

Urban Space and Barstool *flânerie* in Gail Scott's *Main Brides*

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From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood. The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. (Massey 5)

This permanent hostility men have toward women, this is what we forget about when the sky is blue, that is what those survivors — who were so quick to declare they weren't feminists — had forgotten ... But what can a woman be thinking of when she says, 'I'm not a feminist'? What hasn't she thought of? Whom hasn't she thought of? (Brossard 115)

EXAMINING THE WAYS in which urban spaces invite or deny women's belonging, Gail Scott's novel *Main Brides* offers a gendered interpretation of the complex web of overlapping surfaces, overheard conversations, and dynamic interactions which comprise each lived moment in the city. The 'portraits' created by the main character, Lydia, attempt to rewrite or overwrite the palimpsestic surface of the Main (Montreal's Boulevard St. Laurent), representing a textual intervention into the urban spaces of Montreal during the time immediately following the Montreal Massacre of December 6, 1989.¹

Time and Space

In *Space, Place, and Gender*, Doreen Massey discusses the gendering of time and space and the links (or ruptures) between history, progress, and femininity:

It is, moreover, time which is typically coded masculine and space, being absence or lack, as feminine.... It is time which is aligned with history, progress, civilization, politics and transcendence and coded masculine. And it is the opposites of these things which have, in the traditions of western thought, been coded feminine. (6)

Lydia rejects a masculine narrative of history, a fiction of progress, which consigns women to the margins as a footnote or an "unfortunate statistic.... She prefers another approach to History" (98). Historical narrative is characterized as a seductive, though ultimately empty, spectacle:

The emcee bows deeply under the arch of painted horses. 'Ladeez and gentulmen,' (in American showbiz English, then several other languages), 'we're proud to present *The History of Cuba from Early Times Until the Revolution*. First [a rush of cabaret music], The Slave Period!' The beat is fabulous. (89)

In order to avoid this kind of alluring and deceptive display, *Main Brides* favours a different approach, one which consists of "anecdotal fragments organized — but not too rigorously — with a little space around them to open possibilities" (167).

Time is intentionally de-emphasized in the narrative structure of *Main Brides*. While the events of the novel take place in a bar over the course of one evening from dusk until closing time, the reader's ability to be drawn into this linear, chronological narrative is confounded by the intervening chapters in which Lydia constructs portraits of her "brides," the various neighbourhood women who enter the bar. These impressionistic and inconclusive portraits are written in a dense, poetic style which prevents rapid consumption by the reader. Consequently, the return from the portraits, some of whose narratives span several days, back to Lydia's seat at the bar is always accompanied by the jarring realization that, in Lydia's time, only a few moments have passed. Lydia's portraits do not lend themselves to narrative closure nor to facile interpretations of history; rather, they invite the reader to engage in an active process of reading and interpreting history as it is played out on the surfaces of the city and the bodies of its citizens. The textual fragments of *Main Brides* emphasize juxtaposition, simultaneity, and surface — characteristics of space rather than time.

The Main

Montreal itself is a space that has been gendered in certain discourses. In

1993, in the city's new tourist logo, "the 'o' in Montreal [was] replaced with red puckered lips" (Probyn, *Outside* 66); the *Montreal Gazette* reported, "it figures the lips are feminine (Montréal is, after all, a lady), classy, seductive and [they] reflect the city's *joie de vivre*" (qtd. in Probyn *Outside* 66). The city is figured not only as feminine, but as flirtatious and sexually available, an invitation to the heterosexual male tourist. However, if woman is a trope for the city, it is at the expense of her subjecthood, her ability to take up space in the city: "In the discursive space of the city ... woman is both absent and captive: absent as theoretical subject, captive as historical subject" (De Lauretis 14). *Main Brides* uses the setting of the Main in Montreal to represent a discursive rupture in the city, a place from where Lydia can imagine herself and the women around her as historical subjects-in-process.

The Main represents for the Montreal literary imagination the potential to explore difference and otherness. Boulevard St. Laurent is not only a dividing line (between east and west or English and French) but also a carnivalesque rupture characterized by endless encounters between various languages, classes, cultures, and sexualities. Consequently, the Main has frequently been used in Montreal literature as a setting which allows for the exploration of various marginal ethnic, gender, or sexual identities.² At the beginning of *Main Brides*, Lydia's eyes travel

past the Portuguese photo store with the bride standing in the window. Her soldier's X'd out. But even if he weren't, she'd be standing there in her white lace with everybody looking: the Main thing in the picture for a single minute of her life. (9-10)

By making women "the Main thing in the picture," Scott attempts to insert them as subjects onto the urban landscape in ways that foreground their absence in the dominant discourses of the city. The Main is the place where the marginal can be made central, where various identities and discourses 'othered' by the rest of the city find expression.

