An Interview with Katherine Franke

In fall 2000, Professor Katherine Franke joined the Columbia University School of Law as Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Center for the Study of Law and Culture, specializing in civil rights, the jurisprudence of identity, and feminist and critical race theory. Professor Franke’s work overarches not only teaching and academic research, but also politics, activism, and a committed engagement with organizations such as the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, which she co-chairs, and the AIDS Employment Project in San Francisco, of which she is founder and director. At Columbia, Professor Franke’s courses include “Federal Civil Rights Law,” and “Jurisprudence of Identity Workshop.” In a recent interview with Feminist News, she discussed some of the principles and objectives that guide her work.

As a civil rights lawyer, prior to joining the academy, Professor Franke specialized in HIV, race, and sexual orientation discrimination cases. “It has always been of the utmost importance to me,” she states, “that my work have significance beyond the two parties to a lawsuit, or a small set of legal academics who might read my articles. In this sense, I see my teaching as political work—to be perfectly honest, teaching is a kind of proselytizing by which I try to give my students perspectives, tools, and historical contexts that will enable them to be effective lawyers and community activists. The gift of teaching, however, is that I get as much, or more back from them as I hope to offer them in the classroom.”

In her writing, Professor Franke is guided by the same principles that she emphasizes in her teaching. She addresses difficult issues, ranging from sexual harassment and race discrimination to reproductive rights and AIDS, which are framed as legal problems on which she brings to bear
larger departments. Our undergraduate advisor, Professor Julie Crawford, has contributed significantly to the intellectual life of our majors and concentrators. Our seniors, under the excellent stewardship of Professor Jean Howard, are researching theses on a startling array of exciting topics (see “The New Format of the Senior Seminar,” p. 14). As for the spring semester, we have some new courses offered (e.g., Philosophy and Feminism), and some new faculty teaching some of our standards (e.g., Professor Pilar-Rodriguez). It promises to be a great semester.

After the reassessment of our undergraduate program, we have turned our energies to the graduate curriculum. We have recently revised a central element in our graduate program. Our newly reworked reading list will aid our graduate students in acquiring a solid grounding in feminist and gender studies. This list—with categories such as Ethics and the Law, Religion and Spirituality, and Feminisms—will serve as a guide to the preparation for the oral examinations offered by IRWaG as one of the requirements for the Certificate in Feminist Scholarship. We would like to thank our Director of Graduate Studies, Alice Kessler-Harris, for her enormous contribution.

Our standard colloquia have also been a great success. In the first lecture of our Feminist Interventions series, Teodolinda Barolini, Lorenzo Da Ponte Professor of Italian, wonderfully displayed the analytical power of gender when it is applied to historical texts. In “Beyond Courtly Dualism: Thinking about Gender in Dante’s Lyrics,” Professor Barolini offered a gendered analysis of Dante’s lyric poetry and thereby uncovered a long-missed aspect of Dante’s art. In our second event of the series, co-sponsored with the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, we were thrilled to be joined by three Asian American authors; Jessica Hagedorn, Mei Ng, and Cathy Park Hong read from old and new work to a large crowd of faculty and students. Hagedorn gave us a glimpse of her new play, based on her novel Dogeaters, which will be performed at the Public Theater this spring. It was particularly fun to watch Hagedorn have our colleague, David Eng, assist her in acting out a part of this delightful piece. Our “In the House” series has now again introduced the Columbia community to the work of Columbia faculty and visitors. With topics ranging from early Christian martyrs, union organizers, and Japanese coal-mining women, this was a genuinely fascinating group of discussions. It is an enormous pleasure to have the gems of our colleagues’ research presented to us for discussion.

Besides our normal lecture series, IRWaG is proud to announce a series of discussions which question the very notion of “normal.” In a series that we have entitled Queer Futures, internationally known scholars and cultural critics discuss profound questions concerning sexual identity, the nature and future of queer studies, the ethics of difference, and the politics of the normal. Besides bringing to campus some of the most important scholars working in this field, we have also collected the most qualified members of our Columbia community to engage in panel discussions which will be of interest to faculty and students across disciplines. As Eliza Byard’s article, “Troubled by ‘Normal’? Consider Queer Futures” (see p. 12) notes, in the present political climate, the issues discussed in this series have a special poignancy. Coupled with this lecture series, IRWaG is...
On Engagements

By Gary Y. Okihiro

Ethnic studies scholars of my generation, when reflecting upon our field, are wont to wax nostalgic about the originating fire of educational and social transformation. Back then, we might remember, we shared a common purpose, and were energized by the injustices and inequities visited upon us, and by the expansive promise of democracy.

The once radical pursuit of colored politics mimics and energizes white politics by reifying race and its assumed salience and solitude, and by erecting fences to discourage and restrict border crossings and subversions. What was once a strategic essentialism has become, like other subjects and politics, universal and timeless.

Instead, ethnic studies and our politics should embrace the social formation and not the racial one, and should insist that race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation are related social constructions—the systematic exercises of power to maintain privilege and poverty. Those discourses and practices can be multiplied or singly, simultaneously or serially expressed as constituting an interlocking whole, such that race is gendered, classed, sexualized, and nationalized; and gender is raced, classed, sexualized, and nationalized; and so forth.

Although a fiction, we know that race structures self, and self’s choices. I am not calling for an end to race-thinking or ethnic studies. What I am calling for, already proposed by many others before me, is the reorientation of our field away from “ethnic” or race studies to a study of social formations. If the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line, it was because white racial politics and its opposition, colored racial politics, made it so.

Accordingly, I am grateful for Christia Mercer’s generous invitation to write a brief note to converse over the intersections and divergences of our fields of study and political commitments, as represented here at Columbia by the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race. Asian American studies requires its students to take a course in women’s and gender studies, among others, to complete a major or concentration, and the Center cross-lists, when administratively possible, women’s studies courses on Latinas and Asian American women. Assuredly, the Institute and the Center can work together on joint projects, such as the evening of readings by Asian American women writers held this fall semester. However, despite my hope for even more extensive collaborations between the Center and the Institute, especially around the areas of curriculum and research, I advance the necessity for two distinctive and strong programs.

As I stated earlier, race-based ethnic studies is essentially conservative, both intellectually and politically. Adrienne Rich’s criticism of U. S. feminism of some years back applies equally to ethnic studies today. Rich scored feminism’s retreat to “versions of female oppression which neglect both female agency and female diversity, in which ‘safety’ for women becomes valued over risk taking, and woman-only space—often a strategic necessity—becomes a place of emigration, an end in itself.” Instead, she proposed, feminists should carry on “a conversation with the world.”

And to this global engagement should be enjoined the recognition that the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of the unruliness of our subjects and disciplines, in all their confounded complexity and fetching fullness.

Professor Nicole Marwell joined the Columbia faculty in fall 2000 as Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Latino/a Studies Program. She comes to Columbia from the University of Chicago where she wrote her dissertation entitled: "Social Networks and Social Capital as Resources for Neighborhood Revitalization." Her interests include urban sociology, Latino communities, poverty, and nonprofit organizations. "My work," she explains, "is most broadly concerned with how people in the U.S. have differential access to life chances. This is obviously a very big topic that guides much of sociological research. More specifically, then, I'm interested in how low- and moderate-income residents of urban areas—particularly Latinos—access resources and opportunities that allow them to improve their socioeconomic standing, or at least their quality of life."

