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## **THE PERSONAL BECOMES POLITICAL & THE VERY PERSONAL BECOMES ART: ANA CHA ART COLLECTIVE & COUNTER-DISCURSIVE FEMINIST PRAXIS (U.S.)**

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« The Whitney Museum became the focus of our attention. We went there often to deposit eggs. Unsuspecting male curatorial staff would pick up the eggs and experience the shock of having raw egg slide down the pants of their fine tailor-made suits. Sanitary napkins followed... Generally, everywhere the staff went they found loud and clear messages that women artists were on the Whitney's case » -- Faith Ringgold (2005).

« Flare-ups [of misogynist backlash] are hardly random; They have always been triggered by the perception -- accurate or not -- that women are making great strides » -- Susan Faludi (1991).

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<sup>1</sup> Hankyeol Song is a filmmaker and scholar in residence of Ana-Cha Artist Residency in Chicago, IL. She co-founded the Ana-Cha Artist Collective in Iowa in 2017 and now works to expand the collective across national and international borders. Her film and art work mainly address themes of race, gender and power. Song's mission stresses creative practice intersecting with political activism and collective action. Song's most recent Project was a documentary activist film on the U.S. campus rape crisis, and she is currently working on an experimental biomythography film on displacement, loss, and identity. Her research interests include popular media, film history and aesthetics, queer theory, and feminist theory. Song earned her B.A. in Media and Cultural Praxis at Grinnell College.

The Women's Liberation Movement of the '60s emerged during a time when downward redistributive social movements actively threatened the stability of the dominant capitalist order. Second-wave feminists collectively engaged in political intervention in the nuclear family, media, political office, and academia, among many more public and private spheres of society. The Art establishment was not exempt from these interventions, and like other counter-cultural movements of its time, the Feminist Art Movement's utilization of mass protest brought it to public attention in the United States<sup>2</sup>. Across the nation, artists formed protest groups to directly critique museums for the lack of women artists' and artists of color's work in cultural spaces<sup>3</sup>. Many feminist collective projects came from these public protests and artists, scholars, and activists joined together to carve out spaces, albeit marginalized, for an explicitly political art practice<sup>4</sup>. In the following years, there was an eruption of feminist collectives, galleries, academic programs, archival projects, and other various forms of counter-discursive art practice. As feminist thought became more salient, its politics were transformed with works by black, working-class, international, and lesbian feminists. These feminists politically interrogated women's experience in terms of collective struggle without the individualist bourgeois tendencies found in early Western feminist thought. However, with the growing threat of feminist politics came the misogynistic backlash that strikes to punish 'bad' women who destabilize existing gendered hierarchies. In 1985, the death of Ana Mendieta brings the Feminist Art Movement to head against the violent realities of patriarchal oppression.

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<sup>2</sup> Feminism in art has a teleology that does not have a specific time frame. In this paper, the term 'Feminist Art Movement' refers to feminist intervention in the Western Art and Art History world that gained traction in the U.S. from the late 1960s and trickles into the contemporary.

<sup>3</sup> The groups formed to protest the 1970 Whitney Annual included: Women Artists in Revolution (WAR), Women Students and Artists for Black Artists' Liberation (WSABAL), and the Ad Hoc Women's Art Committee. Their tactics included printing and distributing fake Whitney press releases that claimed on behalf of the museum, full support for 50% representation of women's work and 50% representation of artists of color's work at the museum. Other actions included digital projection of women's work on the outside of the museum during the opening and discrete placement of raw eggs in the galleries. Faith Ringgold of WSABAL painted her eggs black with "50%" painted on them in red lettering, specifically addressing the lack of black women's work in the gallery. Many of these groups formed not only in dissent against the museums, but with dissatisfaction of the male-centered leftist cultural movements happening at the time. For instance, the Ad Hoc Women's Committee was formed by women artists who were concerned with the lack of feminist issues represented in the Art Worker's Coalition. For press coverage of the protest in *The New York Times*, see Glueck (1970).

<sup>4</sup> For example, the picketing of the 1971 Corcoran Gallery of Art Biennial in Washington D.C. was organized at artist Mary Beth Edelson's home. At this meeting, a conference steering committee was formed for the Conference for Women in the Visual Arts at the Corcoran. This conference held in 1972 led to the founding of the East-West Bag (E-WB) network of artists. The E-WB held weekly consciousness-raising meetings for two years and created a national registry of women's art and résumés. This network gave women artists access to other women's work and this led to the formation of the Artists in Residence, Inc (A.I.R.) Gallery, with founding members including Howardena Pindell and Ana Mendieta. The A.I.R. Gallery was the first all-women artists' co-operative gallery in the United States (Bickley-Green 2014).



