From the Director

One of the singular pleasures of directing an Institute is welcoming into its folds a distinguished new member. This year the Institute has the distinct pleasure of welcoming Professor Alondra Nelson who joins the Columbia faculty with a joint position in Sociology and IRWaG. Previously of the Sociology Department at Yale University, Nelson brings to us research and teaching interests that include the historical and socio-cultural studies of science, technology, and medicine; racial formation processes in biomedicine and technoculture; social movements; and social and cultural theory. She is co-editor of Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life (New York University Press, 2001). Her monograph Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Politics of Race and Health examines African American advocacy around issues of genetic disease, medicalized models of social unrest, and health disparities. Her current research is an ethnographic study of genetic “root-seeking” and the implications of these practices for contemporary understandings of race and ethnicity, diaspora, ancestry, and memory. I would like to thank everyone in Sociology and IRWaG who worked at the forefront and in the background. But, of course, my real thanks goes to Alondra Nelson.

Acts of Reparation in the Social Life of DNA

By Elizabeth Povinelli

On Monday April 13th, Professor Alondra Nelson (Sociology, Yale) presented a lecture on “Acts of Reparation in the Social Life of DNA.” To a packed sociology seminar room, Nelson outlined her new research project on the genetic “root-seeking.” With rich ethnographic detail, broad social scope, and delicate theoretical balance, Nelson explored the impact of genetic testing on the construction of race and ethnicity among African-American and black British consumers of genetic genealogy testing.

Rather than the tests determining their understanding of their history and being, test-takers adjudicated between sources of genealogical information and from these construct meaningful biographical narratives. Consumers engage in highly situated objective and affiliative self-fashioning, interpreting genetic test results in the context of their genealogical aspirations. A lively discussion followed, moving among the complex theoretical, social, and ethnographic registers Nelson so nicely navigated.

Act of Reparation in the Social Life of DNA by Elizabeth Povinelli

Q & A with Khiara Bridges

Archiving Women Conference

CCASD

Fall 2009 Courses

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH
ON WOMEN AND GENDER

In This Issue:

Seniors Present Theses 2
Arendt After ’68: A Symposium 3
News Briefs 3
Prose, Poetry, and the Art of the Political with Antjie Krog and Adrienne Rich 4
Jackie Stacey: Feminism, Science, and the Cinema 6
Fall 2009 IRWaG Events 6
Marilyn Lake and Drawing the Global Colour Line 7
Graduate Colloquium Roundup 8
Theory Mondays 8
Khiara Bridges

Q & A with Khiara Bridges 9
Archiving Women Conference 10
CCASD 10
Fall 2009 Courses 16
Seniors Present Theses

By Julie Crawford

This year’s (2008–2009) senior seminar for Women’s and Gender Studies Majors produced three excellent senior essays.

Shira Burton, a Women’s and Gender Studies Major with a Concentration in Psychology, wrote a senior essay entitled “Does the Life Story Fit? The Traditional Transgender Narrative in TransGeneration.” Focusing on a TV documentary miniseries which followed the lives of four trans-identified college students, and informed by her readings for Women’s and Gender Studies Classes on “Sexuality, Gender and the Law” and “Transsexuality,” Ms. Burton’s essay offered an analysis of the ways in which the documentary relied on, and in some ways resisted, the dominant medico-legal narrative for sexual transition. This narrative, based almost entirely on a “gay childhood” story as the legitimating grounds for sexual reassignment surgery, and often inflexible in regard to other gender stories, is subject to scrutiny both in the students’ own accounts, and in the documentary format itself. Ms. Burton’s essay was advised by Professor Rachel Adams of the Departments of English and Comparative Literature and American Studies.

Megan Dey Lessard’s senior essay, “An Analysis of the Structural Factors Impacting School-Based Sex Education in New York City” focuses on changes in both Department of Health and Department of Education policies regarding HIV education and prevention and in political and public attitudes towards sex education in New York City more broadly. By carefully outlining attitudes towards sexual education in New York City since the notorious “Rainbow Curriculum” controversy of the early 1990s (a controversy evolving around a multicultural curriculum that included discussion of homosexuality as well as condom distribution in high schools) and placing these attitudes in dialogue with recent political changes in New York, including Democratic majorities and the passage of the Healthy Teens Act in 2008, Lessard shows that the real problems facing comprehensive sexual education in New York are the ideological remnants of nation-wide “abstinence-only” sex education curricula, and the absence of clear directives for the implementation of more recently legally mandated and (somewhat) more progressive sexual education programs in New York City itself. Ms. Lessard’s essay was written under the direction of Professor Julie Crawford, Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Oriana Magnera’s essay, “Who’s Listening?: Audience, Public, and Extreme Behavior in the Aftermath of the Duke Lacrosse Case” takes as its subject a 2006 alleged rape case in which a black female stripper accused the white male lacrosse players who had hired her for their party of rape. The media frenzy that resulted, Ms. Magnera argues, not only highlighted already extant race, class and gender issues in both Duke University and Durham, NC, but led to a range of cultural records that tell the widely disparate stories of “what really happened.” The three records...
News Briefs:

