



# *Archives in Context*

## Season 7 Episode 3: Marika Cifor

Aired March 10, 2023 • Length: 50:25 minutes

### **SPEAKERS**

Chris Burns, Anna Trammell, and Marika Cifor

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

AIDS, documenting, pandemic, archives, records, book, activists, institutions, archivists, collections, nostalgia, AIDS activism, communities, materials

#### **Intro 00:10**

From the Society of American Archivists, this is *Archives in Context*, a podcast highlighting archival literature and technologies and most importantly, the people behind them.

#### **Chris Burns 00:28**

Welcome to this episode of the *Archives in Context* podcast. My name is Chris Burns and I'm here with Anna Trammell.

#### **Anna Trammell 00:34**

Hi everyone.

#### **Chris Burns 00:35**

Today we are speaking to Dr. Marika Cifor. Marika is an assistant professor in the Information School at the University of Washington in Seattle and is also adjunct faculty in Gender, Women & Sexuality studies. Her book, *Viral Cultures: Activist Archiving in the Time (Age) of AIDS* was published in 2022 by the University of Minnesota Press.

#### **Anna Trammell 00:59**

*Viral Cultures* explores how activists and archivists have documented the work of AIDS activism in the United States. And it's the first book to critically examine the archives that have preserved and created the legacy of this movement. Through the study, Cifor examines how power and ideology shaped the nature of archival material and how it's accessed and used. Thank you so much for joining us, Marika.

**Marika Cifor** 01:24

Thank you so much for having me, Anna, and Chris. I'm excited to be here today.

**Chris Burns** 01:29

So, our first question is what drew you to this topic? In your introduction to your book, you describe a childhood experience as your AIDS activism origin story. Can you talk to us about that experience and how looking back you feel that it informed your eventual work in archives?

**Marika Cifor** 01:47

Sure. So I grew up in San Francisco in the 1980s and 1990s. A period covered by my book, though, on the opposite coast. The book focuses on New York City, but San Francisco too, right. It was an epicenter of the American AIDS epidemic. And I think one of the kind of interesting things about revisiting kind of fairly recent periods in history, right, is that parts of my life, right, happened alongside the period I'm writing about. But though it was mostly happening around me, I don't think as a child it was a thing I had a great awareness of, right. I have queer people in my family, but it wasn't kind of at the forefront of my experience in that moment. And so revisiting materials from that period, right, is an interesting act of kind of experiencing things that you both lived and did not live. And I think, to- I write in the same section of the introduction a bit about kind of what I see AIDS meaning as a queer-identified person. And I think, again, it feels like something that both fundamentally shapes queer identities still and is this kind of really important moment in kind of making queerness, even as a concept, exist. And this kind of- it so fundamentally shapes how I understand queer history and who was even there, right, to inform my understanding of queer history, but again, right, as a cisgendered, queer woman, it's both my history and not my history, right. I'm not a member of the communities that were most- were and are most deeply impacted, though, right. Some of my book talks about the ways in which lesbian activists brought their expertise and particularly their kind of community archives knowledge and work to bear. In AIDS activism there's a kind of both a closeness and a distance there. And then when I teach students- when I was a postdoc at Bowdoin College, I had the opportunity to teach a class on AIDS and science policy and culture and at the time, in 2017 and 2018, my students had mostly been born in 1996, which is also an interesting moment, right, because they don't often get to the 80s or the 90 in high school history classes. It's a thing that, again, feels familiar and unfamiliar because it happened in your lifetime, but it wasn't necessarily a part of your kind of awareness. And 1996 is an important year in the context of the AIDS epidemic because that's when we see more and better treatments and- that enable possibilities for survival and for the management of HIV as a chronic illness. And so, I think it's writing about this kind of time period, there's both a familiarity and a distance from it that I think enables it to be both kind of relevant and accessible, but also, right, kind of subject of study and an examination and a way in which, right, like, it queers in the other sense of queering, right. It allows us to see kind of what's challenging and interesting and exciting about this kind of moment in history.

**Anna Trammell** 06:08

So, Marika, you are turning this research on AIDS archiving into a book, and you found yourself in that moment right in the middle of another pandemic; COVID-19. So, could you talk to us about the connections that you discovered between the AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics? I'm interested in what those of us engaged in memory

work right now can learn from examining archiving strategies used by some of the activist and archivists you describe in your book.

