

“HERSTORY IF CAUGHT BY THE CAMERA’S EYE”:
PHOTOGRAPHERS OF OREGON’S LESBIAN LANDS

by

RAECHEL HERRON ROOT

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of the History of Art and Architecture
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2020

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Raechel Herron Root

Title: "Herstory if Caught by the Camera's Eye": Photographers of Oregon's Lesbian Lands

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture by:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| Dr. Emily Scott | Chairperson |
| Dr. Nina Amstutz | Member |
| Dr. Keith Eggener | Member |
| Linda Long | Member |

and

Kate Mondloch Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2020

© 2020 Raechel Herron Root
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (United States) License.



THESIS ABSTRACT

Raechel Herron Root

Master of Arts

Department of the History of Art and Architecture

June 2020

Title: “Herstory if Caught by the Camera’s Eye”: Photographers of Oregon’s Lesbian Lands

This thesis explores the photography of Oregon’s lesbian land communities, through the Ovular workshops hosted at the lesbian land Rootworks from 1980 to 1983 and their subsequent magazine *The Blatant Image* (1981-1983). I argue that these photographs are crucial to developing, documenting and disseminating a queer ecological “culture of nature.” I analyze the photographs’ blending of the female body and the landscape, through Ruth Mountaingrove’s landscape-portraits, as well as a recognition of the land as female and erotic, typified by Tee Corinne’s *Isis* series. I argue that the photographs cultivate an intimate, circular sense of visibility through the print networks of *The Blatant Image*, and that their distribution is a tactic for suggesting alternative futures. Lastly, I reflect on the archival existence of these photographs in that future, and their subsequent engagement by contemporary artists such as Carmen Winant.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Raechel Herron Root

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Miami University, Oxford, OH

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, History of Art and Architecture, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Art History, Miami University
Bachelor of Arts, Creative Writing, Miami University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Contemporary Art
Cultural Geography
Spatial Justice

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2018-2020.

Programs Assistant, Steven Holl Foundation, New York, 2017-2018.

Curatorial Intern, Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, 2016.

Educational Intern, Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, 2015.

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Marian Donnelly Prize: Best Essay in Art History, "Our Shapes and Our Lives: Photographers of Oregon's Lesbian Lands," University of Oregon, 2019.

Gloria Tovar Lee Travel Award, Master's Thesis Research, University of Oregon, 2019.

Undergraduate Summer Scholars Fellowship, Honors Thesis Research,
Miami University, 2016.

Don & Susan Kastle Travel Scholarship, Study Abroad, Miami University,
2016.

PUBLICATIONS:

Root, Raechel Herron. "A Tribute to the Artistic Communities of Oregon's Lesbian Lands." Edited by Elisa Wouk Almino. *Hyperallergic*, December 19, 2020. <https://hyperallergic.com/534136/lesbian-lands-oregon-carmen-winant/>.

Root, Raechel Herron. "Shining a Light on Portland's Art Scene: 10 Exciting Venues in the Rose City." Edited by Elisa Wouk Almino. *Hyperallergic*, October 22, 2019. <https://hyperallergic.com/522955/shining-a-light-on-portlands-art-scene-10-exciting-venues-in-the-rose-city/>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the guidance, conversation, enthusiasm, and labor offered to me throughout the last year and a half, this thesis would not have been possible. I wish to express sincere thanks to Dr. Emily Eliza Scott for her many hours spent discussing this project, reading drafts and providing feedback, and for her enthusiasm for experimentation and personal reflection. Special thanks are due to Dr. Nina Amstutz, whose course *Art and Nature* led to this research, and who provided helpful guidance especially at the project's early stages. I also appreciate the feedback of Dr. Keith Eggener and the archival guidance, resourceful knowledge, and generous advocacy of Linda Long. Additionally, this project was greatly enriched by the trust, time, and honesty of the various women I interviewed. Special thanks to Laura, Caretaker of Rootworks, for her genuine and warm welcome and willingness to discuss anything. I thank Carmen Winant for her frank and enthusiastic discussions of the Ovulars, Aggie Apolito for her colorful stories and invaluable memories, and JEB for her experienced perspective.

This research was in part funded by the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Oregon, which supported my time spent with invaluable archival resources. Lastly, I appreciate the casual conversations, formal feedback and forged connections amongst my peers at the University of Oregon, most expressly Liam Maher, Joseph Sussi, Cassidy Schoenfelder, and Dana Buzzee, for their perspectives on this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| I. INTRODUCTION: DIGGING/NAMING | 1 |
| II. CHAPTER I: IMAGINING/IMAGING | 14 |
| III. CHAPTER II: CIRCLES/CIRCULATIONS, MEDIA/MEDIATIONS..... | 33 |
| IV. CHAPTER III: FUTURES/PASTS | 50 |
| V. CONCLUSION: EROSION/LEGACY | 61 |
| APPENDIX: IMAGES..... | 64 |
| REFERENCES CITED | 74 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Joan E. Biren, Photographers at the Ovular..... | 64 |
| 2. Joan E. Biren, Photographers at the Ovular..... | 64 |
| 3. Construction Photos, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers | 64 |
| 4. Construction Photos, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers | 64 |
| 5. Construction Photos, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers | 64 |
| 6. Bathers, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers | 65 |
| 7. Four Women in the Landscape, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers | 65 |
| 8. Gathering, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers | 66 |
| 9. Woman Stretching, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers | 66 |
| 10. Photo Development Process, Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers..... | 67 |
| 11. Tee Corine, <i>Isis</i> Series..... | 67 |
| 12. Tee Corine, <i>Isis</i> Series | 67 |
| 13. Tee Corine, <i>Isis</i> Series | 67 |
| 14. Art Historical Comparisons | 68 |
| 15. Owl Farm Council Gathering..... | 68 |
| 16. Easter circle at Womanshare | 69 |
| 17. Circular portrait from Ovular 2..... | 70 |
| 18. Carmen Winant, <i>Lesbian Lands</i> | 71 |
| 19. Carmen Winant, <i>Lesbian Lands</i> | 71 |

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 20. Carmen Winant, <i>Notes on Fundamental Joy...</i> | 72 |
| 21. Carmen Winant, <i>Notes on Fundamental Joy...</i> | 73 |
| 22. Carmen Winant, <i>Notes on Fundamental Joy...</i> | 73 |

I: INTRODUCTION: DIGGING/NAMING

"It matters what we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories." –Donna Haraway

In 1971, a middle-aged woman named Ruth left behind a middle-class life and long-term husband to drive 3,000 miles west and join the growing women's land movement in Southern Oregon. When she arrived at a site called Mountain Grove, she and her new partner, Jean, took the name of the land, leaving behind the patriarchal surnames of fathers and husbands in favor of one which married them both with the land and each other.¹ This anecdote reflects the dedication of lesbian separatists in Oregon to radical rebirth and reorientation of themselves toward the land. It is also exemplary of the absolute blending of body and self with the land, a distinct feature of their "culture of nature," as queer ecologist Catriona Sandilands has termed it. While Sandilands has analyzed this culture of nature from a sociological point of view, the artworks created within that culture have yet to be seriously considered from an art historical or visual culture perspective. Like the founding of a new lesbian land required the digging of its foundations, the naming and re-naming of the site

¹"Historical Note." Archives West: Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, 1950-1999. <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv51562#historicalID>. Mountaingrove was a heterosexual commune, that Ruth and Jean found highly patriarchal and eventually left on bad terms, in part prompting their founding of Rootworks.

and its residents, this thesis seeks to excavate a missing piece of feminist and lesbian art history and to name it.

Through the use of an extensive archive at the University of Oregon, interviews with participants, a site visit to Rootworks, as well as theories of queer ecology, archival studies, and photography, my research seeks to recognize this important visual culture, both for its contributions and its limitations. Specifically, this paper discusses a series of photography workshops, entitled “Ovulars,” held from 1980 to 1982 at the lesbian land Rootworks in Southern Oregon. Like many of the women took new names when they arrived at the lands, so too the “seminar” was renamed “ovular” to distinguish it from patriarchal modes of education and collaboration. Lead by Mountaingrove and the artists Tee Corinne, Carol Newhouse, and JEB, the Ovulars were summer photography workshops for feminist artists from around the country. These workshops culminated each year in the publication of *The Blatant Image*, a mail-submission and subscription magazine of feminist photography that ran from 1981 to 1983. The images produced through the Ovulars are not only critical to the construction of a singularly queer and feminist culture of nature, but they renegotiate and reclaim artistic associations of femininity with nature and landscape.² Lastly, in their archival form today, they represent a “usable past” in

² Ruth Mountaingrove and Tee Corinne’s work, and those mentioned further into the paper such as Katie Niles and JEB, can in no way speak for all members of lesbian intentional communities, or for all queer/female/landscape photographers. In fact, they are only two artists who were

their documentation of rural, natural queer space and its visual culture. The phrase “usable past” was first put forth by literary critic Van Wyck Brooks in the wake of World War I, as a tactic for approaching history as “an inexhaustible storehouse of apt attitudes and adaptable ideals,” which can be personally and creatively “placed in the service of the future.”³ The Ovulars offer one such usable past in their demonstration of the power in imagining and imaging new futures, and the significance of visualization to our political possibilities.

Additionally, while the Ovulars are indeed past, occurring across a handful of years in the early 1980s, many of the related organizations live on at the time of this writing. Rootworks is an operating non-profit that continues to be open to women, though fewer reside there than during the 1970s heyday of the back to the land movement. For ten years, a single resident has walked the fading footpaths, through the hand-built cabins and the barn darkroom, and into the attic library where she painstakingly chases bats and dust away from the works of largely lesbian authors gathered there. The land is a new place, different from its mythic, archival descriptions: it is surrounded on all sides by change, from weed farms to logging, to the ever-growing threat of fires that chase residents away for a few weeks every summer. While the images this paper focuses on were produced during the years of the Ovulars, the queer

present at the Ovulars, and a fuller representation of what those workshops produced would certainly require including more artists, with more space and time than I have here.

³ Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *The Dial* (April 11, 1918).

ecology of Rootworks and other separatist lands in Southern Oregon is a living, complex and evolving community.

Before diving in to this history of Rootworks, the Ovulars and *The Blatant Image*, I'll define the term *lesbian land* as I'll use it to refer to the rural separatist feminist communities of Southern Oregon. There are many different terms for communities like Rootworks, which are made up of women, most of whom are lesbian, and which are situated on rural sites and strive for a feminist, self-sufficient and environmentally-informed mode of living. Common terms applied to these sites include women's lands, womyn's lands, herlands, lesbian separatist communities, and intentional communities. The individuals I have encountered in archives and interviews prefer not to use the word "commune," which they associate with religious and patriarchal traditions that their communities work against (such as Oregon's nineteenth-century Aurora Colony). Additionally, as researchers such as Sandilands and anthropologist Keridwen Luis have pointed out, identities within these communities are heterogeneous—not everyone identifies or even likes the term "separatism," not everyone necessarily identifies as "lesbian," and not everyone agrees on what exactly their collective community contains, is doing or ought to do in the future.⁴

⁴ Sandilands and Luis both do an excellent job not generalizing or flattening the heterogeneity of these communities, Sandilands in her various articles cited here, and Luis in her recent book *Herlands*. While Luis uses the term "women's lands," her project encompasses many sites, and this thesis focuses mainly on Rootworks, which I have more often seen referred to as a "lesbian land."

Even amongst those who identified as lesbian, many individuals describe that identification as a “political” choice, an understanding of sexuality and identity that contrasts with contemporary “born-this-way” rhetoric. As historian Catherine Kleiner writes, lesbian feminists “believed that all women were potential lesbians... that lesbianism was primarily a political, not a sexual, choice,” and that women who *chose* a lesbian lifestyle were “model feminists.”⁵ Kleiner considers this an aspect of lesbian land “spirit politics,” which intertwine sexuality, religion and politics so closely that they are inseparable.⁶ This is reflected in the visual and print culture of the lands, as evidenced by Rootworks’ publication *WomanSpirit* (1974-1984), which is often called the first periodical dedicated to “feminist spirituality.”⁷

This political association with the word “lesbian” is part of the reason I’ve chosen the term “lesbian land,” in combination with its common use to describe Rootworks specifically. Additionally, using “lesbian lands” ensures that the terminology of this research reflects the identities of the women featured in it, and that the metadata for this thesis will reflect that Rootworks (and many others) was a land founded not just by women, but by lesbians. This terminology is a tactic to avoid the erasure lesbian feminists often decry in the writing and

⁵ Kleiner, Catherine. “Nature’s Lovers: The Erotics of Lesbian Land Communities in Oregon, 1974-1984.” In *Seeing Nature through Gender*, edited by Virginia Scharff, 242-62. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003.

