

CONSERVATION CENTER

for Art & Historic Artifacts

Activist Archives and
Frameworks of Care





Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts



In a typical year:

- Preservation Services specialists complete over 50 survey projects.
- Approximately 60 CCAHA-sponsored workshops, conferences, webinars, and training sessions are presented.
- The Digital Imaging Services staff digitizes thousands of pages of fragile archival documents, books, and photographs.
- Conservators assess and treat more than 6,000 individual artifacts, from over 400 clients.
- Housing & Framing Services house approx. 75% of the artifacts treated (folder, sleeve, box, mat and frame, or sealed package).



Activist Archives and Frameworks of Care

Marika Cifor

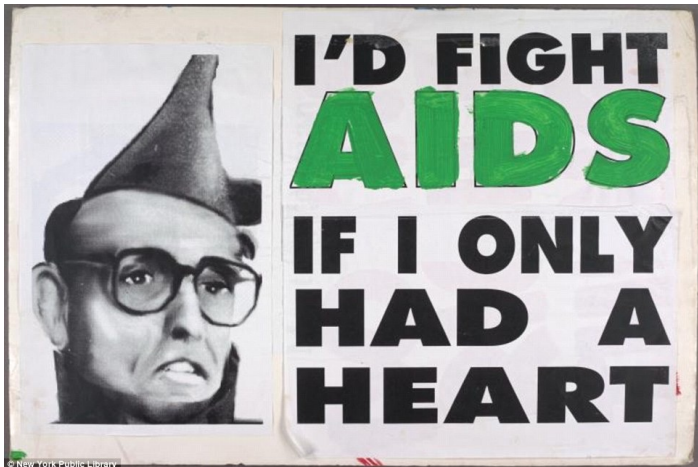
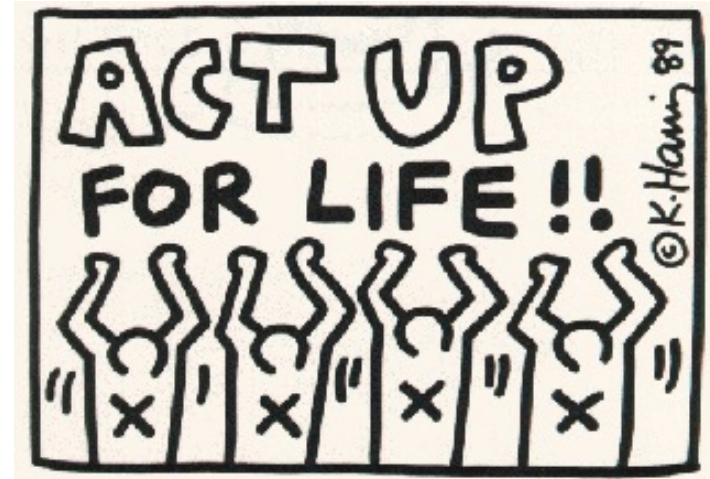
Assistant Professor, Information School
University of Washington



- Framing AIDS Activism, Framing Activist Archives
 - Cure
 - Care
 - Radical Empathy in Archival Practice
 - Case: Archives work as Curing and Caring
 - Critical questions for cultural heritage work and workers
 - References and Resources
-

Activist Archives

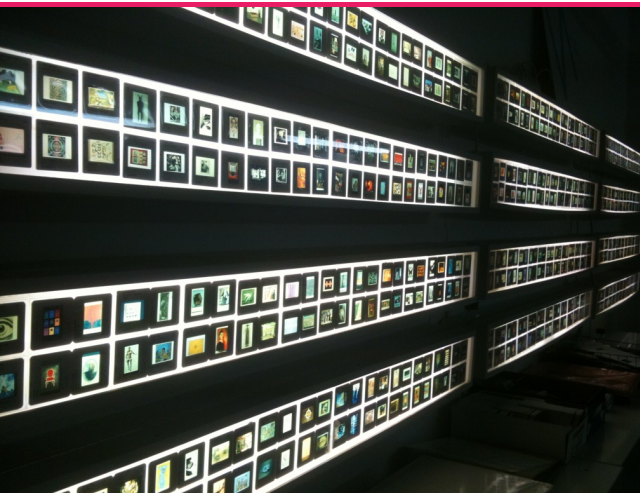
**Setting the Scene:
Framing AIDS, Framing Activist Archives**



Archival Ethnography

Naturalistic, interpretivist inquiry in which the empirical data collection takes place within archival environments in order to gain an understanding of the perspective of those responsible for the creation, collection, care, and use of records.





THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

Collections > ACT UP New York records

ACT UP NEW YORK RECORDS

150 results found

Sort by: Title Date created Date digitized Sequence

Navigation About Filters

ACT UP New York records	
+ Actions, demonstrations, and zaps	1
Published and near-print material	1
+ Ephemera, fliers, and handbills	1
+ Photographs and slides	14
Posters and placards	145
+ Artifacts	2

STOP THE CHURCH

Front page of Act Up Reports .

AIDS AIDS



Research Sites: Visual AIDS, New York Public Library, and New York University's Fales Library and Special Collections

For the Record: AIDS, Archives, and Vital Nostalgia

Chapter 1: 'Your Nostalgia is Killing Me!': ACT UP Nostalgia and the Meaning of HIV/AIDS

Chapter 2: How to ACT UP: AIDS Archival Temporalities and the (Anti)-Institutionalization of The ACT UP New York Records

Chapter 3: An Archival Cure: Remedy, Care, and Curation with the Visual AIDS Archive Project

Chapter 4: Status=Undetectable: Liminality and Archival Exhibitions in the Age of Survivability

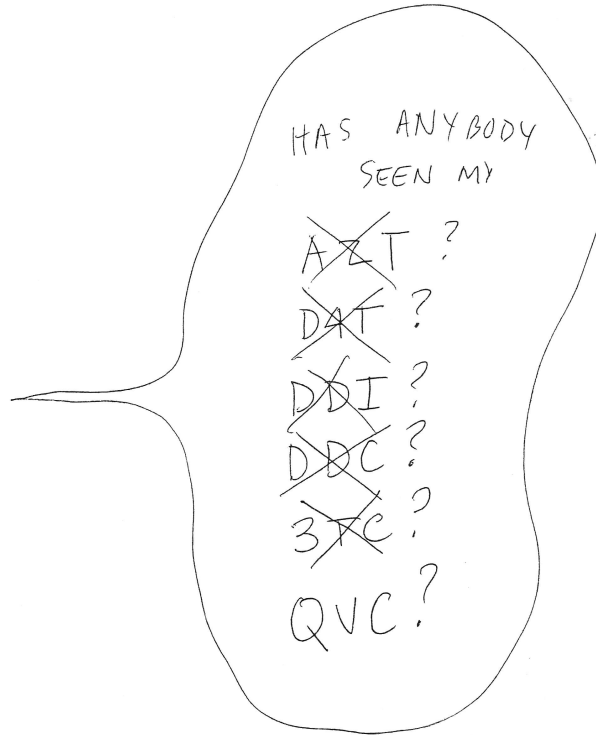
Chapter 5: Going Viral: Mobilizing AIDS Archives in Digital Culture

Epilogue: How to Survive Another Plague

Cure and Cultural Heritage Work

Archiving as Cure

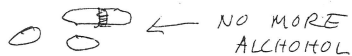
"THE ETERNAL QUESTION"



Frank Moore, 1995,
Archive Project Zine

DIET DEVOLUTION OF AN ARTIST WITH "HASHVAIDS."