**Marika Cifor 06:37**

Sure. And I think, right, the research that became this book began long before COVID, though, right? There's always been other pandemics happening alongside and other crises kind of intersecting with AIDS, and some scholars argue, right, that AIDS couldn't- can't even be talked about as a crisis, but rather as a series of crises, because it looks so different in different parts of the world and along different axes of power. But it did become, I think, the relevance became quite obvious, I think, in this moment, in- as I was finishing the book in kind of early through mid-2020. And as I was working on thinking particularly about what the conclusion of this work should be, and we were- and I guess we maybe still are, but we were in a very early moment in the COVID-19 pandemic, but already in that kind of period, and as the pandemic particularly kind of moved through the US, and as it pertains particularly to impact places like New York City, we saw this really kind of powerful discourse happening, both in kind of popular media, right, and PR stories and in LGBT media and from scholars who were making these kinds of comparisons between AIDS activism and COVID activism. And I think there's a way that AIDS is an example of a pandemic that felt familiar to us and felt like it had had a significant impact in the United States, in a way in which maybe some of the other kind of global pandemics of recent times haven't touched as many of us who are privileged to live in this kind of geographic location. And, right, and so there's a way in which also, the percept- kind of our perception of AIDS is something that we've overcome, and we've made important progress, right? There are more and better treatments, there is more testing, there's more advocacy, there's more knowledge. But we haven't actually- we're not done with the AIDS pandemic, either. But there's a perception, I think, that at least- that AIDS is a problem of somewhere else, of over there, rather than something we need to be thinking about and engaging in the United States. And so there was this kind of desire, I think, to draw lessons from how AIDS activists kind of responded, and I think this was particularly acute too, right, because there are very real comparisons to be made between these pandemics.

The way though they're distinct, the way government responses seemed inept and slow and inadequate, the way in which, right, pandemics disproportionately impact people who are already marginalized and already have less resources, right. And so there were all these very real comparisons and at the beginning, right, of COVID; not that we don't still have things to learn. But there wasn't much understanding of how it was transmitted that had, right, some real kind of similarities to the experience of AIDS and its early years to where there's this kind of ignorance about spread and transmission and this kind of fear. And so, I think AIDS was a kind of way to talk about these two pandemics to try to understand what was happening in this moment of uncertainty. And I do think there are sometimes, right, those comparisons can be flattening, can simplify, can kind of erase particularly when it comes to AIDS, right, the way in which it is an ongoing pandemic, but also, right, they are useful, and there is kind of this gener- generative potential from putting them in conversation. And so that's what the conclusion of the book really does, is think about how particularly archiving as a response kind of works in these two contexts, and in particularly, in these two pandemics that are fundamentally also shaped by the way in which racism operates in the United States. And so what I think, right, can be- can inform our kind of work as those who engage kind of in memory practices and memory making, right, is we did see- I think there were some things and some of that is about AIDS and some of that is about technological progress, and expectations, and our field's understanding of power, and the way the field has changed over the last few decades. But, right,

