Late Editions

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Cultural Studies for the End of the Century

CONNECTED

ENGAGEMENTS WITH MEDIA

George E. Marcus, EDITOR

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago and London

Shakya, Tsering. 1992. "Of Real and Imaginary Tibet." *Tibetan Review* 27, no. 1: 13–16.

Turner, Terry. 1990. "Visual Media, Cultural Politics, and Anthropological Practice: Some Implications of Recent Uses of Film and Video among the Kayapo of Brazil." *Commission on Visual Anthropology Review* (Spring): 8–13.

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JUANITA MOHAMMED AND ALEXANDRA JUHASZ

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KNOWING EACH OTHER THROUGH AIDS VIDEO: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AIDS ACTIVIST VIDEOMAKERS

Alex, Juanita, and the Women's AIDS Video Enterprise

Alex's Introduction

Since 1985 there have been thousands upon thousands of videotapes about AIDS produced outside of broadcast television by and for communities as diverse as black gay men into sadism and masochism, Hispanic teens who are homeless, or Jewish parents of persons with AIDS (PWAs). In unprecedented volume, individuals, communities, and organizations have used inexpensive video technology to speak about and to AIDS, a brutal biological phenomenon with massive personal and political impact. People affected by AIDS videotape marches and protests, oral and anal sex with dental dams, funerals, women feeding sick babies—the shapes and sounds of living in a world with AIDS. I watch, make, and write about such work to understand why there is so much of it, how or if it is different from other media, how it affects its viewers and makers, and what, if anything, it accomplishes in the face of AIDS.

In my work I attempt to make sense of and enact a cultural practice rooted in both a distrust and a celebration of representation and the deepest ambivalence about the uses, meaning, and power of the media. I learn many things from and about AIDS activist video. For instance, unlike commercial television or Hollywood film, it is inexpensive to make and distribute and requires little technical know-how or professional credentials. In contrast to traditional ethnographic film, the "disempowered others" of our society have access to the form, technical apparatus, and authorship of representational work about their condition. Yet unlike so much of the camcorder production currently being promoted on broadcast television—featuring slapstick, catastrophe, amateur gaffes—activist producers use the medium to articulate carefully constructed ideological positions made to convince others of who they are and what they believe, if not at least to communicate these things.

Activist video production challenges current theories and practices of media

as it enacts not another field of dominance begging for resistance or negotiation but instead a site for intimate and local identification and consolidation. Yet, of course, making a low-budget, alternative, or activist AIDS video does not grant you hegemonic control, nor does it abate bodily pain or bring back the dead. Or does it? I saw my friend Jim kissing a cute East Village clone a few nights ago in the Castro Theater. Jim has been dead for a year and a half. His image, a part of the crowd at an ACT UP "kiss-in" in Gregg Bordowitz's video *Fast Trip, Long Drop,* propelled me back to him.

The gains of activist video are small—one viewer recognizing, at last, what dental dams are for; one viewer bringing back the dead. But after seeing so many of these videotapes, I am certain that these isolated effects begin to explain the motivation for this unprecedented media movement which is perhaps the first political and social cause to be told and made and seen and fought, to such a large extent, through video. And there are other reasons. The AIDS community is vast, diverse, dispersed: to reach others you must speak carefully, taking account of difference, taking stock in your own position, taking responsibility for the real effects of words. This is where video's power of scripting, using talented and knowledgeable interviewees, editing, and VCR exhibition are so important for the movement. Video allows words to be spoken with care and precision and on places many speakers could never go. The AIDS crisis is without origin, center, logic: to speak of it, or within it, or to it, you inevitably converse from a position where identity is both certain and uncertain, as are community, politics, and meaning. Thus AIDS activists use video which is a medium itself based upon many of the contradictions found underlying AIDS. Video is both impermanent (images which can be edited, digitized, or lost due to magnets or time) and frozen (a face in a crowd can be recorded and live as an image more finally than his own mortality). Video is both entirely objective (the camera's mimetic hold on reality) and subjective (our abilities to mold that reality to our liking). Video is both precise and technical, like biology, and creative and political, like poetry.

The overwhelming needs to counter the (mis)information about AIDS represented on broadcast television, to represent the underrepresented experiences to the crisis, to communicate with others who feel equally unheard, coincide with the formation of a new condition of media practice, the low-end, low-tech video production enabled by new technologies like the camcorder, VCR, inexpensive editing, and cable. Thus the new possibility of media production for those individuals and communities who could never afford or master it, occurred just as there was a social crisis of massive proportions and multiple dimensions that begged to be represented in a manner available to the most and the least economically and culturally privileged. The politics of AIDS—the diverse demands for a better quality of life for the people affected by this epidemic—are well matched by the potentials and politics of video.

This is what alternative AIDS TV is about: the use of video production to form a local response to AIDS, to articulate a rebuttal to or revision of the mainstream media's definitions and representations of AIDS, and to a form community around a new manner of political identity forced into existence by the fact of AIDS. The process of producing alternative AIDS media is a political act that allows people who need to scream with pain or anger, who want to say, "I'm here, I count," who have internalized sorrow and despair, who have vital information to share about drug protocols, coping strategies, or government inaction, to make their opinions public and to join with others in this act of resistance. The process of viewing alternative AIDS television—lying on a couch at home watching a VCR, sitting at church, or joined with friends and neighbors at a local screening—is always an invitation to join a politicized community of diverse people who are unified, temporarily and for strategic purposes, to speak back to AIDS, to speak back to a government and society that has mishandled this crisis, and to speak out to each other. Thus AIDS video exists for the same reason most political, cultural production does—just faster, or newer, or more desperate—because in the face of horror people are motivated to do whatever they can in whatever forum that they can get their hands on.

