

APR08

CSW

NEWSLETTER OF THE
UCLA CENTER FOR THE
STUDY OF WOMEN

update

MAY 2

UCLA Faculty Center
9:15 am to 6:30 pm

Gender of "Terror"

**a public conference
organized by Kathleen McHugh and Purnima Mankekar**

DEPARTMENTS

Announcements 19
Staff 20



The Gender of "Terror"

On May 2nd, CSW will sponsor an international conference on "The Gender of 'Terror'" organized by Purnima Manekar, Associate Director of CSW, and myself. We intend the conference to make several distinct interventions to the topic of terror. While there has been a considerable amount of scholarship done on September 11, 2001, and its aftermath, conversations on terror and terrorism have been largely from U.S.-centered perspectives. Our conference will internationalize the discussion and foreground the role of gender and sexuality in the formation of terror. Our concern is not with demographics (as in discussions of how many men vs. women become terrorists) but related more fundamentally to the interrelated constructions and representations of gendered identities, agency, nationhood, and citizenship. For example, how might ideas about manhood or feminine agency shape how men and women are recruited to become terrorists? What is the role of gender and sexuality in

situations of state-sponsored terror? How are discourses of gender and sexuality implicated or reconfigured when terror is visited upon communities at the margins of nation-states? How are conceptions of martyrdom, sacrifice, and victimhood central to the designation of certain populations as perpetrators of terrors and how are these conceptions of martyrdom gendered and sexualized?

The conference features three panels, the first on the role of states, civil societies and NGOs in the politics of terror, counter-terrorism, state-endorsed terror, and peacekeeping. The second investigates the representational practices that construct terror. The third will consider how legal discourses and practices of citizenship constitute the very category of terror. The scholars we have invited hail from humanities, social sciences, legal, and media studies backgrounds and all do interdisciplinary research. They represent very diverse, possibly divergent, perspectives on these issues. They include: Susan Buck-Morss, Malathi De Alwis, Inderpal Grewal,

Jennifer Terry, Lori Allen, Paola Bacchetta, Sherene Razack, Sunaina Maira and Veena Dubal. The discussions we envisage emerging out of the conference will bridge conventional divides that frequently separate these disciplines, such as that between policy and theory. We are grateful for the generous (and interdisciplinary) support we have received from our co-sponsors: the Deans of the Humanities, Law, Social Sciences, and Theater, Film and Television; the Center for India and South Asia and the Asian American Studies Center; and the Departments of Anthropology, Asian American Studies, Comparative Literature, and Women's Studies. The complete conference program can be viewed at http://www.csw.ucla.edu/Flyers/GT_program.pdf. The conference is free and open to the public. (If you want to join the participants for the lunch, you must pre-register.) Please join us for our consideration of this timely and important topic.

— KATHLEEN MCHUGH

BY NOEL ALUMIT

I started doing AIDS work in the early 1990s. I was a young Filipino man raised to believe in charity. I started as a volunteer at the Chris Brownlee Hospice for People with AIDS. In the hospice, I was informed that people were there to live out the last six months of their lives. My job was to make those last months as comfortable as possible.

The only face of AIDS that I knew at the time was always gay and usually white. When I started volunteering, I was not prepared to see people of color and I certainly didn't expect to see women. I was shocked when I met a Filipina—a woman who resembled some of the aunties who raised me—dying of AIDS.

I think it was at that moment that I realized that AIDS, contrary to media indications, did

not belong to one group of people. It was something that was also ravishing women and children from everywhere.

When I say "ravishing," I mean this Webster definition: To seize and carry away by violence; to snatch by force. In those days, that's what it felt like. Once vibrant beings were being seized, carried away by diseases that appeared violent to the body (the rashes, the sores, the lesions), snatched by some unseen force until they were gone.

In the rooms of the hospice were photos of individuals before illnesses like pneumonia or kaposi sarcoma took over. In the pictures from their pasts, hospice residents had shining faces with strong bodies, friends and family surrounding them. Alas, this is AIDS. There's



Photo: Reed Hutchinson

Survival

by Fiona Kirkwood

nothing like a stigmatized disease to see who truly loves you. Susan Sontag said it best in her book *AIDS and its Metaphors*, "The unsafe behavior that produces AIDS is judged to be more than just weakness. It is indulgence, delinquency-addictions to chemicals that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant."