Lydia mirrors the heterogeneous character of the Main: she has "a handsome profile which could be English, French, Portuguese" (10); she is a translator, fluent in at least two languages; and she has an apparently fluid sexual identity. From her seat in the bar, she is surrounded by and conscious of the diverse signs, voices, and social relations which make up the Main and which, in turn, become part of her own identity. With her make-up and fashionable clothes, her "crisp, white blouse" (36) and "red lips on creamy white skin" (10), Lydia might be read as the stereotypically seductive, fashion-conscious Montrealer. Her seat at the window in the

bar places her in the position of a store mannequin, an attractive display. However, it is Lydia who does most of the observing, and her appearance, like the Main itself, requires a conscious act of interpretation because it can signify differently to different readers. Lydia inhabits and reflects a part of Montreal that defies easy categorizations and eludes unitary notions of identity or of the city itself. The shifting, multiple identities present on the Main constitute this space as an ideal one for Scott to imagine Lydia as a "writing subject" in-the-feminine. Not the 'self' as a (feminist or otherwise) predetermined figure, but a complex tissue of texts, experience, evolving in the very act of writing" (Scott, *Spaces* 11).

The City as Palimpsest

Christine Sizemore describes the city as "a palimpsest, a text that is built up layer after layer, each layer preserved partially, or wholly underneath the others" (176). She goes on to quote an urban planner, Charles Abrams, who suggests the extent to which the palimpsest of the city tells a primarily male story:

A city ... is the pulsating product of the human hand and mind, reflecting man's history, his struggle for freedom, his creativity, his genius — and his selfishness and errors. It is the palimpsest on which man's story is written, the record of those who built a skyscraper or a picture window, fought a pitched battle for a play street, created a bookshop or a bakeshop that mattered. (176)

The city represents a male text to the extent that its readable surfaces and spaces are largely public and thus dominated by the traditionally male spheres of commerce, politics, and sports.

The polyglot crowds and storefronts of the Main render the presence of ethnic and linguistic difference, as well as the resulting conflicts, the most salient characteristic of that space: "the Main ... is scored by the marks left from its flows of immigrants: Jewish, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Latino, Chinese.... This street has traditionally been staked as a sort of no-man's land in linguistic battles" (Probyn, *Outside* 70). In *Main Brides* Lydia's simultaneous interpretation/creation of the urban landscape, while ever conscious of the multitude of discourses circulating on the Main, suggest that *women*, in fact, are the absent figures in this "no-man's land." Scott's most convincing illustration of this is found in the parallel developed between Simon, the sign shop owner, and Lydia. The sign in front of Simon's store is being changed because of Quebec's language laws:

The sign-shop men, dressed in white, march past again. The problem being how to place their sign, which says *ENSEIGNES SIMON*, in conformity with the French-only sign law, over the one which says *SIMON'S SIGNS* in English, Arabic, Hebrew. Given the new one is inadequate in size to cover the Arabic script, the Hebrew lettering, plus of course the English (*writ large*) of the old. (151)

Although the workmen try, "the French-only version fails to cover the larger English-Hebrew-Arabic scripts showing underneath" (155). Simon, visibly distressed, sits in the bar, where he is observed by Lydia. While Simon drinks to calm himself over the sign incident, Lydia does the same to hide the anxiety she feels about the murdered woman's body that she saw in the park, "the damn lumpy shadow, with the blanket thrown over it" which she imagines repeatedly (61). Both the blanket and the new sign attempt to erase what is underneath, but only serve to foreground the act of erasure itself. However, unlike Simon's sign, the murdered woman's body does not register on the urban landscape as a tangible 'sign' of the social and political relations of the time. The body will be taken away, the story barely mentioned in the media, while Simon's sign remains on the street, a legible narrative of political and linguistic conflicts inscribed on the palimpsestic text of the Main. The text of the city thus privileges and renders legible certain conflicts while obscuring others.