IRWaG congratulates the following faculty on their awards: Marcellus Blount, who was elected President of Columbia’s chapter of Phi Beta Kappa; Eileen Gillooly, who was awarded a fellowship at the National Humanities Center for academic year 2009–2010; Suzanne Goldberg, who received the Willis L.M. Reese Prize for Excellence in Teaching from Columbia Law School; Ellen Gray, who received a senior fellowship residency for 2009–2010 at the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis (for participation in their “Vernacular Epistemologies” seminar); Marianne Hirsch, who was named the William Peterfield Trent Professor of English and Comparative Literature and also gave the keynote lecture on Literature and Photography at the Photo Espana Festival in Madrid in June; Jean Howard, whose book, Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642, won the 2008 Barnard Hewitt Award given by the American Society for Theatre Research for outstanding work in theater history; Martha Howell, who was appointed to the International Francqui Chair in Belgium for 2008–2009; Frances Negron-Muntaner, who was named Global Expert for the United Nations’ Rapid Response Media Mechanism (RRMM) project and awarded a grant by The Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program to pursue research on artist Jean-Michel Basquiat; Joseph Slaughter, who was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for this coming year to work on his project, “Intellectual Property and the World Novel”; and Rebecca Young, who received a Mellon Environmental Science Minigrant to study how the notion of “sex hormones” affects the scientific trajectory of research on endocrine disruptors and a Barnard College Faculty Minigrant to explore emerging clinical and scientific applications of brain organization theory in relation to the medical diagnosis and treatment of “gender identity disorder of childhood” (GIDC).

IRWaG FEMINIST NEWS ~ PAGE 3

Arendt After ‘68: A Symposium

By Katherine Polin

“Arendt After ‘68: A Symposium” spanned two days, February 12–13, 2009, of impassioned discourse inspired by Arendt’s essay On Violence (1969). Throughout her life, Hannah Arendt strived to reconcile the maddening and often fatal contradictions of political life in modern times. It is thus critical “to explore her work in the wake of the discovery of violence and the events of ‘68,” said Professor Elizabeth Povinelli at the onset of this conference. She asserted that violence is affective, seeping into memories, emotional life, and political life. Professor of Political Science Lisa Zerilli, of the University of Chicago, formulated the simple but profoundly difficult task at hand: “Has Hannah Arendt given us tools” with which to think about political engagement? With 14 participants, who constituted seven speaker-respondent pairings, all of whom had varying degrees of personal connection to Arendt (Professor Richard Bernstein, for example, knew her from The New School), the tension was palpable.

Hannah Arendt’s work has historically provoked controversy among scholars and in the public at large, and “Arendt After ‘68: A Symposium” did not disappoint. Professor Povinelli described the conference as the “brainchild” of Professor

Rosalind Morris, Anthropology, and “a theory boot camp” aimed “not merely [at Arendt’s work] as opus, but specifically as historical intervention.” This examination of the mark Arendt has left on activism and thought was one of the “most heated conferences [I have] been to in a long time” declared Professor Zerilli. Given Arendt’s belief in plurality and discussion, the political philosopher would have welcomed the exchange of ideas and process of disagreement.

Arendt, Continued on Page 12

Ayten Gündoğdu (Barnard) speaking on "Arendt on the Stateless: Rethinking the Violence of Rightlessness in an Age of Rights."

Andreas Huyssen (Columbia) responding to Jean Cohen’s (Columbia) talk on "Banishing the Sovereign? Arendt on Sovereignty and Freedom in America and Beyond."

Stathis Gourgouris (Columbia) speaking on "Anarchy’s Democracy" with respondent Nadia Urbinati (Columbia).
Prose, Poetry, and the Art of the Political with Antjie Krog and Adrienne Rich

By Katherine Polin

Altshul Auditorium hummed with excitement on the evening of April 28, 2009, as an audience of students, professors, and the public, waited for the culminating event of the Women Poets and Writers at Barnard Series, also hosted by the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, and the Heyman Center for the Humanities. Delight animated the audience and conversations waned in an out as they waited, expectant and eager, for American writer and feminist Adrienne Rich and South African poet Antjie Krog to appear. A sense of fragility—a theme addressed consistently throughout the program—inspired by a formality in the audience, pervaded the atmosphere, as Professor of Anthropology, Rosalind Morris, introduced these two women “who work at knowing what they don’t want to know” to uncover truths and fight for justice and equality. Though they vary stylistically, both question artistic form and efficacy with an insistence similar to that with which they continually and self-reflexively confront their status quo. Professor Morris described the two as “not parallel, but together under complicated skies,” striving to answer the question, “when does life bend toward freedom?” They question the distinct and similar structures of political violence in which they live.

Rich and Krog have both received international acclaim for their bold and beautiful artistry despite of—and because of—its dissident nature. Rich, for example, as Morris recounted, was chosen by W.H. Auden as the winner of the Yale Young Poets Prize at the age of twenty-two. Tellingly, he described her poems as “neatly and modestly dressed, speak directly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them, and do not tell fibs.” And at this event Adrienne Rich and Antjie Krog demonstrated how the pervasive and penetrating honesty of Rich’s, and Krog’s, writing coupled with a deep sense of mortality, are artistic expressions of not only feminist politics, but of the female condition.

Both poets have recently published new works and, although each woman has read and admired the works of the other from oceans away, the two had never shared a stage, nor had they ever met. It was personal and cultural history when Krog contemplated the first part of Rich’s four tiered response was equally fraught, if understated. “That’s poetry,” she declared, summing up the audience’s reaction in two words. She then gave her own response. She characteristically reflected on the state of our world—a subject that pervades her work—and confirmed the inextricable link between politics and poetry; she avowed to reread Krog’s, “Country of My Skull,” an autobiographical account of reporting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in light of current discourse on torture. Poetry is an antidote to the status quo, a separate voice that criticizes and can potentially aid in its status quo.