It was with this sentiment that friends and family went away, leaving volunteers like me to fill the void.

That was 1991.

Today, the Chris Brownlee Hospice for People With AIDS no longer exists. It did not fold due to mismanagement or lack of funds. It closed because no one was dying. Breakthroughs in medication came by to prolong life.

Upon entering the MAKE ART/STOP AIDS exhibition at UCLA's Fowler Museum, I was struck with the amount of time that had passed. It is 2008 and I am a not-so-young Filipino man of forty. The exhibition chronicles the last twenty-five years of artistic response to AIDS and we know things now. We know that in the United States, the cases in women have tripled since 1985. Women make up almost half of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the world. That's close to 15 million women. We know that the medications don't reach everyone.

Faces of women—about 45% of people with HIV/AIDS are women—are throughout the exhibition. Africa leads the global death toll in AIDS cases. The exhibition features South African images of a HIV-positive mother and her HIV-positive children and a lesbian infected through rape.



On May 7th, MAKE ART/STOP AIDS and the International Institute will host AIDS|SIDA - Global Updates, Art, and Performance, from 1 to 5pm, Kaufman Hall 200. It will feature updates and art from Latin America, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa. Admission: free. For more information call Larissa Deckert at 310-825-4811.

It is agreed that AIDS no longer favors one group; it affects people from everywhere. Artists from India, South Africa, Brazil, and the United States offered their voices to the chorus. South African artist Fiona Kirkwood flew in to personally lay hundreds of male and female condoms to spell out the word: Survival. Survival, explains Kirkwood, encases the words *viva* and *virus*.

Brazilian fashion designer Adriana Bertini offers her condom couture dress, an evening gown made of condoms. It raises AIDS awareness and, if condoms significantly reduces HIV

infections, addresses the question, Why are condoms controversial?

Jean Carlomusto's provocative *The Portrait Gallery*, is "an interactive multi-media installation that allows visitors to explore the evolution of a health crisis that forever changed medical research and public policy towards those with communicable disease." Carlomusto, an associate professor of media arts at Long Island University, provides moving images of fine women and men doing AIDS work. Their faces literally light up a room.

Some of the most moving pieces are by Indian photographer Dayanita Singh. She photographed thoughtful caregivers working with people with AIDS in India. It reminded me of 1991.

Looking at the exhibition, I believe it's ravishing. This time, I use this definition: to transport with joy or delight.

Noel Alunit is the bestselling author of *Talking to the Moon* and *Letters to Montgomery Clift*. His work has appeared in *USA Today*, *The Advocate*, and *A&U: America's AIDS Magazine*. He worked at the *Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team* for fifteen years before becoming the *Community Organizer for MAKE ART/STOP AIDS*.

Attributions of Blame in Gender Violence and the Mass Media

BY LESLIE M. SCHWARTZ

HOW
WORDS
REALLY
CAN
HURT

The power communication has over how meaning is created and transmitted in society is indisputable—language contributes to decisions we make, opinions we form, stories we believe, attributions we assign, and perceptions we internalize. Because of the substantial influence that language has on these areas of social life, it is essential to critically examine how language functions in the mass media in order to discuss possible implications communication has on audiences and the perceptions, opinions, and attributions they form about gender violence in our society.

HOW WORDS REALLY CAN HURT, *continued from page 1*

From a linguistic perspective, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis illustrates that “human beings do not live in the objective world alone, [and] are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society....We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation” (Sapir, 1929). Here, Sapir defines language as a social medium of expression that influences our choices and interpretations of reality within given contexts. Whorf (1940) further describes our world as “a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds.” Both of these conceptions relate to the influence language has in our given social structure to mold and shape the version of reality we perceive, illustrating the powerful impact language has on constructing individual ideas of social reality.