At Columbia, Professor Marwell teaches in both the Latino/a Studies Program and the Sociology Department, with courses ranging from "Introduction to Social Theory" to "Latino Communities in New York City," and to "Qualitative Research Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Documents." In her teaching, she focuses on conveying the interdisciplinary nature of the issues and methodologies that she works with in her own research. "Teaching," she remarks, "is wonderful because it forces you to step back from your more narrowly focused research concerns and take a broader view of things; one that will orient your students to the larger field within which you are located."

Currently Professor Marwell is preparing for publication a research study she conducted as a post doctoral fellow at the CUNY Graduate School and University Center. Her work, on the "participation of second-generation Dominicans in community organizations and local politics in northern Manhattan and North Brooklyn" was conducted in the context of a larger long-term and multi-method study: "The Second Generation Project," funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and led by professors John Mollenkopf (Political Science-CUNY), Philip Kasinitz (Sociology-CUNY), and Mary Waters (Sociology-Harvard). "The study," she explains, "was designed to look at the experiences of the second generation of the so-called "new immigration," i.e., the post 1965 influx of immigrants following the change in U.S. immigration policy that largely eliminated country quotas and instead made family reunification and, to a lesser extent, skills, the basis for granting immigrant visas." The study focuses on the second generation adults of six major communities in New York City: Dominicans, anglophone West Indians, Chinese from Hong Kong, South Americans, Russian Jews, and Chinese from mainland China, comparing their experience to those of other ethnicities who, having held U.S. citizenship and lived in New York for several generations, are considered natives. Nicole Marwell's study on second-generation Dominicans will be published in an edited volume.
New Voices at Columbia: Introducing Susan Boynton

Medievalist and musicologist Susan Boynton joined the Columbia faculty as Assistant Professor of Historical Musicology in fall 2000. Previously she taught at the University of Oregon School of Music, where she was Assistant Professor of Musicology from 1996-2000. Professor Boynton received her Ph.D. in Musicology from Brandeis University for her dissertation: “Glossed Hymns in Eleventh-Century Continental Hymnaries,” and an M.F.A. in Music and Women’s Studies, with her thesis entitled: “The Reception of the Trobairitz: Implications for Music History.” In addition she holds a Diplôme d’études médiévales from the Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve and an M.A. from Yale in Medieval Studies.

With an area of expertise embracing the intersection of women’s studies, medieval studies, and liturgical music and practice in the middle ages, Professor Boynton’s work is marked by a rich eclecticism. At Columbia she teaches a wide range of courses including “History of Opera,” “Music of the Baroque,” and a graduate seminar on the Music of the Middle Ages. In fall 2001, Professor Boynton will offer “Women and Music,” an undergraduate course for non-majors, requiring no technical background in music. “The course will address, from both a Western European and a cross-cultural perspective, the experiences and reception of female composers and performers (with guest presentations by women composers at Columbia); the ambiguous status of women’s voices in several religious traditions and the attitudes of religious leaders towards women’s musical performance; the traditional role of women as the official lamenters of their communities in many cultures throughout history, and the idiosyncratic nature of music associated with female lamentation.”

Feminist scholarship, according to Professor Boynton, has had a profound impact in understanding how social, intellectual, and political power structures unceasingly mold the aesthetic environment, and how they condition and shape both the nature of musical experience and the expectations of audiences. She remarks: “Feminist research has contributed significantly to revising the history of Western music, illuminating the gendered nature of musical canon formation, and the multivalent roles of women in music history, as composers, patrons, performers, muses, consumers, audiences, and so on. Many recent studies on women in music force us to rethink the historiography of music, revealing the continuing need for research based on original sources. To me it seems dangerous and damaging to label such work, as some people do, ‘compensatory history’ and relegate historically grounded study to some vague purgatory of ‘positivism’. We are only beginning to understand the musical past, to hear the variety of voices speaking in its creation and performance, and we need to try harder.” In her teaching, Susan Boynton seeks as much as possible “to share with students the excitement of discovery and revision, and to encourage them — Boynton, continued on page 17
The Weaver and the Web: Fabricating an Alternative Museum

By Marina Kotzamani

In contemporary art, gender is increasingly used as a powerful tool to affect change. Explorations based on gender frequently take the form of re-interpreting the past, calling into question or subverting norms and stereotypes associated with the patriarchal order. These revisions of the past frequently also involve taking it apart and reconstructing it in a transparent manner that highlights the process. Attention to process signals that the artist is not simply engaged in reading the past, but also in reinventing it. Thus the past is equally relevant to the artist as the present and the future; in re-creating it, she is simultaneously giving shape to a new world of unexplored possibility.

In a recent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, “Projects 70,” artists were asked to design banners for the museum. A banner of course traditionally proclaims an institution’s identity. What would the banners of the Museum of Modern Art look like, designed from a gender sensitive perspective? Janine Antoni, among other artists, directly confronted this question, using the banner to convey subversive messages. She employed stitching, a traditionally female activity associated with domesticity, to challenge the patriarchal character of the institution. The artist offered a reinterpretation of the Museum of Modern Art’s traditional banner, by unstitching all its letters, until what remained were the letters that read “MoM.” In her banner, absence, the unstitched letters, were clearly visible, symbolically proclaiming the erasure of a patriarchal past. On the other hand, “MoM” advertised a new identity for the museum, associated with the feminine.

Antoni’s banner illustrates how, employing gender, an artist can re-interpret the past in a way that opens up new possibilities. However, this is not an example of a penetrative or radical work, as change of the established order is only suggested in jest. Through commissioning the designs of banners, the museum was of course only toying with the possibility of changing its identity. There was no interest in exploring how critique based on gender could change the concept of the museum itself.

I propose to take up this challenge seriously. “The Weaver and the Web” is an art project, supported by the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, that focuses on reinventing the museum as an institution, challenging central ideological tenets associated with the great museums. In the West, museums, the institutions par excellence dedicated to safeguarding and validating tradition, have always strongly and uniquely reflected the male oriented, dominant culture. By contrast, I will emphasize the perspective of those who have been marginalized or excluded from the great museums. My proposal for an alternative museum will take the form of an installation that will be set up at Columbia University and in Greece in the fall of 2002. The preparation of this project will proceed in two phases.

In the first phase, I will present at Columbia a model for the alternative museum at the end of the spring semester. This will be a work-in-progress and will be prepared in collaboration with Nicos Alexiou, a visual artist from Greece who will be at Columbia this semester as a visiting artist-in-residence. Students interested in the project will also be welcome to contribute to the preparation of the model. The second phase of the work will result in the installation of the model at Columbia and in Greece.

Eva, in her daily wear that she would weave herself on the loom, on patterns inspired by ancient Greek vase painting.

1Mr. Alexiou has been invited by the Program in Hellenic Studies of the Classics department on a grant provided by the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation, for “The Weaver and the Web” project.
of the alternative museum. Its preparation will partly be based on an experimental interdisciplinary seminar that I will offer in the fall of 2002 for the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. The seminar will explore themes directly relevant to the project and will engage students in the preparation of the alternative museum, which is conceived as a community-based, collaborative work.

The alternative museum I propose will house the life and work of an extraordinary woman, Eva Palmer Sikelianos (1874-1952). Eva was an American who lived most of her life in Greece and is only remembered today in association with her husband, the major Greek poet Angelos Sikelianos. Focusing on Greek antiquity, Eva explored the significance of tradition throughout her life in highly original and creative ways, ranging from weaving to theater work and experimentation with sexuality. My conception of the alternative museum will be shaped by her insights.

