

Losing Ground

Lise Weil

Mes rêves commencent maintenant avec des rassemblements de femmes – de grands rassemblements dans des stades, dans des lieux d'exposition, sur les lieux de conférences, de petits rassemblements dans des classes, des salles de séjour, des cuisines. La raison pour laquelle ces rencontres se produisent dans mes rêves vient du fait qu'ils ne se produisent nulle part ailleurs. C'est un monde perdu. Un monde que nous avons produit. Un monde qui n'avait pourtant rien d'impraticable ou d'impossible et qui portait les rêves de féministes de ce continent-ci dans les années 1970 et 1980. Nous mettions des femmes en contact avec nos propres corps, nos propres esprits, nos propres muses, notre histoire. Montréal, 1988. Des femmes de partout dans le monde s'étaient rassemblées dans la ville pour la Troisième Foire féministe du livre. Nous avons pris la ville d'assaut. Les rues et les cafés débordaient de femmes qui parlaient, qui s'amusaient. Aujourd'hui, les librairies et les bars lesbiens sont disparus. Ces actes de matérialisation – le travail consistant à refaire le monde – n'ont laissé que peu de traces. Notre culture féministe et lesbienne menace de devenir vraiment utopique : imaginaire, lointaine, sans lieu où se manifester. Nous nous devons de reconnaître, pour nous-mêmes et pour l'histoire, que quelque chose a été réellement découvert. Il faut admettre que nous avons besoin de lieux, d'espaces où les femmes peuvent se rassembler. Rien ne peut remplacer un cercle de femmes occupées à écouter intensément, à faire parler les mots.

“[S]i le patriarcat est parvenu à ne pas faire exister ce qui existe, il nous sera sans doute possible de faire exister ce qui existe.”

— Nicole Brossard, *de radical à intégrales*

“We’ve come together for a conference, a huge crowd of women, many familiar faces from my past.” “I walk into a living room where women are sitting in a circle, talking intensely, drinking wine.” “A room filled with women, we’ve come to hear the lesbian poets. . .” This is how my dreams begin now. Night after night, with tedious regularity, gatherings of women

– large ones in stadiums, exhibition halls, lecture rooms, smaller ones in living rooms, kitchens, bookstores. For a long time I shrug this off as the mark of a die-hard feminist consciousness, refusing to shut down even in sleep. Then it dawns on me: the reason these gatherings are happening in my dreams is they're no longer happening anywhere else.

Utopia. fr. Gk *ou* not, no + *topos* place. "An imaginary and indefinitely remote place."

Something has been lost. It's not just my imagination. Is it? "Quelque chose ne s'est pas produit qui devait se produire. Quelque chose devait être retenu qui a été oublié" (Louky Bersianik).¹ A world has been lost. One we brought into being. Made be. Which isn't to say it didn't exist before us. A world of women, manifesting on the streets of our cities, towns, on campuses, in our homes. A dream was it? If so we made it real.

Utopian: "proposing or advocating impractically ideal social and political schemes; impossibly ideal."

There was nothing impossible about the schemes of feminists on this continent in the 70's and 80's – Audre Lorde, Judy Grahn, Adrienne Rich, Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, Monique Wittig, Susan Griffin, Mary Daly. Impractical perhaps at times – but not impossible. We were mounting the most powerful challenge ever to the patriarchal imperative to "ne pas faire exister ce qui existe" – by connecting with our own bodies and minds, with our muses, with our history, by bringing ourselves into existence as never before in recent memory. By remembering what we'd been told to forget: that we'd been burned at the stake by the millions. That we had not always been hated, subordinated. That god had been a woman once.

A whole landscape came into view. One we'd been prevented from seeing. The landscape of our bodies. Of the earth. To know they were once praised in one breath. The earth her body. In Ireland, worshipped as one: the mounds her breasts her belly the valley her cleft. The earth brought her creatures forth then took them home again into her giant womb. The caves the stones the shrines telling it still today. Knought. Lough Crew. Creevykill. To see with the force of revelation: erotic, orgasmic. So this is what is possible; this is what was.