While the average media consumer seldom considers the semantic structure



of newspaper articles or broadcast news reports, the way these messages are communicated to readers and viewers has the potential to impact our worldview and perceptions of reality. Cultural Stud-

ies scholar and UCLA professor, Douglas Kellner (2003) reports that “media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values....Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through

which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into the culture”(9). Therefore, the tremendous socializing role the mass media plays on all of our lives must be examined actively and considered when we begin to deconstruct how we make decisions and attributions on a daily basis.

More specifically, how the media portrays cases of violence against women through the construction of language oftentimes shifts the agency in the sentence when the passive voice is used in place of an active construction. One of the main byproducts of converting a sentence that is originally written in active voice to passive voice is the change in emphasis of the subject and verb. The verb voice used in sentence constructions determines where the focus and action in the sentence is placed based on who/what is the agent; in passive construction, the subject is acted upon or receives the action expressed in the verb, whereas the subject performs the action in sentences written in active voice.

Because of this, using passive construction is especially problematic when report-

ing on cases of gender violence when the perpetrator (agent) is unknown. Based on a comprehensive textual and content analysis of eighty-six newspaper articles from the Los Angeles Times and the Denver Post between 2000 and 2005, I found that the pervasive trend in shifting active to passive voice, and even eliminating the agent clause altogether, occurred in a majority of cases. Instead of reporting that “an unknown perpetrator raped a woman last night” (active voice), reporters generally wrote, “A woman was raped last night (by whom?)” (passive voice), leaving off the attributional “agent clause.” Feminist linguist, Julia Penelope (1990), argues that “the rhetorical reasons for the popularity of the passive are obvious: remove the agent, shift the hearer/reader’s focus to the victim” (146). This function of the passive makes it commonly used as a responsibility mitigating device that works “to suppress reference to the agents who commit specific acts, particularly when the speaker/writer wishes to deny or cover up responsibility” (144).

Therefore, when passive construction is used in reporting cases of gender vio-

lence, the related implications for attribution of blame toward the victim instead of the perpetrator are obvious. The effect of truncating the sentence to eliminate the agent altogether shifts the focus to the “object” of the crime (the victim), while changing the information readers receive by migrating responsibility again to the object instead of the subject. In the previous example, when the victim is moved into the role of “subject” in passive voice, the perpetrator oftentimes is left off altogether, begging the question “by whom?” Readers are left to make conscious and even subconscious attributions of blame.

This semiotic shift from active to passive construction has the potential to normalize and perpetuate the notion that the crime was the victim’s fault by removing the blame from the perpetrator. Penelope further argues that, “passives without agents foreground the object (victims) in our minds so that we tend to forget that some human agent is responsible for performing the action” (146). Potential impacts of using agentless construction include ambiguity due to excluding the

DO JOURNALISTS EVEN RECOGNIZE THAT THEY ARE USING THIS TYPE OF CONSTRUCTION TO REPORT ON CASES OF GENDER VIOLENCE?

subject, as well as the ability to influence reader perceptions and opinions formed about the incident by the information provided and the language used.

Furthermore, UCLA psychology researchers, Henley, Miller, and Beazley (1995), believe that “how people interpret a message may depend, in part, on the verb voice used to phrase that message; such an effect would represent an interaction between syntax, or structure, and semantics, or meaning” (60). The idea that verb voice influences how readers comprehend causal roles of actors within a sentence suggests that “verb voice differentially biases readers and hearers toward seeing the subject or object of a sentence as the primary actor” (61-62). Similarly, a Harvard study by Brown and Fish (1983) shows that “certain facts about English morphology predict certain ways of thinking about causality.”

Overall, it is important to critically consider the influence language has over our thoughts, perceptions, and attributions of events, especially relating to gender violence and how it is presented

in the mass media. Do both active and passive construction convey the same view of reality to readers? Are the perceptions, opinions, and attributions synonymous for both types of grammatical construction? What ideological messages are upheld by each type of sentence construction? And do journalists even recognize that they are using this type of construction to report on cases of gender violence?

