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### MICHÈLE PUJOL: WAYS FOR WOMEN TO BE

A long-legged girl with beautiful brown eyes looks thoughtfully out of the photograph taken of Michèle Pujol when she was a teenager living with her parents in Tahiti. Those eyes look out at me now in the last photograph I have of her, standing with her partner Brook outside the cabin on Salt Spring Island where Michèle died eleven weeks later on August 2, 1997.

Anyone who ever has worked with Michèle knows her integrity, her fierce loyalties, her meticulous and beautiful mind, her unrelenting solidarities with those who struggle for justice, and her ability to oppose critically and energetically what she regarded as wrong or inadequate. I have felt both her opposition and her support, and the extraordinary clarity behind each. I remember her as my colleague, at a time when I didn't think I would have any.

We both loved our work: she, a feminist economist, and I, a feminist literary scholar. And the work we shared in developing Women's Studies

was to make our other loves possible, to make our lives possible, to make so much more possible to the lives of women. Michèle's vision was an active and activist praxis, a focussing of critical consciousness on practical activities. There was nothing outside her discerning and demanding feminism, including the relations among women. She would show up with organic foods, seek out and support women and men estranged in our communities, weed an old lot, carry water from the river to sun-wilted plants, and embrace the opportunities to learn from other cultures. Her vision included a steady tenderness for gardens, for other people's children, for friends, for the beauties created around us and by us, and for those who did that creating in daily activities, politics and the arts.

When I met Michèle on the stairs at the University of Manitoba, she asked in her direct way if I was a real appointment or just term, and nodded at my reply. That was in 1984, and she had been here two years, teaching in Economics and Women's Studies. Imagine my surprise to find a feminist and an out lesbian, not undercover at the university, but engaging the people and structures there as directly as she had spoken to me. Right away, I knew lesbian and feminist were lovely ways for women to be.

From 1984 to 1988, Michèle coordinated Women's Studies, bringing in the Major and wresting from the university the economic basis for the Program. Michèle researched the position of women in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Manitoba, contributed to the proposal for the Prairie Endowed Chair in Women's Studies, signed the Human Rights Complaints against Manitoba universities for systemic discrimination against all women, and refused to separate academic Women's Studies from activist community participation. I remember her clear voice in one Women's Studies Committee meeting where we were being asked for a small contribution for a community-organized Lesbian Issues Conference. To the objection to funding a conference that was not academic, Michèle pointed out that lesbians experienced discrimination in our own Women's Studies classes and that the work to change that discrimination was being done in the community. So a pittance from

our tiny budget went to that Conference. Michèle worked in such projects as the Canadian Women's Music and Cultural Festivals that were held in 1995, '96 and '97, the Human Rights Lobby for including sexual orientation as one of the areas where discrimination is prohibited (now part of the Manitoba Human Rights Act), the Manitoba Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Winnipeg Native Family Development Group, and the first three Gay Pride Parades. She was an artist, a writer and poet, a gardener, and for four years in Winnipeg, a Taiko drummer. When the University of Manitoba failed to rehire Michèle in 1988 (one of the wondrous ways universities have of eliminating principled opposition), she worked at the checkout in Woolco and finished her PhD dissertation, published in 1992 as *Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Early Economic Thought*. After Michèle was hired by Women's Studies at the University of Victoria in 1990, she returned to Winnipeg several times to work on her research on pay equity. On July 6, 1997, her friends and colleagues jammed the West End Cultural Centre for performances of Fabuki Daiko and others to celebrate her life and to support her healing, just a month before her healing ended.

Michèle's time in Winnipeg had been wondrous in terms of people and energy, but also punishing; before she moved to Victoria, she told me of a dream she had of driving on past the University of Manitoba and of seeing ahead the fields of green grasses. I can only imagine what it took for her to turn her battered and aged Volvo in there every day, to call her press conferences against the administration, to take on the Senate and the President, and to push even her progressive colleagues faster than they might have proceeded. But if she was hurt in Winnipeg, and I think she was, it was not her determined resistance that hurt her, but the oppressions she resisted. The conclusion I take is not for us to go easy and adopt a subdued compliance, but for us to recognize that oppression kills, quickly or slowly.

When I talk or write of feminism, I am thinking of Michèle. And when I remember her (which is every minute), I know what is important in feminism: the people struggling to change the

material systems of making meanings which oppress women and damage everyone. Feminism is women doing the work of making our lives matter; theory and knowledge are just how we talk about that. What I care about and try to live is the embodied feminism, the transformative feminism, that I met when I met Michèle. What I have learned is that there is no other kind. Each one of us counts.

Michèle was an artist who supported the arts, a political activist who worked in solidarity, a feminist who fought for women, a teacher who was a doer, an anti-racist who worked for us all. She was a thinker, a fierce critic, and the best kind of friend - one who challenged us to take up who we want to be and to work actively for the world we want to live in - and to do it now.

*Keith Louise Fulton*

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#### MICHÈLE PUJOL, THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA AND BEYOND

Even now, a year and a half after Michèle Pujol's death, I sometimes think I've caught a glimpse of her as I turn the corner of the Women's Studies corridor at the University of Victoria where we were colleagues since 1990. For me, one of the daily pleasures of working on the first floor of Clearihue B-Block was running into Michèle, even intercepting her as she passed my office, wanting to know what she thought of shared problems or concerns. I needed her clear-minded, steady vision of social justice and her unwavering attention to the myriad oppressions that structure our University environment. Not just a friend, she also provided for me - and, I would venture, for many people drawn to her - both a reality check and a constant challenge to personal complacencies and wavering commitments. Her proximity was a pleasure, but it was also one of the rigours of my working life, and one I do not wish to lose. Not surprising that she still inhabits my dream life; were her potent presence to disappear from our academic corridor, we would be much diminished.

At the memorial event held at UVic after her death, student after student rose to speak of