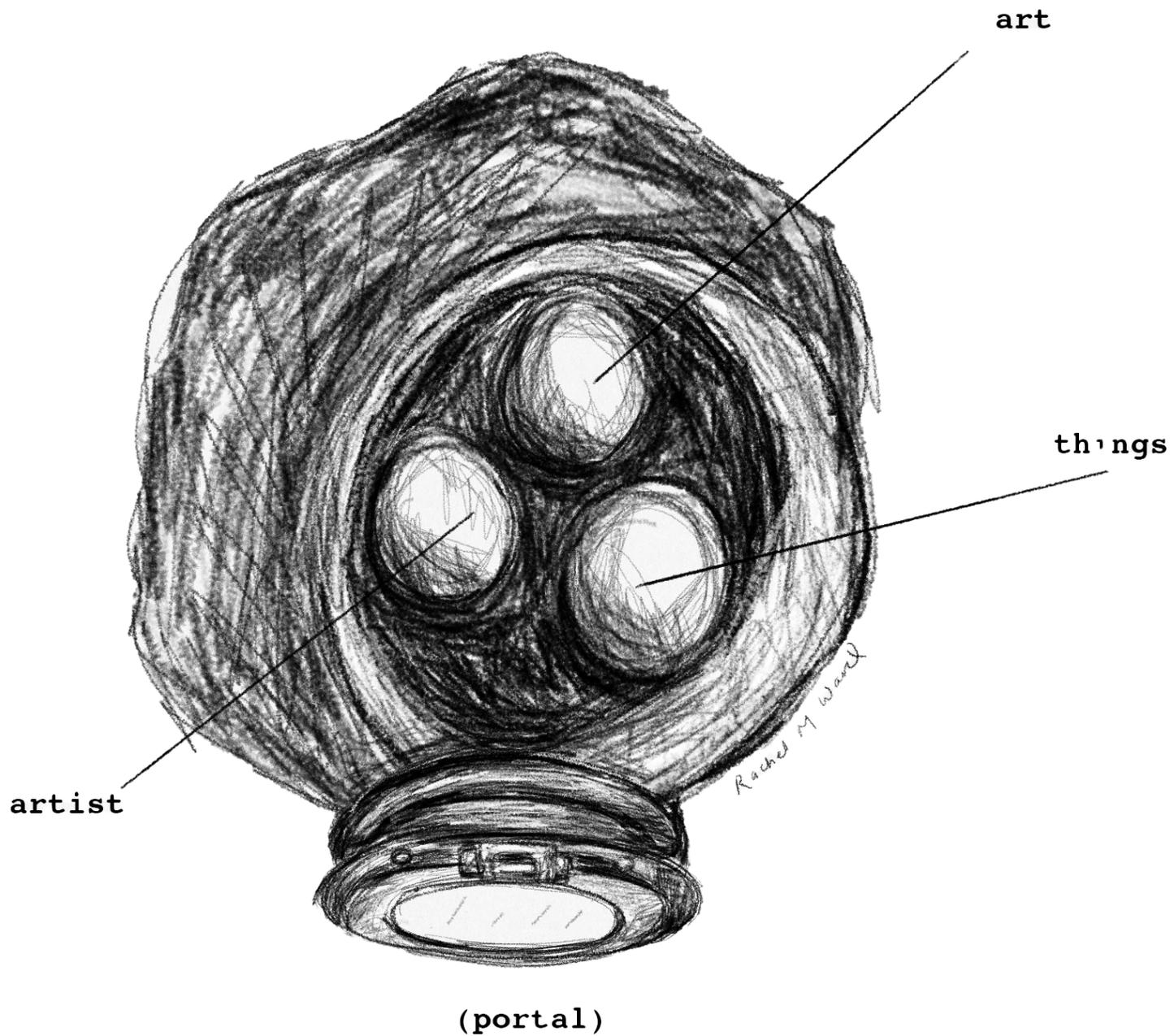


an illustrated overview of
my doctoral dissertation



rachel m. ward

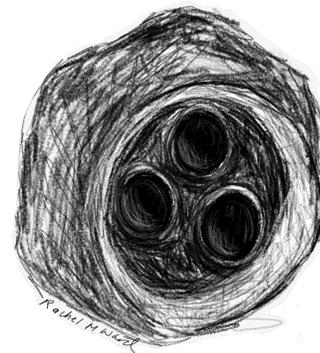
Although my project is based on speculative visions of “other worlds,” it is founded in Ethnographic Fieldwork that was conducted “IRL” (in real-life) with the acclaimed NYC women artists Carolee Schneemann, Dianne Blell and Laurie Spiegel from 2016-2020. In these four years, I witnessed many poignant life experiences, such as a MoMA Retrospective (Carolee Schneemann, 2018), induction into the Women’s Hall of Fame (Laurie Spiegel, 2018) and, more recently, co-writing urgent COVID artist relief grants (Dianne Blell, 2020). After years of work, I was left with many unexpected digital “byproducts” and virtual “fragments” of fieldwork. Often these remnants are discarded — what George Marcus refers to as the “anthropologist’s private archive” — yet, he says, these materials are of more value than a finished monograph (which is based on interpretation) and should be preserved, digital and open access (Marcus 1998; 2016; Fortun, Fortun, and Marcus 2017).

Initially, I developed the fictional concept of an Archive Capsule as “something to think with” (Strathern 2005) in the preservation of Carolee, Laurie and Dianne’s invisible fragments of memories, ephemera and obsolescing digital artworks. It is inspired by the tradition of Speculative Design prototypes that are produced in SIAT. Yet, as a “troubled” (Haraway 2016) interdisciplinary project that spans Anthropology, Design, Art and Archives, I was consoled by Donna Haraway who likewise conceded that bounded disciplinary individualism has become “truly no longer thinkable” (Haraway 2016, 5). Equally inspired by Marilyn Strathern, Haraway, in her science fiction inspired futuristic envisaging, developed the rich concept of “tentacular thinking” to connect with “multiple others across disciplines [in] necessary and continual collaboration” (Risako 2017, 19). My Archive Capsule in some ways “looks like” or even “thinks like” a “tentacle” — spanning professional sectors, theoretical foundations and digital-hybrid memories — yet, in line with contemporary Speculative Design imaginaries, comes in the form of a rudimentary, whimsical analog drawing. This crude blueprint is what now guides my Dissertation Expedition in a newly emerging and fluid framework called Speculative Anthropology.

Beyond theory and in “IRL” contexts, this work represents my efforts to contribute to research-based solutions to ongoing and future problems of the pandemic. When COVID-19 closed 90% of museums worldwide (American

Alliance of Museums 2020; UNESCO 2020), I saw that my speculative Capsule could also be of service as an imaginary design-prototype tool for archive and collection access amongst museums, researchers and users at home. This is what UNESCO said that we need right now —urgent innovations in digital collection access “are among the top priorities that need to be addressed” (UN News 2020). Although a “far-fetched design” my hope is that it could become a “concrete starting point” (Dunne and Raby 2013, 148) for scientists and technologists who can actually build something that serves the same destiny.

—Rachel M. Ward



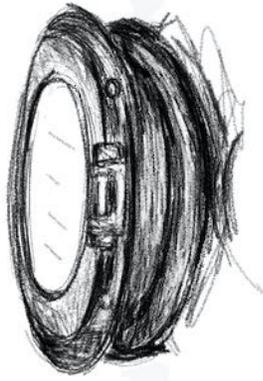
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page 1.
a capsule story
further defined.

drawings and prose as research



figure 1. covid



Rashed M Ward

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world.

[Roy Arudhati 2020]

The Warhol Foundation is meticulously digitizing and preserving:

- Artist - his voice on 3400 cassette tapes
- Art - his decaying media art on floppy disks
- Things - his infamous Time Capsules

so he is a good example of the long-term safeguarding of these 3 categories of archival materials



andy's work is well-cared for, but why isn't it for most women artists?

to try to understand why this was the case.
to try to understand this conundrum.
i worked, ethnographically,
with 3 women artists.
including Carolee Schneemann,
just prior to her passing.