In a society that is continually a victim to the pervasive nature and influential power of the mass media, we can do our part as aware media consumers by taking an active approach through Critical Media Literacy in order to understand and analyze how these linguistic patterns perpetuate dangerous notions of social reality. It is through this recognition and active process of deconstructing media messages that we can begin to understand the full effects of language and its power to shape our worldviews in order to advocate for positive social change.

Leslie M. Schwartz is a M.Ed. student in the Student Affairs program within the Higher Education and Organizational Change division of the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. She will be graduating in Spring 2008. Schwartz was awarded the Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D., Award from CSW in June 2007 based on her senior Communication Studies departmental honors thesis research, highlighted in this article, entitled "Semiotic Intersections Between Gender Violence and the Media: How Violence Against Women is Normalized and Perpetuated Through Syntax and Semantics." Made possible by the generosity of Dr. Barbara "Penny" Kanner, the Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D., Undergraduate Award provides a \$1000 prize to one undergraduate for an outstanding research report, thesis, dissertation or a published article on a topic pertaining to women, health, or women in health-related sciences. Schwartz's research study was also published in the UCLA Westwind/Aleph Undergraduate Research Journal in Spring 2006. Schwartz currently works at the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute as a Research Analyst on the Spirituality in Higher Education longitudinal study as well as with the UCLA Office of Residential Life as an Assistant Resident Director within a transfer student theme community.

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CSW AWARDS

Each year, CSW awards grants and fellowships to students doing research on women, sexuality, and gender. For information on types of awards and deadlines for applications, visit our website (csw.ucla.edu) and select FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.

BY BEN SHER

Stephanie Rothman

Q&A WITH THE DIRECTOR OF *THE VELVET VAMPIRE* AND *THE STUDENT NURSES*



WITH CO-SPONSORSHIP from the Center for the Study of Women, The Crank, UCLA's grad student run film society, recently hosted a special screening of writer-director Stephanie Rothman's acclaimed film *The Velvet Vampire* (1971) with the filmmaker in attendance. Rothman, writer-director of "exploitation" films like *The Student Nurses* (1970), *Terminal Island* (1973), and *The Working Girls* (1974) was one of the most prolific female filmmakers working in Hollywood in the 1970s. During that decade, her films were at the center of feminist debates concerning the most effective way in which women could use film to overturn Hollywood's often degrading representations. While some argued that the creation of avant-garde and independent films was the key to breaking the influence of the patriarchal system, others contended that women working within the mainstream could dismantle and revise Hollywood representations to reveal and disempower their misogynistic qualities. Scholar Pam Cook wrote that "Rothman's work was part of this polemic, since her films could be seen as a prime example of feminist subversion from within, using the generic formulae of exploitation cinema in the interest of her own agenda as a woman director."¹

In her introduction to *The Velvet Vampire*, Rothman stated that, “while in the *Dracula* films, both men and women were the victims of vampires, it was the women who always seemed to endure the ecstasy of having their blood sucked while lying passively in their beds. If men were assaulted by vampires, it was usually while battling them, and they either destroyed the vampire, or met a violent death themselves. So I decided to reverse this convention, and have the man enjoy a masochistic orgasmic death by vampire while the woman battled back.” Below are excerpts from an audience Q&A with Rothman that followed the screening.

***The Velvet Vampire* was the last movie you made for New World Pictures and Roger Corman before you made *Group Marriage* for Dimension Pictures, the company that you co-founded with [husband and collaborator] Charles S. Swartz and Laurence Woolner. How did making movies for your own company differ from making them for Corman?**