Yet although I am certain that it is important to theorize how AIDS video—in its quantity, trendiness, impact—has altered the media landscape, in this piece I attempt to do something different, or at least to approach this concern from a different vantage. Rather than from the outside in, here I intend to look at AIDS video from the inside out: what it feels like to make it, to put your hands on a camera, to work with others, to be vulnerable and powerful all at once. In this dialogue I will use one of my own video projects—the Women's AIDS Video Enterprise (WAVE)—as a jumping-off point. But instead of describing the project as whole and how it fits into the larger activist video scene, I wish to home in on what I am certain is another critical impetus behind a great deal of the production and viewing of AIDS activist work, namely, its power to allow people who are different from each other to "know each other," as well as to know themselves (at least as they wish to be known on videotape).

At the end of this introduction I will outline the Women's AIDS Video Enterprise as background for a much more difficult enterprise, an attempt to engage in a mutual and respectful dialogue with a fellow member of this project—my friend and colleague Juanita Mohammed—who is also, at least superficially, something like my polar opposite. Like so much ethnography (and most of the work in this book), we are separated by the typical markers of difference, with the imbalance of power seemingly on my side of the binaries of race, class, education, and profession. But I hope that this dialogue with Juanita evidences how our participation in an activist AIDS video project differs from (while sometimes resembling) the typical interactions between film-

maker and subject in both ethnographic and mainstream media—processes which serve to preserve, unexamined, power imbalance and prevailing assumptions about difference. We hope to show how many of the distinct features of camcorder video allow for such interactions.

We are interested in using this forum to understand the obstacles and bridges incurred by cross-cultural, activist, and educational video production. To this purpose we have attempted to devise a form for writing that both acknowledges the power disparities that frame every act of interpersonal communication while working to ameliorate and question them. This was also the motivation behind the WAVE project, and, as is evidenced in the discussion of that project below, we both succeeded and failed. The structure for our dialogue is simple, if at first a little off-putting. We each conceived of five questions to pose to ourself and our friend about the meaning, importance, and theory of activist AIDS video. After writing our answers to these questions in isolation, we shared them with the other conversant, who edited and critiqued them. Finally, we met and discussed our answers, the piece as a whole, and the process. (These after-the-fact conversations are identified by the use of italics.) Although the only instances of "real" dialogue (two friends and colleagues talking together in person) in the piece, it is important to understand how initially writing our individual responses in private liberated us to have these later, difficult, in-person conversations about the WAVE project, about video, about ourselves and each other.

I met Juanita in the winter of 1990, when we joined up with four other women from Brooklyn and one woman from Queens in an innovative "video support group" of my design. WAVE was organized to empower women from the communities disproportionately affected by AIDS (urban, lower-income women of color) to produce their own educational video through the structure of a long-term AIDS support group. I hoped that this structure would serve to disperse the imbalances of power typical of educational video projects where an outsider enters a community with a project and process already in mind. At this stage in my AIDS activist video career I had already made one too many videos "about" poor, HIV-positive women of color. Yet the support group would still allow me to continue to make use of the knowledge and power (money, skills, equipment, education) that I had. Coupling video education with an AIDS support group seemed an obvious choice for other reasons as well. Integrating video production into a typical AIDS support group gave the group a focus, an output, and a method of communication. Integrating a support group into the production of community-specific AIDS educational material acknowledged the complexity of making public the very private experiences of AIDS, especially for women.

During twenty-two three-hour sessions, Aida, Sharon, Carmen, Marcia, Glenda, Juanita, and I met to discuss AIDS, the media, the politics of representation, and video production. We shared the goals of video education, AIDS support, and video production, but had little else in common. In our group were six women of color and one white woman; working women, housewives, and the unemployed; women with a great deal of education and some with very little; women who had a variety of relations to HIV, through infected spouses, relatives, or friends, or through political or religious commitments to the crisis. The seven of us held in common only two readily apparent traits: our gender and our commitment to making a contribution toward abating the affects of the AIDS crisis.

From these similarities, and across all our other differences, we formed a temporary community and collectively produced three videos: *We Care: A Video for Care Providers of People Affected by AIDS; WAVE: Self Portraits;* and *A WAVE Taster. We Care* is widely distributed. We sent out nearly one thousand copies of the tape free of charge to community AIDS service organizations across the country. The tape has been shown in major art museums, AIDS conferences, churches, and in group members' living rooms. The effects of the group continue for the participants: in economic terms, as the tape continues to make money; in activist terms, as we continue to take the tape to people and organizations that can use it; in emotional terms, because over four years later we are still friends. Juanita has gone on to achieve a career in AIDS educational media. She is currently working full time for the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) "Living with AIDS" cable program. Glenda has worked on several other videos at her job at the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force (BATF). Sharon is currently organizing a tape on anger. I focus upon the success of this group, and our video project, because it points to the most powerful and unique aspect of alternative AIDS media: the strategic and conscious claiming of identity and recognition of community across differences for the accomplishment of shared and progressive ends in the face of an epidemic.

Juanita's Introduction

When I signed up for the WAVE project, little did I realize that the producer Alex Juhasz would be instrumental in transforming my life. She awakened my self from a deep sleep. My self had been locked away because of economics, family, peer disapproval, and self-abasement. For too long no one had reaffirmed my talent; no one trusted me enough to show me how to use it. Until that time I had let go of my dream to be a director. Instead, I had devoted myself to working with PWA. You can not imagine the flame that flickered when Alex let me take home her expensive video camera. To be able to use it without guidance gave me the determination and courage to put forth my ideas. I was truly afraid to use the camera. I knew my hands would shake. Thus in the first segment that I shot I purposefully tried to make it look like an artistic endeavor

by shooting body parts here and there. As we looked at videos by other videomakers, I always fantasized about making the same type of videos and working with the people who make them. To me, that's just what it would remain—a fantasy. It's amazing that I am now a peer with those very same people.

