

by Chon A. Noriega

LAURA AGUILAR

CLOTHED UNCLOTHED

CHALLENGING NORMATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF THE BODY

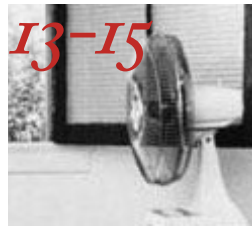
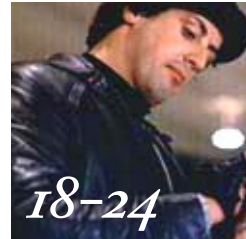


LAURA AGUILAR is a photographer whose work spans over two decades and who also has made tentative, yet significant, forays into video.

Her photography deals mostly with portraiture, documenting social groups and identities that remain invisible in mainstream culture: Latina lesbians, black couples, obese people. This work shares certain similarities with the provocative portraits by Jock Sturges and Sally Mann, especially in terms of the high degree of collaboration involved. But Aguilar collaborates with subjects who are her peers so that her work is not about power differentials between photographer and subject as is often, if implicitly, the case with

Sturges, Mann, and the social documentary tradition itself.

In the 1990s, Aguilar received increasing critical attention, especially insofar as her works allow one to interrelate the gay/lesbian and Chicano communities. In particular, her nude self-portraiture challenged normative conceptions of the body, inserting her figure into various aesthetic frameworks: large-scale installation, photographic series with an almost sculptural attention to flesh as form, iconic and ironic self-portraiture, and



DEPARTMENTS



Gratitude and Welcome

This year has been very successful for CSW in no small part due to our Associate Director, Professor Purnima Mankekar. Purnima helmed the very successful workshop series titled *Intersectionalities: Transnational Feminisms and Comparative Racial Formations* along with CSW affiliates Lucy M. San Pablo Burns, Grace Hong, and Thu-huong Nguyen-vo. She also came up with the idea for the international *Gender of "Terror"* conference held this spring and that convened scholars from all over the world to discuss the question of terror and gender from non-U.S.-based perspectives. Purnima has received a Fulbright for next year and she will be doing fieldwork studying call centers in India. I know I speak for everyone at CSW in thanking Purnima for all her contributions.

It has been my great pleasure to work with Purnima this year and I am happy that she and I will continue to collaborate on CSW projects in the future.

I am also very pleased to announce that Professor Juliet A. Williams has agreed to be CSW's Associate Director next year. As many of you may know, the UCLA Women's Studies department successfully recruited Juliet from UC Santa Barbara where she was on the faculty of the Law and Society program and in Women's Studies. Juliet is the author of *Liberalism and the Limits of Power*, the co-editor of *Public Affairs: Politics in the Age of Sex Scandals* and currently is working on two new projects, the first on the meanings of marriage in the twenty-first century and the second on single-sex public education. Given Juliet's areas of interest and expertise

and the recent ruling legalizing gay marriage in California, I asked her if she could organize a symposium for fall 2008 on marriage equality and the presidential election. She agreed and has already given me a title for the October event: *State of the Union: Marriage Politics in the Shadow of the Presidential Election*. I very much look forward to working with Juliet next year.

As this academic year nears its close, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Purnima and welcome Juliet!

– KATHLEEN MCHUGH

...In this way, she places an emphasis on social and physical presence through portraiture as a way to envision the interpersonal relationships that make all communities, whether local or national, defined by political allegiance or corporeal belonging, inherently diverse, complex, and unstable.

landscape photography (in which her figure becomes isomorphic with rock outcroppings in the Southwestern desert). This work is bold, yet normalizing, iconoclastic, yet stunningly beautiful.

More than anything, Aguilar's work foregrounds issues of class, literacy, and the body; and, in some ways, these issues are more fundamental to her work than specific cultural identities, since she does not seek to define an essential or authentic core to her photographic subjects. Aguilar's work derives from or is motivated by her lifelong experiences as working class, dyslexic, obese, and lonely. For her, both ethnic and sexual self-identifications developed later in adulthood and are therefore expressed differently in her work. In this sense, Aguilar's work marks a shift in the expression of gender, racial, and sexual "minorities" away from the cultural politics that emerged during the civil rights era and then took shape in subsequent decades. But toward what? If she rejects cultural nationalism and identity politics, as well as the search for an authentic and fixed essence, she does not reject the underlying values of social equity and conviviality. In this way, she places an emphasis on social and physical presence through portraiture as a way to envision the interpersonal relation-

ships that make all communities, whether local or national, defined by political allegiance or corporeal belonging, inherently diverse, complex, and unstable.

In the mid 1990s, Aguilar turned to Hi-8 video, producing three *testimonios* in which she discusses her emotional state, dyslexia, and obesity in relationship to her art.¹ These works—*Depression* (10 minutes), *Knife* (5 minutes), and *The Body* (7 minutes)—reveal a sophisticated use of the medium, suggesting a possible new artistic direction that allows Aguilar to add a very revealing oral text to her striking self-portraiture, thereby circumventing her own dyslexia. What is most apparent about the videos, however, is that they are insistently autobiographical rather than testimonial per se. That is the videos reference an isolated "self" whose "home" is a dyslexic and obese body racked with severe pain and depression that cuts her off from "society." Her condition does not constitute a community for whom she speaks; rather, her assertion of self implies a community within which she can be seen despite her seemingly abject states: naked, obese, racially other, sexually other, and unable to communicate easily through writing. It is in this context, then, that she speaks of the "right" to exist and to find

happiness within a body at odds with the societal norms that determine participation within the public sphere. But while her rights echo those of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” Aguilar articulates these within her own body and outside the body politic. She does not claim special protected status as a “victim”; instead she insistently narrates her condition through the trope of a speaking self.

Her conception of the social remains focused on the act of being seen, unclothed. In *The Body*, Aguilar stands naked before the camera, but, unlike the other videos, she is quite animated, offering a rather coy smile. At the end of a shot, when she subtly signals for the camera to stop, we realize that her smile is not only to the camera and implied viewer but also to a person behind the viewfinder. It is here in the one-to-one exchange between the autobiographical self and the interlocutor that Aguilar re-constitutes “community”—not as something to be represented to an outside audience, but as a space within which to represent the self. As in her photographic series, community becomes strategic rather than essential, a necessary backdrop against which the self can disrobe. As Aguilar concludes in *The Body*, “through my art I have

been able to find some comfort and peace with my body.” What these videos suggest is that this process is both personal and political, not as an identity politics, nor even as a question of public policy, but as an “ethics of identity” in which art mediates between the speaking subject and other people.² This mediation is no simple matter that takes place within a one-to-one communication model, but rather it is an “unworking” by which “singular beings share their limits, share each other on their limits.”³ Who these other people are and what Aguilar wants from them remains within the realm of Malinche’s secrets. But they can be seen.



Chon A. Noriega is a professor in the UCLA Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media, and Director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. He is the author and editor of many books, including *Shot in America:*

Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema (Minnesota, 2000). Currently, he is an Adjunct Curator of Latino and Chicano Art at LACMA, where the landmark exhibition, “Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement,” is currently

underway (<http://www.lacma.org/art/ExhibPhantom.aspx>).

notes

1. I discuss the concept of the *testimonio* in Chicano video art in “Talking Heads, Body Politic: The Plural Self of Chicano Video,” *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, ed. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 207–228.
2. The phrase comes from Nancy K. Miller, “Facts, Pacts, Acts,” *Profession* 92 (1992): 13.
3. Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Inoperative Community,” in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop (MIT Press, 2006), 69. Nancy is often invoked as proof that “community” is a chimera, a position that opens the door to an implied Cartesian ontology (communities do not exist, but thought does); but his position is actually more nuanced, moving back and forth between the impossible necessity of both community and subjectivity: “We must never stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself” (68).

links

- http://www.enfoco.org/index.php/photographers/photographer/aguilar_laura/
<http://www.amrousseau.com/articles/photometro10.html>
<http://www.laweekly.com/news/features/the-natural/3259/>

Domesticating the Harem



Odalisque with Slave, 1841
Jean Dominique Ingres
Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland

Harem

RECONSIDERING
ZENANA IMAGERY
IN NINETEENTH AND
EARLY TWENTIETH
CENTURY INDIA

BY GIANNA CAROTENUTO

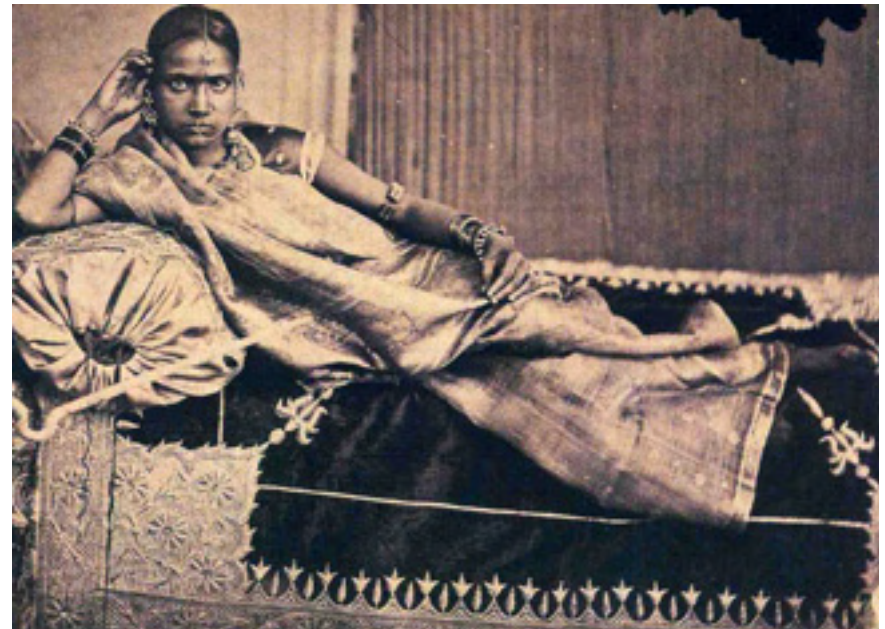
Loosely bound with a black ribbon in a now long forgotten gesture of affection, one hundred and twenty photographs of the women of the Seventh Nizam of Hyderabad's royal *zenana* (female household) were discovered in the dark storerooms of the King Kothi palace in Hyderabad, India. One expects these so-called harem pictures to depict the stereotypical sexualized image of lounging half nude odalisques smoking hookah pipes. A common misunderstanding is that the harem and the *zenana* are one and the same; operating as pictorial or semantic designations,

they are most often used interchangeably. The surprise in the discovery of these photographs is their presentation of women as wives, sisters, and mothers, as well as consorts and concubines, an uncommon depiction that complicates the conventional understandings of what a harem might be. Rather than eroticize, the pictures domesticize the Indian female, and present the possibility for a different understanding of the predominant definition of the harem.¹

Taken between 1905 and 1910 (approximately) by Raja Deen Dayal, court photographer to the Nizam and dignitaries of the British Raj, these pictures were produced at a crucial moment in the history of India and its colonial legacy. Hyderabad at this time was a bastion of traditionalist sentiment, squeezed by colonial pressures and modern forces of Indian nationalism, the appeal of modernity, and nascent female emancipation movements of the late nineteenth

century. The Nizam's court, firmly rooted in its Indo-Islamic heritage, held out during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries against British efforts to reform and modernize Indian society and resisted the Indian National Congress campaign for self-rule, insisting upon political and cultural autonomy from both spheres.² Refracting the Nizam's resistance through the camera lens, Dayal's portraits celebrate the *zenana* women's place as an integral part of time-honored Indian society, as opposed to the view that relegates women of the harem to exotic deviants. In this context, the women of the House of Jah, legendary for their exceptional beauty, elegance, and refinement, symbolize the customary power of the Nizam. Their powerful gaze suggests confidence in their rank and authority, thereby refuting notions of disempowering subjugation.

The spectacular adornment symbolizes both the wealth of



Courtesan, photographer unknown, c. 1870

The Nizam and each woman's personal power. The lavish clothing and the excessive jewelry function as a code that tells of each *zenana* woman's group and individual status, their hierarchy within the harem, and their relationships to each other and to the Nizam. There are both similarities and subtle signs of individuation in dress and type of jewelry within different groups of women.

Presented in Dayal's photographs as an ensemble of 44 courtesans, 22 concubines, 6 premier wives, singular beauties, and mothers with children, the women confirm The Nizam's royal status by their sheer number. The range of female types portrayed in these pictures emphasizes the diversity of physical beauty and regional identities of the Nizam's *zenana*, while the various groupings indicate the

varied structure of female roles and familial associations.

In general, the women are carefully arranged in neat rows or posed against stock European-style painted backdrops; they are presented in a sober, classicizing manner that lends a sense of noble reserve. The standardized composition reveals fluctuating levels of conformity and individuality within the *zenana* rank and file that alludes to the larger flexibility of a colonial modern female identity. This visual conformity reflects a sense of internal cohesiveness that a segregated community of women would exhibit. It also references typical portraiture styles inherited from long standing indigenous painting of the Mughal Dynasty (1526–1857) that produced a vigorous pictorial tradition of *zenana* imagery.

Reconsidering representations of the nineteenth and early twentieth century *zenana* of India, my doctoral dissertation aims to unravel the visual

and cultural paradox of harem *versus zenana* imagery in Colonial India (1820–1920). It offers a close reading of the photographs discovered in the King Kothi palace, and other pictures, painted and photographed, of royal Indian *zenanas* from collections in America, Europe, and India in order to examine the private and public representation of elite Indian women alongside the unstable conditions of colonial Indian female identity. I am primarily concerned with the sociopolitical currency of harem mythology, the manner in which harem and *zenana* images were employed by both traditional and modernist factions to define Indian womanhood, and the influence of the Orientalist trope of the erotic harem upon representations of *zenanas* in India.

The discourse around the colonial harem was an important factor in the development of a pictorial narrative for Indian femininity and, as Dayal's pho-

tographs of the Nizam's *zenana* indicate, the transformation of the Indian family. For the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the harem was defined as a site of female power and promoted as a place of Indian tradition, and is but one of the ways that Indian women were idealized during the colonial period. But the *zenana* was also an aspect of Indian society that caused great concern for the colonial British rulers of the subcontinent, generating legislation against widow burning, child marriage, and education of women that ran counter to the norms of Indian society. Burgeoning nationalist and feminist movements of the modern Indian nation also utilized the *zenana* as a platform of debate that employed pictures of elite Indian women to capitalize on the harem myth and to reconstruct the definition of womanhood to serve indigenous political agendas. When female identity is read through

the pictorial history of the traditional *zenana* rather than exclusively through that of the harem, which contains the larger legacy of stereotypes, a more nuanced understanding of women's lives during the colonial era becomes apparent.

While the pictures of the Nizam's *zenana* attest to the veracity and strength of the ancient tradition of female segregation practiced in the early twentieth century by the elite classes of India, they also announce its decline. I argue that the well-known and powerful narratives of the harem, with its eroticized images and sexualized connotations, along with inaccurate notions about the actual boundaries of *pardah* (female sequestration), have eclipsed our understanding of not only what a harem might be in the Indian colonial context but has also limited the possibilities for other notions of elite female identity to emerge—identities that are not solely generated through a

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Three thematic threads run through Dayal's images that inform the dissertation: first, the interplay between the European eroticized harem, the nationalist reconceptualization of the harem, and the traditional Indian domestic *zenana*; second, the exchange of artistic influences, genres and mannerisms of European stylistic trends and Indian aesthetic practices; and third, the shifting image of female identity as the fulcrum between the Colonial and the modern eras.

The familial nature of the Nizam's *zenana* pictures are their most striking attribute within these themes. According to Arjun Appadurai, "in a sex-segregated colonial environment," photography was one of the "central practices through which family, domesticity and reproductive intimacies...moved into the public sphere" (Appa-

durai 1997:5). For the Nizam to have his *zenana* photographed featuring his wives, children, and concubines suggests a choice to both expose the lived reality of the *zenana*, and also display them as his possessions.

