

# **CULTURAL POLITICS OF SEEDS**



may 2013

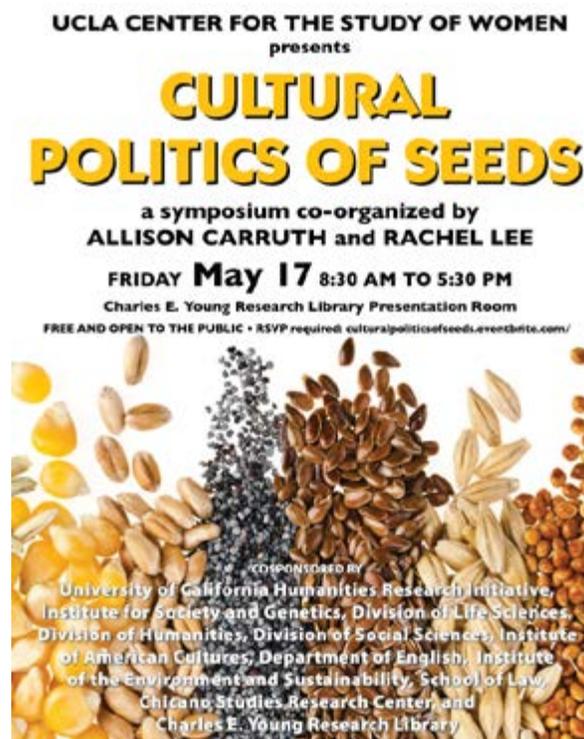
CSWupdate

## WHY SEEDS?

**W**HY DOES IT MAKE SENSE for those interested in gender and women to be interested in “The Cultural Politics of Seeds”? Because they are potent symbols of fertility, seeds present an ideal topic through which to prompt our feminist, gender studies, and LGBTIS communities to gauge their awareness of linkages between, let’s say, the devaluing of women’s worth and issues of gendered violence (for example, use of amniocentesis to select for male babies) to horticulture, soil health, and labor on farms.<sup>1</sup> CSW’s upcoming symposium on “The Cultural Politics of Seeds” also offers the opportunity to

acknowledge the immense scientific expertise held by rural women in their processes of farming—expertise that has been honed and refined for thousands of years.

This conference is part of a multi-year initiative at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women titled “Life, (Un) Ltd.,” which explores developments in the biosciences and biotechnology and their implications for feminist studies in the humanities, social sciences, and life sciences. In May 2012, Life (Un)Ltd gathered scholars from anthropology, sociology, film and media studies, gender studies, law, and literature to collaborate on cutting edge work concerning the uneven effects of bioscience/biotech on women’s bodies and the bodies of



1. See “The Gendered Politics of Food and the Challenge of Staying Alive” (xxviii), a 2009 Introduction to the republication of *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 1988, 2010).

poor people of color. These industries experiment on and trade in body parts, tissues, reproductive cells and germ plasms. Similar to that symposium, *The Cultural Politics of Seeds* emphasizes that reproductive issues do not end “at the skin” but include petrochemical and corporate infrastructures, environmental pollutants, foodways, and food scarcity. Through the stellar organizing efforts of Allison Carruth, Assistant Professor in the Department of English, under whose auspices this year’s conference has been conceived, *The Cultural Politics of Seeds* will gather scholars from the fields of literature, gender studies, cultural geography, anthropology, plant science, and environmental studies along with a well-known representative from the art collective *Fallen Fruit* (Mathias Viegner) and urban agriculture advocate (Tezozomoc). Scheduled to take place from 9 am to 5:30 pm on May 17th, the conference will bring visibility to existing UC strengths in cultural studies, gender and women’s studies, and environmental science.

Co-organizer Carruth wished to move the conversation around women and food from conventional discussion of issues at table to the more invisible processes of agricultural production and the various perspectives on corporate (genetically modified) seeds. Indeed, the project builds on two prior conferences on the topic of food justice that she convened in 2009 (at UC Santa Barbara) and in 2011 (at the University of Oregon). We both felt that feminist and gender studies scholarship had a vital role to play in assessing how we socially organize, choreograph, and narrate historical developments related to human agency over the food supply and the capacity to control (as in render dormant or awaken) the latent abundance that seeds embody. Through the cross-fertilization of aesthetic, narrative, environmentalist, social scientific, and biological approaches to this highly charged symbol of stored potential (the seed), *The Cultural Politics of Seeds and Life (Un)Ltd* are building a transformed gender

studies project that will be ready to meet the call for interdisciplinary robust scholarship on the most pressing issues of our times.

In celebration of International Women's Day, CSW recently hosted the eminent environmental philosopher Vandana Shiva. Dr. Shiva makes the complex point that one cannot think about women's survival—the sustenance of “the girl child” in rural areas of India, for instance—without also thinking about the imperiled status of self-renewable food systems (including animal husbandry, soil care, protection of the forests, and seed keeping). She notes, alongside other critics, that Western industrial farming (for example, the “Green revolution”) starts by belittling the existent “native” practices of so-called “subsistence” farmers of the Global South. The largely women's work of feeding the household, sustaining the food supply of humans and non-humans, and caretaking the self-renewability of seeds needs endless emphasizing as founded upon the horticultural expertise of female farmers, foragers, and practitioners of animal

husbandry—an expertise as scientific and complex as quantum physics. Our upcoming symposium features Lucilia Martinez, a maize farmer from Oaxaca, Mexico, who is precisely such an expert on sowing practices in Mesoamerica. Another featured speaker, Stephen Jones, is a crop and soil scientist—whose research interests may initially seem far afield from a traditionally conceived women's issue; however, a complex view of the interlinked systems crucial to the raising of generations of children entails not only being concerned about the scarcity of “food” (for example, edible grains for human consumption) but the acknowledgement of our symbiotic reliance on non-human actants, such as soil and non-edible plant matter, as vital partners in food sustenance, soil health, and the maintenance of life.

Another of our keynote speakers, Matias Viegner, member of the artist collective Fallen Fruit (with David Burns and Austin Young) will be speaking on their “Mother Patch” project in rural York, Alabama, which is sited on a one-fourth-acre watermelon patch. Akin

to other farming communities in the South, York has experienced economic decline and poverty. During a 2012 residency, Fallen Fruit interviewed residents and determined that watermelons once grew in the town on vacant lots; these plants were, in short, volunteers—growing from the seeds spit out by members. The decline of this local fruit source is a consequence of seedless industrial mini-melons sold widely in supermarkets. The gendered, classed, and racial meanings of seed-spitting (and seed splitting) should prove rich terrain for our discussions.

— Rachel Lee

*See page 6 for more info on the program and speakers.*

# Cultural Politics of Seeds

PREVIEW OF THE SYMPOSIUM ON MAY 17TH

***How have particular communities of women and issues of gender, ethnicity, and race shaped social movements related to edible and medicinal seeds?***

**O**RGANIZED BY Allison Carruth and Rachel Lee, “The Cultural Politics of Seeds” symposium will look at how gender, ethnicity, and race shape contemporary cultural and political movements related to seeds. Conceived as a forum for integrating research, policy, activism, and art practice, this event will include day-long event with 3 panels and two keynote talks and a related art exhibit at UCLA’s Art/Sci Center featuring Fallen Fruit, the Los Angeles-based art collaborative. By bringing together farmers,

artists, academics, and political organizers, the symposium demonstrates that to adequately examine seeds’ diverse functions in culture, taking a multifaceted approach is fundamental.

“Moving into a century of 9 billion people and unprecedented pressures on the environment, there is nothing more important than how we will feed ourselves and the sustainability and equity of that enterprise,” says Glen M. MacDonald, Director and Distinguished Professor at the UCLA Institute of the Environment

***How have developments in both genetic engineering and commodity markets influenced seed stocks and the biodiversity of seeds propagated around the world?***

***How are globalization and global climate change impacting the cultivation, propagation, and sharing of seeds in particular regions /cultures?***

and Sustainability about the upcoming event. “Here is a thoughtful and multifaceted exploration of that challenge.”

Participants in the symposium come from across the country, including farmers, artists, academics, and political organizers. Several participants take several of these titles. For example, Stephen S. Jones, a professor, collaborates with graduate students to develop wheat for organic and small farms that are underserved by traditional research programs. Elaine Gan, an artist, lecturer, and Ph.D. student studying Film & Digital Media, is working on a multimedia web project that maps different varieties of rice and the ways in which they bring together (for better and worse) biocultural entanglements and political economies. Artist-writer-critic Mathias Viegner will give a presentation on “Feral, Wild, Domestic and Social.” The symposium will include an installation by Fallen Fruit (David Burns, Matias Viegner, and Austin Young) at UCLA Art/Sci Center + Lab (see the related article on page).

The event’s diverse presenters illuminate the inter-connections between individuals’ experiences working with seeds, and broader social and cultural systems. For example, Lucilia Martinez will give a co-presentation about her family’s development of a successful maize farm with ethnoecologist Daniela Solieri.

Solieri works collaboratively with scientists and practitioners to analyze small-scale, local food systems, identifying key biological and sociocultural processes that may increase their resilience.

