

Cut, tear, draw, compose, stick: Zine-making as a decolonial initiative

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Abstract

In this essay, a zine-making workshop facilitated by the collective Incidental Unit as part of the *CICC School* provides a point of departure for observations on the convivial space that emerges in the process of making and embodied creation with others, as well as on how non-linear narrative can be mobilised to articulate the complex navigations and fractures of queer migrant identity, and their wider political significance.

Keywords: Court for Intergenerational Climate Crimes; Incidental Unit; migrant identities; narrative; non-linear; queer identities; zine-making

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On the afternoon of 23 April 2025, a special workshop led by the art collective Incidental Unit took place at Ambika P3 at the University of Westminster. Centred around the *CICC: The British East India Company on Trial*, this zine-making workshop brought together participants from artistic, academic and activist backgrounds. Through the creation of DIY self-publications, participants collectively explored key issues such as intergenerational environmental crimes, social injustice and contemporary decolonial practices.

Conceptually, the workshop was shaped by Incidental Unit's long-term engagement with John Latham's notion of 'incidentalality'. This idea emphasises entering unfamiliar institutional systems, rejecting fixed ideologies and engaging with the 'unknown' as a mode of critical observation and practice. Incidental Unit encourages participants to approach institutions without predetermined positions, to disrupt, reframe and recompose the functioning of structures such as education, law and administration.

The zine, as a self-published, anti-mainstream format originating in the 1980s, was here reactivated as a politically expressive medium. During the workshop, participants used collage, cutting, drawing and writing to assemble paper-based works that expressed their entangled experiences of nature, race, gender and institutional power. In this zine-making session, the zine became not only a tool for creation but also a platform for collective dialogue.

As a DIY and embodied creative method, zine-making enabled participants to generate knowledge through the act of doing, not only through verbal or logical reasoning. The hands-on process of cutting, pasting and touching materials evoked memories and emotional resonances such as rage, grief, hope and tension. These affects were not mere by-products of knowledge, but knowledge in themselves. The workshop thus provided a space where reflection and making intersected, extending Incidental Unit's experimental exploration of incidentality and institutional intervention and sparking deeper discussion on how decolonial strategies might be enacted today.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in making and exchanging ideas through their zines, sitting together around a table where the shared act of cutting, pasting and assembling pages opened up new forms of socialising. Conversations unfolded alongside the creative process, with participants exchanging stories, techniques and fragments of personal experience, so that the practice of making together itself became a mode of connection. This temporary yet intense affective community, emerging from both dialogue and embodied acts of creation, wove together multiplicity across different backgrounds, identities and lived experiences.

At the end of the event, all zines were displayed on a central platform, where participants explained their themes and intentions. Topics ranged from colonial legacy and unjust wars to ethnic minority identities, ecological crisis and the systemic traumas that extend from the personal to the global. The session also opened up space to imagine alternative institutional possibilities beyond dominant paradigms.











Figures 1–6: People sharing their zines. Image credit: Geyujing Shen.

As part of this workshop, I created a zine as my personal response and mode of expression. Grounded in the perspective of queer ecology, my zine seeks to challenge linear narratives and normative orders. Drawing on my lived experience as a queer migrant, the zine articulates my constant navigation between identity, belonging, language and institutional structures. These personal fractures extend toward broader concerns such as social justice, visibility of marginalised communities, human-nature relations and the continuity of systemic oppression.

I also tried to incorporate interactions with non-human species and to explore posthuman and decentred-human perspectives, reflecting on ecological justice and the possibilities of interspecies coexistence. The zine-making process itself was one of messiness: I had to engage with scattered text, layered codes and visually tense arrangements of images and meanings. This messiness mirrored the positionality I occupy – fragmented, unsettled, in-between.

Through cutting, writing and recomposing, I was not aiming to ‘clarify’ everything, but rather to dwell in the disorder referred to above, to enter into a dialogue with it. For me, this became a practice of resisting colonial modes of narrative, which disrupts their claims to unity, ontological stability, linear history and legitimate knowledge.

About the author

Geyujing Shen (she/they) is a PhD researcher and visual practitioner at the University of Westminster. Their work spans queer studies, migration studies, resistance studies, and decolonial pedagogy. They are particularly interested in participatory visual methods and embedding these within a queer feminist standpoint to challenge and critically interrogate processes of knowledge production.