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Oral history interview with Alexandra Juhasz, 2017 December 19-21

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Alexandra Juhasz on December 19 and 21, 2017. The interview took place at the home of Alexandra Juhasz in Brooklyn, NY, and was recorded by Theodore Kerr for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So you sound good.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: I'm very happy.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Me, too.

THEODORE KERR: Let's remind each other of the date. It is the 19th. December 19th.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: December 19th.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So, this is Theodore Kerr interviewing Alexandra Juhasz at her home in Brooklyn, New York, on December 19th, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Interview number one. Hi, Alex.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Hi, Ted.

THEODORE KERR: Thank you for letting us be in your home for this interview.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, I'm extraordinarily honored to be part of this record and to be part of the archiving and historicizing of this record, one that's very important to me.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. When you think about today, who's in the room with you today, on a spiritual or intellectual or even emotional plane?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's a really interesting question. It's a nice way to start. I would say something to you that you know because we are friends, and even because you knew me before that through my work. All of my AIDS work is situated in a large community of activists and artists who I've known since my 20s. So I grew up into myself as an adult and a person of the world through that community, and many of them are still here in New York and have continued to be my community. So I'm in conversation with them, and have been for 30 years. And that is actually an international community. So people across the United States and around the world.

But AIDS work is always also in conversation [00:02:00] with people who have died, and is motivated in some part because of people who were sick and then died. All of my AIDS work is dedicated to my beloved friend, James Robert Lamb, who I call Jim, who was my best friend in college, and a man that I was in love with. I lived with him in New York City, and he died when he was 29. So he's always with me and he keeps me committed to stay the course because he deserves it. And he's just one. So we all have our person or people like that. We stay the course because they need not have died.

And for me, always, AIDS work is about the future and people I don't know as well, or people I want to continue to be in my life in the future. Because a committed relationship to thinking about and being an activist and an artist, and in community around AIDS, is about wanting to think through the limits in our society that fell people unnaturally. And HIV/AIDS is one of those limits. So I speak to people in the future that I want to be here and I want to keep talking to. Even those people I don't know yet. They're in the room.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. [00:04:00] Yeah. And I think that this—you know, a lot of your work does that and this will be part of that, I think.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's part of why I'm honored to do it.

THEODORE KERR: Good. This is a slightly similar, but it is a different question. So thinking about—you said at

the end—who do you hope is going to be the audience for this? Who do you hope is going to read this online or request to hear your voice?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I guess, a few kinds of people. One of the things that I talk about a lot in my community—and I name you as a member of that community, and as an interlocutor, so I hope that's okay on the record that we have an intimate intellectual and activist and artistic life together—is that AIDS is not over. We say that a lot in our community. And I imagine at some point it will be. You know, I hope in the future, I won't have to build a body of ongoing work around refuting that simple [. . . neologism. –AJ]

But AIDS—people say now that AIDS is over. It's not. But, you know, I imagine there'll be a time in the future when it's over in the sense that it will be a disease that has a cure, and it won't afflict huge segments of the people in the world and America. So in that future, I look forward to people looking back to hear and gain insight how politically and [00:06:00] personally engaged and enraged humans contributed to the end of something that they despised. So that's one audience.

But I don't know when that will be. I don't do my work anticipating it, but I assume, as long as the earth still exists, that it will happen, that AIDS will be over. But I guess the other audience in the future are feminists, and queer, and anti-racist activists engaged in whatever their despised, unjust, illicit, unattended-to blight may be. And I hope they get some sustenance and solace from the fact that disenfranchised people before them used the power of our intellect and the grace of our humanity, and our beautiful and complicated art, and our passion in the streets to respond and change something that mattered to us. So that, I suppose. Them.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Those are, those are beautiful audiences. I'm going to check—that's better.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: My microphone.

THEODORE KERR: So yeah. We do have a robust friendship and working relationship. And I think oral history makes space for that. So just know that you don't have to treat me as like a—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Objective [laughs] outsider.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Exactly. And if you [00:08:00] say something that's too familial and I think it needs to be unpacked a bit for an audience of the people you just mentioned, then I'll just prompt you on that. Is that okay?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Also I think oral history also means that there's going to be times where than can be conversation, you know? It's an interview. I'm talking to you about your life specifically around the intersection of art and AIDS, but also, you know, part of—if I understand your work correctly, and I think I do a little bit, you are motivated by thinking with.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Thanks.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah [laughs], yeah. Thank you.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: For letting me [laughs] get to talk to you back.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Hear from you, as well.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, thank you. With these oral histories, what's really nice is that we get to hear about people's life through, before, after, with, on top of HIV. And I think that that's something that—especially if we're thinking about a future where HIV is vastly different. That will be exciting for readers and listeners.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And I like the way that you say that, you know, because I think "it is over" is very hard for me to imagine. And it isn't a trajectory that motivates me. So "vastly different" makes a lot more sense anyway. Just like—I don't know—tuberculosis is vastly different and so are eating disorders. I mean, you know, they're culturally live. And it probably will remain culturally live certainly as long as people who have HIV and people who have known people who have HIV are with us. It's culturally live.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And I think also in your opening statements, you've also said that it will be culturally

live because it has impacted the way that the world works. You know, like it—somebody will listen to this in 50 years [00:10:00] and even if HIV isn't a live force, there's lessons within the response to HIV that can be used for whatever might be the travails of the time.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: We understand that. And I'm sure that it is not something I need to spend a lot of time [on] in this interview, because you speak to so many other people whose work frames this, but one of the great gifts of AIDS activism and AIDS cultural activism is that we organized an analysis and a set of actions around people taking control of their own health. And health being the first link in a very complicated chain that included race, class, gender, but also education and wealth and location, where you happened to be born. But we organized around the health of living bodies. And people had done it before. We learned from the women's health movement, for instance. But people will continue to need to organize around health, and medicine, and money, the pharmaceutical industrial complex, and greed, and the lived circumstances by which human beings are denied access to good health.

THEODORE KERR: Something that I think it's good to—at the beginning of this conversation—is [00:12:00] to note and maybe just get your thoughts on: you play and you have played so many different roles within the response, you know. Friend, video-maker, editor, writer—you know, the list is endless. And I wonder, do you have like—by the end of this, you're going to have to fill out a form and you're going to have to put your occupation. And so that'll be one or two words. And so a) what do you imagine putting as your one or two words? And then b) how do you explain your roles within the ongoing response to HIV?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I've always called myself an AIDS activist video-maker, but that's what I started as. And I think probably now I'm as much a theorist and historian of AIDS activist video and cultural production, slightly writ more large than that. And that is because I am an artist and a scholar. And my thinking about these practices, I'm not—there's not that many scholars who think about these practices. And my voice in that conversation is extremely important to me. Not my voice. That I have a voice in that conversation of a small number of very committed people has been very important to me, and how we build on and learn from each other. I like doing my work—my academic work, my activist work, my artistic work—in small, edgy, committed communities. I am not complaining that it's a small community. When I speak, I [00:14:00] know that I'm being heard and I know that I'm listening, because I need to know from my community, because what we do we really care about.

So my role has changed over—I started doing this work when I was probably 23. And I'm 53. So I've done it for 30 years. My work has changed dramatically over that time. My role has changed because I've grown up. [Laughs.] And I know more. I have more confidence and authority that is just granted to me because of my age and duration in the world. And the AIDS crisis has changed. So my role wouldn't stay the same because what I need to do and who I'm talking to is different, and what we're talking about is different, and what our needs are are different. So it's been fluid.

And some people have stayed that course. Some people started when I did, and are still participating. Many of those people died, so I don't know what they would be like now. Many of my colleagues from the earliest days have walked away for reasons, again, that those in our community can name, because they're really grief-stricken, because they have PTSD, because they became addicted to drugs, because they're sick even though they're not dying, because they're poor, because they're disenfranchised outside of their illness, because it's too much. And then a small number of us has really been doing it, and it's kind of [00:16:00] disheartening that we're still at it. And it's sort of inspiring because massive social crises are not solvable with a fix. So people have stayed the course because they're invested in this massive social crisis that, you know, kind of came out of nowhere and is here still.

THEODORE KERR: Let's go back a little bit and think about who and how that 23-year-old person came to be. Is that okay?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] A question I really like to think about is—and I'm asking you—what's your earliest memory? What's your first memory or your earliest memory?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In my life?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [00:17:00] I don't know. I have a lot of early memories, but I've never thought of my earliest. It's not my earliest memory, but I certainly have a cluster of memories from around the time when I was three. And they all take place in Berkeley, California and around Berkeley, California. My parents were graduate students there in the '60s. So it's 1967. And the memory that came to me when you asked me—it's not my earliest memory, but it's from that time—is my father taking me to the Royal Bolshoi Ballet in—[00:18:00] I

don't remember where it was, but I remember the parking lot, being with my father in the parking lot going to the ballet.

THEODORE KERR: And you were around three?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And I mean, it's interesting that you remember the parking lot and you know that you were going to the ballet.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] Yes.

THEODORE KERR: That's just the association.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't remember the inside at all.

THEODORE KERR: That's amazing.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Or the ballet. But I remember, you know, how special the trip was, exciting as to my dad. I don't remember what I was wearing, but I know I must have been dressed up. I'm sure I had patent leather shoes. And I love patent leather still. You know I have so much of it.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I have a red patent leather purse. I often wear patent leather shoes. I love it. It must be connected to patent leather from when I was three.

THEODORE KERR: That's really sweet.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And how long were you in Berkeley for?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: A few years. My parents were in graduate school there, so you know, I was born into a hippie-like environment. My parents were quick to remind that they weren't really hippies because they were graduate students. They were professionalizing. But they sure looked like hippies. And it was Berkeley. And wherever we traveled after that, they were read as hippies, in the sense that they were very young. My parents are young. So my mom was 21 when I was born. So, you know, this time, she's 25. He's 29. That I'm remembering. They weren't middle-class, suburban anythings, but two academic parents. My mom was in the generation of women that founded women's studies, and she's a feminist. My father was married to a feminist. They're not married now.

THEODORE KERR: When you said you had a cluster of memories, what were other things that came up?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: From that age?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mr. Mopps' Toy Store, which is [00:20:00] still in Berkeley. It was near our house. I could walk there. Just, again, the magic of the anticipation. It's another anticipation memory. I got married to my—our downstairs neighbor in our Berkeley house, a boy named Jimmy. There's some memories around that. I mean, I have a lot of memories from three.

THEODORE KERR: Like when you were three, you got married to the boy.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. In the house?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In the backyard—

THEODORE KERR: Oh. [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —wearing like a—I mean, there's pictures of it. So the pictures also, you know, instill the memories. But I'm wearing some adult slip, like satiny slip. So here again is like a shiny fabric. We went out to McDonald's afterwards because I was not allowed to really eat McDonald's, because that was a kind of hippie—like, we didn't eat unhealthy things or watch television or any of those kinds of things. Like, hippie, Berkeley, '60s. '60s. I mean, I was a kid in the '60s in Berkeley.

I mean, I have a lot of memories from that age. That's why I can't, like, peel back to the earliest. It's fertile to me. I was saying to somebody recently, I remember where I was when the first man walked on the moon. I don't know what year that is, but it might also be '67, when I was three. Maybe '68.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. That sounds right, but I don't know for sure.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: We lived in a different house in the Bay area. And I remember my parents caring a lot about it and being sort of outside and hearing them watching television. Again, like, not a lot of television. So, I remember going to Golden Gate Park and watching rock and roll. It probably was the Summer of Love. Like, rock and roll concerts, like, huge seas of people. I can remember being in the Santa Cruz Mountains in sort of like hippie-like—it was very hip. You know, it was very––

THEODORE KERR: And describe hippie.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Art festivals [00:22:00] and—

THEODORE KERR: Because we know what—we have a shorthand for hippie maybe, but like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, yeah. I'm using it as a shorthand. People with long and really dirty hair. You know, lots of hair and loose fabrics, and a general relaxed atmosphere, a very sensual atmosphere. Again, I'm remembering as a kid, but I mean, that lasted for many years around me. Understanding that it was outside of dominant culture, for sure. Probably not at three, but a bit later. It's not what normal Americans were like. So that felt curious and embarrassing, and fun, exciting, I guess.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And it was mainly—like, in these hippie worlds, was it families of hippies? Or was it, like, lots of single people, and your family was the odd group out?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't remember. I mean, my parents mostly hung out with other married graduate students. There were graduate students, so people like that with little kids. I mean, that's the other thing. They had all these little kids. I was the first. There was two more right behind me. Students. My parents' students were around us a lot. You know, they were graduate students and then they became students like into the early '70s. It all sort of—that all sort of feels the same. We moved. But a kind of looseness and sensuality that was organized by very rigid understandings, just to the edge of what everyone else was like. My family was not—and that was true ongoing, but that is to say my family was, is, full of progressive, [00:24:00] outsider-ish types. And then there's the rest of American society, which we don't ever really look like.

But, yeah, hippies. Hippies felt sweet and loving and relaxed, and it—there was music. I mean, I'm a little kid, though. [Laughs.] Those memories. And crafts. You know, great fabrics, leather. My mom wore this leather poncho. My father had leather pants that strung up like this with the X's.

THEODORE KERR: At the front.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And a leather hat. [Laughs.] I thought it was horrifying.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And listened to, you know, '60s music. Like, most parents—most people I know's parents weren't listening to that stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But your parents were young and they were in that culture.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And they liked it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. But you know, they're academics, too, so they're not—like, real hippies were, you know, living in communes and doing a lot of drugs. They had kids. I mean, they were in graduate school. So there, there's—

THEODORE KERR: There were limits.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They were like you, you know. They're grown-ups who were keeping it together and moving forward. You know, they listened—when we lived in the Bay area, they became friends with Country Joe McDonald, who was Country Joe and the Fish and then became Country Joe. You know, it was—and they smoked pot. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It sounds like a really nice time.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Of course. It was.

THEODORE KERR: You talked about McDonald's as being one of those moments where there was like—you got a sense of the edge, it seemed like. Are there—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right. What I wasn't allowed. [00:26:00] What was right there, but my family didn't do. I also had a European parent. My father is Hungarian and is a Holocaust survivor. And so there was a certain—another way that we were different because he's European. So we did things that regular Americans didn't do. And because they were intellectuals. So, like, that combination, I never—especially as a kid. I always thought of our family as being very different from regular Americans. There was an edge that I wanted to cross, but was always a little disdainful of, as well.

THEODORE KERR: So there was, like, a wrestling with edge.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, definitely for me. Until I just succumbed and was like, "I'm never going to cross this edge."

[They laugh.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because I didn't want to. But I was curious about it, for sure.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Because of what it offered?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I mean, on the other side of that edge is conformity and fitting in and, you know, middle-class—I don't know how to say it. Middle-class, suburban, you know—it was everything from the food that we ate to my parents had art on the walls that they purchased from their friends. We had a lot of plants in our house, which was just not common in the '70s. I guess maybe it started to be. Like ferns were, you know, they were bohemian. And I ended up growing up in Boulder, Colorado and there were bohemian people there, but my friends' parents weren't bohemian. They were just kind of straight-laced, upper-middle-class people.

You know, it's like being straight and gay. If you're straight, you get access to all this—the privilege of conformity, and just not being seen. It's kind of laziness [00:28:00] and privilege mixed up. If you're gay, you get the wonders of being on the outside. And you also get oppressed. It was the same kind of edge. So yeah.

I thought I was going to be a lawyer. I wanted to not be like my parents. I didn't want to be a professor. I didn't even want to be bohemian.

THEODORE KERR: And did a lawyer seem different than a professor?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Because why? How?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because you had money.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You would have a normal house. You would be traveling in places where power registered visibly and in ways that were noticeable and verified. I mean, this was me at 20. That's what I thought I might want to be. An intellectual.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But I guess I'm in—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And then I quickly decided that I was wrong. [Laughs.] I didn't ever try.

THEODORE KERR: To be a lawyer?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I did for most of college. I had internships. I worked for a very fancy law firm. I took the LSAT my senior year of college. And then I decided not to go. And I went to film school instead.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. Okay. We're going to—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So I checked myself at about 21, and I never looked back. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: We're going to get there. Good. I'm wondering: That kind of relationship to the edge, was it something you negotiated with your sisters as well?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. So we all sit on it differently, but we all negotiate it differently. But I think—so there's

three of us in my original family. And my father got remarried, has two more daughters. So there's five girls that I consider my family. Five [00:30:00] sisters.

My sister that comes behind me really was a shy girl, and really didn't care for being on the outside, and was sort of humiliated by it, as a child. She was shy. It was about the shyness. She didn't want to be seen that way. And she has built for herself a much more normative life than the rest of us. And yet, compared to regular Americans [laughs]—you know, she's a feminist, liberal Democrat with a PhD and—you know, I mean, so it's all relative.

My family, there's a pretty big spectrum, but we're all not normative. Comfortably so. So we're all intellectuals and activists. Several of us are—well, no. I guess two of us are queer. We're all feminists. I don't know, I guess—my entry into kicking back that claim, that clawing desire to be normal, really started when I identified as a feminist. And that was in high school. And so [00:32:00] there's sort of no turning back. Like that was—like I said that AIDS was the head of a sub-chain and I think understanding that my gendered position as a girl was sort of the same thing I said about AIDS. Like, unfair, unconscionable, structurally produced, illicit, immoral. That dawned on me in high school. And so that was sort of the first step of saying, you know, if the rest of the society, the normative society, is organized around these unprincipled distinctions, then maybe I don't want its bounty.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But I kept trying for a while.

THEODORE KERR: Well, what I like about hearing you talk about this is that you don't have a tale about it. You're working with words to try to explain it now. And I'm wondering, at the time, did you also feel like in a sea of unknowing? Or was it just—you were just putting one foot in front of the other? You were just like a 13-year-old kid, just like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I mean, the other thing is that—I mean, it's a cluster of things. My family's Jewish. I'm living in Boulder, Colorado. Like, there's a lot of ways we're not normative. It's clear to us, me. My parents are intellectuals. We're Jewish. I don't look like girls in Boulder, Colorado. I'm not blonde. I'm not pretty in that way. You know, I always was applauded for being smart above everything else. In my family, we thought that was a Jewish kind of thing. We're not religious. You know, we had a set of values that were not in check with those around us, and actually cherish [00:34:00] those values to this day, and sort of cherished them then. So it's really about values and valuing, you know, ideas and a sort of ethical relationship to your daily life that, you know, wasn't religious. It didn't come out of religion. It's sort of connected to politics. It's sort of connected to ideas. It's sort of connected to art.

THEODORE KERR: Can you say more about the art part? How is it connected to art for you and your family?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I mean, my mother actually was an artist before she was an intellectual. She has a PhD in English and she went on to become a professor. But she, growing up as a girl, understood herself as an artist. So she was an actor and a poet, and she drew. A lot of my parents' friends were artists.

THEODORE KERR: Are we talking about visual art or are we talking performance? Are we talking musicians? All of the above?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: All of the above. And my father came from—he is a photographer now, but he—the class of Jewish intellectuals that he lived with and grew up in in Hungary were—many of them were artists. And some of them were intellectuals. The two are sort of mixed. And in Hungary, the class of cultural elite were primarily Jewish. And they, as I understand it—you know, you could be an extremely fine mathematician, or you could be an extremely fine concert pianist. They were sort of the same. And I think that he grew up in milieu—I know he grew up in a milieu like that. But [00:36:00] I didn't think of myself as an artist until I was in college. That was part of my sort of stripping away of the final cloak of what it would have looked like if I had been a powerful, normative, young woman, who would have been a lawyer.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I mean, one of the ways I've learned to use the word "ecology" comes from you, this idea that it's not like—there's not the mainstream culture versus the non-mainstream culture. It's that there's ecosystems, and that there's all these ways of being, and they're all in relationship to each other. And it sounds like a lot of like your life is often about just being in that morass, if that's the right word, and finding your way through it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Yeah. I guess, I think—you know, we even talked about class and capitalism, but I said, you know—a lot of times when I think about normative people—as someone who has the supreme privilege that I have. Highly educated. I'm well educated. I was very smart. I did well at all forms of school. And I could have gone on to be anything with my skills and privilege, the mix. I never really wanted money. I mean, that was the other thing that's just determinant in my family. Like, it's just not—so like, upper middle-class, like, "Did

you get the things?" Or I don't know, the trips. Rich people I knew had ski houses. I don't know. I never really cared about it. And that was a set of values that were very live for me and my family. Like things mattered much more than money. Way. So many things mattered more than money.

THEODORE KERR: Like what?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And so—

THEODORE KERR: Like ideas?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Ideas and [00:38:00] people.

THEODORE KERR: People mattered.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Ideas, people, living ethically. Those mattered more than money. And so like, if becoming a normal person and having power—which I have the ability to have—is organized around making lots of money, that quickly just did not make any sense to me. It wasn't useful to me. So then I had to imagine other values by which to mark my efficacy as a human being. But like, making a lot of money and being a lawyer has never mattered to me. Money just didn't matter in my family. Food mattered way more.

THEODORE KERR: Like food experiences?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Food experiences, and spending money on food, and being with your family and your friends.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I can imagine—I mean, I know you as someone who has lots of friends, but I'm wondering: Were friends something that were easy to make when you were in Colorado?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: For me?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. Because I've always been very social.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I had—yeah. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: So even though you may have felt that you were different than a lot of the people that you were interacting with, it didn't stop you from having a group of buddies.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. But I knew who I was different from.

THEODORE KERR: Did you find people you weren't different from?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] Yes. When I was in high school, I had a delightful and wonderful group of friends, who I'm still friends with, who were the smart and ambitious youth of Boulder, Colorado. The smartness comes first.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you enjoyed your mind even then.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. As I'm saying, I had to be a feminist.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Yeah. Let's talk about that. Like, if your Mom was someone who was pioneering women's studies, then it was around you, but that doesn't necessarily—like, [00:40:00] how did it come to be for you? What was your—did you have a feminist awakening?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. Absolutely. I—you know, I don't think this society still has much room for very smart women.

THEODORE KERR: True.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's not exactly the most comfortable way to inhabit your gender. And it's very visible.

We're having a conversation that's surprising to me. And I'm saying things—I don't know if I've exactly thought about them, so that's cool. Thank you, Ted.

You know, I made a decision at that age to be like—if being normal, and being not visible, and fitting in, and

getting all those comforts, means that I'm not going to get to talk as much as I want, you know, using the power of my intellect and my analysis of the world, fuck that. Like, okay, I won't have a boyfriend. Oops.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's going to mean a whole class of young—I was very straight at that time. A whole class of young men is going to find me unpalatable.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And it was clear to you. Like, there was not a question in your mind.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I would not give that up for anything. Even though I wanted a boyfriend more than anything. But in fact, I didn't.

THEODORE KERR: Right. There was something you wanted more.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: My words, my mind. You know, my connection with other people's words and minds. Yeah. And then you have to be a feminist, because who—what—why is that being taken from you? Your best thing? It's my best thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Was it a fight within yourself or with friends? Like, was it something that you were having to—was it a stake in the ground that you kept on having [00:42:00] to make contact with?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I read *A Room of One's Own*. I led a conversation about *A Room of One's Own* in my advanced English class. And, you know, she's overtly creating a feminist analysis of her situation. And it was absolutely apparent to me that that was legitimate. Nothing had changed, or a few things had changed. I did have a feminist mom.

But again, like a feminist mom having consciousness-raising circles, which I also remember very well, is not like most of the other people's moms. Everyone else's mom was a housewife. Like I didn't know any other mom who worked, let alone had a real career. You know, you're visible. You're visible. With my face. This is a Jewish face, a big nose. You're visible for checking the values of the society that are, at least, uninteresting, and, at most, oppressive. And, you know, my parents were living outside of that. And I quickly decided that that was what I was going to do, too. And, you know, my siblings did, as well.

With a lot of privilege. That's what I'm trying to say. Like, for me, it's a choice.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right. And there was some support there.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Is that where having a feminist dad comes in handy, as well?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I mean, you know, I don't know that my father would call himself a feminist [00:44:00] then, but certainly would now. I mean, you know, I think I was raised in a family—my family of origin looks very much like how people parent now, which is at least two generations later. So my father did, not half of the work, but close to it. That was unheard of, as well. So my mom being a career woman was unheard of. And my father, being interested in the daily life of his family, cooking, making a commitment to his children above other things, making a commitment to his marriage above other things, making—you know, like these were—that was sort of unheard of in normative America. And, yeah, I think I was really lucky to have two parents who modeled that. And—so yes.

THEODORE KERR: Did you feel heard by your parents?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely.

THEODORE KERR: I think that's unique.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Unique to what?

THEODORE KERR: To people's upbringing. I think, yeah, we can gender it. I think for a cis woman to feel heard by her parents is still maybe not the norm.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Today?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Really?

THEODORE KERR: I don't know. But let's talk about you. Did it seem like your other friends were being heard by their families?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. I mean, my parents raised me like people raise their kids now. So I was friends with my parents. Like that's very normal now. It was not normal then. I talked to my parents—as a teenager, and as a young adult, and to this day—like they're people. Partly because we now all do the same thing. We're all professors.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They're intellectuals. My mom's a lesbian now. So she's a lesbian feminist. She's been a lesbian for a long time. She works on lesbian feminism. I mean, you know, the thing I did was not differ[ent –AJ] from my parents, which is itself a bizarre and unhealthy decision.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I would have had to do that by being [00:46:00] a lawyer. And it just wasn't worth it. You know, of course, I could have been a public interest lawyer or whatever, but you know, I—the juicy way of living where, you know, ideas and people, and values are the live mix of daily life, that's how I—that's the family I was born into. It's the family I produced with my own partners. It's how I engage with you. You know, those are the sets of values that were given to me and my family. And being heard is part of it. So yeah. I listened and I was heard. Always. And conversations were exciting. And then I made for myself a life where exciting conversations was the first thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Of course. That makes sense.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Above other things. Power, making money, I don't know. Hiding in normative suburban households. I mean, I don't know, whatever the values might be.

THEODORE KERR: And so I'm trying to imagine, like, the conversations that you all were having. Like the '60s and '70s were not a boring time. There's Vietnam. There is women's lib. There's the pill. There's *Playboy.* There's civil rights. There's Nixon. There's—you know, you're in Denver. I don't even know what the—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Boulder.

THEODORE KERR: Boulder. Sorry. You're in Boulder. I don't even know what the local conversations would be. I'm sure environmentalism was finding its way into these conversations. So I wonder if you can just, like, take us there. Like, what was a dinner conversation that you all would have?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So I don't remember the '60s all that well. So, you know, I think my sense of my—I have the memories you asked me about, but those [00:48:00] are the memories of a small child.

But the '70s, sure. That's when I'm a teenager and a young adult. I don't know, I think conversations in my family of origin are pretty similar to conversations in my—the family that I produced and the families that I produce. I mean, I have a family with various partners and two children. But I have a whole bunch of families that I've produced with cohorts of like-minded people in a variety of ways. I don't know.