[The experiences were] not really that much different, because in both instances the decisions that I had to make and Charles had to make were market driven, since we were making exploitation films, which means that

we were making films on a very low budget for primarily drive-ins and older theaters in the central cities. We knew what our market was supposed to be and what elements we had to put in it. I suppose many commercial films are market driven to some extent, but ours were very much so. So, there were certain ingredients that always had to be in it, like nudity, and any kind of sexual expression had to be controlled by what would get us an R rating. There had to be a certain look to the film. Our actors almost always had to be very attractive, those in the leading roles. And there were only certain kinds of stories we could tell. So, the limitations that we encountered making films at New World extended into our work for Dimension Pictures... Our films were financed by the regional sub-distributors who distributed these films throughout the country, and this was their expectation, that we would make this kind of film. The freedom that existed was the freedom to take what were the genre expectations and do unexpected things with them. Do things that would make them seem relevant to a wider audience than the usual fans of exploitation films. So we included

political opinions and we tried to make the stories have more psychological depth. We tried, given the restrictions of the genre, to address some ideas that were ignored by Hollywood and by most other films made at that time. As long as we met the sub-distributors expectations, they didn't mind if we exceeded them in other ways. In fact, they were happy if we did things that were controversial, because that would give them publicity in the papers. That's not why we did them, but that was certainly why they accepted these things. As long as the theater wasn't burned down, it was all right if we exceeded the conventional expectations for this kind of film.

I thought it was very interesting what you said before the screening about it being a conscious decision on your part to explore what happens when you switch the roles and make the female [in the vampire-victim relationship] the more active of the two, and the male the more passive. And so I wondered if you'd say a bit more about how you are approaching this in relation to other vampire films.

The only way that I could see to make this kind of film and to make it interesting was to reverse expectations, at this point. The obvious passivity of women in vampire films

was both disturbing to me and rather boring. As far as making another Dracula film, well I couldn't compete with the ones made by Hammer Films. I didn't have the money, I didn't have the facilities or anything. It just seemed to be the obvious thing to do. And I tried to make it as amusing as possible, because I know that audiences—like yourselves, you were laughing quite a bit—you know what the landmarks are, what the geography of a vampire film is. You know what to expect. And so when the expected comes along, all you can do is hope that you have presented it in a way that people will laugh in recognition at the fresh twist you have given it.

Working in the exploitation film community, can you talk a little bit about what the relationship between mainstream and exploitation groups were? Did you ever want to cross over to the other side, if that's the right term? I know there's lots of talk about folks who worked with Corman who then went on to make mainstream Hollywood films. Did you ever want to do that?

I like the way you put it, to the other side! It's like crossing to the valley of death, or life, or whatever. It was my fervent wish that I would be able to make mainstream films.

*I wanted to, I never got the opportunity. I tried for about 10 years and then I gave up and just decided to continue living my life, not making films anymore. Was there any interaction between me and people who made mainstream films? Well, it's very interesting you should ask that question with regards to *The Velvet Vampire*, because as I was getting ready to come here today I remembered something that is, in fact, a beautiful example of that. I was called in to meet an executive at MGM after I'd made *The Velvet Vampire*, in fact it was perhaps three or four years later. And this person said to me "Oh, you know, we were talking about you the other day in a meeting, because we've hired the younger brother of Ridley Scott to make a film, and we think we'd like it to be a vampire film, and we were talking about how we would like it to sort of be like *The Velvet Vampire*." And my response was, "Well, if you want a film like *The Velvet Vampire*, why don't you get Stephanie Rothman to make it?" So—yes, my encounter with the mainstream was, a few people had heard of me, and some of them even were responsive to my work, but that didn't seem to matter. I didn't get the*

jobs. There was one time when I had a three-picture deal to write and direct for a studio. The man who hired me also had a slate of other films to produce there. When I finished my first script, the first picture he produced came out and went into release. It had two very big stars in it, and it bombed. So that was the end of his deal, and that was the end of my deal. There's a lot of happenstance that goes into a career... So, yes, I did cross over, but the gates were always closed.

Would you say that going to USC film school or going to any film school was actually a stepping stone to getting to Corman or to getting into filmmaking? You and Charles both went to USC, right?

Yes, that's correct, we went to USC... When I went there, there were only two women: myself and an air force captain who was there to learn how to make documentary films. [Going to USC] certainly was [a stepping stone]. It was actually a very lucky occurrence. In those days, people went to film school, but basically, if you didn't have some kind of nepotistic connection to the film industry, if your parent or parents weren't in the craft unions or they weren't producers or very strongly

socially connected, you just disappeared, and most of my classmates did just disappear.