Utopian? Yes, from a patriarchal perspective. Outlandish. Unworldly.

Laughable even. Perhaps more so than ever in these postmodern premillennial years as virtual reality, cyberspace and global monoculture erode the value of place and biotechnology threatens the integrity of our bodies. As the reigning intellectual discourse makes us reluctant to speak on behalf of our bodies or the natural world for fear of committing the crime of essentialism.²

"Utopian" – we used the word ourselves to refer to the fact that what we were laying bare was something the prevailing reality denied, dismissed, rendered invisible. "*Utopique*" – a key word in the fictions of Nicole Brossard, where it refers to a vital and necessary trajectory of the imagination, one that might help "stimuler en nous une qualité d'émotion propice à notre insertion dans l'histoire."³ Yet wouldn't the word, at least as defined in the dictionary, be more accurately applied to patriarchal projects? To those technocrats for whom the very idea of place (*topos*) is becoming increasingly irrelevant. To those scientists who are even now dreaming up an "impossibly ideal" genetically engineered human being incorporating all races and genders. To the multinationals which are rapidly undermining the conditions for sustainable life on this planet.

Utopian? We were reclaiming the right to think, to imagine, to BE. To take up space. To stand our ground. We were taking back territory that had been stolen from us. Granted, in francophone writing "*champs*" and "*territoire*" tended to be metaphors: for taking up linguistic and intellectual space, for thought, for the imaginary. When Brossard wrote "*ma continent*" she meant all the lesbian writers who had nurtured and inspired her. U.S. feminist thought tended to be more literal. Reclaiming rock river earth tree. "The patches of silver and brown. Worn by the wind. The grass reflecting all that lives in the soil" (Susan Griffin). More material. Honoring the women whose work goes unnoticed though everything depends on it. "She's made of grease / and metal, with a hard head / that makes the men around her seem frail. / The common woman is as common as a nail" (Judy Grahn).

In practice our imperative, on both sides of the language divide, was one of materialization. We were grounding thought, emotion, vision, desire, making them visible, communicable, palpable. Those of us who weren't writing poems or essays or fiction, making films art videos music, were founding journals, coffeehouses, bookstores, performance spaces, hosting fairs and conferences and festivals. We were creating

spaces where the dream could become real. Giving it a place to land. Thus showing it was never just a dream to begin with. We were taking what exists – despite our having been told it didn't, or if it did it didn't matter – and making it *be*.

1981, Western Massachusetts. The kitchen of an old farmhouse where women gathered every week, coming from all over the state, to study literature and philosophy – Bronte, Woolf, Arendt, Benjamin, Nietzsche – in the context of radical feminism. To listen to each other with a kind of attention none of us had ever given or received in our entire lives. In the summer women stayed on, lazed around on the porch all day reading. Finding lines that had been written for us, reading them out loud to each other: “Dwellers in possibility.” “Companions of the flame.” Emily Dickinson, H.D. Our foresisters! What they conceived we would now bring to term. We who in this late decade of the 20th century had been endowed with freedom, with resources beyond anything they could have imagined.

“*On ne peut pas prévoir,*” wrote Brossard, in *sous la langue*, about the moments just before lovemaking, when two women stand together on the brink of the unknown. So it was in those meetings. You never knew what was going to emerge from them, as you could not know what would emerge from your own mouth when you spoke. It was the presence of the other women that pulled it out of you, the power of their listening. Nelle Morton wrote of this phenomenon, peculiar to groups of women talking. She called it “hearing into speech.”⁴

A year later a journal was born from those conversations, from that place and those meetings; we named it after the goddess *Trivia* who presided at the ancient crossroads, the place where women met and conspired. Words that had emerged from our meetings now materialized on the page. We cast our net out into the world, and women responded. Within a few years, women's words from all over the globe were meeting and mingling on the pages of the journal.