we saw a really immediate response, both from communities and from institutions of all sorts, right, to documenting COVID, right. It felt like nearly everywhere began some kind of COVID memory project, right, in the early days of the pandemic. Whether it was colleges and universities, right, documenting the experiences of their students, or community-based projects, right, documenting the way anti-Asian sentiment was shaping hatred and marginalization, right, of AAPI communities, we saw all of these kind of projects immediately start to happen. And I think that's something that is very different than the kind of early moments of AIDS, where it was only kind of within the communities of people most impacted and their allies, where that kind of documentation works felt so immediate. It's also, right, AIDS is not pre-digital but it's in a different era of the digital. And so, right, social media doesn't exist in the same way in the 1980s and 1990s. And I think, right, we've learned a great deal as a field and projects, right, like documenting the now have taught us about- have taken some of the lessons from kind of earlier moments to think about the kind of particular ethics of documenting, right, activist responses now. But I think there are also kind of ongoing questions for us to think about, right, many kind of COVID memory projects kind of also mirrored the kind of way in which we were thinking about the temporalities of the pandemic in that moment, right. Lots of these projects were set up quite quickly and were set up in this kind of moment of urgency to document this thing as it unfolded. And many of us, right, perhaps very naively imagined that this would be a short kind of temporary disruption of our normal lives, right, and that we would go back to something that looked similar to what had been before. And obviously, kind of even three years in, right, that's become very clear that that is not going to be the case that, right, maybe in different ways, but our world will look exactly the same and that this pandemic is going to maybe eventually become like AIDS, right? Something that has shifted, that has kind of chronic implications, right, that moves from what scholars sometimes called the epidemic period to an endemic period, right, and when and if that has happened or will happen, right, are open questions when it comes to COVID. But I think there are questions here too, right? Like we have a lot and- a lot of powerful documentation that I'm fortunate enough to talk about in my book, right, from the 1980s and 1990s. From this period, this epidemic period in the context of AIDS in America, right, where there was this kind of urgency towards documenting. And in COVID, I think, again, we will have lots of documentation of this early moment, this kind of early response and navigation, but what does it look like to document something that doesn't have an endpoint or that continues but only continues to impact disproportionately, right, marginalized and minoritized people in different ways? And how do we kind of sustain energy and think about documenting something that doesn't kind of have this finite duration? And I think there are lessons there from kind of- particularly the kind of community archives side where some of that AIDS documentation and AIDS kind of intervention and activism work hasn't stopped in the same way. And so, I think, as COVID becomes its own kind of long pandemic, we're going to have kind of more- both opportunities for it to be kind of a problematic set of comparisons, but also opportunities to kind of learn from and engage with how documentation happened and these kinds of ethical questions that emerged, right. And they only become kind of more acute in an environment, right, where activists might be put at risk by all kinds of new technologies and new structures of surveillance.

**Chris Burns 16:22**

You talk a lot in your book, Marika, about this wonderful idea of vital nostalgia, and I'm wondering- wondering if you could define vital nostalgia- nostalgia for our listeners? How it's distinct from from plain old nostalgia? How does it inform archival theory and practice? And what- what can archivists learn from it?

**Marika Cifor 16:46**

Sure. So, this didn't start out necessarily as a project about nostalgia. I had- and much of my other work looks particularly at the kind of relationship of asset and vision feelings and archives, and I've always been- my archival like, both my work as a practitioner and my work as an archival scholar has always kind of dealt with these questions of things that are fundamentally important to human existence and to LGBTQ communities and our experiences, but are difficult to capture, right. Interested in kind of how we capture bodies, feelings, sex, emotions, right, in a way is kind of that, right, paper documents or electronic records don't always capture. And so, for me, when I started this research, I thought it would be maybe a project more centrally about effect. And as I started doing- I was fortunate enough to have funding from the Social Science Research Council to do some dissertation- early dissertation research and as often happens, right, something you think is going to be one chapter, right, is actually more than a book, more than a whole story in and of itself. And so, in spending time, particularly the New York Public Library in the Archives and Manuscripts Division and looking at their AIDS records and looking particularly at New York's records, right, I realized there was a whole story to tell here. And for me, nostalgia is an interesting and powerful way to talk about our relationships to the past in the present and what those relationships, the past, tell us both about this present moment and the ways in which they dictate future possibilities. And for me, nostalgia is a particularly kind of interesting object because it's neither simply, right, a feeling, nor simply kind of a memory practice, it's, to my mind, right, something that is perhaps both of those things and more all at once. And I think kind of drawing also, right, from that kind of thinking and queer theory, I'm also drawn right to this kind of idea of bad feelings and where bad feelings become generative and productive. And so, nostalgia, right, has often been kind of dismissed and derided, right, as a kind of conservative, kind of rosy-colored looking back. And the way in which I conceptualize nostalgia in the book- drawing from other scholars who work on archives, work on memory, who work on cultural heritage and our kinds of relationship to it, right, is to think about what I call vital nostalgia. And I define that, right, as a bittersweet longing for the past time or space. And particularly, right, I'm interested in the kind of longing, not only for that past time and space, but for the people who kind of occupied that space and that time. And I think AIDS always seems kind of like a strange object for nostalgia, right? Who wants to relive, right, death, devastation, illness, pain, but also, right, in kind of, especially as we think about queer activism and even if we- to the conversation we were having just a few minutes ago, right, think about why we looked at AIDS activism, right, in these kind of moments of uncertainty, right, there was this really kind of powerful, radical work that happened and this way in which, right, kind of government, and indifference, and a kind of larger societal indifference, right, brought people together.

