

Creative individualists get a chance to network, trade tips

Are you ready to get serious about self-promotion? Christina Manolescu and Nancy (N.A.T.) Grant want to know. Because if you are, they've got the creative networking group for you. It's called Invisible Cities Network, and it's about to make a pitch for high visibility with a day-long public conference next Saturday showcasing the work of its members.

The event is being billed as ICN's 2005 Book and Creative Arts Conference. This year's hot topic is The Art of Marketing and Networking. High-profile participants in this unique shmooze fest include the aforementioned Grant, who is a detective novelist by trade, Gazette cartoonist Terry Mosher (Aislin), shopping expert Sandra Phillips, filmmaker Peter Wintonick, musician Jean-François Fortier and journalist Marilyn Vanderstaay.

The Invisible Cities Network began with a four-way chat over coffee in a Plateau café about 4½ years ago. After that meeting, on



PAT DONNELLY

an April Fool's Day, Manolescu and Cristina Perissinotto decided to found a company of kindred literary souls who would meet regularly and keep in touch by Internet, all in hopes of making themselves better known through the dissemination of self-published works.

That group now has an email list of more than 250 members. Perissinotto has since moved to Ottawa. But Manolescu has kept the flame alive, along with her many newfound friends. And she has retained the original title, Invisible Cities, chosen by Perissinotto, who picked it up from a book about a metaphysical

journey, penned by Italo Calvino.

When people object to the title, which seems to imply a studied anonymity, Manolescu tells them, "There are so many of us that seem invisible. And yet we are here."

Unclaimed treasures, all. Many still suffering from the cruel sting of rejection slips. Previous ICN events have been held in cafés with limited seating capacity. The ticket price would include a chapbook of the work of the members.

The conference, the organization's first major event, will also be a marketplace, with a wide array of self-published books, CDs and magazines for sale. Lunch and lunchtime entertainment are included in the \$20 admission price.

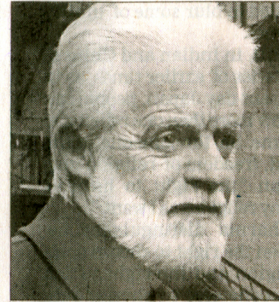
Manolescu, a woman in her late 50s who was born in London, England, says she has spent her life "with a foot in each continent." She discovered the trend toward author-publishing sup-

port groups while living in England in the 1990s, and decided to transplant the idea here, where resorting to vanity-press publication was still considered an act of foolish desperation.

A former ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher as well as a writer, Manolescu said she gave up on traditional publishers long ago. "I had unhappy experiences with them and it wasn't just the rejection notices."

In an era when you're nobody until you have a Web presence and anything is fit to print – or blog – groups like ICN can provide artists with a local, supportive forum for their ideas, up-to-date information on local events via a bimonthly newsletter and access to online marketing via the group website. All this for the low, low annual fee of \$5. And that membership fee is a recent, reluctantly agreed to, innovation.

Invisible Cities prides itself on being more of a shoestring operation than ELAN, the English-



FROM GAZETTE FILES

Terry Mosher (Aislin) is to appear at the conference.

language Arts Network, another, similar organization recently formed to support English-language culture in Quebec.

"They are coming from a government agency standpoint," said Manolescu. "We're coming from a grassroots, completely independent standpoint."

Also, there's nothing pointedly

English about ICN. "Our members are very bilingual and trilingual," she said. "We're very, very open to the cosmopolitan life we live every day in Montreal." What they have in common is artsy individualism and a need to follow the advice of British novelist E.M. Forster ("Only connect!") "We're all mavericks," she said. "We have to be. If you sit quietly in your corner and don't connect, nothing happens. We like one another, we have fun with one another."

ICN's 2005 Book and Creative Arts Conference will be held at FACE auditorium, 3449 University St., on Saturday, Sept. 10 from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$20, lunch included. Call (514) 807-4171, email christina@princechameleon.com or check out the website: www.invisiblecitiesnetwork.org

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