Montreal, 1988. Women of words from all over the world converged on the city for the Third International Feminist Book Fair, over six thousand of them, for five days of networking and some fifty panels and readings (multilingual readings, Native readings, Québécois readings, Spanish readings, lesbian readings, lesbian multilingual readings). For those of us who drove up from the United States it was exhilarating: as if the kitchen of that farmhouse were now projected out into the world. So many of the

same conversations, the same questions being asked about language and creation. And the same aura of heightened expectancy, knowing at any moment the truth might burst forth, *inédite*. Except that taking part in these conversations were women from Pakistan, Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, Zimbabwe – to name only a few. In the U.S., the feminist movement had been accused of being white and Eurocentric. While I knew that *Triviva* reflected that bias, I don't think the fact ever came home to me as it did here, in this crowd of women in saris and robes, skirts and shorts, buzz cuts and Afros and turbans. This movement was big, it was rowdy, and it was definitely not white.

Among other things the Fair hosted the largest gathering of Canadian First Nations women writers ever to take place on this continent. Their strongly felt presence – perhaps too the unseasonable heat of those mid-June days and the parched grass – served to foster an understanding that our fate as women is irreducibly tied to the fate of the earth, and vice versa.

The organizers had structured the conversations at this Fair around broad, resonant themes – memory, power, and strategies for feminist thought – and insured that every panel was racially and culturally diverse. A panel on “Literature and Empowerment” (in French, “*forces vives et transgressives*”) featured U.S. Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldua, Okanagan Indian Jeannette Armstrong from B.C., Argentine poet Diana Bellessi. Writers from Chile, Czechoslovakia, Pakistan, and the Caribbean addressed the question of “Writing as a Dangerous Profession.” South African writer Ellen Kuzwayo was paired with Quebec writer Mary Meigs to speak on “Memories of Age.” There were simultaneous translations into three languages at once. And, as was only fitting in a province where lesbians are at the forefront of literary creation and experimentation, lesbian presence was central to all panels and readings. Enough so to signal the absolute centrality of lesbian energy and creation to feminist vision and action around the world. In short, the Fair felt like a culmination of twenty years of reclaiming our territory, enlarging our cultural intellectual and physical space.

Women took over the city. The streets and cafés were bursting with women talking, laughing, playing. Our coming together here in itself transformative, naturally generative: of sparks, creative energy, bonds of all kinds. Lillian Allen singing it in the *spectacle* on the last night of the Fair: “revel in the streets if that's the beat.” For those few days, the city

was our world. Michèle Causse put it best when she said after the Fair was over, "you know something, I've lost my territory. There is no more territory that I can go to." Here for once in francophone discourse the word was being used literally! "This was my land, my women's land, and when it was over, for three days, I didn't know where to go . . . This Fair gave me this idea of an urgency, an extreme urgency, for a territory, at least a small territory . . . to give women a constant place to go to, to listen to each other, to read, and to enjoy themselves too."⁵

"An urgency" is not saying too much. This Fair, like the ones that came before it and those that followed, was a matter of cultural survival. Not just the discovery that conversations we were having in our corner of the world were taking place in other parts of the globe as well, in other languages, that feminist passion was global, that we were part of a global movement of women, an enormous historical force. But also the networking, the sharing of essential information. Publishers finding new titles, authors finding publishers, translators, publishers for translations. And beyond all this, the vital infusion of energy. The fuel on which many of us would run for the rest of the year, if not for many years to come. What made it possible for us to continue.

Two years later, in fall of 1990, I moved up here to this city. Partly it was the spell of the Fair, which was powerful and enduring for many of the women writers and publishers who came up from the U.S. Also it seemed to me feminists here in Quebec had laid claim to pieces of the world feminists in the States too often ceded to the academy or considered politically suspect. Not only large philosophical questions and difficult thinkers of both sexes, but also . . . certain aesthetic and epicurean pleasures. I liked the way women here dressed up for each other, appreciated good food and wine. I think I felt that by moving here my world would expand in the same way it expanded at the Fair, grow to embrace multiple languages and cultures and appetites, and still remain lesbian-centered. Then too Montreal had a certain magic about it. "Things are possible here," said my American friend who had already moved here.