⁶ Kleiner, 244.

⁷ Kleiner claims this about *WomanSpirit*, as does the magazine itself, at various points.

subsequent “straightening” of their histories. While in the documentation I have often seen the terms “women’s lands” and “lesbian lands” used interchangeably, for the sake of this paper I will hereafter use the term lesbian lands.

Like the terms “lesbian” and “lesbian lands” carry a significant specificity, so does these lands’ location in the state of Oregon. Historian James J. Kopp address the place of lesbian lands in Oregon’s utopian lineage in his book *Eden within Eden*. Kopp writes that the proliferation of lands in the area “reflects the draw of Edenic qualities of the state, but in this case Eve returned to the garden herself, along with her sisters. Thus the nature and success of this community of women in Oregon are continuing elements of the state’s utopian heritage.”⁸ The Willamette Valley, in particular, has held since the seventeenth century a “mystic attraction” as a site for “social regeneration.”⁹ This area was often characterized as a fertile, beautiful, untouched garden that welcomed individuals seeking alternative ways of living, a characterization inherited by the ideologies of Manifest Destiny that first brought settlers West. This image of Oregon prompted founders of various communes and utopian projects to choose it as their site.

⁸ Kopp, James J. *Eden within Eden: Oregon's Utopian Heritage* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2009), 150. To be clear, lesbian lands are situated south of the Willamette Valley—however, this perception permeates throughout the state.

⁹ Kopp, *Eden within Eden*, 8-10.

While lesbian separatists didn't consider Oregon an "untouched" Eden by any means, there are occasional utopic characterizations of femininity and lesbian relationships especially as they relate to land. The etymology of Eden, meaning "fertile luxuriance," is a definition that resonates with lesbian separatists' characterization of the land as a mother or lover that gives energy, resources, and fosters creativity and authentic femininity.¹⁰ That "authentic femininity" is often expressed through the experience of being nude in the landscape, another correlation to Eden: the return of the body to a more natural, uninhibited state of existence without the mediation of shoes and clothes between itself and nature. Queer geographers David Bell and Gill Valentine have tied this characterization to the history of American feminist and lesbian literature, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel *Herland* (1915) and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1985), which "use rural utopianism and a kind of ecofeminist critique of masculinist techno-urbanism to write fables of women reunited with nature (and thereby rediscovering lost strengths and powers)."¹¹ However these rural "utopias" are in a sense stuck in that realm, as fables and imagined worlds— "utopia," itself famously means both "good place" and "no place."¹² A lesbian land is both a

¹⁰ Kopp, *Eden within Eden*, 9.

¹¹ David Bell and Gill Valentine, "Queer Country: Rural Lesbian and Gay Lives," *Journal of Rural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1995): 114.

¹² Kopp, *Eden within Eden*, 12.

“good place” in its attempt to make a fresh, naked start to imagine better futures, and a “no place” in both the everyday realities of attempting to do so, and in the inescapable histories that negate the idea these sites could ever be truly utopian: namely, the often-ignored indigenous displacement from the lands. As Oregon historian William Robbins has pointed out, “One people’s Eden... was another’s tragedy; and some would say that the consequences of the newcomer’s heroic odyssey was to despoil Eden itself.”¹³ While this awareness of the indigenous displacement and “despoiling” of the land is shared by residents of lesbian lands, the sources I have encountered rarely if ever actively acknowledge indigenous sovereignty or the role of settler colonial residents on lesbian lands. Rootworks, for example, exists on and around land traditionally inhabited by the Takelma, Tolowa Dee-ni’ and Cow Creek Umpqua tribes. I hold this significant absence of engagement with indigenous stewards of the land hand in hand with the significant contributions lesbian lands have made to feminist photography, queer ecology and other fields.¹⁴

To be fair, “land-dykes” would not likely claim that their communities were perfect or utopian—instead, their understandings of the site often exist in between a good place and a no place, in between ideals and everyday life. In

¹³ William G. Robbins, “Western Voices: Willamette Eden: The Ambiguous Legacy.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 99, no. 2 (1998): 190.

¹⁴ There is also certainly a history of appropriation of Indigenous rituals and aesthetics on lesbian lands, which deserves a more thorough discussion than I am able to provide here. 1970s-80s lesbian separatist spirituality, in particular, tends to be rife with appropriative symbolism and language, which I hope to explore in future expansions of this project.

Sandilands' study, she reflects that none of the women she interviewed expressly described lesbian lands as *utopian*, but instead see them as “an ongoing dynamic between a separatist utopian ideology and an everyday practice of subsistence culture located in a particular place.”¹⁵ Julie Enszer, a former resident of lesbian lands, described a similar dynamic: “lesbian separatism as ideology generates conflicts and irreconcilable challenges, but lesbian separatism as process generates utopian possibilities that, even if not achieved, transform the field of the possible for lesbians.”¹⁶ Both Sandilands' study and Enszer's reflection emphasize that there is a semi-utopian, future-oriented vision that drives a “process” or “practice” that is more in tune with the everyday realities of rural separatist living.

This reconciling of idealistic futurity and everyday life is especially embodied at Rootworks, which was notorious for its dedication to a politically-motivated everyday. Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove established Rootworks in 1978 near Wolf Creek, Oregon—atop one of the areas many wooded hills, accessible only by a rough gravel road. The site is roughly seven acres, and over the course of its occupation has come to include a handful of hand-built structures, including cabins, an outdoor and indoor kitchen, and a barn (“Natalie

¹⁵ Sandilands, Catriona. “Lesbian Separatist Communities and the Experience of Nature: Toward a Queer Ecology.” *Organization & Environment* 15, no. 2 (2002): 140.

¹⁶ Julie R. Enszer “‘How to stop choking to death’: Rethinking lesbian separatism as a vibrant political theory and feminist practice,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 20:2 (2016): 193.

Barney,” as residents called it) that housed the Ovular studio and lesbian literature library. The grounds include a fruit orchard, circular vegetable garden, a creek and informal hiking trails throughout the hills. The conditions at Rootworks were famously rustic, Ruth and Jean¹⁷ famously serious: there was no alcohol, meat, electricity, running water or men allowed on the land.¹⁸ Jean was particularly known for her strict adherence to her ideals: legend has it (and interviews confirm) that she would systematically consume small portions of poison ivy, in order to build up a tolerance and banish any antagonistic relationship with a part of the land.¹⁹ Ruth was a key figure in the Oregon Women’s Land Trust, a coalition of women’s intentional communities in Southern Oregon with the shared goal to “live outside of mainstream patriarchal culture.”²⁰ Ruth and Jean made Rootworks the home of two publications: *WomanSpirit*, a magazine about lesbian spirituality, and *The Blatant Image*, a feminist photography magazine published in conjunction with the Ovulars.

Tee Corinne was also an influential force in the Ovulars and lesbian photography as a whole, and, like Mountaingrove, her papers are housed in the University of Oregon Special Collections. Corinne was one of the first widely-

¹⁷ I refer to Ruth and Jean by their first names throughout the thesis, both because it’s more in tune with the ways sources and interviews refer to them, and to differentiate between the two.

¹⁸ Aggie Agapito, interview by author, Eugene, August 2019.

¹⁹ Laura, Caretaker of Rootworks, interview by author, Sunny Valley, October 2019.

²⁰ Corinne, Tee. "Ovulars and The Blatant Image." *Lesbian Photography*, Purdue University. <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/WAAW/Corinne/Mountaingrove.htm>

known openly lesbian artists, and a large part of her work is dedicated to depicting lesbian intimacy and sexuality, even at a time when to do so could be dangerous for a young artist. This paper will focus on her works that address the relationship between sexuality and environment. While these are very different from her famous solarized sexual portraits, her landscape works offer a different perspective on her oeuvre and contribute to a better understanding of the visual culture of Oregon's lesbian lands. Since the 1980s, Corinne has gained notoriety for her "Cunt Coloring Book," still sold at feminist bookstores, though she also published extensively on the history of lesbian imagery in art and was featured in the 2007 feminist art exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. Her lack of recognition in art historical discourse outside of a few publications and this exhibition is indicative of the archival absence which the Ovulars intended to address: the lack of a lesbian art history and a distinct lineage of feminist photography. The importance of developing that history motivated Corinne's participation in the Ovulars, which she wrote were intended to explore the question: "What are the realities of our shapes and our lives? What are the differences between the ways men have pictured women and the ways we see ourselves?"²¹

The photographs produced in the Ovulars begin to answer this question, with extensive exploration of not only how women see themselves, but also how

²¹Ibid.

they see the environment and their embodied relationship to it. Though Mountaingrove, Corinne and the other Ovular photographers did occasionally make cut and dry “landscapes” or “portraits,” most of the images are somewhere in between: depicting women’s bodies in and with the landscape.²² This genre-bending melding of bodies into the land reflects what Sandilands has called the lesbian separatists’ “culture of nature,” or the community’s unique lived relationship to their environment. Sandilands’ 2003 sociological study, utilizing the University of Oregon Special Collections and interviews with eleven women still living on the lands in the year 2000, was influential in the foundation of queer ecology, a field she defines as “interrogating the relations between the social organization of sexuality and ecology.”²³ Her study of the Southern Oregon lesbian separatists’ “culture of nature,” in particular, focuses on six points of “separatist ecological wisdom”: inclusive, collective ownership of rural land, withdrawal from and resistance of patriarchy and capitalism, feminizing and eroticizing of the landscape, a physical embodied experience of nature, and the political reclamation of rurality for lesbian identity.²⁴

²² Tee Corinne is certainly better known for her portraits of lesbian couples, however this paper focuses more on her landscape-oriented works. It seems that her work in the Ovulars was more landscape-oriented than her more famous portraiture.

²³Sandilands, *Lesbian Separatist Communities*, 142.

²⁴Sandilands, Catriona. "Landdykes and Landscape: Reflections on Sex and Nature in Southern Oregon." *Women & Environments International Magazine*, no. 56/57 (2002): 13.

This thesis builds on Sandilands' conclusions through analysis of the Ovular photographs as productions and preservations of this queer ecology. The Ovulars, particularly the work of Mountaingrove and Corinne, incorporate and blend the queer female body directly into the landscape, blurring boundaries between the two, reflecting the integrated culture of nature. Like the 1980s separatists, the photographs both subvert and strategically perpetuate gender essentialism and the aesthetic association of women and nature. The photographs both perform and document the reclamation of rurality as queer space, and the negotiation of a new feminist way of visualizing and living with land. More than anything, they seek to polemically make such alternatives visible on a wider scale, through the distribution of photographs through both mail subscription magazine networks and a speculative saving for future archival collections. From that future, these works represent a usable past for understanding the Ovulars, Rootworks, lesbian separatism in Oregon, and the wider role of photography in queer spaces and ecologies.

II: CHAPTER I: IMAGINING/IMAGING

"I never wanted to build a 'body of work,' but to preserve these, our bodies, breathing and unaccounted for, inside the work." – Ocean Vuong

This chapter positions the Ovulars and *The Blatant Image* as a collective visual experiment in new feminist modes of perception, education, documentation and imagination. While feminist/queer collectives and rural artist's colonies had certainly existed before, the combination of the two was quite radical for its time. Like any groundbreaking experiment, the Ovulars encompass both a leap forward in thinking, and an incomplete project, something to be built on by its successors. This chapter reads the "results" of the Ovulars experiment, their photographs, like one would read the results of a scientific experiment: as a mixture of positive and negative outcomes, both of which contribute to an advancement of knowledge, both of which are usable for a more informed future.