The symposium will examine the ways in which seeds lead to the creation of social, political and artistic movements that intertwine with issues of gender, ethnicity, and race. It will explore how seeds become entangled with issues such as globalization, global climate change, and developments in genetic engineering and commodity markets. Finally, it will provide a forum for integrating research, policy, activism, and art practice.

According to Carruth, “The symposium brings together an exciting group of scholars in the fields of cultural geography, gender studies, comparative literature, anthropology, environmental studies and science, and plant science along with the three co-founders of LA-based Fallen Fruit as well as longtime urban agriculture and food justice activist Tezozomoc. We are fortunate to have had support from across campus to make this interdisciplinary conversation on the cultural politics of seeds possible.”

“The Cultural Politics of Seeds” symposium is part of CSW’s multi-year “Life (Un)Ltd” research project, which is addressing the question of what impact recent developments in

## Schedule

<b>8:45 to 9 am</b>	<b>WELCOME by Allison Carruth</b>
<b>9 to 10:30 am</b>	<b>SESSION 1: featuring Akhil Gupta, Rebecca Tsosie, and Elaine Gan. Discussant/Chair: Rachel Lee</b>
<b>10:45 am to 12:15 pm</b>	<b>SESSION 2: David Cleveland, Allison Carruth, and Anne-Lise François. Discussant/Chair: Jessica Lynch Alfaro</b>
<b>12:15 to 1:30 pm</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
<b>1:30 to 3 pm</b>	<b>SESSION 3: Daniela Soleri, Lucilia Martinez, Tezozomoc, Lindsay Naylor. Discussant/Chair: Anne McKnight</b>
<b>3:15 to 4:45 pm</b>	<b>KEYNOTES: Stephen Jones and Matias Viegner. Chair: Ann Hirsch, Discussant: David King</b>
<b>4:45 to 5 pm</b>	<b>CLOSING REMARKS</b>
<b>5:00 to 6:30 pm</b>	<b>RECEPTION IN ROLFE COURTYARD</b>

***All sessions take place in the Presentation Room of the Charles E. Young Research Library.***

the biosciences and biotechnology have had on feminist studies. In this year, the group, led by Principal Investigator Rachee Lee, is exploring the rich connections between food, ecology, propagation, and metabolism.

Cosponsors of the symposium include University of California Humanities Research Initiative, Institute for Society and Genetics, Division of Life Sciences, Division of Humanities, Division of Social Sciences, Institute of American Cultures, Department of English, Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, School of Law, Chicano Studies Research Center, and Charles E. Young Research Library.

---

The Cultural Politics of Seeds will take place May 17, 8 am to 5 pm in the Charles E. Young Reference Library Presentation Room.

For more information, visit: <http://www.csw.ucla.edu/events/the-politics-of-seeds>. To RSVP, visit: <http://culturalpoliticsofseeds.eventbrite.com>.

## SESSION 1

# Seed Genetics and Seed Sovereignty

### Akhil Gupta

*Farmer Suicides: Seeds of Discontent?*



Akhil Gupta is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for India and South

Asia (CISA) at UCLA. His areas of interest are ethnography of information technology, the state and development, anthropology of food, environmental anthropology, animality, space and place, history of anthropology, applied anthropology; India and South Asia. Professor Gupta is currently doing a long-term field project on call centers in Bangalore.

### Elaine Gan

*Considering Rice: Mapping Differential Temporalities*



Elaine Gan is an artist and lecturer/PhD student in the Film & Digital Media De-

partment at University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). She is also a fellow of the UCSC Science & Justice Research Center and a member of the advisory committee for Interdisciplinary Arts at New York Foundation for the Arts. Her research experiments with visualizing multispecies temporalities as a means of opening up new modes of ethico-political engagement across incommensurabilities.

### Rebecca Tsosie

*Indigenous Peoples and First Foods: The Cultural Landscape of Food Sustainability in an Age of Bioengineering*



Rebecca Tsosie is a Regent's Professor at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State

University and a member of the Faculty of Philosophy in the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies. She is also a faculty affiliate for the American Indian Studies Program. Tsosie has published widely on doctrinal and theoretical issues related to tribal sovereignty, environmental policy, and cultural rights.

### Rachel C. Lee

*Chair/Discussant*



Rachel C. Lee is Interim Director of the Center for the Study of Women and Associate

Professor of English and Gender Studies at UCLA. She is Principal Investigator of the Research Project, Life (Un)Ltd and member of the University of California Humanities Research Institute's working group on Feminism and Technology, which explores info- and bio-technology in relation to feminist pedagogy. She is editing a special issue of the online journal, *The Scholar and the Feminist*, on "Race, Feminism, Biotech, and Biopolitics" (Fall 2013).

## SESSION 2

# Local Knowledge and Global Food Networks

### David Cleveland

*What Farmers Know: Local Seeds and Knowledge in a Globalized World*



David Cleveland is a human ecologist who has done research and

development project work on sustainable agriculture with small-scale farmers around the world. He is a professor in the Environmental Studies Program, University of California, Santa Barbara. Cleveland's research and teaching focus on the relationships between small-scale local agrifood systems and environmental benefits, conservation and enhancement of crop genetic diversity, and food sovereignty.

### Anne-Lise François

*"The Loves of the Plants": Rereading Romantic Botany in an Age of Honey-Bee Colony Collapse*



Anne-Lise François is Associate Professor of English

and Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley. Her current teaching and research focus on the convergence of literary and environmental studies. In areas as diverse as contemporary food and farming politics and debates on climate change and the temporality of environmental violence, she continues to seek alternatives to Enlightenment models of heroic action, productive activity, and accumulation.

### Allison Carruth

*Seed Banks & Seed Networks: Narratives, Images, Infrastructure*



Allison Carruth is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at UCLA.

Her current book project, "The Transgenic Age," examines how biotechnology has shaped and been shaped by contemporary environmental discourse, as evident in speculative fiction, bioart, green architecture, and food activism.

### Jessica Lynch Alfaro

*Chair/Discussant*



Jessica Lynch Alfaro is the Associate Director of UCLA's Center of Society and Genetics and

coeditor of the journal *Neotropical Primates*, a publication of Conservation International. She is a biological anthropologist whose research centers on the evolution of diversity in socially learned behaviors, mating strategies, and social structuring in neotropical primates.

## SESSION 3

# Sowing Mesoamerica: Maize, Migration, Resistance

**Daniela Solieri and Lucilia Martínez, *Maize and Migration, One Family's Story***



**Lucilia Martínez** (above right) is a Zapotec farmer from the Central Valley of Oaxaca, in the state of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. She is an accomplished and respected farmer who is known for the quality and diversity of her maize varieties. **Daniela Solieri** (above left) is an ethnoecologist working collaboratively with scientists and practitioners in small-scale, local food systems to understand the implications of knowledge and practice for those systems, including crop and food diversity, risk assessment and response to a changing climate.

**Lindsay Naylor**  
*Sowing the Seeds of Resistance: Maiz Criollo in Highland Chiapas*



**Lindsay Naylor** is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Oregon. In her research, Lindsay uses agriculture and food production as a lens to examine power relations and spaces of resistance. Her dissertation work is focused on the everyday lived experience of autonomy and food sovereignty in subsistence and fair trade coffee producing communities in Chiapas, Mexico.

**Tezozomoc**  
*Xinachtli: Myth and Life in the Meso-American Diaspora*



**Tezozomoc** is the Vice-President of the South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund, a non-profit organization that assists in the development and education of organic farmers in Central/Southern California. He is also the manager of the South Central Farmers Cooperative, LLC, which operates as a worker-owned cooperative in Buttonwillow, CA. He has also worked to organize a network of organic farming cooperatives throughout Southern California and has provided trainings to other groups forming cooperatives.

Photo Credit: Tezozomoc by Jennifer Cockrall-King / [www.foodgirl.ca](http://www.foodgirl.ca) / *Food and the City* (Prometheus Books, 2012)

**Anne McKnight**  
*Chair/Discussant*



**Anne McKnight** teaches in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures and the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability at UCLA. She writes about prose fiction, film, social movements, post-natural systems, and sex/gender issues as they play out in the built environment, especially in the cities of Tokyo and L.A. She also teaches both formal and informal courses on Japanese/Angeleno food systems and globalization. A Master Gardener, she cofounded the Green Grounds collective in South Los Angeles, and has a collection of “retro” Japanese seeds that she shares.

## KEYNOTE SESSION

# Unruly Seeds and Heritage Foods

### Stephen S. Jones

*Kicking the Commodity Habit:  
The Value of Being Grown  
Out of Place*



**Stephen S. Jones** is a Professor and the Director of Washington State University's

Research and Extension Center in Mount Vernon, WA. He has been breeding wheat since 1991. Together with his graduate students he develops wheat for organic and small farms that are under served by traditional research programs. He teaches graduate courses in advanced classical genetics and in the history and ethics of genetics.