1990



NO MORE ALCOHOL

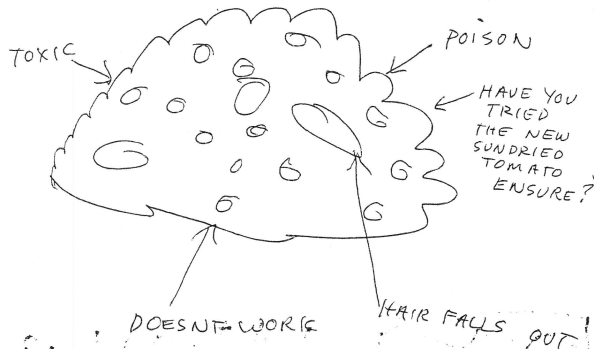
← "WHERE HAVE I BEEN?"

1991

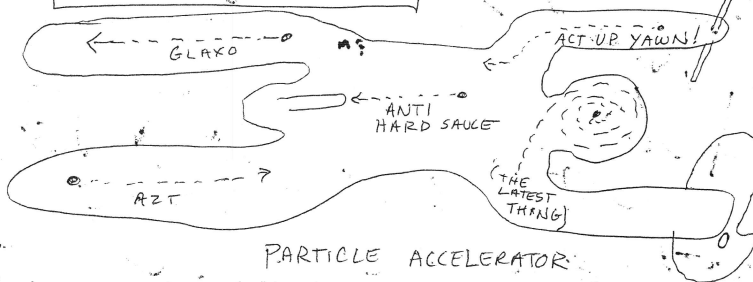


NO MORE YEAST LACTOSE SUGAR GOOD STUFF

1995



NEW AIDS THERAPY



Frank Moore, 1995, Archive Project Zine

Cure signals the outright and enduring elimination of impairment, but also encompasses the normalizing treatments, the curative processes, that work to assimilate the disabled mind/body into normative society

Cure always carries “the memory of disability.” Even when one is successfully cured that does not erase formative experiences. “Moreover,” cure often does not eliminate the stigma associated with a history of disability and illness.” --Eunjung Kim, *Curative Violence*, 11

The Archive Project as Holistic Cure

“*by cure we do not mean a medicine* that will stop the mechanism of HIV within the human body. We mean a cure for the human impulses . . . those which cause the evisceration of social service agencies for those living with AIDS, the censoring of life by the religious right and the theory-obsessed left, and the material impoverishment of the majority of humankind...We mean *a cure of cruelty and fear.*”

--Nick Debs, 1996, 21.

Archiving as Care:

Activist archiving is emotional, physical, and financial caretaking



Eric Rhein,
1994, *Interview*
(David Hirsch
and John
Dugdale).

**Doing Carework in Archives:
Radical Empathy and other Feminist Care Ethics**

— — — “What does it mean to shift our ideas of access and care (whether it’s disability, childcare, economic access, or many more) from an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body, to a collective responsibility that’s maybe even deeply joyful?”

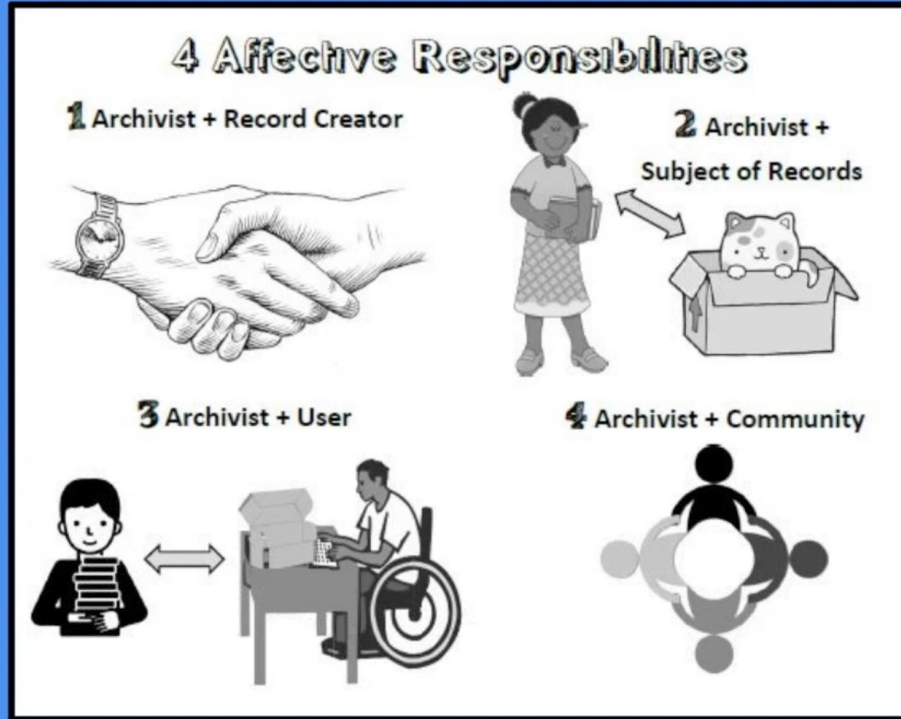
“... I would like to advance the radical notion that providing care is work. By work, I mean it’s just that: work. I mean that the care work we give is essential to building movements that are accessible and sustainable. We are building and maintaining movements when we’re texting to make sure someone is okay, talk on the phone for hours, talk shit on the couch, drop off a little care. Those things are not a sideline or an afterthought to our movements. They are our movements.”

— Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, [Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice](#)

Within a feminist ethics of care archivists are caregivers, bound to records' creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility based on radical empathy.

Caswell, Michelle, and Marika Cifor. "Neither a beginning nor an end: Applying an Ethics of Care to Digital Archival Collections."

The affective responsibilities



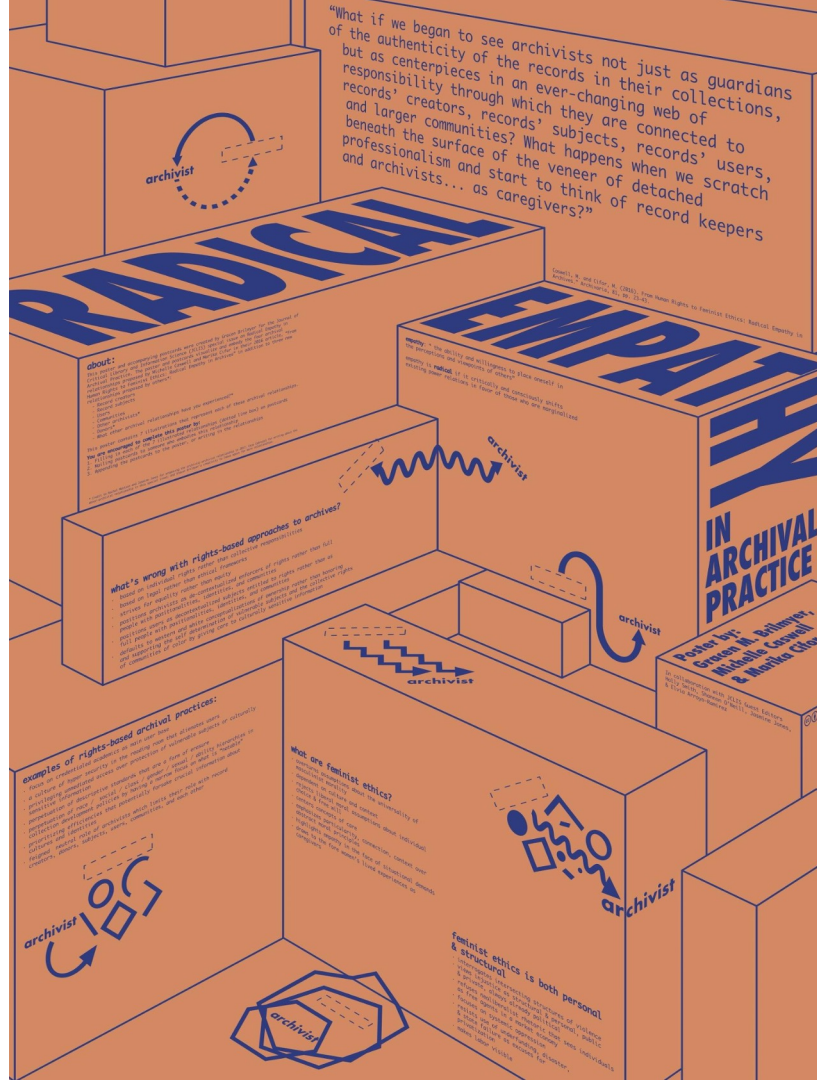
+



What is radical about radical empathy?