An experiment within an experiment, the Ovulars began shortly after Ruth and Jean established Rootworks, when Ruth noticed she had begun to feel out of touch with her photographic practice, and was "always fuming" about the proliferate "male pronouns" in the photography magazines she read. The introduction to Volume One of *The Blatant Image* refers to Jean's subsequent idea to start a feminist photography workshop as a "personal solution which grew to political proportions," an ideological intertwining that is emphasized

throughout the life of the Ovulars. That introduction also asserts the applicability of that solution to more widespread issues, such as the exclusion of female and lesbian photographers from exhibitions and publications because their work was either “too personal or too political.”²⁵ The turning of a tactic of exclusion and oppression (such as the conflation of personal and political) into a tactic of reclamation and expression of power is a major theme of the Ovulars (and the era of feminism in which they existed). Their photographs reclaim the personal as political, as well as rural space as queer space, landscapes as feminine, and photography as feminist.

Because these reclamations took place on remote, rural sites, the planning and promotion of the Ovulars was conducted almost entirely through the mail, in personal letters and on the pages of feminist periodicals. While I will address this relationship to print media and mail circulation further in the next chapter, it is worth noting here that the promotional ads and mailing flyers use multiple strategies, such as a sliding scale fee and special invitations to “women whose experiences and photographic subjects diverge from stereotypical white, young, middle-class ones,” to draw a diverse range of women for the workshops.²⁶ While the format of a week long summer workshop that might

²⁵ “The Blatant Image: Her Story,” in *The Blatant Image* Volume 1, 1981: 4. Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

²⁶ 1980 Ovulars Call Flyer, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

involve traveling long distances was certainly not accessible to all women, these strategies evidence an attempt to break out of the white, middle-class homogeneity that is often noted among lesbian lands in Oregon.²⁷ This can also be seen in the more diverse pool of women included in *The Blatant Image*, and the editorial board's acknowledgement of their own whiteness in the magazine's foreword. While the advertisements and calls for participants do not blatantly mention or ask for lesbian women, the majority of the instructors and participants identified as lesbian.²⁸ Over the course of five Ovulars, ranging from 1980 to 1984, instructors included Tee Corinne, JEB, Ruth Mountaingrove, Alta Fly, and Caroline Overman.²⁹

The organization and social environment of the Ovulars was much like a summer camp. Women stayed in tents at Rootworks and followed a schedule of classes, creative and free time. Workshops emphasized photographic skills and theory, including how to create slide shows, studying the “foremothers”³⁰ of photography, using large format cameras, taking erotic portraits, color printing,

²⁷ See Sandilands, Luis and Cheney.

²⁸ Tee Corinne, *Ovulars Scrapbook*, page 15, Tee A. Corinne Papers, Coll 263, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR.

²⁹ It's of course impossible to name and properly address the work of every Ovular participant or relevant contemporaneous lesbian photographer, which is important to acknowledge considering these images' relationship to battling historical erasure. It is my hope that the expansion of the archive and the bloom of current research on women's lands and lesbian land photography will encourage further writing on these issues and crediting of these artists.

³⁰ *Feminist Photographers Promotional Flyer*, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

creating a low-technology darkroom, and “ethical” seminars on race and class in photography (see figures 1 and 2).³¹ There were often field trips to Wolf Creek and to the Grants Pass Art Museum. Also like a summer camp, there were certain rules and certain traditions of flouting those rules. As one participant told me, Ruth and Jean’s strict bans on contraband such as meat, refined sugar, alcohol and relationships amongst participants were occasionally broken with glee, by women sneaking into town for a cheeseburger or into the next tent over for a romantic encounter.³² While the archival and print sources paint an image of a devotional and strict adherence to the lands’ “ecological wisdom,” my discussions with Ovular participants reveal instances of more light-hearted engagement with Rootworks’ ideals and the ways of lesbian separatism.

Despite this range of reverence toward the rules, the overall culture of nature certainly influenced, and may have been influenced by, the subject matter and style of the Ovular photographs. The images reflect the lands’ the shared tenets of “ecological wisdom identified by Sandilands:” collective ownership and labor, resistance to hetero-patriarchal capitalism, feminizing and eroticizing of the landscape, a physical embodied experience of nature, and the political reclamation of rurality for lesbian identity.³³ These ideas especially

³¹ Tee Corinne, *Ovulars Scrapbook*, page 15, Tee A. Corinne Papers, Coll 263, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR.

³² Aggie Agapito, interview by author, Eugene, August 2019.

³³ Sandilands, Catriona. "Landdykes and Landscape: Reflections on Sex and Nature in Southern Oregon." *Women & Environments International Magazine*, no. 56/57 (2002): 13.

manifest in the everyday scenes that are most common across the archive, capturing the residents of Rootworks going about their lives and work on the land. As one Ovular participant told me, women photographed “each other and ourselves the most,” and women had to get used to “having a camera on your face and body constantly.”³⁴ When asked if this spurred performative posing or made some women nervous, she described the experience as “symbiotic,” with participants getting so comfortable over time that it made the photographs more “authentic.”³⁵ Photography, possibly more than any other medium, allowed for everyday lived experience to become a material and a medium in the Ovular artworks.

Mountaingrove’s work in particular emphasizes the everyday documentation of women learning traditionally “masculine” skills such as woodworking, construction, mechanics, and auto repair. In her introduction to the first issue of *The Blatant Image*, “Making Ourselves Real,” Mountaingrove writes that she has almost no images of herself or Jean preparing meals, but over 500 negatives documenting the construction of various buildings at Rootworks (see figures 3-5).³⁶ As the construction of these buildings “made real” the otherwise imaginary or utopian idea of a lesbian land, so did its

³⁴ Aggie Agapito, interview by author, Eugene, August 2019.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Mountaingrove, “Making Ourselves Real,” in *The Blatant Image* Volume 1, 1981: 4. Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

photographing. In Mountaingrove's images, women build shelters, a greenhouse, and the barn darkroom that would come to be the main site of the Ovulars. The straight lines and orderly grids of the building frameworks contrast the curving, organic textures of bodies, branches, leaves, and footpaths. Women work in denim cutoff shorts and no shirts, or in overalls, jeans and flannels. Corinne notes in her book *The Little Houses on Women's Lands* that while many women pass temporarily through these communities, "the structures stay, change, grow, get repaired. They are the touchstones, the building blocks of a common language, repositories of our group memory."³⁷ Corinne's characterization of the buildings emphasizes their significance to a feeling of world building and belonging, almost over the actual residents themselves. Today, for example, when Rootworks has only one consistent resident, the buildings on the land give the site a sense of future possibility, with that one resident dedicatedly maintaining structures for anticipated future arrivals.³⁸ The construction and continued maintenance of these structures, and their photographing by Mountaingrove, also reflects the land's queer ecological goal of self-sufficient, collective living, with no alienation between laborer and

³⁷ Moore, Lisa L. *Sister Arts: The Erotics of Lesbian Landscapes*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 185.

³⁸ The practice of slow, painstaking maintenance and care undertaken by Laura, the current resident of Rootworks, is astounding. She seems to conceptualize her role as a caretaker of the site as spiritual and in conversation with women like Mountaingrove, who she describes feeling a strong connection to. My discussions with her often prompted me to think of Shannon Mattern's *Maintenance and Care*, and the often invisible labor of maintaining both sites like Rootworks and archives like the UO's Special Collections.

product. Sandilands calls this “anti-capitalist agricultural ethic” in part “a response to the accusation made by some urban political lesbians that going to the country was a form of retreat from front-line separatist politics.”³⁹ As such, Mountaingrove’s documentation and circulation of these images is also important public evidence of the political possibilities of lesbian lands, one that would travel via print magazines to the very urban centers who might critique them.

While these photographs are often described as “documentary,” especially in contrast with Mountaingrove and others’ more “creative” or posed work, I would argue that they in fact belong to what Deborah Bright has described as “a new kind of ‘intimate’ documentary photography,” in line with other 1980s confessional, personal-political artists such as Nan Goldin. Bright describes this style as “mirroring the artist’s autobiography rather than neutrally presenting a selection of visual facts as in canonical modernist documentary.”⁴⁰ The Ovular photographs are often spoken about and conceptualized as “mirrors,” as documenting bodies for the purpose of their recognition by similar bodies, rather than for their study by others. While Mountaingrove’s recording of the construction of Rootworks’ buildings is certainly documentary, it also fits into this wider artistic practice of 1980s intimate photography.

³⁹ Sandilands, *Lesbian Separatist Communities*, 143.

⁴⁰ Bright, Deborah. *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

The queer ecological “feminization and re-acculturation of the landscape” is also well-represented in the Ovular photographs. In another of Mountaingrove’s works, blurry foliage flutters into the photo and frames the scene (figure 6). The blurred shapes suggest movement of grasses in the wind, their indistinct intrusions fulfilling the landscape trope of framing foliage, and considering the intimacy of the scene at hand, almost suggesting a pulled-back curtain. The top two thirds of the frame are filled with leaves and branches, which give way to an eddy in a creek or pond, containing three white shapes. At first glance, it would be easy to mistake the rounded pale shadows for river rocks, with their smooth outlines and rippled textures. This misidentification might be even more likely for a viewer who is not expecting to see three nude figures in the water.⁴¹ However, after another moment of looking, it becomes recognizable as three bathers. The composition emphasizes the muscles of their backs and the movement of their bodies, rather than identity or gender-associated parts such as faces or genitalia. After yet another moment of looking it becomes apparent that perhaps it is not three figures but one or two in motion, over time. The overlapping of translucent body parts mirrors the grasses in the foreground. In its blending and blurring of bodies and landscape, this piece reflects the deep sense of corporal identification with the land.

⁴¹ One would have to be unfamiliar with Mountaingrove’s work and papers for this to be the case, as many of the photos include nude bodies in the landscape.

Sandilands discusses how the women shaped the land with their feminism, and considered their feminism shaped by the land as well: she cites a vulva-shaped garden and a female body-shaped clearing as manifestations of this.⁴² This aspect of the culture of nature is dictated by a desire “to see their own iconography organizing the landscape, rather than the straight lines and corners they associated with the heteropatriarchal world,” and to “find familiar symbols and memories of their own creation integrated into the landscape.”⁴³ This also manifests in the Ovular photography, as Figure 1 demonstrates. Not only do the residents mold the landscape with the female body through gardens and clearings, but their photographs capture their actual bodies in moments of harmony with the environment, moments of blurred boundaries and intimate interminglings.

This thread weaves throughout the Mountaingrove papers: women are photographed working, communing, and simply being in the land (see figures 7-9). The textures of their skin and hair blend in with grasses and flowers, they stand straight and tall like trees. Couples are almost always photographed within scenic vistas or surrounded by foliage, emphasizing the *naturalness* of lesbian sexuality at a time when it was often deemed unnatural. Especially in the material volume and multiplicity in which they are presented in the

⁴² Sandilands, *Lesbian Separatist Communities*, 141.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 135.

Mountaingrove papers, the photos strongly align the female body and queer desire with nature.

Corinne's photography aligns the female body with nature in a literally and figuratively more explicit manner. Rather than photographing everyday life or capturing candid moments, Corinne's images are artfully manipulated compositions. The yonic landscapes in her *Isis Series* (figures 11-13) embody this relationship through their seamless editing of vaginas into Oregon landscapes. They are not softened or edited—they are typically centered and the most focused part of the image. Along a rocky coast, nestled into a tree trunk, and even floating amidst cloud formations, Corinne cleverly pairs the vaginas with similar environmental textures: wrinkled tree bark, curved stone, and rippling water. Like the Mountaingrove photo of the bathers, at first glance these pictures might appear to be straightforward landscapes. As before, rounded backs pass for rocks, Corinne's yonic imagery passes for geological formations—again tying the female body to nature. These collaged vaginas are both disembodied from the human—feminizing and eroticizing earth, trees and skies—and anthropomorphizing—casting land as bodily human, as a potential lesbian lover.

Sandilands asserts that eroticizing the land is one of the central tenets of ecological wisdom on lesbian lands, and discusses several examples of its manifestation. Largely, these manifestations include outdoor sex and

masturbation as "a public way of sexualizing space."⁴⁴ One woman described her experience as "making love because the landscape is asking me to... the trees are watching me make love, the sky is listening to me, the earth is holding me, and we're all having this experience together and we're all full of joy."⁴⁵ This testimony that the landscape is "asking" for intimacy, the trees are "watching," the sky is "listening" and the earth is "holding" all point to an understanding of the site as more than a prompt or catalyst for human sexuality, and instead as an active partner in that sexuality. This way of engaging with the land reflects the Ovular's progressive recognition of places and objects as lively, sexual and gendered. This recognition could be characterized as what new materialist Jane Bennett calls "thing power," or "the ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle."⁴⁶ Few responses to the inanimate can be so animate, active, and dramatic as arousal. Corinne's *Isis* series intervenes in the landscape photograph to cast the land as alive and erotic, and most importantly, as female.