As a record of a private royal *zenana* in colonial India, these rare photographs resonate with conflicting realities—on the one hand, the photos of the Nizam's women assembled on carpets in the palace garden exhibit the exotic notions of the harem common to Western Orientalist fantasies. On the other hand, as an intimate memoir of family life, these pictures depict a domestic space filled with children, family hierarchy, and household practices. For example, the Nizam presents himself casually arm in arm with his children at whose feet are seated their various mothers, along with the family *ayah* (nanny). Imaging the non-traditional family challenged British constraints on the morality of its Indian subjects. Other

photographs in the Nizam's archive feature the women of the *zenana* in their roles as royal consorts, gathered in varying groups of ten and twenty, some lounging casually on the ground, others seated, with bottles and dishware interspersed amidst their ranks as if ready for an afternoon picnic. Paradoxically, these pictures show the full spectrum of the traditional domestic sphere while including visual references to the Orientalist harem in their composition and select iconography.

Considered in a larger socio-political context, the Nizam's *zenana* pictures nuance the discussion of Indian female identity during the colonial period and help answer questions about how Indian women and men of the colonial era negotiated the complicated exchange between colonial expectations, traditional Indian culture, and modernity.

Colonial photographs of Indian women champion a variety of identities. Malavika

Karlekar engages with the various modes of representation made of Bengali women at the turn of the twentieth century, subjects which range from philanthropists to housewives and social activists.³ However, a discussion of harem/*zenana* imagery is left unexplored. My comparative analysis with the Nizam's *zenana* pictures and other pictures of elite Indian women draws attention to the enormous disjuncture between how the harem and the *zenana* were exoticized and popularized, primarily for European audiences, and how it was lived and portrayed by Indian culture. When measured against other colonial images of Indian harems and *zenana* women (an extremely limited archive), the influence of the Orientalist trope of the erotic harem upon representations of *zenanas* becomes apparent.

The trope of the harem, one of the most pervasive stereotypes of the colonial era, existed

in sensationalist renderings of the "unveiled" harem women featured in stereotypical style as lounging courtesans and dancing (*nautch*) girls. These "Orientalized" renditions were mass produced at the later half of the nineteenth century by European and Indian artists alike, such as painters Edwin Lord Weeks (1849–1903) and Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906), or the photographs of Maharaja Jai Singh II, who documented his own *zenana* thirty years earlier in 1870, setting a precedent for the harem as an eroticized space that remains fixed in popular imagination. In contrast, pictures of the domestic *zenana* were not frequently published and remained hidden from view.

What my study suggests is that the eroticized female is refashioned in pictures of conservative elite Indian women crafted for the campaigns of Indian nationalist reform. AsINDERPAL GREWAL has noted, "while the harem woman in Orientalist

texts were seen as promiscuous and duplicitous... those of the Indian *zenana* were seen as passive and exploited..."⁴ This feminine binary inherent in the discourses of Imperialism and Indian Nationalism, is seen in the simultaneous interplay of the erotic and the domestic. The pictures of the Nizam's *zenana* reveal complex and discrete differences overlooked in harem discourse, whereby pictures of the harem are primarily eroticized and those of the *zenana* are predominantly domestic. In the case of the Nizam's *zenana* both undercurrents are present. A careful analysis of these *zenana* pictures makes possible a distinction between the harem as a construct and the *zenana* as a reflection of a lived reality. What is gained from this understanding is that, in both cases, Indian women were idealized, either through erotic or domestic narratives, and in service to both Indian and British concerns.

Part of the impact of the Nizam's *zenana* archive is the challenge posed to the standard argument that women were forbidden from depiction because of the laws of *pardah* (female sequestration). Current scholarship has presented the colonial harem/*zenana* as a site for British and Indian attempts to modernize and reform not only the status of women but also the future of Indian society.⁵ However, many scholars assume that elite female portraiture during the colonial era is rare because the laws of *pardah* forbid women from having portraits taken. This taboo intensified the mystic and titillating effects of pictures of harem women, causing them to be misread. Based on my findings, the claim for the rarity of elite female representation in India, in particular, that of the women of the *zenana*, is an untenable fiction, one tied to the powerful mythology of the harem and its legacy of exoticization, which has colored understandings of status, rights, and mobility for elite colonial Indian women, including

interpretations of the boundaries dictated by *pardah*.

The harem trope was often put to use by Indians to produce anti-colonial propaganda. For example, the *zenana* pictures of the Seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, I argue, were, from an Indian perspective, intended to act as proof of the Nizam's power and status. Furthermore, Daya's pictures attest to the Nizam's desire to preserve his traditional way of life in the face of colonial and nationalist reforms.

The assumed absence of elite women from the pictorial record is further strengthened by the perceived dominance of the Orientalist harem genre in literary and visual arts of the colonial period. Because harem pictures featured women unveiled, an unorthodox gesture, it was thought that the women depicted could not be of elite females, but those of lesser status. However, my research shows the contrary is true, that elite women were extensively photographed, either as individuals or

included in their *zenana* community. This reveals a wide spectrum for reconsidering traditional female roles and the status of Indian women in colonial India. What becomes clear is that there is a harem genre, or style of representation, that is employed in varying degrees in the representation of the *zenana* and of elite Indian women.

Though both of these categories of female representation, the erotic and the domestic, at first seem designed to meet Western standards of womanhood, they in fact are informed by and functioned in response to colonial pressures upon Indian culture. The category of pictures that escaped public scrutiny are those of the *zenana*. Though often idealized, *zenana* pictures remain grounded in the desire to preserve a certain cultural authenticity while they also accommodate modern forms of self-exposure. At the time, made for private viewing and kept within the confines of the family, the Nizam's pictures co-exist with other *zenana* archives that circulated beyond domestic limits,

such as those of the royal women of Gwalior or Lucknow. Having commissioned these pictures, the Nizam has produced powerful symbols of a traditional royal lifestyle. Exposing his women to the scrutiny of the photographic process goes against the belief in the sequestered status of the female, therefore, defying cultural norms and casting doubt upon the presumed ban on elite women's pictorial representation. From a contemporary viewpoint, it is easy to see the Nizam's pictures as evidence for women's continued subordination within a patriarchal system/family. However, examined in their historical context they stand as a testimony to the ambiguous responses inherent in the colonial moment, and speak of the expanding frontiers of women's lives at a time when those possibilities were severely limited.

In tracing the many ways in which female identity was fashioned during the colonial period in India, an analysis of *zenana*



Gianna Carotenuto at the Chowmahalla Palace, 2005

pictures bring us full circle. From their initial impact as rarely-seen depictions of the female household of the Nizam, a deeper analysis reveals aspects of Orientalist fantasies and notions of resistance, to both British colonial presence and Indian nationalism, and reference to

burgeoning female agency. These remarkable photographs speak to the complexities of patriarchal control and traditional values, and in their analysis we find a mixed legacy from these representations of the lived reality of elite Indian women.

Gianna Carotenuto is a doctoral candidate in South Asia Art History at UCLA. Her area of focus is the Colonial Art of India, in particular photography, with a directed interest in Postcolonial and Subaltern Theory and Feminist Studies. She will be filing her dissertation, "Domesticating the Harem: Reconsidering Zenana Imagery in Colonial India," in June of 2009.

NOTES

1. *Zenana* is a Persian derivative that signifies "woman" and the female quarters of the home. As an Eastern institution it comes from the concept of *pardah*, a Persian word that literally means "curtain," but connotes the concealment of women from public view. The Arabic term "harem" conveys the notion of taboo and generally refers to prohibition or unlawfulness as well as something revered and holy. When used by the West, it most often signifies a place of erotic decadence. In my study I make a clear distinction between the Indian use of the word *zenana* for domestic contexts from the use of the term harem, which does not occur as a colloquial term in Hindi or Urdu. It is most

often employed by the West to refer to an erotic context for female segregation.