So, there's this perception, right, there's this kind of nostalgia for certain aspects of the kind of AIDS response, right. And I think those are around particularly, right, the way in which it seemed to kind of unite community, the way in which it kind of embodied kind of radical politics that, right, many LGBTQ people, right, feel have kind of not been a central right to the movement as priorities have shifted towards kind of inclusion towards marriage, towards other kinds of priorities, right. And there's a way in which, right, it's just aesthetically appealing. There's lots of beautiful and powerful images, right, that were neat in the context of doing this work that still resonate. And so there is this kind of nostalgia for AIDS that I think can do something generative and productive now. And so, my interesting kind of take of nostalgia is thinking about how we can use a particular kind of relationship to moments, to people, to things in the past as a way to engage with kind of pressing questions and problems in our present and in ways, right, that allow us to imagine a different kind of future. And

in thinking about what I think archivists and other memory workers can kind of take from this concept, in the third chapter, which talks particularly about Visual AIDS, which is a community based arts organization out of New York City; they've had an archive project since the early 90s that documents the work of HIV positive artists and includes the work of kind of quite famous artists and people who have made art but not necessarily made their living making art. And they do, I think, a really beautiful job of mobilizing their archives and mobilizing, particularly, their kind of iconic images, right, work by, say Keith Haring, to do- to engage audiences now with the present of the AIDS pandemic, right, and how it particularly impacts Black and Brown communities in the United States, and how it particularly impacts transgender and gender non-conforming people, and about the kinds of injustice, right, that are still happening around criminalization laws, and also kind of larger global questions of the pandemic. And so, I think they do a really beautiful job of the... Alexi Allah, (unintelligible) who was a programs manager at the time described for me to write it as a strategy of looking back to look forward, right. How do you actually mobilize your collections to engage with kind of present concerns and to mobilize action, right, around those present concerns?

And so, for me, thinking about nostalgia, right, whether it's for AIDS, whether it's for something else, right, as a kind of generative tool of a way of engaging with, right, collections, showing their kinds of resonance for the kinds of questions we deal with now, and I see archivists doing this kind of work, right. I think Densho, which is based here in Seattle and which documents the experiences of Japanese Americans, particularly their incarceration during World War II, right, has talked- utilized its materials, right, about incarceration in this earlier moment, right, about- to talk about kinds of violence and harm and the ways in which, right, people who are attempting to migrate across the border now, right, face some of the same kinds of racism, and violence, and potential harm, right. In ways that have kind of analogy, right. They're using these kinds of historical materials to influence and to shape, right, these kinds of contemporary conversations and to put these events, right, in the context of these larger histories. And so I think nostalgia, right, is a way to talk about archives and to think about the emotional impact of them but also a way, right, to kind of mobilize our collections in a powerful way.

**Anna Trammell 26:05**

So, you mentioned some of these in your last response, but can you tell our listeners more about some of the institutions or archives that you chose to focus on for this book? How did you select them? How did they differ? And how are they similar?

**Marika Cifor 26:19**

Sure. So the book focuses, in particular, on three archival institutions: the New York Public Library and its Archives and Manuscripts Division, in particular, though, I did some research as well at the Schomburg Center which is also part of the New York Public Library system; and on NYU's Fales Library and Special Collections, that's New York University's, so public library; it's one of the largest public library systems in the country; a private university, New York University's Archives; and on Visual AIDS, right, which is a community-based arts organization that has an archive as part of its work and focus, but does all sorts of arts-oriented programming, and funding, and materials grants for artists. And so, each of these institutions, right, has a different mission, a different kind of core constituency, different practices, right. And in particular, right, what I thought I'd be doing when I came to graduate school was looking at the relationship between LGBTQ community archives and more institutional partners, particularly kind of academic archives, right, where many of these collections came to live.