However, Corinne's way of defining and delineating the female relies heavily on the idea that biological organs determine "natural sex," and creates a domain of exclusion which cannot accommodate femme-identified individuals

⁴⁴ Ibid, 151.

⁴⁵ Sandilands, *Lesbian Separatist Communities*, 151.

⁴⁶ Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010: 6.

without these bodily traits. This essential definition of sex has been critiqued by many feminist scholars, beginning not long after the Ovulars: Judith Butler's infamous *Gender Trouble* was published in 1990, in which she demonstrates that the category of "sex" is as artificial as the cultural construction of "gender," taking great pains to demonstrate that "the body is a constructed thing, not a neutral surface."⁴⁷ Corinne (and other Ovular photographers) often liken the earth as a "neutral surface" to the body as a "neutral surface," both "pre-discursive" places in which to retreat from patriarchal performativity — from this perspective, to live nude on remote rural land is to connect with some kind of inherent womanhood. However, just as the idea of the natural, pre-discursive body is disproven by Butler and other feminist scholars, so has the idea of landscape as something "neutral" and separated from "culture" been troubled by scholars such as Stacy Alaimo, Denis E. Cosgrove, W.J.T. Mitchell and T.J. Demos.⁴⁸ Despite the inherent issues with this over-simplification of sex, gender and landscape, the essentialism of the *Isis* series and other Ovular photographs can also be read as a strategy or tactic toward the reclaiming and queering of natural space.

⁴⁷ Butler, 12.

⁴⁸ Denis E. Cosgrove, Introduction and "The Idea of Landscape," in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*; Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*; W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*; T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, 2016.

In her book, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*, Alaimo acknowledges that nature is often depicted as a comforting mother, as a body that can be exploited or penetrated, and as a passive entity to be acted upon. She writes that feminist thought has accordingly often rejected natural associations, on the grounds that they “thrust woman outside the domain of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency.”⁴⁹ However, Alaimo troubles this rejection of all things natural and essential, claiming instead that “whereas feminist theory’s flight from nature leaves nature dangerously abject, a remarkable range of women’s texts inhabit nature in order to transform it, not only contending with the natures that have been waged against women but writing nature as feminist space.”⁵⁰ The Ovulars certainly “inhabit nature in order to transform it,” in order to queer it and remold it for an ecofeminist future.

Sandilands also understands the inhabiting of nature and concurrent essentialism of lesbian lands “strategic,” for the ways it allows women to redefine themselves and their environment through these categories, through “their own creative reflections in a natural world.”⁵¹ She also elucidates how the association of the female body with nature both participates in a trope and strategically subverts it:

⁴⁹ Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 2.

⁵⁰ Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground*, 13.

⁵¹ Sandilands, *Lesbian Separatist Communities*, 145.

The women demonstrate that nature is a 'like' place or actor, not an other to be tamed or feared but a friend, a sister, a lover... In a Euro-western cultural context, simply understanding nature as feminine is not at all subversive. What is, perhaps, is understanding and respecting the femininity of nature as a merging part of, rather than an opposition to, the self... actively intervening into the land with feminist iconography suggests an interesting space in which the femininity of the land is something that needs to be *achieved* rather than being always already present in nature.⁵²

While Sandilands is describing shaping of the literal landscape into vulva-shaped gardens or woman-shaped clearings, this same concept can be applied to Corinne's pasting of the vagina into her photographic landscapes. While the images may participate in the trope of a feminine nature, Corinne's intervention into the landscape suggests "something that needs to be achieved," and reflects the Ovular's goal of not merely considering nature to be akin to femininity, but remaking it in and through their own image, their "own shapes and lives."

Corinne describes her work as "interested in the magic" of yonic imagery, and refers to her representation of lesbian sexuality as "the bringing forward of what in Western societies has been both hidden and forbidden."⁵³ While sexualization of the female body has by no means been hidden, the vaginal image specifically has been forbidden throughout art history, especially in

⁵² Sandilands, *Lesbian Separatist Communities*, 146.

⁵³ *Erotica: Women Creating Beyond the Sexual*, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

comparison with the domination of phallic imagery or readings of imagery as phallic.⁵⁴ The association of the female body with landscape and nature has a much more documented art historical lineage than that of lesbian photography (see figures 14-18). Georgia O'Keeffe's floral paintings are an oft-cited case of the association of female genitalia with nature. Despite the artist's insistence that this was not the intention of her work, it has become a widely disseminated, popular interpretation of her still lifes.⁵⁵ In O'Keeffe's case, the reading of her work as connecting female anatomy and nature is a forced one, based in the canon's conflation of the two concepts rather than in O'Keeffe's intention itself.

Mountaingrove's photos of nude women amidst the landscape, on the other hand, bring to mind Arcadian associations of the female body within nature, especially in late 19th-century works such as Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* and Cezanne's *Large Bathers*. While Mountaingrove's photos of women's bodies may play on and queer their art historical predecessors, her nudes are not for the enjoyment of male picnickers or for the formal explorations of another artist. Mountaingrove and Corinne both resist the sexual gaze of men in their compositions. Corinne deploys darkroom manipulation, such as solarization, to hide the identities of her models and to prioritize the intimacy of the composition rather than the erotics of it. Mountaingrove often obscures identities as well, and

⁵⁴ Tamsin Wilton, "The Erotic Art of Tee Corinne", in *Intimacies*, 2001.

⁵⁵ Lucas, Tamara. "Georgia O'Keeffe: Still Life at Tate." *The Lancet* 388, no. 10055 (2016): 1975.

also presents the nude female body in everyday, desexualized situations. The significant distinction between Mountaingrove and Corinne's work and the canonical conflation of women and nature is the simple one of agency and self-identification: they *choose* to identify their own female bodies with nature, and queer that association by also feminizing the Earth itself. Therefore, while these works certainly participate in essentialist gender definitions and certainly perpetuate a fraught link between the female body and nature, they also do both of these things in pursuit of new, queer, feminist ecologies which laid foundational groundwork for more inclusive worlds to come.

In her final reflection on the lesbian lands, Sandilands writes that "their contradictions give them life and relevance."⁵⁶ The contradiction between the lesbian separatists' simultaneous subversion of and production of essentialist terms and tropes can be a difficult one to reconcile, but can be seen as a "usable history" through Butler's call to "trouble" heteropatriarchy as well, and to recognize the imperfect nature, the "etc." of any attempt to do so. She writes:

Perhaps a coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions and take action with those contradictions intact. Perhaps also part of what dialogic understanding entails is the acceptance of divergence, breakage, splinter, and fragmentation as part of the often tortuous process of democratization.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Sandilands, *Lesbian Separatist Communities*, 159.

⁵⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 20.

If we, the inheritors of these images, are to read them as a usable history in their significant contributions to feminist and lesbian photography, ecofeminism and queer ecology, than we must take the action of viewing and studying them with their and our own contradictions intact. The Ovular photography and its presentation in *The Blatant Image* reclaims rurality, nature, the “feminine” landscape, and photography for lesbian and feminist women. Reclamation, in contrast to outright rejection, inherently involves perpetuation of the thing it reclaims—in this case, a historically fraught link between the female body and nature. As I’ve discussed here, that link can be read as a visual manifestation of the idea of a “natural” sex, and essentialist, biological understandings of gender. However, following in the lineage of Alaimo, Sandilands and Butler’s calls to embrace contradiction, I also argue that this link is an expression of new power, that it is “strategic” in its allowance of women to document an experiment and visualize a new mode of living.

This function of documenting the present as a way of imagining the future, of inhabiting in order to transform, is reflected in the way many of the photographers talk about their work in *The Blatant Image*, as a way of both filling a historical void of lesbian imagery and of creating a new future. Ovular instructor and artist JEB, for example, writes that lesbian photography in the 1980s was “transforming ourselves and the world in which we live by seeing and

sharing the realities of our lives and visualizing the future.”⁵⁸ She describes her images of lesbians as “a synthesis of how we are now and my vision of the future.”⁵⁹ A former resident of lesbian lands, Julie Enszer, writes that “separatism was a strategic mechanism for lesbians to create new political futures.”⁶⁰ In this way, the photography of the Ovulars was always situated deeply across time, in a blind spot of the past, a documenting of the present, and a speculative vision of the future.

This conception of both filling historical archival silences and projecting imagery of a new future perfectly encapsulates the definition of a “speculative archive.” Pioneered by Afrofuturist artists and writers over the last twenty years, speculative approaches to archival collections ask us to consider the archive not as something we “passively encounter,” as Beverly Nowviskie writes: “We don’t just play it back, like a phonograph record. It becomes... scratchadelia. This is vinyl for the scratch-artist, the DJ at the club. We’re talking about playable archives, simple records, that themselves become instruments—a truly usable past.”⁶¹ The Ovular photographs make the most sense when read this way, as usable pasts, as tools and instruments to be played. They are intended

⁵⁸ JEB. “Lesbian Photography-Seeing through Our Own Eyes.” *Studies in Visual Communication* 9, no. 2 (1983): 81.

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Enszer, *How to Stop Choking to Death*, 183

⁶¹ Nowviskie, Bethany. “Speculative Collections.” December 26, 2019. <http://nowviskie.org/2016/speculative-collections/>.

not only as documents of a culture of nature, but as examples and evidence of the possibility of “alternate destinies and divergent timelines.”⁶² Those alternate futures are born out of the voids of the past, as Nowvieskie writes: “Afrofuturism never forgets its archival aporia: gaps and uncertainties that open possibility even as they hurt. Can a community whose past has been rubbed out, imagine alternate futures?”⁶³ Likewise, the Ovular photographs again take a tactic of oppression – “archival aporia” – and reclaim it as a method to “open possibility.” To write and disseminate lesbian/feminist art histories, to document a woman building a barn or washing her hair in a river, and to imagine geologic formations forcing forward the hidden image of the vagina are all strategies of filling the “gaps” in a foundation, so that a new future might be constructed upon it.

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

III: CHAPTER II: CIRCLES, CIRCULATIONS, MEDIA, MEDIATIONS

"My work in recording the photographic herstory of the mostly Southern Oregon Lesbian community was undertaken to preserve the moment so glimmering, so quickly gone. I emphasized preserving on film the experiences that were happening and would be herstory if caught by the camera's eye." — Ruth Mountaingrove⁶⁴

This chapter reveals the media-specific circularity of the Ovulars through two photographs of the same moment: one of a scene constructed to be photographed, and another of its photographing. Together, these two images represent the Ovulars' attempt to reformulate photography as a medium for feminist and lesbian visibility, and the circular nature of that "visibility" as it was distributed through the print networks of the 1980s. Both of these phenomena are culminated in *The Blatant Image*. While a kind of physical, separatist world-building was going on at Rootworks as women picked up hammers and saws for the first time and constructed darkrooms and cabins, another kind of world-building went on through *The Blatant Image*, which constructed an infrastructure of mailing lists, magazines, exhibitions and reading groups that made possible the wider world of feminism. The Ovulars, at the intersection of these two practices, were thus motivated by the desire to not only formulate a new world, a new way of seeing, but to be seen, to *circulate* that world through photography and print materials. Their visual culture has thus always been a phenomena

⁶⁴ Corinne, Tee. "Ruth Mountaingrove Artist Statement." Lesbian Photography.

experienced through the intimate intermediary of paper: from *The Blatant Image* to my own archival engagement with them today.

First, the photograph: one of the strangest and most unique of those included in the University of Oregon's archive. Unlike those discussed in Chapter 1 and later in this chapter, it is a clearly constructed composition of bodies, a "studio" portrait rather than a candid snapshot (figure 17). The archival metadata offers little interpretive purchase, revealing only that the image is from *Ovular 2* (1982). However, in combining it with JEB's infamous image of *Ovular* photographers taking this exact picture nude in the studio (figure 1), we can assume that a handful of women took similar photographs that could have resulted in the archival negative that lives now in the Ruth Mountaingrove Papers. This image is significant not only in its uniqueness, but in its manifestation of circularity, a distinct iconographic theme of the *Ovular* photography and more theoretical theme of that photography's circulation.

