

“Feeling Women’s Culture:
Women’s Music, Lesbian Feminism,
and the Impact of Emotional Memory”

First off, I want to add my voice to those thanking Sara and Nick and Tanya and Amy and everyone for all their work this weekend. Second, I want to thank everyone who’s already presented for your inspiring work, and especially the performers—all of them—whose ideas and artistry continues to mean so much to me. Third, I want to thank John Waters and David Savran for their keynotes, and admit that both of them are very hard acts to follow.

A couple other preliminary things: My title hasn’t changed. I really am going to talk about women’s music and lesbian feminism. My aim here is to rehearse those sounds through memory. I thought a lot about playing music clips and showing images; I even drafted a PowerPoint. But then I realized that I want to rely instead on the sound of storytelling, to conjure for you through my *voice* what Sara on Friday called “the soundtrack of my politics.” Also, in various earlier versions of this talk, playing some of the women’s music I want to address backfired, in part because it doesn’t serve up for everyone the same affective or aural memories that *I* feel when I hear it. And honestly, I couldn’t bear the looks of antipathy or boredom I saw on some of those faces when the music played. Those reactions made me feel too vulnerable. So—just me talking, telling stories.

Finally, I want you to know, since it’s come up so frequently this weekend: when I was in high school, my best friend Cliff and I—he was gay and I was a lesbian but neither one of us knew it yet (about ourselves or each other)—Cliff and I would hang out at our

homes listening to the cast album of *Company* over and over again. So although in college, I found and formed myself through women's music, my eventual coming out was foreshadowed by Sondheim. Little did I know how prominent he would become later in my life!

This talk considers lesbian feminist cultural production in the 1970s as an activist project fueled by what were then potent, newly expressed emotions. This “women’s culture” has yet to be given its due in feminist or LGBTQ scholarship. As an erstwhile lesbian feminist myself, I’d like to recuperate the visionary cultural work which, I believe, was caught in the cross-hairs of political and academic history, falling victim to the post-structuralist theoretical critique and becoming a scapegoat of sorts for a new academic field trying hard to establish itself as legitimate and serious. Given this constellation of historical pressures, lesbian feminist cultural production—by which I mean women’s music, women’s coffeehouses and restaurants, women’s theatre and performance, and women’s presses and periodicals, in all of which “women’s” was a thinly veiled substitution for the less easily spoken “lesbian”—were too quickly dismissed as essentialist and retrograde by 1980s and ‘90s feminist and queer theorists who adopted post-structuralism’s suspicion of experience and identity politics, myself included. (I want to borrow Brian’s gesture of looking back at myself from another moment in history, and remind you and myself that I’m implicated in my own critique.)

My goal, then, is to retrieve 1970s lesbian feminism from the dustbin of queer history, where it languishes as a relic of a time when “lesbian” was supposedly a coherent, and as such, exclusive identity, too white, too middle-class, and too sexually conservative, critics say, to serve as an historical model for the new queer sex radicalism and its rejection of bounded identity categories. I of course had my own queer theory-inspired rejection of

even my own experience of women's culture. But the passage of time urges me to recall 1970s lesbian feminist cultural and political activism as vital, lustful, intellectually acute, and more culturally diverse than it's been described during the last 20 or 25 years of U.S. academic and activist discourse. I aim to launch this reconsideration by trying to evoke how it *felt* to be part of that moment in history.

I continue to find myself jolted by 35-year-old memories that still inspire my activism, simply through the depth of feeling the events I recall inspire. Affect studies, which has become such an acute area of inquiry in feminist and queer theory over the last decade, provides a useful framework for my investigation.¹ I'm interested in how the sharp feelings that motivated my own politics—along with those of so many other lesbian feminists in the '70s—were discounted before scholars really had a chance to analyze what all those heightened emotions, often in community-organized moments of performance, accomplished. My goal in this talk is to describe those emotions in some detail, so that I can tease out how the feelings provoked by dancing in lesbian bars and attending women's music performances, especially, moved me and many of my contemporaries into the political activism and systems of belief that transformed our lives.