It has to move from politics, the world around you, trying really hard to make sense of that by connecting it to knowledge from before and the personal. So, like, the same thing happens, you know, with—like, you're going to talk about each other's interior lives that way too. And I do talk to my family that way.

THEODORE KERR: So at a dinner table, if you all were going to talk about Jimmy Carter's presidency, it wouldn't just be about his policies.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. No, no, no, no. You know, it's always connected—I mean, my mom's a literature professor. It's connecting it back to books or movies that are in the past or in the present. And then also, intimate knowledge and a comfort about talking about self, and self in family. So that's what the meal would be like. Like a kind of unchecked flow. Just like [how –AJ] you and I talk.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. With your sisters diving in, as well.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And friends? Like I—because of the relationship to the hippie culture, was your house also like—did it have a commune feel, even though your parents were professors?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Not a commune feel, but like my—so, by the time I was in high school, my house was the

cool house to go to because my parents were talking to [00:50:00] people like they were real people. We were allowed to drink. Not in, you know, great volume. I'm not a hedonist in that respect [laughs], or a bad girl in any way.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was a comfortable place to be. But, you know, a lot I think because of—you know, my parents did a thing that parents do now, but didn't do then, which is recognize people as people, and want to talk to you like you were a person. And would listen, you know, to my friends. So it was a cool place to be. So, yeah.

No, it wasn't a commune. You know, normal families in Boulder, Colorado were white and blonde and Christian, and everything was under a layer of congenial normativity. I have actually never liked any of that. I wanted it for a bit. *Blechh*.

THEODORE KERR: Right. I think the word congealed [sic] normativity is very descriptive.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: It sounds as gross as—well, there's my bias. [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So I didn't have that in my family of origin.

THEODORE KERR: Right. And you all talked about current events. Were you a newspaper-reading family? Was the radio on? How did the outside world get to the dinner table?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: *Time* magazine, the *New York Times Book Review*. Now, the *New York Times* did not travel. You couldn't buy a *New York Times* really, but my mother subscribed to the *Book Review*. It came [00:52:00] like a week late in the mail. We got *Ms.* magazine. My parents read a lot. So my memories of being—we didn't have a—there was one TV in my house that was black-and-white, and it was very small, and it was in Antonia's bedroom. Antonia has gone on to become a—I don't know who's more progressive, Antonia or I. We would battle it out, but—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —extremely important voice of the American left was in Antonia's room. She loves television. As do you. I do not. My parents did not watch [the –AJ] TV. They read at night. So they read novels, and history, and I don't know. And, you know, they would be downstairs in their room reading. I would be reading in my room.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. What did you read? Do you remember any of the titles?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I remember every—I mean, as a girl reader, so that's just another thing I did.

THEODORE KERR: What? You said you were a girl reader?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. It's a thing.

THEODORE KERR: What does that mean?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] It's a thing, Ted.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. But I'm not the only audience.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay. But you're from Canada.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: A girl reader is a girl who makes a world for herself inside of books and stays strong and alive, and is completely filled by it. And like, whatever else is happening in Normal, Colorado doesn't matter because you're just—you've got—

THEODORE KERR: You've got the whole world.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And I started reading like that—and my family—well, when I was six. I mean, I was a very precocious mind.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I can imagine.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So I was reading novels after novels, after novels—children's books, but probably starting at about six. But you know, up till now. I'm still a reader.

THEODORE KERR: Are you taking your parents'—like, whatever they read you're reading?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. My mother was a girl reader. See, it's a thing. It's a way of being a girl. My mother wrote a book about it. Not about being a girl reader, but about being a woman reader. I mean, it's a way of being female. It's [00:54:00] specifically a way to read that's very female in our culture. It's around the consumption of novels and fiction.

My mom and I had, and do have, a whole world built around reading books. So we would go to the library together and she would give me books, starting from six till now. I mean, I read everything. And I read a lot of less contemporary stuff, as a girl, than children's fiction. A lot of British children's fiction and a lot of American children's fiction from generations before me that my mom gave to me.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And are we thinking about like—is it like, Jack London? Or like, are you reading *Little Women*? Like I have very—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. So I mean, I wrote my undergraduate thesis on *Little Women*. The book and the movies. So that's when I began to depart a little bit from what my mother did. I read all of Louisa May Alcott—and I have a collection of all of Louisa May Alcott on that shelf right there—in high school. But by the time I was in high school, I was reading great adult fiction. Virginia Woolf was extremely important to me at that time. I mean, all of the great American and British—I loved Edith Wharton at that time, in particular, read all of Edith Wharton at that age. D.H. Lawrence, and—you know, whatever. The Eyres, Jane Eyre, and, you know, all of that. And when I was a younger girl, I was reading children's fiction. So there was a lot of reading in my house.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And as you get older, were you also reading, like, Norman Mailer or Truman Capote, or [00:56:00] like these kind of—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I was reading everything. I was a reader. I mean, I had read through the American canon and most of the British canon. I mean, if you're reading—by the time I graduated college I was an English major. I mean, I was a reader. I turned to film as a political decision, as a feminist. I was a reader. I am a reader. I mean, I could list books, but I don't think it's relevant. The practice of reading is more important.

THEODORE KERR: The practice of reading is more important.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Is that what you said?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Sure.

THEODORE KERR: Because it's how you—it's the world making—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: How you live.

THEODORE KERR: As a reader.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: As a decent person, as an intellect, as a person seeking worlds that make more sense, as a person who wants to have that conversation, so that you can have it with people, and then you can have it with books. And you're having it with people when you read. You're having that same conversation.

THEODORE KERR: Are you reading sci-fi as well?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Everything.

THEODORE KERR: Everything.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Just like, "Fully accept, listener: It's everything."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, that's what girl readers are like. They're reading all the time. I think you watched a lot of TV.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Imagine if what you were doing was reading. I did not watch television. I read all the time.

And now I split it, probably. I always have a novel. I read, I don't know, 20, 30, 40, 50 novels—I mean, I don't know. I read all the time.

THEODORE KERR: And just a minute ago you said you made a switch to film as a feminist choice.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right.

THEODORE KERR: Can you say more about that?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, so I was saying, in college—I became a feminist in high school. In college, I was an out feminist, and an activist. I entered activism through organized feminism. I was [00:58:00] at Amherst College, which was a patriarchal, elitist holdout. So again, if you're looking at the girl who's trying to figure out, "How am I going to engage with as much power as I want? And that I have the right to, and I have the privilege to gain."

I went to Amherst College. So like, that's very normative. So, you know, this battle of like, "Am I going to be normative and bourgeois or not?" is—you know, I'm wrestling with that up into and through college. But, you know, those questions are alive to me, I guess. But I was immediately a feminist because I was in a completely patriarchal and sexist environment, and organized in all kinds of ways. So we organized against sexual assault, and demanding a sexual harassment policy when I was in college. And we had a sit-in in the president's office.

Lesbian feminism was very alive where I went to college. I went to college from 1982 to 1986 in the Pioneer Valley, which is where Northampton is, but that whole area was and still is a hotbed for lesbian feminism. So the feminism that I grew into and that shaped me was lesbian feminism. And that I eventually pushed against, even in college. So the thing that entered—what entered through my feminism was nascent queerness. [01:00:00] There wasn't that word for it yet. But I spent a lot of time with lesbians and because I was spending time with lesbians, I opened up to a political understanding of sexuality that has organized my entire life. My work, but also my being. And in that milieu—now, it's completely closeted, by the way.

THEODORE KERR: For you or for the—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In the world.

THEODORE KERR: In the world.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So there's lesbian feminism, but it's hidden. I meet Jim Lamb, who I say is my best friend, who is gay. He doesn't come out to me, or even himself really, I don't know, for at least a year or more into that intense romance. My friends are gay and lesbian outsiders to the heteronormative patriarchal landscape in which I'm being exceedingly well-educated. And Eve Sedgwick is our professor. Just about ready to, you know, invent queer studies. All of this is closeted, but just barely. And [phone rings]—can you just grab that phone for —

[Audio break.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: My feminism was lodged in a nascent [01:02:00] project that later is what we called queer studies and queerness. But that's not a set—

[END OF JUHASZ17_1OF1_TRACK 1.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —of words that we knew. But it was a world that we built, many of us. And again, you know this history, that AIDS activism leads to queerness. Queer studies, queer activism. But I was in the nascent world from which that was going to emerge. It was a world of ideas and a world of activism. And I was a college activist. And I was an intellectual, in a stew where those things were evolving. And AIDS was part of that, as well, nascently.

So in a very quiet but known way, the world was beginning to shift, this very staid world that I lived in, that I was on the edge of. I was in college in a very staid place, as staid as it could be, as normative as possible. And I was friends with people on the edge. And the people on the edge were feminists, closeted gays and lesbians, artists [laughs], people of color. People politicized by our identities or by our politics or both. And that was the heyday of identity politics, so often our identities [were –AJ] our politics. Outsiders. So the outsiders were either—were strange for any number of reasons. Again, that's like the first place where I was in that small group of outsiders. And like, here's where I want to be, even though I saw what the normative middle could offer. And so—and this is where art comes in for me, too. So it's one—it becomes one cluster in college and stays that cluster for the rest of my life.

So I enter [00:02:00] college as a smart girl, and a girl reader, just a very dangerous girl to be. It's a girl who is a threat and is often unlovable and, you know, not appropriate. And at some point, I had fallen in love with an

outrageously, a beautiful, eloquent, dashing, intelligent actor who's way more on the outside of anything that I could ever be. Because he's gay, but not saying that. But he's walking around like he's an Evelyn Waugh novel, and eventually comes out. And I get more and more drawn to those outsiders and make a break, make an actual break with my friendship groups, my activities. And so at that [laughs] moment, I start taking filmmaking classes for the first time. It's the first time I do anything. I would not have considered myself an artist, but I was curious. So I go to Hampshire College, which is the opposite of Amherst College. It's a place of hippies and artists. And I start taking filmmaking. I take a poetry class at UMass. I'm thinking about it.

By the time I'm going to write my undergraduate thesis, I have an intellectual analysis of [00:04:00] patriarchal dominance that I've learned at school—which is about media—and an idea about the possibilities of personal power, which I also learned at school. And I think, "I can't just study old novels." And so instead of [laughs] writing my thesis around *Little Women*, I write it about the movies and the book, because I think that where sexism is most live and most possible to engage with in a positive way is through media. And at that point, I would call that film. And so I start studying film seriously, as a political project. Not as a personal set of, like, "what I like" or "what I'm moved by."

THEODORE KERR: It's a tool.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely. Understand it as such. And I always have and I don't look back. So now, you know, I read for fun and it—as for pleasure, and it's a way of being myself. But I think through media, because the society does. And I already knew that at that age, that that's where the society was going to think through things. It was where the action was going to be. And I was right. Way more right than I ever anticipated. And so that's why I decided to go to study film.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. It's hard not to jump to the present moment, to talk about film and gender, but we can—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I knew that then. And I wasn't making it up. I was receiving that wisdom from very, very smart feminist professors. Eve being only one of them. I mean, I had a great group of feminist educators, many of whom were men. And, you know, I think the other thing that lots of people my age are saying now, but is extremely important to say, is that this idea of an intersectional critique and thinking [00:06:00] about gender through race and sexuality and class—that is how I was educated. So when I came to New York City, and I'm already an AIDS—and moved to AIDS activism, it was exactly the place to go, because anyone who had a sophisticated critique starting from any of those places—but for me would be as a feminist—would understand that you would always be thinking about sexuality, race, and class, not isolated from your feminism.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So AIDS made the ultimate sense. But that's—I didn't make that up. That's how I was educated. That's what I read. That's what I was taught. That was my community of activists and scholars. I think I have been more willing to live at the edge of activism and art-making as a scholar than most scholars. Certainly especially ones who've been as quote-unquote successful as I have. And by that I simply mean, you know: I have tenure, I'm a full professor, I've always been employed, I write lots of books.

Those have always been one project for me. Academia doesn't see them as one project, but I have consistently found a place for myself inside of academia where those are one project. But I feel it's because I was educated that way, and I had the courage or the naiveté or the stubbornness or the sense of my own entitlement/power/morality to be like, "I'm reading this in a book. This is what I should be doing. That's what everyone says you should do."

It's always been dumbfounding to me that more people don't engage in careers where their activism and their art-making and their scholarship is one practice. [00:08:00] I just find that dumbfounding, because everything I read, everything I do as an activist, all the artwork I see, supports that they're one related set of ways of being in the world, and changing the world.

THEODORE KERR: I think it's interesting to go back and maybe put some eggs in the basket of what you meant by "a nascent queerness." And I think you're—I want to just confirm that these are things that you would put in that basket. So kind of an intersectional approach to activism, and to the academy, is part of what would then become queer studies.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, again, for me, I entered through feminism. And I'm always—is not first a feminist, but enter through feminism. So queerness takes that from feminism, and builds on it, and adapts it. For sure.

THEODORE KERR: And did you and the group of people that you were learning with and from and alongside, think of yourselves as pushing past barriers or—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I mean, the way that I came into feminism is through lesbian separatism.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's what I mean by lesbian feminism. That's who lived there. That's who lived there and that's who many of my professors were. And like, Eve Sedgwick, for instance, had no relationship [laughs] whatsoever to lesbian separatist feminism. She invented queer studies because she was interested in men, and gay men, just for an example. But did we think we were—yes. I mean, can you imagine how radical it is to be a lesbian separatist feminist? Or even think about it? It was as radical then as it is now.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But you all were interested in [00:10:00] in seeing that and understanding that that was a thing, but also making your own life—making your own lives beyond that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, yeah. But I mean, I guess it's very hard for you to understand.

THEODORE KERR: Well, I guess I'm just trying to—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Gay men and lesbians didn't really hang out.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They were separate spheres. They weren't yet thought of as a similar orientation to the world exactly. And lesbian separatism was organized around not liking men.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like no one was saying "LGBT."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. It starts to happen then. You know, I mean, in the smallest way. But gay men didn't like lesbians. You know, we didn't socialize really. And then there's this cross-hatching that starts to happen.

I like gay men. I mean, I always have. I always will. That has its own lofty cultural space as being a fag hag. It's not exactly the same thing as being lesbian or gay man. I'm a straight woman at that time. I hang out with a lot of lesbians and I'm a nascent fag hag because I know one fag. He's the man that I love the most. And I begin to understand my love for him as being connected to his gayness. But that's slow. I'm a naïve girl from Colorado, and the world is closeted. So I don't have a lot of access to that. It's slow stripping away where I get access to how that's about his homosexuality and his own nascent gayness in a closeted world.

THEODORE KERR: What are hangouts with Jim like at this time?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: At that age?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] I don't know. He's stylish. He reads *Interview* magazine.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Very few people do where [00:12:00] I am. He goes to New York City and has secret experiences, some of which he tells me about and some of which he doesn't. He's highly cultured.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But what is it? Are you guys sitting in diners and talking over one cup of coffee? Are you, like, in a bedroom sitting on chairs? Are you walking the campus?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: At that age in college?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, performing some exquisite rendering of romance, collegiate romance that's—

THEODORE KERR: I know, but give me details. Paint a scene.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: We travel everywhere together. He's always stealing cars. I mean, he's a charlatan, in somebody's fancy car that he's, you know, arranged somehow—

THEODORE KERR: And what does stealing mean? Does stealing mean like, he takes a hanger and opens it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, no.

THEODORE KERR: Or like, through friendship he gets the keys?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Convinces people. So we're traveling. We're so young and we're traveling. We're driving, and staying in hotels, and eating fine food. And somehow he's gotten money to drink champagne and just all the things you've never done before. And watching movies and talking about them endlessly. He knows everything about musical theatre and he's singing songs. We're talking about novels. We look amazing. We're both incredibly—he's beautiful, and I'm beautiful in the air that he creates around me, and that makes me beautiful. And we're wearing outlandish fashion in this utterly uptight environment, and—I don't know. Dancing a lot. Going to discos, gay clubs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like these cars are taking you to [00:14:00] nearby cities so you can go to gay discos.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. A lot of travel, a lot of walking. We're buying thrift clothes and wearing each other's clothes. And talking about the world that we see all the time and it's very romantic. But there's no sex.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you're feeling happy? Satisfied? Confused?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Alex as a girl?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: All of it. Desiring. Wanting more. Blocked.

THEODORE KERR: Blocked?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Don't know why. In love. Effervescent, smarter than everybody, more fabulous.

THEODORE KERR: And people are treating you that way?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Everyone is.

THEODORE KERR: And you're excited about how you look. Like you take—there's—oh, your eyes just widened.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] Of course! I mean, we don't look like anybody. I mean, I don't want to be self-deprecating. I'm not. But he's a model. He's gorgeous. He looks like you're supposed to look. I don't. You know, I look like myself. And then we're parading around around, again, like this homogenous, preppie space. Outlandish. He would wear very outlandish clothes. I would, too.

THEODORE KERR: What's outlandish?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: He wore—I have it still. He wore like a blue and white sparkling brooch that was made for women. You know, as a bolo. I mean, just as an example.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: At Amherst he didn't look like an East Village clone, because that would have been too dangerous. But he pushed the edges of it. So I started pushing the edges of things in fashion, as well, because I could.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. And [00:16:00] together you're making a look. So if he has attributes that you're seeing and you have attributes that you're seeing, together you make—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. We're a duo.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. A scene.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely. And it's a small whole environment. Just as easy to make a scene. But you know, we crossed over into a big environment and continued to make a scene. He was a very well-known figure around the East Village, partly because of how beautiful he was. Outlandish. He stayed outlandish. And then he became an actor in The Ridiculous Theatrical Company. I mean, we crossed over and continued to be seen, in a much bigger pond.

THEODORE KERR: And did "outlandish"—is that a word that you would have used at the time? What's a word you would have used at the time to describe yourself and him?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In college or when we came to New York?

THEODORE KERR: In college.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Eccentric. Edgy.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And are you thinking that you're in the lineage of the people in the novels that you're reading and—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. That's what I'm trying to say. Especially Jim. He was so organized by understanding how to be a cultured person, an artist, and a hidden homosexual, by what he read and saw. I mean, when I wrote about Todd Haynes—I don't know if you're familiar with that essay, but *From the Scenes of Drag Queens*, you know, that's a particular—*Carol* and—what's the one about—*Velvet Goldmine* and—I mean, a lot of Todd Haynes' films are about—*Safe, [The] Karen Carpenter Story*. You know, they're about suburban youth who look to culture [00:18:00] to figure out how to be gay. Those are—I mean, that's what I write in that essay.

And especially, like, Todd and Jim. Again, they come from that normative family that was already different from mine. It's like upper middle-class, WASP-y. Jim's Catholic, but kind of rich, suburban. Like and they are doing—like, that's like, as a girl reader; it's like, boy gay reader. I mean, you're just having to find it. It's not where you live. So you're finding it in musical theatre. You're finding it in novels. You're finding it in poetry. You're [laughs] finding it—and then you're sneaking away if you're a gay boy. You know, rest stops or this—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you're also enacting—like even beyond the rest stops, or before the rest stops, or around the rest stops, you're enacting the culture. It's not enough—it's not just about searching it and getting it into your brain. It's about then living it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But see, the thing is, remember I said I wasn't a bad girl?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I'm not. I'm very drawn to bad people who will push things even farther than me. I think to normal people I seem very adventurous, and I've led, you know, what seems to be an adventurous edgy life. But like, Jim was so much more—especially at that time—so much more adventurous than me. And he's a bad boy. Like, he did steal things. He was a prostitute when we became adults. He really lived on an edge. He got HIV, but because he had sex with a lot of people. I wasn't doing that. You know, I'm really not a thrill-seeker in that regard. I seek those thrills through people like him and other partners that I've had. Cheryl would be an obvious example.

Jim enacted a critique. You said: Are we critiquing the edge? Yes. Enacting it daily in how he talks, how he walks, how we walk as a couple through the campus. [00:20:00] What it means for us to be a couple. What we read, the plays that he puts on. He is a girl in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*. I mean, you know, whatever. It's what artists do. It's partly why you have to love artists, and it's why I love artists, and why I wanted to be one, even though I didn't think I was one. Because they stretch out the possibilities of how to behave and how to live in otherwise banal worlds. And Jim was really noticeable. And so I, you know, sought him out. And I wooed him.

THEODORE KERR: And in that bond that you two had, was there—in the confusion, was there also comfort in that confusion or was it just angst?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, no. Utter comfort. Utter comfort. I mean, I was with him for years. We lived together in New York City for many years as a couple. Yeah. He made me feel like my best self. Every time he looked at me, he ratified something that I wanted to believe about myself for years. Utter comfort. I mean, it's not comfort. It's joy.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's a sense of life.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: He's my best—he was always my best enabler. And I've had others since, but—and I did it back to him in a different way. I enabled something he needed.

THEODORE KERR: What do you think you enabled in him?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, something about intelligence. So, you know, he's really pretty. [00:22:00] And everyone was wowed by that. But I was most wowed—as I said, I don't care about money. I don't ultimately care about prettiness either. Like, the conversation, I reflected back to him that he was my conversational equal. And that's what I really loved about him.

I've been the rock for many extraordinarily creative, and exuberant, and outlandish people. And he's one of them. So I enabled him to fly, because he could be safe. So I enabled him to go farther out, because he could always stay in my apartment, or eat my food, or—but also, you know, not lose touch. People like that can lose touch.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He didn't float away.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. No. So that's what I enabled.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's really beautiful. How did the New York move go? How did that happen?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So I decided not to go to law school.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Thank God. [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I decided to go to film school. And by that I mean getting a graduate education in film, not as an artist. So an MA initially. I applied to a bunch of schools and I get the most money from NYU. So I decided to go to NYU. You know, really didn't know—didn't want to become a professor because my parents were professors. Didn't want to be an academic because my parents were academic. But kind of thought New York would be cool and this is still me being a smart girl. Like I'm being rewarded for my intelligence. That's my best feature. And so [00:24:00] I moved to New York. This is 1986. And Jim moves to New York, dropped out of college.

THEODORE KERR: He dropped out of Amherst?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. He finishes later, but drops out, and comes with me, to have a real life.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you mean that, right? Like that idea of a real life. Like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —you all had had something special in Amherst, but now you guys were going to go and be—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, him in particular.

THEODORE KERR: And is the word "adult" appropriate here? Like you were going to be adults in New York?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: He just wanted to be gay. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Should I pause it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

[Audio break.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah, we were ready to enter the world, and enter the stage of the world. The world stage.

THEODORE KERR: Did you feel like adults already?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Were you?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] No. No, not really. But close enough.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Where did you guys live?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I lived in a dorm, an NYU graduate school dorm. It's actually the first—I was the first inhabitant. It's still there on 3rd Avenue and 9th Street. And I lived there for about two months. And I was like, "This is ridiculous." It was too expensive and uptight, and not the city that we—and by that I mean Jim and myself—envisioned for ourselves.

THEODORE KERR: He was living with you in the—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. He wasn't living with me there. I actually don't remember where he lived when I was there. Oh, vague memories. But they don't [00:26:00] completely line up.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I ended up finding a place just through the newspaper and living in someone's living room. Her name was Louise Tallmer and she's actually Abby Tallmer's mom. Abby Tallmer's a major AIDS person. Louise was living alone in the apartment. She lived in her bedroom. I lived in her living room. And that only lasted for a few months. And then she got really weird.

I was a waitress, and I moved into the apartment of a woman who I was a waitress with, and a cook at all-night—"trendy" is not the right word, but it was one of a few 24-hour joints in the East Village. So it was very scene-y. So especially like, club kids. My place was called the 103. It was right by the Saint. And then there was like, Round the Clock, and Dojo, and maybe those might be the three places you would go all night long. So we got very quickly enmeshed in club life, which was also very gay. And then I moved into that apartment. And that apartment was my apartment on the Lower East Side. So when I moved in there I was a tenant—it's on Attorney Street—of the waitress and the cook.

And then, again, I was extremely naïve. Like, this is a piece of this that I don't know that you'll completely [laughs] understand. I didn't realize they were heroin addicts, but it became clear when she got sick and left. And, I mean, there was behavior that I now understand is heroin addict. But she left and then I got the lease. And then Jim moved in. And then a lot of other people lived in that apartment [. . . –AJ]. My apartment had three bedrooms over the many years that I [00:28:00] had it. And eventually it became Tom Kalin's apartment.

THEODORE KERR: Wait. How long did you have it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I had it for five years, the lease, or maybe four, and then I think it ended up as Tom's apartment. I don't know how long he ended up living there, but he moved through it. Many, many people lived there. I had the main bedroom and Jim had the small bedroom, and then there was always a third bedroom, and different people lived in it. So we lived together for most of my life in New York on the Lower East Side on Attorney Street.

Jim had several boyfriends. For a long time, until he died, in the years that—in the, in the years where he was sick he had two. One of them was a guy named Joe Guimento, and Joe Guimento worked at amFAR. So that was one way that our household became very connected to AIDS. But then there was a man who was in our household named Jon Engebretson, who was an ACT UP guy, and he ended up becoming an AIDS doctor. He's still alive. Joe is still alive also. So Jon was a kind of ACT UP-y guy who lived with us for a while. And Jim and Jon always had a—

THEODORE KERR: Rivalry?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Kind of rivalry. Yeah. They inhabited—

THEODORE KERR: For Jim's affection?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. Just about, you know, how to be gay in the East Village.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Jim was an artist and an actor and a go-go dancer. And Jon was in TAG. He was very serious and cloney. Not effeminate. And edgy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you're in film graduate school.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. So I'm getting a master's degree in cinema studies at NYU. And have [00:30:00] broken through to imagine that I want to be an artist, and I want to be an activist. So I believe that it's in 1987. In my second year in graduate school, I'm in the Whitney ISP program. And a lot of people that you've interviewed are in the Whitney ISP program. You know what that is, right?

THEODORE KERR: You should say it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Whitney Independent Studio Program. It's a very fancy finishing school for artists that's organized around cultural theory and conceptual art. And again, I don't really know what it is. Someone tells me to apply for it in my first year of graduate school because I'm making videos. There's no such thing as that. I'm making these kind of intellectual videos. And I literally don't know what it is.

And I apply and I get in because every year—it's this total rarified hothouse environment. Everyone else who goes there goes from art school and it's the biggest deal in the world to get in. Like I literally don't know that. Every year they kind of let in someone like me who's sort of more an intellectual and less an artist. It changed my life. First of all, because I meet lots of people. Second of all, because I'm still really not an artist but I'm in an [laughs] art program. I'm performing being an artist. The Whitney ISP is a hothouse around AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: At this time.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Although I'm already involved in it when I enter. It's my second year of graduate school. I start hanging out with all these art people. I volunteer at GMHC. And I pretend that I'm a video-maker. So it's the same pretending. So I'm pretending [00:32:00] that I'm an artist and I get into the Whitney ISP. And I

pretend that I'm a video-maker, and I go and talk to Jean Carlomusto [at GHMC –AJ].

THEODORE KERR: But you were already making videos in school.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I am, but I really don't know how.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, I took one class at Hampshire.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Like I really don't know how. I really am not an artist. I'm really pretending to be. And I believe in it and I'm—that's why I'm not adult [laughs] because no adult would have that sense of balls.

