

Book Review

Jen Hoyer & Nora Almeida (2021) *The Social Movement Archive*. Litwin Press

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During these times of continually unfolding trauma and tragedy, each news cycle brings more heartache. Economic uncertainties due to the Pandemic and other unrest have caused irreparable damage to the cultural heritage sector. According to a recent survey by the American Alliance of Museums,¹ up to a third of American museums are at risk of closure due to “Covid-19-related hardships.” UNESCO paints a similarly dire global picture in their 2020 report *Museums Around the World in the Face of Covid-19*.² The archive world is no stranger to these severe challenges, and small community-focused archives are most at risk. Focusing on social movement archives, this book is one bright spot amidst all this gloom with a focus on archivists, activists and artists that engage with socio-political disruptions, upheavals, and transformations.

The authors, both archivists at Interference Archive in Brooklyn New York, stretch the parameters of the monograph form beautifully with a design by Josh McPhee, incorporating full color images of cultural ephemera from the archives represented in the book in much the same way a museum catalog reifies items in an exhibit. The book is also an oral history project in which the voices of the artists, activists and archivists in these pages ring true. With an expansive approach to social justice movements, we hear from new and longer-term activists engaged in work to create a more just world. The authors deftly select fifteen ‘counterarchive’ projects that transform and disrupt the concept of ‘the archive’ in exciting and provocative ways. For example, both Sky Cubacub, a nonbinary, queer and disabled Filipinx human from Chicago, IL as clothing designer and creator of *Radical Visibility: A QueerCrip Dress Reform Movement Manifesto*, and Sikowis (Plains Cree-Saulteaux) founder of the Great Plains Action Society, work to stretch and challenge the fundamental ideas of access and documentation within contemporary archival understandings.

¹AAM Snapshot Surveys from June 2020 <https://www.aam-us.org/2020/07/22/a-snapshot-of-us-museums-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/> and October 2020 <https://www.aam-us.org/2020/11/17/national-snapshot-of-covid-19/>.

²UNESCO (2020) *Museums Around the World in the Face of COVID-19*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373530>.

One quibble: some of the images are too small or oddly placed to do them justice, but I give full credit to the publisher for including so many images, (and the authors and archives for selecting them). These images help provide visual support for the central inquiries – *what is an archive?* and, *how do we archive?* The index is an invaluable tool for those who wish to dive more deeply and independently into the visual materials. The featured counterarchives believe that “movement materials have value as historic artifacts, and continued relevance in relation to ongoing struggles for social justice” (p. 5). In practice, this means that each seeks to provide robust access for community members, and open these materials for new uses that can reactivate and reamplify these materials. The act of creating spaces to preserve movement work means infusing the past into our present, while igniting the possibility of our futures. This often means repurposing or reusing images to connect past, present, and future work. Each featured project also steadfastly foregrounds collective memory by uplifting and centering community voices in their processes of collecting and organizing. Some – like the Fireworks Graphic Collective, War Resisters League, and Mobile Print Power – produce the artwork and other materials held by the archive, others – including the Environmental Performance Agency and Decolonize this Place – document direct actions and performances by their collectives. *The Social Movement Archive* is a critical exercise that has much to add to current conversations about the future of archives. It is also an exercise in hope, and a template for joy in these troubled times.