- Caswell and I defined *empathy* as the “the ability and willingness to place oneself in the perceptions and viewpoints of others”
- We posited that empathy is radical only if it critically and consciously shifts power relations in favor of those who are marginalized



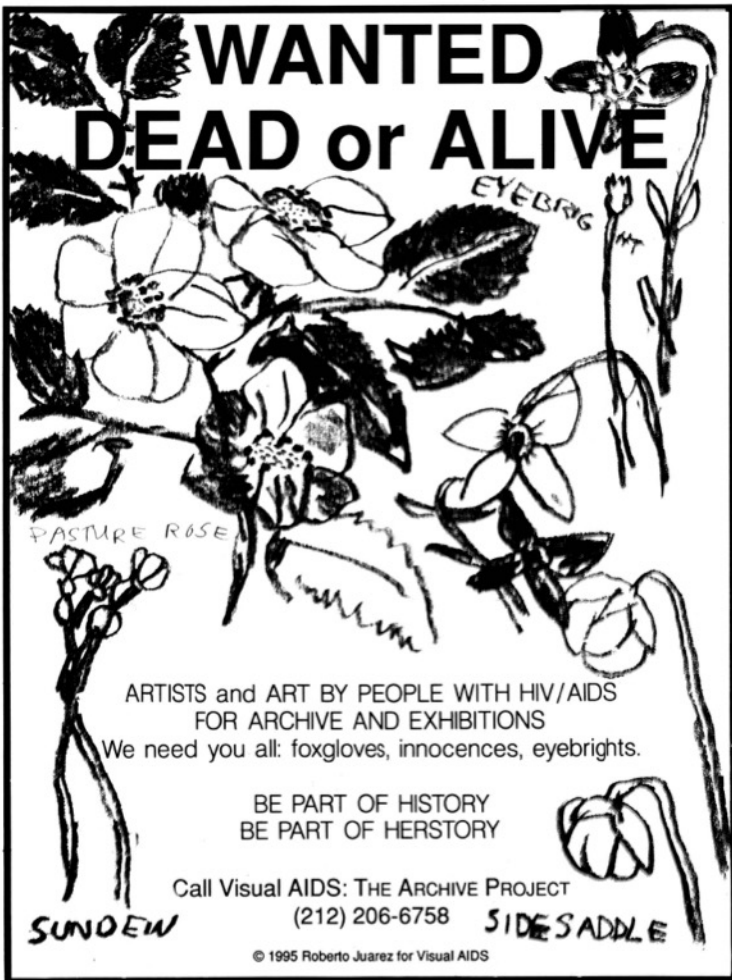


Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor. “Radical Empathy in Archival Practice.” Poster and Postcard Design by Gracen Brilmyer

Additional generative conceptualizations of care for cultural heritage contexts

- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha proposes “care webs,” groups of individuals (who may be disabled, able-bodied/not disabled, or a mixture) who work together to provide care and access to resources for each other. Creating care webs shifts the idea of access and care of all kinds while working through the raced, classed, gendered aspects of access and care.
- Hil Malatino argues that “trans care” is mutual aid in which an empathetic individual or group chooses to expend their resources in service of another’s trans persons needs or interests.
- Hi‘ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese conceptualize “radical care” as the strategies minoritized persons deploy to endure precarity and harsh living conditions.

WANTED DEAD or ALIVE



ARTISTS and ART BY PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS
FOR ARCHIVE AND EXHIBITIONS
We need you all: foxgloves, innocences, eyebrights.