The first part of Rich’s four tiered response was “I dream I’m the Death of Orpheus,” from The Will to Change (1968). In this modern
In "The Art of Translation," the second part of her response, Rich celebrated "the translator"—the poet whose work is an act of translation—who allows the excluded access. Both "The Art of Translation" and "I dream I'm the Death of Orpheus," conclude that mental inertia is not an option: "I wanted to somewhere/the brain had not yet gone" Rich admits in "Letters to a Young Poet," the third installment in her response to Krog.

Explaining the abovementioned poem, Rich asserts, "In this poem the voice is not my voice...but the voice of poetry." She removes herself again from her own voice, exemplifying the isolation inherent in the poetry. This is a significant practice for Rich, who speaks so passionately and thoughtfully and for whom writing, and words, is crucial to survival and subject formation. She is "a woman with a certain mission/which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact." In "Letters," poetry speaks from the place where life really is, where you can “distract your thirst for closure and escape.” It is “forespeaking, not déjà vu, that..."
Jackie Stacey: Feminism, Science, and the Cinema
By Elizabeth Povinelli

On the eve of the spring break, the audience started small but gradually gave way to a crowd who turned up to hear Professor Jackie Stacey, Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Manchester, present a lecture on “Cloning Films with a Difference: Feminism, Science, and the Cinema.” Stacey’s lecture was part of IRWaG’s ongoing conversation with the social and cultural study of science (see “Nelson Talk” on page 1 and “Embodiments of Science” on page 5). Stacey is an internationally read scholar of feminism, culture, and science. As well as being a co-editor of two journals: Screen and Feminist Theory, her publications include: Star Gazing: Female Spectators and Hollywood Cinema (1994) and Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer (1997) and (as co-author with Sarah Franklin and Celia Lury) Global Nature, Global Culture (2000). Stacey read from her current project, The Cinematic Life of the Gene, upcoming from Duke University Press.

The talk was a multimedia presentation of cinematic representations of the new genetic sciences. The talk focused on Teknolust, Lynn Hershman Leeson’s 2002 narrative about a biogeneticist, Rosetta Stone (Tilda Swinton), who has secretly downloaded her own DNA and combined it with computer software to engineer three self-replicating automatons (SRA’s), also all played by Tilda Swinton. Each replicant looks human but functions as an intelligent machine. In order to survive, the SRAs need regular injections and infusions of sperm/semen to top up their constantly depleting levels of Y chromosome and thus Ruby, one of Rosetta’s offspring, seduces random men to retrieve sperm for herself and her clone sisters. Juxtaposed to Teknolust were Alien Resurrection (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997), Gattaca (Andrew Niccol, 1997), and Code 46 (Michael Winterbottom, 2003). With subtle theoretical skills, Stacey probed the aesthetic layers of these texts to ask whether the new genetic sciences are compatible with cinema’s death drive.

Professor Patricia Williams, of Columbia Law School, followed the talk with a wide-ranging comment on genetics, race and law.
Marilyn Lake and Drawing the Global Colour Line

By Katherine Polin

On January 26, 2009 Professor Marilyn Lake, of La Trobe University in Victoria, Australia, addressed an intimate gathering at SIPA. As she wove the stories of her coming to co-write Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality with fellow Australian Henry Reynolds, with the fundamental narrative of her book, the audience continued to grow. Her own journey started at Harvard University where she held the position of Chair in Australian Studies from 2001–2002; her book recounts the history of the people and ideas that inform the emergence of the “colour line,”—a social perspective of nationality and ethnicity that produced so called “white men’s countries” throughout the world during the late nineteenth-century.

Taking their title from W.E.B. DuBois’s famous declaration that the problem of the twentieth century is a “problem of the colour line,” a reference itself to U.S racial segregation after the abolition of slavery, Lake and Reynolds excavate literary history of a phenomenon that continues to inform western culture and its understanding of human rights today. The “color line” is an intellectualization of an emotional response and Lake started her research with the question “what were people reading?” at the time; she followed with a coeval study of racial theory circulated in the English-speaking world.

Lake cited Australia’s Pacific Islanders Labourers Act of 1901, which was designed to facilitate the mass deportation of nearly all the Pacific Islanders working in Australia, as an interesting starting off point. Indeed, Lake and Reynolds trace the efforts of the ruling elites in the United States, Australia, and other Anglo settled states in the early twentieth century, to forge self-proclaimed “white men’s countries” by means of racial segregation and immigration restrictions. Their assertions of whiteness, Lake claims, comprised a “transnational phenomenon,” symbolized by the “white man,” a “transnational figure” and a “member of an imaginary and affective community.” Sons of western conquest and heirs to an imperial legacy, these men responded with fear to the threats that migrant labor, colonial nationalism, and other forces, posed to the established order and to the “space” in which they had been dominant for so long. Indeed, these ruling white elite regarded the occupation of space as a talisman for domination and a guarantee of safety.