In the image, five nude bodies form a small cluster, turned in together, each face hidden by another in the group. The majority of the women in the photo appear to be white, though one head of tight curls and glimpse of darker skin is visible in the back left.⁶⁵ The similar shape, size and pose of the bodies,

⁶⁵ This is one of the only *Ovular* images that features non-white women, especially in such a constructed "artistic" setting. Women of color are almost exclusively (and still rarely) included in images of larger social gatherings, such as the circles discussed later in this chapter. Beyond the photos selected for this thesis, many feature women of different sizes, ages and abilities—Tee Corinne's work is especially intersectional, often succeeding where other *Ovular* photographers fall short.

as well as the obscuring of individual facial features, is emphatically homogenous. The two bodies closest to the foreground appear almost as mirror images, with only slight deviations in the length of hair or the bend of an elbow revealing difference. Sitting on their knees, each woman leans her head in conspiratorially—it looks almost as if the back figure might be whispering something. They are gathered around nothing more than the space between them, hands reached delicately into the middle as if they might be drawing a map in a pile of dirt. As viewers, we are invited to observe the form created by this small, circular conversation, but not to hear the words exchanged inside it. Considering the rareness of posed portraits at the Ovulars, it is significant that this one poses the figures in a way that implies an intimate conversation, a circle of trust and confidence that is the exclusive site of showing one's face. Though there are Ovular photographs that reveal women's faces, they are more commonly obscured, turned away or solarized: in part perhaps so as to avoid being publicly identified in images and risking jobs and safety, but also in part perhaps to emphasize a shared identity ("woman") over the individual. While the landscape-portraits in the last chapter were highly indicative of the "culture of nature" on the lands, I find that this posed portrait is more reflective of the circulation of that culture of nature outside the lands—circular, intimate, and safe.

While this figure is a particularly strong manifestation of that culture, other Ovular photographs also frequently connote circularity, “affirmation,” simultaneous portrait and self-portrait, resonance, and echoes. Circles are one of the most common iconographic traits of the images and the culture of nature they depict: healing circles, sharing circles, circle gardens, the circle of the earth, the Venus symbol, the curves of the female body. Catherine Kleiner notes that “the ritual practice most often used to honor Mother Earth, “her” change of seasons, and all women was the *circle*, a form modeled after the first consciousness-raising groups but later attributed to feminist reconfigurations of Native American and prehistoric European traditions.”⁶⁶ Such “ritual” circles are featured in figures 15 and 16, documentary photographs likely by Ruth Mountaingrove. These kinds of circles did indeed come from the “consciousness-raising” events feminists held throughout the 1970s, which relied on personal “sharing” as testimony to their ideals, but the circular seating formation also reflects the non-hierarchical, pagan-influenced and collective motivations of these groups. These seating arrangements are also closed and intimate forms of sharing. When these physically circular meetings could not be held, the sharing, consciousness-raising and intimate affirmation occurred in print, through publications like *The Blatant Image*. The significance of these print circulations for women without a queer community is imagined by Susan Bright

⁶⁶ Kleiner, *Nature's Lovers*, 250.

in her reflection on the release of *Coming to Power*, a flagship book of lesbian erotica published in the same year as the first *Blatant Image* (1981):

Coming to Power included so many pictures: pictures of real women: their faces, tits, cunts and hands. I couldn't believe those women were really out there! If I felt this way working in a vibrator store in the middle of San Francisco, you can imagine the effect the book had on women in more remote locations.⁶⁷

Bright's impulse that this would be even more affirmational for women without an urban queer community is accurate, and also reflects the special networks that had to be created in order to link together all those women "out there." *The Blatant Image* is one such attempt to create a network of visibility, affirmation and exchange, through the mail.

Many feminist networks of the 1970s and 1980s were built and sustained by postal networks: mailing lists, postcards, calendars, zines, and feminist bookstores were all central tools in the organization of meetings, political action, and festivals, as well as the writing of feminist histories. Kathy Rudy attests to this when she writes that "through the mail, I found my way into a lesbian community and a lesbian identity."⁶⁸ Enszer, too, points out that "the intellectual roots of lesbian separatism" were indebted to "community newsletters and hand-printed pamphlets circulated within lesbian communities."⁶⁹ Deborah

⁶⁷ Susan Bright, "Introduction," in *Nothing but the Girl: The Blatant Lesbian Image: A Portfolio and Exploration of Lesbian Erotic Photography*. New York, NY: Freedom Editions, 1996.

⁶⁸ Rudy, Kathy. "Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory." *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 194

⁶⁹ Enszer, 144.

Bright remarks that “anyone with access to a word processor, a photocopier, and a dissatisfaction with mainstream gay and lesbian periodicals” could produce a zine, newsletter or scrapbook that would add to what they found lacking in that “mainstream.”⁷⁰ *The Blatant Image* certainly sets out to correct such a “dissatisfaction,” namely, the absence of lesbian visibility or photographs taken by lesbian photographers. JEB, for example, claims that when she began taking photographs in 1970 she “was a Lesbian who had never seen an affirming Lesbian image.”⁷¹ The goal of correcting this lack is referenced in the very title of the magazine, as it plays on the term “latent image,” which is the photograph before development, the invisible image that has yet to be made visible. Making latent images *blatant* images is the polemic of these artists, but that polemic is specific to networks built of paper, ink, glue, photographs, and envelopes. Confronted with networks built instead of digital threads, online articles and social media tags, I’ve observed this polemic becoming more cautious, with women turning down opportunities for “visibility” such as magazine features and discouraging digital sharing of images. The paper networks of the 1980s, in contrast to contemporary digital networks, represented a safe circle in which to seek “visibility” and in which to visualize alternative futures. The media and era-specific shift of trust is well exemplified by one

⁷⁰ Bright, *Passionate Camera*, 8.

⁷¹ JEB, *Seeing Through Our Own Eyes*, 83.

woman's comment that she can't believe all of the print advertisements, newsletters and calls for magazine submissions used to include Rootworks' address and even maps of how to reach the land from nearby freeway exits.⁷²

A large part of the safety of those networks is the literal circularity of their circulation. *The Blatant Image*, and other informal magazines like it, was a controlled kind of public visibility: advertised in other feminist periodicals, occasionally in photography magazines and in personal correspondence. Mail subscribers made up the majority of its audience, supplemented by visitors to select women's bookstores. The mailing list and the women's bookstore clientele are both closed networks, with a predictable range of individuals in the audience. This kind of publication is not "public" in the same way most magazines are today, open to anonymous e-mails, social media followers and instantly shareable.

When JEB sought to create and circulate the "affirming" lesbian images she had never seen, she did so in "newspapers, calendars, books, postcards and posters," she "did not make photographs to be exhibited on a gallery wall."⁷³ This preference for intimate print material, pieces of paper that can be held in a hand or hung on the wall of a bedroom, is in part motivated by the

⁷² Laura, Caretaker of Rootworks, interview by author, Sunny Valley, October 2019.

⁷³ JEB. "BEING SEEN MAKES A MOVEMENT POSSIBLE." Leslie Lohman Museum of Art, 2019. <https://www.leslielohman.org/project/being-seen-makes-a-movement-possible>.

relative safety of closed print networks at the time. Reading a magazine could be private and intimate, with material wrapped in covers or delivered to the private sphere of the home in an envelope. Especially for women who weren't embedded in a queer community or even out at all, mail subscription magazines made lesbian imagery and literature more accessible. These were safer ways to participate in queer culture, protected by the privacy of paper.

Historically, female storytelling has long been tied to paper through media such as writing, journaling, scrapbooking, and later, photography. Scholars have begun to address this material history: Ellen Gruber Garvey's work demonstrates the ways 19th century scrapbooking allowed women to keep secret, informal archives, Maryanne Dever illustrates the significance of paper's materiality to queer figures such as Eve Langley and Greta Garbo, and closest to the temporal home of the Ovulars: Deborah Bright, Keridwen N. Luis and Sylvia Page have discussed the significance of zines and other DIY publication formats to feminist organizing in the late 20th century. This body of work informs my conclusion that *The Blatant Image* and the Ovulars sought a very media-specific kind of "visibility," one that was circular and safe, in comparison to a digital sphere, due to its distribution through paper networks such as mail subscription magazines and feminist bookstores. This circular environment of safety, affirmation and resonance is manifested in images such as Figure 17, as well as Ruth Mountaingrove's more documentary photographs of circular

gatherings. However, it is also manifested in another genre of the Ovulars: portraits of women actively photographing.

One of the most proliferate motifs of the Ovulars is the nude female body photographing, rather than being photographed. Along with the landscape-portraits discussed in the last chapter (and which the circle photos might also fall into), images of women taking photos are the second most common genre of the workshops. These portraits of women photographing have at times been more widely circulated than the landscape-portraits, making up almost half of the photographs selected for Carmen Winant's book survey I'll discuss in the next chapter. JEB's image (figure 1) is certainly one of the most circulated from the Ovulars, even appearing in popular magazines such as *The Atlantic*. In Figure 1, nude women work with a variety of different equipment, from handheld to large format cameras. The scene exemplifies what the sign above the Ovular studio door stated: "women at work." Like Mountaingrove's documentation of women learning construction, auto repair and farming, JEB's image and others like it demonstrate female mastery over a skill previously considered "masculine": photography.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ While there is a history of female photography, including, among others, Berenice Abbott, Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Diane Arbus, it seems that the Ovular photographers see photography as a medium more easily accessed by men, both for its financial and technical barriers to entry. Additionally, their characterization of the medium is informed largely by erotic photography and photographs of lesbians, both of which were certainly dominated by men up until this point.

Like the landscape-portraits work to associate the female body and the landscape, this second category works to associate the female body with the camera: as the subject that points the camera, specifically, rather than a subject “captured” by it. The body that gazes, rather than the object of a gaze.

Contemporary artist Carmen Winant addresses this category of the Ovular photographs:

These women photographed the process of photography itself: they made pictures of making pictures, continually imaging one another *behind* the camera. More than the image-objects that were produced, it's this meta-act at the center of all of it: a desire to capture the approach to documenting itself, the re-determination of photography as a tool for community-making rather than one for individual recognition.⁷⁵

Winant's assessment of this trend in the Ovulars gets at the heart of their relationship to photography as a medium, “re-determining” its possibilities as a tool, turning and returning the gaze, and documenting the present in the service of the future.

These camera-portraits are so significant that one even graces the cover of the second issue of *The Blatant Image*, by the Ovular instructor Katie Niles. In the work, a female photographer raises a camera over her right eye, its lens and her left eye staring out at the viewer with equal steadiness. While the woman appears to be nude, the image is also solarized or tone-reversed, a practice

⁷⁵ Winant, Carmen, and Ariel Goldberg. *Notes on Fundamental Joy: Seeking the Elimination of Oppression through the Social and Political Transformation of the Patriarchy That Otherwise Threatens to Bury Us*. New York: Printed Matter, Inc., 2019.

often used by Ovular photographers (famously Tee Corinne) for obscuring identities and de-familiarizing bodies. Together, the outward gaze of the figure's eye, the camera, and the solarized obscurity of her body resist the viewer's gaze in order to emphasize her own: reminding you that even as you open the magazine to view her photographs, not to forget who made them, who has offered this window into her world.

Laura Mulvey first theorized the "male gaze" in 1975, just six years before the first *Blatant Image*, putting terminology to the voyeuristic male artist or viewer that takes pleasure in the female body as a spectacle.⁷⁶ Throughout the 1980s, lesbian photographers began to describe their work as combatting the male gaze that had been producing and consuming lesbian imagery up until that point. Susan Bright's introduction to *Coming to Power* reflects on the first lesbian photographs she ever saw, which were produced by and for men. The photographers of both *Coming to Power* and *The Blatant Image* thus turn their cameras on themselves, each other and the viewer as a tactic for disrupting the male gaze in favor of a new female, and lesbian, gaze.

