Title
Processing of Audio-Visual Collections

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AS OF JUNE, 15 of the audio and video collections in the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives have been digitized and processed. Most of the collections hold between 15 and 40 audiocassette tapes or VHS tapes. The content of the material includes recordings of conferences, workshops, meetings, performances, radio and news broadcasts, interviews, and oral histories concerning topics such as homosexuality, lesbian issues, feminism, racism, discriminations, literature, music, history, and so on.

Of particular note is the June L. Mazer and Bunny MacCulloch Interviews Etc collection, which includes interviews with Mazer and MacCulloch concerning the Southern California Women for Understanding (SCWU), the archive, Mazer’s death, and lesbian culture in the San Francisco Bay Area. The audio recordings provide great insight into the life and work of both Mazer and MacCulloch, who were prominent figures in the lesbian community of the West Coast. The women conducted interviews with scholars and other experts on lesbian culture and history and were also the subjects of interviews. The collection includes a recording of the Jewish memorial service that honored the life and work of Mazer after her death in 1987.

The rest of the (mostly audio) audio-visual collections that have been digitized so far has included many well-known people and significant events. Lesbian-feminist activist Diane Germain’s video collection includes interviews with Southern California lesbians and recordings of Germain’s various appearances on news broadcasts and talk shows. The Reading Performances 1980–1983 collections features reading performances by a variety of lesbian and feminist writers, including Judy Grahn, Peg Cruikshank, Judy Freespirit, Kent Hyde, Terri de la Pena and others in lesbian bars, bookstores, events, and on KPFA radio. There are a number of recordings from radio shows, including a KPFK presentation about the Stonewall Riots and the KPFA show, Women’s Magazine, which featured Del Martin discussing domestic violence within heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

The digitized collections present a range of topics with a variety of hosts and speakers. From music recordings to scholarly talks to small group medical information sessions, the Mazer audio-visual collections capture the culture, diversity, politics, scholarship, and activism
that feminist and lesbian communities have produced throughout the last 50 years.

The tapes also describe a great deal of activism that women were involved with in Los Angeles throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. One recording, titled “Rape City Mall,” includes materials from a project that took place over three weeks to raise awareness among Los Angeles inhabitants of the frequency of assaults against women across Los Angeles. The event included speeches, interviews, self-defense demonstrations, and an art piece by Suzanne Lacy. The recording includes Lacy explaining her intentions in producing the piece and interviews with the public as they passed by, reacted to, and watched her as she indicated the number of reported rapes that had occurred in three weeks that May.

A number of recordings were taken at the Women’s Building, which was a nonprofit arts and education center founded in 1973 by Judy Chicago, Sheila Levrant de Brettville, and Arlene Raven and was originally located in MacArthur Park. The Women’s Building closed its doors in 1991, but it was a vital base for the feminist movement in Los Angeles. It also was a safe space for women to create art, write, collaborate, meet, and develop their sense of identity and community.

Another set of recordings documents the Women Writers Series that were held at the Women’s Building. These events were mostly organized by the Los Angeles-based author Eloise Klein Healy. She is an American poet who has published five books of poetry, founded Arktoi Books, and taught at the Women’s Building and served on its
Board of Directors. She was recently named Poet Laureate of Los Angeles. The recordings include Healy reading her work but also her interviewing other writers on her radio show, Women’s Words, on KPFK 90.7. Other recordings feature Healy and other writers reading their work at the Sisterhood Bookstore, a unique establishment on Westwood Blvd. that specialized in feminist and non-sexist literature and music for more than 20 years.

Before doing this processing, I was not well-versed in lesbian and feminist history, but I have gained so much from listening to these voices. I not only have learned about the development of lesbian-feminist activism but I have also been given a chance to help make available an integral piece of the story of Los Angeles and of California.

– Angel Diaz

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