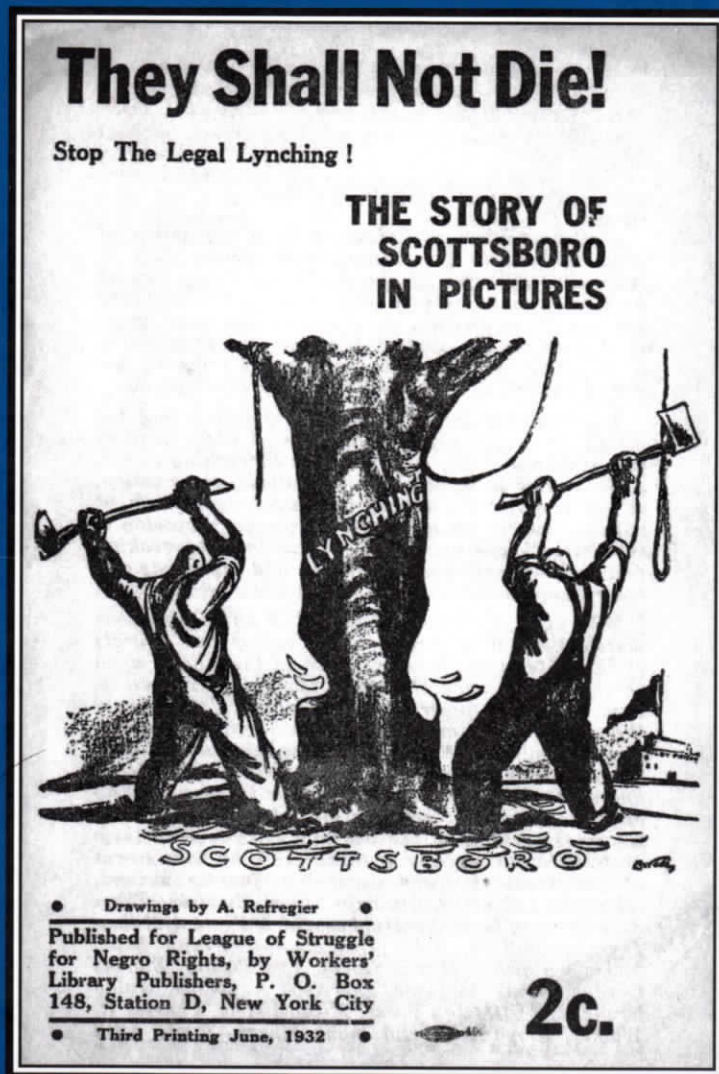


Modern Print Activism in the United States

Edited by
RACHEL SCHREIBER



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ASHGATE

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Amazon Quarterly:
Pre-Zine Print Culture and the
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Tirza True Latimer

Oakland, California, in the early 1970s looked a lot like what the radical feminist critic Jill Johnston famously described as a "Lesbian Nation."¹ In a collection of *Village Voice* essays published under this bold banner, Johnson outlined a lesbian separatist cultural agenda for lesbians building anti-patriarchal social, cultural, and economic networks. Her ideas were nourished by and resonated throughout lesbian popular culture. "They built their own houses and fixed their own bikes / Fulfilling our dream of a nation of dykes," the lyrics to "Sweet Betsy the Dyke," by the singer-songwriter Les B. Friends affirmed.² In the Bay Area, where gay men were restoring Victorians and reconfiguring San Francisco's Castro district, lesbians by the thousands settled in the East Bay. One entire row of 1920s stucco rental units on Sacramento Avenue was known as Amazon Acres for its dykey demographics. Berkeley and Oakland were honeycombed with such enclaves. Plaid-shirted dykes converged on the women's bookstores, women's centers, and lesbian restaurants and bars that cropped up to serve "the other side" of the Bay. Lesbian feminist publications both documented and contributed to the creation of alternative social structures and artistic economies. One of the first was the Oakland-based periodical *Amazon Quarterly: A lesbian feminist arts journal*, edited by Laurel Galana and Gina Covina.