THEODORE KERR: But aren't you an East Village adult? Like isn't that what the East Village art scene is about, largely, at that time?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Largely, but not the Whitney ISP. So I don't have a lot of pedigree. I mean, you know, it's the same—like, I can invent myself and be an artist and make something I don't know how to make. But that's how we make *The Watermelon Woman*, you know, not that many years later. It's like, we didn't know anything about making feature films. I didn't really know how to make a 30-minute documentary.

I go say to Jean, "I would like to volunteer." And she's like, "What do you want to do?" And I'm like, "I want to make a [laughs] documentary about women and AIDS." And so I do. This is 1987; I think there had been one or two things ever made about women and AIDS. It's not the first, but it rivals by a few months. I research it and do most of the interviews, and I do it collaboratively with Jean, who's sort of my boss. So we make that together. And it's the first long-form documentary that comes out of the audiovisual department at GMHC.

And I'm really just a girl. I don't really know what I'm doing. But I was talking about this with Jean recently: Like, I'm a young person who's traveling around New York City and going to all kinds of meetings and forums and think tanks, where women older than me who are professional social workers, and who are professionally working in [00:34:00] NGOs and in health organizations, are already formulating an analysis around women and AIDS. I'm listening to it. I'm not inventing it. It's there in New York City and I'm interviewing for *Women and AIDS*, like the really powerful women that go to these forums. And those forums are the first forums like them maybe in the world, but I'm a kid. And there's older women. And I'm learning and I'm—and that's where you see this so-called intersectional analysis is just at the heart of everything that's happening in that community. And that's where I come into AIDS.

At the same, I go to the first ACT UP demonstration because there's been signs all over the neighborhood I live in, and I go. I don't remember the order of those things. I mean, I could probably figure it out, but like, joining ACT UP, being in the Whitney, and volunteering at GMHC; that's all happening in the same year. So my second year in New York City. I'm 23, and so is everyone else around me. So then in the Whitney program—that DIVA TV comes out of the Whitney program, Testing the Limits comes out of the Whitney program, Tom Kalin and Gran Fury. He's one of my best friends. He's doing that. Like, not everyone's doing it, at all. You know, there's lots of people not doing AIDS, but I'm in a cohort of people that are coming into their young adulthood as artists in particular through AIDS. And that's a live discourse in that space.

And then I make a decision, because I'm not really an artist [laughs], a fine artist, to do my work that looks much more like activism and a little bit less than fine art. So I start to make this body of work for GMHC after *Women and AIDS*, that's not situated in the art world. Because I'm not in the [00:36:00] art world. I'm just adjacent to it. Whereas like, those other people are making work that's very conversant inside the art world. Importantly, because I'm conversant to the art world—the Whitney, which is the heart of the art world, and my friends are in the art world—the work that I'm making at GMHC, not just me but others behind me, shows in those spaces. So it quickly shows at the New Museum, for instance, which was not what it is now [laughs]—but, you know, it's a gallery. It's a well-known gallery downtown. They do a show on women and AIDS pretty early. So *Women and AIDS* shows there. *Women and AIDS* shows at the [San Francisco] Gay and Lesbian Film Festival right away.

So like, we're conversant—we're sort of moving outside of nonprofit into art and cultural spaces immediately. Just not—like Tom Kalin, as a perfect example. You know, he has bonafide chops as an artist. He's coming out of art school. He's making his life in New York City, wants to be in the art world. I don't even know what the art world is. I'm just learning it by like grabbing on to his coattails.

THEODORE KERR: Let's go back a little bit—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: —because you've brought us into a really rich world. Like, it's really—I mean, one of the things that happens to us in our discussions together, Alex and Ted, is that you know a world that you were in. And it's hard for others—it might be hard for you to understand what other people don't see or see about that time. And so I'm curious, at this time, and to get it on the record: Did you enter New York and there was already hints of a cultural world dealing with HIV?

Because what you've just described is, is quite intense. You go from Amherst to the city. You have this apartment. Lots of [00:38:00] school stuff is happening. And then you're making now a really important canonical film that is paving a road that—and the film, *Women and AIDS*, is even hard in 2017 or 2018 to fully grasp. You know what I mean? Like, you're—it's thick. It's rich.

So are you entering in—if we go back to the 1980s and that move to New York, do you see any hints of AIDS culture yet?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So, if you're in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1985, 1986, 1984, you're in New England. And I'm at an elitist, preppy, patriarchal, wealthy, WASP-y space. So, you know, we started in Boulder, Colorado where, you know, am I pushing the edges? No. I choose that space. I mean, I'm in this—I'm oscillating. In that space, I become friends with the strangest outsiders, and one of them is my beloved. And he is reading about AIDS in the newspaper. So I learn about it there, from Jim. I mean, I remember him telling me about the gay cancer.

THEODORE KERR: And he's telling you this as maybe someone who's out, but maybe he's not out.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't remember exactly when he comes out to me, but he's out to me in whatever way that means by the time we're 22 and I go to New York City. But I still think that we're going to get married or, you know, be lovers, or have a life together, because we're in love with each other. But yes, I know about it already. And [00:40:00] part of why—our senior year we found a group called like, Friends and Allies of Gay People. Like again, that's a very common thing. It wasn't common then. And there's already a taste of AIDS in the space. Danger. Danger.

THEODORE KERR: And you feel danger for Jim?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: A little bit. Yeah. But you know, it's hard to untangle the dangers, because he was having—I mean, you wouldn't say "unsafe sex" then. There wasn't such a thing. You know, he was having dangerous sex with older men. I mean, again, maybe I didn't understand that then, but I know he's doing bad things.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And things that are in your world because of him but—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —would never be otherwise. And I'm curious, but also not. Like, I'm not a gay man. And I don't know, whatever. There's the things that he's excited about that are not exciting to me and, but I—so it's in my head. You know, only with hindsight do I know that he's tricking on Times Square. I wouldn't know that then. When he comes back with all that money and that's why we get to go out for elegant meals and stay in hotels, it's because he's a prostitute. I don't know that then. He has all these lies about where the money came from.

And you know, a lot of the sex he had as a trick were with very famous [laughs] men. Sometimes they gave him money and there was no sex involved. So there wasn't always sex. But like—can I out them?

THEODORE KERR: You can if you want to.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, fashion moguls who he was often at the site of, even at that time, who were too old to really want to have sex. He was very beautiful and he was also verbal. And so the same thing I liked about him, a lot of those men liked him, too. It was a surprise when they would pick up this trick who, you know, wanted to talk them about Shakespeare, Evelyn Waugh, or the *Follies*, or whatever he wanted to talk about, as well as he did. [00:42:00] And then they would—he would stay as companions to many of these men. I don't know that he had sex with all of them.

So there was money. Clothes would come with the money. You know, even in college. So when we got here—I don't remember, Ted. It's in the air.

THEODORE KERR: It's in the air. I mean, that's an answer. That's a really—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't remember. I saw the sign. I mean, if you read—I just read Avram's book. It's like—it's in the air. These older gay men—the men who invented GMHC and ACT UP were older than us. Not a lot, but—you know.

THEODORE KERR: But enough. Especially at that age.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Especially at that age. Well, and some of them were a lot older. So you know, we're the youngest people. So you know, there are people in their 30s and 40s, and 50s even, who understood activism, who understood culture, who understood all of that. And it's in the air.

THEODORE KERR: But maybe also understood the stakes of what AIDS was. Like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They understood all of it.

THEODORE KERR: And for you it's in the air. And it's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So when the signs go up, they're putting up the *Silence = Death* signs. Probably I'm seeing them. It's wheat-pasted everywhere, and it's what he's trying to do. I just read the book. It's what they're trying to do. They're trying to make it seem cool. They're trying to make it seem relevant. They're trying to make you see it. I saw it.

THEODORE KERR: That there's a world, that there's a network out there that are thinking and doing—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I joined it immediately.

THEODORE KERR: What did you join?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: ACT UP.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I went to a demo. Before Wall Street. It was maybe their third meeting. I joined right away. It was in the air I breathed.

THEODORE KERR: And you found it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah, because there were signs.

THEODORE KERR: But those *Silence = Death* posters were not signs to go to ACT UP.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: There was—I remember a leaflet about a demonstration, the first demonstration I went to. It was in a triangle downtown, way downtown. And there were speeches. And they said at that demonstration that there was a meeting [00:44:00] every Monday night, and then I went to the meeting. But it was only a few weeks into it. You know, I just caught it. I was in the right place. And it must have been because I was in the Whitney, so I was downtown. I mean, I don't—again, I don't exactly remember.

I actually know that when I was making *Women and AIDS* for Jean, Testing the Limits was also happening. They hadn't—Jean eventually joined Testing the Limits. But they were showing us some of the videos at the Whitney, and I was just doing it on my own. And they were doing them on their own, and I'm like, "Whoa. How weird is that? We're both doing AIDS activist video." And then, you know, these alignments start to be visible.

I came to AIDS activism and to that milieu as an intellectual. Many people did. What was interesting about ACT UP and AIDS activism probably had been true about feminism in the women's movement and civil rights, as well, was there was a certain place where intellectuals held ground. Like part of what was happening in these movements was intellectuals in conversation with the movements trying to bring in theories of change, theories of living, and analyses of the world. And I'm sure that, you know, that was true for intellectuals in civil rights, and intellectuals in the women's movement. And it was very true for intellectuals in ACT UP. So I came equipped by my very fancy education. And I had learned a lot when I was there, that intersectional feminist analysis is what I brought. And like, AIDS was the picture that [00:46:00]—AIDS was the reality that the analysis that I had been grown up into realized as fact.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. That's profound. I mean, that's like, kind of a realization that if it hadn't happened it would have also been fine. It would have been nice to never have had a fact that proved all the analyses right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right. But the fact that proves the analysis right is everywhere. It's poverty and who doesn't get to, you know, go to Amherst College. It's tuberculosis and who dies before they're able to, you know—AIDS just compounds it. That fact will be present when AIDS is no longer here. You know, we talk about this all the time, but AIDS is really about the nexus of poverty and racism. And sexism is there because half of poor people are women. And homophobia is there because X percentage of human beings are gay. And also because, you know, for unnatural reasons it lands on gay men.

But you know, AIDS is really about poverty and racism and their conjoining in our culture and around the world, and about lack of access to healthcare, and education, self-empowerment, access to cultural capital that come from the nexus of poverty and racism. And a disease lands on top of impoverished people in a racist society. I mean, that's really what it's about. Sexism folds in. Homophobia folds in. Because we're human.

THEODORE KERR: [00:48:00] Right. And the United States in the 20th and 21st century.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And the United States. But I knew about those things.

THEODORE KERR: So earlier, when we were talking in the interview, there was construction sounds and, and they were these deep, like, bangings. And for the majority of my interviews, that is almost like a symbol of how AIDS entered people's lives. It was this kind of storm on the horizon or this beating that just got closer and closer until people found themselves in the middle. What's interesting about your story so far is that's not exactly it. It's not like you were in this idyllic moment and then you were in the middle of a catastrophe. If we go back to that word "ecology," it's like you're in these ecologies and then AIDS is introduced into the ecologies, but it's not a cannonball introduced.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah, but that has to do with the fact that—certainly at this moment, I'm a straight woman. And I'm completely privileged. I enter it out of political will. I don't enter it because people around me, or people I know, are dying. I don't enter it because I'm sick. I enter it out of political analysis about our culture that I learned in school.

THEODORE KERR: At the same time is that your soulmate is interested and following it. Or is that a romantic read?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's a romantic read. He always was disdainful of ACT UP, and I was the AIDS activist. He just happened to get AIDS because he was gay. He's a political enough person, but—

THEODORE KERR: [00:50:00] Right. So did he see *Women and AIDS*? Like, did he have a feeling?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, yeah. No. I mean, he was very proud of me. That's a funny story. We set up a screening of it at the Cubbyhole, which is a lesbian bar, because none of us had television, and it was on cable access. And none of us had cable because we were all so poor. I don't even know how we let people know, but there wasn't the Internet. So I don't know. I don't know how we knew. We called people or we sent them—

THEODORE KERR: You told them?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Told them to come. And when we got there, the bar was full because people had come to see it. And now I can't remember. It was either that we couldn't get in because it was so full [laughs] or they couldn't get it on the channel properly. It was some kind of—

THEODORE KERR: Like, it was being broadcast on the TV and you made a date with all your friends to watch it in Cubbyhole?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And I went with Jim. And he was very proud of me. He worked on it a little bit, I think. Some sidekick kind of way.

The thing about that story you told about the bomb dropping—it's like, once you're in, then there's the bomb. Because once you're in, then everyone you know is sick and dying. I imagine you could be 21, 23 years old, and a straight girl from New England, and not see it at all. I imagine there's a version of me that that would be true for. But you know, once you're in, you're in all the way. Then you're in. And then everyone you know. And then that's your world. [00:52:00] So I wasn't a gay man living in New York City [laughs] and having sex before there was AIDS, which is true of a lot of people. And then there's the bomb. I entered and the bomb had already gone off.

And then I entered into the bombed out space with people who were first responders. And I happened to be a first responder because my eyes were open, and because I loved gay men and lesbians. And there were lots of lesbians there, and feminists. And there were lots of feminists there. So all the kinds of people I loved most in the world were in that room being smart together. And I loved artists. And I was drawn to the radical experiences of people of color. You know, like, where would be a better place to be? And I'm 23 years old and extremely naïve, and then I'm just in the middle of it. And then I'm making it. We're all making it together.

THEODORE KERR: And you're also extremely intelligent, maybe fearless, and ambitious?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's me saying I can tell—that's [laughs] me telling Jean I know how to make a documentary.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And because you had—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Hungry.

THEODORE KERR: Hungry. And is it that you—were you hungry to ensure that women were included in the conversation? Or did you see it as an important angle that was being missed? Like, what's the thing in your stomach that made you go speak to Jean? And pitch—I don't know. I'm assuming that you pitched the idea and she was like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —"Go for it. Why not?"

THEODORE KERR: "Okay, kid." [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: "Okay, kid."

THEODORE KERR: "Here's a camera."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. [00:54:00] You know, I wanted to be—as did Jim, who was my partner in crime during these years—you know, he wanted to be in the middle of the most exciting conversation in the world. That's New York City. And we wanted—I said, like, we wanted to be players in it. Why wouldn't we? Who doesn't? That's why you come to New York. I don't know that everyone succeeds, but we did in our way. You know, I legitimately am an activist. I legitimately cut my teeth as a young person engaged in struggle. And I'm a feminist at root, and am a nascent queer activist. I believe that sexuality and a gendered critique of patriarchy has a sexual perspective. I know that already. It's not yet widely known, but I know it. So like, homosexuality and feminism are always entwined. And then there's a crisis.

I mean, I don't know what I thought. I didn't think—I mean, you wouldn't make an AIDS activist video to be famous or to be an artist. I did it because I wanted to be part of a conversation about what was wrong about our society, and work on changing it with other people. I mean, that is the truth. That is what I want. My ambition isn't—I was ambitious, sure, to be part of a conversation at the heart of the world, where the conversation was [00:56:00] relevant and powerful and about what was wrong. So the ambition isn't—

THEODORE KERR: It's not name-and-lights ambition.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: No. That's clear. I mean—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But I'm ambitious. And I'm nobody.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. When—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I didn't think making *Women and AIDS* was going to be an important film in the history of anything. I just, you know, wanted to be part of the conversation. And I was a very self-righteous feminist, and educated, and I knew a feminist analysis was key. But so did all the women around me. They were reflecting that back to me, and many of them were older than me, and that wasn't my analysis. I just want that to be very clear.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. *Women and AIDS* is an important document, because it's not a parlor trick of intelligence. It's not just something that a smart person made. It's a worldview. And I think that's what comes through. And so what you're saying now is it was your worldview, but it was also endemic of the community that you were within.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely. And in fact, I may be at a point in my life now where I'm capable of creating new versions of things that are complicated. That was not who I was at 23.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's what I had learned.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I was bringing an analysis that I had learned in college to a community, and engaging in conversations with other people who were bringing that analysis that really came out of feminism, came out of civil rights, came out of nascent gay and lesbian activism to a crisis. That way of talking was already written. It's just that gay men didn't know it. So we came in and instructed gay men who were wanting to listen to anybody, [00:58:00] a set of ideas about the world. And, you know, that is also—the other conversations that came were leftists. Again, Avram's book. Communists, socialists were in that conversation, as were anti-war activists. I mean, there were all these bodies of thinking in activism that came to blithe gay men who had enjoyed their—and this is white gay men—who had enjoyed their privilege as men and as middle-class and upper middle-class people, without any attention to these bodies of ideas and practices around them.

Now again, someone like Jim, God bless him, was—you know, he wasn't one of those guys. He was reading feminist theory and anti-racist theory in college. Like, you know, it was—that's why I loved him. You know, he wasn't just running around in fancy outfits and going to discos. He was an intellectual. So there were gay men who knew it. But, you know, for the most part, I was part of a brilliant community. And I knew how to talk like them. And I listened. I mean, Amber Hollibaugh, for instance, she cut her teeth in lesbian feminism and other movements. Just as an example, Maxine Wolfe. These are women older than me. I'm listening to them, learning from them. It's shaping—it's a realpolitik that's shaping this education that I've learned in this [01:00:00] completely safe environment.

THEODORE KERR: In *We Care*, one of the WAVE videos, you see you at that age. And you know, you're having to take on—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I'm older in *We Care.*

THEODORE KERR: I know, but wait.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: You see you, and you're having to be in a facilitator mode, like kind of setting the stage. But it's so clear that you're also still a sponge.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: You're still just like, so soft and just taking it all in.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You just think I'm a sponge because my face is soft and I have more flesh.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: But also—maybe. But yeah. There is the aura of, just like—even in the WAVE videos, you are still not that from like, just, youth, youth, youth, youth. You know what I mean? Like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And so I can—when I—the last time I watched *Women and AIDS*, I'm just trying to see what the women on the other—the women we see, I'm trying to imagine how they saw you behind the camera. Like, what did they make of this young woman with a camera and really good questions? Like, what did they make of this woman who was not part of that world, but whose analysis was helping to weave these voices that were only together in forums that were often, I don't know, maybe being ignored or not being heard in the same way? Like, how did—like what was that eye contact with these women who were dealing with life and death, and—?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I think there's a number of answers to that. Part of why—so I make three documentaries for GHMC before I make *We Care.* They're all about women and AIDS, various issues. So *Women and AIDS*, *Prostitutes, Risk and AIDS*, which is, again, me simply expressing a set of radical feminist ideas, which I was very conversant with from my community. So thinking about prostitution and sex work—

[END OF JUHASZ17_1OF1_TRACK 2.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —who was most criminalized within HIV, as a prostitute stood in for, continued to, an ongoing problem about criminalization, which we now see righting itself slightly differently. But they were criminalized then. So, you know, it's the same analysis that people have now about criminalization, you would make through prostitution, but also around a feminist pro-sex position. So that's the second piece I make. And then I make one called *Test for the Nation: Women, Children, Families, and AIDS.* That one I've only gone back and looked at recently. It's actually pretty good, too. But something happens in the making of those three that responds to your question, that is also inflected by my education. So I'm having conversations with all kinds of

extremely qualified older women who've been working in movements for decades before me. So like—

THEODORE KERR: And, and these women are older, but they're everywhere from maybe 25 and 28 to in their 50s—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: To 60.

THEODORE KERR: —or 60s. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So that, for instance, in *Prostitutes, Risk and AIDS*—I'm not going to remember her name right now, but I hope that you will put it in the record [Arlene Carmen]—there's an incredible woman activist who works at Judson Church and has—you know, major player, I just can't bring it up right now—around prostitutes' rights who I go interview. And she's probably in her 50s. I don't know at that time. She, you know, just has been doing this work forever. And I learn about it from her.

But I'm also interviewing women with AIDS, women with HIV, women whose families have HIV, and a lot of women of [00:02:00] color. And and I'm getting a PhD in cinema studies at this point because I've decided to continue my education and, "Okay, fuck it. I'm going to be a professor. I like the life of the mind. I'm good at it, whatever." I like teaching. That's really why I got a PhD. And part of where my studies take me to is ethnographic film. I'm interested in learning ethnographic film because I'm less interesting in thinking about cinema in relationship to narrative or popular culture, and more interested in thinking about cinema in relationship to cultural and interpersonal difference. And that's being theorized in ethnographic film and anthropology in ways that it's not in cinema studies.

So when I'm making these documentaries for GMHC in at-risk populations, I become increasingly less comfortable about making work about people of color as a white person, and about people with HIV as a person who doesn't have HIV, and about poor people as, at that point, you know, a poor person myself who happens to be in graduate school [laughs] and is not going to be a poor person and didn't start out as a poor person. And I end up making *We Care* as both a political and an intellectual response—it's just one thing—to the problem of sitting across the room from someone who I'm so different from, saying, "I want to make a documentary about you." I just couldn't do it anymore.

And I theorized the process to make *We Care*—which is community-based, community-produced, HIV educational media in a support group led by a social worker over six months—as the only way that I can be engaged in representing [00:04:00] the AIDS crisis, which is experienced by women who are urban, of color, and poor and working class. And, you know, then I write a whole book about whether it succeeds or not.

But like, so one answer to your question is: I have to create a new model for making media.

THEODORE KERR: Because of the gaze. Because of—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: —the way the women are—because of the interaction.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, they're not being—they're being very respectful.

THEODORE KERR: Of course. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No one's pushing back. But I know it's not how I want to make media. I know it's not how I want to engage with difference, and power difference.

THEODORE KERR: Is it also how you know that for the media to be valuable, it can't be made in that way?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's the political part. So again, never just me. Me in conversation with other people thinking about function, how you functionally use media to change people's behavior around HIV, risk behavior. We quickly realized media has to be made from communities to whom it is addressed. That's, you know, AIDS education 101. It's also media studies 101. Very little of it happens, but it's a set of ideas that I'm figuring out with people in real time.

And then there's a set of ideas that are purely intellectual about power, and the brutal power of the camera as it is and will always be, and has been, used against disenfranchised people. And anyone behind a camera is participating in that brutalizing objectification [00:06:00] that is enacted by the technology of the camera that takes images from people who don't reciprocate. So I'm also thinking about that as a scholar. And learning from feminist theory to want to imagine collective media-making practices that destabilize power relationships written in to documentary. So that's what *We Care* is—it's not the really—because I have power in any filming situation—

[Audio break.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay. You were asking me about people looking at me as this girl, so I was trying to explain to you that when I was talking to women of color and people affected by AIDS, they're always respectful to me because there's the power imbalance that's produced by my privilege. My privilege as a white person, my privilege as an educated person, my privilege as a soon-to-be upper-middle-class person, my privilege of the person behind the camera. So, it's not really about how people are looking at me. It's more about my internal checks.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: People are very respectful. The older women who I admire are just really glad that people are representing—I mean, now everyone makes [00:08:00] films. Now everyone has cameras. I mean, very few people made media. It was very privileged and rarified space. So all these women who have this incredible analysis of culture, and medicine, and politics, and race, and class, you know, it's not like they know how to make films or know anyone who makes films. It's, you know, a very small number of people who do that. So they're just glad you're, you know—no one's ever interviewed them about anything. Also, these are completely marginal points of view on the edge of nothing. So the idea that you come in with a camera and shoot them, I mean—so they're just glad that they're being entered into discourse.

I guess what's interesting to me about this conversation so far is that, you know, my AIDS video is very marginal. You do understand that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Ted?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay. You do understand that.

THEODORE KERR: But you should say more.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I'm not—

THEODORE KERR: Like, marginal to what? Marginal to—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —everything.

THEODORE KERR: —the whole story?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And marginal at the time.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, marginal and not marginal in a very complicated way. But like, I'm not—I'm making a lot of choices which are very Alex-like, like that Alex that you met, to not be the most—to not do the thing that would get me to the sparkling heart of the matter.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like you're not making a sparkly AIDS film.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: No.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, I—

THEODORE KERR: Or you're not making a sparkly film about anything else besides AIDS.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. I'm not. I could, maybe. I just don't want to do that. I'm not making the flashiest thing. I'm having a conversation with Testing the Limits, for instance, that is what they're seeking. They're seeking a PBS screening. And that's a [00:10:00] political choice that I totally understand. I am simply making a really marginal choice in relation to—one that they understand that's not outside of a discursive, political conversation that we're all having. But I'm often making the choice to make these very principled, theoretical, marginal objects that then do and do not have a bigger life. You know, partly because people I know have cultural capital, and then I gain more and more cultural capital.

But I'm making very marginal things. It's not like everyone in AIDS is talking this way or people are making these

choices. I'm representing a margin, and I'm talking to people who are much more central than me. So Gran Fury would be a perfect example. Those are my friends. And reading Avram's book—it's just on my mind because I just read it. They're making—he's making decisions about how to move in popular culture. I would never make those decisions, partly because I don't know how, and partly because I don't want to. It's not my politics.

I'm willfully making choices that make my work very marginal. And some of it has become central. You know, because you can't anticipate where these things are going to go and where you're going to—where or how the society's going to move in directions that you don't even think you're leading. You're just in your space. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I'm curious about why you wanted to say that right now.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because no one's really listened to me. You know, people don't usually ask me these questions. These should be for the famous people.

THEODORE KERR: But who is famous in this world of HIV media production?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] I don't—other people.

THEODORE KERR: I'm not trying to torture you and I'm not asking you to name names, but just like—are you talking about at the time? Or are you talking about now? Or the space between? I think if anything, you know—okay, I'll [00:12:00] say that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, then and now. Then and now. You think I'm famous because you like to talk about it the same way I do. But we're marginal.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, no. I—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Do you understand what I'm saying to you?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I do understand.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: We're not making any of the blockbuster hits that are currently traveling. And we have a critique of it. And that critique—and that, I'm saying art shows, movies, documentaries; we're not doing that. And we—you and I, Ted—in our community have a critique of that. And that puts us on a margin of the dominant AIDS conversation. And people engaged in the dominant AIDS conversation know about our margin. And they're talking to it in a certain way. And they're making the choice to make, you know, understandable narratives, big blockbuster movies with swelling soundtracks that get on to HBO and show in real movie theatres. And I've never made that decision. So it's made me marginal, but steady and principled. And you know, you can hold—I'm not saying they're not principled. Please do not hear—it's another—it's a political position that's—

THEODORE KERR: Right. It's a different political position.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —important.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But my principles hold a space. So like, these movies that we're talking about, they're not "important movies." They're [laughs] very small. Only a few people care about them and have cared about them or ever will care about them. And that is a place that I like to make work. So that is not me saying they're not relevant or they're not important. They're just not relevant or important on the grand scale. That's what I told you early on. I like being in intense [00:14:00] conversation with a small group of people like you and I have. That's what it was like when I was 20. By the time I'm making *We Care*, that's the edge of a conversation about how to make AIDS media. And a very important one, an important edge. But there's a lot of more dominant stuff that's happening at that time. That's all I'm trying to say.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. I just think it's an interesting—I'm glad that you shared that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I hear what you're saying about the importance of—especially putting that on the historical record. I also think that there's a way in which like, marginality or margin-as-a-space becomes less and less relevant over time, because it is funny what becomes important later versus what's important at the time. That's one way of thinking about it. So I keep on mentioning *Women and AIDS* because I think it's a film that, yes, is marginal, was marginal then, is marginal now. People can have full, rich careers in AIDS cultural production and have never heard of it, and never seen it. I get that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: That's how marginal it is.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: You can even talk to women deeply invested in HIV/AIDS now and they would be like, "What is *Women and AIDS*?"