2. Rajendra Prasad. *The Asif Jahs of Hyderabad: Their Rise and Decline*. Vikas Publishing House Pvt.:New Delhi. 1984.
3. Malavika Karlekar. *Re-Visioning the Past: Early Photography in Bengal 1875-1915*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi. 2005.
4. Inderpal Grewal. *Home and Harem: Nation Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*. Duke University Press: Durham North Carolina. 1996:51.
5. See Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*. Oxford University Press: New York. 2003. Though there are no studies to date in the discipline of art history on the visual component of the *zenana*, see Karen Leonard (1978), Meredith Borthwick (1984), Ruby Lal (2005), Geraldine Forbes (1996), Ruby Lal (2005). Gail Minault (1994).

the private and the public in the photography of laura aguilar

BY PATRICIA VALLADOLID

WITHOUT WORDS
Laura Aguilar's
photographs have
broken a big silence across
marginalized communities.
The images that she produces
represent a community that has
been invisible in the arts, not only
queer, brown, and female, but
also large. The ability to claim
identity is empowerment, and
although Aguilar does not seek
to define Chicana lesbian art,
she does challenge viewers to
reconceptualize constructs of
race, class, gender, and sexuality,
particularly patriarchal constructs

of art that seek to romanticize
or idealize the female form.
Laura Aguilar's photographs of
female nude forms in the natural
landscape represent a vision of
the female body that directly
shocks the viewer's expectations
and desires. It is through these
aesthetic manipulations that
Aguilar achieves self-acceptance
of her own body, a body may not
be considered "beautiful" or "fine
art" because of how it opposes
a Western aesthetic of "feminine
beauty."

Born in 1959 in San Gabriel,
California, Aguilar continues



In Sandy's Room, 1989, © Laura Aguilar

to live and work in the San Gabriel Valley. She attended the photography program at East Los Angeles Community College and continued her studies with “The Friends of Photography Workshop” and “Santa Fe Photographic Workshop.” Her work has been exhibited in the Aperto section of the Venice Biennale (1993), the Los Angeles City Hall Bridge Gallery, the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), Los Angeles Photography Center, Women’s Center Gallery at UCSB, Los Angeles’s Self Help Graphics, and the University of Illinois in Chicago. Aguilar considers herself a primarily self-taught photographer, and her work focuses on self- portraiture and portraits of her extended family and friends.

Aguilar’s photography moves beyond and out of the conception of portraiture into a place that is fascinating and creative, a place that creates strength not only for Laura but also for individuals

who know what it is to be the Other. As a Chicana feminist I too identify with Chicana lesbians and assume this identity as my own. Being exposed to Aguilar’s images has empowered me and reinforced my love for myself and my community, which has always been marginalized due to our race, class, gender, and sexuality. As a plus-size Chicana, I can relate to the struggle of acceptance for the non-hetero-normative female body. Mine is a brown curvy body, which is more than just *gordita*; it is human and real; I feel, I love, and I desire a voice and a place of my own, what Emma Pérez calls my own “*sitio y lengua*.”

By using her own body as an example of what it feels to be an outcast, Aguilar creates a *sitio y lengua* for the Chicana lesbian. Her vulnerable large body, I am sure, has been targeted by many as disgusting or not worthy of being classified as art. As a viewer of these representations of the vulnerable Chicana body, I feel as though Aguilar is pushing

Aguilar’s images subvert social expectations of female beauty and make the large Chicana lesbian body the center of discourse, thereby decentering the dominant perception of what is beautiful or acceptable in the female form.

me through the barriers that socialize my own sense of self. Unlike supermodels who are currently seen in society as prototypes of feminine beauty, a fat woman is seen as an aberration, something ugly, or embarrassing. Aguilar's images subvert social expectations of female beauty and make the large Chicana lesbian body the center of discourse, thereby decentering the dominant perception of what is beautiful or acceptable in the female form.

One photo in particular shows Aguilar's comfort with her own body. *In Sandy's Room* (1989) is a self-portrait reclining in a chair in front of a fan and an open window. As soon as I looked at this photo, even on a small scale, I had to take a second look. I felt myself engaging in a personal conversation with this piece and was able to connect on the premise of public acceptance. As a plus-size Chicana, I wondered at the feelings and challenges

Aguilar must have experienced by taking this photo. Although I am comfortable in my body, society's constant rejection of anything other than size 2 constantly reminds me how I don't fit in. In Aguilar's portrait a sense of openness and comfort is conveyed by the way her body is relaxed and projects the idea of fearlessness and a sense of acceptance by occupying an open space, something that is even more obvious in her landscape photographs where Laura's naked form becomes part of the natural environment. Going back to her naked body reclining in front of the fan, I was almost able to see my own body open and ready to be seen.

I have gained a sense of self-acceptance by viewing Aguilar's work; her images allow me to feel the vulnerability of exposure, the daily struggle I engage in when I place my private body in the public space. Aguilar's photographs had the power to

move me as a viewer. I was able to connect and feel a part of a community that will understand me and not exclude me because of my size, the color of my skin, or the way that I speak. For the first time I was able to actually see the way Chicana lesbians challenge notions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. With all of the writings of Chicana lesbians that I've been reading so far this quarter in Professor Alicia Gaspar de Alba's course on "Chicana Lesbian Literature," I feel that Laura Aguilar's work is an extension of the theories and ideologies of writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and Emma Pérez, how they all explore the same concepts of home, desire, sexuality, identity, and consciousness. More than anything, Aguilar's work helps me to see how the personal is political.

Patricia Valladolid is a *Chicana/o Studies* major and a *McNair Scholar* doing research on women truckers in Long Beach, California. She thanks Prof Alicia Gaspar de Alba for her help in editing this piece.

Initiation of Collaboration between Women's Studies and Gender Research Environments



by Helena Pettersson

During the last week of April, Professor Britta Lundgren from Umeå University, Sweden visited UCLA's Department of Women's Studies and met with several women's studies researchers. The visit's aim was to initiate an exchange program between Umeå Center for Gender Studies (UCGS) and the UCLA Department of Women's Studies. Professor Lundgren is an ethnologist and the current dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Umeå University and the intellectual leader for UCGS. She is also the founding director of the Swedish National Graduate School of Gender Studies (a post she resigned from in spring 2007) and the chair for the Gender Research Committee in the Swedish Research Council.

The Swedish National Graduate School of Gender Studies works through interdisciplinary collaboration with participants from various scientific environments with diverse traditions. This diversity affects the structure of the graduate research training, methodology, theory, reflexivity, and research ethics. The graduate school is a part of the umbrella organization UCGS, a research platform for gender studies shared by all faculties at Umeå University. UCGS has the responsibility of organizing an



Britta Lundgren, Professor of Ethnology, Department of Culture and the Media, Umeå University, Sweden, recently visited UCLA to initiate an exchange program between Umeå Center for Gender Studies and the UCLA Department of Women's Studies

interdisciplinary, boundary crossing co-operation within gender studies, both on the national and international level. The center hosts the research program “Challenging Gender,” a research program lauded by the Swedish Research Council for its outstanding quality.

Besides presenting the National Graduate School of Gender Studies and Umeå Center for Gender Studies for the Women Studies Program, Professor Lundgren also met with both the UCLA Vice Chancellor for Research and the UCLA Vice Provost for the International Institute. She also gave a talk at the Scandinavian Section about mourning and grief in Sweden as cultural expressions. The

talk was based on her latest book *Unexpected Death—Expected Mourning* (2006). Professor Lundgren's research is generally within gender theory. The point of departure for her research is to analyze gender as a social and cultural construction. Her impact on the development of Swedish gender theory has been profound. She has written several books, for example *Public Servants. Femininity and Occupational culture in the Swedish Post Office* (1990), *The Imperfect Friendship* (1994), *To Distinguish and to Unite. Ethnological studies in meanings of gender* (1996), *Determining, Naming, Doubting. Cultural perspectives on gender, sexuality and politics* (2001), *Academic Culture* (2002) and *Family*

and *Gender* (2002).

We look forward to a future exchange program between UCLA and Umeå university!

The trip was jointly sponsored by the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, the UCLA Department of Women Studies, the UCLA Scandinavian Section, the UCLA Vice Chancellor for Research, and the Umeå Center for Gender Studies.