The magazine's mission statement and table of contents reflected the preoccupations of the Lesbian Nation's constituents—women who converged on the Bay Area, Women's Lands to the north, and other promising territories to write poetry, to make art and music, to break into the trades and other traditionally male métiers, to escape their biological families or husbands, to achieve autonomy, to find soul mates, to make love with women, to build houses, to create intentional communities, to re-imagine the world. "Freed from male identification, lesbians are obviously in a very good position to be the ones to cross [freedom's] frontier," the first paragraph of *Amazon's* inaugural issue declares.³ The journal's utopian

¹ Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

² The lyrics are reproduced in full in *Amazon Quarterly: A lesbian feminist arts journal* 1:2 (February 1973), p. 25.

³ "Frontiers," *Amazon* 1:1 (Fall 1972), p. 5.

rhetoric should not be mistaken for naïveté. "Even after we are seemingly *free*, there remains only a patriarchal culture to be *free in*," *Amazon* cautioned. "We cannot just tackle the most visible institutions and 'equalize' them. We cannot stop short of a thorough knowledge of the extensions of the patriarchy, how and why it works, and ultimately a dismantling of the entire machine."⁴ Every aspect of the journal—its facture, production values, literary and editorial contents, design, distribution, and economics—contributed to this project.

As a preliminary gesture, the magazine's co-editors, like many feminist contemporaries, dropped the patronymic from their signatures. Laurel's editorials, with titles such as "Toward a Woman Vision," emphasized that the deconstruction of the patriarchal apparatus, including its symbolic and psychic formations, was but a first phase of an exacting creative process. The lesbian feminist revolution called for the creation of new patterns of thought, relation, speech, action, and perception. Was it possible to make art, make love, make sense, make a living against the patriarchal grain? How would a future disentangled from masculinist schemas of power and the economic imperatives of capitalism look, sound, taste, smell, feel? Such questions interested the magazine's editors more than the coming out narratives and same-sex love stories that dominated lesbian feminist print culture throughout the 1970s. For *Amazon*, lesbianism was "a fait accompli, the background but not the message."⁵

Though we define this as a lesbian-feminist magazine, we aren't interested solely in stories that tell of lesbian love, the problems of being a lesbian, or the joys. Most of us who read this magazine are quite familiar with all that on the personal front . . . [We imagine this magazine, instead, as a space for] launching out from all that we as women have been before into something new and uncharted . . . We are calling this an arts journal in the sense that art is communication . . . We simply want the best of communication from lesbians who are consciously exploring new patterns in their lives.⁶

Gina and Laurel aspired to create a context for the formation of revolutionary feminist networks to develop in dialogical exchange across disciplinary as well as social, sexual, and geographical boundaries. The magazine's title and the cover graphic for the first issue (a woman warrior astride her tightly reined and rearing steed) alerted readers to the militant character of the project. (See Figure 11.1)

The journal introduced work by contributors who deeply marked the history of feminism, lesbian feminism, publishing, literature, and the visual arts. An interview with Jan Oxenberg follows a review by the Women's Film Co-op of the filmmaker's early short *Home Movie*;⁷ the lyrics to "A Woman's Love" by Michigan Womyn's

⁴ Laurel, "Toward a Woman Vision," *Amazon* 2:2 (December 1973), p. 18, p. 20.

⁵ Gina Covina and Laurel Galana, *The Lesbian Reader* (Berkeley: Amazon Press, 1975), inside front cover.

⁶ "Frontiers," *Amazon* 1:1 (Fall 1972), p. 5.

⁷ *Amazon* 2:2 (December 1973), pp. 53–5.



Fig. 11.1 Unidentified artist, *Amazon*, 1973.

Music Festival regular Alix (a generous financial backer of the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Festival) and the National Book Award as the National Book Award for poetry on behalf of "all women whose world";¹⁰ Audre Lorde, who s

⁸ *Amazon* 2:3 (March 1974).