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Exactly.

THEODORE KERR: "And what is WAVE? I have no idea."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right.

THEODORE KERR: I get that. But there's also a way in which this project that we're doing, this Smithsonian interview, is to put things on the historical record, to help it get underlined because there's a way in which *Women and AIDS* is a really important document of that moment. It captures an analysis. If no one else in the world had—you had, but as it happens, you captured the analysis that was going on in the world that our work speaks to—would be lost if you hadn't made that video and if we didn't talk about that video on tape now. Does that make sense?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Like, [00:16:00] we're in a real danger—less so now than when we started this conversation five years ago—of the marginal and important conversations about HIV/AIDS being lost to history. And so an oral history talking with artists is about collecting the marginal and not-marginal voices together so that they can exist as a complex narrative, or complex narratives.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. I understand.

THEODORE KERR: Well, of course, you understand, because you taught me that.

[They laugh.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I did not.

THEODORE KERR: You—like that's—I mean, you can read our first discussion—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: —and that's literally one of the takeaways.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Is it?

THEODORE KERR: Is that there is an ecology of, like—we would get nowhere if we said, "There was a mainstream response to HIV and then there was a non-mainstream response to HIV." Because that's just not true. There were as many responses as there were people. And even you can say that ACT—like one of the things that we're good at talking about is that even ACT UP is not one response to HIV. So you in that room is just one of 400—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's right.

THEODORE KERR: —or 50 people.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's right. I—that's right. Thank you for reminding me. I think I just—I'm not used to being on this side.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Of the camera. Ha ha.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Nope. Not really.

THEODORE KERR: Right. And that—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So it's making me feel uncomfortable.

THEODORE KERR: It's also at odds with—because you've been—yes, you're famous in our small world. But also, let's not forget that I contacted an AIDS service organization in Philly to talk about one of the videos they made,

and they had no response except for, "Please read Alex Juhasz's *AIDS TV*."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes, but that's because there's only one book ever written about it and I wrote it. Now there's three. I mean, you know—

THEODORE KERR: What are the other two?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Roger Hallas writes one after me.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, and Paula Treichler?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, yeah. I mean, people write about AIDS cultural production. But I think that's what I was saying. [00:18:00] When I said there's a very small number of people who work on AIDS, it's a very small number of people.

THEODORE KERR: What was the second one you were going to say? I interrupted you.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: After Roger Hallas?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, if you're talking about film, there's lots of young scholars who are now doing it. Because it's now become dense enough, I suppose, and big enough to work in.

THEODORE KERR: Also, I think if we go back in time to the time that you made the—well, a) I don't want you to feel uncomfortable too much. But this is an uncomfortable—this is an uncomfortable making project, slightly.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Like you've went through lots of uncomfortable—like you, you're—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: It's not easy to talk about one's life.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. No. And you're asking me things—you're framing things in ways that I don't anticipate and—yeah. And I see a through-line through everything I'm saying that's emerging that's sort of surprising me. But helpful to me as a person.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And I see it, too, and I think it's really exciting.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: About centers, and margins, and edges, and deviance. [Laughs.] And the necessary power and draw of the most radical parts of our culture.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And also—and I'm not saying this to make you uncomfortable, this is just the nature of how an oral history works—is that in the story of Alex, Alex is the protagonist that is walking forward, or just is proceeding, right? So the thing that I'm interested in is how is the Alex who's making *Women and AIDS*, and Alex who is living with Jim, also the Alex that's [00:20:00] lived—that's going to ACT UP meetings? Like that's the Alex—I can't actually picture you in that, in the Center on a Monday night in that room.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Why?

THEODORE KERR: Honestly?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: A) It's about representation. The videos I've seen of those films are—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Of the meetings?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Of the meetings. Just like, it's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Say it.

THEODORE KERR: They're mainly white dudes.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But they're not.

THEODORE KERR: No, I know that. And so that's like just one part of it. The other part of it is—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, they are numerically, but there's always women in there.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. No, I—and I just had a conversation with Robert, and he is—one of his take-homes is like, riding that space between like, "You only see white people, but there were people of color and women. There weren't a lot of us, but we were there, and our bodies mattered in the space." So that's just one way.

The other thing is, like, literally, when did you have time? How did you find—like, what was the experience of your body and mind in those rooms? Did you speak up? Were you in affinity groups? Like, we've spoken now for years about HIV/AIDS, but I actually don't have a sense of like—I couldn't give a testimony of what Alex's ACT UP history is.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, so a couple things.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Ted, I was 23, 24, 25, 26 years old that time. I was young. I'm inventing myself in real time with other people. I wrote *Forgetting ACT UP* because a lot of people I knew who were AIDS activists didn't go to ACT UP. It really isn't the story of AIDS activism at all. [00:22:00] It was one story. And I went a lot. And most people I know didn't go, partly because I was engaged in the radical feminist theoretical political analysis that I was telling you about. And those people were doing other things. And I oscillated.

And I end up making *We Care.* I don't join Testing the Limits. I don't join DIVA TV. Again, these people are my colleagues, comrades, friends. It is not a critique of that position. It's necessary. I have a position that is not fully aligned, for myself, with those decisions. So I often am not going to ACT UP, or I'm critical of ACT UP. And people were critical of ACT UP because it was racist, sexist, and full of a lot of entitled people. And so I'm doing other projects. I'm meeting other people.

I end up making *We Care* for that reason, as well, because I want to align with community-based AIDS service organizations that are engaged with people of color, because that's where the issue is for women. I have a feminist analysis that tracks to there, and that's where I'm going to be in conversation, with AIDS activism that is primarily organized around those questions and those people. So I'm also like, at that age, don't feel cool enough for ACT UP. I also am cool enough for ACT UP. I mean, again, I'm not very self-confident. So I'm both. I'm in the Whitney, I work at this very hip restaurant, I hang out with club kids. I mean, am I [00:24:00] cool? Am I not cool? I don't know. I don't know.

THEODORE KERR: Right. You're unstable. You're—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I'm unstable. I'm—

THEODORE KERR: —identity's unstable.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. So that place is very scary. It's exciting. That's why Jim doesn't go. It's a meat market for men. I'm not a lesbian, so there's a lot of judgment in the ACT UP women's group, which I am a member of for many years, that's spoken but not spoken. I'm, you know, a straight woman at that point. There are a few other straight women, but it's mostly lesbians. It's the same gay world that I knew where lesbian separatists who, you know—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —move into this body of politics and then start engaging with gay men. And that's where queerness comes from, because they align politically there in that space. Am I talking? No. The people who are talking are show people. You know who—you know, it's like there's 500 people in that room. You know who they are. I'm not going to name their names. They're like really—talk about ambitious.

Again, I really hope this is not sounding judgmental. It's not judgmental. Everyone did the thing they could do, but the people who are talking are, like, willing to talk in front of 500 people.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And, and they're sexy as all hell, and they're actors, basically. And that's happening. I mean, that place was scary. And fun. So I'm going and not going. It's not the only thing I'm doing.

THEODORE KERR: Right. No, it's clear.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So, I can talk about ACT UP because I was there. But I was doing other things by choice.

As were other people. And also being there by choice because it was doing certain things that only ACT UP could do. So I don't know. Does that explain who I am better?

THEODORE KERR: I mean, yeah. Of course.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In the room?

THEODORE KERR: It takes up—it checks that [00:26:00] off the list of things we should discuss.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I was on the women's committee. I did other things as well. But, you know, it's a story I tell in [. . . *AIDS TV*. –AJ] It's one that I would like other people to know. When the women's committee organizes our set of actions, you need the hardcore ACT UP people to name—but I think it's the nine days of protest. I'm pretty sure that's what it is. There was a split in the women's committee about the Shea Stadium action and the action that I did.

The action that I did was to table outside of high schools and give young people of color, who go to high school in New York City, condoms. And we split. We decided to do both. And the Shea Stadium action became one of the most famous actions of ACT UP and of the women's committee. And people like me—and there was half of us in the group—thought, you know, that's all about showmanship and moving in mainstream circles, and convincing people, you know, through flashy advertisement-like iconography. And I don't want to do that kind of work. I want to do the slow, hard, steady, movement-based work of educating people where they live, and the people that we need to speak to. Not at Shea Stadium.

And so it wasn't one or the other. It was both. That story has never been told, because no one took any pictures of it, because it wasn't sexy, because it was very marginal. It was the margin of that margin. That's where I put myself because of my politics, because of my theoretical experience, and because of who I am. And so I, you know, tabled. It's unwritten in AIDS history because it's un-writeable, because it's just like a daily thing. Who knows if we helped anybody? And there's no pictures of it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's also interesting because, you know, you don't go to too many AIDS events where you don't hear somebody of older [00:28:00] generation saying, "People don't do the activism like we did before." And what I like about this story is that actually they do. Like, you can't go to an AIDS event and there not be someone tabling.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right.

THEODORE KERR: You know, like you can't—like some of the things that we take for granted now that we might even roll our eyes at are strategies that have a beautiful and long history. And that, like you're saying, choices were made.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Choices were made and conversations were had. There was more than one politics. Mine reflect my values and my ideas.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And I think what you're saying all along is, "And most people's do." And that there's not a judgment there.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, no.

THEODORE KERR: People are doing what they know to do.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, not at all.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. No, I—yeah. I think that becomes really clear.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And we all have to do all of it. And thank God other people can do that thing because I can't.

THEODORE KERR: Right. That's why it's an assemblage of response.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I literally don't know how to make mainstream things. Like maybe once in my life I tried. I literally can't do it. I literally can't talk in a normal voice that regular people can understand—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —because—for all kinds of reasons. And I actually don't want to.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So, anyway. I also think, you know, just to track back, like the piece that I don't want to be disingenuous about: You know, I ended up wielding—I grew up. I lived for 30 more years. People just—it doesn't matter how good or bad you are at anything. If you make it through, you gain more traction, you gain more capital. I didn't gain more money capital. I gained more cultural capital. And part of why my things are remembered is because I kept talking.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you're there to point to it if you have to, or you work with people and they can—through getting to know you, they find these [00:30:00] things out.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, I wrote books.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean—so there's lots of other videos like mine that aren't going to get remembered that should get remembered because the person who made it didn't end up becoming an AIDS professor. I mean, so part of why [laughs], you know—it's what we were saying about—people I know from my milieu, some of us have stayed visible partly because we just stayed in and kept talking about the thing we talk about, kept making work about it, kept staying in the conversation. I've stayed in the conversation about AIDS for my whole career. And so just by being present, my work gains a certain relevance or staying power, because I had staying power. Do you understand what I'm saying?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And that's true for a lot of people who are cultural producers. Most people stop. Most people go home. They don't stay in the big city. They run out of money. They run out of time. They can't deal with the brutality of trying to stay in the center [laughs] of the conversation and they stop. So part of why my work moved forward in time is because I moved forward in time and kept talking about it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I'm backtracking a bit, too. So while all this work is happening, this activist work, there's still a personal life.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] Okay.

THEODORE KERR: Right?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: And so Jim's still an active part of your life, but is that relationship changing?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So he didn't live very long.

THEODORE KERR: [00:32:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In New York. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, in his life.

THEODORE KERR: No, that's what I mean, like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So that all those [early –AJ] years are the years he lived and then he died. So it's its own deadly conversation.

THEODORE KERR: While you guys lived together? Did he get sick while you guys were living in that apartment?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. And then he only died a year or two later. I mean, he didn't have HIV very long before he died of AIDS. We didn't know he had HIV that long. So, yeah, he got diagnosed with HIV in our apartment. I left the apartment to live in my friend's apartment on 2nd Avenue and 6th Street, as I was finishing graduate school. I had started to pursue other men. We had all these different theories about how we were going to have our relationship. And one of them was that we each would have a lover, or lovers, and then we would be, you know, the primary unit. And so I think it was at that time—this is when he had his two significant partners. Miguel Prieto and Joe Guimento, both of whom, you know—Miguel died. Joe is, I think, still alive. I saw him not that long ago when I showed *Video Remains* at Anthology. So he's probably still alive. He has HIV. He did at the time.

So we were detaching a little bit. So I moved out. That was very painful. When I became involved with my first significant boyfriend, I moved—so I lived in that apartment for six months—I moved to Amherst. I had a [00:34:00] pre-doc. I got money to write my dissertation there. I lived there for six months. So that year, I moved out. And then, the following year, I got my first job. So I got a job as an academic at the age of 27. So I had finished my PhD at the age of 27. So I'm also, you know, kind of industrious and precocious still.

And then I start teaching at Swarthmore and I live in Philadelphia with that new boyfriend. So he moves in with me. His name is Scott. And Jim dies in February. So it's about a year and a half that we don't live together. That's when I shoot *Video Remains*. I don't make *Video Remains*, but I shoot—

THEODORE KERR: That's when that footage is?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right.

THEODORE KERR: In that time.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I live in Philly. I have abandoned him.

THEODORE KERR: That's the word you use?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Now.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, I'm your friend and I don't—I'm not sure how I—okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, I've moved on. I am not pursuing a love object who will never love me back. I mean, I'm growing up.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So I move to my new life and he's dying.

THEODORE KERR: And he's being taken care of. Like, he's not alone.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: He's not alone. He has two boyfriends.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. He has two boyfriends and—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. He lives with Joe, and Miguel gives him money and—

THEODORE KERR: And your name is on the lease.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: No?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I don't know if he's still living in that apartment. He might be. He might intersect with Tom. And Robert Vasquez lived in that apartment.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. A lot of people lived there. Maybe Jim intersected with them. Everyone had a crush on him. He was kind of unattainable and weird.

Yeah, so I'm living in Philly. Jim [00:36:00] decides to have this crazy trip. I meet him in Florida. He's insane.

THEODORE KERR: And you don't say that lightly.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: It's real.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: What do you mean it's real?

THEODORE KERR: I mean people can say that as like an off-the-cuff remark. People can be like, "Oh—"

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, no, no. He has probably AIDS-related dementia.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: He's manic. You know, it's supposed to be another romantic holiday, one of our many romantic holidays. We've been to—and we're going to make this art piece together because I'm now a video artist. I arrive, and he's, you know, not mentally sound. And I love him. He's really sick. He's in this extraordinary pain, which he was for most of his death with HIV and AIDS. Just extraordinary pain. He doesn't have any medicine. There's nothing to take.

And then I shoot a video because he wants me to. We're fighting because of course he doesn't have any money, and he's stuck down there, and I have to find money to get him home. And he's staying when I arrive in this, just, derelict hotel for indigent people. And there's roaches everywhere, so I have to move us out of the hotel. And, you know, then in parts of it, it's normal and we're having fun. We're having adventures. Like we always had adventures. We're exploring neighborhoods and eating food [00:38:00] in the—you know, where local people eat food, and buying thrift clothing, which we always really enjoyed. And then we shoot this video.

And it's terrible. It's a terrible experience. It's heartbreaking. And because the story of who Jim is and who we are as a couple, and how we're going to be at the heart of the center of a conversation of the world in art-making, he's fallen off of it because he's sick and doesn't have capacity. So none of it's working. And he knows it, but I can't tell him, but I sort of do. And I get mad at him. And he's really, like, in a lot of pain. And his craziness, again—like I write about all this. I mean, you know, most of my AIDS work, I told you, is about Jim in the room. Like, I have done so many projects where I try and resuscitate him. And I've written a lot of essays about him. And I've made two videos about him. He was, at that time—I mean, because he was so crazy—AIDS-related dementia, I do believe—like, his brain wasn't functioning like an adult person. He was taking baby aspirin, a lot of baby aspirin, for the pain. Like he just had a lot of pain in his mouth. Chronic diarrhea. Thrush. I think the pain in his mouth was from thrush. [00:40:00] His lips have thrush probably. So he's using like, ChapStick. Like all these over-the-counter remedies that he is telling me are going to cure him.

THEODORE KERR: He's using the word "cure"?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. But like, not as a sane person. He always had this newspaper delivery bag that he had stolen—he actually had stolen [laughs] that from a kid.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And it looked really cool in the East Village. And he would walk around with it. People knew him as the guy with this—again, it was before people could buy them. And it said, like, "North Something Gazette" on it. He had that in Miami, and it was just full of strange potions that he was taking.

THEODORE KERR: And you're frustrated.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, so frustrated. So sad, so angry. Angry because he's being crazy. Angry because he's so sick. Angry because there's nothing that either of us can do about it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. It's so unfair. It's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: He was taking AZT I think. It just did not work. I think he stopped taking his AZT. That was the only AIDS medicine he ever had. He had a real AIDS doctor also. I think he saw Sonnabend. I think that was through Joe, who worked for amFAR. So he was getting the best medication. There just wasn't any. [Laughs.] So he wasn't—he couldn't make it go away.

And then he got a lot of KS. So I don't remember seeing the KS so much then, but I'm sure he had that. And it hurt. So he was in a lot of pain. And he was really vain. So that was part of, you know—[00:42:00] when he was there with me, he still looked really good. But he spent a lot more time, like, getting it together and, like, crawling his way out of how tired he was and how sore the—how much pain he was in, to look the way he wanted to look.

THEODORE KERR: Were you conscious of that as the person behind the camera?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, yeah. And I didn't want to shoot it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Because you wanted him to look good. You knew that he—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I knew he didn't.

THEODORE KERR: You knew that he didn't look good.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I knew he did for part of it. And he kind of couldn't keep it together. But he was really crazy when I shot that video. So he thought he looked, and was behaving, you know, admirably or attractively. And I knew that he wasn't. I had to make a choice about whether to pretend or not. And he—

THEODORE KERR: Like in every moment.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And you know, I do—like, if you watch *Video Remains*, I do push up against him once or twice and say, "Jim, you know, why don't you wind it up?" Or, "Maybe we should end." Or mostly I just let him do it because—by participating, I was [laughs]—it's funny that this comes back. What was that thing we were

talking about? About how we enabled each other?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I was still enabling him.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In the way that he needed to be and I could.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Even though he wasn't himself anymore. So I did. It was really painful.

THEODORE KERR: What do you think—because I think a lot of your relationship is about reciprocity. Or love. It's more about love. Like, what were you getting from that [00:44:00] situation towards the end?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: From Jim?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It didn't matter.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: His love.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I saw him in New York. I lived in Philly then and visited him when he was really, really sick, which was several months before he was hospitalized. He died in a hospital, but he wasn't in the hospital very long. He lived with Joe. Joe took care of him in the apartment on 13th Street. That was Joe's apartment—13th and 1st Avenue. Then he was in so much pain, and he spent a lot of time in the bathtub. It made him feel better. And in his bed. I spent hours with him just looking at our photo albums. I have a lot of our—there's a lot of pictures of us together. And that—what he gave me was that. Just all that love, and his heart, and his youth, because he didn't get to grow up.

THEODORE KERR: Do you want to talk about his death, or no?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, I've talked about it. I write about it. I can't exorcise it. And I [00:46:00] can't—you wanted me to tell you stories about him and I can't. Do you feel like you understand who he is?

THEODORE KERR: I do over time and over different mediums. But every time it changes. This is a different understanding.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I said to Avram when I wrote him back, the thing I most appreciated about his book was how well he drew those men that he loved. That's what I really love about his book, because that's all I've ever wanted to do. And I've just tried so many times. And I've tried in so many media. He deserves—I'm not—like, he was the person who was good at that. He was the person who was good at telling amazing stories, and captivating a room with his scintillating verbiage and his dynamic showmanship. That's not who I am. So I can't do him that service.

THEODORE KERR: I mean, this interview has done a lot of that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I can just do it in my way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You can't do it in his way.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I just try over and over and over again. So I've written about his death, and partly when you do that, it doesn't feel as vulnerable. He was taken to a hospital room, through a hospital, and—I forget which one. On the Upper East Side. And I lived in Philly and his brother called me and said, you know, "He's dying," and woke me up in the morning. And I got on the train. I remember all of that train ride really well. And I got to the [00:48:00] AIDS wing, and his family was there. Joe was there. I was there. His parents, his brothers, and me.

He was in a hospital bed and he was intubated, so he really couldn't talk, I don't think. So frail. And I was tired because I had woken up really early. And I sat by the bed and I held—I was holding his hand and he's so thin and weak. And I put my head down and our hands were held together, like on that. And I was sort of sleepy, and I

was crying. And he squeezed my hand. You know, and he told me it was okay. Like that. That I shouldn't cry. That's what he was telling me. Like, "It's okay."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. That's something to cry about though, too.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. It made me feel better.

THEODORE KERR: It did?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Because why?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because he said he was—that he knew that he was going to go. [00:50:00] And that he recognized my pain. So much of it had been about his pain, that he recognized and he wanted to take care of me back. And he did.

And then I left to go home. I had another studio apartment in New York City that I shared with my partner at the time, my boyfriend. It was on 10th Street. And I went to bed. I took a sleeping pill. And then his brother woke me up in the middle of the night and he had died.

I know that Joe was in the bed with him when he died. And Joe had then told me what happens. And they had a really profound experience, which made me feel good, as well. Then we, you know, got rid of all his things. Joe and I did that, from their apartment. And you know, I have a bunch of things of his that I wear.

And then there was a huge, spectacular—[at –AJ] The Ridiculous Theatrical Company—later that I helped plan. It was an [00:52:00] amazing event because he knew he was part of a really amazing queer art scene in New York City. People came and they—really, you know, famous New York people at that time. Countercultural people from the Ridiculous—

THEODORE KERR: Made something beautiful.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, yeah. Performances, and speeches, and a slide show, and—

THEODORE KERR: Wow. Did you go with Scott?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't think I did. My family came.

THEODORE KERR: Wow [laughs].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I was there with my family. My mom and my dad, and my sisters, a lot of our friends from college. And I was the widow. And Joe was the widow. And Miguel was the widow. So people were taking care of us.

THEODORE KERR: And did you think about what to wear? Like were you like, "I want to look good."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I had the greatest outfit.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I remember that outfit.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, my God. Say it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I bought it on Houston Street. It's a store that's not there. And it was tight. It was a tight skirt and a matching shirt with this like, big, bright flowers. Like big, huge, bright flowers, but dark. And I had just started wearing tight clothes—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —because I had enough self-confidence. I had started wearing tight clothes that year, and I hadn't before. And I still wear tight clothes, as you know, sometimes.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was a hot outfit.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Yeah. What time of year was it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was not—it was February, but I think the event must have been in March. It was still cold. It was, like, pushing it a little bit to wear it.

THEODORE KERR: And like, makeup and [00:54:00] earrings and—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, I can imagine.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And I ran into—I went to an event last year when I was here. The Ridiculous Theatrical Company had a big event at the Grad Center. And you know who they are. Charles Ludlam's company. Charles Ludlam died of AIDS, as did most of the original troupe. And Everett Quinton was Charles' leading lady and his boyfriend. Everett took over the Ridiculous, but it was—it already had a very storied and very important history in the East Village and theater counterculture. So Everett's was a remake of the troupe. And Jim was in that version of the troupe. So he was brought in when Everett really remade it. And most of the original collective had died. And a lot of them were very famous actors in New York.

But Jim was very central to that newly configured Ridiculous, and he had a lot of leading roles. So like, he had the lead in *Der Ring Got Farblonjet*, which is a huge opus remake of the *Ring* cycle. And there's pictures of him in the *New York Times* because the *Ring* cycle was playing in New York City, and he was playing the Siegfried character, and the actual opera singer came. And he was in *Camille*, and he was in *Big Hotel*, and he was in *Brother Trucker.* He was in a whole—I mean, he was in it. And those people were part of—that was another world that I lived in in New York. And like, those guys—those people dying of AIDS, people who are HIV-positive, people who had died of AIDS—those people didn't go to ACT UP. That's what I was trying to say.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [00:56:00] Like that was a whole other AIDS sphere that I engaged in. So anyway, I went to Everett's—they had a big event, CUNY Grad Center. And they read—it was a celebration of X number of years of the Ridiculous. I don't know, maybe 50, maybe more. Everett's still very much alive and still leads the company. And there were all these actors from the past. I recognized many of them, but I hadn't seen them, you know, since I left New York. Because I had already left by the time Jim died. And I approached them afterwards. Everett and then some of the other actors and actresses. There [were –AJ] women in the troupe. That was one of the cool things about Ridiculous. And they all, you know—of course, they remembered him, but they probably hadn't thought about him. Because I carry him. And they carry their own people. It was really nice to see all those Ridiculous people.

THEODORE KERR: It sounds beautiful.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, it was amazing. It was so feeding to see them again because I had been really cut off.

THEODORE KERR: Did you write about that? About going to the Ridiculous anniversary?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. No.

THEODORE KERR: Oh. As your friend and co-collaborator, I'm asking you to write about it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] That's just private. I just told you. I just remembered.

THEODORE KERR: I think it's—okay. The feeding part seems really important.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was nice to meet people who remembered him besides me. Like I had been carrying the burden all these years. Artists who remembered.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. People who knew that other side that you also knew and other parts that you didn't know maybe. Is that [00:58:00] possible?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. But also like, regular human beings who lose people—I'm not saying I'm not a regular human being, but people who aren't artists or cultural producers, you know, carry the weight of loss privately. And if you're an artist or a cultural producer—I mean, this is what I'm saying, like, I just have this incredible burden to not just remember him like I would with you and me if he was our friend and talk about him. Like I need to enter him and hold him live in the public. And it was so nice to meet some other artists who also do that, not for my Jim, but for their people, because it's a really [exhales]—it's such a burden.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And it's such a—it's not a burden that I regret. It's not a burden in a negative sense. It's

just—[exhales]. You can't achieve it. And so much AIDS art—this is what I said to Avram—is actually—comes from that. That's maybe something your generation just doesn't understand.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It comes from this—like, you can't stop, because all these people died just when they were young for no reason.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Or for really bad reasons.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: There's no reasons. There's no reasons. Having sex is not a reason to die.

THEODORE KERR: Right. But they didn't die because they had sex. They died—I mean, I'm not [01:00:00] going to rehearse political understandings that you've shared already, but—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: The first generation of people who died of AIDS died because they had sex and there was no medicine. And they lived in the various communities in which they lived. And then there was some medicine. And then people continued to die who didn't have access to that medicine. But the first—the catastrophe years, people either had sex, or used IV drugs, or you know—there's no reason. Those are just things people do.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. They're acts of intimacy or hopes for intimacy.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Exactly. And survival.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And just being alive and—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And engaging with your body and the world and trying to feel better.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And trying to take advantage of the time we're here.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's all.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. Let's say what we want to talk about when we come back together.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] I have no idea.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Okay. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Can we turn it off?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. We can turn it off now. Okay. Thank you.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Woo!