In the beginning the WAVE project was, in my eyes, Alex Juhasz's vision. I saw her as the director—that when she asked for ideas she was really doing research to help her do her own project. Although she said we would use the camera, I always thought it was in the context of using it under her direction. But my opinion changed as we began to work on the video. I think the time I took the camera home to shoot my self-portrait was so successful because Alex had trusted me to take it home. I probably worried more about the safety of the camera than the project.

Trust was what the WAVE project was built on. Alex trusted us to stay committed and focused. We trusted her to listen and understand us. We trusted each other to be nonjudgmental and caring. When one of us did not show up, the others were concerned. When we were together, we were like a family, full of bickering, favoritism, stupidity. When I think back, I always wonder why we didn't tape our group sessions. We all claim we just didn't think about it. But these were the scenes which should have been on tape. These would be scenes which showed us bonding, crying, sharing, taking, and giving.

When I first met Alex, she was the "white girl." As I got to work with her she became my mentor. Only after she gained my trust did she become my friend. It is my mentor with whom I am corresponding in this dialogue. But it is my friend with whom I have chosen to discuss two of the most important facets of my life. AIDS and video production are on the same scale for me. For this reason, being able to discuss them with someone I trust, respect, and envy teaches me more than any school ever could.

The Questions

Alex's Questions

1) Describe yourself in relation to AIDS.
2) Describe Alex/Juanita in relation to AIDS.
3) What have you learned about yourself through AIDS video production?
4) What have you learned about [the other conversant] through AIDS video production?
5) What is the relationship between AIDS, community, and video?

Juanita's Questions

1) What preconceived prejudices, stereotypes, or biases do you start out with when doing a video dealing with a community of people either infected or affected by AIDS?

2) What are the personal issues you have to deal with when you enter into a group dealing with AIDS where you are the "other"?
3) Is it necessary to detach when dealing with an AIDS group? How do you manage to detach from the real emotions, or do you?
4) Coming from an academic, middle-class background, how do you adapt that to dealing with people who come from poor, working-class backgrounds and have very little education?
5) Why do you think it's important to allow communities to tell their HIV/AIDS stories through video?

Answers to Alex's Questions

Describe yourself in relation to AIDS.

Juanita: I thought this would be an easy question, but it was the hardest to answer. I figured that I'd be self-effacing. But I didn't mind saying the things I was good at, the positive things, that I was talented.

Alex: This is also a hard question for me, but more for the issue of infection versus being affected. For myself, I know profoundly how I am affected by AIDS, but in a public statement like an article, I find I am very defensive.

Juanita: I have the same defensiveness. But I feel it through jealousy. When I'm with a group of people who are all HIV-positive, they seem to be so happy and friendly. I'm the sole outsider. It's illogical, but they seem so close and you can never be in it.

JUANITA: When I think about it, it seems easy to describe myself in relation to AIDS. The immediate answer would be, I am a person who is concerned about people with AIDS. However, once I am forced to look into it, I have to admit that it is much more complex. I see myself as an information gatherer and dispenser. My biggest function is to act as a conduit dispensing and acquiring information. This information comes from those I see as the "real" people who are affected and infected. This is information which is generally ignored or not allowed to be valued by the general public; it is information on humanity that they need to know. An important role in this concept is that I do not add my agenda, nor do I hide the fact that I am also a part of this issue. When I tape a family, I am allowing the viewer to see themselves. I am putting a face on a disease. Through my private and public talks with people I interview, I come to see them not as tokens, political tools, or numbers, but as people. I guess this is the public description of my work and myself.

The second part which I would describe as my private self is much more complex because it has more roles. There is the part who, like everyone else, is afraid of AIDS, who still does not practice what I preach (safer sex), someone who still wants to find a fall guy. On the other extreme, there is the outreach educator who puts on an optimistic face and goes out to preach the safer sex word every day in any little way, be it by wearing buttons, giving out

pamphlets, correcting statements, handing out condoms, or volunteering. The me who is a buddy is the hardest to describe, as she is the one who is the most unsure of herself, the self who has to deal directly with a person who is positive on a day-to-day basis, never knowing what will develop, good or bad.

ALEX: I am a woman who believes herself to be HIV-negative. (I was last tested in 1990, but have not practiced safer sex with either my male or female lover since that test). I have been involved with AIDS activism, education, video production, and scholarship since 1987. Since then I have produced videos, written several scholarly articles and my dissertation (now a book) on the representation of AIDS, watched my best friend die painfully of HIV-related illnesses, known of many other friends and colleagues who have died or are currently dealing with HIV infection, and have organized within my small college community around issues concerning HIV and college students.

When I think of myself in relation to AIDS, I see that it is probably the largest political, intellectual, personal, biological, sexual, social, and metaphysical force that has structured and given meaning and focus to my adult life, even as I am not infected by HIV.

Like Juanita, I struggle with what it means to have dedicated myself to a cause which affects but does not infect me. This was particularly difficult in the early years of my activism, when as a straight, white, highly educated woman engaging in a crisis thought to be affecting only gay men and low-income people of color. Although my activism was precisely to make others see what already seemed clear to me—that AIDS was an issue for everyone who was sexually active or used intravenous drugs—there was still an undertone at places like ACT UP, GMHC, or BATF that I was colonizing others' issues and pain. Today I continue to struggle with my distance and difference from the majority of people infected by HIV, and I struggle with what motivates me.