⁹ *Amazon* 1:3 (May 1973).

¹⁰ The statement was presented at the National Book Award for poetry ceremony. "We agree that it would be a mistake that we can enrich ourselves more by fighting against each other." *Amazon* 2:4

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Fig. 11.1 Unidentified artist, cover, *Amazon Quarterly: A Lesbian Feminist Arts Journal*, Fall 1972.

Music Festival regular Alix Dobkin are preserved here as well;⁸ Robin Morgan (a generous financial backer of the magazine) published her keynote address to the 1973 West Coast Lesbian-Feminist Conference, "Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?" in *Amazon*;⁹ Adrienne Rich posted her statement to the National Book Award assembly accepting a prize for *Diving into the Wreck* on behalf of "all women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world";¹⁰ Audre Lorde, who served for a time as *Amazon*'s poetry editor, composed

⁸ *Amazon* 2:3 (March 1973), p. 27.

⁹ *Amazon* 1:3 (May 1973), pp. 8-20.

¹⁰ The statement was prepared by three of the women nominated for the 1974 National Book Award for poetry (Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker) "with the agreement that it would be read by whichever of us, if any, was chosen We believe that we can enrich ourselves more in supporting and giving to each other than by competing against each other." *Amazon* 2:4 (July 1974), p. 71.

an artful and profoundly moving review of Toni Morrison's second novel, *Sula*, for the journal;¹¹ Judy Grahm, a founder of the Oakland Women's Press Collective, made public her epic poem, "A Woman is Talking to Death" in this context;¹² excerpts from Rita Mae Brown's lesbian classic *Ruby Fruit Jungle* appeared in *Amazon* prior to its publication by Daughters, Inc., as did excerpts from *Riverfinger Woman* by Elana Nachman (later, Elana Dykewomon);¹³ June Arnold, founder (with Bertha Harris and Charlotte Bunch) of Daughters, Inc. feminist publishing company, introduced her path-breaking novel *The Cook and the Carpenter*, as well as her later novel *Sister Gin* to *Amazon*'s readers;¹⁴ Jane Rule submitted her short story "Like a Woman" to the magazine.¹⁵ This roster of contributors altered the frame through which *Amazon*'s public viewed the world. They attracted—and, indeed, created—a self-empowering, Amazonian counterpublic.

Rather than capitalizing on the constellation of feminist luminaries whose names appeared in the journal's table of contents by cultivating a lesbian "market niche," the editors of *Amazon* invited sister publications (such as *Majority Report*, *Herself*, *Ain't I a Woman?*, *The Lesbian Tide*, and *Sisters*) to advertise for free in the magazine. They published directories of lesbian feminist resources, including what capitalists would view as competing enterprises. Anticipating the next generation's feminist grrrl zines and the contemporary Do-It-Yourself movement (and demonstrating similar disrespect for commercial imperatives), *Amazon* even ran an illustrated tutorial, "How to Make Your Own Magazine," that mapped out *Amazon*'s production process in three installments.¹⁶ In addition to defying the logic of commercial success, this demystification of publishing was tactically essential if lesbian feminists were to exercise control over the production (and reproduction) of cultural values.¹⁷

Gina, a student at California College of Arts and Crafts at the time, provided many of the illustrations for the journal, especially the first few issues. Seven out of the ten graphics in the inaugural number bear her signature. These include pen and ink vignettes capturing moments in the routines of couples whose reptilian hybridity completely queers the coziness of what otherwise appear to be quaint domestic scenes: lovers back-scrubbing in a claw-foot tub, curling up on the couch to watch TV, playing Scrabble in bed. (See Figure 11.2) These drawings, as well as others published in the journal, owe a visible debt to surrealism—one of the rare early twentieth-century movements to invite, albeit somewhat late in the day, the participation of women and to celebrate the strangeness/estrangement of their vision. Gina's flighty yet precise drafting, as well as her charismatically



Fig. 11.2 Gina Covina, illustration, *Amazon*, February 1973.

monstrous iconography, call to mind the work of outsider artists loosely identified with the surrealist movement.