There were vestiges of that world of women of the summer of 1988 when I arrived. But the city was in mourning. The year before, in December of 1989, a man had killed fourteen young engineering students, because they were women, because they were strong women. As if paying us back for our celebration, for the feminist presence in this city which the Fair made so visible. As if to remind us that such celebrations

don't come without a price.

Still, Montreal was a city of women when I moved here. Thinking women, thinking lesbians, very visible, and visibly conspiring. At the heart of this feminist world was the little bookstore on Rachel, *l'essentielle* ("*fricatelle ruisselle essentielle, sous la langue*"), a lovely intimate space tucked between a hair salon and a bar, its books, in French and English – all by women – lovingly displayed on hot pink shelves. In the evenings there were readings and *lancements*, the store would fill up with women on wooden folding chairs, the air charged with the energy of listening. It was here you'd come to find out what was happening, who was launching a book, who was coming to town. All kinds of lesbian and feminist writers, artists, intellectuals were drawn to town in those days, a lot of them remembered Montreal from the Book Fair and came to get another taste of that radical urban energy, that rare blend of cosmopolitanism and lesbian thought. For both francophone and anglophone women, *l'essentielle* was their first stop; the woman behind the counter could always steer you to a bar or a dance or a reading.

Down St. Denis, a little way from the store were two lesbian bars side by side, *Lilith* and *Labyris*. You could spend an evening moving back and forth between the two bars, dancing and drinking, and many women did. Down the street in the other direction was *l'exit*, an afternoon bar



photo: Marik Boudreau

where you could sit with a book or go for a drink before dinner. And for a short while there was yet another lesbian bar, *Kiev*, just a block east from *l'essentielle* on Rachel, a disco bar where lesbians went to dance late into the night. Farther on in that direction and a bit north was the *École Gilford*, home of the *Salon des Tribades* and the lesbian archives, and host to a myriad other lesbian cultural events.⁶ In short, *l'essentielle*, in those days, was the hub of a wheel. You felt completely nestled in the heart of lesbian culture there.

In addition to physical spaces for readings and performances, there was the feminist art gallery Powerhouse on St. Laurent. And there were, in abundance, feminist journals and magazines, publishing houses, radio shows.⁷ In sum, there was no shortage of homes for the feminist and lesbian imagination. By way of these spaces the work of lesbian and feminist writers, artists, thinkers entered the very texture of city life. Though the most recent site project of Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe, *La Donna Deliquenta*, had been completed three years earlier in 1987, it was still very much alive in the imaginations of the women I knew, and their ongoing work of rescuing abandoned buildings and resurrecting lost cultural histories felt like a kind of metaphor for our attempts at cultural inscription.

But it wasn't only readings, performances, exhibitions.

Our world, such as it was, was sustained by ongoing encounters, exchanges. Something as simple and unremarkable as meeting another woman at a bar or a bookstore, having a conversation that might help move you forward in the piece you were writing, alert you to just the book you needed to read, or simply: fill you with joy. It was sustained not only by the repeated coming-together of radical thinkers and creators, but by those women who made these ongoing meetings possible. All of us who worked to create and maintain those spaces as well as all of us who gathered in those spaces were weaving a fabric of meaning. That fabric was our culture, and it was our world. Not imaginary, not remote. Wherever we gathered and turned our full attention on one another, there were our sacred sites...

It's been over ten years since the International Feminist Book Fair happened here. There have been three Fairs since then, the last one happening in Melbourne in 1994. A group of women tried to organize one in Brazil two years later, but it never got off the ground and apparently the Fair, having no centralized administration, died along with it.

Lilith and *Labyris* (funny how quaint that name sounds now) are both long gone, though *Lilith* held out a few years longer. In 1994, *l'exit* transmuted into *l'exit II* and moved across the street. In that same year another lesbian bar, *O-Side*, started up further south on St. Denis; soon after *l'exit II* expired. As I write this, *O-Side* has just announced it is closing. *L'École Gilford* is gone, as are for the most part the cultural activities that took place there. Of the fifty places cited in a map of the "*principaux lieux de rencontre de la communauté lesbienne de Montréal, 1973-1995*",⁸ only eight or nine remain, and every single one of those is mixed. Of the dozen or so local magazines and periodicals that serviced the lesbian and feminist community in the 70's and 80's only three still publish today and those come out irregularly.⁹

As for *l'essentielle*, it was forced to close its doors late in 1991. The space has been occupied ever since by a decorative cushion store.