And I'm still interested in some of those questions about how different kinds of institutions, right, relate to one another, the ways in which they operate in kind of collaboration and intention. And so some of that is part of the story in this book. And the way in which those three archives came to be the focus is that they have these both kind of informal and very formal relationships to one another, right. They're located physically in the same city, they have done various kind of configurations programming together, whether events, film series, and exhibitions, and they actually share, right, individuals, right, some people have materials in one place or another, or the work they get as part of an organization is in one place in their personal papers or in another, and for NYU, which doesn't explicitly collect for the Fales Library, which is not explicitly an AIDS collection, but rather a collection about art movements from the 1970s to the 1990s. The downtown scene- but that is, of course, also very much a story about AIDS, right, as a community that was particularly impacted, both the Fales and Visual AIDS have a very strong relationship to one another as well. Some of Visual AIDS' non-current records are at the Fales, and they've also- for collections that they don't feel are appropriate kind of to the scope, or aren't best served kind of within the institution, they facilitated the kind of acquisition of those collections by NYU, which is a larger, more formal institution. And for me, right, the way in which all of these kind of organizations were interconnected to one another is an interesting part of the kind of story of how AIDS in a particular time and place is documented, but also how I ended up doing a project about New York City where I wasn't primarily based. I lived in LA at the time, which has, I would say, equally interesting AIDS collections, right. The one- and other places is- what was happening kind of in the mid-2010s was this kind of really interesting activation of these materials through exhibitions, and programming, and creative engagement that hadn't yet happened in other places. And so, for me, that was part of what drew me kind of, to this project is the way in which not only have these records been collected and maintained, but also how they were actually being used in this moment, both by the institutions themselves and by projects that they engage with, and just by artists and activists. And there was a kind of dialogue happening about the way in which AIDS was being documented and remembered in this space that I think has a much broader resonance. And so, for me, I'm always interested in these kinds of differences, and their practices, and who they serve, and how at these questions about where these records belong. But also, there was this kind of fascinating relationship between these organizations and in this space. And there's a way in which, right, I was hesitant to write another book that focused on New York City-based notes (unintelligible) gets a disproportionate kind of amount of the kind of scholarly and popular attention to AIDS in the United States. But there is also like this way in which that attention, right, meant that there was this kind of activation in a powerful way that raised really interesting questions to be explored. And so, it's a way, right, to look at this kind of larger question of how AIDS was, and is, being documented and how those records are being activated by archivists, and curators, and librarians, and activists, and others, right; in this way, right, where there was this kind of interesting engagement already happening. And so, my hope is that there would be many other AIDS books, right, that look at documentation in many other different kinds of spaces. And I think, right, particularly questions about how the contemporary moment of AIDS United States will be documented, will look quite different, right, because some of these organizations are still collecting. And New York City, right, is still an important part of the conversation, but it's maybe no longer the kind of epicenter of that conversation.

**Chris Burns** 32:50

So, as we think about ongoing activist movements happening right now, say around Black Lives Matter, reproductive rights, climate change, etc, I'm wondering if you can speak to what you've learned about the relationship between AIDS activists and archivists that can inform memory workers when approaching these

relationships and documentation projects? And- and if I could steer at least part of your answer in one direction that gets at a little bit of what you were referencing in your last answer, I found one of the particularly fascinating pieces of your book was that story of the exhibit at the New York Public Library and sort of Act Up's response to that and then New York Public Library's reaction to Act Up's reaction and then the- the sort of ongoing back and forth that you were just speaking to, which- which I do think helps answer the question that we asked about how we can all think about how to engage productively with activist communities around archives.