BE PART OF HISTORY
BE PART OF HERSTORY

Call Visual AIDS: THE ARCHIVE PROJECT
(212) 206-6758

SUNDEW

SIDESADDLE

**Archives as Curing:
Activist archiving in and as
cure, care, and radical empathy**

“We knew that there were stories that needed to be preserved and retold—not about ‘victims’ but about the universes these artists inhabited; not about their illness, but about its irrelevance to their deepest life-affirming gift” -- Frank Moore, 1996



Stefanie Nagorka and Sur Rodney (Sur), Lightbox, 2001.

Visual AIDS

- ARTISTS+
- EXHIBITS+EVENTS
- BLOG
- GALLERY
- PROJECTS
- HISTORY
- SUPPORT

Artist+ Registry

The Artist+ Registry is the largest database of works by artists with HIV/AIDS. It offers a unique resource to inspire and educate the public. Visual AIDS assists artists with HIV/AIDS, while preserving a visual record of their work and helping them reach new audiences. The Artist+ Registry is open to all HIV+ artists.

BROWSE THE REGISTRY

SUBJECTS ▾ MEDIUM ▾ DEMOGRAPHICS ▾

Browse By Letter: [A](#) / [B](#) / [C](#) / [D](#) / [E](#) / [F](#) / [G](#) / [H](#) / [I](#) / [J](#) / [K](#) / [L](#) / [M](#) / [N](#) / [O](#) / [P](#) / [Q](#) / [R](#) / [S](#) / [T](#) / [U](#) / [V](#) / [W](#) / [X](#) / [Y](#) / [Z](#)

View: [RANDOM SELECTION](#) / [RECENTLY UPDATED](#)



GLAMMY



CHARLES HOPKINSON



NORA WALLOWER



JORGE VERAS

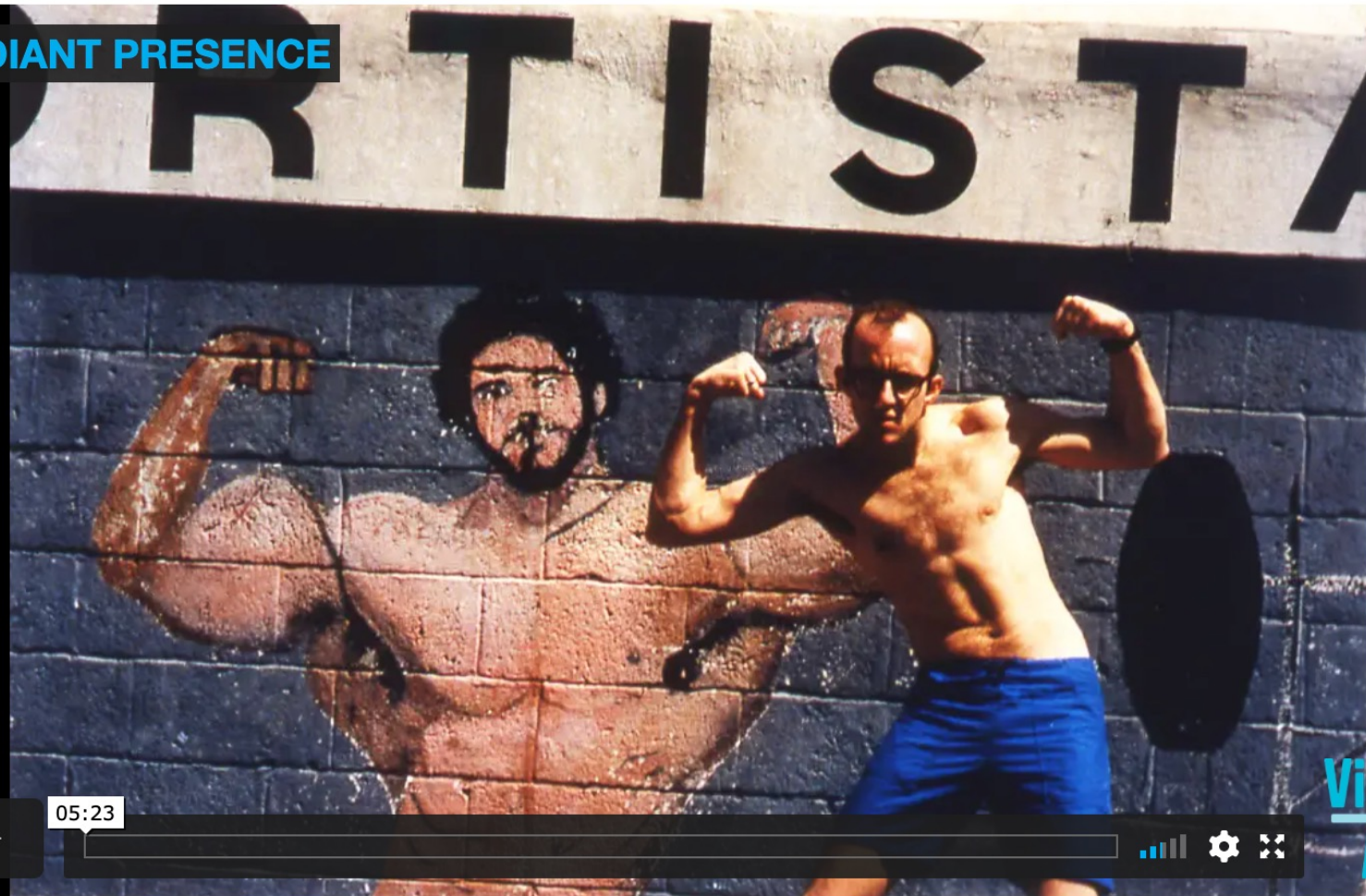
SEPTEMBER'S WEB GALLERY
THE MELODY OF THE FLESH
[More Web Galleries](#)