Helena Pettersson holds Ph.D. in ethnology and gender studies from Umeå University. She is conducting fieldwork for a study of dual-science careers among plasma-physicists in the United States, Japan, and Sweden.

TRANSCENDING MASCULINITY

(RE)READING ROCKY ...THIRTY YEARS LATER

by Heather Collette-VanDeraa

NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY have been discussed in film scholarship for decades, with the genre of action films, particularly that of the boxing film, providing a most fertile ground for discourse. While *Rocky* (1976) did not inaugurate the genre, it remains one of the seminal films of not only the boxing genre, but of all American films, providing an archetype of masculinity that spawned a franchise. Many of these films repeat a theme of triumph against all odds that relies on a negotiation and assertion of masculinity in its most physical (and often violent) forms. Jurgen Reeder (1995) asserts that “these films seem to be a kind of ritual where a seemingly identical dramatic structure is reiterated many times over...such ritual repetition of dramatic themes express[es]

an epoch’s need to explore an experience that as yet has not been adequately formulated and thematized” (131). The ‘experience’ that has yet to be adequately formulated in *Rocky* is a construction of masculinity that must adapt to, and reflect, the changing cultural climate of working- and middle-class values in light of civil rights and gender equality. In his struggle to achieve champion status, Rocky Balboa navigates a new cultural terrain marked by a disruption of traditional gender roles. While the hard-body/ action genre of films has presented an arguably homogenous class of masculine iconography, *Rocky* can be deconstructed today in light of an historical re-reading to demonstrate a nuanced representation of masculinity simultaneously embodied in the character’s physical strength



and emotional development, both of which are achieved through his interpersonal relationships. Rocky Balboa’s masculinity is marked by a personal catharsis of emotional self-actualization that transcends his raw physicality and role as an underdog boxer. As any athlete will tell you, physical strength is enhanced by a mental and emotional fortitude, which develops in *Rocky* primarily though the titular character’s

interpersonal relationships. Rocky's development both physically and emotionally is enhanced through his relationships with principle love interest, Adrian (Talia Shire), and boxing rival Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers) as well as the other men, most notably the father-figure trainer, Mickey (Bergess Meredith), and Adrian's brother Paulie (Burt Young). In contrast to views expressed in other studies of the film, *Rocky* presents a nuanced, if somewhat sentimental, archetype of a man who must negotiate his masculinity through complex emotional relationships with others, while simultaneously developing his physical strength. It is these relationships that frame the central plot of *Rocky's* physical training and ultimate match in the boxing ring, which, unlike the interpersonal relationships, ends in ambivalent defeat.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Rocky follows from a long tradition of boxing themes in films. One particularly poignant example, *From Here to Eternity* (1953), was another prominent American film with a central plotline devoted to a boxing match between the protagonist, Private Pruett (Montgomery Clift), and another soldier at an army base. Pruett's boxing match is one he explicitly does not want to fight and much of the film traces his circumvention of the match. His masculinity

is still caught up in boxing and fighting, but he is attempting to prove himself as a man who will not fight, in part due to the fact that he had blinded his last opponent, something he feels strong remorse for. Therefore, his masculinity is, like Rocky Balboa's, at least partly defined by his humanity toward others. Although, like Rocky, both men must fight at some point to demonstrate that masculinity is only partly defined by humanity; it is subtextually implicit in each of the fighting scenes in *From Here to Eternity* and *Rocky* that regardless of their own self-definition of manhood or personhood, it is the fight that will define them within the larger world they must inhabit. Pruett's philosophy of masculinity is revealed when he states, "A man should be what he can do," punctuating the fact that masculinity is a function of action and behavior—not how he feels, what he wants, how he thinks, but what he does. Just as Pruett defines himself, and his masculinity, through his humanity and his role as a career soldier, Rocky defines himself and his masculinity through his identification as a boxer and his relationships with others.

In both films, contextualized fighting is an acceptable form of masculine expression—*From Here to Eternity* takes place in the military setting at a camp in Hawaii in 1941 prior to the US involvement in WWII. The film shows the brutal barbarism of a military bully habitually beating up a sympathetic character, Maggio

...Rocky presents a nuanced, if somewhat sentimental, archetype of a man who must negotiate his masculinity through complex emotional relationships with others, while simultaneously developing his physical strength.

(Frank Sinatra), who is ultimately killed. Pruett then avenges his friend's murder by engaging the perpetrator in a back alley knife fight, killing him. In the end, it is WWII—the penultimate fight—that provides the context for the most sanctioned form of fighting. Fighting therefore must be contextualized in the spectacle of formalized boxing or war in order for it to be a redeemable masculine characteristic. Brute force or violent tactics without justification are punished or frowned upon. Pruett's fate is to die at the gun of one of his own men on the evening of Pearl Harbor, whereas Rocky Balboa is scorned by Mickey early in the film, who admonishes him for his brutish career choices: "You could have been a fighter but instead you became a cheap leg-breaker to a second-rate loan shark. It's a wasted life." The commentary suggests that to fight in the ring—the formal, controlled, contextualized fight—is

legitimized over the street fight—the informal, unsanctioned, uncontained fight.

BINARY OPPOSITIONS

Much of *Rocky*'s thematic structure is explored through binary pairings that function in a dyadic structure of cooperation or competition. Rocky-as-boxer is situated in direct opposition to Apollo Creed, but Rocky-as-man is contextualized in both his opposition to Creed and in his relation to Adrian, especially, and among the other men in his life. Rocky's masculinity is situated in a binary opposition to every other principle male character in the film, including Mickey—the aging father figure/trainer, Paulie, the alcoholic but aspiring manager (who are also positioned in opposition to each other). The exception is the only principle female character, Adrian. Rocky's masculinity and Adrian's femininity are expressed in relation, not opposition, to each other. In Rocky's own words, their relationship with one another is about "filling gaps." He tells Paulie in the meat locker, "I don't know...she's got gaps, I've got gaps; together we fill gaps." While the language Rocky employs to express this parity is simple, it is by no means simplistic. The gaps he refers to, in both himself and Adrian, reflect an understanding of the flawed nature of individual existence -- that in isolation

we are never self-actualized. And while they "fill gaps" together, it is also important to note that filling of gaps does not mean they complete each other, only together forming a whole person; rather, through their relation to each other, each becomes a whole self.

In an exchange between Rocky and Adrian at the ice rink, Rocky reveals that his motivation for becoming a boxer was stimulated by something his father said to him, "You weren't born with much of a brain so better start usin' your body." To which Adrian replies that her mother informed her, "You weren't born with much of a body so better start developin' your brain." This early scene in the film's narrative demonstrates (and not without a bit of campy humor) that Adrian and Rocky complement each other in the most basic way, a way that never denigrates Adrian's status as his female counterpart, but rather provides a foundation for a relationship based in mutual regard, balance, and equality between them.

Feminist scholars may be quick to argue this point with me, as evidenced in claims made as recently as 2005 by V. Elmwood that "Rocky offers masculine status and national citizenship to a previously rejected group in exchange for their allegiance in a quest for the remasculinization of white men...as well as offering a bond of solidarity in rolling back the



Rocky & Adrian's Thanksgiving date at the rink, discovering their complementarity.

advances made by feminism" (49). Elmwood claims that the oppositional pairing of Rocky and Apollo Creed somehow advances the fight against the feminist movement through the 'remasculinization' of (white) men, though it is unclear what content of the film squarely supports this claim. She states, "It is clear that the moral universe of the film relies squarely on her [Adrian's] efforts to fulfill a properly feminine role by serving the champ and humanizing him" (pp 57-58). As I will illustrate below, it is not a subservient role that Adrian plays to Rocky, but that of a loving partner who has discovered her own agency through the relationship they forge together, not least of which is sparked by Rocky's ability to see Adrian as a real, whole person.