Eva's attempt to understand antiquity led her to assimilate material from very diverse sources, ranging from an upper class lesbian community of the Parisian belle époque to the culture of Greek village life. She had an ardent interest in theater as a means of promoting universal understanding between people, and was especially engaged in its non-verbal aspects. Her summit achievements were the Delphi Festivals which she organized in collaboration with her husband at Delphi, Greece in 1927 and 1930. These promoted a comprehensive immersion into Greek culture through theater performances, exhibitions of weaving, folk singing and athletic contests, and were the fruit of extensive communal work.

Eva's interpretation of antiquity appears not only to offer a revisionist reading of the classical ideal of Greece but also to be dialectically opposed to it on many major issues. The traditional conception is Western, male, and predominantly associated with high culture. Eva challenges this conception from the point of view of marginal cultures, highlighting Eastern features as well as female and low culture reconstructions of antiquity. Similarly, the classical ideal is strongly associated with the written culture and privileges texts and great authors. By contrast, Eva attempts to approach Greek antiquity from within the context of the oral tradition, emphasizing performance, the body, the importance of craft, and of community. Above all, Eva wishes to interpret Greek antiquity as a living culture that can have direct relevance to our lives.

Significantly, Eva's experimentation with Greek antiquity highlights the importance of orality, and of a tradition that was still vibrant in Modern Greece in the first half of the 20th century. The oral, as opposed to the written tradition, can inspire theater, as it is directly linked to a performance culture. I will explore Eva's attempt to use Greek folk culture as a model in creating a non-literary aesthetics for the interpretation of Greek drama based on the aural and plastic qualities of speech. In addition to performance, I will also explore orality's strong link to a communal culture, which highlights Eva's emphasis on communal work, as well as on the chorus of Greek drama.

Eva was a visionary who had grandiose conceptions that she pursued with relentless passion. All her projects have a poetic character: they are ideal and utopian. Fleshing out her sensibility presents an intriguing task, as she primarily expressed herself not through words but through living and most importantly, through weaving. The project will outline a poetics of weaving, as a means of gaining insight into Eva's life. Weaving will be used as a central metaphor, binding together all major facets of her experimentation. I will focus particularly on the connection between weaving and tradition, gender and the non-verbal. Weaving also involves making connections, creating a web. This metaphor will be of central importance to understanding Eva's interest in communal work, interculturalism and erotic experimentation.

Eva offers an interesting example of the usefulness of gender as a tool.
“Sexy” in Asian America

By David L. Eng

“‘You’re sexy,’ a young South Asian boy, Rohin, tells a startled Miranda, the 22-year-old stranger babysitting him for the afternoon in Jhumpa Lahiri’s (Barnard ’89) short story “Sexy.”

‘Tell me something,’ Miranda responds. ‘That word. ‘Sexy.’ What does it mean?’ Although Rohin is, at first, reluctant to share his “secret” meaning of the word, he finally relents. Cupping his hands around his mouth, the young boy whispers to the narrator, “It means loving someone you don’t know.” Rohin goes on to explain the genealogy of his precocious statement: “That’s what my father did,’ he continued, ‘He sat next to someone he didn’t know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother.”

Lahiri’s story rescripts one of the most quotidian clichés of bad heterosexual relations: the older man who leaves wife and children for a younger woman. Moreover, it illustrates the unconscious ways in which gendered norms are passed down from one generation to the next, that is, from father to son. Yet, we also learn in the opening lines of “Sexy,” drawn from Lahiri’s 1999 Pulitzer Prize-winning collection Interpreter of Maladies, that this particular affair was initiated not in the office or with a family acquaintance but on a trans-Atlantic flight with a stranger: “He sat next to her on a plane, on a flight from Delhi to Montreal, and instead of flying home to his wife and son, he got off with the woman at Heathrow.” In re scripting this bad cliche in a circuit of transnational movement, “Sexy” focuses attention on the shifting meanings of sexuality as it travels through various diasporic spaces. As such, Lahiri’s short story provides the occasion to reflect on some of the ways in which Asian American writings contribute to past as well as present issues in feminism and gender studies. At the same time, it also furnishes critical opportunities to think about the ways in which questions of feminism and gender have helped to shape and to reshape the theoretical focus of Asian American studies.

“Sexy” is immediately notable for the fact that the trans-Atlantic affair Lahiri depicts is between a white British woman and a South Asian man, a pattern redoubled in “Sexy” by the white protagonist’s own affair with the married Dev in Boston. This coupling is a contemporary reversal of traditional East/West power relations often symbolized, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests, by white men saving brown women (from brown men). Here, we witness not only the partial recuperation of the brown man’s agency and desire but also one larger critical effect of bringing together gender studies with Asian American studies. We gain, that is, a thicker understanding of the ways in which gendered norms are created and sustained through their intersection with other differences—racial, national, and economic.

Indeed, over the past several decades, the creative production of Asian American women writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Jessica Hagedorn, Fae Ng, Hisaye Yamamoto, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, among others, has collectively worked (with other works by women of color) to dislodge traditional assumptions of second-wave feminism positing sexual difference as the inaugurating form of social difference. From a slightly different angle, we might state that stories such as “Sexy” expose the limits of a feminism based exclusively on gender and sexuality as the primary modes of oppression experienced by women. Social relations of power are established through numerous, often disparate, crossings. As the Chicana feminist Norma Alarcón observes, in cultures in which asymmetric race and class relations are an organizing principle of social relations, one may often become a woman in opposition to other women. Bringing together Asian American studies with gender studies is to understand that our subjectivities are not just stabilized but indeed constituted through multiple and intersecting differences. This crossing yields the understanding that we cannot afford to privilege one form of social difference over the other. To the contrary, the combination of Asian American and gender studies forces recognition of the ways in which gender and sexuality become legible in relation to race and vice versa. Put otherwise, the politics of feminism and multiculturalism must be thought together.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to state that, since its inception in the late 1960s, Asian American studies has been obsessed with the ways in which gender and sexuality impact racial formation and racism. This obsession, however, has manifested itself in a particular way: through attention to the patterns through which Asian American men have been
feminized within the U.S. political, economic, and cultural spheres. Editors Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong write in the Preface to The Big Aiiieeeee!, for instance, that it is an article of white liberal American faith today that Chinese men, at their best, are effeminate closet queens like Charlie Chan and, at their worst, are homosexual menaces like Fu Manchu. No wonder David Henry Hwang’s derivative M. Butterfly won the Tony for best new play of 1988. The good Chinese man, at his best, is the fulfillment of white male homosexual fantasy, literally kissing white ass.”

While the Aiiieeeee! editors posit macho heroism as the proper antidote to this predicament, the literary critic King-Kok Cheung offers an alternate approach—one in which feminist intervention provides not only a greater structural understanding but also a more productive response to the constraints of Asian American masculinity. Cheung observes in her contribution to the path-breaking anthology Conflicts in Feminism that “the racist treatment of Asians has taken the peculiar form of sexism—insofar as the indignities suffered by men of Chinese descent are analogous to those traditionally suffered by women.” As such, Cheung admonishes Asian American activists and critics to “refrain from seeking antifeminist solutions to racism,” for to do otherwise “reinforces not only patriarchy but white supremacy.” Precisely because the feminization of the Asian American male in the U.S. imaginary typically results in his emasculation, the importance of feminist insight and intervention to both Asian American women and men cannot be emphasized enough. This is one crucial site where the theoretical concerns between Asian American studies and women’s studies—between multiculturalism and feminism—come together for a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which racism and sexism intersect, underpin, and structure all our everyday subjectivities and experiences.