Women's music albums and performances were among the most audible, visible, powerful examples of 1970s underground cultural production. Late-20th and early 21st century examples of U.S. popular culture that caricature women who adopted lesbian feminism's credo and that represent the movement as a naive, stereotypically gendered politic, most often use women's music as their touchstone, representing as it does a powerful signifier of the time and its style. (I'm thinking in particular of *The Kathy and Mo Show* and various *Saturday Night Live* sketches.) Generations of young people recognize the moment women's music recalls mostly through representations of unshaven women adorned with

labryses and amulets, celebrating goddesses in alcohol-free, scent-free coffee houses where they ate macrobiotic food and were entertained by monotone, untalented lesbian poets who droned for hours at poor quality microphones. Certainly, that stereotype was based in a partial truth. Yet it also reduces to caricature a culture that offered a rich, conflicted, and nuanced sense of community. For many American women who came out in the mid- to late-70s, going to women's music concerts and frequenting lesbian bars helped us relocate ourselves as subjects of history.

The case made against women's culture criticized experience as the foundation of lesbian feminist politics. And the notion that women could or should produce a separate (or separatist) culture was derided by post-structuralist scholars who believed that gender and culture are constructs of history and, as a result, fluid and changeable rather than transcendent and unique. This academic challenge to experience offered important insights into what, by the 1990s, had become an unfortunate didacticism about identity.² Alice Echols's influential essay, "The Feminism of Yin and Yang," was the one of first to identify feminism in liberal, cultural, and materialist strands; her low regard for cultural feminism became enormously persuasive.³ Once the criticism of cultural feminism was launched by commentators like Echols, abandoning its tenets became popular. The very emotions that had fueled the movement—public feelings of liberation, self-knowledge, and sisterhood—were soon impugned as non-theoretical and hegemonic.

But lesbian feminism had always been a theorized practice. From Shulamith Firestone's potent *The Dialectic of Sex* to writing by collectives like the Furies and the Combahee River Collective, lesbian feminists combined Marxism, socialism, materialism, and third world feminism in their theoretical work.⁴ And the term "lesbian" was never a stable identity or label. The sadly late Adrienne Rich's foundational essay, "Compulsory

Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” was nothing if not an effort to parse “lesbian,” to make it more fluid and open, so that more women could organize politically and affectively under its banner.⁵ Men used the threat of lesbianism to keep women in line, creating the image of an unfeminine, unwanted person who no straight woman would want to emulate. But when feminist anger in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s reached its boiling point, radical women transformed that very stereotype into a positive rallying cry. “WE ARE THE WOMEN THAT MEN HAVE WARNED US ABOUT,” Robin Morgan shouted in all caps in her prophetic essay, “Goodbye to All That” (1970).⁶ Likewise, the Radicalesbians wrote in their foundational screed, “The Woman-Identified Woman” (1970), “What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion.”⁷ Many 1970s lesbians defined their identities through their politics and resistant life-choices, as well as or even instead of their sexual desire. As journalist Ariel Levy said, in her recent “Lesbian Nation” article in *The New Yorker*, “Now, when the phrase ‘lesbian mom’ is a commonplace, it’s hard to imagine a time when female homosexuality was imbued with a countercultural connotation so potent that women were drawn to it by ideology rather than by desire. Similarly, if you are a young gay woman today, it can be difficult to understand the idea of organizing your entire existence around your sexual preference.”⁸

In fact, it’s easy to forget how differently some lesbians lived our lives not so very long ago. Gayle Kimball, tracing what she then described as the “women’s renaissance of the seventies,” said, “We are witnessing a potentially revolutionary proliferation of women’s culture: films, music, magazines, presses, books, and bookstores; coffee houses, theatre groups, and credit unions; health clinics, women’s centers, caucuses in academic societies, and women’s-studies [sic] programs; shelters for battered women, centers for displaced homemakers, political caucuses, minority women’s groups, and international feminist groups.