Drawing the Global Colour Line is not a conventional history of the growth of racial thought. Whereas most historians have confined their studies of race-relations to a national framework, this book offers a pioneering study of the transnational circulation of people and ideas, racial knowledge and technologies that underpinned the construction of self-styled white men’s countries from South Africa, to North America and Australasia. In her talk, Lake took us from the gold fields of 1850s Australia and the Chinese immigrant protest literature they espoused, to the post- Reconstruction United States and Teddy Roosevelt, to Gandhi’s South Africa, to Canada and California, and finally returned to a defiantly exclusionist Australia “beset by anxiety…and the apprehension of imminent humiliation and loss of power and prestige.” The population of China, for example, was about to reach 400,000,000 at the time, requiring a reassertion of racial vigor. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds show how in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century these countries worked in solidarity to exclude those they defined as not-white, actions that provoked a long international struggle for racial equality. By crossing these international boundaries, Lake proved to her audience the great potential of a new way of writing history that transcends the idea of “the nation.” This is a leap absolutely necessary to the conception of human rights. Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality makes clear the centrality of struggles around mobility and sovereignty to modern formulations of both race and human rights.
Graduate Colloquium Roundup

By Sherally Munshi

In the days following the November 2008 election, IRWaG sponsored an informal ‘Speak Out’ against Proposition 8, the California ballot proposition which restricts the definition of marriage within the state constitution to ‘marriage between a man and a woman.’ The panelists, Alice Kessler-Harris (Columbia, History Department), Katherine Franke (Columbia Law School), and Kevin Maillard (Fordham Law School) spoke about the status of marriage within modern liberal societies, the relationship between the current gay rights movement and earlier civil rights movements in the U.S., and the implications of proposition’s passage. The event drew an impressive crowd of politically curious and engaged faculty, staff, and students.

Alice Kessler-Harris led a dozen graduate students from various disciplines in a month-long workshop on feminist pedagogy. Workshop members participated in thoughtful, candid discussion about what it means to be a feminist, about the relationship between scholarship, teaching, and activism, and what it might mean to create a feminist classroom. Workshop members also developed and shared teaching syllabi.

This past semester, IRWaG introduced Theory Mondays, a monthly series of conversations focused on major feminist texts, including Elizabeth Povinelli on Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble and Marianne Hirsch on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Touching Feeling.

Theory Mondays

By Elizabeth Povinelli

On the request of its graduate students, IRWaG initiated “Theory Mondays,” a series of conversations focused on major feminist theoretical texts. “Theory Mondays” meets regularly on Mondays from 4 pm to 6 pm, in 465 Schermerhorn Extension (Anthropology Lounge). Readings are circulated in advance and a member of the IRWaG faculty lead conversations. On February 9th, Elizabeth Povinelli led the first meeting through Judith Butler’s classic, Gender Trouble, situating it in the conversations and debates that were circulating at the time it was written, the broader context of Butler’s scholarship, and contemporary concerns in feminist, sexuality, and gender theory. The workshop drew a lively crowd of faculty, graduates, and undergraduates. The second workshop was also greeted with a robust group of participants if in a more sober mood. On April 20th, Professor Marianne Hirsch led a discussion of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s life and work in the wake of her death on April 13th. For the first hour of the meeting, colleagues, students, and readers of Sedgwick, from the Columbia and CUNY communities, shared reflections on her life, teaching, and writing. For the second hour, Marianne Hirsch and Kate Stanley led a discussion of Sedgwick’s most recent book, Touching Feeling.

IRWaG plans a number of new meetings including a “make-up” of the postponed session on Donna Haraway led by Nadia Abu El-Haj, Barnard Anthropology Department. We will be going over Haraways’s Primate Visions, specifically, chapter 2, 3, and 7, and Modest Witness@Second Millenium. FemaleMan Meets OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience, chapter 2 of part 2.

RWaG offers Ph.D. students the opportunity to earn a certificate in women’s studies. Two courses are required as part of the certificate, so interested students should register their intention to pursue the certificate while doing coursework.

Professors: please tell your students about it.

Students: please contact the Director of Graduate Studies, Lila Abu-Lughod, la310@columbia.edu, for more information, or visit www.columbia.edu/cu/irwag/programs/main/graduate/
Q & A Khiara Bridges

By Katherine Polin

Khiara M. Bridges joined the Center for Reproductive Rights in July 2008 as the first recipient of the two-year Center for Reproductive Rights-Columbia Law School Fellowship. She earned her B.A. in Sociology, with a minor in writing, from Spelman College. She received her J.D. from Columbia Law School, where she was a Stone Scholar, a Kent Scholar, and a Developing Editor of the Columbia Law Review. And she earned, with distinction, her Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University in 2008. Khiara has focused her academic work on how reproductive rights law and biomedical ethics intersect to reinforce racial inequalities in the U.S. She is currently revising her dissertation into a book, entitled Reproducing Race: An Anthropology of Pregnancy as a Site of Racialization, to be published by the University of California Press in 2010, and writing a paper about the Supreme Court’s recent decision in Gonzales v. Carhart and its implications for the undue burden standard.

Q: Your fieldwork for your dissertation was largely spent at an obstetrics clinic in a public New York City hospital. What did you learn from the experience?

A: My fieldwork focused on how reproductive rights policies and laws in practice end up reproducing racial inequalities. New York State offers poor women a variety of prenatal services, but one of the first things I noticed is how unkindly poor women, most of them women of color, were treated at the clinic. Women who depend on state assistance are vilified, and that has an impact on their health. They are less likely to come to their appointments or to tell doctors if there is a problem.