The ambition to subvert capitalism with vanguard art magazines of the 1970s, like *Amazon* and *Minotaure*. Like surrealism, the material aligned with dissident aesthetics. *Amazon* also shared common ground with magazines—such as *Aspen*, *0-1*, and *Art Journal*—of the same period to challenge established magazines, as the historians of the movement observed, set new standards “of what was possible inside and outside the so-called

¹¹ *Amazon* 2:3 (March 1974), pp. 28–30.

¹² *Amazon* 2:2 (December 1973), pp. 4–17.

¹³ *Amazon* 1:2 (February 1973), pp. 6–18; *Amazon* 2:4 (July 1974), pp. 6–10.

¹⁴ *Amazon* 2:2 (December 1973), pp. 44–5; *Amazon* 3:2 (March 1975), pp. 42–7.

¹⁵ *Amazon* 1:2 (February 1973), pp. 18–23.

¹⁶ See *Amazon*, vol. 2, issue 3; vol. 2, issue 4; vol. 3, issue 1.

¹⁷ Gina Covina. Interview by author. December 26, 2007.

¹⁸ Gwen Allen and Cherise Smith, “The Art Journal 66:1 (Spring 2007), p. 10.

¹⁹ Allen and Smith, p. 41.

on's second novel, *Sula*,
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Fig. 11.2 Gina Covina, illustration, *Amazon Quarterly: A Lesbian Feminist Arts Journal*, February 1973.

monstrous iconography, call to mind Remedios Varo or even Frida Kahlo, two outsider artists loosely identified (for want of a more appropriate context) with the surrealist movement.

The ambition to subvert capitalism's cultural production apparatus aligns *Amazon* with vanguard art magazines of the surrealist era, such as *La Révolution surréaliste* and *Minotaure*. Like surrealist reviews, *Amazon* featured visual and literary material aligned with dissident political perspectives but bodied forth no unifying aesthetic. *Amazon* also shared certain objectives with contemporary artist-generated magazines—such as *Aspen*, *0–9*, *Avalanche*, *FILE*, and *Art-Rite*—that arose during the same period to challenge “formalist models of medium specificity.”¹⁸ These magazines, as the historians of visual culture Gwen Allen and Cherise Smith have observed, set new standards “of self-reflexivity about institutions and audiences both inside and outside the so-called art world.”¹⁹ The phrase “alternative distribution,”

¹⁸ Gwen Allen and Cherise Smith, “Publishing Art Alternative Distribution in Print,” *Art Journal* 66:1 (Spring 2007), p. 41.

¹⁹ Allen and Smith, p. 41.

which came into circulation at this time, connoted the creation of new patterns of cultural accessibility—a “desire to produce and exhibit art outside the mandates of profit and to reach a wider audience.”²⁰ With hindsight, and against the backdrop of today’s market-driven art scene, it is clear, Allen contends, that “to publish art, to literally ‘make it public,’ was a political act, one that challenged the art world and the world at large.”²¹ However, these rebellious pursuits contributed to forms of counter-publicity that often reinforced, via the dynamics of binary opposition, the very structures they contested. Moreover, they all but invited absorption, as the latest vanguard novelty, by the larger cultural economy.

Amazon strove to negotiate a way out of (or, more accurately, through) these binds by generating lesbian feminist counter-publicity and modeling forms of social and economic disentanglement from capitalism/patriarchy. What kind of a stance could a lesbian-feminist journal strike vis-à-vis the “man’s world” from which it issued and in which it remained embedded, the editors wondered. Unlike artist magazines that bucked market forces to open alternative avenues of creativity and communication within mainstream culture, *Amazon* imagined social territories off the patriarchal grid as the proper domain of lesbian artists. Perhaps it then makes sense, in a perverse sort of way, that although *Amazon* operated on a strictly not-for-profit basis, it was denied official non-profit status because, according to the IRS, the lesbian readership it served could not be defined as “the public.”²²

Amazon, unlike most art magazines, however alternative, chose not to generate revenue through the publication of advertisements. Gina and Laurel produced the journal on a shoe-string with resources garnered from subscriptions, bookstore commissions, in-kind and cash donations. Low-quality paper stock, typewritten galleys, black and white illustrations, and low-cost photo offset printing technologies contributed to the viability of the enterprise. The resulting DIY aesthetic made a statement of non-complicity with a culture industry increasingly invested in packaging.