### Matias Viegner

*Feral, Wild, Domestic and Social*



**Matias Viegner** is a writer, artist, critic, and instructor at California In-

stitute of the Arts, who does solo works as well as working collaboratively in the fields of writing, visual art, and social practice. He is a co-founder of Fallen Fruit, a participatory art practice focusing on fruit, urban space, and public life. Fallen Fruit is an art collaboration of David Burns, Viegner, and Austin Young. Their work has been exhibited at major institutions throughout L.A. and internationally.

### Ann Hirsch

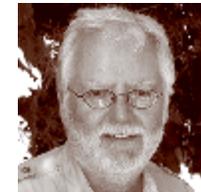
*Chair*



**Ann Hirsch** is a Professor in the Department of Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology at UCLA. She studies the interaction between nitrogen-fixing bacteria (alpha-rhizobia) and legumes such as alfalfa, pea, and soybean in order to determine why this interaction occurs exclusively with certain plants.

### David King

*Discussant*



**David King** is an avid gardener and the chair and founder of the Seed Library of

Los Angeles. King has taught gardening and horticulture at UCLA Extension and UC Cooperative Extension. He has been with The Learning Garden at Venice High School for over ten years. He has written the LA Garden Blog for over three years.

Fallen

Fruit

**IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF SEEDS SYMPOSIUM, THE FALLEN FRUIT ART GROUP WILL EXHIBIT AT THE ART/SCI CENTER + LAB**

**H**OW DO PEOPLE ENGAGE WITH FRUIT, and how does fruit engage with us? In what ways does fruit erect or problematize social boundaries? How can fruit bring people together, or tell us about the lives and behaviors of individuals? If fruit is endlessly intertwined with social and cultural politics, how can it become a means of positive change? These are some of the many questions raised by Fallen Fruit, a long-term art collaboration between visual artist David Burns, artist-writer-critic Mathias Viegener, and portrait photographer-video artist Austin Young. Viegener will speak about one of the collaboration's latest projects at the "Cultural Politics of Seeds" symposium hosted by CSW on May 17. Concurrently, an exhibition by Fallen Fruit will open at UCLA Art/Sci Center + Lab.

Fallen Fruit began when the members of the group mapped fruit trees growing on or over public property in Los Angeles and it remains one of their core projects. In order to map local fruit, they explore neighborhoods to which they have been invited, creating maps of all the publically available fruit. The maps are hand-drawn and distributed free from copyright as jpgs and PDFs. Several of these maps will be on display at Art/Sci.

Since first embarking on the fruit mapping project, the collaboration has expanded to

include serialized public projects, site-specific installations, and happenings in cities throughout the world. Fallen Fruit's projects cover all media (including photography, video, wall-paper, and the internet). Through its happenings and museum exhibitions, the group takes particular interest in working with public space and those who travel through it.

At the symposium, Viegener will talk about Fallen Fruit's pending public art project titled "Feral, Wild, Domestic and Social," a one-quarter-acre watermelon patch in the center of

**Two of Fallen Fruits' many public fruit maps, which are available for downloading from their website (<http://fallenfruit.org>). The group has mapped neighborhoods in Malmö, Sweden, Guadalajara, México, and many sites in the Los Angeles area including Silverlake, Larchmont, Long Beach, and Echo Park.**

a small town in rural Alabama. During a brief residency in Fall 2012, the group learned that watermelons had once grown on vacant lots throughout the town, partly as the result of people spitting watermelon seeds in the vicinity. Over the years the lots became bare as the result of industrially produced seedless mini-melons (called, ironically, “personal melons”), sold in supermarkets nationwide. “Mother Patch” will be a public watermelon patch in which visitors will be encouraged to “spit their seeds” as they please, in the hopes that the land’s legacy of natural, community rooted watermelon production may begin again.

“This narrative links to the variety of feral stone fruit we’ve found growing in Copenhagen, Northern California and Santa Fe, New Mexico,” says Viegner, in correspondence. “These plants have a symbiotic relationship with us, but a happier one than feral dogs or cats. We’re interested in this kind of peripatetic communal culture that not only links communities but also plants, animals and humans in significant relationships.”

In addition to creating public spaces and events built upon the growing and harvesting of natural fruit, Fallen Fruit comments on the broad social implications of these events (and fruit in general) through the use of mixed media. Fallen Fruit’s 2008 video *Double Standard*,



currently featured on their website, exemplifies how the collaboration melds real time public happenings with various forms of media in order to chart different ways in which fruit functions in society’s social and geographical structures, illuminating issues of sexuality, race, class, and the mediation of “public interaction.” The video juxtaposes unedited footage from two video cameras, documenting one of Fallen Fruit’s Neighborhood Fruit Forages, an event at which people gathered to take a tour

**As part of their exhibition at Art+Sci, Fallen Fruit will screen “The Loneliest Fruit in the World” (2010), a video that came out of a residency in Tromsø, Norway. While there, they learned about an area where arctic berries grow without human involvement until they ripen—when human arrive to pick and eat.**

**At the Fall Fruit website (shown above), visitors can get instructions in how to participate in “The Banana Hotline” project (part of TEDActive 2013), download maps, watch videos, or get information on forages, projects, and exhibitions.**

of Los Angeles, exploring public places where fruit grows. The videos are overlaid with a text block of comments from a short public television video of the same event that was posted on YouTube. The comments range from insightful to homophobic and racist, creating what the group’s website calls “an alternative, cynical narrative to the events.” The Neighborhood Fruit Forage was an effort to bring people

together and consider the roles that fruit plays in public urban space. *Double Standard* incorporates the event with mixed media in order to challenge participants’ and viewers’ experiences. Fallen Fruit’s website points out that the video probes “at the correspondence between the public walking on the tour and the anonymous public of the internet.”

This year, the group was also invited to do a project with TEDActive. They devised “The Banana Hotline,” wherein the public is invited to follow a set of instructions, record a memory, and email the audio or video to the group, who will then put together “a living monument of sound.”

The exhibit at Art+Sci will also include *The Loneliest Fruit in the World* (2010). This video portrays the human activities, interactions, and explorations that spring up around a stand of arctic berries growing near Tromsø, Norway: “Against a beautiful, spare landscape peppered with tiny blueberries,” according to the website description, “the video follows a group of Norwegians who while picking negotiate the relation between solitude, gleanings and company.”

—  
Photo credits: All images are from the Fallen Fruit website.

**For info on about the UCLA Art/Sci Center + Lab, visit: <http://artsci.ucla.edu/>**

# Celebrating Carole Browner

*As she retires, we salute an extraordinary scholar who has done essential work connecting gender, reproduction, and health*



“Many of us know Carole formally as an outstanding and much-awarded teacher and mentor. We know her, too, as a committed citizen of the profession—here at UCLA and broadly in the academic community,” noted Sondra Hale in her closing remarks at the recent conference honoring Carole Browner. “However, many of us know her more informally as a person of great integrity, impeccable politics, and sharp mentoring skills.”

The conference, titled “Bodies, Politics, Subjectivities: A Celebration of the Career of Carole Browner,” was organized by Hale, who is a Research Professor in the Departments of Anthropology and Gender Studies, and Jenny Sharpe, Chair of Gender Studies

and a Professor in the Department of English. The all-day conference honored Browner and celebrated her many achievements on her retirement from UCLA. Browner’s friends and colleagues praised her diverse contributions to UCLA’s community, particularly regarding issues of gender.

Speakers include Susan Erickson, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University; Cheryl Mattingly, Professor of Anthropology and Occupational Science and Therapy, USC; and Ramona Perez; Associate Professor, Anthropology, and Director, Center for Latin American Studies, San Diego State University.

The event was hosted by the Departments of Anthropology and Gender Studies and was co-

sponsored by the Center for the Study of Women, Chicano Studies Research Center, Dean of Division of the Social Sciences, International Institute, Latin American IDP, Semel Institute and its Center for Culture and Health, Latin American Institute, and Institute for Society and Genetics.

Browner embarked on a career as a medical anthropologist by earning a B.A. in the Social Sciences from the New School for Social Research in New York, NY, then moved on to UC Berkeley to gain an M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology and a M.P.H. in Health Administration and Planning. She taught at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, from 1977 to 1983.

In 1983, Browner joined the faculty at UCLA in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral

Sciences in the School of Medicine. She is currently a Professor in the Departments of Anthropology and Gender Studies and at the Center for Culture and Health, which is based in the David Geffen School of Medicine's NPI Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. She became Chair of the Department of Anthropology in July of 2010.

Browner's research in the area of gender has been comprehensive, strikingly diverse, and groundbreaking. Jenny Sharpe highlights Browner's work in the Department of Gender Studies: "Carole Browner has been an invaluable and contributing member of our department from its earliest inception," says Sharpe. "Her centrality to Gender Studies, whether it be her work with our Ph.D. students or sound advice based on her many years of experience, cannot be underestimated."

Browner has also long been associated with CSW. "Carole Browner has been a longstanding, active, and valuable member of the CSW community since 1986," says Kathleen McHugh, CSW Director (currently on sabbatical) and a Professor in the Departments of English and Cinema and Media Studies. "CSW celebrates and congratulates Carole on all her career accomplishments!" says McHugh.