Figure 1 (Left): *Untitled (Self-Portrait With Blood)* (1973). Figure 2 (Right): *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt Building)* (1973). Images copyright by the Estate of Ana Mendieta, courtesy of Galerie Lelong.

Ana Mendieta was a Cuban-American artist fundamental to the Feminist and Chicana art movements. Her death was harshly emblematic of the limits of feminist intervention faced with direct assaults from enforcers of patriarchal authority. The events surrounding Mendieta's death were a clear indication of how and where political divisions had formed throughout the years of the feminist movement. At 36-years of age, Mendieta was in the thick of creating a successful oeuvre that explored key feminist ideas, such as the body and violence. The subject-matter of her work rings painfully too close to her death: During a fight with her husband and established minimalist painter, Carl Andre, Ana fell to her death from her 34<sup>th</sup>-floor apartment window. Mendieta was at a point of ascendance in her art career, while demand (and prices) for Andre's work were falling. Her work marked a movement out of minimalism into a more expressive, site-specific and feminist practice. According to interviews of the couple's friends, they were prone to drunken fights over this tension<sup>5</sup>. Despite contradictory evidence in the defense, namely Andre's inability to remember what had happened immediately before her fall, and scratch marks on his face and arms, Andre was acquitted from murder charges. The defense cited Mendieta's artwork as evidence of mental instability and presented the argument that Mendieta had committed suicide. The scenario serves like a modern-day witch trial, in its hystericization and silencing of those who challenge patriarchal dominance, while excessive sympathy is given to

<sup>5</sup> « Often, when drink had been taken, she would taunt him about this, once saying, 'You know, Carl, minimalism is over... you already did your thing.' He would respond in kind. » (O'Hagan 2013).

perpetrators of violence in positions of control<sup>6</sup>. B. Ruby Rich points out how Mendieta's death reflected the division of an art world between people with and without power: « Even the Guerrilla Girls were divided, and they never did a poster. Because a number of the Guerilla Girls dated back to the 1960s New York art world and had alliances with Carl Andre » (Bale, 2011). Many feminists in the art world erupted in protest, but because of Carl Andre's deep ties in the establishment, it was dismal compared to the feminist protests in the '60s. Mendieta's murder tragically revealed how resentment against feminism drew the political and personal dangerously close.

The silencing of dissident women coincided with the suppression of radical feminist politics and theory. Feminism was made unpopular and a different form of 'equality' was forged, a feminism defanged into individualist terms. However, despite the ongoing threat against feminist politics, collective feminist cultural movements and counter-histories continue to be created and bring up traces of collective feminist art practice into the contemporary<sup>7</sup>. Traces of feminism are evidence of the possibilities in creating counter-discursive narratives and spaces, something that is particularly critical during the most precarious times for feminism. This legacy includes the foundation of the contemporary feminist art collective, Ana Cha. The collective was formed in 2017 at Grinnell College, a private liberal arts college in the Midwest. After watching Lynn Hershman Leeson's *!Women Art Revolution* (2010) as a part of an introductory film studies class, student artists were concerned with the lack of feminist art praxis in the university. Dr. Theresa Geller, the feminist film professor teaching the course, was also advising my undergraduate thesis on media and cultural praxis and proposed that I help establish and lead the feminist art collective. Together, we formed a coalition of artists, scholars, and filmmakers dedicated to exploring the intersections of radical feminist politics and creative practice.

Ana Cha's 'Ana' is named in memory of Ana Mendieta, and the latter 'Cha' commemorates Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, another non-Western artist murdered in an act of femicide. Cha worked with video, performance, and text to explore themes of language, gender, and nationality in ways that resist identity-based logic. She was slain shortly after completing one of her most successful works, *Dictée*<sup>8</sup>. Cha was murdered in a horrifying act of sexual violence, raped and strangled by a security guard (Wallach, 2003). While the Feminist Art

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<sup>6</sup> Kate Manne coins the term 'himpathy' to describe the excessive amount of sympathy towards relatively privileged male perpetrators of sexual violence. Contemporary examples include Brock Turner and Donald Trump. See page 196-205 (Manne, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Riot Grrl in the punk music scene in the '90s, and feminist counter-history in the more recent release of Lynn Hershman Leeson's *!Women Art Revolution* (2010).

<sup>8</sup> *Dictée* (1982) challenged extant narratives of meaning formation through its polyphonic and non-linear structure. The text is written in multiple languages (English, Korean, French, *hanja*, etc.), along with images of original artwork, and images from other texts. Cha's texts fragment and break down the structure of language to reveal the ontological instability of language. *Dictée* draws connections between the hierarchical structures of signifiers and structures of nationhood and gender, to trouble how cultural systems of meaning transform individuals into what Lisa Lowe identifies as the « female/colonized/postcolonial/ethnic 'subject' » (Lisa Lowe 1996: 135).