Less visibly, but perhaps even more significantly, the magazine relied heavily on an expansive volunteer labor pool for production and distribution. The editors offered thanks, for instance, to “a woman in Oklahoma who helped with typing ... and a woman in the East who is computerizing our subscription files”; they invited local readers to participate in an “all-you-can-drink mailing party” when it came time for distribution.²³ The editors themselves—subsisting on food stamps and occasional odd jobs—devoted all their free time (“free” in this case meaning both “available” and “gratis”) to editorial and production tasks. They plowed any surplus funds they or the magazine earned into aligning the journal

²⁰ Allen and Smith, p. 41.

²¹ Gwen Allen, *Artists’ Magazines: An alternative space for art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2011), p. 7.

²² Mentioned in “What You Can Do to Help Miss Q,” *Amazon* 1:4/2:1 (October 1973), p. 13.

²³ *Amazon* 2:2 (December 1973), p. 3; *Amazon* 3:1 (November 1974), p. 72.

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²⁵ Jeanne Gallick, “Phallic T
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"Amazon 1:4/2:1 (October 1973),

(November 1974), p. 72.

ever more closely with their anti-market, anti-patriarchal, pro-social justice, and pro-environmentalist ideals. For instance, volume 2, issue 3 of *Amazon* was "dedicated to Trees" and printed on recycled paper, despite the additional expense.

In these ways, *Amazon* modeled editorial and production strategies redeployed by oppositional enterprises of the 1990s, when punk and grrrl zine makers turned to self-publishing. Print-culture activist Elke Zobl explains that this kind of self-publishing opened up "an outlet for creativity ... a network tool," and a forum for cultural resistance and political critique, while enabling social dissidents to narrate "an oppositional history and an alternative to the narrow and distorted mainstream representation of women [and] queer people ... an alternative that reflects and resists their cultural devaluation."²⁴ Zobl's remarks concern the grrrl zine movement, yet it is striking how accurately her observations about contemporary forms of counterpublicity describe *Amazon's* ethos. Such resonances make *Amazon* accessible to a new generation of readers.

Reviewing *Amazon* through the lens of current events and preoccupations (such as climate change and the emergence of eco-feminism as a set of activist commitments and practices) reawakens latent content. For instance, reading the frontispiece of *Amazon's* March 1975 issue in light of recent developments throws sustainability-related registers of meaning into heightened relief. (See Figure 11.3) The black-and-white photograph by Carol Newhouse pictures a wild-eyed woman—draped in a revealing shawl of macramé—emerging from a dense forest. Today's readers may laugh (or wince) at the picture's essentialist implications: Women (presumably because of their ability to generate life) have a privileged relationship with Mother Earth; women are, if you will, a force of nature. At the same time, this woman's don't-mess-with-me stance (she crouches as if to spring to action) and her expression (alert to potential danger) make it difficult to objectify her sleek, frontally exposed body. This 1970s *Amazon* looks like she can take care of herself. Her hand-crafted garment suggests autonomy from capitalist consumer economies. Indeed, the photograph's visual cues (the macramé, the massive tree trunk that serves as a backdrop) gesture toward a succession of eco-conscious historical trends—the back-to-the-land, DIY, and neo-craft movements among them.