She first served on the CSW Research Committee in 1986 then joined the Advisory Com-

mittee, serving on and off from 1993 to 2011. She has also served on the committee to select recipients of the annual Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D., Award.

In March of 1984, she co-organized the CSW colloquium on "Gender, Culture, and the Politics of Reproduction." She presented a paper on the role of job-based social support in women's health on the "Women, Health, and Stress" panel at the "Women at Work" conference in May of 1987. She often served as a discussant for CSW events and in May of 1996, she and Emily Abel convened a CSW Feminist Research Seminar on "Women's Selective Compliance with Medical Authority: The Uses of Subjugated Knowledge." In addition, she shared her on "Prenatal Diagnostic Testing: How Women Decide" in the Winter 1991 newsletter.

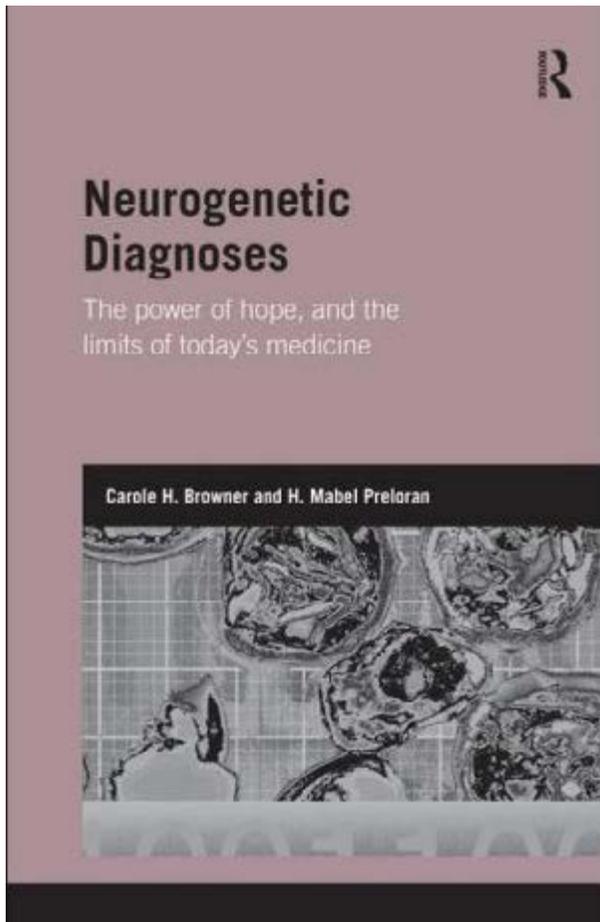
Recently, Browner has been an active member of CSW's Life (Un)Ltd research group. Her articles, "Can Gender Equity in Prenatal Genetic Services Unintentionally Reinforce Male Authority" and "Expectations, Emotions, and Medical Decision-Making: A Case Study on the Use of Amniocentesis," were read and discussed at a recent group meeting.

Throughout most of her career, Browner's research interests have been focused at the intersections of gender, reproduction, and health. She has done field research in urban Colombia,

rural Mexico and with diverse ethnic groups in the U.S. In Cali, Columbia, she investigated the circumstances that led pregnant women with unintended conceptions to seek illegal abortion. In rural Mexico, she sought to understand how local political relations shape gender-based reproductive strategies. Since 1989, she has worked mainly in the U.S. on issues surrounding the medicalization of pregnancy and prenatal care, particularly the ways that prenatal genetic information may alter reproductive experience.

Broadly based on these interests, her collection—*Reproduction, Globalization, and the State* (Duke UP, 2011), coedited with Carolyn Sargent—conceptualizes and puts into practice a global anthropology of reproduction and reproductive health. In this volume, leading anthropologists offer new perspectives on how transnational migration and global flows of communications, commodities, and biotechnologies affect the reproductive lives of women and men in diverse societies throughout the world. Based on research in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Western Europe, their fascinating ethnographies provide insight into reproduction and reproductive health broadly conceived to encompass population control, HIV/AIDS, assisted reproductive technologies, paternity tests, sex work, and humanitarian assistance.

Browner's most recent work focuses on the



growing role of genetic testing in the field of neurology, building upon and expanding her longstanding research into the social impact of decoding the human genome and the meanings and uses of genetic information. Her monograph, *Neurogenetic Diagnoses, the Power of Hope, and the Limits of Today's Medicine*, coauthored with Mabel Preloran (Routledge, 2010), explores the diverse meanings and impacts of genetic diagnoses for patients enduring currently incurable,

ultimately fatal neurodegenerative diseases—and for their family caregivers and clinicians.

Calling the volume “superbly insightful,” Linda Furlini of McGill University notes in her review that “this book is a welcome addition to the literature in raising important ethical questions regarding the complexity of neurogenetic diagnoses and genetic testing.”

Hale echoes this comment at the event on April 26th, “Perhaps the title of the book gives us some clues about where she is in her ethics and outlook—with the words ‘power,’ ‘hope,’ and the critique of medicine included in the subtitle. Carole is always thinking of change, always thinking of serving the underserved, always alert to the system and its flaws, and always engaged. She frequently works collaboratively, making *real* an important principle not only of feminist research, but of revolutionary thinking in general.”

Browner and her team of neurogenetics experts and health services researchers have continued the work started in *Neurogenetic Diagnoses* by engaging in an investigation of when and why community-based neurologists order genetic testing and refer patients for neurogenetic specialty consultations.

Throughout her career, Browner’s stellar work has been recognized and funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Agency for Health

Care Policy Research, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, private donors, and private foundations.

Her professional service has included membership on the Scientific Advisory Committee for the State of California’s Birth Defects Monitoring Program and on the Executive and Advisory Boards of several University of California institutes including UC-MEXUS, the Institute for American Cultures, the Institute for Development Studies, the International Institute, and the Latin American Institute.

Nationally, she has been elected to the Executive Boards of the American Anthropological Association, the Society for Applied Anthropology, the Society for Latin American Anthropology, and the Society for Medical Anthropology; she was President of the latter from 1995 to 1997. She has also served on several journal editorial boards.

In her closing remarks at “Bodies, Politics, Subjectivities,” Hale pointed out that we must not let Browner’s voluminous professional accomplishments overshadow her personal ones: “Amidst all of the serious thinking, we should not forget the sharp wit that permeates so much of what she does,” says Hale. “Nor the warmth of the many friendships she has forged here and throughout the world.”

**Rebekah Park has been a CSW research scholar since 2012. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociocultural Anthropology from UCLA and an M.A. in Applied Medical Anthropology from the University of Amsterdam.**



# Argentine Former Political Prisoners After the Dictatorship

*Researching stigma against members of the “disappeared” who reappeared*

*by Rebekah Park*

**O**VER THE PAST YEAR, I have been working on a book manuscript and three articles based on fieldwork conducted in Córdoba, Argentina, in 2006, 2008, and 2009. My work focuses on former political prisoners who were “disappeared” during the last military dictatorship (1976–1983). These victims of state terrorism were kidnapped and imprisoned for participating in resistance movements, labor unions, and religious organizations that were deemed “subversive” by the military. Unlike the estimated 30,000 Argentines who were taken,

never to be seen again, these people later reappeared in regular prisons and were eventually released. Since the end of the dictatorship, Argentina has embarked on a lengthy transitional justice process in an effort to solidify the rule of law and democracy in the country. But although Argentina’s process has become a model for other post-conflict nations, survivors of its secret detention camps were marginalized by both human rights groups and the broader society after their release from prison. Former political prisoners did not form organizations until 2008,

**UNLIKE THE ESTIMATED 30,000 ARGENTINES WHO WERE TAKEN, NEVER TO BE SEEN AGAIN, THESE PEOPLE LATER REAPPEARED IN REGULAR PRISONS AND WERE EVENTUALLY RELEASED.**

**DESPITE SCHOLARSHIP ON LATIN AMERICA'S TRANSITIONS FROM AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES TO DEMOCRACIES, LITTLE HAS BEEN WRITTEN ON THE TRANSITION FROM REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE TO HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FORMER GUERRILLAS.**

and their public presence in the national human rights scene only began in the mid-2000s. My research has focused on the missing voices of former political prisoners, as I am the first scholar to work with an organized group of self-identified political prisoners. Specifically, I examine why these stigmas against survivors developed, the reasons for the formation of political prisoner groups nearly three decades after the dictatorship ended, and the particular motivations and activist practices of former political prisoners within the transitional justice process.

Initially, I had assumed that the former political prisoners were integrated members of the Argentine human rights community, and that they had been a consistent part of the transitional justice process in the truth commission, trials, and memorials. Soon after

arriving, I quickly learned that this was not the case, and that the public acknowledgement of political prisoners as victims was a new development. One of the main reasons for the marginalization of former political prisoners revolves around their survival. Relatives of the disappeared victims who remain missing—the *desaparecidos*—are suspicious of the survivors, often wondering how they survived when their family members did not. Another reason for the stigma surrounding the survivors is the belief that they were left-wing terrorists, an accusation made by the military and perpetuated by democratically elected leaders in the post-dictatorial period through state narratives of the past conflict. According to the official state narrative, known as the “Two Demons Theory,” both the military and left-wing terrorists committed acts of violence during the dictatorship, while the rest of the citizenry was victimized by the two warring sides. Consequently, the needs and perspectives of these former political prisoners have been neglected by the state, society in general, and the human rights movement.