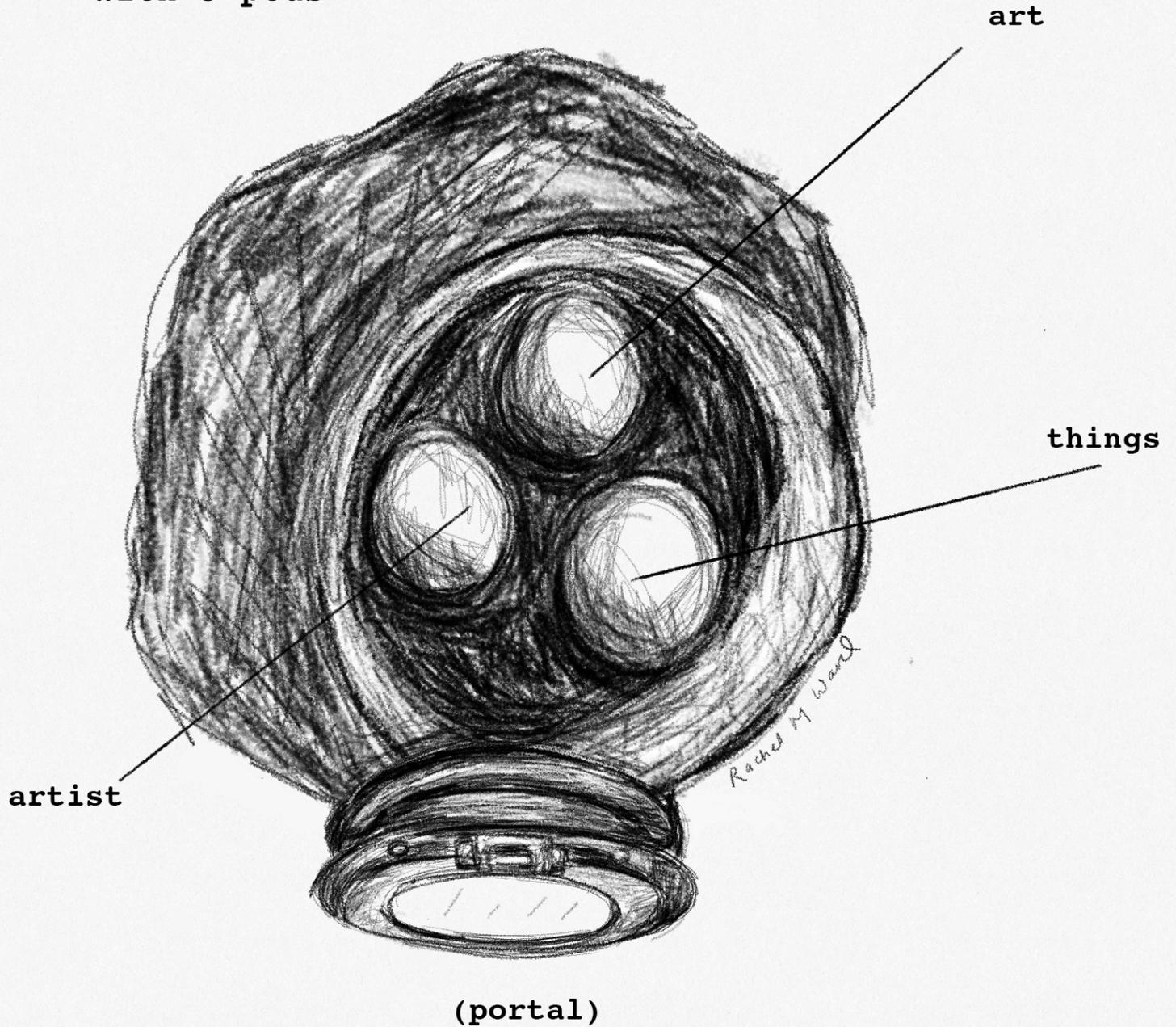
i could not
understand why
her artwork
was stored in
a shed, when
she had just
had a huge
MoMA
retrospective
a few months
before.