Additionally, the viewer becomes the implied subject of her picture, and implicitly, the other pictures in the magazine. These photographs of women photographing create a kind of loop, in which viewers are also subjects, photographers also muses, and portraits also self-portraits. Once again, the

⁷⁶ Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

image's role as a "mirror," as a source of affirmation and recognition, is underscored.

The Ovulars' feminization of photography also went beyond merely taking and circulating portraits of female photographers. Like the renaming of individuals, lands or seminars, the Ovulars transformed the language of photography in order to "work against this male definition of the photographic process as predatory," with terminology such as "capturing" a photo or "shooting a subject" replaced with to "make" a picture, or to "embrace the muse," as JEB writes.⁷⁷ Beyond terminology, the Ovulars encouraged women to rethink other aspects of their role as a photographer, such as being nude when shooting nudes and upholding strict ethics of "muse" consent, both of which JEB's image shows in practice. *The Blatant Image* also attempted to transform the medium by circulating information and practices formed at Rootworks around the world, including the writing of missing feminist and lesbian histories. The magazine took submissions of not only artwork, but also essays highlighting female historical artists, theories and methodologies. Over the course of three issues, women wrote on topics such as the history of lesbian erotic imagery in art, the ethics of photographer-subject relationships, and guides such as how to photograph rituals, how to work with color film, and how to begin making photos with minimal equipment and financial resources. Each issue ends with a

⁷⁷ JEB, *Seeing Through Our Own Eyes*, 81-96.

“Resources” index which includes a “feminist photography release” form subscribers could tear out and use, as well as reading material, directories, events, calls for submissions, workshops and residencies.⁷⁸ The magazine not only helped disseminate previously “latent” images, but “latent” techniques, networks and educational opportunities that were rarely formed by or directed toward female artists.

The Ovulars also attempted to transform photography into a not only feminist, but also ecofeminist, practice. Not only do the photographs’ compositions blend bodily subjects with landscapes and with cameras, but the practice of photography was also blended with the land and environmental concerns. Photographs were produced in a “low-tech” barn dark room powered by a marine battery. Prints were rinsed with water brought from the nearby river, and development chemicals were poured into a makeshift moat in order to prevent harmful runoff.⁷⁹ The sun would slowly evaporate the liquid, leaving the chemicals behind as residue on the plastic, which could then be disposed of without contaminating groundwater. The photographers also occasionally experimented with sunlight as a method of development, drawing on traditions of the cyanotype, which are also tied to natural history and early female

⁷⁸ *The Blatant Image*, 1981 - 1983. Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

⁷⁹ This description is aggregated from several sources, including my interview with Aggie Agapito, *The Blatant Image*, and images of the workshops themselves.

photographers such as Anna Atkins. Additionally, natural metaphors abound in the descriptions of photographic processes and storytelling. For example, *The Blatant Image* was labeled a “perennial” rather than a periodical, and its newsletters often appeal for volunteers to help produce it so that it will “bloom” the following year.⁸⁰

Additionally, while photography is often characterized as “mechanical” and “technological,” the medium is, like any other, a conglomeration of natural and geologic materials.⁸¹ Negatives, for example, are strips of petroleum-based plastic coated in a fine emulsion of gelatin—a product of boiled skin, cartilage, and bones—and silver—the brightest, most reflective of the metals found in the crust of the earth. This conglomeration is perceived as “technological” and therefore somehow separate from the realm of nature from which its components come. This cyclical relationship between media, technology and “nature” is what media theorist Jussi Parikka calls a “double bind” that forms “the sphere of medianatures.”⁸² Parikka’s idea is a media-centric morphing of the term *naturecultures*, which Donna Haraway coined only a year after

⁸⁰ “The Blatant Image: Her Story,” in *The Blatant Image* Volume 1, 1981: 4. Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

⁸¹ This rings especially true when thinking of the first photography book, William Henry Fox Talbot’s *Pencil of Nature*, and the early perception of photography as a material largely dictacted by nature itself.

⁸² Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Electronic Mediations; v. 46. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Sandilands' queer ecological study of lesbian lands and their *culture of nature*. Whereas both of these terms describe the inseparability of nature and culture, Parikka's term recognizes a similar entanglement of the two "co-constituting spheres" of *media* and nature, that "the earth provides for media and enables it."⁸³ This is true of all photography, but especially true for the Ovulars. Like the mingling of bodies and nature in the content, the prints themselves represent a material mingling of the natural site and the "culture" of photography. For example, the negative's macroscopic bits of silver reflect and capture light, and considering the lack of electricity at Rootworks, it is the falling of sunlight specifically which dictates the dispersion of crystals across the surface of a photograph. That particular arrangement of silver is then fixed by rinsing with salt and water drawn from a nearby creek, a bath that could leave traces of local sediment on the final print. Some negatives never even made it to these baths, dropped or left behind in the ground until the soil swallowed the silver back up, leaving behind only image-less acetate. This entanglement of the land and the photographs, and the images it produced, reflects the embodied, often spiritual relationship to nature cultivated at Rootworks and other lesbian lands. While the history of twentieth-century "site-specific" art is inundated with male artists and monumental forms such as sculpture and land art, the Ovulars can also be seen as site-specific in that they draw on the physical and social experience of a

⁸³ Parikka, *Geology of Media*, 13.

specific place in their construction, without which they would be entirely different. While these forms move beyond the physical site in a way that sculpture and land art often does not, this is indicative of the amorphous “site” of lesbian lands, one which is extended through print networks.⁸⁴ This environmentally entangled process is one of the many ways the Ovulars sought to make photography a more ecological practice, and to further blend their selves and ideals with the land.

Like the Ovulars reclaimed and inverted other tactics of oppression, they re-thought what it means to make photographs, especially as a feminist or lesbian artist. Though photography has a patriarchal (as well as colonialist and ableist) history, the Ovulars work to re-claim it by reformulating terminology, photographer and “muse” relationships, and environmentally informed development. Their photographic practice thus becomes uniquely site-specific and motivated by its future distribution through *The Blatant Image*, as a way of filling art historical silences and disseminating knowledge. JEB’s image of Ovular photographers working in the studio, along with other camera-portraits such as Katie Niles’, are thus way of documenting that work and visually laying claim to the role of the photographer, while also creating a loop of looking that

⁸⁴ While land and environmental art has always had a close connection with documentation (see for example Miwon Kwon’s writing on Ana Mendieta) the Ovulars differ in that the documents themselves are considered the main material form of the artwork.

emphasizes circularity and connection across time and space, through the photograph.

Together, JEB's image and Figure 1 represent the circular nature of looking, photographing and distributing at the Ovulars, and the subsequently media-specific understanding of "visibility" as it existed within closed, safe networks of print magazines and small paper objects such as postcards and calendars. While digital distribution of these images and information about the Ovulars is sometimes seen as "exposure" today, the polemic of "visibility" still survives. In 2019, JEB's photographs made their way from zines, postcards and newspapers to the very public New York City facade of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, in an ongoing installation entitled "BEING SEEN MAKES A MOVEMENT POSSIBLE." The work wraps decades of photographs of queer activism around the building, prominently featuring one of a woman next to a rural street sign that reads "dyke." The title of this installation reflects the underlying priority of the Ovulars: to create and circulate a visual reality that would make possible new futures, a future from which I write today.

IV: CHAPTER III: FUTURES/PASTS

*"The lack of a publicly accessible history is a devastating form of oppression. Lesbians face it constantly. The impact of this on art is that lines of development are obscured, broken, sometimes destroyed beyond reconstruction. We cannot casually go into a library, look up lesbian aesthetics or lesbian photography, and find a body of knowledge, a list of artists, or descriptions of masterpieces. The vast majority of our imagery is hidden in private scrapbooks or published in small circulation magazines and newspapers. Those few openly lesbian artists who have gained mainstream attention, though interesting, are generally not representative. The most famous of contemporary lesbian photographers are still totally closeted."*⁸⁵ - Tee Corinne

Today, the existence of the Ovular photographs is largely archival: mainly, in the Special Collections at the University of Oregon, but also in the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York. Some images, especially those by more well-known women such as Tee Corinne and JEB, have gone on to be published in exhibitions and a scant selection of online articles. However, until the 2019 publication of Carmen Winant's book *Notes on Fundamental Joy*, the only way to view a large selection of the photographs was in an archive or in an original *Blatant Image*, of which there are few.⁸⁶ The moment from which I write on the Ovulars is therefore a cusp in their history: Winant's book (2019), an exhibition at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art (2019), online attention through social media accounts such as Queer History and the Lesbian Herstory Archives (2018-2019), as well as this very thesis (2020), are about to transition the material

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶ Copies of *The Blatant Image* are occasionally sold secondhand online, but for inflated prices of up to \$100, making them mostly inaccessible.

situation of the Ovulars from something almost exclusively archival back to something in vibrant circulation. Contemporary engagement, from Winant's artistic re-presentations to JEB's continued exhibitions to emerging scholarship, continues to address and play with the archival nature of this body of work, recognizing the both situated and synchronic nature of that archive.

Like photography, the archive, particularly this archive, is what Parikka calls a “medianature,” or an interlocked sphere of geology and technology. The archive is made up of records, which in the case of the Ruth Mountaingrove and Tee Corinne Papers are largely paper. The surfaces of these sheets of paper are covered in geologic materials: letters composed of scratchy rivulets of graphite, pages of stamped ravines of carbon black typewriter ink. As I discussed in the last chapter, the printed photographs and negatives in the archive also contain traces of the land and the stream water with which they were developed. While a visit to a collection often involves taking great care to prevent natural interferences by wearing gloves or avoiding sunlight, there are many natural sediments in the records that inform the histories that can be written about them. Additionally, the soil at Rootworks has reclaimed bits of these records—in a site visit, a resident told me that she frequently finds fragmented pieces of negatives, lens caps, and even small sculptures in the land itself. However, when I asked if it might be possible to print some of those buried negatives, she laughed and told me that it would be “like printing a piece

of a sandwich bag.”⁸⁷ Over time, the silver and gelatin have eroded off the surface of the negatives, rejoining the crust of the earth from which they came, and erasing forever the images originally imprinted there. The loss of these images poignantly points to the silences in primary research and the impossibility of ever finding whole, unfractured histories in the archive.

Lisa Moore, in her scholarship on lesbian landscapes and gardens, writes that part of the challenge of claiming historical queerness through archival research is that “our archive is slim to begin with” due to the often undocumented, or documented and then destroyed, nature of queer relationships.⁸⁸ The challenge presented by this “slim” archive is also commented on by Tee Corinne, for as her epigraph to this thesis states, lesbian imagery has largely been “hidden in private scrapbooks, small circulation magazines and newspapers,” rather than public archives, exhibitions and histories, leading to the “obscuring” of artistic and historical lineages and legacies.⁸⁹ This absence, which Corinne calls a “devastating form of oppression,” is what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls an archival “silence” in his book *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. The archival silence is that which is left out or suppressed in a collection of records or a historical

⁸⁷ Laura, Caretaker of Rootworks. Interview by the author, September 2019.

⁸⁸ Lisa Moore, *Sister Arts*, IX

⁸⁹ Corinne, Tee. "Ruth Mountaingrove Artist Statement." Lesbian Photography.

telling—a gap which can be created at any point throughout the distinct formation of sources, archives, narratives and history.⁹⁰ The Ovulars sought to rectify these kinds of silences by creating “blatantly” lesbian imagery (the making of sources), as well as circulating and saving it (for the making of the archive). At both of these points the Ovulars attempted to fill the silence, and in the impact of *The Blatant Image* and the abundance of the archive at University of Oregon’s special collections, they succeeded.

However, the Ruth Mountaingrove and Tee Corinne Papers are still exemplary of the kinds of silences that can be created at the stage of archival formation. For example, Ruth’s papers began to enter the University of Oregon Special Collections in the early 1990s, but were not given any gender or sexuality related metadata until archivist Linda Long stumbled across them when she came to the University of Oregon several years later. Long immediately felt an urgency “to specifically use the word “lesbian” in the title so that a search of that word in the online catalog would bring up the description of the collection.”⁹¹ This exemplifies the potential for silences in archival material, which relies on human-created descriptors in order to organize search results. Much of both collections is mislabeled or does not correspond with the finding

⁹⁰ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995), 28.