The sign-shop scene proposes (in quite a literal fashion) that men control the circulation of signs in the city, and Lydia finds these masculine codes inaccessible to her: "the metal band of geometric patterns trimming the edge of a flat-roofed building across the street. Maybe cabalist. She knew she could decipher them. She could do anything she wanted (then, she saw that shadow on the grass)" (32-33). The patterns become illegible to Lydia when the memory of a murdered woman's body, a spectre of misogynist violence, forces her to confront her lack of access to the city's governing patriarchal codes. Lydia's brides, then, represent an attempt to inscribe her own signs in order to counter her alienation and fear: "What she really wants is 'brides.' Women on the roof. So the skyline (around the pediments) won't be empty at this moment of the day. When the light turns pale and flushes" (35). Lydia creates stories about her brides as they come into the bar by piecing together the fragments of fashion, make-up, conversation, and behaviour that she witnesses; she arranges these into portraits of historically situated, non-unitary subjects, then places the resulting brides onto the text of the city, replacing the "cabalist" codes with the signs of her own desire.

The Montreal Massacre

Lydia is not the only character in the novel who senses a resistance to reading the signs of misogyny in the city. During a radio report on the murder, a "(woman) announcer's voice pauses, as if departing from the script. 'The third murder of a young woman in as many months. But the police see no connection'" (200). The announcer, it is implied, does see a connection, but in order to (indirectly) articulate it, she must depart from the script written in front of her; she makes her own ironic addition to the script in a way which is not immediately comprehensible to everyone, just those, like Lydia, accustomed to reading and listening in the margins. Like Lydia, she makes a creative and interpretive intervention into the text before her in order to make links in the recurrence of violence against women.

The urgency with which Lydia (and Scott) make these links is further heightened a few pages after this scene, with the voice of another woman radio announcer: "Ce tango est dédié aux filles du 6 décembre.'... Silence. (In the bar, three female clients, separately, get an image of 14 silver coffins on icy white snow.)" (205). Lydia's melancholy, fear, and her desire to see and be with other women is clearly linked to her reaction to discovering the body of a murdered woman in the park; however, the description of this event and of the feelings it incites in Lydia is not meant to invoke one woman's reaction to a solitary murder. Rather, Lydia's mood, her anxiety, and desire to numb herself with alcohol are meant to be symptomatic of the atmosphere in Montreal after the killing at the École Polytechnique. Furthermore, several examples of violence against women are juxtaposed in the novel in order to accentuate their interrelatedness — Lydia's fear of leaving the bar, May's sister's rape, the harassment of the walking woman, the murdered prostitute, and the "filles du 6 décembre." This insistence on connectedness is in direct resistance to claims to the contrary: "the police see no connection" (200).

In *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, Elspeth Probyn says:

the fact that it was women who were killed, that Lépine expressly was shooting at feminists, can never quite be forgotten. According to friends who were in Montreal during this time, that fact altered the ways in which women recognized each other on the streets and in the *métro* ... Against the current circulation of discourses insisting on the irrelevance of gender in a so-called postfeminist world, these actions recall with some force the everyday gendered aggressions that women may encounter. Of course, all the neoconservatives came out en masse

to argue that the slayings were just a fluke, that men could have got it too. (269-70)

Indeed, after the shootings, feminist attempts to make links between the killings at the *École Polytechnique* and other forms of violence against women were, more often than not, characterized in the media as attempts to capitalize on Lépine's crime. The 'neoconservatives' who came out to argue the singular and random nature of the event were arguing consciously and precisely against a feminist understanding of the killings as a highly visible manifestation of violence against women which is pervasive, if not always visible, in North American society:

There is only a difference of degree, [feminists] argued, between the spectacular deaths of the women at the *École Polytechnique* and the less newsworthy deaths and injuries suffered by the thousands of women who are mentally and physically abused each year by men. There is a difference of degree, not of nature, between the terror provoked by a mass-media antifeminist massacre and the everyday fear that has become as pervasive a part of women's lives in North America as the polluted air they breathe. (Massumi 5)

Lydia's persistent memory of the body in the park, a scene which is absent from the media, is an intentional counterpoint to the "14 silver coffins on icy white snow" representing the spectacle created around the Montreal Massacre. The juxtaposition is meant to highlight the media constructions of these events, one as a barely notable occurrence ("the story wasn't big — the 'girl' just a small-time hooker"), and the other, an enormous spectacle, a massacre of innocent victims (200). The text, however, stages a link between these events, rejecting a so-called postfeminist reading and calling attention to the systemic nature of violence experienced by women in the city.