Since the 2000s, memorials and memorialization projects have flourished as a result of sympathetic political leaders and human rights campaigns—the latest development in the transitional justice process in Argentina. In tandem with this development, the image of the disappeared changed from a picture of in-

nocent youth to one of overtly partisan revolutionaries. In the early years of the transitional justice process, victims of the military were depoliticized and gained international sympathy for the torture they were subjected to and the brutal and illegal ways in which they were killed. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of great social upheaval not only in Argentina and Latin America but in the world over, and many of the victims of the military were, in fact, part of social and political movements—a fact that has been stated more publicly in recent years. I argue that the combination of the opening of memorial sites and the changing image of victims has opened up a public space for the former political prisoners. Their militant identities are no longer uniformly dismissed and their testimonies are vital to the operation of memorial museums at former sites of secret detention camps.

My book manuscript, *The Reappeared*, is the story of how former political prisoners in Argentina were initially marginalized by the general public and the local human rights movement because of their political support for armed struggles, but were later incorporated into that activist community after the political context changed. Despite scholarship on Latin America's transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracies, little has been written on the transition from revolutionary struggle

to human rights activism from the perspective of former guerrillas. Without such an analysis, however, we fail to understand human rights' potential as transformational politics. *The Reappeared* uses an ethnographic approach to explore the relationship between politics and human rights from the perspective of former militants, and argues that human rights has the potential to be political, depending on the meanings and actors.

Another finding from this research is the pattern in which women and men political prisoners narrate their life histories in gendered ways. Although many scholars have already examined how gender ideologies have shaped both identities and narratives, I am interested in how the seemingly stereotypical ways in which the men and women narrate the past reflect how they view their roles in resistance movements. That is, the fact that the men give broad historical narratives in their interviews while women share highly personalized stories from prison is, of course, a reflection of how men and women are shaped by socialization processes. But this difference between the men and women also reveals, I argue, how men and women viewed their own sense of agency. For women, their personal acts of resistance in prison were a form of agency: they resisted the oppressive conditions by refusing to give up information or collaborate. The men, instead

of talking about their personal experiences in prison, emphasized their role in large-scale movements in recent Argentine history. These accounts matter because the former political prisoners are seeking to represent themselves as agents and not simply as passive victims. Together, the men and women speak about how they expressed solidarity and resistance in prisons and within broader social movements.

One of the challenges I have come across in my research is explaining why more analyses of Argentina's dictatorial period and the aftermath are still needed. According to some scholars, the study of Argentine human rights groups that aimed at achieving justice for dictatorial crimes has reached its limit, and our attention should now be turned toward "new" human rights groups and the effects of neoliberal policies. Yet, along with other current scholars of Argentina's transitional justice process, I have realized that while Argentina's case is well known—as are the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, the brave mothers who search for their children and the grandmothers who search for their missing grandchildren who were stolen by the military and its supporters—the changing conditions and practices of these "old" human rights groups are constantly evolving, and much is to be gained from learning from these shifts over time. In addition, the impacts of state terrorism have endured despite the fall of the

dictatorship. For example, political prisoners who were subject to labor discrimination have suffered economically over the duration of their lives. Without receiving a "Certificate of Good Conduct" from the military state, they were barred from seeking legitimate work. As they reach retirement age, these former political prisoners are still struggling: never having been able to work in the formal sector, they never accrued the kinds of government benefits that could support them in retirement. Little to no research has been done on the impact of a group of citizens having been forced to work in the informal labor force. The themes discussed above are the subject of my two other article manuscripts.

For societies undergoing transitions, the question is not about what kinds of remedies need to be implemented and how their success can be measured but about whether survivors—arguably the most vulnerable victims of state terrorism—have been able to reintegrate back into society, their communities, and families. Attention should be paid not only to the crimes committed during the dictatorial era but also to the crimes that have followed the victims during democratic times—when ordinary assaults replace the spectacular, egregious abuses—as these latter-day acts are no less impactful on victim-survivors.

**Nathan Ha received his Ph.D. in the history of science from Princeton University. He is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the UCLA Institute for Society and Genetics, and is a member of CSW's Life (Un)Ltd working group. While at UCLA, he is offering courses on the history of the sexual sciences and the genetics of human origins.**



# Q&A WITH NATHAN HA

***Post-doc at the Institute for Society and Genetics researches the history of the biomedical sciences, especially the history of twentieth-century genetics***

*How did you get interested in the history of gender and science? Can you tell us about your dissertation project and how it developed?*

*When I was an undergraduate at Rice University, I took an interdisciplinary course on genetics that brought together the perspectives of biologists, anthropologists, and historians. It was one of my favorite classes and inspired me to write a paper that analyzed how the genetics of sexual orientation was represented in print and online media. I was fascinated by this topic and wanted to learn more about how genetics had become such a powerful field, one that people relied upon to locate the ultimate source of their*

*sexual identities. I talked to my undergraduate mentors about my interests in gender and science, and since I had double-majored in history and biology, they suggested that I apply to graduate programs in the history of science. It turned out to be good advice!*

*To be honest though, I didn't know much about the history of science before I applied to graduate school. And today, people ask me all the time what historians of science do. Jokingly, we say to ourselves that we are historians who like to study obsolete knowledge and practices. How, in other words, have we come to know what we know? Personally, I've long been fascinated by how science (and history) offers us compelling narra-*

*tives about our existence. And over the years, I've become more aware that there are many stories that we can tell about ourselves, which are often closely linked to our reasons for telling them.*

*Anyways, I started graduate school with the intention of completing a research project on the history of the genetics of sexual orientation but as I proceeded, I discovered that both genetics and sexual orientation have been moving targets. To understand how we got to a place where looking for genes for sexual orientation made sense, I had to start at the beginning of genetics itself, at a moment when scientists first discovered chromosomes and began to link them to both heredity and to sex. This moment occurred at the begin-*

*ning of the twentieth century and also coincided with the discovery of hormones.*

*My project then evolved into an exploration of how male and female sex difference became underpinned by the new idiom of genetics. It took a while to convince people that men and women are different from one another because of their chromosomes. And it took even longer for scientists and physicians to put together the linear account of sexual development – where genes act first to produce gonads that then produce hormones responsible for developing internal and external sex organs and structures. This account of development became very influential; it inspired a lot of scientific research as well as medical interventions intended to change, modify, or correct individual sex, gender, or sexuality. Most importantly, it came to dramatically affect how*

*people understood their own sex. My project examines this historical process of how genetic sex took shape within scientific, medical, and popular cultures over the course of the twentieth century.*

*What drew you to ISG and UCLA? What have you been working on since you have been here? Can you tell us about the upcoming event on “Hurdling over Sex? Sports, Science, and Diversity”?*

*I was excited about coming to the UCLA Institute for Society and Genetics because it's a great place to do interdisciplinary research. The Institute brings together experts in the humanities, social sciences, life sciences, law, and medicine. Everyone shares an interest in advancing our understanding of genetics and its social*

*implications. Being at the ISG has given me the opportunity to collaborate with and have stimulating conversations with people who have novel perspectives that come from their own works-in-progress. It's been a very rewarding experience. Since I've come to UCLA, I've been expanding upon my project in order to see how sex determination research and medicine have been developing from the late twentieth century to the present. Eric Vilain, the director of the Institute, is one of the leading researchers in this field, and I've become a participant-observer in his lab and clinics. I've interviewed physician-scientists about their work and have witnessed how new genetic technologies like exome sequencing are changing the practice of medicine. Geneticists at UCLA are pioneering the development of these technologies, and UCLA is also one of four institutions that is part of a national network, funded by the National Institutes of Health, dedicated to finding ways to improve medical care for patients with disorders of sexual development.*

*On May 10, I'm moderating an event called Hurdling Over Sex?: Sports, Science, and Diversity that is being sponsored by the ISG. The event will address the issue of eligibility testing for elite, female athletes. In 2011, the International*

*Olympic Committee adopted new guidelines based upon levels of testosterone that athletes had to fall under in order to compete in women's events. This policy has been controversial, so Dr. Vilain and I have co-organized a conference that brings together scholars with expertise in kinesiology, history, sociology, endocrinology, and genetics in order to publicly discuss and debate its merits and shortcomings. The workshop will address reasons for sexual segregation in sports, the history of previous efforts to scrutinize the sex of female athletes, issues of privacy and process, and the role that biomedicine can or should play in these efforts.*

*I am also very excited that Dr. Maria José Martínez-Patiño from Spain will be a featured speaker at the conference. In the 1980s, Dr. Martínez-Patiño was a hurdler who personally suffered injustice caused by the genetic testing policy that the IOC implemented in 1968. She successfully challenged this policy, which was lifted in 2000. Her perspectives as an athlete, scholar, and advocate will be extremely salient, and I am looking forward to a vibrant discussion.*