Of course there are economic conditions behind these endings, familiar to most of us: the dwindling resources for feminist and lesbian enterprises, the feminization of poverty, the monopolies of giant publishers and bookstore chains. And of course there is the backlash against feminism.

But my purpose here is not to speculate about reasons. It is simply to call attention to the fact that our territory has been drastically reduced, so much so that there are few if any places left even to have a conversation about what's happened to us. Where did we all go? The lesbians and feminists who participated in those grand gatherings? Where is everyone? And how could a whole world disappear, without a trace? The ten-year anniversary of the Book Fair came and went last summer, I wanted to mark it somehow, but couldn't find anyone to do it with. It wasn't the sort of occasion you feel like commemorating all by yourself.

"[U]ne lesbienne qui ne réinvente pas le monde est une lesbienne en voie de disparition."

— Nicole Brossard

Dispersed. Diasporized. Vanished ... into thin air.

These days it seems to me our feminist and lesbian culture is threatening to become genuinely utopian: imaginary, remote, placeless. Of another place and time.

Dykes on Mykes. I turn it on while making dinner one night and catch an interview with a bisexual woman who says "I just had to follow my desires" and the interviewer says, tentatively, "what about the argument

that desire is political?" obviously not entirely believing it herself. The next time I turn it on the host is interviewing a man. I wonder how much lesbians are going to miss having their own bar in this city; nowadays they mostly seem to want to dance downtown at gay bars which have fetish nights.

Which gives rise to the question: if the places were there, would anyone come? Fortunately perhaps, such speculation too lies outside the scope of this essay.

The cultural climate has changed, that much is clear. As a name, *l'essentielle* would never wash today. Too much stigma surrounds the word, at least in intellectual circles. And all those acts of materialization we were so busy performing – the work of reinventing this world – have been relegated by taxonomically-inclined academic feminists to the category of "cultural feminism" and dismissed as an ineffectual deadend.¹⁰

Writing this, I'm aware, I risk appearing foolish, nostalgic. No one else seems to be remarking on these losses, except to say they were inevitable, or even positive, an evolutionary step. "It was time for me to develop other parts of myself." "I was burnt out." "We were so angry then, I'm much happier now."

We're not young anymore, we don't have that kind of energy. We're writing books we could never have written when we were still doing all that talking, organizing, strategizing; we're having relationships we could never have had when we were trying to attend to so many conversations at once. That was a time of hotheaded desire, now is a time for mature consideration, which requires distance, equanimity. We've settled down and gotten stable. And in any case, then was then and now is now.

Why can't I get with the program?

Okay, I admit this is my own voice talking too, the voice that's been nagging at me as I write this, saying: tell the whole truth. You wouldn't really want to turn back the clock, would you? Haven't you gained something from all these years without collaborators, without community, without gatherings? Isn't it true you're happier now than you were then?

Yes, I am and yes, I have. One by one the threads fray. The net comes undone. We see we can live without it. There's a freedom in this. We're no longer constrained by what our communities expect of us. We see we don't need them to live a good life.

Yes, I've learned all kinds of things about love, and friendship, about

myself, that I couldn't have learned in the context of raging, lusting, exploring, discovering. Knowledge I wouldn't trade for anything.

Yes we're all improved, evolved. We're much freer than before. Still. Something HAS been lost. Hasn't it?

Comme des somnambules, nous avons marché l'une derrière l'autre à travers l'histoire sans regarder ou nous mettions le pied. Notre mémoire s'était retirée et nous vivions à marée basse sans comprendre les signaux laissés par nous sur le sable. Les pas de l'une dans les pas de l'autre, comme si une seule d'entre nous était passée. (Bersianik, p.6)

It's a longstanding tradition, not to say a historical rule: our memories, as women, have a way of deserting us. As feminists our lineage has been broken over and over again. Already the history of the second wave is being distorted and erased.