[END OF JUHASZ17_1OF1_TRACK3.]

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So let me start. This is Theodore Kerr interviewing Alexandra Juhasz at her home in Brooklyn, New York, on December 21st, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Interview number two. Good morning, Alex.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Hi, Ted.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] You want to say anything about last session?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, funny, I do. I say that sarcastically because before we began I told you I wanted to say something. It's not "say something" as much as have a conversation with you. And I hope it—it doesn't need to take that much time.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But I wanted to talk to you a little bit about my feelings and process.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That sounds good.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And specifically about your—I've been thinking a lot and talking to some of my friends a bit about your method of oral history.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And, you know, in my own thinking and in my conversation with some of my erudite friends—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —who are also engaged in AIDS activist cultural production, I've been wondering if you were trained in your method, and if the method from last time—which was specifically to kind of press me and hold me into this space where we were talking about my childhood in particular [00:02:00]—is something that your training asks you to do. And I guess I ask you as a question. Or if it's your own method.

Because what it did for me—I was, like, very upset afterwards, not in a bad way, but like I was very—I had had an intense experience. And I don't—it almost felt like therapy.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Like I don't talk out loud with another person about my personal upbringing and formative experiences, except for like, a partner, my children, or a therapist. And you also held me there for a long time, and you kind of wouldn't let me go. You kept asking for more description.

So it produced this template by which my professional life and my public life now has this layer of very personal and private thinking inside of it. And what's interesting is that I do that in my work. Like I'm always in my work, and I do it in public, but in ways that are very crafted and very—like, I know what the limits are. And so I don't feel like I've stepped past the limit because I've set the limits. But you changed the limits underneath me. I just wonder why that's your process.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So I'm not—I'll answer the question, but do you feel you went too far yesterday in a way that you have bad feelings about?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. So I was talking about that with my current [00:04:00] boyfriend. And I was upset. And again, like not upset in a bad way, but just I had a lot of feelings. And he said, you know, "Did you say something that you regret or did you say something about somebody?" Or, you know, "Did you go too far?" And I was like, "No. No. I—" And I said, "No. It's that I said things that were sort of too true."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Especially—you know, I think it's partly made complicated because you and I are friends.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: We have frank conversations. I keep kind of forgetting that it's on the record, but not.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, I'm aware that there's that box there.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I said, "Well, it's too honest about myself is what it felt like." And I was particularly sort of embarrassed or maybe ashamed about all the times I talked about how smart I was. And he said, "Why are you embarrassed or ashamed about that?" I said, "Well, you know, it's not a thing I would typically trumpet."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But I needed to say it to produce the context by which I became politicized, which is around my feminism. I can't explain it unless I talk about how hard it is to be self-perceived and be perceived as a smart woman. But it felt really shameful.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I mean, you just gave an answer to my question. So before I lose the thought, I want to say that what you just said is exactly why a life history—which is what we're doing as an oral history—is of value. Because, you know, someone can pick up your book. Someone can [. . . read –TK] your book. Someone can watch your video. Someone can hear you speak. And they can get that content. What's valuable about an authoritative oral history like this is that it provides context so that people can understand how you got there.

You know, you didn't just wake up one morning and write *AIDS TV*. There was a series—there was a whole life that happened before that. [00:06:00] And something that democratizes the archives, something that democratizes knowledge production is if we have a better understanding of: "How do people come to ideas? How are they then supported or not supported to share those ideas?"

I think your example is perfect. Certain conditions had to be in place for you to be the feminist you became. And part of that was your own intelligence. And that's important for someone—for those future people to hear this. That feminism—it wasn't just because your mother was a scholar. It wasn't just because your dad helped around the house. It was also because of your own work of your mind.

And then I would also say that I'm sorry that you felt those bad feelings. Also culture's horrible. Like why should anyone feel bad about being smart and claiming it? You know? Like, you earned that intelligence. Even if you didn't. Anyway.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I guess, you know—so another thing that I wanted to say, you know—because I feel like this is a meta-moment, but I like meta-moments. A lot of what I do ends up being about the process of doing it.

You know, in my own work—all of my work, my AIDS work and other work, my academic work, my activism, my art-making—I am very present, but always in conversation with someone else.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Wow.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And like, that's what we do.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. That's true.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: We wrote a book together, it's in conversation. In *Video Remains*, which we'll probably talk about today, I'm in conversation with all kinds of people. I never speak by myself. Well, I do. I have a—well, maybe not [laughs] in that piece. In *Women of Vision*, a documentary I make, it's an authoritative history of feminist filmmaking by sharing the time with 20 people. In my portrait of my own family, [*Dear Gabe* –AJ] which is [00:08:00] totally self-looking, I disperse it out to six of my friends. In *We Care*, I send it out across, you know, probably 15—I'm sorry; in *We Care*, it's me and a collective with five other people. In *Women and AIDS*, it's me just—that's a more traditionally dispersing authoritative voice. My voice is in it [and] people affected by AIDS and only women professionals, and particularly almost only women of color professionals who are thinking about AIDS.

Like, I—methodologically, theoretically, as a practice—believe in coming, sharing my quote-unquote intelligence, my perspective, in conversation dynamically with other people, which—and the word I use when I talk about that is, you know, collective process, which is a feminist process. I do it and theorize it. So it's very awkward for me, not because I'm—I'm not a humble person or even a shy person. So it's not about, you know, like me feeling ashamed. That's what I was thinking. It's not about—you know, I'll say things about myself, but I prefer to do it not where the spotlight's on me, but where the spotlight's on a dynamic.

THEODORE KERR: Right. But that's what these are. These are—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I know [laughs], I get it.

THEODORE KERR: So to say a little bit about the training, I learned under Suzanne Snider, who's an oral historian. And I went to—the Trans Oral History paid for me to take her course in Hudson, which is like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Interesting.

THEODORE KERR: —an intensive, and you're learning while you're doing. And I think Suzanne Snider is really like—it is narrator-driven. So where the narrator wants to go is—that's where I as an interviewer would be nimble enough to go with the narrator.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I see.

THEODORE KERR: And when there's [00:10:00] a specific focus like we're doing here, it's like providing the foundation so that the narrator can provide context for where we're going to go later. And a lot of that comes from somebody—so oral history obviously comes from oral tradition. And then it becomes more of like an academic understanding or a discipline in the 1970s with this Italian guy named Portelli. And what he does, and what I think is really important, is that—in the same way that Howard Zinn did this with his history book—is he reminds us that the experts are all the people who are living. You know?

And a project like this does deputize you to be an expert in the field of AIDS and art, but not just because of the work you produce, but because you're a person living during that time. So your experiences as a young woman in Colorado are just as important as your experiences in New York, as you are today.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, you know, now that I'm halfway through the process I understand that. But it was a bit of a surprise. And it made me think a lot about the thinking behind your process. I know a bit about oral

history, but I make documentary. I don't do oral history. Those are really different traditions.

THEODORE KERR: They're very different.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I'm very interested in collectivist conversation practices, which is also not oral history. There's a thing about the I-centeredness of this that I find hard.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It's really hard. It's really hard, too, when—yeah, I'm the same way. I work mostly in collective. And sometimes that's a way of escaping the lens.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. Well, that's the other piece of it. So anyway. That's really all I wanted to say, you know.

THEODORE KERR: I want to say, too, that there's many definitions of oral history. And you've done at least one other oral history.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I have.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And [00:12:00] it was ACT UP oral history. And that one is very different than this one.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Totally.

THEODORE KERR: Like it's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's way easier.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, for some people. But if you watch some of them, it's harder for some people.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, for me, I'm saying.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. For you.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah, because it was very profound. It talked—it was a long time ago. I haven't looked at it for a while, but it talked to me on that professional tip, public tip. Whereas, like, it was just that thing where you were wrestling with me. I don't mean it—I mean in the best sense—to stay. You kept making me stay in, you know, my youth, in my house, in my family, in New York City and my relationship with Jim. And I kept wanting to leave. And then you would sort of pull me back and I would do it because—partly because I'm committed to our relationship. I trust you.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't know that I would do that with anybody, frankly. And then there were these moments when I fell back that were like, "Did it skitter off to some place that was too personal?" I don't know. Because it got very personal. And that's when I'm a little, again, like, ashamed about—and then it's like, "Why am I ashamed about, like—?"

And Gavin said, "You know, when people come to your interview in the Smithsonian"—which is like a fancy place, I mean, that's part of what the weight of it is—"they're going to love the places where you're personal. Like that's going to be the most interesting part." He said, "If you went there wouldn't you want to hear that one?" I thought, "Yeah. Those are the ones I would want to hear because that's stuff you don't get access to." But it's weird when it's you.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. What you shared is not what's Google-able. You know what I mean?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Like what you shared is the meat and bones. And I mean, our work is a testament to like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, it's the blood and the corpuscles.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, it's the blood. [Laughs.] Oh.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] It's not the meat and bones.

THEODORE KERR: It's not in the meat—you're right. And too often HIV work is too theoretical. And so [00:14:00] if we're going to keep doing this work, we have to be as vulnerable as the rest of the work that we benefit from.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That is right. And, you know, I'll try. But it's hard.

THEODORE KERR: It's super hard, and I have to keep in mind—like, I'm also aware that we're friends. So then there's this other level. I also trust you that you'll be making good choices. And often at times when I was trying to—when I would ask follow-up questions, a lot of that was because people are going to read this and they're going to listen to it, and they need details to ground it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I get that.

THEODORE KERR: So most of my follow-up questions are like, just, "I need specifics."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I get that. And that was back to your original question, which was like, the person in the future. I mean, even people now don't understand what I mean when I say, "Oh, my parents were like hippies," or, "We were in the East Village in New York." But if there is a person in the future, they're not going to understand any of it. Without that rich context, it's just a set of words. So I get it. It's just—I'm ready to stop.

I just needed to tell you that I needed to think about the process behind what we were doing and the theories behind it, to embrace them and to realize that they were solid and useful, before I could go forward and, you know, like, dig back in again. Although I'm looking forward to this chapter because I think it's going to be easier [laughs], because I think it gets to be about my professional life.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Whew! [Laughs.] Okay.

THEODORE KERR: I can't tell if that's a challenge or not.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Let's go!

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Maybe it's a challenge.

THEODORE KERR: In my hand right now is *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*. And I was thinking that today, or now, we could start by me reading a quote as a way of kind of grounding the rest of our interview today.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: And I like to think of it as the rest of our time on tape, too, right? Like once we finish this tape, that's done.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right.

THEODORE KERR: It's a finished [00:16:00] project.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yay.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So it's page 77. "AIDS video is made to help us make sense of a new, real-world phenomenon involving terror, pain, horror, anger, purposefulness, and courage so magnificent as to be fictitional [ph]." Do you remember writing it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: No. Do you want to see it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: What's it about? Is it about a particular tape?

THEODORE KERR: No. I mean, you're—I think you're still—it's still early in the book, so you're still setting things up.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, so this is the theoretical chapter. Okay.

THEODORE KERR: Also, I'm a little bit nervous. You're looking at all the things I underlined.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, no. I'm not. Okay. I mean, I don't remember those words. But now I understand it's context. It's actually in the third chapter, which is a more theoretical chapter. It's the theoretical chapter which is going to start talking about what it means to depict unseen, unspoken truths of experience by people who

have had not had access to the depiction, visualization, and contemplation of their own truth because the media has either not seen them, or has depicted them for them cruelly and with judgment. But there's an embedded theoretical project around what it means to try and tell the truth. I was writing this in the '90s where most art theory, [00:18:00] film theory, was organized around Postmodern theories of evading or challenging truth claims.

So that's what that sentence is about. But that sentence also starts with the trauma, which is often—is now forgotten in some ways, or is now historical, thought of [laughs] as historical. It moves from trauma to tactics, and says that traumatized people have to use whatever tactics are necessary, even if they're not perceived as the right tactics [laughs] inside of their community. That's what this sentence is saying. Is that what you thought it meant?

THEODORE KERR: I am also drawn to the list and the way that it's like a mountain range.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It is a mountain range.

THEODORE KERR: Like, it's trauma, it's—but the word that really sticks out to me is "purposefulness."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's the hinge.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And I think we may have said this in the last tape, or we say it all the time to each other: AIDS is an assemblage. Like, it brings together those forces. Like there's no forward thinking if we're only stuck in trauma. But actually no one is just stuck in trauma.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-mm [negative].

THEODORE KERR: Like that's just not how that works.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, people can be stuck in trauma for a while. That's how trauma works. And then you claw your way out of it and try and engage in the world. And activism is one of those engagements. And art-making is another one. And there are ways to heal from trauma. There are ways to heal yourself from trauma. Maybe not—"heal" is not the right word [00:20:00] because I don't think you heal in the sense that you're done healing. But you can feel more purposeful again. You can feel an engagement outside of your own pain, and you can also feel like what you know, including your pain, can be useful to the world and to others.

But I think a lot of the contemporary discourse around HIV/AIDS—"AIDS is over," "AIDS is manageable," "HIV is manageable," healthcare, pharmaceutical project [laughs]—overrides, dampens, hides, pretends it isn't there, that pain of anyone who's ill, ongoing illness. Plus the pain of the catastrophic loss that my generation and several other generations felt. So it's like, the loss of people and what it is to suffer the indignities of daily illness, even if it's managed by pharmaceuticals. But, as you and I know, [for –AJ] many people it isn't managed by pharmaceuticals. Many people who have HIV, the pharmaceuticals don't work. Or even when they work, they have side effects. And many people that you and I know don't have full access to those pharmaceuticals. And we also know, as students of the world, that people around the world don't have access to those pharmaceuticals.

So the indignities and suffering of HIV, the pain of it—it's bodily felt as trauma. Even for those of us who don't [00:22:00] have HIV.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Also, the management of it is where some of the humiliation and discomfort comes from. Like the virus has its own humiliation and discomfort, but the—it's the management. It's the waiting rooms. It's the bureaucracy. It's the criminalization.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And also, as you and I know, and have worked about in our current work, it's really complicated when people become undetectable. Their viral status is undetectable, and that's both bodily and theoretically, and politically, really complicated. And there are—there's trauma around that, like, around having HIV and not having HIV, right? About carrying a self-knowledge—and I mean that for human beings, but also culturally—you know, a knowledge that HIV is now suppressed, invisible, not findable, but known—or unknown.

And that is a very complicated burden that we as a community are only just scratching at, like how that's traumatic. Because you would think it's not traumatic. You would think, you know, that's a gift. It's over. It is. I mean, physically it is a gift. But culturally—among at-risk communities and people who are then engaging socially, sexually, culturally around the specter of AIDS, and the history of AIDS, and the ongoing reality of AIDS—that it's suppressed is really a burden for everybody, and a new burden that, you know, [00:24:00] we need new work to investigate, and show, and understand. And that's a secret. Like everyone's supposed to be happy, and thankful. And those are reasonable responses. But then you're not allowed to have the trauma.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Right. And I think that will change now. Like the CDC finally released a statement

saying like, "undetectable means untransmittable." And that was a real win for the activists who were trying to celebrate undetectability. And now that that has happened, I think space will be made for some richer complicated questions around, like Avram would say, "the viral divide." But then the divide within the positive community. Then we're getting back into who's good, and who's bad, and who's containable, who's not, who's wild. You know, all those things come up.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: When you were talking about the sentence from *AIDS TV*, you were talking about, like, "People used the strategies that they have, and they might not always be the best strategies, but by using them they"—you didn't say this, but I think the takeaway is also like—"by using them, they become the effective strategies, because it's a strategy."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And this book is about how—and a lot of your work is about how—video is a strategy.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And I wonder—I think it would be good to dive now into like—how did that come to you? How did that knowledge, how did that awareness come to you? And you started to talk about it last time. I'm not trying to pretend that you haven't been talking about that all along, but let's be a little bit flat-footed.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, my—I've been a professional [00:26:00] person engaged in a body of work that is academic. It is artwork, film work, and it is activist for—if you mark it when I became a professor, I got my first job—I've been doing that for 27 years. But if you start it when I came to New York and started to go to graduate school, I've been doing it for 31 years. And when I look at all of my work—and I have a lot of work, and not all of it is about AIDS—what I can say, a through-line, is that I make, use, and think about activist media. And I've made, used, and thought about activist media in the direction of things, and in conversation with—and in the service of, or for purposeful use of—activist projects that have been important to me.

And I have consistently applied that to AIDS, but other things that are related, as well. So I don't think of my feminist work, or my black lesbian work, or my work on YouTube, as not about AIDS. I mean, AIDS is always there, but some of my work is specifically about AIDS. And I use the word "media" now because I started by thinking about video, and now I think about the Internet. The word "media" encompasses those. But you could use the word "video," which is what you're asking me about. And you said video as a strategy. And I guess I would say within that broader body of work, video is not just a strategy. It's also a method, and a process. It's a place. It's a [00:28:00] politics. It's all of those things.

And when I moved to the Internet, I only moved to the Internet because the Internet holds video. It holds video and other things. But I've been very interested in video. And I could tell you a few reasons why, and they're going to start—you know, I think this is the part where, like, I start repeating myself because I only have a few ideas. They're very dear to me and they—I say them over and over and over again. And—just let me finish.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: The idea—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —of video is that it's wildly accessible. It's cheaper than other formats, becomes increasingly so when you get to digital video. It's the people's format. It's not film. It's not theater. It's not painting. It's daily. It's mundane. It's accessible. It doesn't look—video, VHS video, activist video, DIY video—looks not like mainstream things. It's accessible. And it marks that formally.

But I'm also interested in video because it's a process-based collective art form. So that's true about film as well, but I studied video. Not film. Film is the high form. Video is the low form. I say that in quotes, but not exactly. It's a way of making art where many people have to make it. I choose video, not literature. I made that choice because I said that power was invested in the thinking about mobilization and making of images. Not words. Video. [00:30:00] We began by me saying that for the history of moving images, marginalized people had been derided, objectified, humiliated, contained by dominant media that either wouldn't see them or saw them in their most belittled form. To wrestle control of images is a form of power-making and -taking. And we can do that with video.

Now that looks like iPhones. So it also includes photographs and Instagram, but it—that's still the same project. It's just been radically democratized. That's why I end up working on YouTube as a theorist and as a maker,

because that radical democratization, the promise of video, got written into YouTube and on to social media. And it hasn't worked. So I'm very curious to think about why. But I'm still committed to ideas of video that could and sometimes do produce identity, community, and change. Video is a format. It's a process. It's a politics. It's a strategy about how to make your ideas known in action with other people and then outside of your self and your community to a broader [00:32:00] public that might be receptive.

I'm sorry. I know you wanted to say something.

THEODORE KERR: No, all that is really interesting and super important, and it just—as I said in our conversation before we dove into the interview, is that what's valuable is to think like, how did you come to these ideas? So if I'm thinking of Alex in the office with Jean [Carlomusto], you know, these ideas are nascent, but you couldn't have said what you just said 30 years ago.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes, I could have.

THEODORE KERR: You could have?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I was saying it. Didn't—it says [it –AJ] right there in my dissertation.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. But what about, what about before the book? Like—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's my dissertation.

THEODORE KERR: No, I know. So a dissertation—there's a process to get to your dissertation.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's 1986 when you meet me and I'm trotting around New York City. And by 1987, I'm making video. I make *Women and AIDS*, 1987, a year in. Well, partly I'm making video because it's cheap. What else could I make? I'm the person who needs access. There are radical ideas about video. Video was invented in the '60s, late '60s. It's only 15 years later. Now, in my mind, that's forever. I don't realize that that's—you know, like, only when you're 55 does 15 years feel like nothing. In my mind, it's been around forever.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Video, when it was born—I'm a quote-unquote scholar of video. Video, when it was born, had several liberating ideas written into its history. Those liberating ideas take, like, three tracks. I hope I'm not being pedantic here.

THEODORE KERR: You're not being pedantic. It's interesting, but we're going to have to link it to you. Like, how did you learn these things?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay. So I will in a second.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I learned it because I was a student, and an activist, [00:34:00] but there's—you know, video—video's invented in the late '60s. You know, to the audience of the future, it didn't exist. So like, I studied—I got a PhD in film. Film is only 100 years old. I studied video. At that time, video was 20 years old. Then I studied the Internet, which was born under my feet. You know, it's hard to remember a time before the media that you're familiar with didn't exist, but video, when it was invented, became documentary. It allowed people to enter the world with a lightweight cheap thing, totally transformed how you could represent reality. And many people engaged with the possibilities of video were excited because it could be used for political work, because it could—camera could go to places and people that had never had cameras. So this activist impulse inside of video is core.

Then there's an art project. And the art project around video is, again, an access project. It's about who has access to meaning-making when the media before—I listed them: painting, theater, sculpture, performance—were held by great white men who had patches on their sleeves and, you know, that's the professor type. And the painter type were like, masterful—and so feminist video is at the beginning of video in the art world, because feminists wrestled control of the medium before the guys got it, and started doing all these new things with it at the very beginning. So there's a whole art world part of video art that has feminism at its [00:36:00] foundation. And that's about access. It's about—you know, we haven't used the word yet, but it's about expertise. We started out today saying your theory of oral history's about expertise. So is my theory about video. It's a medium where you don't have to be an expert to use it. And that becomes increasingly true once we get to the Internet, where like, you know, you push a button on your computer and it's shooting a video of your face. But you get video blogs—

THEODORE KERR: Right. And the definition of expert changes.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So, those ideas are being wrestled with around video, cracking—you don't have to go to art school. And this is in an art context. Cracking access, expertise, what's permissible to look at. So for feminists, a lot of that's about body work, but it's also about community, and family, and home. Those are all things that feminists start working on in the art world. And then the third context for video is television. So video talks to television much more than it talks to film. Film, the high form; television, the low form.

And it's those three things that—you asked me about video. I think about video because it's the feminist medium. And it's the activist medium. And it's the medium of moving images, which is the medium of now in 1980, in the '80s. And the people who are making cool things in New York City are making video. And there's really cool, like, community-based video centers. So like, DCTV still exists. Downtown Community Television. Like you could go there and edit video for $15 dollars an hour, and they were embedded in Chinatown, and they were doing all this really interesting community-based, activist media.

I got my first artist grant [00:38:00] at Global Village. I don't think that's around anymore. But Global Village was in SoHo. And it was the same thing. It was a—DCTV is Jon Alpert.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Do you know this?

THEODORE KERR: No.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Jon Alpert is a major television journalist with a leftist heart. And he started DCTV out of his own house, which was a fire station. Have you ever been there?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's still there.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Out of this—the history of video comes out of the *Whole Earth Catalog*. It comes out of guerilla television. It comes out of radical people thinking about [how –AJ] the medium was going to set them free. A lot of those guys I'm naming now are leftist dudes. Those leftist dudes were in conversation with feminists and other forms of radicals, other radicals who wedded themselves to that medium.

So the first artist grant I got was when I was at the Whitney program. I made a video that no one has ever seen, but I got a grant for it. I think I got, like, $200 dollars from Global Village. And it was a video called *Another Documentary About the Lower East Side*.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And it stars myself, Jim, and our roommate, Carolyn Lesjak, who went on to become a Marxist English professor at Swarthmore, but at the time was working at—she was our roommate in that apartment on Attorney Street—working as a law clerk of some sort. Working in social—what do you call that kid of law that people get for free? Lawyers that people get for free?

THEODORE KERR: Like pro bono stuff?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. The actual providers. Like if you do—if you—

THEODORE KERR: If you can't afford an attorney?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: I don't know.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: She was working in that office [; Legal Aid. –AJ] And we walk [00:40:00] around the Lower East Side. It's really beautiful. It's a beautiful record of what the Lower East Side looked like when it was in the '80s, so, dangerous, dirty, still ethnic, multi-racial, Puerto Ricans. Whatever comes before hipsters. Early gentrifiers.

THEODORE KERR: Artists?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Artists, gay people, crack addicts, because it was really a time of crack. So we walk around [laughs], I'm shooting with a Super 8 camera. Jim is in front of the camera interviewing people, and Carolyn's behind me with a VHS camera. And so there's her shooting me shooting people. And then we have the Super 8 footage and the VHS footage, and we're asking people about the Lower East Side. And it's, you know, self-reflexive and kind of loopy in that way that I said I was interested in. But we interview all these people. So we interview a woman who started a hat shop down there, which was there for a really long time. Early, early artist person living there. But then kids rapping on the street, and people who owned ethnic businesses.

Anyway, I got a grant from Global Village to make that video. And it was a place you could go in SoHo, and you would climb up the stairs, and it would be someone's house that was transformed into a place where you could access cameras and editing equipment, community-based for radical ends. There were organizations like that all over the city.

So that's why video, because it was where you would go if you were radical—for radical politics of whatever ilk, and you wanted to make art, but you wanted to make art that was not going to be sequestered in the art world. So you had a cultural answer to a radical question. Video was and is the medium.

THEODORE KERR: And so all of that—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —was just alive in New York City.

THEODORE KERR: And you were feeling it. And you were picking up on it. And you were following it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Just like picking up on AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's why so much of the great artwork, in my opinion—I mean, of course I would say it since that's what I [laughs] write on—happens in video. But I'm trying to explain: Why is it happening in video? So my book, *AIDS TV*, is about the thousands of interventions around AIDS in the first crisis moment that are made in video. It's not random that it's video. It is thoughtfully, purposefully, intentionally, in video because we all thought that was the right medium. And people made art in all formats, as you know; you're doing the interviews.

But the place where there was the most activity was video. That's why there's Testing the Limits collective. That's why there's DIVA TV. That's why there's—Brooklyn AIDS Task Force, where I make video, already has made video by the time I get there. That's why we—you and I write about this, and I write about it in the book. That's why there's AIDS films. They're not making films. They're making videos. That's why the [. . . AIDS Discrimination Unit of New York City Commission on Human Rights, NYCCHR –AJ] group—I was saying that there were gurus that I was talking to. One of those is Amber [Hollibaugh], who's running that. Then—I'm just going to forget their names, but there's Katie—I forget her last name—who comes out of prostitute's rights activism. They're making videos. And Alisa Lebow makes *Hard to Get*. And Amber makes her film, *Women and Children Last*.