Rachel M Ward

i asked her: why didn't the MoMA protect it?

what did i mean, 'protection'?
well,
it's kind of complicated.

archive capsule with 3 pods



i thought about Andy's 3 categories.
how his stuff was safeguarded.
hermetically sealed.
maybe forever

Laurie Spiegel a pioneering electronic musician. she had so many obsolescing floppy disks. historically important artworks.

but we can't see them.
d e c a y i n g d a t a .



i inventoried
thousands of them in
her soho loft.

a song of hers is on the golden voyager album. it's still floating around in outer space.

maybe =



maybe this is what her art looks like in that old floppy disk. maybe one day we can look at it in VR.

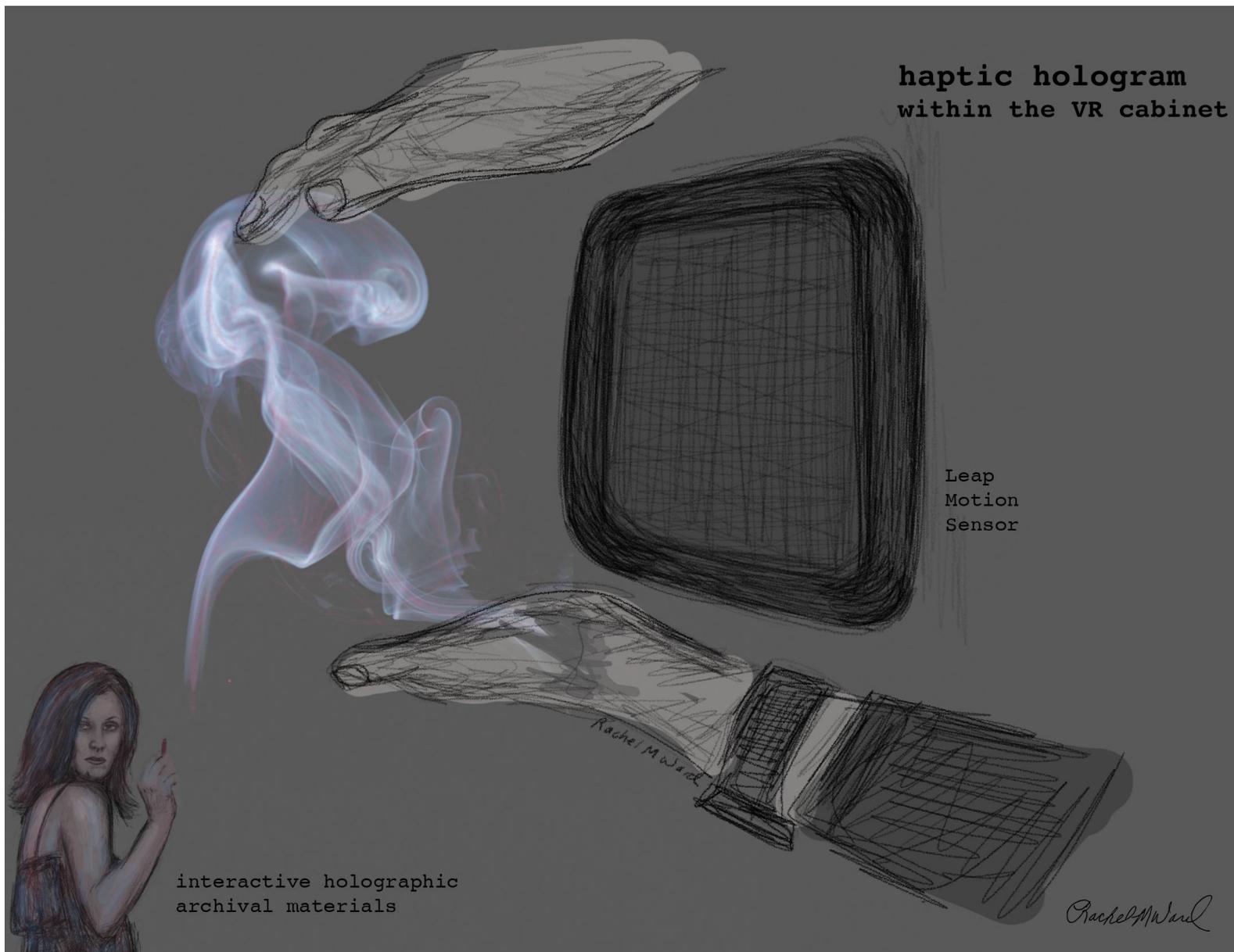


maybe I could
even see the
artist in VR?
talk to them?