This bringing together of gender studies with Asian American studies has not only helped to create the field of differences (or third-world) feminism. Moreover, in the new economy of globalization, short stories such as “Sexy” point the way for future projects of critical consequence, such as the theoretical expansion of transnational feminism into questions of transnational sexuality. From another perspective, the attention to transnational circuits in “Sexy” not only expands our conception of Asian American identity—often thought of in terms of East Asia—to include South Asia. More importantly, it insists that we think about the convergence and divergence of disparate histories of British colonialism and South Asian postcoloniality in terms of U.S. ethnic studies and comparative domestic race relations among numerous communities of color.

How do histories of imperialism and the new economy of globalization relate to the politics and processes of racialization in the U.S.? What happens to our conceptions of feminism and the feminist subject when she is located within the boundaries of the nation-state? What happens to these same assumptions when she is placed outside of it? Hence, for example, how do the white British woman’s and the American Miranda’s relationships with their respective South Asian counterparts converge and diverge from one another? Should feminist analysis and response to these two affairs—disparate in their geo-political locations and histories—be commensurate? The theoretical implications of these questions and (re)locations cannot be underscored enough. They qualify and reshape traditional conceptions of western and U.S.-based feminisms. In the field of American studies, for example, they pry conceptions such as abstract equality and liberal individualism as well as myths of immigration, assimilation, and racialization from their traditional conceptual moorings—from their exemplary and singular status—to consider them within a more comparative global context.

Current forces of development—of economic power and mobility, of capital and labor—have reshaped traditional East/West social relations in unprecedented ways. Asian American cultural productions attendant to these emerging patterns point to a host of contemporary phenomena as well as identities that have widespread theoretical implications for ethnic and American studies, for postcolonial and Asian studies, and for women’s and gender studies. In “Sexy,” for instance, the economic power of Lahiri’s South Asian men grants them a literal as well as a figurative mobility that derives from their membership and participation in a transnational capitalist managerial class. This mobility is symbolized, among other ways, as a type of sexual freedom with both South Asian as well as Anglo women. Insofar as globalization and practices of development have reconfigured vast regions of the world in terms of gendered capital and labor—indeed, a new global division of labor—the “Sexy,” continued on page 18
Gender and Law: First in a Series of Articles

Feminism, Law & Culture: Theorizing Yes

By Katherine M. Franke

It has become accepted practice, not only among the post-modern lefties within the legal academy but across the board, to link legal inquiry to the tools, methodologies, epistemic vantage points or frames provided by other disciplines through the unassuming conjunctive “and”: law and economics, law and sociology, law and psychology, law and literature. Only the most obstinate modernist dinosaurs in legal theory insist that law and legal norms can be adequately understood as autonomous, free-standing institutions. Recognizing this interdisciplinary imperative, Professor Kendall Thomas and I have undertaken a new initiative at Columbia: The Center for the Study of Law and Culture. This new Center aims to create an institutional site within the university for conversations across disciplines to take place on issues of law and culture. We chose law and culture as our frame largely because we both believe that law, in the positivist sense, is surely a cultural practice, and cultural practices function in myriad ways as law.

To take seriously the connection between law and culture demands, from time to time, that we—the legal scholars—step back from our own disciplinary preferences and tools and examine how important questions get framed within legal theory as compared with that of other allied disciplines. To this end, I have recently invited just such a moment of reflection within feminist legal theory with regard to the meaning of sex and sexuality in feminist practice and theory. Legal feminism is by no means a discipline autonomous from a larger set of conversations self-identified as feminist in nature.

Indeed, we, the legal feminists, regard ourselves as concerned with issues that are central to a broader intellectual and political feminist movement: sex-based equality in the workplace, reproductive rights, domestic violence, the needs of working mothers, sexual harassment, and rape, to name only a few such issues, figure centrally in feminist theory—legal and otherwise. Yet, there appears to be an increasing disconnect between legal feminism and other feminist disciplines when it comes to the scope and meaning of a feminist approach to sexuality, desire, and women’s hedonic lives. Without a doubt, when it comes to sex, we have done a more than adequate job of theorizing the right to say no, but we have left to others the task of understanding what it might mean to say yes. However, as Carole Vance has reminded us for over twenty years, a feminist approach to sexual matters must “simultaneously... reduce the dangers women face and... expand the possibilities, opportunities, and permissions for pleasure that are open to them.”

Few legal feminists have taken notice of the degree to which legal feminism has, by and large, reduced questions of sexuality to two principle concerns for women: dependency, and the responsibilities that motherhood entails, and danger, such as sexual harassment, rape, incest, and domestic violence. This concentration on the elimination of sexual danger and dependency for women risks making “women’s actual experience with pleasure invisible, overstating danger until it monopolizes the entire frame, positions women solely as victims, and fails to empower our movement with women’s curiosity, desire, adventure and success.” Curiously, since the end of the so-called “sex wars” in the 1980s, it seems that legal feminists have ceded to queer theorists the job of imagining the female body as a site of pleasure, intimacy, and erotic possibility.

While we devote our considerable energies to addressing sexuality understood in terms of freedom from oppressive practices, feminists in other disciplines continue to approach simultaneously questions of sexuality in both negative and positive terms. Why do legal feminists frame questions of sexuality more narrowly than our colleagues in other fields? Is there something intrinsic to a legal approach to sexuality that deprives us of the tools, authority, or expertise to address desire head on? Can law protect pleasure? Should it, or have legal feminists implicitly made the (I believe mistaken) strategic judgement that feminist legal theory cannot explore sexuality positively until danger and dependency are first eliminated?

“...surely it is a mistake to draw such a rigid distinction...between sex as adjective (that thing we are) and sex as verb (that thing we do).”
In 1984, Gayle Rubin mused that feminism was best equipped to analyze and address gender-based subordination, and that a different discourse was needed to adequately analyze sexuality. From this observation, many believe that lesbian/gay studies does for sex and sexuality approximately what women’s studies does for gender. Some theorists, both feminist and queer alike, have understood the parallel evolution of feminist and queer theory over the last decade to be grounded in the artifice that “the kind of sex that one is and the kind of sex that one does belong to two separate kinds of analysis.”

But surely it is a mistake to draw such a rigid distinction between acts and identities, between who we want to be and whom we want to be with, and between sex as adjective (that thing we are) and sex as verb (that thing we do). To set up the analyses of gender and sexuality as separate critical enterprises is to misread Rubin. Her point was not that issues of sex and sexuality should be fully disaggregated from feminism, but rather that she “wanted to be able to think about oppression based on sexual conduct or illicit desire that was distinct from gender oppression (although...not necessarily unrelated or in opposition to it).”

The wisdom imparted by Rubin in “Thinking Sex,” that neither Marxism nor feminism provided all the analytic tools we needed to account adequately for sexuality-based oppression, does not mean that forever more these two critical discourses should have nothing to say about the issue of sexuality. Rather, “feminism’s critique of gender hierarchy must be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and the critique of sexual oppression should enrich feminism.”