Women who come to the clinic are also strongly encouraged to select a method of contraception that they’ll use after birth, which fosters the understanding that their pregnancy is a bad thing, a negative consequence of ignorance or irresponsibility. Herein lies a vast discontinuity between privacy rights as discussed and imagined in Constitutional Law and “privacy rights” as lived by poor women of color who rely on Medicaid to cover their prenatal care expenses. If reproductive rights means that women have the ability to make meaningful choices about their bodies, then a state policy that seemingly disparages poor women’s fertility undermines those rights.

More generally, the dissertation took, as its point of departure, the truisms among critical scholars that race is a social construction. It endeavored to explore “how” race is socially constructed — how race is maintained as a relevant category of experience — during the event of pregnancy. Specifically, it examined a prenatal health care program for indigent women and described the experiences of the women it affected.

Q: Is it a commitment to human rights and reproductive rights that drove you to study anthropology or something else?

A: I haven’t studied reproductive rights as human rights. And I wouldn’t say that I’ve always been interested in “rights”—human, reproductive, women’s, or otherwise. However, I have always been interested in pregnancy—in the medicalization of the pregnant body and in the politicization of the event.

I’m an emotional person, and I feel personally affronted whenever I witness what I perceive to be an injustice. Moreover, I think that capitalism has produced some of the most manifest, but most accepted, injustices that the world has ever witnessed. So, my commitment derives from my desire to envision a better — or, at least, more honest — society.

Q: How would you say that your pursuits—both academic and professional—have evolved at Columbia?

A: When I first came to Columbia in August of ‘99, I thought that I wanted to be a lawyer and practice corporate law. After working at a law firm during the summer between my second and third years of law school, I knew that practicing law wasn’t for me. Accordingly, during my last year of law school, I began to take more of the classes that I enjoyed—the classes that allowed me to explore the dialectical relationship between law and culture, i.e., how culture shapes law and how law shapes culture. Pursuing a doctorate in anthropology was a natural outgrowth of that.

Q: How would your characterize your relationship to Columbia currently?

A: I have wonderful mentors, and a wonderful workspace, at Columbia. In the anthropology department, I maintain wonderful relationships with Nick De Genova, Brink Messick, Neni Panourgia, and Lila Abu-Lughod. In the Law School, I have incredibly supportive relationships with Kendall Thomas, Carol Sanger, Katharine Franke, Suzanne Goldberg, and Henry Monaghan.

Q: What do you hope to do after your fellowship ends?

A: My fellowship runs from July ’08 through July ’10. I hope to have a job as a law professor by the time the fellowship ends.
Archiving Women

By Elizabeth Povinelli

The two hundred-plus seating was packed all day. Participants crowded doors, twittered thoughts, and praised and pushed lecturers and respondents. Archiving Women: A one-day conference brought together scholars and archivists to examine feminist practices in the archive. The conference was the brainchild of the Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference’s Project on Engendering the Archive. The archive is a living repository of knowledge about the past, present and future. It has also become a site for critical reflection on the ways different cultures and sub-cultures approach the transmission, revision and contestation of their heritage. “Archiving Women” asked how the scholarship on gender, race and sexuality has transformed the ways we think about archival structures and practices. What kinds of new archives are being created and how are they structured? Are new materials being collected, new histories being shaped? What alternative forms of transmission are being imagined? How have new media transformed the ways in which knowledge is classified, stored, and retrieved? Three panels were animated by these questions.

The morning session asked how archives change when women are the subject; and how feminist archival practices engender new historical narratives and new political agents? Professor Alice Kessler-Harris (Columbia, History and IRWaG) began the day with a rousing lecture on the problems historians face when persons understand themselves to be arbiters of their own archives. Her comments were followed by the reflections of Farah Griffin (Columbia, English and Comparative Literature and IRAAS) on research projects dedicated to recovering the history of black women as active intellectual subjects and to moving the study of black thought, culture, and leadership beyond the “Great Men” paradigm that characterizes most accounts of black intellectual activity. In particular she discussed her encounter with a collection of letters between Addie Brown and Rebecca documenting their experiences as black women in the post-reconstruction South. Perhaps a little more self-willed archiving would have helped in the project. Annette Gordon-Reed, Rutgers University and New York Law School discussed the archival opportunities and lacunae that structured her research on The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family which won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for History. Jenna Freedman, of the Barnard College Library Zines Collection, presented the range of material the collection has amassed and their historical importance.

Archiving, Continued on Page 11

CCASD News

Professor Lila Abu-Lughod and Professor Marianne Hirsch to Co-Direct CCASD

By Laura Ciokowski

The Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference (CCASD) has named Lila Abu-Lughod, William B. Ransford Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies, and Marianne Hirsch, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, co-Directors of CCASD, effective July 1, 2009. Neferti Tadiar, Professor and Chair of Women’s Studies (Barnard), directed the Center in 2008–2009.

CCASD is an advanced study center that promotes innovative interdisciplinary scholarship on the role of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race in global dynamics of power and inequality. The Center serves as the research arm of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, the Institute for Research in African-American Studies, the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, and the Barnard Center for Research on Women.