This ability to see is signified in the first scene of the film. Rocky opens with the camera pulling away from a mosaic of Jesus (the epitome of non-violent masculinity) above a small-time boxing ring. Rocky Balboa, the “Italian Stallion,” wins his fight in a minor pay-for-play situation. He wins the match, but his appearance is that of a defeated man. (It is also interesting to note the bookending of the film: it opens with Rocky winning in a small time ring but looking and feeling defeated, and ends with him losing in a big-time ring but feeling triumphant. This simple inversion is not as simple as it may seem when we examine the course of Rocky’s emotional transcendence from a small-time hoodlum to a self-actualized man.) His left eye was injured during the fight and in the following scenes Rocky strolls through his working-class neighborhood in his role as a thug (and presumably not a very good one because he has sympathy for those who owe the money) for a “second-rate loan shark.” The eye injury is significant in that it symbolically represents a shift in his perspective. He goes through the motions of his job, but his outlook on his world and himself has been affected; he does not see things the same as before, or soon won’t. The eye injury is a painful foreshadowing of his change of perspective and eventual catharsis that takes him off the streets as a lone thug into the ring—and into a loving relationship with Adrian.

The romance between Adrian and Rocky

provides the context with which oppositional notions of masculinity come to light in the film. Most notably, their relationship makes Paulie increasingly jealous until it culminates in an alcoholic rage on Christmas Eve. A moment of catharsis for both Adrian and Rocky takes place during this scene when Paulie challenges Rocky’s worthiness of his sister’s love. Adrian lives with Paulie, and as he sees it, he is her ‘caretaker,’ but it is really she who takes care of him—and in the most backward, anti-feminist role. Paulie interrupts Rocky and Adrian’s serene holiday scene by shouting, “You owe me!” A visibly angry Adrian defends herself: “I don’t owe you nothing! I take care of YOU Paulie, I don’t owe you nothing,” to which she reflects and adds, “and you made me feel like a loser!” The binary of winners and losers is evoked repeatedly as a central theme in the film, as Adrian and Rocky together become ‘winners’ through overcoming individual and shared obstacles. In this scene, Paulie is the principle obstacle to be overcome, but it is significant to note that Rocky does not attempt to fight what is ultimately Adrian’s fight. He stays calmly seated in a chair while she confronts Paulie alone, and on her own terms. Rocky’s serene masculinity contrasts sharply to Paulie’s brutishly violent, domineering role. Adrian does not exchange one form of



Rocky with the loan shark: the eye injury signifies Rocky’s shift in perspective

oppressive domination (that of her alcoholic brother) for another; she makes the choice to enter into a relationship of equals with a man she admires and loves. When she asks him, “want a roommate?,” we know that Rocky is deserving of both her love and companionship; he could have played the defending figure, a potentially violent interlocuter in Adrian’s confrontation with Paulie, but he chose instead to remain seated. That the scene could have been staged with Rocky defending Adrian and not have affected the greater plot of the film, nor the outcome, is significant to the pro-feminist reading I am encouraging here. While the scene is problematized by the almost voyeuristic nature

of the seated Rocky watching Adrian fight, it provides an important inversion of the later scene where Adrian will decide not to stay seated in order to watch Rocky in the championship fight against Apollo Creed. Once again, a balance is articulated between Adrian and Rocky that transcends simple oppositional binary to establish them on equal footing.

Rocky and Adrian must also negotiate conflicts within their relationship and one significant scene that illustrates their conflict resolution is when he tells her to “just make the meat,” a brute statement that disregards Adrian’s personhood, and recalls the derogatory way that Paulie had treated her. She begrudgingly goes into the kitchen, but the camera stays on Rocky, who silently contemplates his hostile order. Rocky then walks toward the kitchen and apologizes saying, “I’m sorry.” This is a sharp contrast to dominant expressions of masculinity, especially those embodied in the hard-body boxer or blue-collar worker, which seldom represent strong men apologizing to women for their wrongful actions. While providing a tender and sentimental moment on screen, the off-screen narrative constructed between Rocky and Adrian is that of mutual regard and respect. It is only after Rocky apologizes that Adrian emerges from the kitchen—the penultimate signifier that this is a relationship of equals: Adrian won’t be stuck in the ‘kitchen’ of pre-feminist gender roles. Rocky infers from the moment a

silent understanding that conflict resolution requires responsibility for wrongful, hurtful actions. He owes her an apology and offers it to her freely. Rocky’s manhood is punctuated by this exchange, demonstrating the power of contrition and forgiveness, which, rather than making him weak, actually serves to make him stronger emotionally and psychologically.

MASCULINITY AND SEXUALITY: “WOMEN WEAKEN LEGS”

Rocky and Adrian’s relationship is compromised when she initiates sexual activity after Mickey tells him not to ‘fool around.’ Rocky says that he really likes her and Mickey replies, “so let her train ya!” The phrase next uttered by Mickey, “Women weaken legs,” is an overt commentary on how femininity in any form, but especially female sexuality, threatens male virility and masculinity. In the next scene Adrian is waiting on Rocky’s doorstep, increasing in her feminine expression, movement, and personal empowerment; “looking good,” as Rocky tells her. It’s clear from his response that Mickey’s ‘advice’ will go unheeded, but more importantly that the sexual relationship inferred from the diegetic interaction is a source of strength for both Adrian and Rocky. In Bill Conti’s iconic theme song, the lyrics “getting strong now” apply not



Adrian arrives at Rocky’s doorstep with a new look and a new dog.

just to Rocky, but to Adrian as well; she is truly getting strong now. Free from the repressive restraints of archaic notions of sexuality and sex, intimated by Mickey (the father-figure), Rocky and Adrian fortify their relationship with an open and mutual sexuality that enhances, rather than diminishes, each’s individual strength.

In the same scene, Adrian brings Rocky a dog “to keep you company when you run” and expresses humorously that the dog eats little turtles. She knows how much Rocky loves his little turtles, and she makes a light-hearted joke of it, again illustrating the compassion and integrity of their relationship. That she is able to light-heartedly poke fun at Rocky’s ‘sympathetic side’ only serves to demonstrate the facility of his masculinity that transcends brute strength.

The sexual relationship notwithstanding, Adrian's support of Rocky's training, both emotionally and in the companionship offered by the dog, overtly contradicts Mickey's myth that 'women weaken legs' because it is clear her encouragement is helping to strengthen Rocky's personal fortitude.

In the final scene of *Rocky*, the champion fight against Apollo Creed, Adrian emerges from the locker room to see the fight during the roth round. The fight, contrary to the assertion by Elmwood (2005), is not yet over, and Adrian struggles to see Rocky in the ring. Whatever personal obstacle had held her back in the locker-room (which takes place off-screen) has been overcome as she enters the arena to witness the end of the fight. Rocky's eye is bleeding again, but this time his perspective has already shifted; his catharsis is complete in his transformation from 'just another bum from the neighborhood' to a prizefighting boxer (though not yet a champion). He tells Mickey to "cut me," to release the blood preventing him from being able to see: he won't allow himself to be blinded by self-doubt again. He can see clearly and the next scene illustrates the nuanced nature of Rocky's sight.

The final utterances in the film are particularly poignant in light of the context of the scene. As the fight has reached an anti-climatic end for Rocky, each of the characters shouts for the other—the famous "Adrian!/Rocky!" dyadic—

Rocky amongst the press in the ring and Adrian in the crowd. When he sees her, the first thing he says is, "Where's your hat?" Is this the line to be uttered by a pulverized man who can barely see anything out of two swollen and bleeding eyes—where's your hat? It is almost comical upon reflection, considering the gravity of the scene and what Rocky has just been through. But it is precisely because from the beginning Rocky was able to see Adrian, see the nuances of who she is as a person. It is appropriate in the culmination of everything he has worked for, in the less than subtle dénouement of the love story, that Rocky sees the detail of her missing hat, demonstrating his ability to see clearly the one thing that matters most to him: her.

The moment is punctuated by closing music, which is triumphant even though Rocky has not won the fight. The implication is that he has gained something more valuable, a strong emotional bond with a woman whom he has not had to fight for, together creating a relationship of equals based on complementary characteristics and reciprocal affection and support. The very last lines are each of them embracing each other saying, "I love you" in a triumphant embrace in the boxing ring. Rocky is at its core a love story that problematizes unilateral assumptions about



The denouement: "Where's your hat?"

masculinity as being defined through violent physicality and brute strength alone. Rocky's triumph is signified by his personal catharsis of meeting an insurmountable challenge espoused by meaningful emotional and psychological bonds within his interpersonal relationships. Rocky offers a complex representation of masculinity that warrants reconsideration amongst scholars and film buffs alike.