**Marika Cifor** 33:56

Yeah, I think- often think about our relationships as archivists and other kinds of memory workers right... along... Archival scholars Andrew Flynn and Ben Alexander in the UK have a 2015 article, right, where they kind of draw two lines that I think are very useful, right. They talk about archiving activism, right, the documentation by institutions of activist movements and events, right, and then they talk about activist archiving, right, and the way in which activists actually document this work and those processes, of course, can be kind of- my book talks about both ends of that work. But I also- part of what was interesting to me, in the case you were referencing, Chris, right, of Act Up New York's records, right, instead, I think there is a way in which there's a very interesting story about how those records came to be, who created them, why, what we still have, what made it to the collection at the New York Public Library, right, and what went elsewhere. And then there's a way in which, right, contemporary Act Up New York activists very explicitly are engaging with those records that I think makes it a particularly kind of interesting case to trace. And to give a bit more context there, right, Act Up New York was formed in 1987 and worked. It's never stopped, but it had a particular kind of power, and momentum, and scale in membership in the late 1980s. And through the mid- early to mid-1990s that was particularly kind of notable and powerful. And as they were facing some financial difficulties and had to leave a space where many of their organizational records were held, they had to make a decision about where those records would go. And there's this debate that still, right, an unsettled debate about whether- I mean it's settled in the case of these records, but there are many more records out there in which it's not settled, right? Do those records- where do AIDS records belong, right? They're often grouped together with LGBT archives, and of course, LGBT activists are a major part of many of these movements, but AIDS records are not simply LGBT records and the other way around, right? And then, of course, right, there's the question of, do they belong within community archives spaces, right? And what community archives spaces exist in a particular place? And what are their resources and capacities? And so, this particularly, in this case, right, this decision in 1994 really came down to would these records go to the community- based archives at the center, the LGBT Center, or would they go to the New York Public Library? And there were, to simplify it, right, two different kinds of camps about where those records would be best served? And how- who should be the priority in serving those records, right? Are we thinking about who archivists often think about as traditional users, right, ademic student scholars? Are we- or are we thinking about other activists, other kinds of artists, community members, people who may feel less at home in some of those institutional spaces? They had some particular concerns about kind of the way in which youth activism was documented in the records... and just where do these records- right? Are these records centered in LGBT history or are they about a larger kind of New York history, a larger history of social activism, right, which is the New York Public Library's collecting focus, right, is New York City and activism more broadly. And so, they did end up going to the New York Public Library in kind of the largest- the largest collection of those records and then many individual collections followed, right. And- but some of those records, right, some of the kind of key



people who were involved, some of the lesbian activists in particular, right, gave their records instead to the Lesbian Herstory Archives, placing those records in a very different kind of space and a very different kind of context, putting them in lesbian history first, right, rather than something kind of broader. And right, there are just realities of differences, of access, and who might feel at home and welcome by different kinds of spaces and priorities and where those records, right, would be best served. And so- and these are ongoing conversations, right, when it comes to AIDS still because there are many, many collections, right, that are still in people's basements and attics, and under beds, and in closets, and where do those records belong particularly, right? Some of the folks I talked to had been involved in the Latino Caucus have backed up and, right, those- are those collections that should be at an institution that centers Latinx history, that centers AIDS history, that centers social activism; where will those materials best be served, right? And these are always questions, and I don't think they're questions that have a good answer, right? They're just kind of- it's much more of a kind of gray area, right, and so these- all the way, right, up into- I think sometimes we think about donations, right, as once the donation has happened, once the collection has been processed, right, that kind of some people might imagine that relationship is over, but I actually don't think, at least in this case, right, about relationship and, right, both a kind of perception of what the institution is doing, how people were engaging with the records, how activists from the group are actually going in and engaging with those materials or not, are important questions. And then, right, when we get to particularly some of what was saved of academic records, right, were materials that would be good for exhibition, and digitalization, and some of these kind of very visually driven materials. And as Jason Baumann, who's got a much longer title, but he's the coordinator for LGBT collections at the New York Public Library, he- as he was putting together a show called "Why We Fight: Remembering AIDS Activism," right, he had been involved in Act Up himself in the 90s, but he was part of these kind of broader conversations. And a group of current active New York activists, right, staged protests on the opening night of that show, particularly critiquing its frame of remembering AIDS activism, right, arguing that AIDS is not history, and so therefore it's not something to be remembered as if it is over and if it is done. And so it's this like, really, I think, important kind of space of intervention and how the library responds, right, is by, I mean, welcoming activists into its space but also then inviting activists and others interested in this conversation to do a series of programming alongside the show to kind of expand that conversation, I think, for us, in the archival profession, right, we still are figuring out, right, how- I think what we document, right, is not always born of a natural affinity to- of our institution or of the people who work in it to the materials, right.

And so, we're figuring out how we have generative, healthy relationships, right, that are mutually beneficial with communities, right, and particularly communities who've been marginalized by the kinds of major institutions many of us work within. So, how do we navigate different kinds of power? And I think, right, that there are interesting lessons here in thinking about how do we navigate a relationship that's not just simply about using those records but allowing communities to kind of enter in and mediate and shape the kinds of programming and other kinds of activation of those records that happen. Though I think, right, we've gone a long way as a field, but we still have much to learn about how we kind of use our collections, right, to benefit the communities in which- from which those materials emerge and whose lives are implicated in them. And so, I think, right, they're navigating some really interesting and challenging kinds of ethical questions. And I hope that kind of following deeply one kind of case, as well as others that come up through the book, right, gives a starting point for archivists and other memory workers to, right, think about how we do those relationships, how our

institutions have done them in the past, and how we might do them in a different and more ethical way going forward.