Movement made an immense impact in the art world, tragedies like these reveal the limits of counter-cultural movements in the face of daily structural violence. By paying tribute to Mendieta and Cha's name and legacy, the collective staked its place at the limits of feminism in order to foreground the desperate urgency for the continuation of radical feminist practices.



*Figure 3: Audience member reads about Ana Mendieta and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha in an informative installation at a 2017 public showcase of Ana Cha's creative and political work.*

Ana Cha was created in the throes of the new global neoliberal empire and amidst an ongoing political backlash against feminism. The rise of neoliberalism meant that revolutionary ideas were reformed to individualize class struggle. Neoliberalism disregards the effect of racism, sexism, and other forms of cultural hierarchies, although the existence of capitalism depends upon organizing political life in terms of these exact hierarchies. The channels through which power flows are obscured and is sutured over with individualized identity politics that reproduces the neoliberal ideology of upward mobility. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, neoliberalism takes the form of a made-over 'multicultural' and 'equality' politics, « a stripped-down, non-redistributive form of 'equality' designed for global consumption » (Duggan 2003: xii). The repackaging of revolutionary ideas makes it easier for neoliberal institutions to hide its oppressive policies and practices. In 2019, New York's Museum of Modern Art announced that while it will be closed for four months of renovation, it will take the time to reorganize its collection to represent more women and people of color (Cafolla, 2019). MoMA bought the



neighboring Folk Art building for \$32.1 million, as the American Folk Art Museum could no longer afford the space due to financial debt. On the other hand, MoMA received \$400 million in gifts for renovations from the liberal elite, nicely packaged by its ‘inclusion’ message that serves to disguise any class anxiety underscoring the development project. This type of marketing crafts the museum’s increased inclusion as a sign of its dedication to the liberation of marginalized artists, while hiding its own role in maintaining the systems of hierarchization that depend upon exclusionary practices.

Art institutions will often cite the Feminist Art Movement to demonstrate how their politics have seemingly progressed since the ’60s. After all, the 2010 Whitney Biennial had not just equal, but more women than male artists<sup>9</sup>. This framework collapses radical feminist intervention into a simplified mission of inclusion, eliding the multifaceted approach that the Feminist Art Movement took in its task of eroding patriarchal art practices. Simply increasing marginalized artists’ inclusion within the establishment cannot be the answer to the liberation of the oppressed. In fact, ‘inclusion’ absorbs a faction of the working class and ameliorates the tension that brews the coalitional conditions necessary for class revolt. This strategy expands the stipulations of inclusion and upholds a fantasy of upward mobility without dismantling the exact capitalist structures that produce precarity in the lives of the marginalized<sup>10</sup>. It crafts an impossible fantasy of ‘equality’ within the existing status quo<sup>11</sup>. In order to maintain this fantasy, individual ‘stars’ who have succeeded in entering the exclusionary establishment may be put forth as signs of this fantasy realized.

While protest, collectives, and consciousness-raising were key to the victories of the Feminist Art Movement, these groups and projects are often reduced to singular names. Doing so erases the history of the multiplicity of artists that were involved in the formation and practices of the movement. The discourse on Judy Chicago is an instance of the replacement of collective histories with a ‘feminist superstar’<sup>12</sup>. Chicago founded the Feminist Art Program at Fresno State and with her fifteen students, including Faith Wilding and Suzanne Lacy, held consciousness-raising and created collaborative work. The program was continued by artists like Miriam Shapiro at the California Institute of Art and led to programs like Womanhouse with teachers including Arlene Raven and Sheila de Bretteville. Auteur-driven scholarship of the Feminist Art Program fails to recognize, or perhaps purposefully omits, the collective aspect of the project, an

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<sup>9</sup> Twenty-nine women and twenty-six men (Cafolla, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Cases like Margaret Thatcher’s political reign in the U.K. prove that women-led empires don’t necessarily equate to better material conditions for women, and on the contrary, can be even more restrictive.

<sup>11</sup> Lauren Berlant’s term, ‘cruel optimism,’ can help analyze this fantasy. ‘Cruel optimism’ describes « the affective attachment to what we call the ‘good life,’ which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subject who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it » (Berlant 2011: 27).