I am hesitant to attribute this construction of masculinity in *Rocky* to either the director, John G. Avildsen, or the writer/actor, Sylvester Stallone, alone. Rather, I posit it as a representation culled from the collective shifting ideologies of dominant gender roles as well as

In light of the quickness to implicate all genre films exploiting male physicality as being anti-feminist, I am interested in a more contextualized analysis of the interpersonal relationships in the film's narrative to demonstrate the complexity of Rocky Balboa's polyvalent and transcendent masculinity.

social norms, values, and mores of the 1970s. From an historical perspective, *Rocky* came to the screen during an era that Cagin and Dray call "Political Hollywood, the time when Hollywood made movies for a growing youth counter-culture that wanted to see challenges to the political system" (Jeffords, 1994: 16). While many subtextual themes in the film indirectly confront the political and economic issues of the day, the social dynamics of the struggle for racial and gender equality clearly frame the dramatic interpersonal narrative of the film; a response to the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and early 1970s that played out in public and political spheres. The feminist movement sparked the interest in studies of masculinity, which *Rocky*, holding the cultural capital in male iconography that it does, is imbued

with. In light of the quickness to implicate all genre films exploiting male physicality as being anti-feminist, I am interested in a more contextualized analysis of the interpersonal relationships in the film's narrative to demonstrate the complexity of Rocky Balboa's polyvalent and transcendent masculinity.

Heather Collette-VanDeraa is a fourth-year Mass Communications Studies major, Women's Studies minor at UCLA. She has presented original research titled, "The L Next Door: Fashioning Lesbian Archetypes on *The L Word*," at conferences at ASU and Wellesley College. Two of her most recent works, "Media, Myth and Moore: the Myth of Objectivity and the Documentary Films of Michael Moore" and her senior honors thesis, "Media Ghettos? Redlining of American Cable Television Topography," were accepted for presentation at two regional and national research conferences. She also co-produced and directed an original documentary short, *Staging Resistance*, presented at UCLA's Graduate School of Theater, Film and Television. She has published an academic book review of W.J. T. Mitchell's "What Do Pictures Want" in the International Journal of Communication, co-authored with Douglas Kellner. She begins her MA program in Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television this fall.

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sweet & bitter

EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY "GIRL PHOTOGRAPHY" FROM JAPAN

BY ADRIAN FAVELL



Mikiko Hara, Untitled (Agnes Dei) 1998



Mika Ninagawa, Mika 04-05-B2-1 (Anna Tsuchiya) 2004



Mikiko Hara, Untitled (Is As It) 1996

On March 14, 2008, the Center for Study of Women at UCLA sponsored a special talk at the Hammer Museum by curator Hiromi Nakamura on recent trends in "Girl Photography" from Japan. The talk was part of three days of events at UCLA looking at the growing influence of Japanese pop culture in the West. Later that same day, works by two of the artists featured in the talk, Mika Ninagawa and Mikiko Hara, were displayed at a reception at the

Anderson School of Management. The show was the first time that the work of these two emerging women artists had been publicly shown on the West Coast.

Hiromi Nakamura's talk was published in full in the color program

that accompanied the events. This is still available at the following website, along with images shown at the exhibition: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/favell/jwave6.pdf> Printed copies are also available on request from Adrian Favell.

In the talk, Nakamura traces the emergence in the mid 1990s of a new generation of highly fêted, young female photographers in Japan, that drew upon and reflected the extraordinary youth street culture developing in Tokyo at that time.



Mika Ninagawa,
Mika 04-106-B2-2 2004

Often coming from backgrounds in fashion or design, these new artists used public competitions and commercial sponsorship to rise to prominence, with a brash female photography that celebrated a new, assertive culture of, by and for women in contemporary Japan. The media loved the image of “girl power” it suggested, and their offhand and sometimes confrontational

diary-style techniques seized the public’s attention, while being quickly absorbed by mainstream photographers. But there was also pathos in the rapid rise and fall of some of these stars. Both Ninagawa and Hara, however, have gone on to forge a confident mature style, that sees them now being recognized as international artists in their own right.

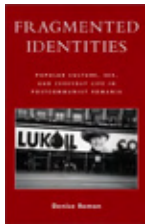
The talk was followed by a long and fascinating panel discussion, which we are very pleased to now make available online, in both text and podcast form. The panel featured four additional speakers: Charlotte Cotton, curator of photography at LACMA; Laura Miller, professor of anthropology at Loyola University, Chicago; London-based artist and writer, Sharon Kinsella; and sociologist Yoshitaka Mouri from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.

Charlotte Cotton sketches the historical context of photography in Japan, and its distinctive relation to other fine arts when compared to the West, that has continued to the present and accounts for much of its striking originality. Laura Miller explores the emergence of a bold, pushy and often irreverent girls’ culture in Japan since the 1990s, out of which these photographers have emerged. Sharon Kinsella then suggests some of the sometimes disturbing ambiguities of Japanese girls’ art as it is consumed in Japan and (increasingly) the West, because of its complicated relation to the parallel voyeuristic fascination of male consumers for this otherwise inaccessible and gender specific girls’ aesthetic. Yoshitaka Mouri, meanwhile, locates the movement in relation to the emergent ideology of creativity in Japan and worldwide,

that celebrates the life of “freeter” [free-working] “creators”, while generating a subversive art that needs to be appreciated outside of formal white museum walls. A lively Q & A session follows that further develops these themes. The text of the panel discussion (in pdf format) can to be found here at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/favell/S&Bdiscussion.pdf>

The live podcast of the full two-hour talk and panel discussion (in two parts) can be found here: <http://www.csw.ucla.edu/podcasts.html>

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Denise Roman, *Fragmented Identities: Popular Culture, Sex, and Everyday Life in Postcommunist Romania*, Lanham: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2003, 2007 (revised paperback edition)

In her latest book entitled *Fragmented Identities: Popular Culture, Sex, and Everyday Life in Postcommunist Romania*, Denise Roman, a native of Bucharest and a research scholar at the Center for the Study of Women at UCLA, takes an interest in the problems of Eastern European women during communist and postcommunist Romania and in transnational feminism, as she holds interviews, cites real anecdotes, and meets with political activists and other feminist scholars and researchers in Romania. The outcome is an original and accurate description of present day Romania, framed by an adept and subtle use of a cultural studies methodology.

A real page turner, *Fragmented Identities* is a voyage set out by a cheerful *flâneuse* in post-1989 Romania's popular culture. It mainly draws upon the practices of "everyday life" and inquires into many important elements (youth, gender, sexuality, the new market economy, society, and politics under construction in

Romania). These important elements are contemplated not only in their own distinctiveness, but also through the strong ties between Romanian citizens and the "heritage of communism." By using the "epistemology of Cultural Studies and Feminist Theory" (p. 29), Roman is interested in answering to "a lack

of previous analytical introspection" (p. 33) into what Michel Foucault has called "technologies of the self" and "technologies of power." In other words, this voyage discloses a complex reality marked by the notion of "identity,"



which is explored primarily through "identity construction" – that is to say, through "practices, discourses, subjectivities, and everyday life experiences" (p. 22)—and only secondarily through "identity politics."



While observing the construction of youth identities, aesthetics subjects, or hate discourses in popular culture (chapters three through five), chapter six, entitled “The Postcommunist Feminine Mystique: Women as Subjects, Women as Politics,” makes an analysis of the way “women are constructed as discursive and political subjects in postcommunism” (p. 19). As such, Roman discusses the subordinate position women have traditionally held in Romanian society, from the pre- to post-communism eras, in spite of the socialist ideal of women’s equality with men. Additionally, she discusses alternative forms of constructing female

subjectivities (peasant, proletarian, bourgeois, aristocratic, sexualized, business woman, politician), Romanian women’s political activism and feminist political identity after 1989, and Western and transnational feminist influences and dialogues.