I wonder if I'm the only one in mourning. I wonder if I'm being nostalgic. But I worry there'll be no one left to testify, to keep the memory alive. To say "this is what is possible; this is what was."

How to avoid nostalgia without courting amnesia?

"Notre amnésie passait pour de la santé mentale et quand nous nous souvenions, nous étions internées. . . Mieux valait nous garder de notre mémoire" (Bersianik, p.6).

Thread by thread, synapse by synapse, we watched it unravel – that giant web. There was less and less that connected us, to each other, to that rich and fertile dream we'd dreamt together. At the same time there was less and less that separated us – from the world we had refused not so long ago, from those "universals" we had forfeited. Many of us rushed to embrace that world again, to be taken into the fold: our families, in-laws, all the men we'd kept out in the cold. Some of us, having nestled in the heart of those we once rejected, seen our Otherness dissolve, also allowed their despisals of who we were at the time of our greatest fervour to enter us.

Don't we owe it to ourselves and our history to acknowledge this?

To admit that we, having seen history in the making/remaking, having helped to remake it, then went on to have a hand in its unmaking.

Would we have written the books we are now writing without those conversations, those circles of women, without all the words that were born of them? Could we be having these relationships we're now having had we not gathered in those circles? Had we not created a culture in

which we were able to give a shape to our longings, our needs, our values, in which we were able to articulate what we wanted in the way of love, of friendship (even if we were not yet capable of practising it at the time)?

Weren't those gatherings of women both large and small all of them gatherings of resistance? Weren't they our best hope against the reckless technocrats, the necrotechnologists,¹¹ all those who threaten to yank the ground out from under our feet, to render matter, our bodies, this earth, null and void. Wasn't this the subtext of every conference, every book fair, every poetry reading we attended? That our vision, our version of history would prevail? "I want nothing left of me for you, oh death ... death, oh death you shall be poor" (Judy Grahn).

Yes, we've moved on. Our energies have taken other forms. But don't we still need ground to stand on apart from the world of family with all its claims (however loosely we define it) and the world of hetero-relations?¹² Places to meet, to talk, to strategize and to have fun.

Yes, those gatherings were marred by infighting and often unbearable tensions and silences. Yes, they were far from perfect. But has anything better come along to replace them?

If we've improved and evolved, well then so much the better. Why not bring what we've learned about love and friendship to the table? Maybe now we can go about our work together – our conversations, our strategizing, our world-building – in a spirit of mindfulness, and of compassion without ceding an inch of our power, our passion, our desire to manifest whole and entire. I have often thought that the day the Amazon meets the goddess Kwan Yin is the day we'll become truly invincible, inscribe ourselves unforgettably on the historical page.

But we need places, spaces, for women to gather. Homes for radical thought. A website is not enough! There is no substitute for feminist presence. A circle of women all listening intently, drawing out the words.

"[A] territory, at least a small territory... to give women a constant place to go to, to listen to each other, to read, and to enjoy themselves too."

We need to start hearing and speaking again, and we need to start somewhere. We need our hallowed ground, our sacred sites.

Notes

¹ Louky Bersianik, *Les agenésies du vieux monde*. (Outremont: l'intégrale,

éditrice, 1982). Also collected in: *La Main Tranchante du Symbole* (Montréal: les éditions du remue-ménage, 1990). An English translation was published in *Trivia* 7, Fall 1985.

² For an analysis of this silencing with regard to ecofeminism see Noel Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action*. Sturgeon argues for the political usefulness, indeed necessity, of essentialist rhetoric. Charlene Spretnak's *Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, Place in a Hypermodern World* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997) offers a perceptive critique of postmodernist deconstruction and the ideology of modernity. According to the deconstructionist world view, any internal coherence perceived in the self or in the biosphere is mere human projection. But as Spretnak points out, the idea of nature as solely a construct of human language and culture ignores the embeddedness of all human activity in ecological and cosmological processes.