<sup>12</sup> For more about ‘stars’ in feminism, see chapter 10 of Whelehan (1995).

approach that included various tactics and diverse voices<sup>13</sup>. In fact, Judy Chicago would not have been able to start the Feminist Art Program without her roots in feminist protest. Chicago was a part of the Ad Hoc Los Angeles Council of Women Artists who protested the LA County Museum of Art in 1971. Her roots in collective politics are made more clear in an interview for Leeson's *!WAR*: Chicago credits her own renaming from her given name, 'Judith Sylvia Cohen' to 'Judy Chicago,' as being inspired by and in tribute to the Black Power Movement's practice of denouncing given names in favor of politicized names (i.e., Malcolm X). This citation and recognition of other social movements of the time draws attention to the revolutionary spirit of collectivity that inspired the politics of feminist artists like Judy Chicago. Erasing this influence defangs the movement's political legacy of radically threatening collectivity. Instead, the focus on the institutional success of the individual woman artist is strategically placed as an illusory sign of the end of gendered oppression. This undermines the effectiveness of protest, collectivity, and consciousness-raising in the attempt to transform material realities and dismantle systems of oppression. And most dangerously, it engineers a warped representation of the historical present as one that has achieved 'equality,' and by doing so removes the urgency to dissolve existing power structures.

Feminists have insisted on a concerted response in tackling patriarchal regimes precisely because individual resistance alone cannot eradicate the structures of violence that uphold the paternal order. Instead of striving for acceptance into existing structures of power, feminists must create spaces outside of the hegemonic cultural realm to interrogate why these establishments have a controlling hold on the means of production. By creating collectives as a space for consciousness-raising (c-r), feminist artists deconstructed cultural production and politicized experience<sup>14</sup>. Incorporating c-r with art practice moved away from medium-based and auteur-oriented models of discussing and creating art. It stressed a more collective and political analysis of creative practice. C-r proved to be a particularly effective mode of revealing power relations. This practice allowed inquiry of social conditions in which experience is materialized and

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<sup>13</sup> The multiplicity and diversity of the Feminist Art Movement is apparent when observing the countless number of feminist collectives founded at the time. Among those not already mentioned are: the 'Where We At' Black Women Artists collective, the first group to organize a public show of professional black women artists, who put together exhibitions, seminars, workshops, panel discussions, youth apprenticeships, and prison workshops (Brown 2011); the Heresies Collective, publishers of the journal, *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, dedicated to increasing discourse around the ideas of feminism, politics, and their relationship to art (Wilson 2010); the Lesbian Art Project, a participatory art movement at the Women's Building of LA; among many more. See documentation of the Lesbian Art Project archived at the Smithsonian (1978-9) through the Woman's Building Records (1978-9): <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/lesbian-art-project-program-sapphic-education-12135>.

<sup>14</sup> Consciousness-raising was widely used amongst feminist collectives. For example, both Faith Wilding and Suzanne Lacy had previous experience in initiating feminist consciousness-raising groups at Fresno State. They carried these influences into the Fresno Feminist Art Program's weekly meetings where artists gathered to collaborate and discuss art practice: « As each woman spoke it became apparent that what had seemed to be purely 'personal' experiences were actually shared by all the other women; we were discovering a common oppression based on our gender, which was defining our roles and [sense of] identity as women » – Faith Wilding (Meyer, 2009).

constructed. Teresa de Lauretis redefines ‘experience’ as: “[the] process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in, oneself) those relations – material, economic, and interpersonal – which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical”<sup>15</sup> (de Lauretis, 1984). This reconceptualization allows critical examination of the workings of ideology behind subjectivity. C-r as a practice of ideological analysis demonstrated that alternative forms of meaning-making outside of existing discursive regimes was not only possible but critical in liberating the oppressed. Through c-r meetings, feminist artists and scholars interrogated the terms of which art and meaning are constructed and reconstructed. By engaging feminist counter-discourse outside of the existing structures, artists could critique the terms of how power was organized in the art world. It is only by destabilizing these very structures that we can dissolve the organization of power that these apparatuses naturalize. If a movement is to be completely successful in dismantling the tools of oppression, our criticism must be fashioned outside the discursive and physical space of these establishments.

Contemporary feminists can use the Feminist Art Movement’s practice of creating feminist spaces as a model for effective political art practice. In doing so, we can demystify the means of production of art, and consequently, the ideologies that shape the ways in which we see and experience our historical present. In the task of resisting the individualism prevalent in the contemporary political environment, collectivity and consciousness-raising are crucial tools for understanding the personal in terms of the ideological and political. This involves tracing the genealogy of the terms of subjectivity to reveal how historical conditions shape the economy of signs that regulate identity production. While neoliberalism tries to hide these hierarchies, the practice of c-r can reveal the conditions that are critical to understanding how the marginalized are placed at the brunt of social orders in order to replicate material conditions of domination<sup>16</sup>.