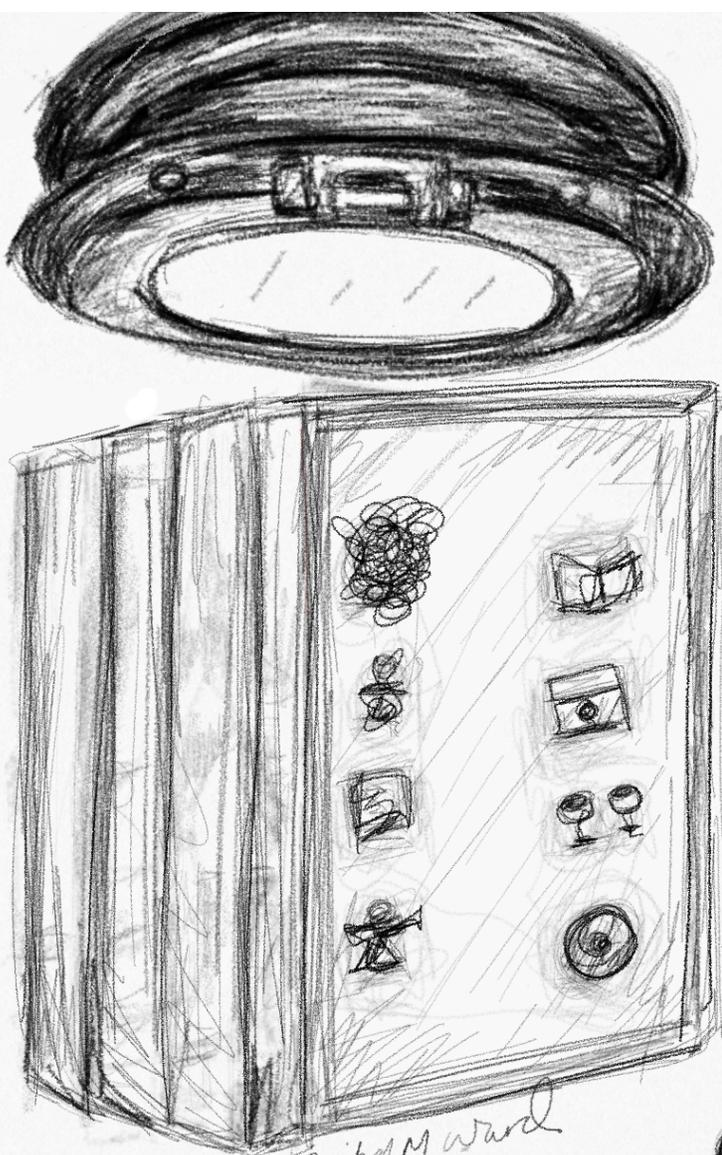
oh you punk!
love,
di di

oh you punk!
love,
di di

for that 3rd category. things.
Dianne Bell.
i 3D scanned some Things,
in her studio.
when Things are gone,
can we recreate them?
from my data?
if we preserve it well enough now?



she had already lost nearly everything,
once.
in 9/11.
her studio was located at ground zero.