And then I know. I remember. AIDS became my issue in 1987 because I recognized that it was a crisis building upon what directly affects and angers me: sexism, racism, sexual conservatism, and a healthcare system rooted in capitalism. AIDS was my issue in 1987 because I understood that all sexual people (white and black, straight and gay, educated and less educated) were at risk for HIV. AIDS continues to be my issue because it has scarred by vision of mortality, humanity, dignity, and sexuality.

I continue to feel uncomfortable about struggling for an issue which does not directly affect (infect) me until I remind myself how limited is this vision of AIDS—a global catastrophe that personally affects many of our lives, that politically and economically affects all of our lives, and that exposes the hypocrisy, greed, and indifference under which it is suggested we continue to live these lives.

Describe Alex/Juanita in relation to AIDS.

Juanita: I had a terrible time with this one. It's hard to describe other people. I'm worried I'm going to insult them. Also, people never know a person as well as they think they do.

Alex: What I said is true to my concept of you, but I don't know if others will get a good picture of you.

Juanita: Your answers amazed me. I never believed that any one could describe me like I could myself. You got into the real me, the one I don't want people to know. You saw that I was shy, and most people think I'm confident or even aggressive.

JUANITA: I would describe Alex as a person who has made a commitment in relation to getting the message out about AIDS. While she is observing others, I am often observing the way they react to her. I have seen that she is not a person who is out to make a lot of money. The fact that she has chosen to work on half-inch video, with a low budget, untrained crew, and in dangerous locations more than anything reinforces my view. Alex is a person who believes in people helping others by helping themselves. She is not only out to put a face on this epidemic, but to also allow the people infected and affected to show their view. If I had to define her, I would say that Alex Juhasz is not someone who remains an outsider. She takes time to go in and get to know her subject while letting them get to know her.

During the WAVE project Alex was able to divide her time and emotions equally between those who wanted technical knowledge and those who wanted practical knowledge. Instead of telling us what to do, she was willing to show us. Much of her success comes from the fact that technical quality is not her number one concern. The visuals do not have to be perfect, lighting can be a little off, audio can be too low or too high. Many of Alex's peers would consider this irrelevant because they would not understand that her main concern is to the story being told and the person who is telling it. Isn't it more effective when you provide lunch, transportation, and information to subjects than purchasing an expensive piece of equipment? This is the type of thinking that helps community AIDS videomakers realize that they do not have to go to college or technical schools to show their views through video. Many of these people do not have time to think about camera angles, lighting setup, or theories for the simple reason that they are dealing with life and death issues.

ALEX: I am not actually sure what brought Juanita to AIDS. However, I do know that when I approached BATF about the WAVE project they told me about this wonderful woman who had been doing volunteer work at the agency; they thought she would be a perfect member for the group I de-

scribed. In the context of the WAVE project I learned that Juanita was an extraordinarily productive, creative community activist; a mother of two young children; married to a Bangladeshi; a funny, shy, beautiful black woman; a little-tutored artistic genius; a part-time college student; a full-time housing inspector; a woman concerned with a great many issues that affect poor people of color; a person who has always wanted to tell stories with film.

Knowing Juanita as I do now, I would guess that her initial motivation to do volunteer AIDS work was much like mine: a personal and political commitment to combating the sexism, racism, homophobia, and economic oppression that she confronts daily from the mainstream culture and often from within her own community. She has told me that she faces more oppression, disapproval, and blockage from her own community than from outside it. I would guess that AIDS gave her a focus for all of those concerns and a site upon which to enact the enormous amount of energy, passion, and desire, which fills and sometimes paralyzes her, to work with and know others. It has provided a field of action that allows her to work within her community as well as to move into others.

Four years later, because of her work for GMHC and her activism outside of the agency, I believe that Juanita Mohammed has come into a new professional and creative power because of and through AIDS. She has made countless AIDS videos, done even more AIDS educational forums in her neighborhood and throughout New York City, has made (and lost) many friends, and has come into her own as an AIDS activist video maker.

What have you learned about yourself through AIDS video production?

Juanita: I hadn't realized I'd learned anything. When I answered the question I was amazed at all I had learned. I see the changes I made personally. This was one of your analyzing questions and it got on my nerves.

Alex: What do you mean by "analyzing"?

Juanita: Asking me a question that I'm going to have to think hard about, that's going to open me up, make me think about who I was, where I am, and where I'm going.

Alex: I go through different moods about this work. On paper, for this answer, I'm very positive. But in fact I'm often more cynical about AIDS video production. Maybe not about what it's like to do the work, but about what it takes to get energized and committed to do it because it's so much work, funding it, remaining optimistic and enthusiastic. With all the hard parts, it's easy to forget how much you get from it.

JUANITA: Through AIDS video production I have learned many things about myself, the most important being that I have a talent and skill that I can use to help others. In producing AIDS video I have been able to see myself more clearly. It has helped me in overcoming my reluctance to meet people different from myself. I realize that even though I do not always agree with different people, I am still able to be open to their ideas and beliefs.

While I have an excellent vocabulary, it was not until I got involved in AIDS video production that I felt the freedom to use it. Dealing with diverse populations has reinforced my belief that no matter what race, class, sexual orientation, or gender, the human family continues to strive to survive. The gay and straight family still worry about insurance coverage, the Catholic family can be as dysfunctional as the Muslim and Baptist family. The poor, single mother can be just as confused as the multigenerational family.

AIDS video production has also allowed me to see that I can be mechanical. That although my hands shake there are tools like the tripod and stabilizer. Tools like this have enabled me to teach children, handicapped people, and illiterate individuals to use the camera to get their ideas across. In terms of conveying ideas or information, the video camera has proven to be an excellent time-saving visual tool.