The chapter entitled “Between *Ars Erotica* and *Scientia Sexualis*: Queer Subjectivity and the Discourse of Sex”, discusses queer identity (gay, lesbian, transgender) and their struggle for recognition in present Romania. “This chapter,” Roman asserts, “has tried to present a comprehensive yet nuanced account of queer subjectivity in postcommunist Romania. First, the background on which queer subjectivities are produced was exposed as a ‘fractal’ organization of time, space, activities, and identities [...] Second, queer subjectivity was mapped as an eclectic, hybrid sexual discourse [...] [Finally] queer identity was deconstructed and located as performative subjectivity, one operating in the absence of clear-out political identities” (p. 101).

The book ends in a *Post Scriptum* entitled “Eastern European Women and Transnational Feminism. A call for Inclusion.” Here Roman explains that “Eastern European women” today are considered as “minor” Europeans,

while these women face integration in the European Union. Roman also comments on the near absence of studies about Eastern European women from North American Women’s Studies departments, “dominated by a transnational feminism of postcolonial origins” (p. 19).

In the end, the conclusion asserts that postcommunism is more than a transition from communism to post-communism: it is a wider transformation that seeks to solve identity and political issues remained stagnant since after the Second World War, when communism took over in Romania.

This is a book highly recommended for Eastern European and Women’s Studies alike. To date, *Fragmented Identities* is unique in its exemplary study of such topics as youth, aesthetics, and queer identity in Romania, while simultaneously it also provides a useful critique of transnational/postcolonial feminism from an Eastern European perspective.

— **Dr. Giancarlo Covella**
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Organizing and Digitizing the Lesbian-Feminist Archive in Los Angeles

PAPERS OF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WOMEN FOR UNDERSTANDING AND OF CONNEXUS/CENTRO DE MUJERES

Over the past seven months, I have been processing the operational records of Southern California Women for Understanding (SCWU) and Connexus/Centro de Mujeres, two significant lesbian nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles history. These two key collections from the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives reveal the evolution of lesbian visibility and activism in Los Angeles from the 1970s through the 1990s.

A group of middle-class professional lesbians founded SCWU in 1976 as the explicitly lesbian organ of the Whitman-Radclyffe Foundation, a gay rights nonprofit organization. SCWU later gained its own nonprofit status and declared itself an

educational organization dedicated to "enhancing the quality of life for our community and for lesbians nationwide, creative and positive exchange about homosexuality, changing stereotypical images of lesbians." While originally based in Los Angeles, SCWU grew beyond Southern California and formed chapters in the Ventura/Santa Barbara area, Santa Maria, the San Gabriel Valley, the Inland Empire, the San Fernando Valley, San Diego and Orange County. Its membership consisted primarily of professionally successful upper-middle-class lesbians. At its height, SCWU reached membership of 1,100. In 1982, *Lesbian News* hailed SCWU as the "largest lesbian support group in the country."

The materials in the SCWU collection reflect the broad base of the organization's operations. The collection includes newsletters, galley proofs,

calendars, flyers and other documents from the various organizational chapters, board meeting agendas and minutes, as well as administrative records from the central unit of the organization. The collection also contains audio recordings of board meetings and video recordings of SCWU events, such as its stage production "Welcome to Our Lesbian World." Because of the archival foresight of June Mazer, the organization's historian and one of the newsletter editors, the early years of the organization are well documented through binders of documents and photos that were meticulously organized, labeled and annotated. The collection also features survey research data for the study on Los Angeles lesbians, photographs from notable events such as SCWU's Myra Riddell and eleven other gay and lesbian activ-

ists' invitational trip to the White House by Midge Costanza, Special Assistant to the President for Community Affairs, and the programs from the annual Lesbian Rights Awards Dinner which honored luminary artists, writers, musicians, and activists such as Charlotte Bunch, Elsa Gidlow, Gloria Anzaldua, and Cherrie Moraga.

Connexus/Centro de Mujeres originated as an organization under the nonprofit auspices of SCWU in 1985. Founders Adel Martinez and Lauren Jardine envisioned Connexus as a space where lesbian women could thrive professionally, privately, and personally through programming and through such services as referrals, support groups, the Connexus Business and Professional Women's Alliance (called the Alliance), the West Coast Lesbian Collection/Mazer Lesbian Archive, counseling/therapy services, workshops, social events, and a coffeehouse. Unlike SCWU, they strove to cater to lesbian women of all social classes and not just those who were upwardly mobile; one of their most prominent programs was Con-

nexus East, a satellite center in East Los Angeles that catered to Latina lesbians. Decreased funding caused Connexus to close its doors in 1990, but the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives and Connexus East remained in operation.

The materials in the Connexus collection include organizational policies and by-laws, board meeting agendas and minutes, newsletters, event flyers and planning information, fundraising and financial records, administrative records, press releases, correspondence, photographs and documentation related to various Connexus programs. The organization's publicity binders of newsletters, press clippings, flyers, and press releases provide a comprehensive timeline and overview of the organization's operations and political and educational direction at distinct historical moments. The subject files as a subset of the administrative records provide insight to the breadth of projects, campaigns and cross-organizational collaboration of which Connexus was a part.

Through this project funded by the UCLA Center for Community Partnerships, both collections will soon have detailed keyword-searchable finding aids available online through UCLA and the Online Archive of California. A select amount of materials will also be available digitally for online perusal. It is hoped that the increased access to such valuable will enrich future scholarship and our historical understanding of the complex dynamics of lesbian experiences in Los Angeles.

– T-KAY SANGWAND

LILLIAN FADERMAN PAPERS AND MARGARET CRUIKSHANK PAPERS

My responsibilities have included primary archival functions such as re-foldering and transferring materials to acid-free folders, re-housing collections in acid-free containers, preservation photocopying of fragile documents, removing destructive fasteners from print-based materials and transferring audio cassette tape recordings to more stable formats.

I have also been responsible for the documentation of associated descriptive information and the preparation of finding aids.

Since I began working on this project, I have successfully completed the arrangement, description, processing, preparation of finding aids and the preservation of two collections: the Lillian Faderman Papers (1976-1989) and the Margaret Cruikshank Papers (1971-1986). As of this writing, the processing of a third collection, the Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) Collection (1974-1986), is close to completion.

The Faderman and Cruikshank collection consist mainly of print-based materials (including correspondence, newspaper clippings, drafts of published and unpublished writings, manuscript drafts and galley proofs and publicity materials). Particular strengths of both collections are the pioneering and often fleeting lesbian, gay and lesbian-feminist periodicals of the 1970s.

A highlight of the Faderman papers is the extensive correspondence with publishers and agents concerning the editorial process for three

of Faderman's books: *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981); *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1991) and *Chloe Plus Olivia* (1994). There is also a 1981 interview with Barbara Gittings, an early pioneer lesbian activist, for *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.

Cruikshank has edited three major anthologies on lesbians: *Lesbian Path* (1980, 1985); *Lesbian Studies* (1982) and *New Lesbian Writing* (1984). In her papers, Cruikshank explains the three anthologies, their genesis and their inclusions. A highlight of this collection is the course syllabi, readings and bibliographies for women's studies and lesbian studies courses taught by Cruikshank at City College of San Francisco (CCSF) where she helped incorporate lesbian and gay studies into the curriculum. There is also an extensive private correspondence (subject to special access restrictions). The Faderman and Cruikshank collections as a whole will allow researchers to study these pioneering lesbian scholars, and the development of both lesbian and women's studies, and lesbian and women's publishing

The WAVAW collection is a mixture of print-

based materials, ephemera and audio-visual materials relating to WAVAW, which played a pivotal role in the late-1970s in bringing national attention to the relationship between media violence and actual violence against women. Of note are the national newsletters and memoranda generated by the Los Angeles chapter for national chapter distribution which detail the formation of the organization in the late 1970s and its activities over the course of several years. The collection as a whole will allow researchers to study the organizational function and history of WAVAW, most notably its major three-year campaign against Warner Communications, Inc.

– JANINE LIEBERT

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