Identity politics collapses complex histories into essentialist analyses that reproduce neoliberal frameworks of the individual. Ideologies like gender, race, and sexuality all have specific historical processes of classification that form the basis of the reproduction of hierarchized orders. Based on how subjects are classified, domination takes on different forms

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<sup>15</sup> For further reading on feminist reconceptualization of experience, see Scott (1991).

<sup>16</sup> Silvia Federici’s project is an example of historical feminist intervention into identity and sexual difference. Federici describes ‘Woman’ as « a particular form of exploitation and therefore, a unique perspective from which to reconsider the history of capitalist relations » (Federici, 2004). Federici outlines the sexual differentiation of women in Western capitalist societies and its aid in the exploitation of reproductive and domestic labor. This reframing of gender as a historically-specific ideology takes the body and sexual differentiation into account without resorting to biological essentialism. ‘Woman’ is a classification based on sexual differentiation to better oppress and exploit a group of people delineated by sexual differentiation.



and tactics<sup>17</sup>. These identifications serve the ruling class that depends upon dividing and pitting groups against each other for an easily compartmentalized and lateral form of neutralizing the collective threat of the working class. The specific material realities of being identified as Other aren't inherently ontological, they are socio-historical. If we conflate these two, we run the danger of discounting the ideological maneuverings of how we come to understand the social order. Instead, we must engage in a political practice that accounts for the particular ways in which we are identified in the world and furthermore, identifies the ideological conditions that negotiate these points of identification. For feminists, this includes understanding that Western epistemology has privileged the phallus as center, constructing a hierarchical symbolic structure of sexual difference upon which the unconscious foundations of identity are formed. These fantasy structures of identity make it easier to reproduce hierarchies that permeate social organization. By engaging with a critical analysis of subjectivity, c-r can help connect specific forms of oppression to identify a common enemy. Ana Cha encouraged critical reflection into the ideological workings behind the ways in which we attach affect to historically specific identifications. The collective was made up of various intersections of otherized subjectivities and bodies. By interrogating the terms of which these identifications are formed, we could deconstruct oppressive forms of meaning-making and build a counter-discursive political language equipped with tools of resistance against hegemonic organization of power. In our weekly c-r meetings, Ana Cha interacted with texts that helped re-contextualize the strife faced in our everyday lives in terms of a history that we could examine and critique – i.e., colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, etc<sup>18</sup>. It was not enough to stop at the critique of the phallogocentric and Eurocentric images we were surrounded by. Moreover, it was crucial to become subjects who produce a counter-culture informed by a critical pedagogy of the epistemology of aesthetics. As we gained counter-discursive vocabulary to identify oppressive structures surrounding us, we could directly come to critique and dismantle these structures through our critical creative production.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, sexual terrorism is used as a method of control for women, lynching (which also took forms of sexual terrorism – i.e., castration) during Jim Crow, and a more contemporary lynching in the form of police execution of black and brown bodies.

<sup>18</sup> Some of the texts we read for discussion included: Valerie Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto*, Audre Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Coco Fusco's "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," and John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, among many more. Ana Cha also researched various creative and political collectives committed to dismantling these structures of power. Such groups included: WAR, the Black Panther Party, and the Sankofa Film and Video Collective. Learning about these movements reminded us that it is possible to create spaces that maintain dissenting voices, and that it was imperative to continue doing so in our historical present. We examined archives and counter-historical narratives that gave us ideas for political strategies modeling after the successful tactics used in these groups. To see a more composite list of texts and groups studied by the Ana Cha Collective, see: <https://anachacollective.wixsite.com/anacha/syllabus>.



*Figure 4: Opening reception of Ana Cha showcase at Smith Gallery, Grinnell, IA. The group showcased feminist performance, video, installation, essays, painting, protest, and more in this group exhibition. Themes in the show included identity/identification, loss, intimacy, sexuality, institutional violence, and sexual violence. It was necessary to share our ideas and works, as we aimed to push repressed subjectivities and politics into the public sphere. These projects are documented on the Ana Cha website: <https://anachacollective.wixsite.com/anacha>.*

It is particularly critical to engage and maintain counter-discursive practices at the university, a site where meanings are produced, reproduced, and contested. As a part of neoliberalism's 'culture war,' public institutions were corporatized, and higher education became regulated to serve private business interests (Duggan, 2003). This came with the purging of feminist theory, critical film studies, critical race theory, cultural studies, or any field that came under the umbrella term 'theory' (Rodowick, 2015). These fields were responsible for producing subjects equipped with a sense of critical citizenship, something that posed a direct threat on neoliberal political interests. Critics in academia claimed that 'political correctness' was overrunning the 'democratic' environment of the university, and accused these fields of censorship, in a twisted means of silencing these critical fields<sup>19</sup>. However, the threat of censorship wasn't against established academic fields but against critical programs such as women's studies. Feminist professorships were and continue to be uncommon amongst U.S. campuses. This lack is a