Because when I make AIDS video I have to ask personal questions and make decisions that effect the lives of others, I have come to learn what I will and will not accept, deny, or exploit. For example, even though an HIV-positive person might want to self-disclose on camera, if I feel they are not able to accept the fallout from this disclosure I will allow them to say what they choose but I will not use the tape for broadcast. Yet at the same time, even if I strongly disapprove of a person's ideas, I will still broadcast them. This has helped me see myself as a responsible educator. Once, when videotaping, I asked a question which caused the interviewee to cry. From a voyeuristic position, I thought it was great, but felt uncomfortable showing a person in a vulnerable state. So I shot it again when she was more composed. On showing it to Alex and the other women in WAVE, we all decided that the segment without the crying got the point across, while the segment with the crying took the focus off the point.

I have come to the conclusion that Juanita can be flexible. The idea of making choices was something I shunned before: I did not want to take the responsibility. Today I am willing to make choices and live with the consequences. If not for AIDS video production, I would still be working at a job I hate, still hanging out with people who were narrow minded, still thinking of myself first. I would still be a phony, denying my bisexuality to the world, denying my humanity to myself. AIDS video production has given me the freedom to be my real self.

ALEX: Through AIDS video production I learn many different things which help me. First, I learn that I am not alone in my grief, anger, pain, or even daily experiences with AIDS. Making (and screening) video is a collective act where I can be engaged with others who are living with and thinking through

this crisis. Interviews are the most obvious example of this: a camera between two people allows them to converse in ways and about issues that are usually unavailable to them in the real world. But also the immense amount of work that goes into making a video is itself an incredibly social act, full of negotiations and attempts at expression, arguments and reconciliations. Screening your work is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the communication made necessary by video production. I always feel very vulnerable showing a video: during a screening it feels so big and concrete. But the tape between me and others often provides a springboard for conversations which would be less comfortable without the video there, especially if I am trying to engage in conversation with people who seem "different" from myself. A video provides a common point of reference: "you know that scene where the woman shows her house . . . ?"

Through AIDS video I am also given an opportunity to discuss, challenge, and expand my own AIDS knowledge: how I understand the politics and implications, as well as the daily experiences, of this crisis. Seeing and speaking with others about something I'm concerned enough about to make or watch a video allows me to learn that my ideas and experiences are valid but also limited—only one vision of AIDS, only one interpretation, but also something that might matter to someone else.

I learn that I can make a contribution, something that is valuable to others, even though I spend most of my days feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of suffering, indifference, and death which is AIDS. Sometimes I believe that this work is entirely selfish—busywork that at least allows you to feel like you're doing something. But this is one way that video is so exceptional. If you are willing to do the hard work of distribution after the already hard work of making a tape, you get to see your entirely selfish busywork affect other people, whether the work is good or bad, liked or disliked. It's such a public form. From an initial inspiration to feel useful you are forced to actually imagine and then image what could be of real use to other people.

Of course, this work is also frustrating—people don't show up for meetings, don't get their work done on time, a project always takes more of a personal, emotional, and time commitment than I initially expect. So I learn that I am sometimes intolerant, but also resolute. I learn that I am committed, as are many others.

What have you learned about [the other conversant] through AIDS video production?

Juanita: I learned that you are not as secure as I first thought. I always had the idea that if you started a project, you knew what would happen. If you wanted to do B, B would happen before C. I always think the other person knows more than me.

Alex: I don't know why you have this overestimated view of who I am and what I do.

Juanita: I know that it is wrong consciously, but it's the unconscious level that is more difficult to change.

JUANITA: Through AIDS video production I have learned many things about Alex. The first would be her commitment to the use of half-inch video as a vehicle for involving everyone in the taping process. While her peers have gone for the political, educational video look, she has left her focus on the views of the people involved. Her videos reflect the hands-on work of the nonprofessional people she works with. I have seen her pain or happiness when a friend with HIV got sicker or healthier. Alex is the type of person who analyzes everything. She does not allow people to make blanket statements; she looks into these statements and makes them look into their statements as well. I believe that Alex has become much more self-assured from working with the WAVE group. She no longer has to ask constantly for affirmation. In getting to know her, I have seen Alex as an individual who dresses and says what she pleases; a romantic who is in love with everyone being in love. While she constantly changes hairstyles, her beliefs and commitments remain steady.

Watching Alex in the editing room is amazing. She turns from this liberal producer who makes sure that everyone is in total agreement into this mother lion fiercely guarding her cub. Throughout the project she was always worried if people did not attend meetings. Throughout editing, I think she was relieved when we all weren't there. During editing, she came into her total, true self. She was comfortable showing her expertise, arguing with others, overriding people's opinions, being corrective and political. I think I like this side of Alex best.

ALEX: Through AIDS video I have learned that Juanita is very vulnerable and very strong. That she is incredibly nervous and entirely self-assured. That she longs for more and more and more in her life—more people, new experiences, many projects—even as she takes comfort in the life she has, and often chooses to stay home rather than go to the events I invite her to. I have learned that Juanita is held back by the world into which she was born—by her race and class and gender, by getting married early and having two kids, by not getting her college degree in film when she began it at eighteen—and that she is entirely capable of breaking through these confines. Video is a powerful tool that allows someone like Juanita—who is not always confident in person, who may worry that she might not say something right, or that she is the only person of color or woman in the room—to take control of a situation, both through the authority of the equipment and the power of editing, where an argument can be rehearsed, fine-tuned, consolidated. I have learned that school smarts are only one way to know, and that creativity is not something

that can be learned in school, through books, or even through the access to high culture that money and education allows. I know that Juanita looks up to me, what I've accomplished, and wonder if she knows that I also look up to her.

What is the relationship between AIDS, community, and video?

Juanita: This is my favorite question. Video production is a connection between the three. You can't have one without the other.

