesn't examine its own structures of power. About the riot grrrl scene, Nguyen asks, "But how then could experience yield revolutionary knowledge about race, where the dominant experience was whiteness?" (179) Nguyen's critique takes the feminist politics of "intimacy" to task as a "liberal fantasy" where emphasizes on "self-actualization" and "self-empowerment" presume a more compassionate collectivity but leave unexamined how "the demand for proximity and



intimacy is unequally distributed" (180). This insight is a particularly salient topic for the gender studies classroom, where students are challenged to think intersectionally about the category of gender. They learn to move beyond solutions to racism or heterosexism as an additive process or a process of simply demanding proximity and access or what the LISM project calls "sycophancy." Instead, students can hone their ally skills of listening, amplifying other voices, honoring the work of people of color, and keeping the focus on the subjects they are studying and engaging, using feminist ethical citational practices. Again, as the LISM project notes, "learning to be a true ally or partner is a multi-step, nonlinear process," which can take place through the multi-step, nonlinear, re-visioning zine-making process (125).

Love Letters in the "Past Tense Future"

Visits to special collections bookend my courses—and this essay—as the start and endpoint of student zine engagement. When I introduce my students each quarter to Special Collections to teach about primary and secondary sources, it is more importantly to teach about the value of archives as spaces where "Community is seen as permanently valuable," as Kelly Spring, one of the archivists, put it. By the end of the quarter, we circle back to special collections by inviting students to "become immortal" by donating their zines to the collection. One of the things that I love most is that zines themselves become rich interactive counterhegemonic microcosms. These pedagogical time capsules—collections of images, words,

and messages—challenge dominant discourses and preserve “ephemera,” those fleeting aspects of community and identities that are living “off the grid,” against the grain, or literally or metaphorically suppressed and distorted by dominant culture.



8. STUDENTS EXPLORING ARTISTS' BOOKS AT THE ORANGE COUNTY & SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHIVE (OC&SEAA), UC, IRVINE. PHOTO CREDIT: AUTHOR

Zines, students have learned, represent tools of survival, especially for minoritarian subjects. Zines are “world-making” spaces for building imagined futures and communities. José Esteban Muñoz writes of this power of queer possibility in his piece on “Ephemera as Evidence”: “Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility” (6).

Zines become the gathering spots, the watering hole, the underground railroad, the temporary autonomous zones [TAZ] where “innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments,” of queer knowledge production can be recouped or imagined. And zines materialize what Philip Brian Harper names the “evidence of felt intuition”—evidence produced by the accumulation of quotidian experiences of discrimination, evidence that the black subject is positioned to read from the position of a knowing subject aware of the ways that structural inequality, whiteness, and social violence

are writ as benign when viewed as isolated incidents. This queer of color literacy is a form of “knowing” that the dominant power group denies, suppresses, and dismisses as “over-reading,” or as a project of slights or victimization. It is a subjugated knowledge that the zine is positioned to recognize and reproduce in an increasingly alienated and commercially mediated world, one in which capitalism determines life chances, narrative forms, social relations, and what gets to count as knowledge.

Simply reading the titles of the UCI student zines over the years is like a found poem, a snapshot of what each cohort of students was experiencing and thinking and imagining. In 2015, it was the campus’s 50th anniversary and there were a lot of official acts of ‘remembering’—from oral histories to photo opportunities to celebrating UCI’s breaking ground in Orange County. The student zines, however, told a different story: *Femme Empowerment* (reproductive justice and birth control); *Fat Cat Gaming* (girls and gaming/ girls and STEM/ gamergate); *Feral Cats* (critique of slut shaming); *Life In Color* (racism and white privilege across three waves of feminism, notable created all in white); *Embrace* (sex positive/body education: menstruation; patient /doctor relationships); *UNDOCUQUEER* (undocuqueer movement / immigration).

In Spring of 2020, as we collectively experienced a global pandemic and “stay-at-home” orders that were concurrent with the uprising against anti-Black police violence, the found poem of zine titles went like this:

Queerantime and Asian America; Dragging Through Time; When Will it End; Sueños Seguros [a reference to Soñar Fantasmas #41 from Mexico in 1990s]; Trans and NonBinary Reproductive Justice and Politics; Hijras in Hindustan; Propaganda Magazine Cracked: A thoughtful



9. STUDENTS ZINES FROM GENDER & SEXUALITY STUDIES, UCI. PHOTO CREDIT: AUTHOR

exploration of queer expression in the *Propaganda Magazine* archives; and iRESISTE!

For student zinesters, "There is no room for shame in the revolution," to quote Cal State, Los Angeles Professor Molly Talcott. Through zines, students make their ideas material while ensuring them a future, often for those whom our society harbors the most genocidal and negating tendencies towards, from black transgender people, to queers, undocumented immigrants, children, and people with disabilities. These small do-it-yourself manifestos seemed to speak with loud, declarative voices: zines are sacred for being profane; zines are the mothers of the disappeared; zines are the "conscience of the art world"; zines declare Transgender Black Lives Matter. Zines are world-making tools. There is no room for shame in the revolution and the revolution will be photocopied!



10: ARCHIVE YOUR ZINE! FROM ZINEFEST 2019. PHOTO CREDIT: UCI COMMUNICATIONS

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