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) particularly fixates on feminism as what he understands to be a tyrannical threat against existing (patriarchal) terms of academia.

symptom of the backlash within academia that curbs any sort of threat to patriarchal authority, even before feminists have succeeded in fully eroding these gendered power structures. Grinnell College, the site of Ana Cha's formation, did not have any tenured Gender, Women, and Sexuality studies professors. At time of writing, the college continues to fail in providing a viable film or cultural studies program, a Latin American Studies, or an African Studies program. The institution's largest academic financial investment is undeniably in the sciences, a field that is largely male-dominated. On the other hand, cultural and identity-based disciplines such as those just listed are severely underfunded, if funded at all. Yet, Grinnell College's mission statement boasts social justice and inclusivity, even while it stands at the center of a nation-wide campus rape crisis that ceaselessly threatens the survivor's place within the school and in the public sphere<sup>20</sup>.



Figure 5: The collective organized many collaborative projects, including the formulation of 'the coprophages,' an anonymous group that created and distributed feminist zines exposing the neoliberal politics of the college. The zine tackled various issues, such as the college rape crisis, divestment from fossil fuels, and the profit-driven policies of the college administration. Left, front cover from issue 1 of the coprophages' publication of « Burn Book ». Center, excerpt. Right, back cover.

<sup>20</sup> See Kingkade (2015) *Huffington Post* article, « Why Even Small, Progressive Grinnell College Has Trouble Dealing With Sexual Assault ».

As a part of new student orientation at Grinnell College, administrators plan a session on sexual health and Title IX<sup>21</sup>. Administrators and members of the college community begin the session with a claim that the institution values ‘sex positivity’. This celebration of sex is strangely followed by a legally mandated talk on Title IX policy and the process of reporting sexual violence. This stark jump from ‘sex positivity’ to sexual violence indicates a premature celebration of sex before the successful dismantling of the phallogocentric terms that can govern sexuality. Feminist and queer theorists have re-contextualized sexuality in historical and political terms, and the ideology of ‘sex positivity’ collapses a complex genealogy into an essentialized positive phenomena that is somehow removed from the reach of violent hierarchies. The campus rape crisis was imminent with its disturbingly high rates of sexual violence against women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities<sup>22</sup>. But what was equally if not far more horrifying was the institutional violence that stemmed from a neoliberal profit incentive, which helped perpetuate an environment that allowed sexual violence not only to take place but to go unpunished. Student survivors of sexual violence were silenced and even forced to drop out of school, while their assailants were present on campus, well-protected by the administration. Despite the immense amount of cases in which universities broke Title IX laws and guidelines, survivors were made reluctant to take on legal battles against universities that had the capacity to change the course of their academic and professional lives (Murphy, 2013). Starting in 2011, the U.S. Federal Office of Civil Rights (OCR) sends a series of ‘Dear Colleague Letters’ outlining specific guidelines for implementing Title IX policy<sup>23</sup>. This provided a much-needed impetus for the New Campus Anti-Rape Movement, formed by feminists to create a nation-wide network of groups, like Know Your IX and End Rape on Campus (EROC), and make survivors’ legal rights easily accessible online<sup>24</sup>. Thanks to feminist labor, survivors and activists around the nation began filing complaints to the OCR as well as winning private suits against gender and sex discrimination.

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<sup>21</sup> Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972: « No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance ». Court decisions and U.S. Department of Education guidelines have given it a broad scope covering sexual harassment and sexual violence. See <https://www.knowyourix.org/college-resources/title-ix/>

<sup>22</sup> Studies show that women, particularly women of color, and sexual minorities are particularly at high risk of sexual violence. 1 in 5 women (Kaiser Foundation 2015), 21.2% of Black women and 13.6% of Hispanic women (Brieding 2011), 23% of Asian and Pacific Islander women (Smith 2017), and nearly 1 in 4 transgender, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, or questioning students (Cantor et al. 2017), and 5-6% of men experience sexual assault during college (Krebs et. al. 2007). Statistics obtained through Title IX Action Network & Know Your IX: [https://actionnetwork.org/user\\_files/user\\_files/000/028/106/original/Mini\\_Data\\_Guide\\_\(N\\_C\).pdf](https://actionnetwork.org/user_files/user_files/000/028/106/original/Mini_Data_Guide_(N_C).pdf)  
<https://www.knowyourix.org/issues/statistics/>