USC got a call from Roger Corman, asking for them to send over somebody to interview to be his assistant and they sent me over.

I'm very grateful to USC, otherwise I don't know how I would have gotten launched as a filmmaker in that time in that world. We're talking 1964 or 1965. A long, long time ago.

Could you tell us more about working for Roger Corman?

Working for Roger was really wonderful. He just threw me into the swimming pool and I had to swim. He was very encouraging. I know that some people came away from their experience with him a little bitter, but I personally found him to be very encouraging. Really, he gave me the self-confidence to do what I needed to do. He was thoroughly behind me. He was, as I've said before, the only mentor I ever had, and until my last breath I will be very grateful to him for that.

Any crazy anecdotes or outrageous stories from the set of *The Velvet Vampire*?

No, I really don't, I'm sorry, and I'll tell you why I don't: it was a very difficult film to

make. I think it looks very expensive for the budget we made it on. Through completion, that is to say through the answer print, it cost \$165,000. And we went on location to the desert, it was very hard to shoot in the desert. We were all brushing against spiny Joshua trees and cacti. I can't tell you how many needles we had to pull out of ourselves at the end of each day. Then the weather was so changeable: one moment it was bright and sunny and the next we were in the middle of a sandstorm. Equipment would get stuck in the sand and we'd have to push it out; the whole crew, everybody. I think there was a maximum of fourteen people on the crew, including the producer and director. So it was a hard film to shoot. In addition to that, the actress who played the young girl was very anxious and very difficult. I had to give her more reassurance than, you know, I thought I had in my entire being to give in a lifetime just to keep her going! I guess maybe the only crazy thing is that—[during a scene in the movie] where there was a sandstorm and a bus came, the bus got stuck in the sand, and all of the male members of the crew started pushing the bus out and I joined them. And

they all stopped pushing and yelled at me to stop instead of concentrating on their own pushing. They correctly wanted to save my energy for setting up the next shot. That's the craziest memory I have and it's not very crazy.

Ben Sher is working towards his M.A. in Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA. He has written for Leonard Maltin's *Movie Guide* (2007 and 2008 eds.) and *Fangoria Magazine*.

For more information about The Crank, including a schedule of this quarter's screenings, please visit <http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/thecrank>.

NOTES

1. Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 57.

Film Notes: Three Romanian Movies (On Belonging and Corporeality in the New Wave of Romanian Cinema)

by Denise Roman

(I) Fears are colorless and odorless in the dim light of a Romanian winter. Gabita and her fellow student, Otilia, who wants to help Gabita end her unwanted pregnancy, know this well. They know how dangerous it is to escape the vigilant, panoptical eye of the Ceaușescu regime. They find a man, Bebe—not a doctor—eager to help them. They rent a room in a hotel. The man comes and asks for a shocking price in order to perform the terrifying procedure. (I am not talking about money here....) This is not a hospital, and the only things available in the sordid adventure are a probe, an ampoule



of ampicillin, a plastic bag, and towels for the possible hemorrhage and to wrap up the dead fetus and dispose of it in a garbage chute.

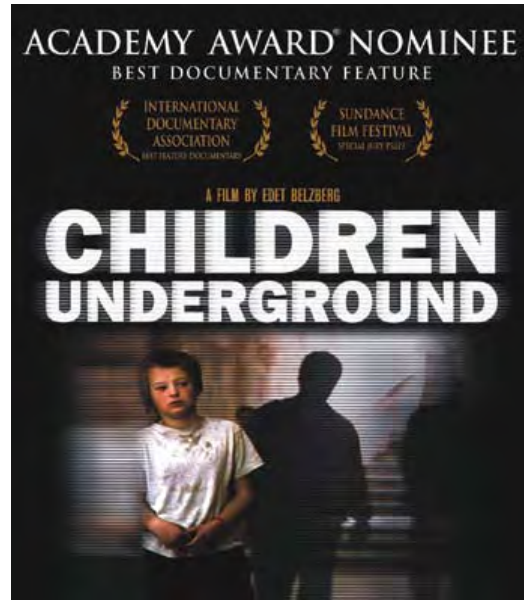
We see it all, and the merciless light of the hotel room cuts into the senses like a knife. There is no escape. The long takes and real-time scenes are devoid of melodrama. We enter into the lives of these women via light, an odorless and colorless light, a light that penetrates through to the heart of a closed regime.