I mean, people are making videos because they're going to circulate, because they're the format for having a problem [00:44:00] which is—you know, many problems in AIDS: How do you inform people how to have safer sex? How do you break past the discriminatory and stupid ideas that have been initially promulgated by the government and mainstream media? How do you honor people living with AIDS and their families and communities? How do you teach people how to clean their works? How do you represent activism? How do you tell people who have lost somebody to AIDS how to mourn, and that there's community around that loss? I mean, everyone's doing that work that the problem—so I listed what? Ten problems?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: There's 90 more.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Everyone is solving those problems purpose[fully –AJ] with video, because it feels very democratic at that time. You can make one and show it to lots of people. There's no such thing as the Internet. There's no place in the culture where you can copy that quickly and that efficiently. Now it doesn't seem efficient at all. It actually seems expensive compared to what it's like now. But it was cheap compared to other things. And you could—you know, [laughs] I told you this: When I made *We Care*, I got a grant from NYSCA to distribute it. And I would literally take a tape, and put it in an envelope, and write the name on it, and stick in a mailbox, and it would go somewhere. And that seemed really fast. There wasn't a thing like that before. So now that seems [00:46:00] silly and hard and impossible. Like, that's how you distributed? It was insanely easy

compared to what had been before. Like you could make one and replicate it, and send it to people who needed it. And then they would show it. Video.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And there were systems in place. I mean, this is what I've learned from you, that there was like subscription services and that even like the New York City government had like, forms that you could fill out. And you could order video tapes about HIV or any other social issues from their office.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Particularly video, though. Like, something happened—I mean, maybe I'm the only person who believes this, but I think it's true. Something happened about the conjuncture of AIDS and video that was the right problem, the right question, the right set of needs, and the right medium at the right moment. There's a convergence that happens there.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Around this idea of viral, right?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: We now think of it that way. We weren't using those words then, of—yes, you can—believe me, I've tried. It's hard to do. Write about the viral—the virus in the body, the viral as a mode of—

THEODORE KERR: —response. And dissemination.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Dissemination. But something happened. AIDS was the right crisis in the wrong way, for a lot of things. So AIDS is the right crisis when it happens in the '80s in this pivotal moment in cultural production, in the sense that some of these Postmodern theories of [00:48:00] the way images and meaning move in culture are really shifting: How you make art, how you think about art, and the role of art. AIDS is the right—I'm saying that in scare-quotes because it's always wrong—the right problem in the way that it aligns our attention to the gross, malformed social structures that produce lived experience in our society around—we've talked of this—race, class, education, healthcare, et cetera. It becomes the right problem to understand our world more clearly, and to hope to understand responses to that world more clearly, in new art forms and their marriage with new technologies, and new formats.

And so you have this problem—I mean, here's the other thing I think is just really important for people of the future to realize. It's like, in your life as a human being, you don't have something new emerge that was never there before that, often. It's strange. And AIDS was that thing. Like, there was life, you trotted around, you lived your life. Okay. There was STDs, sure. There was diseases, yes. There was poverty, yes. There was racism, okay. And then one day, there was a disease that no one had ever heard of, actually didn't understand what it was. People were dying of it.

There's this huge pivot that has to occur when there was—it's not like getting used to something. That's what it's like now. So [00:50:00] there's this huge amount of energy that gets front-loaded to make sense of something that was never there, that was like—there was an absence and then there was a thing. AIDS is that. Video is that.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, interesting. Yeah. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So is the Internet. So is social media. I mean, there was not a thing and then one day there is a thing. And then, like, three years later, like everyone you know knows what that thing is and it's completely changed the meaning of their life, how they live their life. Maybe it doesn't change the meaning of their life. How they live their life.

That's why I study YouTube. It's like, "There wasn't that thing, and then there was." Like you can say the day it started. And what changed? Everything.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Who speaks? How we know, who listens, how it's monetized, what television is, what news is, what film is, how you advertise. Who makes money off of advertisement? How you watch, where you watch, what you watch. Who gets to make it?

I mean, so AIDS is also a thing like that. It aligns with video.

THEODORE KERR: In theological terms, I say that AIDS breaks into history.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Is that theological?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I mean, it's the idea that God breaks into history when—I mean, we don't have to get into it, but yeah. There's an idea of, like, assemblage breaks into history and then—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Assemblage?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. When an assemblage breaks into history and then changes the course of everything.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: God's an assemblage?

THEODORE KERR: I mean, I would say yes. But for example, World War II was something that broke into history. And it changed and reordered everything. And in order to reconcile it, you need God. And the funny thing that you're saying—it's not funny. The thing that is interesting to think about—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: —is that you're saying video is one of the things that helped us make sense of AIDS breaking into history.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. I'm saying video is [00:52:00] God.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because I'm not [laughs]—this is how you and I are different.

THEODORE KERR: No, yeah. Of course. That's why it's kind of an interesting idea, is like—that video becomes not a cure to HIV.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: Certainly not. But it becomes a possible response and a way to deal, and reduce suffering, and increase life chances, and help with education, and deal with sadness.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. It becomes all those things. And it could be anything. It could be God.

THEODORE KERR: Sure.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And for some people it is.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And for me, it's video.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, it's video. And video's the thing—yeah. I mean, I'm going to do a strong pivot here. Video's the thing that lands you in that room where you all create *WAVE*.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And that's a powerful thing.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Video's the excuse to be in the room.

THEODORE KERR: And AIDS? That's an interesting thing. It's video and—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, AIDS is the reason and video's the excuse.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You do understand that. So much of my work is about process. And video's the excuse to have the process about AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I think you need to say more about that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] I will just say one thing backtracking. We can get to it in the future.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, all of the enthusiasm I speak right now about video— because you asked me about video and you put me in that book, which was my dissertation. I'm writing it in the late '80s. It gets published, I think, in 2000—I'm sorry. 1995.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Is it '94 or '95? '95.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. So I'm writing it in the late '80s. It takes a while for it to be published. I have to refine it. I finish it as my dissertation in 1991. And then it's four years till it's published. So it gets revised. But

then I have a body of work about failure of video, the failure of everything we did. I mean, you do know that. So like, *Video Remains* sits in the failure [00:54:00] period. We have a name for it in our work. It's the period of quiet. It's the period where everyone feels that nothing has worked. What is the name of that period?

THEODORE KERR: I would say the Second Silence.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. Ted Kerr's words for that. Second Silence. So in the Second Silence period of my own work, I think all that euphoria, all that idealism, all those ideas that video is the answer, I feel bad about, because people have died. It doesn't stop suffering. You [. . . read –AJ] a list of things we thought it was going to do. Didn't do any of them. It did them and didn't do them and then—

THEODORE KERR: Right. I think that's more true. I think it did them and there was more to do.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And there was more to do. And any case, so you know—

THEODORE KERR: And video isn't God then. [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Video—well, that is God.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] That's a—God doesn't—

THEODORE KERR: I'm so sorry. I just turned you into a theologian.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I'm not a theologian. God doesn't fix everything. That's not the promise of God, right?

THEODORE KERR: My God, you are a theologian.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] Why I'll say video is my God. It's the same thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Yeah. Also because, in my understanding of God, God is the connection between us all. And what you're suggesting is that video is a way to make profound connections.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Exactly.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. It's a medium.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. And that's, that's literally—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I understand!

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You and I are making eye contact. I understand!

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You can use the word God if you want. I will just use the word video. It's the same set of processes and beliefs. To me, it's about culture. You know, I don't look to an invisible thing I can't see. I look to what's in front of me. But I find the same things you look to, if God is—if you think of God as something you can't see. It's the same set of questions and even the same set of answers probably.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But I find them in my culture. I find them in my present. That's probably very Jewish of me, even though I'm not educated as a Jew in that sense. [00:56:00]

Anyway, I—*We Care* is initially an activist video project that I do in response to my questions that we talked about last time about power, and what it means to represent somebody else. So the power of video—so that's a negative critique of video. The power of the camera, the power of representation—even as access was expanding, I was realizing that there's still these sort of formative power structures in place that are around all the formative power structures. Age, class, race, sexuality. So I was trying imagine a more liberatory model for video-making than, than telling somebody else's story. And it takes me a while. It's an activist project. How does a white, young, HIV-negative woman getting a graduate degree represent the most important stories about women and AIDS, which are stories about working-class and poor urban women of color?

So I invent a model, not on my own. Again, I'm in graduate school, learning about other collectivist projects, learning about other community-based projects, learning about ethnographic film, which at that point is taking a turn towards committed documentary and participatory practices. And I invent, as an educated person, this model where we're going to think about women and AIDS and people of color, women who are people of color and AIDS. We're going to do it embedded in the community, [00:58:00] in a durational experience where there's a professional who can talk to people about their emotions, their feelings, their trauma. I'm the professional video person.

And we're going to collectively produce materials that will be useful for that community, always knowing that the conversation, that the coming into voice, that the learning from each other—that collective expression is as much of what I'm interested in as any video that we produce, especially because the videos we produce may be quote-unquote bad. And I really have a lot of work about bad video. When I say something's bad, I don't mean it's bad in a negative sense. It's a descriptor to talk about a set of visual and formal practices that register not as dominant, or normative, or mainstream. And remember, that's the place I always like to be. So, bad, for me, bad is good. But given that the work might not be very quote-unquote good, the work is actually being together in conversation about AIDS and everything else AIDS reveals.

And that's what—you know, we make *We Care*. That's the collective group, WAVE—Women's AIDS Video Enterprise—which is sponsored by Brooklyn AIDS Task Force, and is allowed by a grant. The largest grant I've ever gotten [laughs], by the way.

THEODORE KERR: To date?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I think so. From the New York Council for the Humanities. That's right. Shepherded by Coco Fusco, who—that was her day job at that time. And I think it's $20,000—maybe it's $25,000—to run an AIDS video support group, embedded in the community-based AIDS service organization. And I go to BATF with the grant in hand and say, [01:00:00] "Would you be willing to sponsor this? I have the money." This is something that those of us who work with nonprofit organizations and community-based organizations know: We don't want to enter as a drain. We don't want to enter taking from—we always do take from the hard work they've done embedded in community, but you enter offering. You enter humbly offering, knowing that the AIDS service organization has done all the hard work. You have something to bring. And then it's a collaboration at that point. That's how I enter Brooklyn AIDS Task Force, working with Yannick Durand, who was running it at the time. She herself had already made several important AIDS videos. She had made *Mildred Pearson: When You Love A Person*. She had worked for AIDS Films. She was thinking about video as an activist and within her community.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. As a strategy and a tool.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: As the strategy and tool. Better than pamphlets. Way better than pamphlets.

And she was open to it and then provided me the space, and provided me the social worker. That's Marcia Edwards.

THEODORE KERR: Marcia Edwards.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And then they did the outreach in their community to produce the group. And the group was people who had made it clear to them that they wanted already [. . . –AJ] to be active. So they found the group. And then I get my incredible cohort of colleagues and friends and collaborators. There's no way I could have chosen. I wasn't embedded in that community. I don't live in that neighborhood. I'm not a black woman. Women in my group were black and Latina. Would never have happened without placing it—and, you know, there was ambivalence, believe me, on BATF's part. Always is when an outsider arrives with a project.

But that's *We Care*. And we make several videos.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And [01:02:00] I mean, echoing you, I think what's interesting is the process of how those videos are made. So—

[END OF JUHASZ17_1OF1_TRACK4.]

THEODORE KERR: —I see pictures of you all in a room. That room is at Brooklyn AIDS Task Force?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And you're meeting like, once a week?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I think so. Either once a week or once a month. I think once a week for six months. Different people come. I did journal then and I write about it in the book, there was one meeting when no one

came. That was really hard. I mean, working in community, working in disenfranchised communities where money is really always the biggest obstacle, there's just so many reasons why people can't come to do an art project.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And those reasons were very live. And that's—this kind of work, the work that I did to make *We Care*, can't do it all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's too hard.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, for all of us. When you're working at the real cusp of access, you know, why people don't have access to the full integrity of their voice, you're always working—you're first working through people who don't feel entitled to that voice, who don't feel authorized to speak. And then you have—then you're traveling through illness, hunger, people who are sick and their family, other—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Transportation.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Transportation. That people have to work. You know, there's all these other obstacles between you and making art. But the first one was coming into voice and feeling permitted. And then all the other stuff. So it's just really hard to produce work from that space.

THEODORE KERR: Which makes the self-portraits from WAVE that much more amazing. It seems like that was—using the strategy of video, but also using the tool [00:02:00] of—I don't know if it's a tool or a strategy—of knowing that people want to share about themselves. And that actually to be in that room together you had to create a bond based on who you were, not—like, that was the great equalizer. Everyone viewed themselves on video.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That is the great equalizer. And that project you're talking about is *WAVE: Self-Portraits*. It's one of the first things we made as a group, before we ever made *We Care. We Care* comes at the end, when we know each other well enough and can figure like, what do we have to say as a group? Like what do we all have in common? But we can't know that until we've done a bunch of other projects and exercises.

WAVE: Self-Portraits is a self-portrait by each one of the women in the group, who are very different from each other, who approach that project with their own tastes in place. Tastes for media, tastes for storytelling.

I think that's the other thing that's really hard to understand if you see *WAVE: Self-Portraits*, is like, again, today, everyone has access to a camera. Everyone has access to video. It's not outrageous and unheard of to see yourself on a screen in that way, which it really was then. It was just unimaginable that a regular person would find themselves on a television monitor just through—it was really transformative, and powerful, and scary. It's sort of not, now. I mean, there's a tiny taste of it still, the tiniest taste. Like, you can produce the context where it will still feel liberating, revolutionary, but mostly it's not. So to ask somebody to be on television was a huge ask. It was a huge leap of faith.

THEODORE KERR: And to make it themselves.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And to make it themselves. Right. Not just to be on it. Both.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. I agree.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was scary. And it was—

THEODORE KERR: [00:04:00] Intimidating?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, I mean, yeah. And also, you know, really honoring. You know? Deeply honoring, which it isn't now. It's become too—

THEODORE KERR: There's an expectation now, whereas I don't think that—there's an expectation that one will be in media.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In media. Exactly.

THEODORE KERR: Whereas, I mean, that's why those self-portraits are amazing. There's like—there's kind of

literary tropes one could argue, but there's no—there hasn't been time for there to be video tropes. And so the women, you all are really making it up.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And referring to things that they're familiar with already, too, I think. That's important to understand. You know, some of them are more inventive than others, for sure. Like Juanita Mohammed is simply, always was, always will be, a magnificent artist. I meet her through WAVE, but she's one of my long-time collaborators. I work with her to this day, done lots of projects with her. She had already gone to art school. She didn't finish. She's an artist, so she enters that project with, you know, the fully realized set of creative desires. So hers is very imaginative in format. Some of the others from the group—I'm not saying this in a denigrating way, just a descriptive way—look like a family slide show or—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Which is a genre, too.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It is. That's what I'm saying.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Exactly.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So they're referring to things they know. Sharon Penceal's piece is a complicated piece of video making that merges—she interviews people in her family. I shoot some of it with her out on the beach, because she lets me know that that's a really important place for her. So it mixes these interviews with these sort of landscapes, her and the landscape. That one was very beautiful.

You know, Aida Matta, [00:06:00] I would go and help her with it. Like it's just not something she's going to be ready to do on her own. So that's primarily just an interview with her, with me. I don't think we even cut away to anything. I think it's a long-take interview in her house and then outside.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. With her kid?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: With her kid, yeah. And she's not really ready to conceive of a structure, but she wants to be on camera. You know, Glenda Hasty, she interviews all these people that she knows, about who she is. That one's very lovely. And again, in that—I don't know how legible it is now, but one of the theories of WAVE that was put into practice is that the daily life of working-class, poor, and middle-class black people was not seen. And Latinas. At all. So I'm saying, like, video is a radical form because you can see things that are live in our culture that have never been represented, period and stop. That's the thing I think that, again, like it's hard to understand now, because everything's represented.

THEODORE KERR: Right. I would say also the thing that's fascinating is that it leapfrogs a middleman. It leapfrogs, like, being mediated by mainstream. So it goes from not being represented to being represented by the people living it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. That's the theory. And the practice.

THEODORE KERR: So that's very exciting. I mean, that's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right. So when you see—that's why in *We Care*, the most beloved scene to me, and to history so far, is [00:08:00] Marie showing her apartment. Marie, who is, only we learn with retrospect, the partner of Sharon Penceal, who is in—that is, the lesbian partner of Sharon Penceal, who's in WAVE. The long tour of her home. That has recently shown at the *AIDS at Home* art show, curated by—

THEODORE KERR: Stephen Vider?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Stephen Vider. Because it's so—we talked about the quote from before. It's so purposeful and truthful [laughs] in its reality-based rendering of like, "Here's where I live. Here's my house. Let me show you, you know, my cups. Let me show you my cabinets. Let me show you my bathroom. Let me show you in real time"—that's what she literally says—"nothing has changed. Everything's the same as before. Here's what my house looks like. I'm a woman with HIV."

She was, I do believe, the first African American woman with HIV to expose herself publicly on camera, video. It was an incredibly dangerous thing to do. She was endangered by it.

THEODORE KERR: What does that mean?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: She's outed by it. She outed herself.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: People still don't want to be outed with HIV.

THEODORE KERR: No, I know. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: People at that time lost their jobs, lost their apartments, lost their friends, lost their family.

THEODORE KERR: Was there an impact on her?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I detail it in the book. I'm happy to share it. It's, you know, one of the negative [00:10:00] costs of making video. It's where power raises its ugly head, even when you try for it not to. Some people are impacted. Some people go home.

THEODORE KERR: I think the thing about that video that's really powerful is what she illustrates as like—she talks about like she had separate cups. She has—and any moment that you think could be about HIV, isn't. It's actually just who she is as a person and her kind of hygiene regimen. Like she says, "Nothing's changed." She had a hygiene regimen before. She didn't like sharing towels—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: "My cup is my cup. My glass is my glass."

THEODORE KERR: Yes. She didn't like sharing towels before.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: "It's been this way for years." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And I think that is—that's a remarkable aspect of that video, is that you're seeing a portrait of a person—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Which is what—

THEODORE KERR: —in her idiosyncrasies. And that HIV is a layer on top of that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, one small layer. But, you know, so much of that early moving into representation, the first round of representation, that work which I have been lucky enough to be a participant in in AIDS, and also in black lesbian representation with *Watermelon Woman*, and also in my film, *Dear Gabe*—lesbian family, and queer family. A lot of what you're trying to do is like, "Hey, we're just people, and this is the theme. And the theme is in the background." That's the first wave of any representational politics, and you hope to get past it. But it's like, "Oh, just, you know, we're queer family and all we do is eat dinner." Like, it's sort of weird that you have to do that. And you have to do it over and over again. Like, that's what trans work is like now. "Yup. You know, just people walking down the street, having dinner, you know."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. "We're just a family in Los Angeles."

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: "Just a family in Los Angeles." It's weird. Like every political group has to crack through that before you can even do anything else. And that's what that tour is. You're absolutely right. But it comes always—

THEODORE KERR: —with a cost.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: With a cost. Because representation comes with a cost.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:12:00] Visibility comes with a cost.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's the same as representation. And that's why it's always activist. So, you know, to think that activism is just marching in the streets and that vulnerability, well, okay. That's one form. And to will yourself into self-representation—hard for people who've been denied the integrity of their own voice. And then to make it public is an activist act if you're already threatened in the being of yourself.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because you're HIV-positive, because you're a black woman, because you're trans, because you're, you know, whatever is—

THEODORE KERR: Living in poverty. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —debased and misunderstood in our society. Yes. It's political. And to be political is to be willing to carry that cost, which is the cost of—can be very high. Imprisonment.

THEODORE KERR: Isolation.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Isolation. Censorship. Misunderstanding.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Removal of material goods. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Depending on—so that's where AIDS art and activism always align, because the artist who works about AIDS, as long as AIDS is understood as marginal and different, potentially carries the cost of lash-back. [Laughs.] There's a different word for that. It's not lash-back.

THEODORE KERR: I'm going to pause this for a second.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay.

[Audio break.]

THEODORE KERR: One thing that I'm curious about is—maybe this is—yeah, is what—can you tell me about a time when you're in that room with WAVE and there's silence? Like, do you remember any moment where you're just sitting there?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That room was [00:14:00] very difficult. So I talked about ACT UP as being difficult. The history of WAVE and our interactions together is—there's all kinds of rooms. But a lot of it for me is mobilized around my attempt to manage my power and difference sort of actively and honestly, and humbly, and with integrity. And one of the things we haven't talked about, although it's—this is like point on, but it organizes this, our conversation and things I said—is people interact, and collaborate, and speak, and engage, and make art, and make community, across racial difference, very infrequently in this culture. It's hard to do. And it's painful. And it's scary. I mean, that divide is really hard to cross.

You know, Avram wants to talk about the sero-divide. Hard to cross. We've talked about lesbians and gay men. Hard to cross. I don't know. Lesbian separatists and everyone else. Hard to cross. Class. Hard to cross. Race is really hard, in America maybe the hardest. And I'm very self-aware of being the only white person in a room of women of color, all of whom are older than me. And they're very aware of me. And we spent a lot of time [00:16:00] trying to work that out.

THEODORE KERR: Like, on the surface?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And so there's a lot of silence. Both.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know, naming it and not naming it. Naming it and misnaming it. There's a lot of silence that I remember around my designated authority, my wish to strip myself of that authority. That is, the authority of really being a white woman, but also the person whose project it is, whose person whose camera it is, whose person's money is mine. That is, I got it, the grant. The person who's the most highly educated, although not entirely at that point, but just to be very clear, Marcia Edwards is a social worker. She has a master's degree. At that time, I have a master's degree. Glenda Hasty maybe does, or goes on to, have a master's degree. I mean, there's other highly educated women in that group. Juanita has a job and is making way more money than I am, you know, at that time. She works for the city as a social worker.

So like, race trumps in a lot of ways. That's what I'm trying to say. And as white people, we can know that. That doesn't mean that we can manage its violence and ominous weight well. So there's a lot of silence, I think, in my memory around that. And *We Care* is [00:18:00] an attempt to share and diffuse power in a video landscape and in the AIDS landscape. That's the collectivist model. That's the model of sharing video-making, video voice, video agency, AIDS voice, AIDS agency, AIDS expertise, across a group of people and saying, "I'm one in a collective." That's why there's that model. But you never make your whiteness go away. And that in itself is a false move. You never make your HIV seronegativity go away. That in itself is a false move, has a kind of violence, too. So it's like how do you keep it present in the room without it taking over the room? And there was silence around that.

There was silence around other things, too. There was a lot of loss experienced by women in the group. People died while we were making the group. So I remember mourning, the silence of mourning. Somebody's family member had died several times during the making of that video. And then, interestingly, since you raised the question, there were silences about things people didn't say truthfully to each other. So you know, when we talk about truth in video, even where we started, every truth has secrets. Every truth is partial. Every truth hides other truths. So you know, as an example, I don't believe I've outed Sharon Penceal, because I think that happens later. But Sharon never told us that she was a lesbian. She told us that Marie was her friend. Never said

it. So there's a [00:20:00] silence, even though we were talking. I believe there were members of the group who were HIV-positive. Nobody said that to me then. It's something that Juanita and I have talked about now, 30 years later. You know? And that's a silence.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And it's a meaningful silence within a—it wasn't a consciousness-raising group, but within a group centered around HIV video and activism.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And honesty.

THEODORE KERR: And honesty.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's like, honesty—you know, people always have their limits. I mean, this is about both trauma and danger.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And processes have limits.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And you have to honor that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So those are silences I remember. And there was a lot of talking. And a lot of love, and chattering, and, you know, gossiping, and—part of why I think really good video-making of this sort needs to take time is that it takes time to get to that place with people. And we have so little time to do anything right now as a culture, as artists, as anybody.

THEODORE KERR: Did you say right now?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So, you know, like you can get past my whiteness if you get to know me well enough. You don't get—it doesn't go away, but it just becomes, like, one feature of me, like my HIV, like my lesbianism, like whatever. Just like those videos were talking about. It's like, "Okay, yeah, she's white and she also likes to eat oranges and, you know, talks too much," or, you know, whatever it is. So, enough time, your whiteness can become an attribute among many in a room of people who understand many of your attributes. It doesn't go away. It just isn't the only attribute. It isn't the dominant attribute. And that group that was so much about thinking about changing power, moving power, sharing power, was about giving all of us enough time together to [00:22:00] recognize and honor each other's most important attributes.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. One of the things you name as a quality of activist video in the book is that it is watched, stopped, and discussed. I think that's such an important thing to talk about. I mean, you write about it in the book. We've talked about it in our own writing, but I think it's good to get into this tape. The process of video isn't just about the process of making the video. It's also the process of distribution, which you've talked about. But it's also the process of, "How do you watch it?"

And I wonder if you can think of an example of a time where you watched something from WAVE in an activist setting. We know that it circulated in the art world, and that's important, but—wait, what does that face mean?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, I don't think that it's important that it circulated in the art world in this moment. But yeah, sure. Okay.

THEODORE KERR: Right. I don't think it's—yeah. I agree.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: I'm being—yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: But can you think of a time where you watched it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. So I mean, one of the grants we got—we got a NYSCA distribution grant—I said this already—to send it off for free. But part of that grant was to pay the women in the group $50 dollars every time they took it anywhere, and show it in their community. So I didn't go to a lot of those screenings because

women in the group were taking it to their church groups and—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But I did go to one, now that you're reminding me, that Juanita did, I think, in a shelter of some sort. I don't remember what kind of [00:24:00] shelter. That's an activist screening. That's what you mean, right?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. That's exactly what I mean.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: People in—somehow, maybe a treatment center.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like a day treatment center where people—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —like, sign in at 7:00—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: —and then they get meals, and they get their medication, but there's also activities provided.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. It was an activity. That's where we showed. And, you know, there was six people. Some people wafted in. Some people wafted out. Some people stayed you know, focused like a beeline. And then we talked about it. That's what that tape was for.

THEODORE KERR: And that's what's really—you know, we've talked about this. But that's what can be really hard to understand, is like, the intended uses of these videos.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's a purpose, is—the process—the talking after replicates the talking during. It's the same. So the video-making—what did I say? It's the excuse.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. To bring—to be in the room.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And the video-watching is the same excuse. It's an excuse to be together with a focus and a purpose.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And historically we've used the word "trigger." And you taught me that word in relationship to that. But I also think of it as a catalyst.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. A catalyst. So that's a lot of why we make activist art. You know, there's rationale for making other kinds of art that's noble, but you make activist art to [begin a –AJ] catalyzed action. And one of those actions is talking. And if you're talking about vulnerable communities, disenfranchised communities, communities whose access to the authority of their own voice, the integrity of their own voice, is [00:26:00] diminished and troubled by the larger culture, conversation itself—where their expertise and authority, like you said about mine just being a daily person who experiences AIDS, is relevant, is honored, is the process of watching—happens afterwards if you talk. It's like, "You know a lot about AIDS, as much as these women on the tape. Those women on the tape look a lot like you, which authorizes you to know that your experience is also an expertise." So that's what would happen in those kinds of screenings. And that's why we made that tape. And that's why the theory of community-based media being the best sort of educational materials, you know, is, as far as I'm concerned, absolutely and completely true.

A didactic outsider, judgmental, saying—you know, whatever their tone is—everyone knows what that is. It's bull, you know, you hold it with a grain of salt, and you put your hand up and you say, "No, thank you." Or, "Sure. Thanks so much." You roll your eyes. It's very different when people look and sound like you and they're talking to you, because they care enough to make that effort.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And what's also interesting is that the process of making the video to some degree is recorded, or is captured to a degree. The video becomes like a—is proof that the process happened. But that doesn't happen on the other end. There isn't always a capturing of the discussion that happened afterwards.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's right.