Despite *Amazon's* evident gynocentrism, the journal never fully subscribed to the essentialist programs of feminine representation advanced by many other lesbian and feminist publications of the 1970s. Indeed, the magazine's contributors regularly ratified the Beauvoirian notion that women, within patriarchy, were "man's first artificial product."²⁵ The editors of *Amazon* deliberately steered clear of images that appeared to reduce lesbianism (with its political potential) to sexuality, and sexuality to erotic zones of the body. Although Tee A. Corinne, known in both

Such
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²⁴ Elke Zobl, "Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Feminist Zines—Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35:1 (2009), p. 5.

²⁵ Jeanne Gallick, "Phallic Technology and the Construction of Women," *Amazon* 1:2 (February 1972), p. 62.



Fig. 11.3 Carol Newhouse, photograph, frontispiece for *Amazon Quarterly: A Lesbian Feminist Arts Journal*, March 1975.

the feminist art world and lesbian separatist communities for her photographs and texts celebrating lesbian eroticism, regularly submitted material to the magazine, she received nothing but polite rejection letters from the editors of *Amazon*.²⁶

The artwork published in *Amazon* broadened the iconography of 1970s lesbian-feminism by pointing in less predictable directions. *Amazon's* visual modes of address were as heterogeneous as the journal's imagined readership. The magazine, as the art historian Margo Hobbs Thompson has noted, offered "a visual lexicon of cultural forms."²⁷ It juxtaposed works as diverse as Gina's queer reptiles, Newhouse's Amazon, vintage photos donated by a subscriber, Kaymarion's stylized nudes, Judy Linhares's lesbianized day-of-the-dead vignettes, Diane Derrick's de-idealized Three Graces, and Louise Fishman's *Angry* paintings. The eclecticism of the visual program works against the kind of aesthetic of coherence to which magazine designers typically aspire. *Amazon's* visual unevenness is productively unsettling, disrupting habits of seeing, and thus thinking. At the same time, this disturbing variety operates as a visual analogue for other forms of diversity.

²⁶ Gina Covina. Interview by author. 26 December 2007.

²⁷ Margo Hobbs Thompson, "'Dear Sisters': The Visible Lesbian in Community Arts Journals," *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12:3 (2006), p. 421.

Several of *Amazon's* contri- feminist art initiatives where re- was the "Great American Lesb- up with a very concrete, non-e- art and the celebration of lesb- curators conceived of a sort of- to groups all over the country. open to work by all lesbians. each local venue sent slides doc- the slides were shown at a gala- LA. This capstone exhibition- visibility in the arts. Followi- activists continued to use the- commercial, lesbian-affirmativ-

Harmony Hammond, organ- St. Workshop in New York's- that produced the "Lesbian- *Heresies*, wondered if some so- apparent in the course of these- "A Lesbian Art Show," like *Am- within feminism. Amazon's no- sharp lines where their lesbian- or prioritize one form of crea- contributing artist explained,*

Art for us is a two-way co- active. Instead of a given, ob- responses have become the- view, analyze or interpret ar- it, in a process of communica- lives and our lives can becom-

²⁸ GALAS arose in an environ- Studio Workshop, of which the les- founder. The Feminist Studio Wor- Women's Building, publishing *C- and sponsoring the Natalie Barn- documenting lesbian artists. With- collaboration with the critic Terry- 1979), which hosted art discussio-*

²⁹ Harmony Hammond. Inter-

³⁰ Barbara Starrett, "I Dream- (November 1974), p. 21.



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(2006), p. 421.

Several of *Amazon*'s contributing artists went on to participate in other lesbian/feminist art initiatives where representational diversity was a stated ambition. One was the "Great American Lesbian Art Show" of 1980. The show's organizers came up with a very concrete, non-elitist model for promoting the visibility of lesbian art and the celebration of lesbian culture in its multitude of forms. The show's curators conceived of a sort of DIY lesbian art exhibition kit and made it available to groups all over the country. The goal was to promote a nationwide art festival open to work by all lesbians. Fifty communities across the country participated; each local venue sent slides documenting their event to the GALAS collective, and the slides were shown at a gala invitational exhibition at the Women's Building in L.A. This capstone exhibition honored artists whose careers had boosted lesbian visibility in the arts. Following in the footsteps of *Amazon*, lesbian feminist activists continued to use the arts to imagine and create non-competitive, non-commercial, lesbian-affirmative contexts within which to live and work.²⁸