JOIN THE VISUAL AIDS ARTISTS REGISTRY

Open to all HIV+ Artists. The Artist+ Registry gives artists living with HIV an online venue to share their work and reach new audiences. Artist members can apply for Material Grants. The Artist+ Registry also honors the work of HIV+ Artists who are no longer with us.

The archives does not aspire to “preserve” its collection “like its dead, its history and its gone...we’re preserving it because there is life and essence there that goes beyond that time and that place, that goes through us and beyond, that wants to inform what we were, what we are, and what we want to become” -- *Eric Rhein, 2016.*

RADIANT PRESENCE



05:23



Visual
AIDS

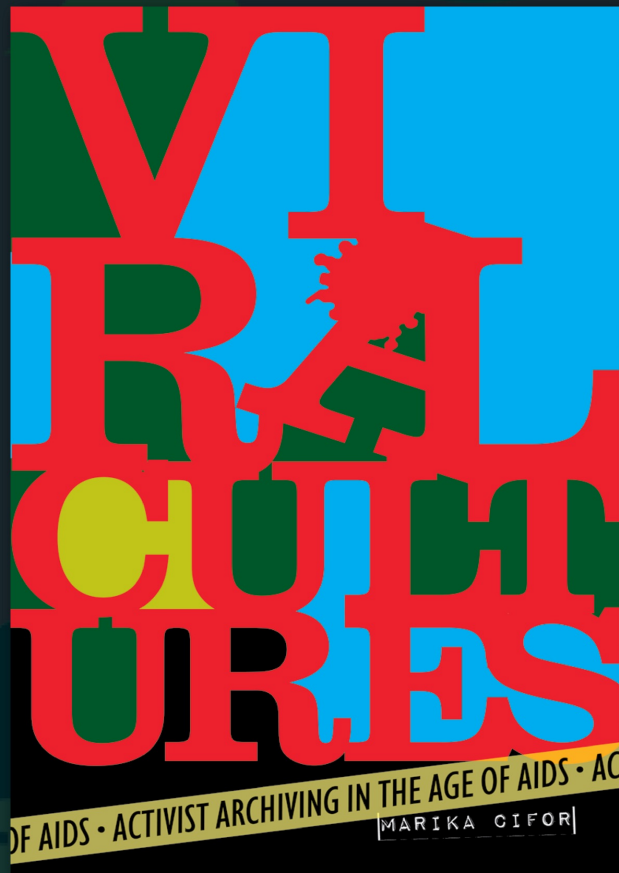
Conclusion: Critical Questions to Think With