⁹¹Gage, Carolyn. "A Lesbian Archivist Discovers a Hidden Literary Treasure in Southern Oregon." Scribd.

aid, and most of the photographers and featured figures in the Ovular photographs are not identified, making it impossible to credit artists in full or search for portraits of a specific person. Beyond the silences created by metadata and organization in the Ovular archive, there are also missing pieces and withheld records. All of these archival challenges obscure the ability for a visitor “to casually go into a library, look up lesbian aesthetics or lesbian photography, and find a body of knowledge,” as Corinne imagines.

Further archival silences around the Ovulars and lesbian photography in general have been perpetuated by the formation of narratives and subsequently history. Art historical scholarship on photography, queer art, site-specificity, and land art have all neglected the Ovulars up until this point. The limited art historical writing of Tee Corinne and JEB, this thesis, Carmen Winant’s book, and recent inclusion of Ovular photographers in exhibitions are all working to counter that silence and “recover” a largely ignored piece of feminist and queer art history. As Lisa Moore writes of her own work reading against archival silences:

Of course our archival ‘recovery’ projects are not meant to serve the long-dead objects of our research. What we are recovering is a usable past for ourselves, based on rumors, fragments, secrets, and secretions. There are the stories I want to listen to as well as tell.⁹²

⁹² Lisa Moore, *Sister Arts*, XI

Moore's assertion that queer archival projects recover not only credit for specific historical individuals, but a "usable past" for "ourselves" as researchers, historians and people is also applicable to the Ovulars. The story of the Ovulars is one such usable past, especially in the sense of "adaptable ideals"—while lesbian separatism may include elements of essentialism, a queer ecological "culture of nature" like the one at Rootworks can still teach us about the relationship between gender, sexuality, place and artistic practice. And while work like Tee Corinne's *Isis* series might reify essentialist notions of gender, it still has a place in a feminist history of art and presents something *usable* for that history.

One of the ways in which this past has been put to "use" is in the work of contemporary artist Carmen Winant. Over the past few years, Winant's artistic practice has drawn on and re-circulated the print archive of the Ovulars. Her 2018 installation *Lesbian Lands*, and her recent book published by Printed Matter, *Notes on Fundamental Joy; seeking the elimination of oppression through the social and political transformation of the patriarchy that otherwise threatens to bury us*, honors Oregon's land-dykes and their contributions to the history of feminist photography. In particular, Winant's work engages with the print lives and archival afterlives of these images.

Winant's 2018 installation *Lesbian Lands* at the Columbus Museum of Art was predicated on years of reading the few print sources she could get on

lesbian lands, and encountering images like Mountaingrove's of the construction of buildings like the barn photography studio at Rootworks (figures 18-19). Winant found in those images a profound "forward-thinking-ness, a kind of optimism baked into pictures of them building a new world."⁹³ Inspired by that optimism, *Lesbian Lands* recreated the frame of the barn studio as Ovular photographers captured it, mid-construction. In this way, *The Blatant Image* serves as a kind of blueprint or pattern book that demonstrates possibilities for a new world, one which Winant took quite literally in her recreation of Rootworks' "Natalie Barney." She also lined the floor with "sketches" that collaged photographs from the Ovulars and Winant's research notes. The installation is environmental, inviting viewers inside something both monumental and incomplete, like the project of the lesbian lands. In its exact replication of Rootworks' barn, and its simplified, architectural form, the project feels almost like a memorial—especially considering the embedded archival historical information within, almost like a museum.

Much of Winant's work has reckoned with what it means to engage with the Ovulars today, given both their legacy for feminist photography as well as their history of essentialism. While she used to think of lesbian lands as a "failed" experiment, her work now honors their contributions while also recognizing that

⁹³ Carmen Winant, interview with the author.

"coalition is a difficult thing to sustain."⁹⁴ While today Rootworks is home to only a handful of women (though other women's lands thrive), and while the idea of "women-only" spaces has at times been incompatible with contemporary rejections of gender essentialism, Winant's work demonstrates the continued significance of this visual culture and how its past can be usable, with flexible and adaptable ideals, for the future of women's lands, feminist art, and individual people.

She continues this project in *Notes on Fundamental Joy*. The book features the work of many Ovular photographers, including JEB, Clytia Fuller, Tee Corinne, Ruth Mountaingrove, Katie Niles, Carol Osmer, and Honey Lee Cottrell (figures 20-22). While each of these individuals is featured, their photographs are integrated together and presented in one continuous flow, with all credits gathered on a separate page rather than captioning each image. This choice reflects the collective nature of the Ovulars themselves, and the shared visual language of their photographs: while there are some distinctions, many of the works share an emphasis on the relationship between the body and nature, ritual and queer desire. Additionally, the pages are printed on a thin, translucent paper that allows traces of the photographs on the next pages to peek through, layering them in a mode reminiscent of the archive many of the photos currently reside in. With a white matte cover and delicate pages, the book has the feel of

⁹⁴ Winant, interview with the author.

something precious. This archival, intimate way of presenting the photographs is a fitting method of distributing them in the world. Winant wanted the project to be a book, rather than "an exhibition in a museum space," which "wouldn't have the same kind of political urgency and power to circulate. [Winant] wanted it to live as a book and be cheap and be able to move around as their print materials did, to live as a kind of tribute." This "tribute" pays homage in particular to the legacy of the print circulation I discussed in the last chapter, continuing *The Blatant Image*'s mode of reading as private and intimate, protected by the privacy of paper.

Winant's essay reflects on the ongoing, evolving work of coalition-building, as it runs along the bottom of each page in a single line. In it she writes that the story of the Ovulars is usable as "both proof (that such world-building was possible and actualized) and instruction, existing in perpetuity and beyond their own time." Seeing these photographs as "instructions" clearly motivates her construction of Natalie Barney through the photographs. Additionally, she writes that her engagement with the Ovulars is "an attempt to mind the gap (in understanding, in experience) between myself as a feminist half a century later, but also as a cis-gendered, heterosexual-identifying feminist."⁹⁵ This temporal reflexivity is necessary for a past to be considered "usable," and in what ways the "optimism," or what I would call futurity, of the Ovulars is directed towards

⁹⁵ Winant, *Notes on Fundamental Joy*.

our own present moment. An essay by Ariel Goldberg at the center of the book also reckons with what these images mean today, especially for trans and gender non-conforming viewers. Their text makes a speculative return to the moment an Ovular “class photo” is taken by Ruth Mountaingrove, and questions where the subjects are now, and how they might feel about the circulation of their photographs in Winant’s book, in exhibitions and on social media. They question their exclusion of those who don’t fit into a “women-only” space, tying it to their own experience as a gender-non conforming attendee of an “all women” dance party. Both essays do the important work of acknowledging the differences between the feminism of these images and feminism today, but also suggest that this intergenerational discomfort is necessary, productive and resonant. *Notes on Fundamental Joy* and *Lesbian Lands* each seek to fill art historical silences by re-circulating the Ovular images in places they were excluded from during their time, from art museums to leading publishing houses. Additionally, they recognize the ideals and optimism of the Ovulars as usable and adaptable for contemporary feminists.

Recognizing the Ovulars as usable today requires an imaginative reading against their archival silences, as well as an understanding of the limitations of the period. Like writers in *The Blatant Image* looked back to photographers such as Bernice Abbott to “recover” and circulate missing queer histories for their own use, writing the Ovulars is a way of establishing the

lineages Corinne worries will be obscured “beyond reconstruction,” and recognizing that this is never the case: a queer speculative gaze can go both ways through time, imagining a new future as much as a usable past.

V: CONCLUSION: EROSION/LEGACY

“What the eyes and analysis perceive on the ground can at best pass for the shadow of a future object in the light of a rising sun.” – Henri Lefebvre

In a small clearing between a circular vegetable garden and a haphazard fruit orchard, two lilac trees bend together like bowed heads over the resting place of Ruth Mountaingrove. Before her ashes were interned permanently in the soil here, this grove was created as a place for Ruth and her partner Jean to have sex out in the land. Together, they planted the lilacs as an intimate canopy of delicate purple blossoms under which they would lie. As a bed, these petals served as a soft surface, crushed and fragrant under moving bodies. As a grave, they fall and accumulate in a thick blanket, undisturbed.

However, this site is in danger of eroding away from Rootworks all together: while the placement of the lilac grove near a small creek was appealing to Ruth and Jean in the 1980s, today that creek has grown into a ravine that chews off bigger and bigger bits of the land every year. The current caretaker attributes the intense erosion of this creek to the history of mining on the land, one she characterizes as highly patriarchal and violent in its “gauging” and “blasting” away of the earth for expensive elements.⁹⁶ Over time, Mountaingrove’s ashes, the lilac petals and the soil that mingle here will fall

⁹⁶ Laura, Caretaker of Rootworks, interview with the author, October 2019.

away into the creek, flowing down the mountain and away from Rootworks indefinitely.

This poignant surrender of the body to geologic forces (and human impacts upon them) is indicative of the embedded, everyday relationship to land at Rootworks and in the Ovular photography. In the blending of their own bodies and the land, as in Mountaingrove's bathers and other portraits, their photographs elevate the shared materiality between themselves and the environment, often until they're nearly indistinguishable. In their recognition of the land as female and erotic, typified by Tee Corinne's *Isis* series, the Ovulars engender earth as something with the ability to arouse, love and hold. This reflection of their queer ecological culture of nature, or natureculture, also takes the form of a circular medianature. The Ovular photographs not only imagine new worlds literally, such as in Mountaingrove's construction photos, but also by circulating those imaginations through *The Blatant Image* and other small-scale print networks. Subsequently, their understanding of "visibility" is very specific to the medium of photography and its distribution via these intimate networks. This medianature also uses an environmental process, entangling silver, sunlight and water, which takes a step toward a collaborative process between photographer and site. In their archival existence today, these site-specific sediments are stratified into narratives and beginning here, into histories, all of which are usable for contemporary artists, thinkers and individuals. As the ashes and

petals from Mountaingrove's grave, the foundations of Rootworks' buildings, and the silver from buried negatives erode away, this photographic archive and the histories written out of it will become ever more significant.

These stories will always contain silences: bits of ash, silver, paper, names and stories missing from the archive. However, accepting those limitations and contradictions, the visual culture of the Ovulars provides a significant, usable example of imagining alternative sites and futures through photography. Those futures, some of which have arrived and some of which may lie still ahead, are a world in which our relationships to land and nature are lively, embodied, queer, and—quite the opposite of a retreat—a political destination.

APPENDIX

Figures 1-2: Joan E. Biren, *Photographers at the Ovular*, a feminist photography workshop at Rootworks, Wolf Creek, Oregon, 1980 © 2014 JEB (Joan E. Biren)



Figures 3-5: Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon



Figure 6: Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.



Figure 7: Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.



Figure 8: Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.



Figure 9: Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

Figure 10: Development chemical evaporation system.



Figures 11-13: *Isis* Series, Tee Corinne. Tee A. Corinne Papers, Coll 263, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Or.



Figure 14:



Left: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Grey Lines with Black, Blue and Yellow*, 1923 (Georgia O'Keeffe Museum)

Right: Tee Corinne, from *A Theory of Art*, see above

Untitled, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

Top: Edvard Manet, *Luncheon on the Grass*, 1862

Bottom: Paul Cezanne, *Large Bathers*, 1898.