...”⁹ The bookstores and restaurants and theatre groups offered a material location in which to enact and embody what the Radicalesbians called “the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women’s liberation, and the basis for the cultural revolution.”¹⁰ Much of the women’s culture Kimball enumerates and that the Radicalesbians presaged was owned, operated, and supported by lesbian feminists, working in collectives, living in cooperatives, and defining their lives by the politics they newly embraced. Women’s culture was emphatically not what came to be called lesbian “lifestyle” politics toward the end of the 20th century. The credit unions and coffee shops lesbian feminists frequented meant to undermine patriarchy at its capitalist core, by developing a countercultural movement that would offer a gender-equitable, lesbian sex-positive way to live off the grid of—rather than happily within—mainstream dominant culture.

Saying “I am a lesbian feminist” indicated common cause with all of these political and cultural pursuits. Saying “I’m a lesbian feminist” also meant you belonged to a community, however imaginary. Identity might be a practice rather than ontology, and community might be symbolic, rather than functional, but those myths of coherence and belonging productively fueled the political movement with focus, hope, and camaraderie.¹¹ Lesbian feminist community in the 1970s, as any other community, came with its own set of norms and conventions, exclusions and elitisms. But those exclusions shifted over time and place, and were always conscious and negotiated. Men and boys over 12 weren’t allowed at the Michigan Womyn’s [sic] Music festival, for example, but that policy always was and remains hotly debated.¹² The history that’s been told of women’s culture has been oversimplified to imply a lack of healthy dissent or resistance from within the ranks.

To redress this history, I want to draw here on my own emotional archive, experimenting with a form I call “critical memoir” to underline that in addition to mining my own affective memories of being constituted by gender, race, and sexuality, my argument means to be analytical and situated, considering cultural history and the expressive artifacts that shaped and continue to ground my identity.¹³ I’m using personal narrative to consider the relationship between individuals and communities, and to explore in anecdotal as well as theoretical detail how one lesbian feminist self-formation happened at a particular moment in time. My own experience isn’t necessarily exemplary; in fact, I’m interested in demonstrating how history trickles down rather serendipitously into personal experience, in ways that are often cataclysmic, but that we can only recognize as such after the fact, only by looking back. My experiments with critical memoir demonstrate my belief in personal narrative’s renewed vitality and relevance to our on-going effort to change public political consciousness. This return to the emotional archive of women’s music, in particular, documents the affective labor required to make myself and to be made by the force of collective as well as individual moment and will.

Let me try to trace this very particular personal history of feeling through music. Very early in my coming out process in the mid-’70s, as an undergraduate at Boston University, desperate to find a place for myself in the world, I caught wind of a protest to be staged against the virulently anti-gay activist and Florida orange hawker Anita Bryant. I found my way to Boston’s Copley Square, where what seemed to me to be a huge crowd of people were gathered on the green in front of Trinity Church, directly across from the hotel in which Bryant was staying. As I found a space for myself on the ground behind some women who seemed friendly, I wrapped my arms around my knees and listened to the anti-Bryant political speeches, absorbing the critique with a huge intellectual and personal thirst.

But when the platform speakers began to lead everyone in refrains from the gay and lesbian political songbook, I felt my own outsidership and my simple desire to know those lyrics most keenly. The songs were Tom Robinson's anthem "Glad to be Gay" and Cris Williamson's "Song of the Soul," both easy, tuneful paeans to the gay and lesbian subjects who crowded in front of the stage, forming themselves in opposition to dominant culture. More than the political speeches of the moment, which I'm sure were equally stirring, I remember the music and how happy it made me to think that this was a political movement in which people sang together. [*Sing a couple of bars . . .*]