The body is at the center of Cristian Mungiu's film, *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*, winner of the Palme d'Or at the

4 months, 3 weeks, & 2 days
(2007), Cristian Mungiu,
Mobra Films

Cannes Film Festival in 2007. It reveals a recentering on corporeality that has to do with Ceaușescu’s pro-natalist, anti-abortion politics, which, for the some 24 years of communism (starting with 1966, when abortion was generally banned), succeeded to limit women’s freedom of choice and the individual’s ability to control her own body and life, thus pushing her toward subversive practices of body resistance through such illicit abortions. It is no wonder that in the years following the Revolution of 1989 (when abortion was legalized), Romanian women saw abortion as a legitimate sign of liberation, making the efforts of pro-life groups futile.

The general banning of abortion in Romania is also responsible for engendering an entire population of street children, who spend their time living underground in the sewage system, or gathering in railway stations. They live under the effect of hallucinatory substances, mainly a local chemical originally designed to clean the parquet. Called “Aurolac,” this substance lends its name to its young consumers; Romanians call street children “Aurolaci.” Edet Belzberg’s Oscar-nominated documentary *Children Underground* (2000) addresses the issue of street children, a topic



Children Underground (2000),
Edet Belzberg

the Romanian citizens and authorities are still uncomfortable to talk about.

The same corporeality is the focus of a predecessor of Mungiu’s film, Cristi Puiu’s *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, winner of “Un Certain Regard Award” at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival. Puiu’s real-time drama is to follow the travails of a sick old man who waits for his illness to overtake him, as a concerned paramedic shuttles him among hospitals that are reluctant to admit him as a patient. This is a movie of



The Death of Mister Lazarescu (2005),
Cristi Puiu

social “black hollows,” as the medical and social services are proven not to reach the ordinary citizen; they are rendered ineffectual. Private lives and the human body become public, while people’s cynicism and sarcasm surmount paramount levels in a Romanian post-communist society of survival.

The body becomes devoid of the signification of a human body, and turns into a mere embodiment of blood vessels, bones, muscles, and skin, standing outside the

notion of a human being endowed with human dignity. The film shows the pettiness and gloominess of everyday life, disrespect vis-à-vis women, the infantilization of the patient and of seniors, the feminization of people who do not have the “right connections,” and their transformation into apparently faceless, shapeless bodies. Insults and dictatorial mannerisms shown throughout the movie seem to have pervaded everyday social relations, as they dominate the main discourse in this highly personalized, macho culture. No wonder the main character’s name is Dante, which suggests Dante’s *Divina Commedia* and its depiction of Hell.

(II) During Romanian communism and its prevalent aesthetics of social realism, one of the major discourses that pervaded the field of arts, including film, was “belonging” as national history. Such discourse typically foregrounded narratives of national identity, the epic heritage, the proliferation of history into a fantasized and idealized socialist future of socialist hero-workers, and the burden of history both as legitimating nationalist voice and a bourgeois past that needed to be tran-

scended. Movies such as Sergiu Nicolaescu’s *Mihai Viteazul* (1970) or Mircea Dragan’s *Stefan cel Mare* (1974) epitomize the melodrama of national heroics during Romanian communism.

Unlike other countries from Eastern Europe, Romania, a one-time ally of the Nazis in WWII, never assumed responsibility for its share in the Holocaust during the communist years. The tragedy of the Romanian Jews was hidden from history manuals, and films praised only national heroes, starting with the Dacians and Romans and ending with Ceaușescu, “the Great Leader.”

Only after the Revolution of 1989 and the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, did the narrative of the Holocaust slowly come to light to a new and skeptical generation that knew nothing about it. This is why, in film, the Holocaust came out only in a diasporic voice, that of Radu Mihaileanu, the Jewish-Romanian émigré to Paris, where he studied, and presently lives, writes, and directs his movies.