Professors Abu-Lughod and Hirsch are both former directors of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and were instrumental in launching CCASD in spring 2008. Professor Abu-Lughod also co-directs (with Professors Katherine Franke, Elizabeth Povinelli, Anupama Rao and Neferti Tadiar) the CCASD working project “Liberalism and its Others” and Professor Hirsch co-directs (with Professors Jean Howard and Saidiya Hartman) the CCASD working project “Engendering the Archive.” Please see the Center’s website (www.socialdifference.org) for additional information about the Center and its projects. IN
Archiving, Continued from Page 10

Freedman’s discussion provided an apt transition to the second session of the conference. It focused on concrete efforts to create new archives and collections. Once again the problems of intentional archives arose—what was the impact on young and mid-career scholars when they are asked for their archives in advance of their retirement? Elizabeth Weed from Brown’s Pembroke Center for Research on Women discussed the Feminist Theory Papers Collection. This collection became the object of numerous jokes throughout the day as lecturers admitted to having been asked—or not!—to contribute their archives to the collection. Michael Ryan, of Columbia University Libraries, and Frank Mecklenburg, of Leo Baeck Institute, discussed specific archival concerns from the point of view of archivists as materials migrated from analog to digital. The search capacity of digital formats promised to greatly enhance scholarly use of library materials, but problems presented themselves in terms of constant updating of software and hardware platforms, of creative indexing, and of cultural and intellectual property rights.

The day ended with the thematic of collecting and being collected. Nancy Miller (CUNY, Graduate Center) spoke in poetically moving terms about becoming an archive after a life of being a biographer. Nell Irvin Painter, from Princeton, spoke in equally powerful terms about the empty spaces contained within her thirty year correspondence with Nellie McKay, who was the Evjue-Bascom Professor of American and African-American Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she also taught in English and Women’s Studies. The poignancy of imagining a history that cannot recover what was never said moved the audience. Povinelli ended the day by reflecting on the paradoxes of archival cultures in nonarchival contexts.

Archiving, Continued from Page 1

Alondra for accepting our offer and thereby enriching our scholarly and pedagogical program exponentially.

I am also delighted to announce our two graduate fellows for 2009–2010, Christine Varnado (English and Comparative Literature) and Rachel Van (History). They will be leading and coordinating a series of public workshops and readings throughout the year in the Friday lunch hours. So keep your eyes open for events. Also, many thanks to last year’s fellows, Musa Gurnis, Sherally Munshi, Ariel Rubin, and Lisa Uperesa.

Other events this semester include a public workshop on the “Embodiments of Science” organized by Beck Young, Nadia Abu El Haj, and myself (see insert on page 5) and a conference on “Translated Feminisms: China and Elsewhere” organized by Lydia Liu, Dorothy Ko and Rebecca Karl. Professor Carol Sanger of the Law School will be presenting the Fall Feminist Intervention lecture. And we look forward to continuing “Theory Mondays” (see article on page 8). Alongside these events are the numerous lectures and workshops at the Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference. After a brilliant stint as Director, Professor Neferti Tadiar has stepped down from CCASD to assume the directorship of Barnard College Women’s Studies Department. Professors Lila Abu-Lughod and Marianne Hirsch will co-direct the Center for the next three years.

The steady growth of IRWaG continues to put pressure on its resources. But I am delighted to announce that after some delay, we have “refreshed” Schermerhorn 755, on generous loan to IRWaG from the Art History Department, for which I continue to be deeply appreciative. As I reported before, the Institute will devote a portion of the office to its graduate fellows as well as work with CCASD to provide office space for Visiting Fellows.

Finally I would like to thank the many people who work behind the scenes to keep IRWaG running, especially, our newsletter writer, Katherine Polin, Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Lila Abu-Lughod, and Director of Undergraduate Studies, Katherine Biers, and of course our superb staff, Vina Tran and Page Jackson.
Arendt, Continued from Page 3

The Symposium, co-hosted by the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and the Institute for Comparative Literature, provided space for a consideration of Arendt’s discussion of violence in America in the aftermath of 1968, particularly as she articulated it in On Violence. It was the culminating program in a series of events that commemorated the 40th anniversary of the 1968 student revolution at Columbia.

Although some of Arendt’s works are now counted among the foundational works of Western political thought, the Symposium demonstrated that she is as difficult to classify as the basic theoretical terms of political experience she attempts to illuminate.

On Violence was Arendt's first formal critique of revolutionary and anti-colonial violence; she wrote it to explain the explosion of violence in the late 1960s, specifically the growing militancy of the student movement worldwide. Her response required “a radical rethinking of power,” according to Professor Zerilli. “Traditionally, power means power over others, but Arendt refuses this idea” by promoting the idea of “power as acting in concert.” This idea is rooted in “the Athenian city-state, which called its constitution an isonomia...as well as in the Roman [political form] civitas.” The fundamental idea is a conception of power and law outside of the command-obedience dialectic. Unfortunately, according to Zerilli, and Arendt, although the students were operating in this Greco-Roman tradition, they got “caught in the logic of politics as rule. Their turn to violence was at once an expression of the frustration of action in the modern world—especially the forcible closing of the spaces of action opened up by the students as they found their protests increasingly met with police brutality.”

Professor Gayatri Spivak, a self-identified “outsider” at the proceedings, opened the conference pointing out Arendt’s deep suspicion of the “adulation of the violence” of Franz Fanon. According to Spivak, Arendt blamed Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre for catalyzing the glorification of violence and inspiring the belief that violent revolution was necessary. Indeed, Arendt wrote that Sartre’s “great felicity with words has given expression to the new faith. ‘Violence,’ he now believes, on the strength of Fanon’s book, ‘like Achilles’ lance, can heal the wounds it has inflicted.’ If this were true, revenge would be the cure-all for most of our ills.”