"Song of the Soul" was one of the most popular cuts on Williamson's 1975 hit album, *The Changer and the Changed*. The album's iconic cover showed the handsome Williamson posing, loose-limbed, happy, and appealing, among the stunted cacti of Joshua Tree National Park, and reads as evidence of lesbian feminism's delight at realigning itself with nature as a place of celebration and resistance against dominant culture.¹⁴ Williamson's sartorial and musical folk stylings caught the political commitment of the '60s and translated it for '70s lesbian feminism. Her songs rang with what we would later call New Age cadences, and their lyrics were odes to women-loving women. *The Changer and the Changed* sold a remarkable number of copies, given its very specific audience, during an historical moment in which women's music circulated mostly through word-of-mouth (there were no advertisements and no internet); it became one of the best-selling records ever released by an independent label.¹⁵

Thirty years later, teaching Judith Halberstam's essay on women's music then and now in a course on queer performance, I learned that my students knew nothing about Williamson or her album. Halberstam discusses the song "Sweet Woman," from *The Changer and the Changed*, and compares it with a rock rendition The Butchies—as you know, a lesbian

queercore band from Durham, North Carolina—created decades later.¹⁶ To help them understand The Butchies’ nod to women’s music, I played the original song for my students. Through the several-minute number, I could feel my face flush with memory and nostalgia, even as I knew most of my students were, at best, politely interested, rather than moved. Hearing Williamson’s song brought rushing back my memories of a moment in lesbian feminist history they couldn’t imagine. But it’s not Cris Williamson whom I remember. The chords of her song “Sweet Woman” remind me palpably of the more quotidian moments of the lesbian feminist culture-building in which I participated: afternoons of stuffing envelopes with flyers for political rallies on the dining room table in our collective, six-women household in Allston-Brighton; of cooking meals for one another, our turns dictated by the chore wheel hanging on our refrigerator; of shameless flirting with housemates who were in relationships with someone else, staging clandestine meetings in bathrooms for quick gropes and deep kisses; of dancing together at bars we refused to leave until the lights came up, sobering us with their fluorescent glare but never diminishing all that tremendous erotic and political feeling we enflamed in one another.

In the mid-1970s, lesbian feminism was still a subculture. The bars were one of the few public spaces available, and certainly one of the only places in which we could perform our sexual attractions and intrigues outside of our homes. Evenings at the bars became a welcome release from the feminist political work under whose auspices many lesbian feminists organized their lives. When I finally met friends who eased the process of my own coming out through feminist activism, they took me to two lesbian bars, the Saints and Somewhere, located around the corner from each other in the depths of downtown Boston. Prior to my first visit to the Saints, my lesbian identity had finally been declared and even consummated in some uninstructed sex with a woman for the first time, an event engineered

on a cold Boston night in which a snowstorm that kept me from traveling home required her to be generous with her bed. But my sexual and political identity was still so new I felt wholly transparent, a fraud easily sniffed out by what I imagined as the lesbian authenticity police, especially at the Saints, where the bartenders seemed so weathered in their own sexuality.

My emotions were heightened my first night at the bar, thrilled by having arrived at last at the beginning of a journey I'd wanted to make in an unarticulated, inchoate way for so long. But mixed with my excitement was paralyzing fear and embarrassment. I truly didn't know how to act; I was certain that I wasn't moving, dressing, or speaking correctly. I followed the model of my friends, slightly more seasoned than I was in knowing how to order at the bar, how and when to make eye contact, when to shoulder through a crowd, and when to hang back and wait for a channel to open up through these jostling lesbian bodies. I watched them, my friends, and tried to learn when it was okay to look, without appearing to stare, at all these women with whom I suddenly, presumptively had something in common. Under cover of those windowless rooms, with their peeling vinyl booths and cigarette-burned tables, we crowded together to drink watery beer, served by bartenders who intimidated us with their butch indifference to our barely contained excitement at being so putatively free. And we danced. 1977 was well before the Indigo Girls, with their proud lesbian love songs available for purchase in mainstream stores like Tower Records.