Feminists on the Air

The community radio station Lydia listens to in the bar represent a creative use of space which disrupts the patriarchal narratives of the city. The voices of the women radio announcers in the bar juxtapose the media's (mis)representation of the murder of the woman in the park and the students of the *École Polytechnique*. The news of the body in the park is relegated to the radio broadcast because the death of the woman, a prostitute, was not 'big' enough for television. Yet, it is in this medium that the announcer is able to momentarily depart from her script to suggest

the irony of the police's inability to see connections in violence against women. Cello's radio program goes even further in putting into circulation feminist discourses and lesbian desire: "Nous autre, on continue à vivre" (205), "Chères auditrice ... Je vous embrasse le sexe. There, do you feel better now?" (207). The marginality of the medium of community radio is mirrored in the shabbiness of the station itself; it is marked as a neglected space:

Lydia thinks of the community radio station's crooked green steps farther up the Main. Leading to the slanted room they called the studio. Lined with old green felt. Minimal technology. An anteroom with chairs of peeling lacquered wood curved over iron legs, from some church basement. (202)

Community radio is a marginal medium, but it is thus more available for circulating messages which do not mirror the dominant discourses of the city, rendering it useful for feminist appropriation. Radio creates its own space, in a sense, regardless of place. The three women in the bar imagine the coffins separately, but the reader can also imagine women all over the city engaging in this remembering. They are linked as an audience and, potentially, a community, brought together conceptually if not geographically. It is after all Cello's voice on the radio and her sensual tango music which brings Lydia, through memory or imagination, to the rococo theatre where lesbian desire circulates in the performance of Montana, Bruca, and Cello. Given that the city does not belong to women in a material way, cultural expression, such as Cello's radio program, Z.'s performance art, Cello, Bruca's and Montana's tango, or May's poetry represent attempts to belong in the city, to take advantage of the spaces the city affords.

To work in feminist radio, it is also implied, is to be both 'on the air' and on the 'street.' Cello's program is meant to address and, to some extent, create a community of women, but in order to do this, she must publically locate herself. To explicitly locate oneself sexually or politically, however, is to make oneself locatable, that is, visible and therefore vulnerable to ideological and physical attack. The central contradiction embodied by the radio station is the fact that while it provides a feminist space, its urban location compromises Cello's safety.

"Night Music"

Women's ambivalent relationship to the city has been described by Nicole Brossard in her introduction to a special issue of *La nouvelle barre du jour*, "La femme et la ville":

La ville fascine jusqu'à l'étourdissement. Réservoir inépuisable pour l'imagination, elle crée ses propres mythes de blasphèmes et de éducation. Elle soutient toutes les comparaisons s'offrant comme un éventail de sensations qui oscillent entre l'horreur et l'utopie, entre l'exaltation et la désintégration.... Plus on c'approche de son centre, le down town, plus violente et réitérée se fait la propaganda patriarcale comme un poing, un néon, un trottoir dur. (5)³

The city can generate multiple sensations ranging from horror to utopia, depending on where one stands at a particular moment; this is graphically illustrated in "Night Music," the chapter which contains the novel's most intense intersections and juxtapositions of space.

In "Night Music" the walking woman goes along the uninviting late-night, early-winter streets of the Plateau Mont Royal, occasionally crossing over onto the Main. She tries to convince herself that "sticking to the main streets at three am isn't dangerous," but she is nonetheless harassed by a man who follows her (209). In contrast to this threatening space where the "wind blows a bleak sheet of rain in the woman's face" (204), Lydia remembers the theatre where Bruca, Cello, and Montana dance the tango: "the pseudo-rococo theatre, which their presence filled (at least for Lydia) with fascinating, hereto unknown sensations. Women parting in their forever dissolving tango" (203). The theatre is the place where lesbian desire is staged most overtly; as a result, the enclosed space of the theatre is made to seem more liberating than the actual open space of the street. The walking woman, free to roam the streets, is made to feel restricted in her movements because of her harasser; on the other hand, Cello, Bruca, and Montana are restricted by the tight choreography of their dance and the walls of the theatre, yet the theatre opens up for Lydia a vast space of possibility, imagination, and desire. The theatre is a utopic space — decorated with and inhabited by "angels" (206, 207, 217).

