The AIDS Memorial Quilt was created 25 years ago as a work of community activism to protest the appalling lack of attention by the US health agencies to what was then, in 1987, an increase in improbable fatalities among previously healthy gay men in the United States. Its first inception unfolded in October 1987 on the National Mall in Washington DC as part of the March for Gay Rights; it included 1,920 Quilt panels. Now 25 years later, the Quilt encompasses more than 48,000 panels, representing 60 countries and commemorating more than 93,000 names. It is the largest living memorial of its kind in the world.

The Quilt is also an "activist archive" of the late 20th century. The activities that gave rise to the Quilt in 1987 are part of the history of the campaign for gay and lesbian rights in the US. The Quilt literally stitches together a million memories, a million stories, a million lessons about the relationship between individual lives, public culture, and political activism. In its textile form, it is an unwieldy archive. If laid out in its entirety the Quilt would cover more than 1.3 million square feet. It weighs more than 34 tons.

This presentation discusses the creation of an interactive memorial that was designed to augment the viewing of the textile Quilt. I will demonstrate three digital experiences: 1) an open-source mobile web application called AIDS QUILT TOUCH; 2) a tangible tabletop interactive that enables viewers to SEARCH the database of Quilt images to find a specific image and to BROWSE the archive of Quilt panel images; and 3) a community sourcing application that engages people in analyzing and archiving information about the Quilt.

This effort is framed by my recent transmedia book project called Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination At Work. In creating the Quilt Digital Experiences I was interested in exploring the cultural work of public interactives, to examine how they are implicated in practices of cultural reproduction—remembering, witnessing, archiving, and educating.

Biography: Anne Balsamo joined the New School as Dean of the School of Media Studies in the New School for Public Engagement in 2012. Her recent book, Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination at Work (Duke, 2011) examines the relationship between culture and technological innovation, with a particular focus on the role of the humanities in cultural innovation. Previously she was a Full Professor at the University of Southern California where she held joint appointments in the Annenberg School of Communication and the Interactive Media Division of the School of Cinematic Arts. From 2004-2007, she served as the Director of the Institute for Multimedia Literacy at USC where she created one of the first academic programs in multimedia literacy across the curriculum. In 2002, she co-founded, Onomy Labs, Inc. a Silicon Valley technology design and fabrication company that builds cultural technologies. Previously she was a member of RED (Research on Experimental Documents), a collaborative research-design group at Xerox PARC who created experimental reading devices and new media genres. She served as project manager and new media designer for the development of RED's interactive museum exhibit, XFR: Experiments in the Future of Reading that toured Science/Technology Museums in the U.S. from 2000-2003. Her first book, Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women (Duke UP, 1996) investigated the social and cultural implications of emergent bio-technologies. In 2010, she received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to create an interactive tangible interface for the AIDS Memorial Quilt. In 2008 she received a grant from the MacArthur Foundation to study the future of museums and libraries in a digital age that focused on the role of play and tinkering in the production of knowledge.