<sup>23</sup> These guidelines required schools to: « use the lowest possible standard of proof, a preponderance of evidence, in sexual assault cases (though not in less serious matters such as cheating and noise violations). The letter required universities to allow accusers to appeal not-guilty findings, a form of double jeopardy. It further told schools to accelerate their adjudications, with a recommended 60-day limit. And, perhaps most important, OCR strongly discouraged cross-examination of accusers, given the procedures that most universities employed. » (Johnson and Taylor, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> For more on college anti-rape movement, see: *The New Campus Anti-Rape Movement: Internet Activism and Social Justice* (Heldman & Breckenridge-Jackson, 2018).



The New Campus Anti-Rape Movement understood campus rape as an equal access issue, and this movement reminded feminists of how sexual violence is a crime of control, a tool of terrorization to take away access to public space from the oppressed<sup>25</sup>.



Figure 6: Audiences look at protest art. Ana Cha artists teamed up with Dissenting Voices activists to organize protests at incoming student days, prospective student tours, and trustee meeting weekends. These posters were used at these protests and were later installed at the Ana Cha showcase. They were accompanied by copies of the DV aims and goals, 'dis-orientation' c-r pamphlets, and a poster for a Take Back the Night event that was organized in concurrence with the installation.

Following this call to movement, Ana Cha was faced with the urgent need to fight the dangerous patriarchal terms that threatened the survivor's place in the public sphere of our campus. The group formed a coalition with Dissenting Voices (DV), an anti-rape activist group on campus, and utilized creative practice in direct activism against the misogynistic violence that we faced locally. Ana Cha collaborated with DV to use a variety of tactics to raise consciousness about the campus rape epidemic and proposed a list of alternative survivor-informed and research-based policies<sup>26</sup>. Artists engaged with protest art that brought attention to administrative failures,

<sup>25</sup> See Federici for an in-depth historical analysis of sexual violence as a means of denying public space to women and to punish dissident bodies

<sup>26</sup> The 2017-18 Dissenting Voices Aims and Goals can be found here: <https://dissentingvoices9.wixsite.com/dvmemory/aims-goals>.

nation-wide statistics, and a call for better practices (see Figure 6). Members organized screenings and discussions of *Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP* (Wentzy 2002) and *The Hunting Ground* (Dick 2015), documentaries about radical organizing and the campus rape epidemic. Filmmakers created a documentary on the local anti-campus rape movement and fought back against institutional memory loss by creating an online archive of the history and work of DV that accompanied the film<sup>27</sup>. Activists organized self-defense workshops and feminist theory teach-ins of Susan Brownmiller, Carole Sheffield, and Catherine MacKinnon, to reformulate sexual and gendered violence as a systemic issue. The collective tackled the systemic assaults that directly affected our daily lives by positioning them in political and structural terms. By revealing the ideology behind sexual violence, members worked to address campus rape as a structural issue with systemic solutions, rather than just the doings of abnormally violent individuals. Ana Cha utilized visual art and media to push the systemic horrors into the center of public attention. The collective's creative praxis opened up visibility to the patriarchal violence going on under the surface of the institution, and consciousness-raising provided the feminist tools to challenge and disable the structures that maintain oppressive material conditions.

In the contemporary, the New Campus Anti-Rape Movement is facing the Devos and Trump administration's rescinding of key documents that enacted more strict guidelines for Title IX<sup>28</sup>. While the internet has helped the movement create online networks of feminist activists and survivors, it had also brewed a different network formed of trolls, Pepe the Frog, and online misogynist backlash<sup>29</sup>. Neoliberal ideological versions of 'political correctness' and identity politics drove alienated netizens of mostly young white men into the hands of the far-right who used online white nationalist platforms to express dissatisfaction against the elite establishment of neoliberalism and respond with transgression for its own sake. The 2016 elections revealed

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<sup>27</sup> The documentary and archive of Dissenting Voices, produced by filmmakers of Ana Cha, can be found here: <https://dissentingvoices9.wixsite.com/dvmemory>. Creating a counter-historical archive was particularly important for the campus anti-rape movement, because colleges utilize the quick four-year turn-over of the students as an easy means to erase traces of recurring institutional violence. While alumni had previously fought against discrimination, this work was not recorded and thus inaccessible to future students. This effectively erased any sort of university responsibility for Title IX violations and proved that leaving institutional memory behind was crucial for feminist activism to continue. By archiving Dissenting Voices' work and impact, we left behind a counter-narrative that future feminist activists can trace and utilize.