The chapter "Night Music," according to Scott, is "in homage to, and partially inspired by [Martha Fleming and Lynn Lapointe's] marvelous installation, *La Donna Delinquenta*. Their work ... has informed [*Main Brides*] sense of women in urban space" (*Main* 233).⁴ The rococo theatre described in "Night Music" is the most visible borrowing from *La Donna Delinquenta*, and Fleming and Lapointe offer an articulate illustration of the imaginative potential of the theatre which has interesting echoes in *Main Brides*:

The amphitheatre is an ostensibly public space within a realm described as private by the discourse of architecture. It is a vacuum into

which the meaning and varied agendas of social exchange are called. At once a site of resistance as a deeply subjective memory theatre, but also a form of social restraint as the site of spectacle ... the arena, or absence, is a place where the multiple exchange of gazes literally weaves ethos across the central void. In this agora, the regard of the spectator is shot across a void as if on a loom, and in the best of conditions, we weave between us a *genius loci*, suspending disbelief and fulfilling the compact of sustaining each other's dreams and visions for a wished-for, and momentarily willed, social peace.

(Fleming and Lapointe 21)

It is the *genius loci* of the theatre that Lydia invokes when it is time for her to leave the bar, the women's dance inspiring her courage: "Lydia steps (a zigzag, to the air of a tango) into the night" (229). And it is this atmosphere that Lydia attempts to recreate for the city: her brides are like guardian angels whose protective gaze keeps her from despairing. Although Lydia recognizes that the tango is "so obsequiously the creation of illusion," it does not stop her from being sustained by its spectacular flaunting of lesbian desire, creativity and belonging (206).

When Lydia does the tango out onto the street, there is a sense that she, the walking woman, and the tango dancers have merged into one. This is the culmination of a narrative in which progress is made not in terms of passing time, but in terms of Lydia's increasing insinuation into her own stories. As closing time closes in on Lydia, her narrative becomes more intense, her anxiety about going out into the street increases, and the imbrication of Lydia and her brides is heightened:

"Ce tango est dédié aux filles du 6 décembre.' Cello's voice grave.

Silence. (In the bar, three female clients, separately, get an image of 14 silver coffins on icy white snow.)

'Nous autres, on continue à vivre.'

The woman walks faster, followed by a man. Cultivating anger.

Angry at her exhaustion. Angry because of how she undertook in good faith to fight to keep despair at bay. (205)

Is Lydia one of the three female clients? Who says "Nous autres, on continue à vivre"? The walking woman is also the writer who has "sat in the café on the Main trying to write" (110), like Lydia or perhaps even Gail Scott. Characters' identities collapse and overlap throughout *Main Brides*, but the process is intensified in the final chapter by the rapid intercutting of scenes of Cello, vulnerable and alone in the radio station; Cello's voice on the air, inciting desire; the walking woman harassed on the street;

Lydia, afraid to leave the bar; and Cello, Bruca, and Montana dancing the tango. This cinematic style of narrative editing implies the interconnectedness of all the women in the novel: the threat of violence experienced by one, it is suggested, must directly and immediately involve each of the others.

The *Flâneuse*

In "The Lesbian *Flâneur*" Sally Munt describes her experience moving from Brighton to Nottingham and how the predominant spaces of those cities either authorized or denied her lesbian identity:

[Brighton's] sexual ambiguity is present on the street, in its architecture, from the orbicular tits of King George's Pavilion onion domes, to the gigantic plastic dancer's legs which extrude invitingly above the entrance to the alternative cinema ... Brighton introduced me to the dyke stare, it gave me permission to stare. It made me feel I was worth staring at ... Brighton constructed my lesbian identity, one that was given to me by the glance of other, exchanged by the looks I gave them, passing — or not passing — in the street. (114-15)

While Brighton streets seem to invite, even incite, Munt's cruising, Nottingham, a four-hour drive away, presents an entirely different kind of space, one in which the circulation of desire is more rigorously policed:

There's nothing like being contained in [Nottingham's] two large shopping malls on a Saturday morning to make one feel queer. Inside again, this pseudo-public space is sexualized as privately heterosexual. Displays of intimacy over the purchase of family-sized commodities are exchanges of gazes calculated to exclude. When the gaze turns, its intent is hostile: visual and verbal harassment make me avert my eyes. I don't loiter, ever, the surveillance is turned upon myself, as the panopticon imposes self-vigilance. (115)

One of the interesting things to note about these passages is the extent to which the ephemeral, intangible elements of the city are as important in creating a sense of belonging (or alienation) as the solid, architectural elements. In fact, these ephemeral aspects — passing glances — are crucial to the construction of an identity which then reads the city anew. For Munt, Brighton's "faded past, its sexual history, is a memory cathecting contemporary erotic identifications as decadent, degenerative, and whorelike" (114). This sexual history, however, is not immediately inscribed on the city's surface (even on "the orbicular tits of King George's

Pavilion onion domes"); rather, it is rendered visible through the reading of an interpretive community constituted as much by passing fashion trends and fleeting glances as by the geographical markers of the neighbourhood itself. Munt is like the nineteenth-century *flâneur* who searched for meaning in the fleeting encounters and crowds of the city, but as a lesbian *flâneur* she is more aware of her status as a gendered and desiring subject, and of the ways in which this identity informs her encounters.