Arendt’s suspicion, even fear, of violence, Spivak explained, “is mired in race.” Professor of Law Kendall Thomas, in responding to Spivak, recognized that “serious violence” came to the student revolution only when it aligned with the black power movement, but explained that “violence was not [the] only rhetoric.” Arendt’s belief in the racist underpinnings of the violence in the 1960s is evident in her use of word pictures like “Negro students [and] black community,” said Professor Thomas. But these phrases reveal a “failure to follow her own intellectual protocol” of identifying exact distinctions.

Spivak further claimed that the student rebellions of the ‘60s were “inspired by moral considerations and a lack of faith in progress.” She sees violent action as ontologically rooted in the “apparatus moment [of] male birth.” Although violence and power are not necessarily gendered, “gender is an instrument” that directs them.

Arendt also discouraged investment in individual consciousness, claimed Spivak: “She hated academic studies.” Brent Edward Hayes described this as “a fear of the soloist,” a reference to Not Ideas About the Thing, but the Thing Itself by Wallace Stevens. Of course, Arendt’s own thinking was informed by her personal experience. For example, her difficulty in reconciling Martin Heidegger’s brilliance with his support for the Nazi regime is an example of what drove her to bid “goodbye to philosophy once and for all”: she “want[ed] to look at politics...with eyes unclouded by philosophy.”

Professor Jean Cohen began the conference’s second day. She suggested that Arendt’s oeuvre can be interpreted as her response to totalitarianism. Arendt feared the abolition of the sovereign state would lead to tyranny. Nonetheless, explained Cohen, for Arendt, sovereignty can also lead to tyranny and dictatorship and “is antithetical to politics,” which is characterized by no rule, (community) action in concert, and external judgment. Even though Arendt “wanted to keep the place of sovereignty empty,” she did not want to exclude “plural sovereignty” and thought “a new concept of state” was needed. Cohen concluded that political plurality is crucial to protecting freedoms and for creating sustainable spaces for politics. The European Union, for example, is not a sovereign state, yet both its supranational sovereignty and the sovereignty of its member states remains intact. Andreas Huyssen structured his response around the question “How necessary is the Arendtian lesson since 1989?” He noted Arendt’s belief that the U.S. political system was insufficient due
to a weak constitution. Cohen suggested that Arendt never “grasped the presidency.” Huyssen observed Arendt’s worry that the public and private spheres would meld and that political life would evolve into a “culture of mediation of the technocratic,” which will ultimately destroy the existence of the “public within the boundary of the polity.”

Professors Nadia Urbinati and Linda Zerilli concurred that sovereignty, if anything, creates “space for politics;” the “power is in the public realm.” Professor Bernstein had, the evening before, asserted that, for Arendt, politics is the “creation of space in which power arises.” He furthered that “the most intelligent way of reading Arendt reminds us democracy politics creates puppet spaces.”

Professor Ayten Gündoğdu, in expanding the discussion to include Arendt’s ideas on human rights, warned of an original violence at the heart of Western politics and its political space. She spoke of people who are rightless and stateless. The stateless, including refugees and asylum seekers, are also rightless. The rightless are “the living dead,” says Arendt; they have “no legal protection.” They have lost their political community and are therefore unable to participate in the action/work/labor rubric that defines the human condition and gives existence meaning: “The stateless are denied the privilege of action and creation, not of politics, but of home.” Gündoğdu cites Arendt’s analysis of camps as maintaining residents “outside life and death” where they are “inanimate and excluded from labor.” Humanitarian aid does not help. It denies those in camps the possibility of surviving on their own and transforms “labor” into “a privilege.”

This exclusion from laboring life and from speaking life is violent, according to Professor Gündoğdu. Herein lies a characteristic of original violence; this violence is exclusionary. It is terrifying that the modern nation state—a sovereign people—has the power to disqualify some of its members in order to expel them from political and social life, rendering them rightless. Gündoğdu recognized this phenomenon as the “ontological plight of the immigrant.” A state of rightlessness, she articulated, is characterized by a loss of community, home, polity. Professor Lisa Wedeen agreed: “rightlessness is a loss of polity.”

Seniors, Continued from Page 2
Ms. Magnera considers most intently are the writings of the so-called “Group of 88” (the Duke professors who responded to the original charges, and the underlying issues they touched on, with outrage and criticism); the blog and (co-written, right-wing-funded, and well-marketed) book of KC Johnson; and the (independently-published and little-known) account written by the accuser herself. The different languages these records deploy, from critical race theory to the rhetoric of anti-political correctness, and the sources and venues through which they reach the public, are, in Ms. Magnera’s thesis, the most telling indices of the racial, gendered, and socioeconomic problems for which the accusations served as a lightning rod.

On May 7th, IRWaG hosted the presentations and celebration of the senior essays in our seminar room. A lively discussion of the papers was followed by the announcement of the winners of the Women’s and Gender Studies and Queer Studies Awards, many toasts, and chocolate cake.