Harmony Hammond, organizer of "A Lesbian Art Show" at the 112 Greene St. Workshop in New York's Greenwich Village and member of the collective that produced the "Lesbian Art and Artists" issue of the feminist magazine *Heresies*, wondered if some sort of lesbian sensibility or aesthetic would become apparent in the course of these events.²⁹ It did not. Instead, GALAS, *Heresies*, and "A Lesbian Art Show," like *Amazon*, made visible a politicized lesbian presence within feminism. *Amazon*'s notes on contributors indicate that most did not draw sharp lines where their lesbian-feminist activism left off and their artistry began or prioritize one form of creative cultural engagement over the other. As one contributing artist explained,

Art for us is a two-way communication in which both (all) participants are active. Instead of a given, objective, mechanical set of criteria, human, personal responses have become the means of our relationship to art. We do not, then, view, analyze or interpret art as a thing out there, separate from us. We engage it, in a process of communicative responses, and we use it ... We use art in our lives and our lives can become art. We participate in art.³⁰

²⁸ GALAS arose in an environment enriched by earlier initiatives such as the Feminist Studio Workshop, of which the lesbian-feminist art critic and historian Arlene Raven was a founder. The Feminist Studio Workshop served as the educational center of the Los Angeles Women's Building, publishing *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women's Culture* (1977–1980) and sponsoring the Natalie Barney Collective, a group committed to researching and documenting lesbian artists. Within the structure of the Feminist Art Workshop, Raven, in collaboration with the critic Terry Wolverton, also initiated the Lesbian Art Project (1977–1979), which hosted art discussion groups, writers' groups, and salons.

²⁹ Harmony Hammond. Interview by author. July 2007.

³⁰ Barbara Starrett, "I Dream in Female: The Metaphors of Evolution," *Amazon* 3:1 (November 1974), p. 21.

These are the tenets of what artists who produce social transactions rather than objects today describe as a "social practice." Distinctions of genre, medium, and even discipline fell away within *Amazon's* conceptual framework, which emphasized art as a form of activism.

The journal's visual program offered points of access to the journal's underlying ideological positions and lesbian-feminist agenda. Gina's wrap-around cover graphic for the December 1973 issue is exemplary. (See Figure 11.4) The oblong line drawing traces the transition from the patriarchal present to a feminist future. The left half of the tableau (on the magazine's back cover) features a patriarchal deity who presides over a vertically organized social schema. Women, in the lower echelons, perform tasks of domestic labor—washing and hanging laundry at the river of life, children clinging to them. These working women bear working men upon their shoulders, and they, in turn, support male superiors. The bosses are held aloft in throne-like armchairs against a backdrop of skyscrapers and elevated roadways. In the distance, oil wells sprout up, mushroom clouds bloom. Downriver, the eye flows along the drawing's fluid lines to the right half of the drawing (on the magazine's front cover), where the freeway crumbles, broken up by roots and irrepressible shoots of vegetation. Women, washed downriver, naked now, free of gods and men, join hands and ride the current that buoys them up and carries them toward a post-apocalyptic, post-patriarchal future. Here, Nature—not some monotheistic deity or corporate boss—calls the shots. Since women, according to this scenario, have profited less from Nature's mastery (or destruction), they are transported and transformed, rather than stranded and crippled, by Nature's resurgence. This visual allegory again articulates lesbian-feminism within the more sweeping didactic program of sustainability. The drawing also schematizes the kinetics of connection (among women) and disconnection (from the world of men) that generate *Amazon's* intellectual dynamic.