Critical Questions for Cultural Heritage Workers

- What are your responsibilities and to whom? What power relations are at play within them?
- What questions do these lead to? A few examples:
 - How can we capture the various perspectives of collection stakeholders in our descriptions?
 - Are our institutions access models and tools for access exclusionary to certain people or communities?
 - What ways can we facilitate professional spaces for relational growth and mentorship for cultural heritage workers?
 - If we have limited resources, how do we allocate them in ways mindful of power relations?

Thanks to Elvia and Jasmine for the inspiration more questions and examples, see Arroyo-Ramirez and Jones, 2018 and the 2021 JCLIS Radical Empathy Issue

Thank you!
mcifor@uw.edu



GET 40% OFF
when you order
at z.umn.edu/cifor
using code
MN90580.

References and Resources

References:

- Marika Cifor, *Viral Cultures: Activist Archiving in the Age of AIDS*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2022.
- Marika Cifor & Claire McDonald, "I Hope We Leave More of a Record—Radical Queer Care within and for the AIDS INFO BBS's Caregivers Mailing List." *Feminist Media Histories* (2023) 9 (1): 78-97. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2023.9.1.78>
- Michelle Caswell & Marika Cifor. "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives." *Archivaria* 81(1) (2016): 23-43.
- Michelle Caswell & Marika Cifor. "Neither a beginning nor an end: Applying an Ethics of Care to Digital Archival Collections." In: H. Lewi, W. Smith, D. von Lehn & S. Cooke, eds. *The Routledge International Handbook of New Digital Practices in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and Heritage Sites* (New York: Routledge, 2019): 159-168.
- Caswell, Michelle and Marika Cifor. "Revisiting A Feminist Ethics of Care in Archives: An Introductory Note," *JCLIS* 3(2) (2021). DOI: 10.24242/jclis.v3i2.162.
- Flinn, Andrew, and Ben Alexander. "'Humanizing an inevitability political craft': Introduction to the special issue on archiving activism and activist archiving." *Archival Science* 15 (2015): 329-335.
- Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, "Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times," *Social Text* 38 (1) (2020): 1-16.

Resources:

- Gracen Brilmyer, Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor. Radical Empathy in Archival Practice Poster and Postcard, 2021. <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/169>
- Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O'Neill, & Holly A. Smith editors, Radical Empathy in Archival Practice, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 2, 2021. <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/issue/view/10>.
- Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez and Jasmine Jones, Applying Radical Empathy in Framework in Archival Practice Webinar, Society of California Archivists, 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvfmvBLVb1U>
- Hil Malatino, *Trans Care*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, . *Care work: Dreaming disability justice*. Vancouver: arsenal pulp press, 2018.
- Visual AIDS: Artist+ Registry: <https://visualaids.org/artists#:~:text=Artist%2B%20Registry,helping%20them%20reach%20new%20audiences..>
- Read scholarly essays in response to *Viral Cultures* in the latest issue of *Feminist Formations* 35 (3): <https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/51668>.
- Listen to additional conversations about *Viral Cultures* at: [University of Minnesota Press podcast](https://archivesincontext.archivists.org/2023/03/10/season-7-episode-3-marika-cifor/) and Season 7, Episode 3: Archives in Context Podcast, Society of American Archivists: <https://archivesincontext.archivists.org/2023/03/10/season-7-episode-3-marika-cifor/>.
- For more books on AIDS and epidemics see: <https://shepherd.com/best-books/how-to-have-sex-in-an-epidemic/>