In the bars, we danced instead to songs with lyrics that seemed coded just for us. One of the first anthems that lead me to the floor was Sister Sledge's "We Are Family," which brought everyone to their feet, eager to wave their arms over their heads and shout together in a show of solidarity, not necessarily for feminism, but for just *being there*. Even then, many lesbians in those dank bars with their sticky bathrooms and smoky mirrors were

survivors, who found their way to these unmarked spaces and arrived sweaty and triumphant. We danced to the tinkling overture of Gloria Gaynor's "I will Survive," overlooking the lyrics about changing the lock and returning the key and rewriting the song as our own personal declarations of surviving a patriarchy that would have had us straitjacketed into marriages with men or maybe even dead. Those dance floors staged our politics and our desires. They encouraged us to look at one another, and the most brazen among us did, letting their eyes travel the length of a body, to linger on the places where our ubiquitous flannel shirts loosened from our jeans and showed some of the flesh about which we could finally be openly fascinated and desirous. The bars let me inhabit a body that for too long carried self-hatred as self-protection. Through the heady pleasure of the music, I could experiment with a bodily connection to myself and other women that began to stir an articulated emotional life.

We went to the bars almost every night the first few years after I came out. But during the day, we immersed ourselves in the political work of a movement whose nascent theory undergirded our evening's pleasure. All the activities in which I participated then were run non-hierarchically; desire, commitment, and a willingness to work were all that was required. As feminist historians Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon say, "Women's liberation gave rise to a variety of woman-owned and woman-operated enterprises . . . In the early years of the movement, these operated with ultra-democratic principles characteristic of the 1960s: the businesses were nonprofit, everyone was encouraged to learn all the skills, and there were few if any wage differentials. The enterprises were often run with collective decision-making, and they sought above all to serve and empower women."¹⁷ This exceedingly open, adamantly non-expert way of conducting business eventually made it difficult for lesbian feminist culture to survive beyond the first flush of its initial success.

But being valued without judgment was enormously enabling for the women who worked with these organizations.

Women's music was then the preeminent form of lesbian feminist cultural production, an underground pleasure to which my lesbian feminist friends and I turned for one of the only available public affirmations of our sexual and political lives. The first women's music concert I attended in was in the Sanders Theatre on the Harvard campus, across the river from where I lived in Allston-Brighton. I didn't know the performer, a woman named Holly Near, but my friends had already keyed into the cultural network her music represented. Walking into Harvard's Memorial Hall and the theatre it housed, I was shocked to be surrounded by a crowd of almost exclusively women who weren't drinking and who were moving through a well-lit public space instead of a dark bar. Holding tightly to the people I knew as we passed among strangers calling to one another with excitement, I again experienced that frisson of inauthenticity. I was sure that something on my face or in my bearing would reveal me as a fraud in the very environment through which I so wanted to move as inconspicuous and typical, as just another lesbian feminist among the glorious hordes assembled that evening.

But once Near stepped out onto the stage and opened her mouth to sing, I understood that I would find my way among these women. Near's was the first lesbian feminist body I ever saw publicly adored, the first I saw use theatrical charisma to pull together a rag-tag audience into my first inkling of what a community might feel like. Near was a brilliant performer, full of old-fashioned stage presence honed from her years performing in more conventional musical theatre and touring with Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, and others in a show Fonda produced called "Free the Army." Her voice was

brassy and bold, colored with the cadences of Broadway that made even the folk songs she sang ring a bit more brightly.

Near knew how to put over a song, creating with her voice and her address a proud community of women. In fact, the major record labels hadn't been interested in her material because, as one company representative told her advocates at the time, she "wouldn't become a successful pop vocalist because there was no element of submission in [her] voice."¹⁸ (How's that for "resoundingly queer"?) At her concert that night in Cambridge, Near performed us into our lesbian feminism through her physical display of ease and pride and her distinct and palpable pleasure in singing among us. Her music and her performance lifted us up and out of ourselves in an ephemeral but powerful moment of belonging and community.¹⁹