Despite such a challenge, most legal feminists seem to have lost a taste for exploring the intersecting stakes that queer and feminist theory have in fully theorizing questions of sexuality. The dependency or danger stance taken by most legal feminists when it comes to questions of sexuality is a testament to the persuasive power of the structural materialism of theorists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Martha Fineman. MacKinnon has rendered feminism the privileged site for analyzing sexuality understood as danger by subordinating sexual politics to sex-based subordination. MacKinnon’s “nearly metaphysically perfect” portrayal of sexuality as always, already, and absolutely about gender-based subordination and domination renders Rubin’s demand for an analysis of sexuality outside of gender not only irrelevant, but incomprehensible. On the other hand, Martha Fineman has done an outstanding job of decoupling relationships grounded in dependency from those grounded in sexual desire, and in so doing has provoked a radical rethinking of motherhood. In a sense, by framing the feminist project in gender-based terms, MacKinnon has explicitly ruled in all sexuality as gender-based subordination, while Fineman has implicitly ruled it all out, preferring to set her sights on gender and dependency constructed in asexual terms. But too few of us, as legal feminists, have stepped in to re-theorize the significance for women of nonreproductive intimacy, desire, and eroticism that end up as the residue of Fineman’s work.

Is there sexuality beyond kinship that we could call feminist? If Fineman pries open the possibility of non-reproductive sex or other intimate relationships with someone or someones other than the person or persons with whom one parents, what would be a feminist approach to these erotic/intimate possibilities? What if we went all the way with Fineman’s suggestion, and declared women’s sexuality to lie only in this non-reproductive excess? After all, this is the domain of the female orgasm. We might want to explore, if only provisionally, what we might gain if we disaggregated reproduction from sex, and treated them as two distinct aspects of women’s lives, potentially interrelated, but not necessarily so. Perhaps it is time that we dust off our Shulamith Firestone.

What might be the consequences of de-sexualizing kinship relationships, not for kinship, which is Fineman’s project, but for sexuality? Might we not want to explore the necessary connections between the regulation of kinship/family and the regulation of sexuality? Subsidies for reproduction surely incentivize certain pronormative uses of the body, not to mention marriage, monogamy, and the heterosexual family—all of which are methods by which our hedonic lives are tied to “proper” kinship formation favored by the state.

Surely legal feminists would want to theorize the sexual nature of human sexuality that is the “excess over or potential difference from the bare choreographies of procreation.” Is there a reason why we have neglected to take notice of the fact that women are substantially more likely to be unhappy about their sex lives than
By Eliza Byard

Several years ago, the Lesbian and Gay Studies Group at Columbia changed its name to the Queer Studies Group, with little dissent. At the time, the main impetus behind the name change was a desire for greater inclusiveness of people who did not identify as "gay" or "lesbian," and few involved in the discussion focused on the more profound difference in philosophy and politics reflected in the shift. While Lesbian and Gay Studies has tended to focus on the history of homosexuality, operating largely within established intellectual and ideological parameters, Queer Studies examines the shifting balance of the “deviant” and the “normal,” a field of inquiry which opens a Pandora’s box of social, cultural, and political possibilities.

This semester, a series of events at the Institute will provide opportunities for reflection and debate on the current state of this field of inquiry, as the Queer Studies Group continues its explorations and the Institute hosts professors from within and outside the Columbia community in a series of talks on “Queer Futures.” These events take place at an important historical moment as the fiery activism of the 1980s and early ’90s has faded, the academic discipline of Queer Studies has matured through initial cycles of growth and reaction, and a president with ties to social and religious conservatives is taking office. In this climate, what future is there for the queer—queer theory, queer studies, queer people of all stripes—in the academy and the larger political and intellectual life of the nation?

On January 25, Michael Warner will give the first in this semester’s series of talks on “Queer Futures.” In The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life (Harvard), Warner offers a challenge to the ethics and politics of sexual shame which serve to define and delimit “normal” sex and sexuality. The pervasive sense of what’s normal produced by the politics of sexual shame is a powerful political force that “involves silent inequalities, unintended effects of isolation, and the lack of public access,” pushing individuals to conform to normative ideals even in the absence of overt policing actions, to avoid being identified as pathological. In response to the choice presented—being normal or being pathological—Warner notes that many have turned to the term “queer,” “as a way of saying: ‘We’re not pathological, but don’t think for that reason that we want to be normal.’”

Contrary to what the garden-variety bigot might say, not all gay men and lesbians are “queer.” One need look no farther than the estimated one million plus gay votes that went to George W. Bush on November 7th (according to ABC and CNN polls) to see that many within “the gay community” were willing to support a candidate beholden to the conservative champions of sexual shame. The divergence of homosexuality and queerness is also amply evident in the goals and tactics of mainstream lesbian and gay advocacy organizations, which work within legislative political contexts to advance familiar, minority rights-based arguments for such traditionally acceptable goals as marriage, employment security, and protection from violence. As Warner points out, the official gay movement “has chosen to articulate the politics of identity rather than to become a broader movement targeting the politics of sexual shame.”

For gay men and lesbians, the shame and stigma attached to “abnormal” sexual practices and pleasures can produce a deep ambivalence about their own identity and about the behavior of queers whose actions threaten to bring down the opprobrium of “normal” people. According to Warner, the temptation to embrace the normal and repudiate the queer poses “a profound ethical challenge” to all individuals who are members of stigmatized groups. It is a challenge that mainstream gay and lesbian activism fails to meet.

However, those who would advance queer understandings of the world also face a challenge—communicating the urgency and relevance of these questions to a broader audience. For many, the issues of autonomy, freedom of choice, and access to information at the core of the queer challenge to shame and the normal are of self-evident importance to a variety of political battles and avenues of academic inquiry. Yet Ralph Nader, the ostensible leader of the left, famously dismissed issues of sexuality as “gonadal politics,” unworthy of attention in the presidential race. And many academics outside the historical constituency of Queer Studies remain unconvinced of the analytic relevance of its framework to their own disciplines. The prospects for the queer future may ultimately be tied to the simple, crucial goal which led the Lesbian and Gay Studies Group to turn queer several years ago: reaching like-minded individuals, regardless of their relationship to the categories “lesbian” and “gay.”
for reinterpreting the past in new ways. She is a particularly elusive figure whose lifelong interest in weaving and other activities traditionally associated with women's domestication, relegated her to marginality. In Greece, she is still typically regarded as a devoted wife who faithfully executed her husband's original visions. The latter is perhaps also the way she chose to be remembered in her autobiography. I have been trying to show, however, that from a contemporary perspective, she appears to have been ahead of her time. Greater sensitivity towards gender allows us to appreciate Eva's interest in "women's work" such as weaving, as an experimental attempt to reshape the world, in ways that strikingly foreshadow ours. Her focus on the other than classical ideal, the interdisciplinary and intercultural character of her explorations, the interest in orality and in performance are all prevalent issues in contemporary discourse. Part of the fascination of working on Eva is precisely the uncertainty about how to approach her, as her activities no longer seem to us easily categorizable. Furthermore, in interpreting Eva, one must take into account what is usually disregarded or rejected: ambiguity, fragmentation, contradiction, silence, as well as the language of the body. The project of creating the alternative museum will be inspired by Eva's original approaches to tradition. My conception of the new museum will develop and be modified as the work progresses. But what would this museum be like? Let me give a broad outline of how I envision it. The alternative museum would be dialectically opposed to the traditional conception in every way. In contrast to the great Museum, continued from page 7

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Queer Futures
*Thursday, January 25, 2001 6 pm
Wein Lounge, 411 West 116th Street

"QUEER FUTURES"
Michael Warner
Professor of English at Rutgers University and the author of The letters of the Republic, Fear of a Queer Planet, and the Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life