³ *Picture Theory* (Montréal: éditions de l'Hexagone, 1989) p. 102. Brossard has clearly reinvented this word, as she has so many others. In her introduction to this edition Louise Forsythe has this to say about Brossard's version of *utopie*: "*Comme l'hologramme elle n'est que l'énergie intense: forme vitale et image cohérente. Elle est l'abstraction dynamique, l'énergie psychique, l'émotion concentrée. En en empruntant l'élan toute femme prend sa place, à sa propre manière, au sein de la société, s'insère dans l'histoire de l'espèce, fait sens de sa quête ouverte et infinie de la réalité*" (p. 19, 20).

⁴ "A hearing engaged in by the whole body that evokes speech – a new speech – a new creation. The woman had been heard to her own speech ... Hearing in this sense can break through political and social structures and image a new system." *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) p.128.

⁵ From "Michèle Causse: for a Sea of Women," *Trivia* 13, Fall 1988, p. 75. *Trivia* devoted two issues to the Fair, one focused on women writing in Quebec (*Trivia* 13, "Memory/Transgression"), the other on questions of language and cultural difference (*Trivia* 14, "Language/Difference: Writing in Tongues"). Copies (at \$5 CAN each) can be ordered from me at LWeilo@compuserve.com.

⁶ For a detailed and thoughtful account of the some of the cultural and political activities that took place at the *École Gilford*, see Suzanne Boisvert's and Danielle Boutet's "*Le projet Gilford: mémoires vives d'une pratique artistique et politique*" in *Sortir de l'Ombre: Histoires des Communautés Lesbienne et Gaie de Montréal*, Irene Demczuk and Frank W.

Remiggi, eds. (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1998). The authors describe the building as “un lieu marquant de la culture lesbienne montréalaise, un laboratoire inventif où les idées politiques et les aspirations de la communauté étaient mises en pratique” (313). Later on they remark, “Si les lesbiennes engagées s’entendent généralement pour affirmer que l’existence lesbienne face au patriarcat est subversive, il reste que cette subversion ne doit seulement être théorique; elle doit exister dans une réalité physique, matérielle. L’imaginaire a besoin de lieux pour se développer” (323).

⁷ See Dominique Bourque’s report on the flowering of the lesbian media in Montreal in the 70’s and 80’s, an era she refers to as “l’âge d’or du lesbianisme montréalais” (306). “Voix et images de lesbiennes: la formation d’un réseau de médias” in *Sortir de l’Ombre*.

⁸ The map is Bourque’s. In an article in the most recent issue of *Amazones d’hier, lesbiennes d’aujourd’hui* (#25), Diane Heffernan writes, “Aujourd’hui, nous sommes des communautés de lesbiennes sans lieu” (“Île était une fois,” p. 116).

⁹ To the best of my knowledge, the only ones remaining are *Treize*, *Amazones d’hier, lesbiennes d’aujourd’hui*, and *Arcade*.

¹⁰ See, for example, Alice Echols’ *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1989), in which the “cultural feminism” of the late 70’s and 80’s is portrayed as individualistic and self-contained, a betrayal of the more radical, collectivist feminist politics that preceded it. In *Ecofeminist Natures*, Sturgeon shows how the academic practice of creating feminist typologies rewrites feminist history to favor movements most easily recuperable by the academy. Those categories seen as most essentialist – e.g. “cultural feminism” – tend to come out the losers (p. 169-178). In addition to the kinds of culture-building activities I’ve cited here, actions relegated to the category of cultural feminism would include women’s anti-war protests, lesbian organizing, and all the cultural and political work of women of color.

¹¹ The term is Mary Daly’s. See her scathing account of biotechnology’s invasion of “a great ‘wilderness area’ – the genetic structure of living organisms” (p. 215) in *Quintessence ... Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

¹² “We live in a hetero-relational society where most of women’s personal, social, political, professional and economic relations are defined by the ideology that woman is for man.” Janice Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) p. 11.

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