

**Cara Ow**

**I wanted to submit this particular project for the prize as I intended to show how students have the creative liberty to produce completely whacky submissions here at UEA, based on the seemingly dry reading and theory we discuss in class. My teacher, Sandy Pool, has been so supportive of all of my most experimental work--from unintelligible cut up bits of poetry to zines containing pictures of flaccid dicks, I feel that her encouragement and guidance has allowed me to produce such a daring piece of work. This zine is reflective of the culture of the uni where students, supported by their teachers, work together to push the boundaries of what literature and creative writing can be.**

- 1. Did you feel you took a risk when you submitted your shortlisted assessment? Did you feel any reservations or doubt when you submitted this assessment/were you scared to submit? Why not pick something more conventional?**

For someone who has never dove into the details of my childhood abuse, I felt like I was taking a massive risk in submitting my project. In revisiting these traumatic memories, I was opening myself up to the additional risk of being retriggered. For days after submitting my project, I was plagued with so much doubt: was it too expository? Would it be seen as unprofessional? Most importantly, would I get backlash for it?

Eventually however, I realised that doing something more conventional would not suffice. The issue of gender-based violence means so much to me because I have lived (and continue to live) through it. Writing a cold, detached essay will never flesh out its immediacy, the shock of it. To create honest conversation, to enact change, I had to be honest myself in my work.

- 2. What was it about the module you took that inspired you to create an unusual piece? Do you have anything to say to future LDC students on these modules?**

New Narrative as a movement was founded upon risk, the act of “naming names, becoming naked...[becoming] social practice that is lived”, as Robert Glück writes in *Long Note on New Narrative*. I felt that, in order for real change to happen, I myself as a sexual assault survivor needed to take a risk to be “exposed and vulnerable...[since] if the writer’s life is more open to judgement and speculation, so is the reader’s.”

To future LDC studentes: literature has the capacity for social reformation. Just like in the #MeToo movement, by daring to place yourself either “out there” or

within the urgency of New Narrative, an opportunity for collective reflection gets created. As we dare to confront our traumas, movements can be mobilised and transformations can happen. My New Narrative class doubled as a support system for me as my teacher and peers explored societal structures through the lens of trauma narratives, be they our own or New Narrative writers'.

### **3. Why did you feel the form of the zine was the best way to convey your idea?**

I felt the limited print run of a zine allowed for a more personalised publication to be developed. The translucent inserts not only frustrated what might have been a brutally linear progression of my narrative, the way they literally jumped out from the zine recreated the shocking, unexpected parts of trauma recovery. Filled with real texts and drawings that I used to communicate during panic attacks or episodes of paralysis stemming from my PTSD, the personal nature of this zine resisted the commercialisation of trauma recovery as it might have been in a conventional essay or a mass-produced magazine.

The small circulation format of a zine also granted me more control in who I chose to share my personal story with. An act borne out of trust, I was able to form strong zine support networks—an idea explored by Kristen Schilt in *Girls and Zine Making as a Form of Resistance*. Historically, zines and zine culture have been an expression of feminine agency; quintessential New Narrative works like Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* were originally published as zines. For a project about resisting gender-based violence, I felt the zine was the best way to convey this idea.

### **4. What do you think your innovative piece has taught you about university work/academia/creative summatives? Do you feel your risk has paid off? (Both in terms of the mark it got, and in terms of your own creative practice?)**

My project taught me how universities really are the hub of knowledge. Students do not merely come here to learn from those who came before, we come to take this knowledge one step further, to push the boundaries of literature by putting university work in the context of our (often politicised) lives.

As a queer, Southeast Asian sexual assault survivor, the risk paid off as this project allowed me to open up conversation around gender-based violence in my largely conservative circles. I was able to finally speak about issues that are important to me through the context of getting a first in my academic work. For conservative communities that can only create conversation around grades, it was important to me that I could broaden the conversation to become so much more, with the support of my teacher, Sandy Pool, and the encouraging environment of LDC.