Thursday, February 8, 2001 6 pm
754 Schermerhorn Extension

QUEER FUTURES: PREMODERN
Kristina Milnor
Assistant Professor of Classics, Barnard College, on Ancient Rome
Julie Crawford
Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University, on Early Modern England
Gregory Pflugfelder
Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures/History, Columbia University, on Premodern Japan
Matthew Sommer
Associate Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania, on Premodern China

*Thursday, April 5, 2001 6 pm
Wein Lounge, 411 West 116th Street

QUEER STUDIES RIGHT NOW
"The Afterlife of Identity Politics"
David Eng
Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University, "Freedom After Identity"
Janet Jakobsen
Director, Center for Research on Women, Barnard College, "Excessive Force: Identity and Injury"
Ann Pelligrini
Associate Professor of Women's Studies, Barnard College, "Visibly Thinking: On Queer Media"
Amy Villarejo
Assistant Professor, Department of Theater, Film & Dance/Women's Studies Program, Cornell University

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The New Format of the Senior Seminar

Culminating the sequence of courses that lead to the degree in Women’s and Gender Studies is the Senior Seminar, expanded this year to a two-semester format. The seminar, directed by Professor Jean Howard, comprises a lively group of seven majors, working on an impressively diverse array of thesis projects. Professor Howard is assisted by Kristyn Saunders, writing instructor for the seminar; the seniors also work with a second, disciplinary advisor with relevant expertise in their field of study.

Around an informal feast of fruit, bagels, cookies and juice, the class meets each week to share ideas and to discuss the progress of each of their projects. The two-semester format allows a far more extended focus on methodological issues than had hitherto been possible, and the seniors clearly relish this high level of interaction and critical support in the germinal stages of their work. The seminar’s second semester focuses on the production of drafts and final versions of the theses.

“The purpose of the class,” says Professor Howard, “is to get students ready to do independent research. So the seminars this fall have focused on how to identify and define a topic, and how to do the initial research that lets a scholar formulate a thesis about that topic.” The seminar benefits from the assistance of Sarah Witte, the reference librarian in Butler on feminist issues, who has shown the class the latest techniques for consulting conventional and online data bases.

Helping the students to define the parameters of their projects has been a chief area of focus. “It’s hard to limit a topic appropriately so that the thesis will actually say something original and significant about a manageable body of material rather than skimming the surface of a vast field,” acknowledges Professor Howard; “since the final senior thesis is to be between 30 and 60 pages long, defining a topic that can be well handled in that amount of space is crucial.” Kristyn Saunders comments on Professor Howard’s pedagogical approach: “Deadlines for various versions of their outlines—beginning with a one paragraph, then a one page description of their ideas, progressing to a five page outline of the sections and arguments of the thesis—have enabled the students to progress much faster than I think anyone would have expected. Peer review of the work has also proved very valuable.”

Herself a graduate student working on her dissertation, “Sugar and Spice: Slavery, Women and Literature in the Caribbean,” Saunders adds: “It seems to me that this seminar operates in many of the ways graduate students only wish their dissertation seminars operated!” Indeed the seven seniors are highly energized by the vigorous exchange of ideas that characterizes their weekly meetings, and take the interactive context of the seminar extremely seriously. “As undergraduate students,” Robbie Millstien points out, “most often we receive feedback only after we have handed our papers in for comments. Learning to incorporate a constant stream of feedback into our work while simultaneously remaining focused on our own end point has proved to be a challenge. But it is precisely this challenge, and the knowledge that we are able to re-center ourselves around new and different learning methods that has been the most valuable part of this experience.”

Stacy Lozner concurs, adding that in addition to the serious attention and nurture of scholarly work from the faculty, “the support and criticism offered by the other students push my work in directions that I might not explore otherwise.”

The seminar’s best feature.” Christine Lee agrees, “is that it provides a space for everyone to share their thoughts and help one another.”

A remarkable aspect of the seminar is the sheer diversity of the topics the seven seniors are working on. “For me,” remarks Simon Moshenberg, “it is important to be able to work with a group of people with such overlapping, and yet far from identical, fields of expertise. All of our papers have certain areas at which they touch, but none cover any of the same ground. We handle some of the same theorists, but force radically different meanings out of them.” Moshenberg’s thesis centers on the economic and political considerations that underlie the politically unprotected status of recent immigrants in the United States, focusing on the experience of Mexican and Filipino immigrants in New York City.

Taylor Larsen, another seminar member, explores the issue of reproductive technology and how it has reshaped the experience of maternity, with special focus on the ethical and legal issues and controversies surrounding post mortem ventilation, a technology that enables the body of a brain-dead mother to be kept artificially alive until the fetus is brought to term. Stacy Lozner centers her thesis on a close reading of the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, analyzing the impact and implications of Sedgwick’s use of the “anti-identitarian” terrain proper to queer theory as the locus of a bodily cross-identification that informs her scholarly work on gay men. Naomi Paik explores how the law engenders cultural and social spaces, through a study of the impact of changing discriminatory and gender-specific legislation on Chinese immigrant communities, beginning with the 1875 Page Law Act that in effect
at times. Jean Howard agrees: “The other students, Kristyn, and Jean.”

genuinely enjoy being around the group is wildly smart and very funny. I also relaxed... refreshingly irreverent

projects. The atmosphere and extended outlines of their actual wanted to research, to the present semester as writing instructor for the seminar Kristyn Saunders says: “Being a part of the class has given me an incredible opportunity to watch seven projects evolve—with all the anxieties, concerns, and hard-won victories—from the first class when most of the students had only very general ideas about what they wanted to research, to the present stage when they've produced extended outlines of their actual projects. The atmosphere and discussion in class has been intellectually very rigorous and yet also relaxed... refreshingly irreverent at times.” Jean Howard agrees: “The group is wildly smart and very funny. I love going to the seminar. It's the very best and most rewarding kind of teaching.” Stacy Lozner confirms an overwhelming consensus about the quality of the class: “I can't completely explain what a pleasure thesis seminar is. All I know is that I look forward to it all week and I genuinely enjoy being around the other students, Kristyn, and Jean.”

museums, which are aristocratic and exclusive institutions, the alternative museum would be organized on democratic principles. The selection and presentation of the exhibited objects would not be undertaken by eminent authorities, but by a community. The installation of the alternative museum, to be presented at the fall of 2002 at Columbia, will draw on the team work of the students participating in the seminar. The community will decide what objects will go into the museum and how or where they will be presented. Nor will the alternative museum necessarily be associated with a fixed and permanent building, but might be more closely related, in this respect, to the circus, or the traveling stages of itinerant performers.

The collections of the new museum would be more inclusive and comprehensive than those of the great museums, featuring objects of both high and low culture, both originals and copies, with no privileged status given to high culture objects or to originals. The exhibition would also include interpretative material and would supply commentary on historical context, as well as on contemporary analogs. The process of selecting the objects in the collection would also be an integral part of the exhibition. Variable interpretations of an object’s significance, variable modes of exhibiting it, autobiographical comments by those making the selection, disagreements within the selecting community would all form part of the exhibition. In this conception, collections are historicized: the objects are not timeless, but are tied to a particular historical period and place, as well as to the people selecting them. Indeed, the collections in the alternative museum would say as much about contemporary life as they do about the historical period they refer to.

Concerning the structural organization of the exhibits, the museum project would explore alternative ways of connecting the objects in display, inspired by the concept of the web. Participants in the seminar will develop a web design for the exhibition, drawing on Eva's uses of the web, myths about weaving, as well as web designs of various origins: spiders’ webs, patterns created for the hand and the mechanical loom, and web maps developed for the internet. Ironically, the web looks both back towards tradition and forward towards cyberspace technology. Thus it can become an ideal medium for exploring the contemporary relevance of tradition, especially within the framework of the new museum, in which the manner of exhibiting objects transparently reveals our own perceptions of the past.