THEODORE KERR: That's action maybe, or that's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's right.

THEODORE KERR: That's change that we can't measure.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's right.

THEODORE KERR: And that's kind of exciting.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's one of the reasons I like video, though.

THEODORE KERR: Because why?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because it's proof that the change occurred. And it inspires [00:28:00] change that is more ephemeral.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah. That's a nice equation. In the rooms that WAVE was in, were you bringing in your loss and your silences and your grief? Like were you talking about Jim in that room? Or were you talking about other friends that you had that were living with HIV in that room?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. For sure. I mean, they knew Jim. Jim knew them. We had the final screening of the video in our house on Attorney Street. There's pictures of that. It's really nice.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. Amazing.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Saw those recently. Yeah. They knew him. He knew them. You know, he was my sidekick. He worked on most things I worked on. I forget exactly what he did with WAVE, but he was present to them. That was a really nice party. Everyone came with their families, a lot of people in our apartment. We had a potluck of some sort. There were a lot of children there. I mean, and again, Jim and I are in our 20s. We don't know anyone with children. Like bohemian, whatever we were, East Village kids. And then all these kids were in our apartment. It was nice. A lot of the women—I think almost all of them had kids. We didn't know people who had kids. Most of them were the same age as me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They were there at the party.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's really a beautiful scene if I picture it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. It was really nice.

THEODORE KERR: You know, it gives a—yeah. Okay. I feel like we've covered WAVE. Do you feel like we've covered WAVE?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Do you feel like we've covered the book or is there more you want to say about the book?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. I mean—no.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Well, we'll probably keep talking about it, but it seems like we have to make a transition. It seems like a stage of your life—you know, transitions are often not clear when we're in them. We just find ourselves in a new stage of life and it's never—but I'm curious. Like in your own self-organizing story of Alex, like what's [00:30:00] life after WAVE, and after Jim, and after the book?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, it's very clear. There's a clear break. I even mentioned it earlier. I become a professional adult. At the age of 27, I move to Philadelphia to start—I graduate with a PhD and immediately get a job. I become a professor at the age of 27. Do not recommend that to anybody. I'm too young. There's no reason to become a professional [laughs] person as a young person. You know, five years later, I'm teaching and I have been ever since. So I move to Philadelphia. I have a boyfriend. I live with my boyfriend. I leave Jim. Jim is dying. I finish this after Jim dies. But it's, you know—I've done the dissertation, and become a professional professor. The next year, I make an AIDS video, which I think is a really good AIDS video. I don't know if you've ever seen it.

THEODORE KERR: What is it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's called, *Safer and Sexier: A College Student's Guide to Safer Sex*.

THEODORE KERR: No. I've only read about it. I haven't seen it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's good. So I continue my AIDS activism. I'm no longer in New York City. I'm no longer in

the scene. I'm no—you know, now I'm this lady professor living in Philly and left New York City. I'm living in a suburban apartment, in a mansion. You know, college and mansion with my boyfriend. So it's a huge shift. And I do this project at Swarthmore, which I think is a really great video and a great video project. So I'm happy to talk about that. *Safer and Sexier*. It's a collective project.

THEODORE KERR: With who?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: College students.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [00:32:00] So I teach—I'm there for four years. I teach an AIDS class. And in that AIDS class, I meet these young, very smart, budding activists where I'm—AIDS is at that point a thing that people would be activists about on their own campuses. So they are involved in a variety of campus-based AIDS organizing. And I'm—start teaching an AIDS class. I must meet some of them there, but some of the kids who joined this collective aren't in my AIDS class.

THEODORE KERR: And the AIDS class is multi-dis?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's about AIDS representation.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I've taught that class—taught it then. And I think I've only ever taught it one other time. Maybe 20 years later, in Claremont, I taught it one other time. It's not something I've taught a bunch of times.

THEODORE KERR: Do you have that syllabus still?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I do.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, my God. I—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I have two versions of it.

THEODORE KERR: I think you should share it with—when we put this in, you should put the syllabus in.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Sure.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I also taught a class my first semester there, called *Visible Symptoms*, which looked at AIDS and other forms of representing illness, and several illnesses. And AIDS was sort of the end of it. So it's where I sort of, as a young college professor, was still working through my AIDS stuff.

But the activist group that made *Safer and Sexier* was an extracurricular group. It was a group that met after hours as part of their own activism. I don't know if I founded it or if I joined it. I don't remember that part, but we decided to make a video, because, you know, you make [laughs]—I make videos. You make videos. And they wanted to make a—well, the theory we were just saying [00:34:00]—a video about how to have, and why to have, and how to think about safer sex, for college students. So not for urban women of color. Not for gay men in the city. And we made that video, and we distributed it widely. Widely, for free and—or at cost, for free or maybe at cost. It was funded by a small grant from Swarthmore College. I mean, we sent out hundreds of them. People still have seen that and talk to me about it.

It was very much the idea that I just said. It has to be embedded in the vernacular and what sounds right, the right music, the right clothes, the way you talk, how you have sex, how you think about sex that would make sense for college students. And we thought college students needed that more than anyone because they thought that they were somehow outside of the crisis because—or outside of HIV—because they were guarded by their class, and their age, and their you know, just that they don't live in a big city.

It's a smart video. And a lot of the people that I met from that video and from that time in my life. So I was 27. They were 22.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know?

THEODORE KERR: That's not that big of a difference.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: None now.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They've all gone on to have careers in healthcare, and health activism, a bunch of them. And I'm in touch with a bunch of them because it's from—I was young enough that I bonded with my students in that way.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And that making—I mean, as your history also says, that making a video is a bonding experience. Or can be.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Doing it collaboratively with an activist bent. Absolutely. That video [laughs]—it's really smart.

THEODORE KERR: Were you going to say it was controversial?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was controversial, in some ways. Sarah Adams, who has gone on to get—I think she has—she's a doctor and an MPH. She lives here in [00:36:00] New York City. I've seen her recently. You know, an activist medical professional, does the safer sex work, educational spiel, which she's inherited from *Women and AIDS* and other ideas that I have coming from New York, where she doesn't [laughs]—she only talks about sex practices. She doesn't talk about people or feelings. So she's like, "If you have sex with a penis"—and she [laughs] says it like that—"you should use"—and that's what people found most controversial. It's like, Christians and other sensitive people were like, "You can't talk about sex without talking about, one, the gender of the person, and two, love."

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And so when we distributed it to college campuses, we got it back from people who are like, "You can't—this is—the way you're talking about sex"—so it was the overtness, was a piece of it. But it was the denuding of sexuality, as an activist tactic, from all the context of sex, which people found wildly offensive. And then there's also a piece of that video where we talk about not having sex as an option. So it's really early because people now talk about that all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Abstinence.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Asexuality.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, asexuality, which is different than abstinence.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. It's not abstinence. Asexuality is a sexual choice. We have a whole section on that. And we show—we made the decision to show putting a condom on a real penis, not on a banana. So that was in response to a lot of what had been in video to that point, and that we thought that when you show people who've never had sex how to put a condom on a banana, it's really quite obscuring, because penises really aren't like bananas.

And so there was a young couple that we knew who—a straight couple who they—

THEODORE KERR: They did that. [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —got his penis hard and they did that in the [00:38:00] context of lovemaking and showed [how –AJ] to put an actual condom on a penis. That's a scene in the—

THEODORE KERR: And that wasn't more controversial on campus? Because, you know, it would—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That was controversial, too.

THEODORE KERR: With Title IX, you can imagine that that would not be possible now.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Not now. No, no, no.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely not. But, yeah, that's in that video. Its production quality values are extremely bad or low. But several of the people who worked on it really were radicalized or helped radicalize the project. So Kenrick Cato, who worked on it, went on to become a—he's a nurse and now he, he does all kinds of medical,

including AIDS, research at Columbia. He was also in the military and worked in the—he's a really interesting man. Megan Cunningham, who worked on that, now runs a huge media production business in New York that came out of her activist commitments from that project. Yeah. It has a staying life. That video has a staying life. It doesn't say anything that isn't true right now. And it's got—it's full of music. It's full of, you know, the music at the moment. Salt-N-Pepa.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Like *Let's Talk About AIDS*? That song?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: *Let's Talk About Sex.*

THEODORE KERR: But they made an AIDS one, too.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. But that was after the fact [laughs], I think.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. That's very exciting, that video.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. It's a sweet video. It culminates—that chapter of my life and AIDS, culminates in two ways. I'm nominated to give a big speech. I'm not nominated, I am chosen to give a big speech for the graduating seniors. They vote for the faculty member they want to give a speech, and you give it to all the [00:40:00] graduating students and their parents. And it's a big honor. And my fellow professors are disgruntled because I'm so young and like, where have I come from? I'm new. You know, no one can figure out why I'm so popular, and it's a big honor. And I decide that it's an activist moment. So I give a [laughs] safe sex speech at it, and an AIDS activist speech, and actually show how to use a condom [laughs] and a dental dam to all these parents. And they're—

THEODORE KERR: And this is around graduation.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And it's—I don't know. So I've been in Swarthmore. It's part of me trying to make sense of you know, being in the hinterlands and not out engaged in activist communities and saying that activism should happen everywhere. So I'm giving it to college seniors at Swarthmore College and their hoity-toity parents.

THEODORE KERR: And the response?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Intense. So, weirdly, it gets covered by the *Chronicle of Education.* I think the reporter was probably just there. So there's a thing about it, public—it's the first time I'm in the press. You know, "Professor gives radical address—safe sex [laughs] address to conservative, uptight parents."

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Almost everybody was positive and enthusiastic. I was, like, breaking through. Like that was early AIDS activism. It was like, "This is the place to talk about graduating from college? No. It's a place to talk about safe sex because we have to talk about safe sex everywhere. You don't want to hear me talk graphically about sex? I don't care. Everyone needs to hear that because you're all having sex. You don't you don't want to hear about someone's sexuality?" Remember, this is before queer anything. "I'm sorry. That's not appropriate in a time when people are dying, and yet young people in this audience are going to live their lives actually now remembering the speech. My friend just died. I'm telling you because people die of this. And I don't care that it's embarrassing to you." So, you know what, that was a curing from Jim, now that I'm remembering it.

THEODORE KERR: [00:42:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was the year he died. And I was like, "There's no place where I'm not going to talk about this, because I don't want people—when I graduated from college, I graduated with my friend, Jim, and he was 18 then. Then 22. And now he's dead. And so I don't care if it ruffles your feathers."

THEODORE KERR: Right. Because it's in the room, it's live anyway, so just name it?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It wasn't a room, there was thousands of people.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. This is you not hearing. You couldn't talk—you didn't talk about homosexuality in public then.

THEODORE KERR: You know I understand that fully.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: I fully get that. That's what I'm saying. Like stuff that wasn't talked about when you and Jim were graduating, but was present. You were going to talk about it because it's still present. And so that—you're not going to inherit the silence.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Correct.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, I'm going to break the silence every chance I—that's like, you know, felt like—it felt radical. That was so not what you were supposed to talk about at a graduation event.

THEODORE KERR: Right. It's supposed to be making people feel safe, and good, and future-oriented.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: "Goodbye." And so I'm like, "You know what I'm going to wish you? Have safe sex. And your parents can hear it, too. They should have—you should have safe sex, also." This is also about women and AIDS. This is also about saying you don't just talk about it in gay spaces and to gay men. You talk about it to everybody who's sexual. It's pertinent. It's live. It's probably not even in the room because no one here has thought about the fact that it's relevant to them. That's AIDS activism that didn't work because straight people [laughs] and women didn't hear. It stayed—this is something we spend a lot of time talking about—you know, in the purview of gay men and poor people of color.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It was owned by those voices and live in those spaces. And at least at that time, at that moment, finishing that film, Jim dying, me feeling outside of my activist roots, I was doing it elsewhere.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And it just so happened that's also—that was needed, too.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, of course it was, but—and taking the public platform and twisting it to make it include AIDS, which was always in the room and never noticed. Like also thinking about what we were saying about it not being seen now.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And was that your life for the next few years? Like was that your life as you went from Philadelphia and then—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, the other thing that happened in Philadelphia is that I became involved with Cheryl Dunye, who was my first significant life adult partner after Scott, who I was living with in Philadelphia. You asked me last time, did Scott come to the Ridiculous? He did not, because we broke up around the time of Jim's death. So he was not capable of being there for me. And I say this only with fondness, not in an angry way. It was just too big a loss. And we broke up right around the time of his death. And then he was gone. So that's why he wasn't at that event. And then I met Cheryl pretty quickly after.

THEODORE KERR: In community?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. My friend, Robert Reid-Pharr, introduced us. And Robert, who I've done some AIDS work with since, very close friend of mine. He was a professor with me at Swarthmore. He had a post-doc and I was a young professor. And he introduced me to Cheryl socially. So in that time in my life, I adapted and converted, [laughs] and transitioned, and chose to be engaged in a lesbian relationship, which was a very profound influence on everything I did afterwards. [00:46:00] Being a lesbian, and the relationship with an African American lesbian. So a lot of my thinking about cross-race experience comes out of that relationship and work that we did as a couple, and work we did as artists, and we had children together. We have a black child. You know, I've enmeshed myself. A lot of my work is around those issues of interracial experience and representation of politics because of that relationship.

In my relationship with Cheryl, one of the major things we did was make a film called *The Watermelon Woman*, which in my mind is a direct beneficiary of AIDS activist media. So it's a well-known film within what's called the New Queer Cinema. And the New Queer Cinema is directly related to AIDS activist video. Its first iterations were by gay men, gay white men, who were coming into their voice through AIDS activism as artists, and into their voice in community, their theory about living in the world. *The Watermelon Woman* comes after the first iterations by gay white men, because of course, women and people of color come next always. And ours is the first black lesbian film ever made. It is inspired, and initiated, and activated by the movement towards gay and lesbian self-representation, which follows AIDS self-representation, because AIDS cracks it open and allows for queerness, and ultimately allows for *Watermelon Woman*.

But we all met each other, and found each other, and fell in love with each other, and figured out ideas [00:48:00] about self-representation, and community representation, in dialogue first around AIDS. We, that is,

the people who invented New Queer Cinema and made New Queer Cinema. So, you know, my cohort in that regard are Tom Kalin, and Todd Haynes, and Lyle Ashton Harris and Thomas Allen Harris, and Marlon Riggs, and Isaac Julien, and Rose Troche, and Guin [Guinevere] Turner. We all know each other through AIDS activism in New York. And then it's global. Marlon Riggs is in San Francisco. Isaac Julien is in London. I haven't remembered everybody, but you understand—

THEODORE KERR: Sure. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —the cohort that I'm drawing. We all knew each other first through AIDS. Pratibha Parmar. This is a constellation of queerness, of gay-and-lesbian-ness that becomes queerness, that is inflected by an intersectional critique around race, racism, gender. Everyone in that group, new queer cinema, is thinking about that initially through AIDS, and knows each other through AIDS, and knows each other's work through AIDS. Gregg Bordowitz. He doesn't do New Queer Cinema, we're learning from him, our conversation with him. Catherine Saalfield doesn't do new queer cinema, quote-unquote. I'm saying that in quotes, but you know, like—or Maria Maggenti. I mean, you know, it's a small group of people who make—Alex Sichel—who make the first queer cinema. We all know each other from activist AIDS worlds.

THEODORE KERR: And why is that important?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: You know why, because that's all we're talking about. It's the theme that brings us [00:50:00] to the reckoning with our own power and lack of power, with our own agency and lack of agency, with our own voice and lack of voice, with our own victimization and rebellion against victimization, that has to do with larger structures that we are going to topple. AIDS is where we start to have those conversations, to find each other, and gain power, seed our own power. And then it—Ellen Spiro is another person. It seeds Ray Navarro. It seeds more activity in other forum, other fields, other problems, but we first meet as an age cohort, as a cultural cohort, as an activist cohort having conversations about AIDS. Christine Vachon. I mean [laughs], I can go on.

These people go on to become major cultural producers. Queer, all of us. Some of us end up straight. Some of us don't. Some of us end up lesbian. Some of us become trans. I mean, whatever. We start as gays and lesbians, become queers. We're talking about AIDS. And race, and racism, sexuality, and gender are very live in how we can think about a cultural response to AIDS.

And then Cheryl and I make *The Watermelon Woman* out of that. Zoe Leonard makes *The Watermelon Woman* with us. I mean, again, like—all of the major—my friends who I continue to collaborate and learn from, and think with, and make [00:52:00] culture with, and make worlds with, I meet either literally through AIDS or through the social worlds, and cultural worlds, and worlds of ideas, and worlds of best practices that we invent together.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There's also like the imprint. The argument is also that the imprint of AIDS is all over the cultural landscape of the United States and then beyond. So like, if we're going to look at the generation of creators that you're speaking about, it's also future readers and listeners are wise to understand that part of that core DNA is the political, cultural, personal reckoning of HIV/AIDS.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. But so I think what's important about the list that I suggest to you is that we—that wasn't a quiet reckoning with AIDS or an unknown reckoning with AIDS. It was an overt, named, explicit, political, dangerous reckoning with AIDS, which gays and lesbians—who became known as queer people, even those of us who are or were straight—took on with risk. Everyone in the society—that's me talking to the uptight, bourgeois, rich, white, WASP-y parents at Swarthmore, and the students. Everyone in society's impacted by AIDS. Was, still are.

We made it live and loud in the room. That *Silence = Death*, we all believe it. So what that you made a big stinking shit in the middle of the room? That's what you had to do. You had to name it. You had to show it. You had to offend. You had to take risks. You had to push—that's what *Safer and Sexier* does. That's why it's so overt. It's like, this is overt. It's not a quiet reckoning. It's an overt, loud, impolite, [00:54:00] unexpected, necessary reckoning that changes anyone who's willing to take that risk moving forward, even if they stop reckoning with AIDS overtly, which much of my generation does. Everyone else is quiet about it. It's there when you're having sex, and having safe sex, or not having safe sex, when people you know are dying, when you yourself are sick. I mean, it's there.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Or even when—because of the introduction of medication, the physical force of death and illness seems less apparent. Because of the cultural production, it's still around.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: And that is one of the gifts and the legacies of the cohort that you're speaking about, too. It's like you—maybe you have quote-unquote avoided it in your own life, but you're a part of the world. So it's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't know what "avoided it in your own life" means. You mean avoid contracting HIV?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Or avoid talking about it, or avoid thinking about it, or thinking that it's still outside of you. But then that's the role of culture. Culture's always mirroring that it's not as far as you think. It's not separate from you. It's—yeah.

But I want to talk a little bit about *Watermelon Woman* in relationship to HIV/AIDS a bit more, too. Because now, there's something interesting about what the movie is saying about archives, and what we're starting to try to think through when it comes to the stories around HIV/AIDS. And I wonder if you want to just, like—I mean, when I say that, is that interesting to you at all?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's not not interesting. It's really complicated.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: One of the things that's really complicated about *The Watermelon Woman*, I don't—this one I don't have a pat answer to. I produced *The Watermelon Woman*. Cheryl directed it when we were still young.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. By now you're in your early 30s.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. I'm late 20s.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, you're still in your late 20s. Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [00:56:00] Just kind of can-do spirit. Twenty years later—so it doesn't come out—it comes out in 1996. Twenty years later, I produce its re-master. We re-master it. We re-release it. It travels the world again. It has a big life and culture. It had a big life and culture when we made it actually. Surprising to us, as so-called marginal people, to have that kind of public exposure.

It had another round of that when when I produced it with Marc Smolowitz, its re-release. And then we traveled around the world and talked about it in a lot of places. And everyone's like, "Oh, my God. It's so present. It's just now. We're just talking about archives now. This is like, who knew? So exciting. Like why—it's so ahead of its time." And like that—like, no, we weren't—we're not just talking about archives now. We were talking about it 20 years ago. We weren't inventing it out of, you know, the air, 20 years ago. We were talking about it. Like it's a film that represents its moment. So, no, we're not talking about archives now. We were talking about archives 20 years ago, quite relevantly and not unexpectedly. So I have not been able to figure out, although I've thought a lot about, why everybody says it as a compliment: "Oh, my God. It's so relevant now. This is what we're talking about now." I'm like, "Yes, but we were talking about it then, too, because it came out of then."

THEODORE KERR: I wonder who's saying that it was ahead of its time or—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Everybody.

THEODORE KERR: But I mean, so here's a theory, and we can say it's not true. The film is about a black woman reconciling with—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Black lesbian.

THEODORE KERR: Black lesbian reconciling, or creating, an archive because she feels that there—she knows that there isn't one.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, there's two black women. So there's two black lesbians. There's the actual Cheryl Dunye, who fakes an archive because she needs one. And then there's the character Cheryl who finds an archive that [00:58:00] the real Cheryl fakes for her to find. There's two Cheryls.

THEODORE KERR: There's two Cheryls.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They both need archives. One of them gets to find one. One of them makes one so the other can find it. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And the reason why I think it's—that some people can see it now in a way that they maybe couldn't see it at the time is because a certain amount of people who lived through those early crisis years are now being faced with the archive of HIV/AIDS history, or the lack of archive of HIV/AIDS history. And if you're a white person dealing with HIV/AIDS, it might be the first time that your history isn't easily accessible. It might be the first time that your history isn't like, just part of the normative story of the United States of America. So *Watermelon Woman* provides—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absent archives you mean.

THEODORE KERR: Thank you. And so *Watermelon Woman* provides a cultural production, a blueprint, an example of what to do for people who feel—who are discovering that they may not have an archive.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Missing archives.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. Yeah. But I mean, 20 years ago it was very pertinent to people—black people, lesbians, black lesbians, black queer people who—none of whom had a live archive because of the reasons that we've been talking about so far. Only some people had access to the recording devices that allowed you to mark that activism had occurred. Activism always occurred. Activism in the form of living your radical life, in the form of living your not-radical life as a black person, as a lesbian living your life. Activism daily. Only some people got to record it. Only some people had access to video cameras or cameras. So the access project, getting to make history, the recording project of getting to hold it, and save it, [01:00:00] the archiving project of putting that somewhere and keeping it safe, had been denied most people in the history of the world.

For many of us, our activism was to enter into that conversation at every point, making, saving, holding, sharing, talking about. And that's what *The Watermelon Woman* is about. But it's about it, you know, because it's Cheryl, not me. Because I'm, you know, more didactic. I'm more literal. I'm more all kinds of things. I don't mean it in a—Cheryl's fun and she can make narrative. These are all the kinds of things I can't do. She's playful and she works through these problems in narrative format that's very accessible. So again, like, Cheryl's way more accessible. It's one of her great talents in the way that she renders these very complicated ideas in artful forms, in a way that I'm, you know, often more obscure, more intellectual, more whatever I am. And so that's one of the great gifts of *The Watermelon Woman*. But people recognized it 20 years ago. That's the thing. Maybe new people and different people recognize it also now. But it was very current and important, you know, when it was a film the first time, and felt very on point.

It's just partly that, sadly, those things haven't been solved. So it stays on point. It stays pertinent. It's not newly pertinent. The other reason why people like it, I think, now, is that it's willing to talk about artifice in the archive, artifice and evidence, artifice and truth—which is, again, where we started—that you can talk about truth and the representation of truth that is the truth of our lived experience, the truth of our expertise, the truth of our knowledge, the truth of our [01:02:00] integrity and brilliance and beauty using media—

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ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —without revealing everything [laughs], without knowing everything, without objectivity, you know, without the—which come with brutal power and abuse associated with them. So the artifice of the archive, even as it's very truthful, is very important to people right now as we're thinking about, you know, who—our current archives are all digital.

You know, this is why I work on YouTube. It's a really bad archive owned by corporations. It's a bad archive because it's lawless, and unstructured, and badly tagged, and badly organized. It's impossible to search. It's a bad archive because by making it impossible to search you have to watch ads, you know. It's a corporate archive. So I think people want to think about the artifice of the archive now maybe more so even than they did before, because it's in our face.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that the archive's always been a construct.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: The archive's always been a construct. Now different people own it. And there are different kinds of archives. The digital has allowed for that. But, you know, I—my current work, as I said, started with video. Now it thinks about the Internet. You know, the Internet has become almost entirely a corporate-owned space, corporate-structured space. And anything we do in the name of our liberation using these cameras, video cameras, which I'm so committed to, become owned by corporations who use them to track us, see us, own us, and sell us things. That is—

THEODORE KERR: Sell us.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Sell us ourselves.

THEODORE KERR: But yeah, and just sell us. Like sell us our—right, like, I just bought a MoviePass for—now I can watch movies for $10 a month unlimited. Well, the reason why it's so cheap is because I just gave them access—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yourself.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. So that's never what we had anticipated what we wanted. So I [00:02:00] think that the falsity of the archive, the falsity of Cheryl's archive—it's called the Fae Richards Archive. It's made by Cheryl and Zoe Leonard, the photos. It's very resonant right now.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And—yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And very prescient to what contemporary archives are, which are digital archives.

THEODORE KERR: Right. And important to womanism and other black feminist projects is the idea of like, if you don't have a history, it's actually in your gut and in your capacity to make up the history. Like counter-memory is a valid archive.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. That's the motivating drive, and power, and set of beliefs, core set of beliefs, of that film. That's what we mean by truth. It's like, you don't have to have documented that black lesbians existed, lived in the United States, made movies, were important in culture, were important to each other, for that to be true.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Yeah. There doesn't have to be a picture.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right. There's no correlation between a thing having happened and a picture to verify that it happened. It's just nice to have the record. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Which is why I make video.

THEODORE KERR: For future readers.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.] Yes.

THEODORE KERR: I'm imagining that this was like a new—not a new period—another period of intensity and focus, and in the same that video and HIV, and, you know, finishing the book, and finishing school was an intense period. Now, having children, making this film, building a life with Cheryl became, like, this other kind of, like, hurricane of life.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. That was in Los Angeles.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So we moved to LA. I moved to Los Angeles to get a job at Pitzer, after—well, this is one of those stories that's pat, that Cheryl tells all the time. So [00:04:00] she had been trying to make *The Watermelon Woman*. We had made the photos. No one would bite. There's a longer story about this. She had made another short film. And I said I would produce it if she would move to California with me. So I had already gotten the job [laughs] at Claremont. And I didn't know anything about producing narrative. I'm not interested in narrative, primarily narrative feature films, knew nothing. Neither of us knew any—I mean, Cheryl had made her name for herself making experimental video. Video. Video. And was, you know, a pretty successful young artist. Had had some of her short videos in the Whitney Biennial at that point.

So I produced *The Watermelon Woman* with Barry Swimar, who had produced *Paris Is Burning.* So this is another—you know, this is my community. Jenny Livingston. We're making AIDS culture together and making things that are queer. And then making things later from it. So I move to LA, then Cheryl follows me. And she's editing *The Watermelon Woman* in Philly while I'm living in Claremont. And then she moves to Claremont and we live in Claremont, and then *The Watermelon Woman*, you know, is in the world for a year. We're traveling the world showing it. And then we have children right away after that, pretty much.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So we, we're definitely a couple who like to make things.

[They laugh.]