*How has been involved in Life (Un)Ltd changed your work? What is the value to the university (or to individual scholars) of such cross-disciplinary projects?*

*My involvement with Life (Un)Ltd has been one of the highlights of my time at UCLA. When I learned that Rachel Lee was putting together a working group intended to foster dialogue between scholars of postcolonialism, medicine, biotechnology and feminist studies, I signed up. The working group has provided me with even more opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary discussions about the diverse ways in which new biotechnologies are expanding our notions of reproduction, what it means to be human – indeed even what it means to be a living organism. The various impacts of these biotechnologies have been and will continue to manifest themselves not only in medical clinics and laboratories, but also in works of fiction and science fiction, philosophical treatises, and in the visual and performing arts. Biomedical knowledge and technologies, in other words, are resolutely material and also constitute the stuff of our dreams. As someone who spends a lot of time alone reading highly technical scientific texts, the working group has*

*provided me with a forum to share my research and an outlet to explore other creative approaches to interpreting sources and texts. Above all, it's been really fun and rewarding to think with this group on a regular basis!*

*What are you working on now?*

*I'm working on an article about the penile plethysmograph, a device invented by Kurt Freund, a Czechoslovakian psychiatrist, in the late 1950s. The plethysmograph was used to gauge a man's sexual arousal and preferences. Over the ensuing decades, researchers have used the device to study, identify, and treat homosexuals, pedophiles, and rapists in penal and psychiatric institutions. I'm examining the history of the plethysmograph as it traversed the clinic, the lab, the courtroom, and the prison. My hope is that this exploration will offer us useful perspectives on the construction and regulation of sexuality and masculinity in the latter decades of the twentieth-century.*

# BLOODY BODY DOUBLES

*performing testimony in the borderlands*

Megan Lorraine Debin is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History at UCLA. She is completing her dissertation, "Body Traces: Performance Against Violence in Contemporary Mexico (1994–2012)." She received a CSW travel grant to present her research at the Center for Latin American Visual Studies, Third International Forum for Emerging Scholars at the University of Texas at Austin in 2012.

# BLOODY BODY DOUBLES

*performing testimony in the borderlands*

BY MEGAN LORRAINE DEBIN

ACCORDING TO Giorgio Agamben, "to bear witness is to place oneself in one's own language in the position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as if it were dead."<sup>1</sup> Put simply, to give testimony means to speak for those who cannot. Agamben's articulation of testimony and the figurative substitution it requires has become a central theme in the works of artists living in areas plagued by violence, which has led to a reliance on what I call "invisibility tactics." In the case of Mexico, this has manifested in the development of a body of work by contemporary artists whose practices center primarily on the interchangeability of the physical body as a means of speaking out on behalf of victims

whose voices have been silenced by *feminicidio*,<sup>2</sup> cartel-related homicide, and institutionalized border violence. Focusing primarily on art created after the 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which permanently altered U.S.-Mexico relations,<sup>3</sup> my project traces the history of performative responses to violence in and around the "state of exception"<sup>4</sup> that is Ciudad Juárez.

This region must be considered within certain stipulations because of NAFTA, which instigated U.S. corporate reliance on the *maquiladora*<sup>5</sup> system. *Maquiladoras*, in turn, have fueled the internal migration of gendered labor—often young, uneducated, poor women from rural Oaxaca and Chiapas who leave behind families

and support networks, rendering them vulnerable. For nearly a decade, women have been murdered at an alarming rate around Ciudad Juárez, an environment of impunity providing little hope of relief. The testimony of these victims is made visible by artists through the corporeal idiom of performance, and exposes the loss of countless human lives in the borderlands. Since then-president Felipe Calderon declared war on the cartels in 2006, these *feminicidios* have been increasingly overshadowed by cartel-related violence, further complicating the scene. Statistics of violent homicide in the region remain high.<sup>6</sup>

Considering art actions that emphasize, among other things, a privileging of indexical references to the body over the body's actual

presence and the use of the artist's body as symbolic substitute, my larger project maps out the ways in which artists conceive of themselves as advocates for subjects stripped of agency as a result of this ever-present violence. Utilizing case studies of performances, I aim to locate the aesthetic and political potential of such practices within contemporary performance art. In an attempt to, like the artists, bear witness to the effects of this violence on the collective social body, I argue that the trauma of physical violence is rendered most legible through this ghostly presence that highlights the body's absence.

There is a strong tradition of anti-violence political protest in Mexico, particularly since the increase in cartel violence over the past seven years. Anti-violence protests in city streets, public plazas, and universities increased in the capital city leading up to the presidential election in the summer of 2012. In the borderlands, the cityscape of Juárez continues to be marked with traditional marches against violence, in which women, families, and other members of the community take to the streets to protest violence against women in the region. In some cases, such as the 2010 Caravan of Comfort, traditional marches and rallies are accompanied by symbolic and performative aesthetic moments. During the Caravan of Comfort,

pink crosses, an emblem of the anti-violence movement in Mexico that refers specifically to *las muertas de Juárez* (the dead women of Juárez), were set up to commemorate women who have been killed or disappeared while women, presumably mothers or family members of the victims, knelt before the crosses and prayed.

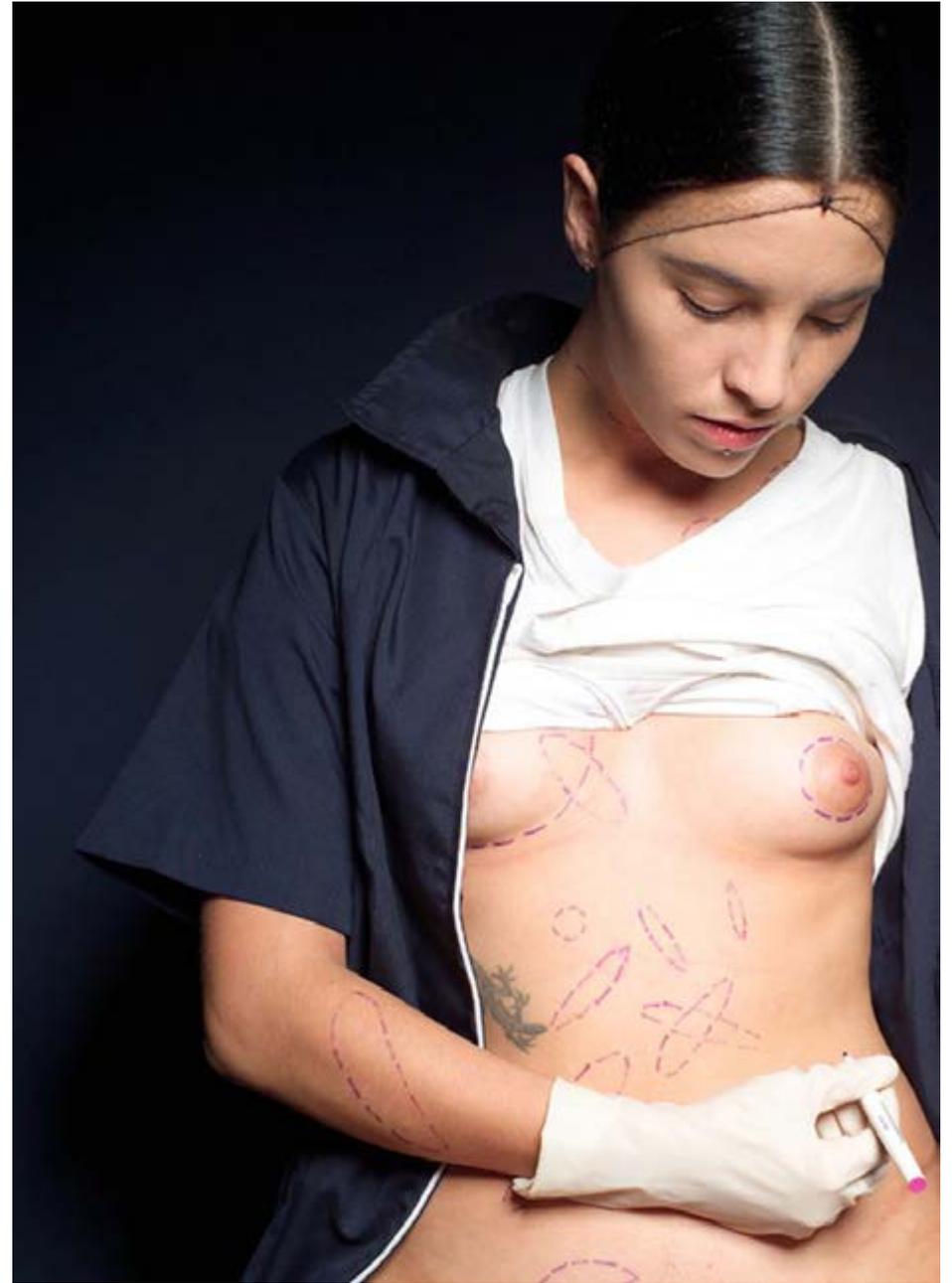
Politically engaged performance artists have also taken an interest in creating a new visual language, often with messages that are more subtle and coded than those in traditional protests, in order to express their frustration, despair, and grief and to bear witness to the countless lives lost to violent conditions in the region. By now, activist art is a common theme in the international contemporary arts scene, and it is a trend among many artists working in Mexico.