It's perhaps not surprising that women's music became one of the most powerful and lasting forms of lesbian feminist cultural production. Most commentators say that women's music began as a named phenomenon in 1969, when openly lesbian folk singer Maxine Feldman first sang "Angry Atthis" in gay and lesbian bars.²⁰ Her plea for recognition and her plaint against sexism and homophobia became the first women's music record to be released as a 45-rpm single, produced by lesbian comedian Robin Tyler. Tyler successfully toured the country with her comedy act in the 1970s, performing at colleges and universities. Feldman opened for her by singing "Angry Atthis."²¹ Shortly after, the Michigan Womym's Music Festival quickly became synonymous with women's music culture, and by the late '70s, the burgeoning sphere of women's entertainment and feminist politics had prompted the establishment of companies like Olivia Records and Redwood Records, which was Holly Near's recording home.²²

Women's music, like the rest of women's culture in the '70s, experimented with new ways of valuing art and work. It was mostly produced by people with no prior experience, women determined to make up new organizational structures through an idealized mix of politics and pragmatism.²³ Most of these women were "amateurs" in the true sense of the word; they loved the work and were driven by a culture of enthusiasm and desire.²⁴ Despite what Naomi Weisstein, who performed with the Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band, calls "enthusiasm-in-place-of-expertise (or 'militant amateurism'),"²⁵ women's music production companies at the time took their mission quite seriously.²⁶ They knew how much lesbian feminist communities needed to see these women musicians perform, to validate identities that had no public mirrors in which to see themselves affirmed.

Describing a performance at the San Diego Women's Music Festival in 1975, Near said her audience came prepared to "listen to the music that many had waited all their lives to hear."²⁷ Since lesbian feminists were invisible in dominant culture, the idea that we could speak or sing to one another in large public forums seemed both exciting and astonishing, and made it worth all the unpaid labor required to bring these musicians to town.

Women's music was pedagogical in the 1970s. In addition to building community through the fervent feeling inspired by its performers, the music itself delivered political meanings in a folk/popular style that taught audiences the issues and guided us toward activism. Before I heard Near sing, I didn't know about the freedom struggles in El Salvador or South Africa. Before I saw Susan Freundlich signing her concerts for the hearing-impaired, I hadn't thought about what it would mean to be differently abled in American culture.²⁸ Women's music provided moments of intense public and private pleasure and also schooled us in the simplest precepts of lesbian feminism. Those performers were our teachers as well as our heroes.

Women's music and other cultural productions of the moment let many people access transformative emotions that propelled them into politically activist work. I palpably recall the tremors of wonder and awe that coursed through Holly Near's and Cris Williamson's and other women's music concerts. Hundreds of women gathered in Boston during those years to take pleasure in music that spoke *to* them and *of* them in large public spaces. Many of them were white, college-educated, and middle-class, but many of them were also women of color and women who paid for their tickets on the sliding fee scale through which lesbian feminists made more widely accessible the culture they built. Many of the performers were women of color; Gwen Avery and Linda Tillery, Mary Watkins and Pat Parker, Toshi Reagon and Big Lovely, and Casselberry and Duprée regularly performed, as well as Near and Williamson, and Alix Dobkin and Meg Christian and many others.

Finally, the emotional archive women's music calls forth for me and hopefully for many others taps into a moment in political history in which *feelings* were vital for refashioning subjectivities, and when alternative cultural production was a place to evoke and capture those founding emotions. Lesbian feminist communities were fraught and emphatically partial in the 1970s, but they were rich with the buzz of the zeitgeist, with the drenched atmosphere of political fermentation and urgency. They were protective and sustaining before they became dogmatic and confining. And they need the same scholarly excavation and remembering brought to other aspects of LGBT life.

I want to end this talk in a slightly different register, with one last summarizing description of my own emotional archive. This bit was written in a workshop Deb Margolin taught at UT-Austin when she visited us there; the only person in this room who's ever heard it is Jaclyn Pryor, with whom I performed a version under other auspices. I want to

dedicate these last few paragraphs to my late friend Paula Ettelbrick, who was one of the women I danced with in those bars:

For a nickel, I'd tell you about all the women I've ever loved, as a way of spinning out for you a story about a moment in time, a moment of passion and politics and performance, a moment when my own flesh collided with history through the flesh of others. A nickel is a small price to pay for memory: the terror of memory is that it could be genetic, not in a restricted, familial way, but genetic in a deep, community, cultural way, like the imprints of a common history that mark us all, but differently.