Alex: This question is important to me—it's the focus of my academic work, but also the inspiration for it, why I think that video production is so powerful for myself and others. I'm almost like a missionary, trying to bring people in to try it. People are so rarely afforded the opportunity to think hard about what they believe, to work through how best to communicate this to others, and then to see this actually put out into the world in a form which carries authority.

Juanita: Originally, when I wanted to go into film, I saw myself as the director, a god. Now I don't feel right if I make a video without input from everyone involved. This makes for good teamwork, better videos, and real relationships.

JUANITA: I believe the relationship between AIDS, community, and video is the human side of people being infected and affected by AIDS. By "human side" I mean the knowledge that the AIDS crisis is affecting real people. AIDS, the community, and video come together to help educate, support, and hook up people who need each other—people who otherwise might have never come together. When a community of people made up of different and similar backgrounds view a video about AIDS, they are allowed the opportunity to see that others are going through the same things. Seeing two gay men's dedication to their HIV-positive baby in my video *Two Men and a Baby* makes one realize the love gay couples can project. A video like *Invisible Women* (Ellen Spiro and Marina Alvarez) shows women their connection with each other: the issues they share such as children, dreams, education, fears, and strengths. Gregg Bordowitz's video *Fast Trip, Long Drop* ties the individual to the community, which in turn ties the community to the individual. When communities feel that AIDS only affects them or overlooks them, video is an excellent tool to reinforce the motto that AIDS affects everyone.

During the WAVE project the women in WAVE became the string which connected the community and AIDS through working on video. For example, one of the participants who never dealt with politicians called a local politician to interview him on how the community was working on an issue. As a result of the meeting, the politician learned about agencies dealing with issues of AIDS and the woman was able to start a support group in the area. Another

example was when we shared *We Care* and other alternative videos with a church group and this prompted that church to have an annual AIDS Day and to publicly open its door to PWAs and their families. When I asked the preacher why, she said because the people in the congregation thought the videos were about people like them.

ALEX: I believe that activist AIDS video—its making and viewing—provides a format which allows people to form transient but useful communities around issues that matter to them. By making AIDS into video, we make sense—not conclusively or irrevocably, but partially and transitionally—of ourselves and our lives in the face of AIDS. The medium allows us a place to ruminate and then express. And while this is true of many other modes of expression, video differs from them in significant ways. Like activism, video attempts to interpret and interrupt the status quo of both intimate experience and large institutions; yet it is also permanent. Like academic work, AIDS video focuses upon analysis, making sense of experience, history, and culture; but AIDS video is accessible to many and is most successful when used in familiar and creative ways. Like other forms of art, video allows us to speak our individual pain; but unlike most other forms, video can be a collective act. Many of us who are profoundly affected by AIDS use video—it's making and watching—to communicate. Which is not to say that we don't communicate constantly about AIDS in other forms: on the telephone, over dinner, through writing. But communication through video allows for other levels of power: a larger audience, a mimetic hold on history, an accessible and familiar form.

When I make an AIDS video with others—those like me and those who are not—around the issues upon which we can agree, we are making an intervention that will contribute to change. These images serve to confirm a larger, politicized community—larger than any single AIDS identity—engaged in an ongoing struggle. Thus alternative AIDS video is about how identities are turned into communities because of AIDS and through video. The production and reception of alternative AIDS TV is a form of direct, immediate, product-oriented activism which brings together committed individuals who insist upon being industrious.

Answers to Juanita's Questions

What preconceived prejudices, stereotypes, or biases do you start out with when doing a video dealing with a community of people either infected or affected by AIDS?

Alex: This was the hardest question for me. It was embarrassing to express to myself, and especially to others, my prejudices. I probably wasn't exactly honest. I had to let my political understandings of these issues color my answers.

Juanita: I hated this question, too. When I answered, I thought I could be totally honest. But I realized I can't say this about this group or that group. So I was more politically honest. But I learned how prejudiced, biased, and stereotyping I really am. Even if I am a person's friend, I'm thinking about them as a member of some group.

Alex: Yes, I know. You have to struggle so hard with all that you've learned before from the outside. Those messages of prejudice are always there, getting in the way of having open interactions. All of the difficulty this society has in dealing with difference ends up being played out on an individual level, even if you try not to, even if you know better. The worst of it is that even when you try to unlearn these prejudices, they seem to haunt the undercurrents of a relationship, they become that which isn't said. It takes courage and work to say them and in this way perhaps to begin to make them go away.

ALEX: Of course, my answer to this question depends upon the community with which I am producing video, because I carry different biases for different communities. If I was describing my preconceptions about the women in WAVE versus what I thought I knew about the Swarthmore College students with whom I produced *Safer and Sexier: A College Student's Guide to Safer Sex,* I would have two different but related answers.

In the first case, working with the women in WAVE who were for the most part less educated than me, and who were all women of color who lived outside of Manhattan, I was certain that some of my lifestyle choices would not be accepted by the other group members: living as a single woman, living in the East Village. It is interesting to consider why I cared about this acceptance. Did I want them to like me, respect me, understand me, follow me? I remember trying to keep my political beliefs and commitments quiet: I didn't want people to know I was a feminist, or that I had gay friends, or even that I was an AIDS activist. I was embarrassed about what I perceived to be my economic and educational privilege, and tried to hide it by not talking like an intellectual, or not referring to the ways and places in which I live my life (trips I had taken, where I went to college). Yet, of course, as Juanita reminds me, we were all quick to make assumptions about each other, give each other titles: Sharon the strong one, Carmen and Aida the religious housewives, Marcia the cold social worker, Glenda the comedian, Juanita the weird one, Alex the white girl.