**Anna Trammell** 44:01

I was really fascinated by all of the people that you talk to and the ways that you gathered information for this project, you know, you were engaging with each archive site as a user and as an observer, and you were speaking with library directors, and volunteer and professional archivists, writers, artists, activists, other archives users. So, I'm curious, after engaging with all these people around archives and through your observations of these institutions, what did you learn that most surprised you or most informed your work or thinking around archives?

**Marika Cifor** 44:39

I think part of what- I mean my favorite part of every- doing this kind of qualitative research I think maybe why I'm a qualitative researcher to begin with, right, is that it's an immense kind of pleasure and privilege to listen to people talk about work that they're doing or have done that they care so deeply about and are still deeply invested in. And that has been, right, so kind of incredibly kind of powerful to them and beyond that, right. And many of the people who I was fortunate enough to be in conversation with in this book, right, are- some of them are, right, archival professionals, and librarians, and curators, right, and some of them wouldn't necessarily define themselves that way. They would sit themselves as artists or writers or other kinds of cultural workers, right, who've been engaged in documentation, who and who doesn't- don't necessarily think about their work primarily through the lens of archives, but I think, right, in having those conversations across these spaces, right, I think we... part of what's beautiful about doing this kind of research, right, is you learn so much from one another, and you get to listen to all kinds of material, right, that's never going to make it into your project, right. People told me all kinds of stories about the art world and about works that- I'm not an art historian, right, that don't make it into my book, but it's just such an immense pleasure and privilege to get to hear people's stories. And maybe it shouldn't be surprising, but I think I'm always- the beautiful part about doing this work is you realize just how generous people are with the things that they care so deeply about. And it's- you get to become kind of a part, in some way, of those kinds of stories and a holder, right, someone who can really- people need and want to talk about certain things, and you get to be there in that kind of position of care for that person and for those stories. And that's just such a kind of immense privilege. And it can be difficult, and wonderful, and challenging all at the same time. And I think that for me is something that I appreciate being kind of reminded of through this process is just kind of the deep kind of care that I think informs or at least I hope informs kind of our work as information professionals.

**Chris Burns** 47:35

So, our final question, and we ask this of all the folks we interview for the podcast, is if you could have any superpower, what would it be? And why?

**Marika Cifor** 47:47

I think I probably don't have the most original answer to this question. I think it would definitely be teleportation. I- maybe this is informed by much of my recent flying having been with a toddler, but I would really love the ability to just be in another place. I think also, right, I know that this is not just something that

happens to academics but to many archival professionals as well, right, and many of us have moved around for jobs and for other reasons, right, and leave behind many people we love and wish we could engage with in many places. And so I think I always wish that there was the ability to just kind of instantaneously be in another place. And so- and also I think flying with a toddler makes you wish you could definitely just be instantly in another place. And so if I could choose a power I think it would be a teleportation

**Anna Trammell** 48:56

Yes, I agree with that one after the mishaps of holiday travel that we're just coming out of for many of us, I'm sure. Well, thank you so much for writing this book. I really learned a lot and really it was a pleasure to read and just a pleasure to talk to you about this work and feel like I really learned a lot. So, thank you so much for taking the time.

**Marika Cifor** 49:20

Thank you so much, Anna. And I feel like I always learn new things in having these conversations, and I am so appreciative of you and Chris taking the time to engage with my work.

**Outro** 49:39

You've just listened to an episode of the *Archives in Context* podcast, the official podcast of the Society of American Archivists. Members of the podcast team include Rose Buchanan, Chris Burns, Mary Caldera, Abigail Christian, Stephanie Luke, Nicole Milano, Lolita Rowe, Camila Zorilla Tessler, and Anna Trammell. All opinions expressed in this podcast are our own and are not reflective of a particular institution. Be sure to subscribe and listen wherever you get your podcasts or at [archivesincontext.archivists.org](https://archivesincontext.archivists.org). And join us again next time.