For a nickel, I could tell you stories from my life in which you might see yourself, in which we might feel these words and memories imprint us with a present that might infinitesimally shift our DNA. These impressions might change the intimate makeup of what we then have available to pass along, not through biology, but through the codes of culture that our stories represent. I'll tell you these stories not to unburden myself, by no means to confess, but to let words linger between us that might let us feel close over our inevitable distance. Elin Diamond, after Freud, calls this the history of our identifications. For me, after no one, it's a history of how who I've loved is what I am. The story is a debt I pay to women who couldn't possibly know then who they were shaping, a debt I owe for their generosity, their grace, and the gift of my own resilience.

I want to dance with every woman I've ever loved. Sometimes, I see us all assembled in the first lesbian bar I ever danced in, the Saints, in downtown Boston, a place transformed in the snowy evenings from a business man's sandwich and beer bar into a haven for flannel-shirted lesbians learning how to make lives with each other. I imagine myself in the center of the dance space, my crisp white shirt glowing under the purple black light along with my

teeth, shining like beacons out of my face while the disco ball twirls and reflects little chinks of light onto my jeans.

I imagine my hands outstretched in love and forgiveness, inviting each of my old lovers to join me in the circle for a turn around the floor, to return to the embrace, the first embrace we ever shared, that tender, lustful first moment of contact with the bodies we wanted and wanted to be near. I imagine the hope in that moment, the recovery of the past in the present, the wholeness of recapturing those moments of fleshfulness in the place, the bar, the Saints, that first gave me my body. I imagine dancing with these women with ease and grace, with all the desire of those for whom the mingling of their bodies transforms them into a dazzling spectacle of light and love.

I imagine putting my arms around these women once again, embracing what we were to each other, choreographed by the sounds of the moment—Sister Sledge, Gloria Gaynor, Sylvester, Cris Williamson, all the women's music stars and singers whose melodies we captured in our dark little bars and made our own. I imagine feeling whole in my life, recollecting (or re-collecting) all the pieces of myself I gave away to each of them, not to take myself back, but to hold those memories between us, shimmering in the light of the disco ball, to remember that what we are is always only made up of pieces of each other. I imagine myself and my body with its middle-age imperfections meeting my ex-lovers in the glorious imperfections of theirs, realizing how imperfect we were then and loving each other for it again.

I ache to stretch those moments out live, instead of replaying them in my mind, images, memories so sharp, so full, so replete with longing and with loss that even scotch only polishes them, instead of diluting them. I ache to feel again the bodies that have lain beside me, knowing that no matter how deeply we touch, how intently we look, how

honestly we talk, we can't fill the space between, not really, not with anything more than this fleeting sense of wonder and love. I ache to recreate those moments, to uncover their geography, to explore their archeology, knowing that only wishes recreate them, never the *will*. I ache for the clarity and sweet pain of those moments when I measure how much I'm alive by what I can never recover. I ache for the failure of language; I ache for the continual attempt to try.

Thanks for listening.

¹ For explications and examples of affect studies across disciplines, see Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, and Ann Reynolds, eds., *Political Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 2010) and Erin Hurley, *Theatre & Feeling* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

² For an investigation of the dynamics of lesbian feminist dogmatism and cultural production, see Stacy Wolf, "All About Eve: Apple Island and the Fictions of Lesbian Community," *New Theatre Quarterly* 10:37 (1994), 28-32.

³ Alice Echols, "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang," *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow Christine Stansell and, Sharon Thompson (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 440-59.

⁴ See Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1970); for information about the DC-based Furies collective, see <http://washingtonart.com/beltway/furies.html>, accessed January 22, 2012; and for the Combahee River Collectives' manifesto, see <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>, accessed January 22, 2012.

⁵ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*, 5:4 (1980), 631-660.

⁶ Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to all That," *Going Too Far* (NY: Random House Vintage Books, 1977), 121-30.

⁷ Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 107.