Another important asset of the web concept is that it allows us to challenge the privileged status of great works and of originals as self-generating, or constituting the identifiable beginning of a tradition. Not only do works influence other interpretations but also themselves constitute interpretations of previous works. Web maps clearly capture this conception, as they are distinctly non-linear. Perhaps excluding spiders’ webs, there is no clearly identifiable beginning to a web design. On the other hand, these designs are always open ended. It is always possible, theoretically at least, to add new strands. Within the framework of the web, great works perhaps become spaces on the web where designs are particularly dense and intricate. The design also challenges the idea that objects in an exhibition are self-sufficient, highlighting instead their interdependencies.

Museum, continued on page 16
Museum, continued from page 15

The web we will fabricate for the alternative museum will have a physical presence. It will be tangible. This museum will privilege touch from among all the senses, and it will be body-centered. Related to touch is the possibility of mutability as well as of integral audience participation. In the new museum, visitors will not be kept at a distance. They will be encouraged to express their own interpretations of the exhibited material by adding to the strands on the web, and by touching and even altering the objects on display. Thus the collection will be open to change.

Not all the objects connected in the web scheme will necessarily be lifeless. The museum may also include performance as part of the exhibition. I wish to explore whether Eva's interpretation of Greek antiquity as performance at the Delphi Festivals can be seen as an attempt to create a living museum, which embodies tradition. The connection to the past is somehow established through the body, in ways that appear to be analogous to a performer's character enactment in a theater production. The Delphi Festivals, as well as the museum I envision, have close affinity to theater. By contrast to great museums that are lifeless and static, the alternative museum I have outlined here has a dynamic quality; it admits of the body, of action, of drama. In this, it is of course close not only to theater but also to ordinary life. Indeed, this project aims at humanizing the museum by turning it into a place that allows for the fallibility of interpretation, for ambiguity, mortality, and in sum for the feeling of fellowship, as well as for all the messiness and wonderful unpredictability of being part of a web.

Questions, comments or other input on the “Weaver and the Web” project are welcome! Contact me: mak88@columbia.edu.

Theorizing Yes, continued from page 11

Are men? Is there something that we, as legal feminists, should be doing to address the fact that forty-three percent of women in the United States are suffering from diagnosable sexual dysfunction, symptomized by a lack of interest in sex, inability to achieve orgasm or arousal, and pain or discomfort during sex?

Desire is not subject to cleaning up, to being purged of its nasty, messy, perilous dimensions, full of contradictions and the complexities of simultaneous longing and denial. It is precisely the proximity to danger, the lure of prohibition, the seamy side of shame that creates the heat that draws us toward our desires, and that makes desire and pleasure so resistant to rational explanation. It is also what makes pleasure, not a contradiction of or haven from danger, but rather a close relation. These aspects of desire have been marginalized, if not vanquished, from feminist legal theorizing about women’s sexuality.

On the other hand, perhaps the place we find ourselves in legal feminism reveals something more about our situation within law. Is it possible that the task of theorizing yes is not one easily susceptible to the analytical tools legal theory provides? Or have we, despite our frequent protestation to the contrary, fallen victim to the myopia of which our discipline in general suffers: thinking of rights and liberties primarily in negative rather than positive terms? If this is the case, at least in part, of legal feminism’s failure to take on the simultaneous projects of negative and positive sexual liberty, what would that positive project look like?

Perhaps we face an opportunity to drag the feminist net over particular areas of law and see how a gendered construction of sexuality plays out. Take tort damages, for instance. Men are more than twice as likely to plead sexual dysfunction as a basis for money damages in personal injury claims than are women. In some cases, courts are more willing to reward the physical disfigurement of women than their loss of sexual pleasure. The recent study of sexual dysfunction among women found that there are a substantial number of women who have suffered loss of sexual desire and satisfaction as a result of various trauma. That injury has been rendered invisible in tort law. Particularly given that we are now living in the Viagra years, it would behoove us as legal theorists to pursue strategies that would elevate women’s sexual pleasure to the same level as that enjoyed by men. While women’s rights advocates fought hard in Congress and in the courts to have reproduction count as a major life activity in the Americans with Disabilities Act, what are the implications of this statutory preference, and the arguments we have made in its support, for women’s non-reproductive sexuality?

As cultural practices, our legal practices produce legal and social subjects. We, the feminist legal theorists, must remain attentive to the dangers of pursuing modes of analysis and argument that suffer from a kind of theoretical phototropism that has amply nourished a theory of sexuality as dependency and danger at the expense of a withering positive theory of sexual possibility. Given the well-known dangers that lie in the substantive legal regulation of sexual pleasure, it may be that the best we can aspire to, as feminist legal theorists, is a set of legal analyses, frames, and supports that erect the enabling conditions for sexual pleasure. If that modest work is the best we can expect from law, that still leaves us much work to be done.
Marwell, continued from page 4

volume of a set of seven ethnographic studies that make up one of the components of the Second Generation Project.

An important area of Professor Marwell's research centers on nonprofit community-based organizations, and the nature of their involvement with local residents. "The majority of participants of the community-based organizations that I studied were women," she relates. "There are several possible reasons for this, including traditional gender splits in terms of community as an extension of the home, as opposed to work; the availability of time, and the concern for protecting and advancing children. I would like to add the category of gender to future work that I do on nonprofits and neighborhoods." Nicole Marwell's research focuses not only on how nonprofit organizations gather, distribute, or even withhold resources and opportunities, but also, reciprocally, on how the social structure of particular communities influences their organizational practices and their ability to access these resources. In her study, for example, of network structures in two Latino neighborhoods in Brooklyn, she found that communities with hierarchical social structures, though better able to access financial resources for neighborhood revitalization projects than their more egalitarian counterparts, were less successful at encouraging civic participation in such projects.

"All of these issues about resources and opportunities," she states, "fall under the larger theoretical perspective of social capital. There is much debate currently about what social capital is, how it operates, how it can be constructed, and what its limitations are. My work engages with these debates, with a focus on both the structure of social capital, as empirically observable in social networks, and the form of social capital, as expressed through human and organizational practices. I hope to make contributions both on a theoretical level—about social capital—and on a practical level—about how people can improve their life chances."

Boynton, continued from page 5

to reevaluate and rethink received knowledge, through oral history, fieldwork, or archival research.

One of the focal points of Professor Boynton's work is her interest in the ways in which music is transmitted. In her essay "Women's Performance of the Lyric Before 1500" (forthcoming in Medieval Woman's Song, University of Pennsylvania Press), Professor Boynton addresses the issue of oral transmission, reassessing evidence for the roles of women as performers and composers in both Arabic and Romance- and Germanic-language poetic traditions. "Because of the problems of transmission and evidence particular to research in medieval music, it is crucial to reevaluate the neglected role of women in primarily oral traditions such as sung lyric poetry associated with or attributed to women in the Middle Ages. The music of these traditions is elusive at best, and difficult to approach using conventional musicological methods reliant on written records and dominated by notions of the work and the author." Despite the paucity of extant musical works that can be attributed to specific women, she argues, "the active authorial roles of women as performer/composers should not be neglected."