<sup>28</sup> See: <https://www.handsoffix.org>

<sup>29</sup> See Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (2018). « This was unlike the culture wars of the 60s or the 90s, in which a typically older age cohort of moral and cultural conservatives fought against a tide of cultural secularization and liberalism among the young. This online backlash was able to mobilize a strange vanguard of teenage gamers, pseudonymous swastika-posting anime lovers, ironic South Park conservatives, anti-feminist pranksters, nerdish harassers and meme-making trolls whose dark humor and love of transgression for its own sake made it hard to know what political views were genuinely held and what were merely, as they used to say, for the lulz. What seemed to hold them all together in their obscurity was a love of mocking the earnestness and moral self-flattery of what felt like a tired liberal intellectual conformity running right through from establishment liberal politics to the more militant enforcers of new sensitivities from the wackiest corners of Tumblr to campus politics » (Nagle, 2018: 8).



that no woman is safe from the patriarchy, even those included in the most hegemonic political empires. The online war was fueled by misogyny against Hillary Clinton and racist backlash against Obama's two-term presidency. For the far-right, these figures of authority represented loss of power and their emasculation, an embarrassment turned into fury and backlash<sup>30</sup>. Neoliberalism's discourse of civility further allowed the culture of misogyny and racism to endure, especially because its politics was also founded on these hierarchies. Neoliberal politics could not successfully dismantle the pseudo-fascist alt-right movements, as the deconstruction of its ideological foundation would also threaten its own tools of maintaining power. The dawn of the online culture war was accompanied by the real-life scenes of white nationalist marches and alt-right campus tours. It was especially terrifying to observe the offline 'Unite the Right' rallies and seemingly momentous spirit of the alt-right, especially faced with the crisis of internal divisions in the left. However, the cohesion of the alt-right did not last long, with internal divisions brewing quickly and various political actors breaking the alt-right rule, 'don't punch to the right' (Freger, 2018).

While neoliberalism has strategically worked to bury the colonial history of violence that has constructed the United States' misogynist and racist political unconscious, it is undeniable that the affects of this history are surfacing. In a critical moment where downward redistributive cultural movements face an increasingly harsh backlash and repression, forming counter-discursive spaces creates the radical and material possibilities we need for the complete liberation of the oppressed. It is entirely possible to dismantle the structures that construct oppressive material realities, but only through a concerted effort between agents of liberation. A key part of this politics is to demystify the ways in which hegemonic ideologies are recreated through cultural forms. For artists concerned with eroding regimes like, capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, it is imperative to develop historically-specific and critical frameworks. The Feminist Art Movement can reveal successful strategies in doing so, through collectivity and political reconceptualization of personal experience. On the other hand, the movement's vulnerable limits signify the urgent need for contemporary feminists to destabilize the patriarchal order with a more transformative, coalitional political front. In archiving the work and politics of the Ana Cha collective, I hope that I can leave behind institutional memory of radical resistance and a methodology for artists looking for an explicitly shared political creative practice. Ana Cha created an intimate space where critical re-examination of experience interacted and materialized

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<sup>30</sup> Kate Manne recounts a popular theory of the moment that Trump decided to run for president: « It was when President Obama humiliated him at the White House correspondents' dinner in 2011, by responding to Trump's laughably transparent as well as offensive demand that Obama produce his birth certificate (Where are you from, *really?* The racist's perennial question) [... Trump] jutted out his chin, pursed his lips, and turned a deeper shade of orange – as audience members looked gleefully in Trump's direction, then away again. [...] But then I realized that Trump's was the face of shame turned inside out – its exterior wall, as it were – shame refused, with fury substituted, since he and his ilk are accustomed to being treated with the greatest respect on all occasions » (Manne 2018: 127-8).

through creative forms<sup>31</sup>. Members embarked in deep explorations of personal and political lives in relation to intellectual research and creative experimentation. Audre Lorde identifies poetry's potential to « give name to those ideas which are – until the poem – nameless and formless », and thus the ability to share it with others (Lorde 2007). With the help of collectivity, many of us broke silences and erupted in ludic creative, political, and intellectual work. A dedication to sustain radical feminist practices collectivized those who would otherwise have not had access to each other's and own ideas, feelings, and work. Amidst the threats of alienation and individualism, we carved out our place and reclaimed the Feminist Art Movement's spirit of « the personal became political, and the very personal became art » (Andrew, 2011).

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<sup>31</sup> Through the help of the internet, Ana Cha has grown into a multi-national coalition of artists. Currently, Ana Cha lives on as a student artist collective in Grinnell and as an artist residency in Chicago.

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