A Mexico City–born feminist artist, activist, and cofounder of the Ex-Teresa Arte Actual performance and exhibition space, Lorena Wolffer allowed her body to stand in for the collective victims of *feminicidio* in Juárez in *Mientras dormíamos (El Caso Juárez)* (2002).<sup>7</sup> This action was presented in various locations between 2002 and 2004, including galleries and museums in Mexico, Finland, Wales, and the U.S. Wolffer says of her work that, in an effort to expose the brutality of violence against

women in Juárez, she uses her body “*como un mapa simbólico que documenta y narra la violencia en cincuenta de los casos, a partir de reportes policíacos,*” and that she makes visible “*cada uno de los golpes, cortadas y balazos que estas mujeres han sufrido.*”<sup>8</sup> The artist's body, then, transforms into a vehicle for the representation of violence against women in Juárez, which has by now become institutionalized.

The performance opens with audio news reports of the murders. The artist enters, wearing a Dickie's-style work suit and a hairnet—attire that recalls the uniforms of *maquiladora* workers—then sits on a surgical table and strips, panties dangling vulnerably from one leg. In the morgue-like environment, the artist, after donning latex gloves, uses a surgical marker to delineate on her exposed body all of the mutilations these women suffered, as if she were the collective victims. Her actions are slow and systematic, allowing the audience time to reflect on each wound. Once the missing bodies are manifest via the artist's body, the brutality ripe for the spectator to experience viscerally, the artist dresses and leaves the space. The artist's body functions as symbolic substitute, facilitating her own—and the audience's—witnessing of the crimes (figures 1, 2).

Visually reminiscent of Hannah Wilke's 1975 “self-scarification” performance SOS or, per-



**Figures 1, 2. Lorena Wolffer, *Mientras Dormíamos (El Caso Juárez)/While We Were Sleeping (The Juárez Case)*, 2002. Photos by Martín L. Vargas.**

haps even more apt, Wilke's last photographic series of self-portraits, *Intra-Venus*, in which the artist documents her own suffering as she dies from lymphoma, Wolffer's performance calls into question society's fear and sterilization of images of death. In Wilke's SOS, which was performed in Paris in 1975, the artist had bystanders chew gum and then place it on her body, in what she called a process of "self-scarification." According to the artist, these scars represent the pain of the Holocaust. Wolffer, like Wilke, marks up her own body in a moment of bearing witness to the pain of others. In her later work *Intravenus*, Wilke documents her own suffering while dying of cancer with photographic self-portraits that were published posthumously. The visual similarities between Wilke's and Wolffer's works are apparent, especially in the color palette, the positioning of the body and the exposed breast, the evocation of the sterile hospital or morgue environments, and the signs of sanitation, such as the gloves or the surgical tape. Both images critique society's desire to sterilize death. Through the latex gloves, the surgical marker, and the hospital-like setting, Wolffer sanitizes death for us, desensitizing us to the pain of the nameless victims as the news reports that play at the opening of the performance do. Death becomes clean, anonymous. Yet the physical presence of

Wolffer's body reactivates their suffering: their phantom pain reappears, becoming visible through Wolffer's embodied presence, and the invisible is made visible, allowing the spectator, in viewing, to witness as part of a public spectacle of grief.

In another testament to the increasing body count in the borderlands, Argentine-born, Mexico City-based artist Enrique Ježik dumps a truckload of what he refers to as "organic matter" (animal body parts, which he obtained from the municipal slaughterhouse) off a cliff outside of Juárez for his 2009 action *Seis metros cúbicos de materia orgánica*<sup>9</sup> (figures 3, 4). The art action was part of the *Proyecto Juárez*, in which curator Mariana David invited artists to come to Juárez to create new works that take issue with the topic of border violence. The project, site-specific and research-based, took place over the course of several years beginning in 2006, and centered around the complicated socioeconomic conditions of the Chihuahuan borderlands.

According to the curator, this border area is of interest because in addition to being a smuggling route since the colonial era, it has become evidence of the failed "war on drugs."<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, despite the visibility of the major role that women artists have played in work that condemns violence in the region, David

invited only male artists to participate, which she explains as a way to "address the concept of patriarchy in a context where traditional male values such as strength, success, and security are presented in an exacerbated fashion."<sup>11</sup> Perhaps she thought this could be a way for male artists to reject this hegemonic discourse, though her choice seems to unfortunately perpetuate the myth of the superiority of the male gaze. Why female artists were not invited to participate is ultimately unclear. It is also problematic that no artists living and working in the borderlands were invited: all the male participants are based in Mexico City, or even as far away as Madrid. The artists chosen to participate present, in part through their choice to focus on measuring and statistics, a perspective on violence in the region that renders the victims anonymous, mere numbers.

In Ježik's contribution to *Proyecto Juárez*, "organic material" serves as indexical reference to the absent bodies, victims of violence in Juárez. An homage to Robert Smithson's 1969 *Asphalt Rundown*, Ježik's action refers to the bodies being dumped in the desert. *Seis metros cúbicos* is a kind of aesthetic gesture, grown out of action painting and abstract expressionism that, as the matter oozes and drips down the landscape, doubles as social commentary. The sight of these bloody body doubles is disgust-



**Figures 3,4. Enrique Ježik, *Seis metros cúbicos de materia orgánica* (Six Cubic Meters of Organic Matter), 2009**

ing: it repulses and sickens us—as should the violence we have all accepted as inevitable—ultimately causing us to wonder what happens to this mass of organic matter. Is it left to biodegrade? And what does this imply about the bodies left in the desert to rot? Hoping for transcendence, can we reimagine this rotting as a return to the earth?

In contrast to Wolffer, Ježik uses other objects, namely the animal parts, to stand in as symbolic substitutes for the collective victims. While Wolffer's performance engages the artist's own body—in fact *is* an embodiment of the violence—Ježik, perhaps because of his lack of a female-gendered body, must rely on Mother Earth to serve as the female body upon which the violence is reenacted.<sup>12</sup> Though the subject matter is similar, it is clear that these artists' works represent to very different, even gendered, versions of invisibility tactics, used to understand violence against the female body. I would argue that they are two different gendered ways of interpreting violence against the body. I would argue that they are two different gendered ways of interpreting violence against the body.

In another contribution to *Proyecto Juárez*, Mexico City-based artist Artemio's intellectualized interpretation of violence in the region, *Untitled (Portrait of Women in Juárez)*, from



**Figures 5, 6. Artemio, *Untitled (Portrait of Women in Juárez)*, 2009**



**Figure 7. Nayla Altamirano, *Las Nobodies*, 2012**

2009, pays homage to the women killed in the region since the early 1990s. Artemio collected official numbers, which likely do not account for the total number of women actually murdered and disappeared: 485 women had reportedly been killed since 1993. The artist multiplied the number of bodies by 55, using an average weight of 55 kilograms per woman, to come up with the sum of 27 tons. For *Untitled (Portrait of Women in Juarez)*, the artist had 27 tons of dirt excavated from the Chihuahuan desert, outside Ciudad Juárez, and transported by truck to a gallery in Mexico City, where the mountain of dirt was displayed. Again, victims of violence are rendered anonymous, reduced to numbers and a pile of dirt. Artemio's work means to pay homage to the human cost that is a result of violence in the region. However, it fails to present the human perspective, opting for a cerebral, even mathematical account of systematic and economic violence (figures 5, 6).

A return to the artist-as-symbolic-substitute model, emerging artist Nayla Altamirano, like Wolffer, uses her own body to take on pain and suffering on behalf of silenced victims. Altamirano, a lawyer-turned-performance-artist, has dedicated much of her life to the protection of indigenous communities in rural Mexico and to environmental conservation. It is to be expected, then, that advocacy permeates her

artistic practice. In her 2011 performance *Las Nobodies*, Altamirano makes visible the invisible agony of women who are raped, often by *coyotes* entrusted with facilitating their safe passage, while crossing the border into the U.S.<sup>13</sup> (figures 7, 8).

As the artist tells it, she was participating in humanitarian aid at the border when she came across women's brassieres hanging from mesquite plants in the Sonoran desert. These bras, she would come to find out, served as trophies of the sexual abuse their former owners suffered. In the first component of the performance, which is documented on video, Altamirano walks three kilometers along the border, collecting the bras and sprinkling salt on the plant to cure the wound, a natural healing practice. She undresses and then wears the bras, figuratively taking on the victims' physical reminder of pain. She wears the bras as she legally passes into the U.S. with her visa, stopping to explain to the border patrol officer that she is bringing, for her "sisters," her *hermanas*, something that they have lost along the way: "their power, their innocence, their dignity, freedom, dreams..."<sup>14</sup>

In the second component of the performance, as the video of her border walk is projected behind her on a screen, Altamirano enters the performance space, undresses, and



**Figure 8. Nayla Altamirano,**  
*Las Nobodias*, 2012

dons the bras, substituting her own body for the bodies of the collective victims. For both Wolffer and Altamirano, the act of *bearing* witness requires that the women *bare* their naked, vulnerable bodies, symbolically becoming vulnerable like the victims of violence they reference.