WOUOD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE

SHIRA BURTON
WINNER OF THE 2009 QUEER STUDIES PRIZE

for her essay on
‘OUT’ IN THE IN CROWD: “THINKING SEX” AND TODAY’S MOVEMENT FOR GAY RIGHTS

ELIZABETH TARRAS
WINNER OF THE 2009 WOMEN’S STUDIES PRIZE

for her senior thesis on
HESTER PULTER’S NEO-ROYALISM IN ‘THE UNFORTUNATE FLORINDA’: A NEW FEMININE, A NEW ENGLAND

Established in 1994, the Queer Studies Prize is meant to honor an undergraduate student for his or her excellence in research and writing in the rapidly growing fields of queer studies, queer theory, and gender studies and the investigation of the connections between sexuality, gender, race, class, nationality, and religion. Established in 2008, the Women’s Studies Prize is meant to honor an undergraduate student for his or her excellence in research and writing in the fields of women and gender studies. Its purpose is twofold: to recognize undergraduate students - who often have few opportunities for such recognition - for their superb intellectual achievement, and to provide students interested in the discipline with an instructional framework in which to work.
“Poets are our translators. They self-reflexively contemplate the status quo and their place in it.”

Prose, Continued from Page 5

kills,” Rich warned, thus considering what it means to “be” in both life and poetry: “who anyway wants to know this pale mouth?”

Words transcend the realm of the psyche/inspiration and become rooted in the physical world through writing. They inform a mythical power whose siren call necessarily both confounds and guides the poet. As “Transparencies” claims, “Word and body [not pronoun] are all we have to lay on the line.” Words, like glass, can be “broken” and “crushed.” and “cleaned,” but their fragmented, reflective quality is elemental to life. Life and words, experience and poetry, are deeply co-dependent. Indeed, the form of her whole poem qualifies life: “That the meek word like the righteous word can bully,” she begins.

Krog’s response to Rich was “Writing Ode,” which conveys a similar belief in the durability of words. Its paradoxical title also reintroduces speech, or utterance as a thematic concern. Her mellifluous voice read: “words do not manage to leave you, words do not manage to keep you.” The poem describes a beautiful, but painful relationship between the poet and her words. As in Rich’s work, words are potentially harmful and frightening, but she ends accepting writing as it is, expressing a pleasure in discovery—internal and external—that is felt sexually: “yes, you have come to sleep in me…touch me, tonight.”

Expounding on her selection “Writing Ode,” Krog, who is also a professional translator, claimed that the process of writing enables one “to enter the self.” Both artists displayed a common concern for the relationship between words and the body throughout the program. Krog depicted words invading her, enlivening her and remaining with her. For her, body proves her existence. In “Body Bereft,” (which followed “Land,” “Country of Grief and Grace,” and “Where I Become You”) she both challenges Descartes and plays on the politics of female sexuality: “I have a body therefore I am.” Here, Krog agrees with Rich that fundamentally “word and body are all we have to lay on the line.” “For My Daughter” reiterates this faith, relating children to poetry and the life of poetry to the ever more autonomous child. The temporary nature of our own bodies reveals two of the themes that Krog veers between in her newest collection of poetry of the same name: growing old—specifically from a women’s perspective—and the eternal endurance of Table Mountain.

Rich concluded the program in prose, reciting excerpts from her essays “A Human Eye,” “Letters Censored, Shredded, Returned to Sender or Judged Unfit to Send,” and “Powers of Recuperation.” The order of these works maps out the aggregate life of the writing process for Rich. For Rich, who clearly has long engaged in writing as a social practice, the title, “A Human Eye,” evokes the narrative “I” of a poet, the capacity of poetry to make objective reality subjective, and Karl Marx’s statement that “the eye has become a human eye, [when] its object has become a social, human object.” Thus, begins the catharsis and tragedy of the poetic process. In an essay on the poet Muriel Rukeyser, Rich says that Rukeyser “was one of the great integrators, seeing the fragmentary world of modernity not as irretrievably broken, but in need of societal and emotional repair.” And this too is the vision at once unsparing and full of hope that Rich left us with. Poetry has the power “to revive spirit, stimulate consciousness, restore a brutalized humanity.”

Pursuant with her own beliefs, Rich never once left the backdrop of political life behind through the program. And yet she remained introspective in her examination of poetry and its purposes in times of extremity without being didactic; she did not express specific political arguments, but rather gave us a penetrating reading that invited reflection and affection. Poetry is a painful process in which the poets lose themselves, acutely suffer the pains of the world, redefine themselves and re imagine a better world.

Utterance figures essentially in the individual recitations of both Rich and Krog. We learn the irony of speaking is that though language is a metonymy for culture, it also only ever approximates human experience. Poets are our translators. They self-reflexively contemplate the status quo and their place in it. “How desperately it aches between you and me…how long does it take/for a voice/to reach another/in this country held bleeding between us,” anguishes Krog, quoting from “Country of Grief and Grace. Speech is a powerful tool for subject formation and also of poetry’s truly politically powerful capacity for human connection. After sharing their words with the audience, the two writers embraced, wrapped in their words and applause. 

An admirer speaking to Adrienne Rich after the readings.
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## Fall 2009 Undergraduate Courses

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<td>BC3121</td>
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<td>K. Hall</td>
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<td>06039</td>
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## Fall 2009 Crosslisted Courses

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<td>Gender Justice</td>
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## Fall 2009 Graduate Courses

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*For more gender-related courses that do not have WMST call numbers, please consult the IRWaG course guide on our website.*