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So we make *The Watermelon Woman*. Then we make two children.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And this is like, *bam bam bam*?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Pretty much. Yeah. *The Watermelon Woman* finishes. Cheryl has that kind of depletion, "Okay. I did it. Wow. Who knew? Okay." Well, another thing that I always wanted to do is children. Another thing we wanted to do was to have children. And then we sort of figure out how to do that as a lesbian couple. And then there's, you know, a life—

THEODORE KERR: And so life changes again.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Big life in LA, for the two of us and our family, which is a—yes, a big [00:06:00] next chapter of my life.

Video Remains, which is my next AIDS work, I think comes after Cheryl. I think we've ended our relationship at that point. I would have to figure that out, but I'm pretty sure that that's true.

THEODORE KERR: I think one of the many gifts that this interview will give to people is like—so if I—because of my time-based location I see something that I call the Second Silence. But that's not true for you. For example, like AIDS is always—in our conversations, it seems to me that AIDS is always there. There's not a silent period.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. There's a silent period.

THEODORE KERR: There is a silent period.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, totally.

THEODORE KERR: So can you say?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Coming to make *Video Remains* is a clawing out of trauma and silence for me. Absolutely.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. This is brand new to me.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Ted.

THEODORE KERR: No, because I—for me, I see you ask somebody who—like, I imagine that you were—it was in your classrooms. It was—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: It wasn't.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. I don't think so. No. Well, I don't know. I mean, I made *Women of Vision* next. So, you know, I have a big project. It's a book, it's a documentary. That's the next thing I do after *Watermelon Woman.* I do *Video Remains* after that. So I have a big project that's about—

THEODORE KERR: And it's not AIDS-centric.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. It's about feminist film history.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's a 90-minute documentary and a book.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. It's huge.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: So I do that for like five years. I come to *Video Remains* because I'm feeling silenced.

THEODORE KERR: I need you to say what that means.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I felt terrible that I hadn't been working on AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And I didn't want to think about it. [00:08:00] And I didn't have a community. I didn't have a community to think about AIDS in LA. I had left New York. I didn't even know where to go.

THEODORE KERR: So LA was almost an AIDS-less place at this point for you.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. It wasn't almost, it was. And I know it somewhere. I've left Jim. I've left my cohort. I've left New York. I've left ACT UP. I've left Swarthmore. I mean, I'm in LA. Everything—and I—it's lingering. It's on the edge of my world. It's not active. And also it's California, and AIDS is all about the East Coast. And Jim is

dead. It's about Jim's death. That's all the East Coast. He's Amherst. He's New York. He's Philly. I mean, I don't know.

I am on an undergraduate thesis review committee with a photography professor from Scripps named Pato Hebert. And we are reviewing this young person's body of work—I don't remember what it was—in my office. And I've never met this man, I don't know who he is. And I just think he's smart as could be, and I love talking to him, and he's so exciting to me. And you know, maybe this is a little of my fag-haggery. Like he's definitely pushing—I love gay men. He's so just everything that I admire and am drawn to.

And after it's over, I'm like, "Wow. Where did you come from? Who are you? Let's talk." And I mean, you know me. I do this a lot. I do it more and more as I become older, too. I like someone, like, [00:10:00] I want to talk to them and—

THEODORE KERR: Right. Like, why waste time?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —and engage with them. And so we have coffee. And you know, I know nothing about him other than that I just think he's scintillating. You know, very quickly he starts telling me that he does AIDS work. And I'm just blown away. "Like really? Oh, my God. You're the first person I met." Not only does he do AIDS work, he works at AIDS Project Los Angeles. He's an artist who's teaching who has this real job at APLA. I'm like, "I can't believe my good luck. I can't believe that the world has given me back AIDS through Pato Hebert."

THEODORE KERR: And can you believe that he exists? Like, can you believe that such a figure—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I just don't know them in LA. I'm just gob-smacked in the best way. It's like—knocks me out of my quietness and my complacency. It's what I've needed. I've needed him. I've needed to be remembered. It's exciting that I have someone to talk to about it. And, you know, I remember that first—like, it's just kind of stunning. But I'm a bit embarrassed because I don't work on AIDS anymore. I'm a little humiliated. I'm—you know, I feel [exhales] defeated in the face of the fact that he's still doing the work.

So I meet him, and you know me. We begin the very early stages of a burgeoning friendship that's professional. And I don't remember how long it is till this next thing, but I remember we go out for lunch. So Pato and I initially —see, like, as is true for me and a lot of people. Maybe every six months I would go out, have a meal, check in, get to know them better.

And at one of these events, brunch in Los Angeles, I tell him [00:12:00] that I'm like really, really, like really embarrassed kind of. I have an AIDS project that I want to work on, and would he help me? And I don't know how to do it. And I don't know how to break in because I've been gone. But I want to revisit this tape that I've shot of Jim that's been sitting on my shelf that I'm haunted by, that I have a responsibility to, that I don't know what to do with, that—

THEODORE KERR: That you've carried with you.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —I've been living with. Yes. And we talked about it in the last interview. I feel bad about. It's negative. It was a bad experience, but he thought it was a good experience. He wanted to make the video. I owe it to him. I'm ready to return to it. I need to do it, for myself and for him. And I say to Pato, like, "I don't know—" You know, and I'm at the very early stages of what is going to become an art film, probably the artiest thing I've ever made, kind of the only really arty thing I've made. Very experimental. And I don't know what it's going to be, but I need access to AIDS. Sort of like when Cheryl and Ellen come to me, you know, this year and need access to AIDS because they're not thinking about it right now. And we end up making *DiAna's Hair Ego Remix* together.

And I'm very humble, sort of like how I approach Yannick Durand at the BATF [Brooklyn AIDS Task Force –AJ], but a little different. You know, so I start to explain to him what I have. And he asks me—he invites me to come to the Mpowerment group, which is a group that he runs at AIDS Project Los Angeles, which is youth of color, advocacy around HIV education, safer sex, and general health. [00:14:00] It's one of the many things he's doing there. But again, like I can't unpack the layers, but he said, "Why don't you just come and, see what we do, and listen, and think about what that might have to do with your return to this tape?"

Now I don't remember all the history exactly, but—so I start going to the Mpowerment group. Pato leads it with a man named Ray [Fernandez]. I know his last name, I'm just not bringing it up. And anywhere from 10 to 20 young people come several times a week, I think. They're all kids of color, primarily young men, but there's some women and some trans kids who are there. And they do what I was doing with WAVE. They talk about

themselves. They make art. Pato—they don't make video so much. They make a lot of photography because Pato's a photographer. They make a lot of HIV education. They run workshops. They're very empowered young people, but a lot of it is the way of modeling. Just ongoing frank conversations about themselves around sex, their sex lives, their desire. And AIDS is folded into, on top and around, or always on the edge of it. It doesn't really matter. It's also just a safe space for these disenfranchised young people to be gay, queer.

So there was a moment of silence. And then I came back. And then I make *Video Remains*. I shoot a number of the Mpowerment sessions. I talk to the kids in Mpowerment about the issues that are live for me. And the issues that I talk about are the forgetting of AIDS, the relevance of the stories of people who have died to their generation. It's an intergenerational piece. Does it matter to them that the stories of [00:16:00] gay white men, who they would never have met, who encountered and died from HIV, the history of AIDS activism as a street activism? You know, how is that relevant to their generation? That's what I'm talking to them about and shooting for the piece.

And then I use that with the—Jim on the beach is an hour of footage. It plays in real time underneath. That's the base of the piece. I interrupt it with a live—the footage that I'm shooting of people who are facing HIV right now and doing AIDS activism, and HIV activism in community. And then I record conversations with lesbian feminist AIDS activists who I knew when I was, you know, in my peak in the '80s in New York, people I had made work with. And we revisit that time on the phone and talk about remembering AIDS, talk about where it's gone, talk about the silence, talk about why we do and do not talk about it, talk about what we made.

And I interview Alisa Lebow, who I've mentioned already, who worked at [AIDS Discrimination Unit of New York City Commission on Human Rights, NYCCHR. –AJ] I interview Ellen Spiro, who we've talked about already, who made *DiAna's Hair Ego* and a number of other important AIDS videos during that time, was a member of DIVA TV. I interview Juanita Mohammed, who we've spoken about already, who I meet through WAVE, but goes on to make lots of AIDS video at GMHC with Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz. I interview Sarah Schulman, who collaborated with Cheryl and I on *The Watermelon Woman* and went on to collaborate with [00:18:00] us on *The Owls*, who is an important cultural critic who writes about gentrification, HIV, AIDS, who I know in part from ACT UP and the women's committee in ACT UP. I mean, everyone on your tape knows the centrality of Sarah Schulman's work and thinking. She produces the ACT UP Oral History Archive, which may or may not,—right around the time that I'm working on *Video Remains*, she comes and interviews me in California. So it's probably right around the same time. So this is about archives. So Sarah's making that archive at that time. Sarah and Jim Hubbard, major player in AIDS activist video. Jim Hubbard makes the Royal S. Marks Collection of Activist AIDS Video which is at the New York Public Library. Also himself has a significant body of AIDS videos, and a very important artist in this history.

They do what we're talking about. They make the actual archive because they're worried that the voices and stories of ACT UP are not being archived. That's one of the best digital archives ever. I interview Sarah. I think that's who—or I hope that's everybody. Their voices play over Jim. And then video. So if they recall a video from the past, it will play on top of Jim on the beach. So there's a beautiful section in that video where Alisa remembers *Tongues Untied*, and we—I cut to *Tongues Untied*, where Alisa remembers Gregg Bordowitz and Jean Carlomusto working on *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. You know, you cut to that, I cut to that.

Ellen talks about Ray Navarro, one of our—a touchstone figure in many our lives from that generation who died so young. He didn't make his career [laughs] New Queer Cinema. Talks about him on his death bed. I don't cut to that, but later that footage is used and [00:20:00] misused in David France's *How to Survive a Plague*. And then I interview the man who cuts my hair, a man named Michael, who I chanced upon in Silver Lake. He was cutting my hair and he starts talking to me about stuff. And the next thing you know we're talking about AIDS in New York City, and he's telling me all these stories—this is before I shot him—and how important it felt to have that conversation, that New York conversation in Los Angeles, and to have a conversation about AIDS, and to have a conversation with people we've lost because we don't do it very often. I hadn't been doing it. So I put him into it because he's someone else for whom it had come alive for me again, and for whom I was healing in talking about it, because we hadn't been talking about it. So I restaged that conversation, but it's real, where he brings to life many people that had been important to him who died, and what it felt like to live among people who were dying.

THEODORE KERR: And was that an echo or a quote trying to link the Holocaust and HIV because of—what's the film? *Shiloh*? There's the, there's the narrative being given about the barber.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. But it's not called *Shiloh*.

THEODORE KERR: No. What's it called?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's called—

THEODORE KERR: By—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: By [Claude] Lanzmann. [Laughs.] *Shoah.*

THEODORE KERR: *Shoah.* Sorry.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's okay. No.

THEODORE KERR: It's not intentional?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: It's not even—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. Yeah. I mean, that's the first time I've ever thought of it.

THEODORE KERR: Oh. Wow. Okay. That's big for me.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, I mean—

THEODORE KERR: I thought it was super—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Oh, no. I mean, I was having that conversation with Michael because he entered my life and had a conversation with me when I wasn't having conversations, when I was in my silence.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And do you think that it—clearly, even though it's staged, it does feel raw.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's staged only in the sense that I say, "Let's—you know, you're going to cut my hair and then we're going to talk about [00:22:00] AIDS." And he has a million stories. He's a great storyteller. And then he tells the stories on that time. I only shoot it once. It's not staged really. It's just—he's doing what he does anyway. You're in the chair and he's going to talk about what he talks about, and this time he's going to talk about AIDS. But he talked about AIDS with me right when I was talking to Pato about potentially doing an AIDS project. That's why he gets written into that project. It's like, I say, "I'm ready". I'm ready to deal with the tape. The tape is the entry back into the conversation.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The video.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Right.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: The record.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's the evidence I have. Jim's at his worst. That makes it poignant and real in a way that if I had Jim at his best it would be a hagiography. It would be a celebration. And who needs that? That's a different project. *Video Remains* is about the trauma and tragedy of dying, and about the horror of AIDS. It's not an ennobling film. And it's hard to look at. And that's why I didn't look at it for a while. And we should look at that part. And I layer it with other voices on there to remember that, in the tragedy, and the horror, and the pain, and grief, loss, there's always forces responding. So, no, I was quiet. And then I started talking again.

THEODORE KERR: And then it breaks.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. And it's earlier than, you know, what you call the Second Silence. I come back to voice earlier than some of my contemporaries. I don't fit into the neat timeline very well, or in the beginning of the—I crack into history at that moment. And then it happens after me. I don't know.

THEODORE KERR: Well, it's [00:24:00] interesting to think about the relationship to margins and how my neat timeline is rooted in—as mainstream as that conversation could be at that time. And your film is not interested in that.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I will tell you that in relationship to your timeline, one of the thing—

THEODORE KERR: Which is 2008.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. One of the things that my film does is it starts to show in marginal spaces of gay film festivals, experimental film festivals. It's very experimental. And it's a hard movie. It's real time. You know, it's not doing anyone any favors. It's no *Watermelon Woman*. It's allowing people to talk about—it's allowing the

audience that it's for to talk about AIDS. It's a breaking-the-silence film. So it's—where it works and when it works, it's allowing people to talk about AIDS again. And that's what people like about it. Among, among other things.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. It's queer video activism.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. But I didn't do it for them. I did that one for me.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But, you know, lots of screenings then allow people to talk about their grief. That's initially how that film is seen.

THEODORE KERR: In intimate spaces?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And screenings. Film screenings. Their grief. And what it's like to be around someone who's dying. That's really what people want to talk about in that movie. And the silence.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. The silence that—that there was a silence around HIV.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Why they aren't allowed to talk about it. Why they don't talk about it. Why they haven't talked about it.

THEODORE KERR: And they feel that young people don't want to hear it or they feel their friends can't understand them. Like, what do you think—what do you think motivates the silence in the first—what do you think motivates [00:26:00] the silence?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I mean, I think it's a number of things. I think it's the waning of the movement. So if you have a movement that's about voice, the movement gave people the space and the permission, and the platform, and the community to talk, and to be heard. And the movement wanes, that's the AIDS activist movement wanes. So that permission wanes. And then people are doing it privately. I think that's a lot of it. I think it's the waning of movement.

And then I think it's all the other things, like the grief, the PTSD, the—for people who survived, who are HIV-positive, it's the guilt and pain about not dying, which is very real for that generation of men, and people, women. An utter shame about that.

But I think it's primarily about—the movement provides the space because there's no spaces to do it. And you know, I think you and I have written later that that really lasted for a very long time, that there wasn't a movement. It wasn't a space, a cultural space or a political space to talk about it. And maybe now there is again, and it's in result of cultural production, which is activism. Activism produces spaces and culture that give permission, not to the most courageous, but to everyone else.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Exactly.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: The most courageous open the space and everyone else can enter. And it takes courage to enter the space, but they're not—I keep using the word cracking—they're not cracking the door open. You say God makes the crack. I say we make the crack.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I don't say God makes the crack. And I don't see a distinction between God and us.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Because God enters through the crack.

THEODORE KERR: Anyway. I would say that also [00:28:00] HIV becomes more complicated and insidious in a way. Like the early movement is, like, people are dying. We have to save their lives. There's bad people who are preventing that from happening. There's a kind of trajectory. Then it gets confusing because people start to sero-convert. There's drug addiction because of the guilt of surviving, or because—who knew? You know. And so there's also like, yeah, the layers of shame are complicated and they're—it's hard to always locate that HIV might be at the core of lots of what people are going through, that the trauma—you know, if it's 2005 and someone finds themselves in a dead-end job in Boston, Massachusetts, and they have no support, they might inherently know it's about HIV. But they may also have no idea that it's about HIV.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I agree. And you know, it's a much later film, but I think that's a lot about what *Desert Migration* is about. I really liked that movie.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: By Marc Smolowitz, who I co-produced the return of *The Watermelon Woman* with. It's about that ongoing legacy. And, you know, I think that—it's a word we haven't used yet—but I think shame, silence, grief, loss, and stigma, you know, are a very potent constellation that orbit around AIDS, and homophobia, and poverty, and racism, and produce that silence. I mean, all of those produced a silence. And it's activism, both on the streets and cultural activism, and doula-like activism, the activism of caring, the activism of mobilizing community, which is the only response to that constellation, which is shame, stigma, sorrow, to make it [laughs] alliterative. Racism, poverty, homophobia, you know, which are [a lot to work on to make people [00:30:00] feel like they have access to and the rights to their voice. So, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: How did that film—how did sharing that film change your life? Did it change your life? What was the impact of sharing that film?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, that's the first thing I ever made that—maybe the first and only thing I've ever made that's—I keep calling experimental. It's really a piece of art. It functions much more like a piece of art and much [less –AJ]like a piece of overt activism and organizing than other things I've done. So it stands outside my body of work, I think, in a particular way, which I find gratifying that I could—that I was—fulfilling and gratifying. That I had that voice, and that it was received as such. And then it allowed me to have very different kind of conversations with audience numbers than some of my other work produces, which is way more sort of didactic and overtly political. That was just gratifying as an artist, I suppose.

It's been written about very beautifully by a lot of people that I respect hugely. My small group of AIDS contemporaries who write about AIDS culture have written about it. And that's just very moving to me. Chris Castiglia and [00:32:00] Chris [Reed –AJ]—there's two Chrises. [. . . . But they have a chapter about it in their book, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past, 2011.* –AJ]

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But a really important book about AIDS cultural production. Roger Hallas writes about it. So, I don't know. It's a unique moment in my larger body of work because it's more contemplative. It's more private. No. That's not the right word. I mean, I still share this voice we talked about earlier. I share the—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I don't talk that much in it. But it's my vision of the world, as opposed to one that I co-author. It's not co-authored. But it's, you know, very well edited by my editor, Enid Baxter Blader. You know, that's why you make video. It's like, it's never really you, but—so that's—

THEODORE KERR: What about personally? Like, I'm—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, I'm answering personally.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. No, I'm sorry. That's true. Did it open a floodgate? Did other people—did all of a sudden—did your Second Silence end?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes. Now I've been back in. It's hard.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Hard, but it wasn't—I didn't meet you the next day. I didn't meet you for—not that I'm your only connection to—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: —HIV now, but like—it was—did it come back into your classroom? Did it come back—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I taught that AIDS class after that, probably, again.

THEODORE KERR: Did it come back into your writing? Did it come back—well, it—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —would have had to.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I started writing about AIDS. I made *Video Remains*, and I then began a lot of [00:34:00] writing about AIDS. I've been writing about AIDS since again. So I wrote *AIDS TV* and then I stopped. And then, you know, I just—I did a lot of writing about AIDS. Did a lot of writing about Jim and AIDS, that we've talked about before. That impulse to honor him has continued. So *From the Scenes of Drag Queens*, which is about Todd Haynes, is really about Jim and Todd Haynes. I have a piece that—well, it's a lot of writing that I end up doing about *Video Remains*. That's actually how it works.

I make *Video Remains* and then I write about it. I write a piece for GLQ on archives, queer media archives. That's where—I mean, obviously *The Watermelon Woman* came first, but that's where I begin to realize some of my thinking about archival—video and archives, and the holding of memories, and the use of those memories as a form of activism. So I published that piece about *Video Remains* as a theoretical intervention. "The Failures of the Flesh and the Revival of AIDS Activism."

THEODORE KERR: That's how I find you.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And then I write another piece, and I forget the name of it, but it's in the *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, and it's a piece—they have a special issue on failure. And it comes—it's sort of the bookend of that project where I talk about how all of those attempts, *Video Remains*, the writing about it fails. Fails to represent Jim, fails to hold on to the movement, fails to save people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you were going back to remembering that bad and failure are—we can't take what you're meaning for granted.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No.

THEODORE KERR: This is specific. You're not writing them off. You're not—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No. [00:36:00] I mean, I—you know, again, that same—like when I write *Forgetting ACT UP*, which is a bit later, it's not about literally saying, "I want to forget ACT UP." [Laughs.] It's starting with an honoring of ACT UP and saying, "And I would like to remember more." When I say AIDS activist video is a failure, the AIDS activist movement was a failure, I say, "People died." And the whole point was to save people. You know, in the eyes of history we won. We succeeded. You know, it's a long game. Yeah, we did great in the long game. Probably even the medium-short game. Even in the short game, in the eyes of history. But that's not—that's still a loss in a local daily life of a person. And I also say in several of those pieces, the video evidence, which does maintain a record, doesn't maintain the person. It's cold and hard and made of plastic. And people are warm, and have smells, and make eye contact with you.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And change.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And change. And respond to you.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And respond to you. Yes.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: They're responsive.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Even an ignoring from a live human being is different than—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —anything you get from a video, which is nothing. Other than its triggers.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. [Laughs.] Alex, it's—we—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —need to end.

THEODORE KERR: We need to end.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Good.

THEODORE KERR: How do you feel about—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: What time is it?

THEODORE KERR: I'll tell you after we end.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Really?

THEODORE KERR: It's okay, we're fine. We're not in danger.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Why are my children still asleep?

THEODORE KERR: Because they're children and it's—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: —Christmas break or holiday break.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Well, can we do two things to end?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Can I say that I've done a lot of writing since, a lot of it with you. We've pointed to that, but [00:38:00] I want to talk about that for two seconds. You know, my resuscitation into a new chapter of AIDS work is partly through collaborations I make, and what I can learn in conversation. And you've been really foundational for that, in our growing and adapting relationship. Like I came to you also as someone who was much more connected to contemporary AIDS activism, cultural activism, and politics than I was. And I've learned a lot from you and have steadily gained a vocabulary and footing, you know, which then produced other things, but also produced our book.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Our book.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Which is—you want to say—want to name it and talk about it?

THEODORE KERR: Well, what if it's going to have a different name?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I don't want to talk about it now.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay. You just don't want to jinx it.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: But we've published a lot of conversations, and I've learned a lot from those. So I want to thank you for that, as well.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Thank you. And I think we've helped people shape their understanding so they could shape it for themselves.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Absolutely. And we've been part of a community, which is something that, you know, I think in our book and in our writing, were constantly thinking. Like it's not a—and it's how I felt in my moment. And then I feel in this moment, which is also my moment. You don't name things out of the blue. You're in a cultural milieu where things are live, lots of activity's happening, and what you may be doing is crystalizing or putting your finger on, or, you know, giving a name to it, or whatever. But it's—you're not producing it by naming it.

THEODORE KERR: Right. No.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: It's there and then you name it.

THEODORE KERR: It's all around.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And we're in a vibrant community that's been revisiting and thinking about AIDS of the past and AIDS now. Now you and I have for five years as collaborators.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: And have been part of a larger cultural conversation and cultural production that has brought AIDS back to visibility out of the period of silence. You, [00:40:00] Ted Kerr, named that AIDS Crisis Revisitation, the return. But AIDS Crisis Revisitation also is about AIDS now and, at its best, when it's at its best, which it often is.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In our world.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: In our work. So, you know, we've been doing a lot of writing. And then I just made another AIDS video.

THEODORE KERR: That's right. That's the second thing you want to talk about?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah. I just want to end with that. Or then wrap up afterwards, but I hadn't made one for a while. So I produced a video that Ellen Spiro and Cheryl Dunye directed called *DiAna's Hair Ego Remix*, that is

also a revisitation. But I hope, one, because of my participation and in collaboration with those two directors, and the community that it revisits—which is AIDS activists in South Carolina particularly, and fully its constant African American community there, revisits what had happened in the past—which is DiAna DiAna's incredible activism as a hairdresser and community activist in conversation and collaboration with Bambi Gaddist. But now, it's about AIDS now, which is about, what does the crisis on the ground right now look and feel like for black people living in South Carolina? And that, I think our short film puts its finger on that, names that really well. So it's capable of looking backwards, but also is a presentist depiction of what the AIDS crisis is right now.

And Bambi Gaddist says, and to her horror, that crises are being experienced by African Americans living in the South of the United States of America looks and feels exactly like it did when she began her AIDS activism, or worse. Which is—you know, AIDS is not over. It looks like something and she says it's [00:42:00] now, always was, and now particularly is a crisis for people of color in the United States. So I'm very proud of that film and—

THEODORE KERR: It's very beautiful.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: —all of our work on it.

THEODORE KERR: I think we should wrap by maybe just, like, pointing to things we didn't talk about.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

THEODORE KERR: So I would say *Compulsive Practices*, which is a video project connected to an exhibition that you, Jean, and Hugh Ryan did for Visual AIDS last year. So, 2016.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That's right.

THEODORE KERR: It was a beautiful exhibition and then a video program that, that played it, you know—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: All over the world.

THEODORE KERR: All over the world.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: The video—the gallery show was called *Every Day*, and it was a big AIDS art show that looked at the artwork by a range of artists, many of them fine artists, many of them people engaging in artistic practices as a way to make sense of their daily lives with HIV. And then *Compulsive Practice* highlighted the work of nine video-makers, starting from the beginning of the crisis to this day, presentists, who make sense of their daily lives with HIV by using a video camera. It's got a total video argument, like, video is the cure, video is the forum, video is the format. I'm very proud of that video. So I actually did make another video, I forgot, with Jean and Hugh, and the nine people that we featured.

THEODORE KERR: And then I would also say that you now—you know, starting with that video at Swarthmore and ever since—have been a mentor for generations of people doing AIDS activist work, both in media and beyond.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: That is true.

THEODORE KERR: And so that's interesting, and I think worthy of noting, that you were able to name some of those people at Swarthmore. And that is a powerful list, and that the list continues, so—

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: I love doing that work. And again, just—I would never have thought of it, but thank you for reminding me. [00:44:00] People in academia and the art world who work on AIDS are few and far between. Every single one of us is a member of the community, even when we have internal squabbles. That's just part of being in a community. Even when we don't like each other's work. Even if we call each other out on things. That is nothing in the face of you know, what it means to have been committed and stayed in this body. And I have a small number of graduate students over the years who've wanted to work on HIV/AIDS and, you know, lovingly and receptively mentored them because I learn from them as much as I helped them. I really like doing that work. I like being part of this community. You know, Marty Fink comes to mind. David Oscar Harvey comes to mind. Jih-Fei Cheng.

THEODORE KERR: Dan Udy.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Roger Hallas. Why am I blanking on his name?

THEODORE KERR: That's okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: No, no, no, no. I will remember him. I actually wrote a piece with him. Lucas Hilderbrand. You know, these are people who are doing their important academic work on AIDS and are radically altering the conversation. If I can remember her, too.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Bishnu Ghosh..

THEODORE KERR: Bishnu Ghosh. Good.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Yeah, I really like doing that work.

THEODORE KERR: So we have one minute. That's it.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Okay. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Anything you want to say for one minute?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Thank you, Ted.

THEODORE KERR: Thank you, Alex. But there's nothing you want to mention?

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ: Nope.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. I'm going to press stop.

[END OF JUHASZ17_1OF1_TRACK6.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]