⁸ Ariel Levy, "Lesbian Nation: When Gay Women Took to the Road," *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2009, 33; http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/03/02/090302fa_fact_levy. Accessed January 18, 2012.

⁹ Gayle Kimball, *Women's Culture: The Women's Renaissance of the Seventies* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 23.

¹⁰ Radicalesbians 109.

¹¹ See, for example, Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), on the importance of emotion to political movement.

¹² At "In Amerika They Call Us Dykes: Lesbians Lives in the 70s," the historic conference revisiting lesbian feminism at the Center for Gay and Lesbian Studies at the City University of New York in October 2010, the question of gender separatism at the Michigan festival was still the most provocative topic addressed. See the conference schedule, archived at www.70slesbians.org. Accessed January 18, 2012.

¹³ This essay is part of a larger project-in-process tentatively titled *From Flannel to Fleece: Women's Cultural Productions, 1970-1990*.

¹⁴ Cris Williamson, *The Changer and the Changed* (Oakland, CA: Olivia Records, 1975).

¹⁵ *AfterEllen.com* reports that it has sold over 500,000 copies since its release. See Sarah Warn, "Back in the Day," May 5, 2005; <http://www.afterellen.com/column/2005/6/backintheday.html>. Accessed January 18, 2012.

¹⁶ See Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, eds. *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 79.

¹⁸ Near 79.

¹⁹ See my *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

²⁰ For information on the history of women's music, see, among other scholarship, Nancy S. Love, "Singing for our Lives: Women's Music and Democratic Politics," *Hypatia* 17:4 (2002), 71-94; Bonnie Morris, *Eden Built by Eves: The Culture of Women's Music Festivals* (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 1999); Boden Sandstrom, "Women's Music: Passing the Legacy," *Women's Culture in a New Era: A Feminist Revolution?* Gayle Kimball, ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press 2005), 99-135; Ruth Scovill, "Women's Music," *Women's Culture: Renaissance of the Seventies*, Gayle Kimball, ed. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 148-162; and Arlene Stein, "Androgyny Goes Pop: but is it Lesbian Music?" *Sisters, Sexperts, and Queens: Beyond Lesbian Nation* (New York: Plume, 1993), 96-109.

²¹ Rebecca Krefting, "Robin Tyler: Chuckling Towards a Queer Intersectional Politics," unpublished manuscript, 22.

²² See <http://www.michfest.com/>. Olivia Records became a lesbian-oriented travel company, and is now planning to celebrate its 40th anniversary as an independent entity (in 2013); see www.olivia.com.

²³ Even the vocabulary, at the time, was newly circulating. Near tells a story about insisting, in her touring contract, that all housing for her and her band be "chemical-free space," to avoid the criminal implications of the drug culture rampant in some communities at the time. She says this was because she didn't want to run into trouble with police when she toured. Near recalls, "Often when we did benefits or community events in a town, folks would generously offer their homes for me and my group to stay at. This saved costly hotel expenses. We arrived at one woman's home a little early and found her doing last-minute cleaning. She had her arms full of containers from under the kitchen sink. She apologized and said, 'I'm sorry, I was just told it is in your contract that you need chemically free space.' Bless her heart, she was literally taking all the chemicals out of her house" (Near 157). The amusing anecdote also underlines that language that has come to be universally understood and representative of particular kinds of community practices and mores ("chemical-free," "scent-free," "smoke-free," etc.) were in the mid-70s just being established as the new lexicon.

²⁴ Thanks to Erin Hurley for this insight.

²⁵ Naomi Weisstein, "Days of Celebration and Resistance: The Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band, 1970-1973," *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 306.

²⁶ And many went on to become sought after sound engineers (Sandy Stone and Boden Sandstrom), lighting designers (Leni Schwendinger), and music producers and distributors.

²⁷ Near 107.

²⁸ See her website at <http://www.susanfreundlich.com/html/about.html>. Accessed January 18, 2012.

Freundlich in fact pioneered the now common practice of signing for the hearing-impaired at music events.