Lydia, like Munt, takes in the ephemeral aspects of the city: the conversations and interactions of people in the bar, her brides' clothes and haircuts, and news reports on the radio. It is through these elements that Lydia is able to read the city as a place which, in fact, inscribes the absence of women. Like Munt's description of the Nottingham shopping mall, Lydia feels the intimidating threat produced by the not-belonging of lesbian desire in the city: "The two dykes look carefully around, then choose the only empty table over near the window.... She only wishes they wouldn't be so obvious — one has her hand on the bare, downy nape of the other. (At the bar, a guy's fist is clenched)" (101). These markers of the present are read by Lydia as signs of the necessity of an imaginative intervention, a rewriting of the city that foregrounds lesbian desire and women's subjectivity, in the form of portraits that take up space on the city's surface and herald the possibility of "some other kind of History" (98).

Lydia represents an attempt to conceptualize and contextualize a version of a twentieth-century *flâneuse*. *Flânerie* is an appropriate term to describe Lydia's narrative, not because she strolls down the Main (she is seated through most of the novel), but because, like Baudelaire's poet/*flâneur*, she is the "secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city" (Tester 7). The fact that most of her random encounters with other characters in the novel occur within the space of a bar, rather than strolling on the street, is itself significant: Lydia's narrative position foregrounds the ways in which the city streets are read by her as an inhospitable, even hostile, place for women. The contradiction implied by Lydia's 'barstool *flânerie*' points to the impossible nature of women's role as urban spectacle/spectator, a role that Lianne Moyes describes as "mired in contradiction":

Whereas a man's movement, his capacity to exercise his gaze, and his presence in the city is a function of his anonymity and invisibility, a woman's limited movement, her inability to return his gaze, and her historical absence (invisibility) in the city, can be understood as a function of her visibility. (8)

If Baudelaire could both celebrate and fear the random nature of encounters on the urban street, *Main Brides* insists upon the ways in which "random" signifies differently for women in the city; even though she is inspired by the chance encounters with her brides, Lydia laments the implied violence of the city, the fact that "things happen randomly to women no matter what they do" (98). However, this reluctance to walk the streets at dusk does not result in a curtailed creativity; on the contrary, Lydia channels this anxiety in inventive ways: "Like Scheherazade postponing her execution in *One Thousand and One Nights*, she spins stories as a strategy of self preservation" (Horton 47). Lydia's distress, while it keeps her (only temporarily) off the street, also propels her to examine the social relations at work in the spaces she inhabits and to create the stories of women who come into the bar, rendering them visible by positioning them as historical subjects on the palimpsestic surface of the Main.

NOTES

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¹ On December 6, 1989, an armed man entered an engineering class in Montreal's École Polytechnique. Separating the men from the women, he proclaimed his intention to kill feminists, whom he believed had ruined his life. The women in the class protested that they were not, in fact, feminists, but the gunman opened fire, killing fourteen of them. Afterward there were competing versions of the event's significance: a feminist interpretation sought to explain the tragedy as an extreme example of the violence and misogyny experienced daily by women, while the mainstream media worked to distance the event from other forms of violence against women.

Main Brides is set in the days immediately following the killings when the city was in collective mourning, and these kinds of questions were being debated in various media.

² Especially in the work of Mordecai Richler, Marie-Claire Blais, and Michel Tremblay.

³ The city fascinates one to the point of dizziness. Inexhaustible reservoir for the imagination, it creates its own myths of blasphemy and seduction. It sustains all comparisons, offering itself as a range of sensations which oscillate between horror and utopia, between exaltation and disintegration.... The more one approaches its centre, the downtown, the more the patriarchal propaganda becomes violent and unrelenting, like a fist, a neon sign, a hard sidewalk. (Author's translation)

⁴ In the spring of 1987 Fleming and Lapointe reclaimed an abandoned Montreal theatre, renovated it, and fitted it with a multimedia installation which addressed "the rapport between the spectacle as a form of social discourse and the way in which society goes about marginalising (criminalising) ostensibly non-productive elements of itself, and the way women are, *a priori*, made culpable within this model" (Fleming and Lapointe 20).

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