Of course, being white did not help in this awkward camouflaging process where we all tried to hide the weird parts from each other. Initially it seemed that in this context my whiteness was my greatest liability—I couldn't erase it or cover it up—and everyone could see that I did not fit in. The misconceptions allowed by privileging my difference (whiteness) were rooted in my simple-minded conflation of race, education, class, and politics: as if a less

educated person couldn't be politically liberal or radical, as if a Christian women couldn't challenge her religion's dogma, as if a working-class black woman couldn't be highly educated. It took time and conversation to begin to understand the very inaccurate way that our skin colors gauge the full meanings of our differences. For of course it was not only my whiteness that was "different" here. The six women of color in our group—from a variety of ethnicities, religious upbringings, classes, educational backgrounds, and political outlooks—were as different from each other as they were from me.

Making video together allowed for, made necessary, the kinds of conversations that forced us to see beyond the visible differences that tend to disallow communication across difference in our society (I'm thinking here not only of skin color but also the markers of class, neighborhood, and ethnicity that are worn on the body: clothes, jewelry, hairstyle, weight). When you're working closely with people on a difficult project like a video about issues that matter to each member of the group, it's almost impossible to not speak with the words that make you most comfortable, or about your particular life experiences, or about your beliefs and values. And as you begin to reveal those politely protected spaces to people (my parents are professors, I eat bagels, I am not planning to get married or have kids for a long time, if ever), others begin to do the same. When people who are different from each other start talking together, they begin to see how their stereotypes are inaccurate, they see the ways that their most obvious or visible differences mask both similarities and differences. What I learned seems obvious but hard to know in a society that teaches us to place a premium upon what distinguishes us from others: I learned that race, class, gender, education, life experiences, political beliefs, and social values don't line up neatly, don't necessarily imply any one thing about the others.

On the other hand, when I worked with my college students (a group who shared only an elite liberal arts college educational background in common), the prejudices which structured this interaction were similar, if only coming from the opposite direction. I assumed that we were all *similar,* that we could take political beliefs, class, race, lifestyle, or values for granted because of our shared educational position. When we talked with each other in the process of making a video around an issue to which we are all committed, we learned how different we are. In this case, the group was constituted of men and women, a cheerleader, a frat boy, a safer-sex educator, a premedical student, a videomaker. The students were white, African American, Asian American, Jewish, Catholic, straight, bisexual, asexual, conservative, liberal, sexually naive, and sexually active. We all said we were HIV-negative and we all shared a commitment to making a safer-sex video, but our interpretations of safer sex, not to mention sex, varied: we disagreed on the viability of showing real sex on screen, about the importance of celibacy as a method of safer sex, about

how to represent women's bodies. It became clear that our shared educational privilege served to mask the other traits which distinguish us. The only way to work together on the video was to talk together to learn about what we could agree upon.

Whereas I believe that race falsely marked what I perceived to be irreconcilable differences for the participants in the WAVE project, education (and thus, class) signified what I misperceived to be a common base for the individuals involved in the *Safer and Sexier* project.

JUANITA: I have to admit that when I am shooting a video with community groups, I find that a lot of my own personal prejudices, stereotypes, or biases come up. This generally happens when I am dealing with people whom I consider different from myself. When I am with people from less educated backgrounds, I try to not talk with words that I assume they will not know, or I try to talk their language, but at many times I just sound phony. I am more careful of what I wear; if I am with a church group, my pants will not be as tight, no low-neck blouses or jeans. If I am to be with a homosexual group, I try to dress trendy. Many times this even extends to where I choose to take people from different communities to lunch. I have found many times that people from lower income groups are more relaxed eating at fast food places rather than restaurants.

Although I have been around many people affected or infected by AIDS, I still feel that I have to be cheery and go out of my way to show that I am not afraid of them by drinking and eating their food or touching them. I tend to expect people to not know or want to know as much as I do about AIDS. When I am dealing with people from different races, classes, and genders, I tend to feel wary, that they will not accept me. To ward off these feelings interfering with the video and to get the chance to experience the real people, I have to make an effort to accept them. I do this through listening to and communicating with the real people rather than their races, classes, or genders.

What are the personal issues you have to deal with when you enter into a group dealing with AIDS where you are the "other"?

Alex: It was interesting to me how both our answers expressed how hard it is to do work with people who feel different from you: we both spoke of being very vulnerable, uncertain, and lacking self-confidence. But then, especially if you're in charge, you have to be able to put a good face on it anyway.

Juanita: I always feel like I am the other. When I enter a group, I am the other. But I also know that sometime during the process I can become friends with everyone in the group because I can find something in common with each of them. Yet when its over, I am the other again.

ALEX: If I am making video with a group of people who are HIV-positive, I deal with my sadness: I wish they weren't infected. I deal with my lack of confidence about how to be with people who are infected: I don't know what is the right thing to say. Should I mention their illness, should I act like they are or are not sick, like they will or will not die? I deal with my own stubborn belief in my mortality, as if their infection confirms my own health. I deal with my own fear of death, my own hypochondria, as if their infection is proof of my own.

If this is a group where I am "other" due to race, class, or sexual preference, I deal with my own uncertainty about how others see me. What do people of color really think about white people? What do poor people really think of more privileged people? What do young people think of older people? What do married women think of single women? Do they like my clothes, my hair, do they understand how I talk? I worry that I have to like everyone and if I don't it's a sign of my internalized racism or sexism or classism. I worry what they say about me when I'm not around. Maybe I'm too bossy, too closed, too much in command. I worry about what my responsibilities are to others. What do I owe people with whom I make educational video? What do they think I owe them? I carry a great deal of guilt, always thinking people want more of me than I can provide.