A Romanian, French, Belgian, and Israeli co-production, Radu Mihaileanu’s *Train de vie* (1998)—won twelve international film awards. The film was honored at the Venice Film Festival with the



Mihai Viteazul (1970),
Sergiu Nicolaescu

Critics Prize and an award for Best First Work, and at the Sundance Film Festival with the Audience Award. For the first time in Romanian cinema, belonging as history was seen through the lens of a minority, the Jewish minority.

In the film, the village fool of a small Jewish community during WWII warns his brethren that the Nazis are coming. His idea? A fake deportation train will take them across the Russian border and get them to Palestine. The train encounters real Nazis, communist revolutionaries, and Roma/Gypsy refugees, in this surrealist voyage that does not seem to end.

Mihaileanu’s is a genuinely anthropological movie. In its documentation of life in the shtetl, the film is reminiscent of Ben Hokpins’s *Simon Magus* (1999), which shows life in a shtetl in Germany. In *Train de vie* we have close-ups on social and family relations, with the enticing



Train de vie (1998),
Radu Mihaileanu

music of Goran Bregovic, klezmer music, Jewish traditional shtetl clothes, religious rituals, cuisine, architecture (the houses and the synagogue are made of wood because of the wandering, diasporic nature of the Jewish community), Yiddish language, relationships with Romanian neighbors—in a word: a universe of the Eastern European shtetl à la Marc Chagall.



Simon Magus (1999),
Ben Hopkins

Belonging and corporeality in the new wave of Romanian cinema also bear stylistic influences. The movies made in Romania after 1989 are cinema vérité, documentary, real-life style (*The Death of Mister Lazarescu*; *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*), which represents a reaction to previous historical-nationalist melodramas, or fake social realism of proletcultist values.

The movies created in the diaspora tend to follow the style of the country of cultural production (in this case, France), for Radu Mihaileanu's *Train de vie* reminds one of the work of French director Jean-Pierre Jeunet with his focus on the detail, surrealism, and comedic in people's lives, even in the midst of real or imagined tragedies.



Denise Roman is a CSW Research Scholar. She is the author of *Fragmented Identities: Popular Culture, Sex, and Everyday Life in Postcommunist Romania* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003). She is currently working on an article titled "The Body and Corporeality in the New Wave of Romanian Cinema."

LINKS

4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt032846/>

Death of Mr. Lazarescu: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0456149/>

Train de vie (Train of Life): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0170705/>

Tillie Olsen Grants for 2008

GRANTS SUPPORT THE WORK OF CSW RESEARCH SCHOLARS

Each year, the Center for the Study of Women awards a set of grants that are available only to research scholars affiliated with CSW. Called the Tillie Olsen Grants, they honor the memory of a writer who documented the silences imposed on women by family and work responsibilities and financial need. Grants may be used to support participation in scholarly conferences, travel to research sites, purchase specialized research materials, or for procurement of technical services. The Research Scholars Program supports local independent scholars conducting research projects related to women, gender, or sexuality. Acceptance to the program is based on the quality of the proposed research. Scholars receive formal affiliation with CSW, library privileges, stationery, email accounts, personal web pages, and opportunities to participate in CSW programs.

Into the Suburban Fold: A Social History of Postwar Suburban America



Becky Nicolaidis won for her project looking at the relationship between community and the built environment of suburbia since 1945. In recent years, a spate of studies has suggested that social capital has been in decline in America, at least since the 1970s. Suburban sprawl is often implicated in this decline. While most of these works have been done by political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists, historians have largely avoided this scholarly debate. Nicolaides' goal with this project is not only to enter this discourse but also to bring to it a historical perspective and an appreciation for the great diversity of suburban experiences since 1945.

Women's Transnational Promotion of Mexican Modernism



Ernestina Osorio received a grant for her research project that focuses on women's transnational, media-based promotion of modern Mexican architecture. The purpose of this work is to advance knowledge and understanding of women's roles in an international mid-twentieth century architectural discourse.

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