In her recent article on monasticism, "The Liturgical Role of Children in Monastic Customaries from the Central Middle Ages," she focuses on the question of transmission through teaching practices: "I seek to understand how children in Benedictine abbeys learned to sing and read, how melodies and texts were passed on to the next generation of singers in writing and through oral transmission, and how the meaning of liturgical music was transmitted through grammatical education." Professor Boynton is engaged in a long-term collaboration with University of Toronto historian Isabelle Cochelin for the study of texts that help to "locate music within the context of monastic life, and to understand the influence of social structures on monastic liturgical and musical practices."

Currently Susan Boynton is working on the manuscript of a book entitled "Liturgy, History, and Power at the Imperial Abbey at Farfa." "The book," she states, "takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of monastic culture by placing the liturgy in the context of the abbey's politics and history writing." Farfa was one of the most important monasteries in medieval Italy between 705 and 1122 when it enjoyed royal and imperial patronage. Focusing on the particular monastic identity of the abbey as expressed through its distinctive texts and music, she shows how ideology and representation play a role in shaping the liturgy. "My study," explains Professor Boynton, "offers a new perspective on the history of the abbey by painting a picture of its vibrant liturgical culture at the height of its power and prestige."
Franke, continued from page 1

complex theoretical concepts from a broad array of disciplines. “I have drawn,” she explains, “from various critical theories in order to give new accounts of questions such as: What is wrong with sexual harassment? What happens to what we know about a practice once it is identified as sexual? How were marriage laws used in the immediate post-bellum south to discipline and regulate African American men all in the name of citizenship? All of these projects, in the end, are animated by an interest in the technologies by which law both regulates and produces identities that it seeks to render exogenous from the law itself. This tension in law—the indexical stance which points to identities produced elsewhere, while intimately creating and managing those identities at those very same moments—is where my projects inevitably end up.”

Professor Franke, together with Professor Kendall Thomas, co-directs the Center for the Study of Law and Culture (CSLC). The Center is a new venture dedicated to interdisciplinary research on the intersection of law and culture, and an understanding of law not only in the light of its strict institutional function, but also as an active force in the construction of cultural meaning and individual identity. “My sense of the Law School,” remarks Professor Franke, “has been that it has remained rather isolated form the larger Columbia community—and not all of that isolation can be attributed to geography. There are many people on the law faculty involved in long-term interdisciplinary projects, and without question there are many people in departments across the University who are interested in issues of law and its impact on culture, identity and myriad social institutions. Law is, of course, a social practice, and social practices often take the form of law. My hope with this new Center is to create an infrastructure for work that is already ongoing, while also creating opportunities for new connections across disciplines through fellowships, visitorships, and focused discussion on a set of issues over a yearlong period. The focus of the 2001–2002 academic year is Law, Violence and Identity, and for 2002–2003 Citizenship.” The center is currently taking applications for both fellows and sabbatical visitors for next year, and is seeking funding to buy out Columbia faculty teaching time, such that each semester, as partial fellows in the CSLC, two or more CU faculty members will be free “to pursue projects in law and culture that their teaching load would not otherwise have allowed.” (For further information, see: www.law.columbia.edu/law&culture.)

Professor Franke is deeply committed to preserving some of her time for non-academic activism. She is currently co-chair of the Board of Directors of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), a non-governmental human rights organization that has offices in San Francisco, New York, and Buenos Aires. “IGLHRC’s mission,” she explains, “is to monitor, document, and mobilize response to human rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV sero-status. IGLHRC is the preeminent organization pushing to keep issues of sexual orientation and gender identity on the human rights agenda of the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch as well as thousands of smaller local and national human rights organizations. My work with IGLHRC is extremely important to me as I’ve seen the organization through enormous growth and transition and continue to be awed by the outstanding and essential work that our staff undertakes across the globe.” (For more information, see: www.iglhrc.org)

“Sexy,” continued from page 9

cultural production of Asian Americans writers, especially those focusing on transnational and diasporic contexts, grants the category and fact of gender significant new constraints and possibilities.

Works Cited


We at IRWaG are also thrilled to work with a new and exciting group in the Law School, Katherine Franke (see “An Interview with Katherine Franke, p. 1) and Kendall Thomas announced this fall the creation of the Center for the Study of Law and Culture. Some of the most important topics concerning gender and feminism under discussion today are legal ones. As conservative politicians win (or should that be ‘steal’?) the day in Washington, there are bound to be significant threats to the few successes of recent years. Roe v. Wade will be seriously threatened, the basic rights (or should that be ‘the basic safety’?) of gay and lesbians will be diminished. Whether the question is the rights of women to obtain inexpensive and safe abortions, the rights of youngsters to be educated about basic sexual matters, or the rights of people to be “queer,” the answer will very much be formulated in the legal arena. IRWaG looks forward to collaborating closely with the CSLC, which has kindly offered to co-sponsor some of the events in our Queer Futures.

The success of IRWaG is partly due to our hard work and commitment over the years, but it is also very much a function of the intellectual rightness of our project. Scholars reflecting upon culture and its constituents, present or past, need gender as a category of analysis to consider their subject with any subtlety at all. This volume of the Feminist News begins a series of articles that represent both the centrality of gender in scholarship and the variety of its applications. In the first of a series on Gender and Art, Professor Marina Kotzamani displays the surprising revelations which result from the application of gender to art of the past (See “The Weaver and the Web,” p. 6). Inaugurating a series of discussions of Gender and Culture, Professor David Eng discusses the cultural production of Asian American writers and reflects on the intersections between feminism and Asian American studies (see “Sexy in Asian America,” p. 8). Finally, beginning a series on Gender and Law, Professor Katherine Franke discusses legal feminism and its need to reflect more seriously on issues concerning female sexuality. Among other things, she shows that legal theorists have a good deal to learn from queer theory (see “Feminism, Law, and Culture: Theorizing Yes,” p. 10). Not only do these articles exemplify the centrality and diversity of gender as a scholarly tool, they offer abundant evidence of the exciting consequences that result from its use.

It has been an enormous pleasure to act as Director of IRWaG this semester. I would like to thank the staff, Kathleen Savage and Page Jackson, and all my colleagues for their help and enthusiasm. We look forward to another semester of hard work and its accompanying intellectual satisfaction. Those of us at IRWaG wish all of you a productive term and invite you to share in our colloquia and projects this spring.
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8 PM, 614 Schermerhorn Hall
GENDER ON THE PERIPHERY
Jean Howard, Professor of English and
Comparative Literature, Columbia University
Natalie B. Kampen responding

March 26, 2001:
8 PM, St. Paul’s Chapel
BLUENOTES AND BUTTERFLIES: THOUGHTS ON “THE” BLACK SINGING VOICE
Farah J. Griffin, Visiting Professor of English and
Comparative Literature, Columbia University
( featuring a live performance by
Bernice Johnson Reagon)
Robert G. O’Meally responding
Co-sponsored by The Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University

Schedule Announcement:
The Queer Studies Group
A forum for reading recent work in queer studies, the Queer Studies Group focuses on discussing works in progress by members of the Columbia community and hosting talks by visiting professors. Readings for each session will be available at the IRWAG office. Please email David Scott Kurnick (dsk29@columbia.edu) for additional information or suggestions.
2–4 PM, 754 Schermerhorn Extension


March 23: “Queerness and HIV”


Want more information on IRWAG?
Looking for news about events?
www.columbia.edu/cu/irwg/
Visit us at our web-site for an introduction to faculty, courses, and happenings.

For access and information on interdisciplinary activities in the humanities and social sciences, go to:
www.columbia.edu/cu/interinfo/
All you need to know about lectures, symposia, and schedules of events.