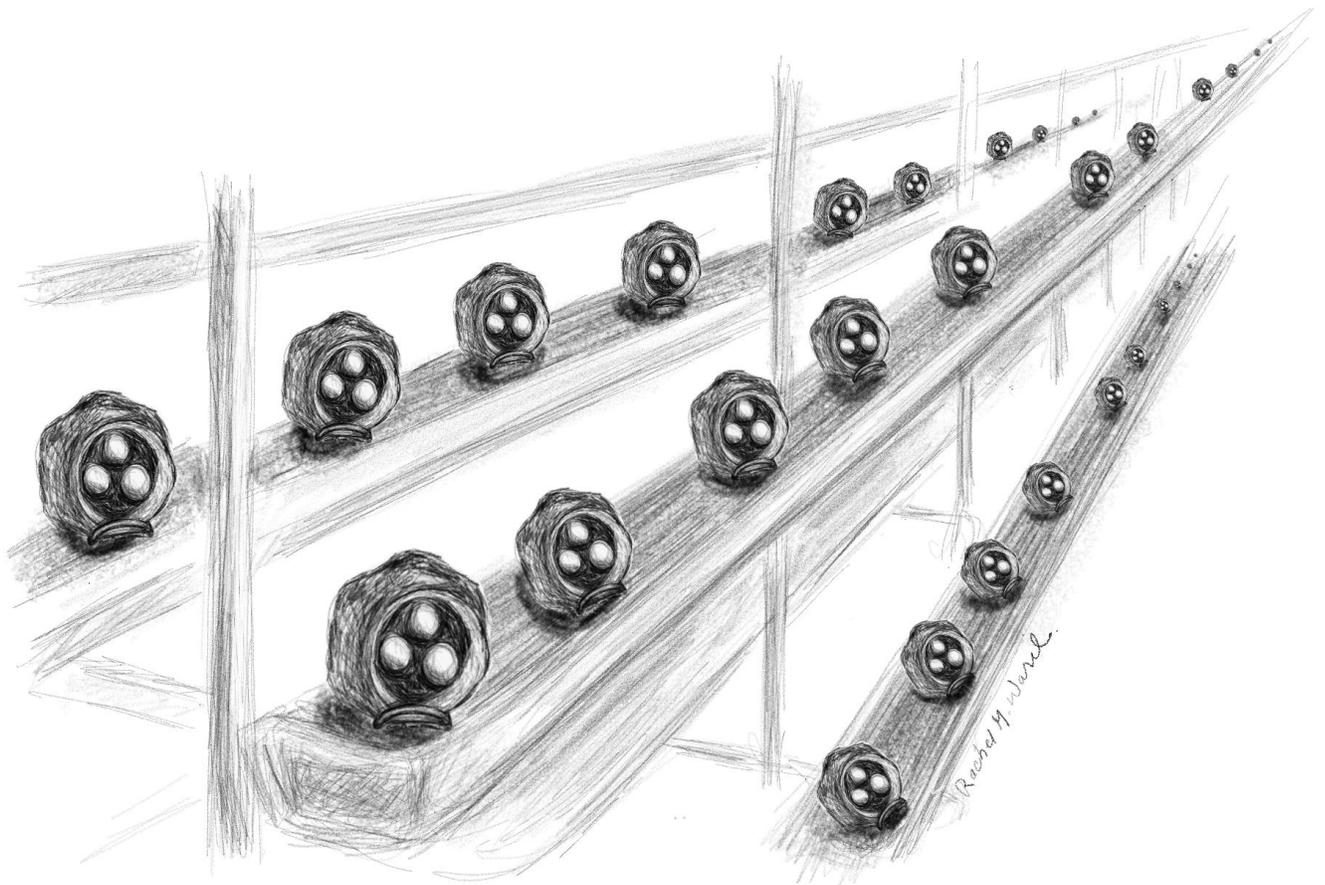


Rachel M Ward



interactive archive cabinet

i want everything to connect



instructions

Step 1. put the women's
archives into Capsules.

Step 2. plug every Capsule
into ONE (1) grid network.
just 1.

Result: museums, archives,
peoples' homes are now
tethered.

so please now look. interact. and remember. (that's memory institutions are for.)

how

the materials collected in fieldwork are
digitized then
embedded with metadata



the metadata is the dna of a digital object
it is how it is identified in a search query
it is how its contents are accessed

it is kind of like cell receptor signaling.

someone told me once that metadata is king

thank you,
rachel m. ward
2023