The historian Martin Meeker, in his award-winning book *Contacts Desired*, stresses *Amazon's* role in forging connections, knitting scattered outposts of lesbian feminists into a self-sufficient socio-economic complex. The lesbian feminist network, he writes,

Could be built and could be robust without being tied to specific neighborhoods, cities, or regions; the lesbian-feminist network could be established through the interaction of close-knit and small-scale lesbian communities ... linked with others through newspapers, magazines, newsletters, collectives, distribution networks, telephone calls, live music festivals, conferences, and pen-pal clubs.³¹

Much evidence affirms the validity of Meeker's analysis, including *Amazon's* spin-off publication *Connections* (a lesbian social networking directory) and the editors' 12,000-mile odyssey around North America to meet and converse with their subscribers.

³¹ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s–1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 232.

AMAZON
JOURNAL
OF LESBIAN
FEMINISM
VOLUME 1
NUMBER 1
1973



Fig. 11.4 Gina Covina
A Lesbian Future

Yet it is the disconnect
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communications and com
disconnections only partial
moral impact. Indeed, *A*
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new ways of seeing, think
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³² Allen, *Artists' Magazines*

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Lesbian Communications and Press, 2006), p. 232.

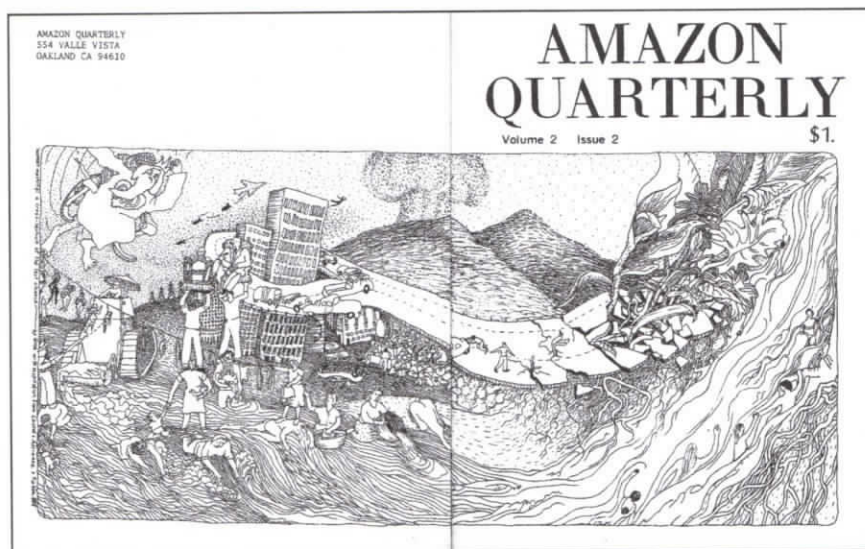


Fig. 11.4 Gina Covina, drawing, back and front cover of *Amazon Quarterly: A Lesbian Feminist Arts Journal*, December 1973.

Yet it is the disconnections that invest these connections with meaning. In the desire for disconnection from the patriarchy lies the specificity of lesbian-feminist "communications and community." That the connections proved fragile and the disconnections only partial, at best, does not detract from the force of *Amazon's* moral impact. Indeed, *Amazon's* very precariousness signals the force of its resistance to commercial expedients and compromise. The expectation of failure, as Gwen Allen convincingly argues, is narrowly associated with both alternative publication ventures and the concept of social revolution. Failures generate new ways of seeing, thinking, making, and thus living. "Such failure should be understood not as an indication of defeat, but as an expression of the vanguard nature of these publications and their refusal of commercial interests."³² In other words, considering the prevailing standards of "success" (more money, more power, more possessions, more publicity), failure appears, not as a shameful outcome, but as a necessary condition of possibility for any truly anti-capitalist revolutionary process. Indifference to the terms of commercial success enabled *Amazon Quarterly* and other activist publications of the era to model anti-consumerist cultural practices and affirm alternative modes of circulation and reception. The fact that *Amazon's* politics and production strategies resonate at key sites of cultural intervention today, despite the journal's limited circulation and relatively short publication history, suggests that the wheels of revolution may still be turning.

³² Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, p. 2.