Altamirano then removes each bra one by one and washes it in an act of cleansing solidarity. Through the act of washing, which references all sorts of culture-specific beliefs on the redemptive power of cleansing, the aesthetic moment becomes emancipatory. In this moment, the bras become the signifiers for the victims. Here, the artist and the spectators are witness not only to the violence but also to the cathartic process of healing through cleansing. Like Wolffer, her own body is the sign, and, yet, like Ježik, she simultaneously substitutes an object, the bras, for the absent victims, thereby producing the ultimate cathartic substitution.

In employing the figurative substitution that Agamben endorses by exchanging their own bodies or other items for the absent bodies of victims, artists in Mexico highlight that same absence, making it even more visible. The audience, ever a participant, in turn sees what was once invisible, becoming able to bear witness to the tragedy. Beyond witnessing the tragedy—in which we are all complicit—we, as

spectators, are also witnesses to the redemptive power—and, in this, to the aesthetic and political potential of the healing process—of sprinkling salt in to heal the wound. Though rubbing salt in a wound can be painful, it can also speed up the healing process; so, too, do these performances function as a testament to the transformative power of witnessing as an aesthetic project.

—  
Photo credits: All photos are reproduced courtesy of the individual artist.

#### NOTES

1. Agamben, Giorgio. "The Archive and Testimony." *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books, 1999. 161.
2. In Mexico, the term "*feminicidio*" refers to the systematic killing of women in and around Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and other parts of the border region.
3. Effective January 1, 1994, the U.S., Mexico, and Canada signed a treaty to create a trilateral trade bloc, which eased import tariffs among its members. However, NAFTA has suffered much criticism for its failure to protect the laboring classes. For example, NAFTA's passage made possible the growth of the *maquiladora* system in Mexican borderlands, which resulted in sub-par working standards for the impoverished Mexican laborers manning the factories. While theoretically a free trade area provides increased wealth for all parties, in reality it does nothing to ensure equal distribution of that wealth.
4. Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
5. "*Maquiladora*" is the term for manufacturing operations in Mexican free trade zones, where facto-

ries import material and equipment on a tariff-free basis for assembly, processing, or manufacturing and then reexport the assembled, processed, and/or manufactured products, sometimes back to the raw materials' country of origin.

6. In 2009, Ciudad Juárez was declared the "most violent city in the world," according to a study by the Mexican non-profit group Citizen Council for Public Security and Justice, which presented its report to Mexico's security minister in August of that same year.
7. Wolffer, Lorena. *While We Were Sleeping (The Case of Juárez)*. 2002.
8. She uses her body "like a symbolic map that documents and narrates the violence in 50 of the cases, (information gathered from) based on police reports," ... "each one of the blows, cuts, and gunshots that these women have suffered." Author's translation. Personal communication.
9. Ježik, Enrique. *Six Cubic Meters of Organic Material*. 2006. Action for *Proyecto Juárez*.
10. Curator David's statement is available on the *Proyecto Juárez* website: <http://www.proyectojuarez.org.mx>.
11. *Ibid.*
12. For a discussion of the debate on gender and land art between Lucy Lippard and Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, see Anne Creissels's "From Leda to Daphne: Sacrifice and Virginité in the Work of Ana Mendieta," in *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference*, edited by Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron.
13. Altamirano, Nayla. *The Nobodies*. 2011. Video documentation available at: <http://vimeo.com/27545858>.
14. Nayla Altamirano, personal communication.

## RECORDS OF *BROOMSTICK* MAGAZINE



**B**ROOMSTICK was an independent, self-published radical feminist magazine dedicated to supporting and promoting women and lesbian activism and art for an audience of women over forty. Founded by Maxine Spencer and Polly Taylor in Berkeley, California, in 1978, it ceased publication in 1993.

Its main goals were confronting ageism, stereotypes of the disabled, and breaking down gender conventions in publishing. and explores topics related to radical feminist politics, lesbian culture and art, spirituality of the Crone, women and aging, and feminist coalitions and communities. The collection contains a complete run of the magazine, organizational records, financial statements,

correspondence, submissions and rejections, and many of the plates used for printing the magazine. The collection also contains Spencer's personal papers documenting her personal experiences with radical feminism, lesbianism, disability, sexism, and age discrimination.

The idea for *Broomstick* was born when eight women over forty attended a Crone's Caucus and organized a loose coalition that would support, fund, and collectively address concerns specific to older women. This peer-led group would also function as a supportive network for activism. Together, Spencer and Taylor approached "OPTIONS for Women Over Forty," a newly formed feminist organization in Berkeley. They asked for its endorsement and





**Broomstick sought to provide materials, information, and support for women over forty.**

financial support to create a feminist political journal for and about women over forty. In exchange, Spencer and Taylor pledged to publicize OPTIONS in the journal and promote its programs. Though OPTIONS gave initial support and funding, Broomstick eventually grew into an independently published and funded magazine, but financial insolvency led to its demise.

The materials are organized into four series: Magazine Production, Publicity, Administrative Records, and Author Files. The Magazine Production series documents the creative and physical production process of Broomstick from start to finish. It offers a unique perspective on the process of creating a grassroots, independent magazine. It contains layouts, typesettings, artwork and cartoons, articles used for research, letters to the editor, ideas for editorials, drafts and potential content for magazine columns, promotional contests, as well as a complete set of finished Broomstick issues, including Indexes—published annually cataloging authors, themes, and published issues—and a self-produced

Writer's Packet to guide contributors in the submission process. The other series are equally rich in material about the process of publishing, including developing ideas, managing finances, and getting attention.

*The finding aid for this collection is available for viewing at the Online Archive of California (<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8br8sth/>). Digitized materials from the collection and the finding aid will be available for viewing on the UCLA Library's Digital Collections website. This research is part of an ongoing CSW research project, "Making Invisible Histories Visible: Preserving the Legacy of Lesbian Feminist Activism and Writing in Los Angeles," with Principal Investigators Kathleen McHugh, CSW Director and Professor in the Departments of English and Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA (on sabbatical from April to June, 2013) and Gary Strong, University Librarian at UCLA. Funded in part by an NEH grant, the project is a three-year project to arrange, describe, digitize, and make physically and electronically accessible two major clusters of June Mazer Lesbian Archive collections related to West Coast lesbian/feminist activism and writing since the 1930s.*

*For more information on this project, visit <http://www.csw.ucla.edu/research/projects/making-invisible-histories-visible>. For more information on the activities of the Mazer, visit <http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org>*

## POSITION AVAILABLE! CSW ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

UCLA has an exciting staff position open for a PhD, field open, to direct the UCLA Center for the Study of Women (CSW). CSW is an internationally recognized research center that serves UCLA faculty, graduate students, undergraduates and community scholars and that sponsors numerous research projects and hosts national and international conferences. Under the general oversight of the CSW Director, the Assistant Director develops plans to organize and implement research activities that include: research projects and programs; development and fund-raising strategies; and outreach programs. The CSW Assistant Director also has overall responsibility for operations of CSW, including financial and personnel

administration, event management, and communication activities. Among the primary requirements for this position are knowledge of and experience with academic research and publication relating to women, gender and/or sexuality; knowledge of research programs, implementation, and goals; excellent analytical, communication, organizational and managerial skills; and excellent writing skills. Specific responsibilities cover three areas: Research Development and Implementation 40%; Operations and Administration 40%; and Contracts and Grants 20%.

More information about CSW at: [www.csw.ucla.edu](http://www.csw.ucla.edu)



*Living green extends to many areas, including batteries. If you've ever wondered which ones to use, pick rechargeables over alkaline batteries. A 2007 study found that fully wearing out one rechargeable battery has 28 times less of an impact on global warming than using alkaline batteries. Rechargeable batteries are also much more cost-efficient. A 4-pack of AAs and the respective charger range from \$20 to 30, but you will quickly recoup the cost in energy savings, since cost of energy to recharge them is miniscule, about 13 cents a year. Recycling batteries prevents the dispersal of heavy metals and toxic chemicals in soil and water. Recycling is required in some states. Many businesses will take your used batteries, including some electronics shops.*

*--Rylan Ross*

UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN  
*supporting innovative research on women, gender, and sexuality*



**ACTING DIRECTOR**

*Rachel Lee*

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, ENGLISH AND GENDER STUDIES

**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

*Julie Childers, Ph.D.*

**MANAGING EDITOR**

*Brenda Johnson-Grau*

**ADMINISTRATIVE SPECIALIST**

*Allison Wyper*

**STUDENT ASSISTANTS**

*Olga Desyatnik, Kimberlee Granholm, Angel Diaz,  
Angelica Lai, Magaly Martin, Josh Olejarz,  
Rylan Ross, Bessie Sanchez, Ben Sher, Cathy Son,  
Laura Swanbeck, and Stacy Wood*



UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN

1500 Public Affairs Building/Box 957222

Los Angeles, CA 90095-7222

campus mailcode: 722203

310 825 0590 / 310 825 0456 (fax)