FIGURE 15: “Owl Farm Council Gathering” Photograph from the Ruth Mountaingrove papers. [\[Untitled, Coll309_A16_P11_0022A\]](#)



FIGURE 16: Easter, Meditation circle at Womanshare. Photograph from the Ruth Mountaingrove papers. [\[Untitled, Coll309v2cs2_001\]](#)



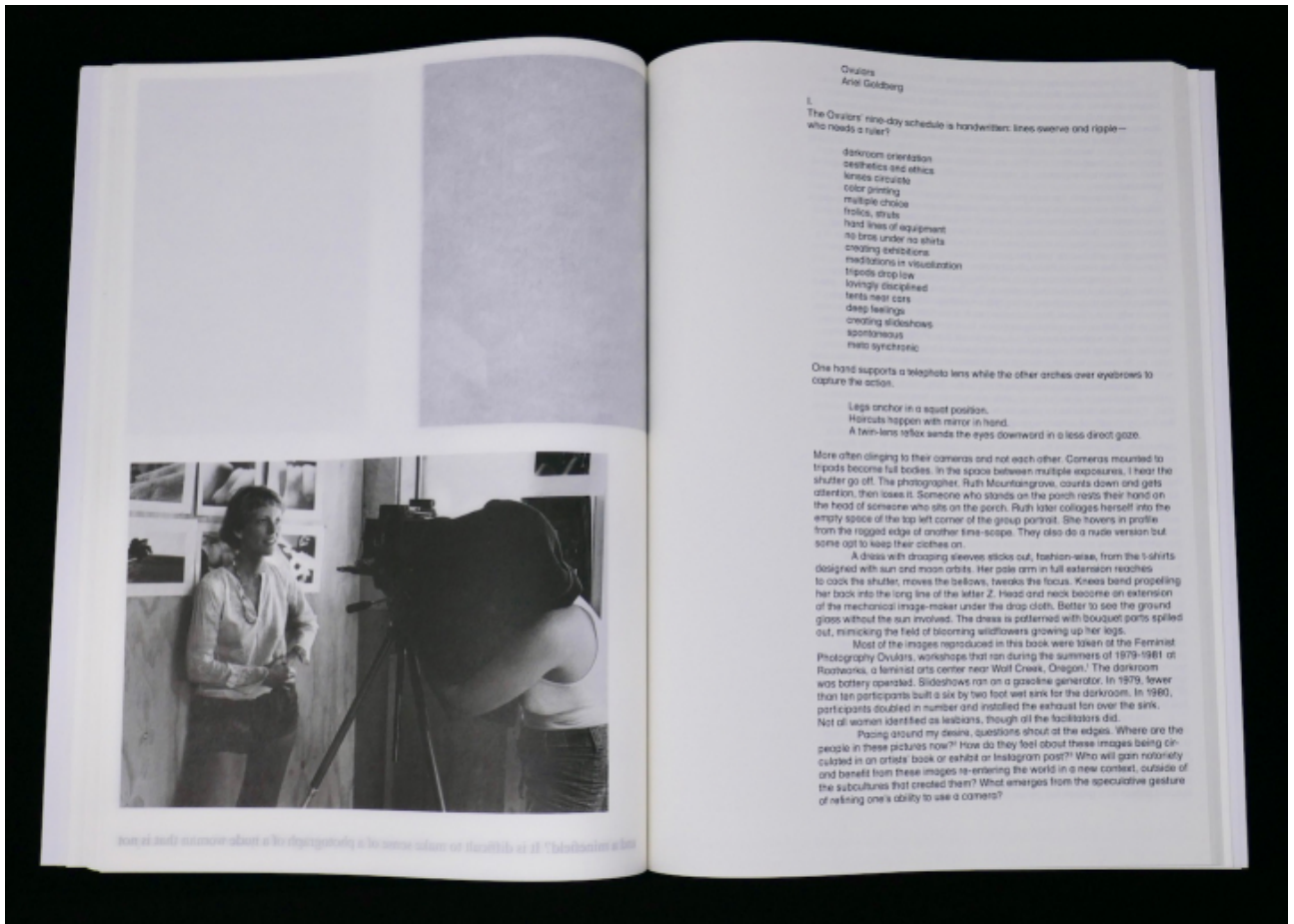
FIGURE 17: Photograph from *Ovular 2*, Photograph from the Ruth Mountaingrove papers, 1950-1999. [[Untitled, Coll309 v12 cs12 008](#)]



FIGURES 18-19: Carmen Winant, *Lesbian Lands*, Columbus Museum of Art, 2018.



FIGURES 20-22: Spreads from *Notes on Fundamental Joy* by Carmen Winant, Printed Matter, 2019.





REFERENCES CITED

PRIMARY MATERIALS

1980 Ovulars Call Flyer, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

Agapito, Aggie. Interview by author, Eugene, August 2019.

Biren, Joan E. "Lesbian Photography-Seeing through Our Own Eyes." *Studies in Visual Communication* 9, no. 2 (1983): 81-96.

The Blatant Image, Volumes 1-3, 1981-83. Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

Cheney, Joyce. *Lesbian Land*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Word Weavers, 1985.

Corinne, Tee A. "Women's Land." *Off Our Backs* 33, no. 5/6 (2003): 35-36.

Corinne, Tee, and Pearlchild. *San Francisco Haircut, 1975 : Radical Imaginings and Lesbian Feminist Photography*. Wolf Creek, Or.: Pearlchild, 2002.

Corinne, Tee, Lapidus, Jacqueline, and Sloan-Hunter, Margaret. *Yantras of Womanlove*. 1st ed. Tallahassee, Fla.]: Naiad Press, 1982.

Corinne, Tee. "Ruth Mountaingrove Artist Statement." Lesbian Photography.

Corinne, Tee. *Lesbian Photography on the U.S. West Coast, 1970-1997*. Oregon: T.A. Corinne, 1998.

Corinne, Tee. *Ovulars Scrapbook*. Tee A. Corinne Papers, Coll 263, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR.

Erotica: Women Creating Beyond the Sexual, Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

Laura, Caretaker of Rootworks, interview with the author, October 2019.

Mountaingrove, Ruth. *Ruth Mountaingrove Videotape Autobiography, Ca. 1988-1997*. 1988.

Ruth Mountaingrove Papers, Coll 309, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

Tee A. Corinne Papers, Coll 263, Special Collections & University Archives,
University of Oregon, Eugene, Or.

Winant, Carmen. Interview with the author, November 2019.

SECONDARY MATERIALS

Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*.
Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Aletti, Vince. "Queer Photography?" *Aperture*, no. 218 (2015): 26-27.

Arnold, Marion, and Meskimmon, Marsha. *Home/Land : Women, Citizenship,
Photographies*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida : Reflections on Photography*. 1st American
Pbk. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

Bell, and Valentine. "Queer Country: Rural Lesbian and Gay Lives." *Journal of
Rural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1995): 113-22.

Bell, David, and Valentine, Gill. *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*.
London ; New York: Routledge, 1994.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke
University Press, 2010.

Blessing, Jennifer, Halberstam, Judith, Harris, Lyle Ashton, Spector, Nancy,
Tyler, Carole-Anne, Wilson, Sarah, and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
Publisher, Host Institution. *Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose : Gender Performance in
Photography*. New York, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1997.

Borsa, Joan. "Rebels with a Cause." *N.paradoxa*, no. 23 (2009): 20-28.

Bright, Deborah. *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*.
London; New York: Routledge, 1998.

Bright, Susie, and Posener, Jill. *Nothing but the Girl : The Blatant Lesbian Image
: A Portfolio and Exploration of Lesbian Erotic Photography*. New York, NY:
Freedom Editions, 1996.

Butler, Cornelia H., Mark, Lisa Gabrielle, and Museum of Contemporary Art.
WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution. Los Angeles : Cambridge, Mass.:
Museum of Contemporary Art ; MIT Press, 2007.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Thinking Gender. New York, NY: Routledge, 1990.

Enszer, Julie R. "'How to Stop Choking to Death': Rethinking Lesbian Separatism as a Vibrant Political Theory and Feminist Practice." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2016): 180-196.

Field, Terri. "Is the Body Essential for Ecofeminism?" *Organization & Environment* 13, no. 1 (2000): 39-60.

Gage, Carolyn. "A Lesbian Archivist Discovers a Hidden Literary Treasure in Southern Oregon." Scribd. <https://www.scribd.com/document/30877835/A-Lesbian-Archivist-Discovers-a-Hidden-Literary-Treasure-in-Southern-Oregon>.

Gage, Carolyn. "Tee Corinne: Lesbian Artist and Revolutionary 1943-2006." *Off Our Backs* 36, no. 3 (2006): 8-10.

Garvey, Ellen Gruber. *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Grosjean, Shelley, and Herman, Ellen. *"Making Ourselves Real": Jean and Ruth Mountaingrove in the Southern Oregon Lesbian-Feminist Community, 1970 - 1984*. 2014.

Hackett, Sophie. "Queer Looking." *Aperture*, no. 218 (2015): 40-45. <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/WAAW/Corinne/Mountaingrove.htm>.

"Herstory" Oregon Women's Land Trust. 2017. <http://www.oregonwomenslandtrust.org/>.

Jansen, Charlotte. "Why Photography Was So Important to These Radical Lesbian Communities." Artsy. August 06, 2019. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-photography-radical-lesbian-communes>.

JEB. "BEING SEEN MAKES A MOVEMENT POSSIBLE." Leslie Lohman Museum of Art, 2019. <https://www.leslielohman.org/project/being-seen-makes-a-movement-possible>.

Jones, Amelia, and Silver, Erin. *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*. Rethinking Art's Histories. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2016.

Jones, Amelia. "The "Eternal Return": Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment." *Signs* 27, no. 4 (2002): 947-78.

Killen, Gemma. "Archiving the Other or Reading Online Photography as Queer Ephemera." *Australian Feminist Studies* 32, no. 91-92 (2017): 58-74.

Kleiner, Catherine. "Nature's Lovers: The Erotics of Lesbian Land Communities in Oregon, 1974-1984." In *Seeing Nature through Gender*, edited by Virginia Scharff, 242-62. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003.

Kopp, James J. *Eden within Eden: Oregon's Utopian Heritage*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2009.

Levin, Laura. "The Performative Force of Photography." *Photography & Culture* 2, no. 3 (2009): 327-36.

Lippard, Lucy R. *The New Explorers: Making Meaning in the 21st Century American Landscape*. Edited by Kris Timken. Oakland, CA: Conveyance Press, 2015.

Luis, Keridwen N. *Herlands : Exploring the Women's Land Movement in the United States*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

"Making Feminist Art:: Womanhouse and the Feminist Art Movement, 1972–1974." In *The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2007*, 48. Athens; London: University of Georgia Press, 2013.

Manders, Kerry. "Photos of Lesbian Lives Meant to Inspire a Movement." The New York Times. April 08, 2019.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/08/lens/lesbian-lives-movement-jeb.html>.

Monagle, Clare. "Mary Daly's Gyn/Ecology : Mysticism, Difference, and Feminist History." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 2 (2019): 333-53.

Moore, Lisa L. *Sister Arts : The Erotics of Lesbian Landscapes*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona. "Queering Ecocultural Studies." *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3-4 (2008): 455-76.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

Nowviskie, Bethany. "Speculative Collections." Bethany Nowviskie. December 26, 2019. <http://nowviskie.org/2016/speculative-collections/>.

- Page, Sylvia. "“Make Visible the Otherwise”: Queering the Art Library." *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 37, no. 1 (2018): 20-32.
- Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Electronic Mediations; v. 46. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Petrescu, Doina. *Altering Practices : Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*. London; New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Pollock, Griselda. "Feminism, Art, the Library and the Politics of Memory." *Art Libraries Journal* 37, no. 1 (2012): 5-12.
- Robinson, Hilary. "Reframing Women." *Circa*, no. 72 (1995): 18-23.
- Sandilands, Catriona. "Landdykes and Landscape: Reflections on Sex and Nature in Southern Oregon." *Women & Environments International Magazine*, no. 56/57 (2002): 13.
- Sandilands, Catriona. "Lesbian Separatist Communities and the Experience of Nature: Toward a Queer Ecology." *Organization & Environment* 15, no. 2 (2002): 131-63.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. 1st Picadore USA ed. New York: Picador USA : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
- Southern Oregon Lesbian Land Communities Oral History Collection*, Undated.
- Dever, Maryanne. "Papered Over, or Some Observations on Materiality and Archival Method" in *Out of the Closet, into the Archives : Researching Sexual Histories*. SUNY Series in Queer Politics and Cultures. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2015.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. John Hope Franklin Center Book. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the past : Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *The Dial* (April 11, 1918).
- Wilson, Alexander. *The Culture of Nature : North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991.

Winant, Carmen, and Ariel Goldberg. *Notes on Fundamental Joy: Seeking the Elimination of Oppression through the Social and Political Transformation of the Patriarchy That Otherwise Threatens to Bury Us*. New York: Printed Matter, Inc., 2019.

"Women's Lands in Southern Oregon. Jean Mountaingrove and Bethroot Gwynn Tell Their Stories." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (2014): 60-89.