JUANITA: When I have to deal with any group in which I am the "other," personal issues pop up. The fact that I am shy and insecure makes me anxious, which stresses me both emotionally and physically. I am very liable to have an anxiety attack when meeting a group. The main cause not being because I dislike the people, but because I do not want to offend. I take great pains with dress and how I am going to introduce myself. Many times I have to overcome learned prejudice and stereotypes. The only way I can do this is to open my eyes, ears, mind, and heart to people. When I find myself uncomfortable with a different race, class, or culture, I make it a priority to extend myself. For example, I will go to their homes and eat their food, or I will take them to my home. I get to know them and let them get to know me. I do not talk down or up to them, nor do I make judgments. I have even overcome automatically expecting people from my own race, culture, and gender to behave and have the same beliefs that I do.

Another personal issue for me is being the responsible person. I have never liked assuming this role. Responsibility carries with it the expectation that one is in the know; I am rarely in the know. I do not know what goes on in people's lives when I am not around. I do not know what affects them and what does not.

It is especially hard for me to take responsibility in producing a video about AIDS because even after four years as an AIDS activist and two years as an AIDS video activist, I still feel like a novice. This goes back to my insecurities based on the fact that I am the "other" even with people I work with. As I see it, they do not come from the ghetto and I live there; they have more political savvy and are not tied down with children; they know how to speak and

have no insecurities. I know logically that they all have problems just like I do, but still it's hard to see from my eyes. I see them as free and a part of each other. I see me as a part, but also on the outside.

Is it necessary to detach when dealing with an AIDS group? How do you manage to detach from the real emotions, or do you?

Alex: This was a hard question for me because since my friend Jim died I have been doing a lot of work to not think about this part of AIDS work. It's easier to think about AIDS as a political issue. This question asked me to reveal more about the other, more emotional stuff.
Juanita: That's often why people have a camera in front of their eyes.

ALEX: Yes, I guess it is necessary to detach when dealing with the emotions and experiences raised when confronting AIDS. But the funny thing is that as much as I try to protect myself from being hurt or vulnerable in an AIDS video group, there are always words, or images, or experiences which make their way in. I imagine, finally, that this is why I do this work: not because I want to be safe but because I want to be confronted or shocked or upset. I want to feel deep emotions, even if they hurt. This is because the only way to live day to day in a life surrounded by AIDS is to be numb. In my day-to-day life and in AIDS video groups, I detach from difficult emotions or thoughts by thinking that I've already heard or seen something before, I've already worked through or resolved a particular crisis (what someone with Kaposi's sarcoma all over his body looks like, what to say to a wife with two children who has recently lost her husband, how to talk to someone who is too young to die). In my day-to-day or within a group, I deal with each upset as practically as I can, and then I can tell myself I've resolved that, it's out of the way. In AIDS video groups we all enter with these hard shells defending us—all the issues we've confronted and gotten past. The power of working on a video with people who are affected by and committed to AIDS is that you know, often without saying, that they've seen similar horrors with their eyes, that they've confronted similar traumas, and that they too have lived through it, probably also by hardening up and closing down. We all enter a group pretending that we would never want to share what really happens in our lives. It is startling how rarely we can keep up this pretense. Producing video is about making a commitment to externalizing, making visible these fears and images, to yourself and to others. But this is not a simple purging, or a release for release's sake, like saying it will make it go away. Rather, making and watching video allows both a context to release and expose vulnerability and also a forum with which to productively transform these emotions into knowledge, communication, images, or sounds from which we and others can learn.

JUANITA: I believe a certain amount of detachment is necessary when dealing with a group around the issue of AIDS. In my case, I know it is hard for me to detach my emotions. I feel for the person who is not only facing an incurable disease but also a society which seems incurable in their prejudice. I cannot just forget a person or their family when the taping is over. I have to keep in correspondence with them in some form. For this reason I am the buddy to many HIV-positive people. When someone with AIDS dies, I cannot cut my attachment to the family because I know they will still be affected by AIDS.

On the other hand, I have trained myself that there are times when I must detach. I realize that I need to detach so that I may view and hear what my subjects say without letting my emotions cloud my judgment. Many times I will set aside the questions and just ask the subject to say what she wants. Another way I detach during taping is to focus on the technical aspects like lighting and audio rather than analyzing the person's speech. Nevertheless, I do believe that it is important to not become completely detached, as it can lead to losing the image of the real person.

Coming from an academic, middle-class background, how do you adapt that to dealing with people who come from poor, working-class backgrounds and have very little education?

Alex: This was a difficult question about something I worry about a lot. It made me feel defensive.
Juanita: During the time I was writing it, there were things happening at work that made me upset. Someone asked me why, if I didn't know something technical, I just didn't take a class about it. I didn't have the money. So the question to you was an attack for something you didn't do. However, initially, I thought it was written for both of us. I've always thought that I came from a middle-class background. Then I realized that I was one of "them," those poor people I asked about. I never saw you as a privileged person. It wasn't in my mind. I saw you as you. A weird person who dresses in weird clothes.
Alex: Why didn't you see me as privileged? When did you decide that I was?
Juanita: You were free. You're not a mother stuck in your house with those children. You were going on a trip or something. But even so, I think we have the same commitments. It's just that I can be more jealous or envious. You want to be that person.
Alex: What do I have that you think you want?
Juanita: Freedom.
Alex: Freedom to do what?
Juanita: Go where you want. Not have to be the other.
Alex: That's probably true. I do have those freedoms. So I can say as much as

I want about our similarities, and how video can bring us together, but the bottom line is that I always have certain privileges. I can always leave.

Juanita: You said that you couldn't hide being white in the WAVE group when we were all black. We all should have had that feeling of difference—that we were all different from each other.

ALEX: My answer relates a lot to Juanita's question 1, about biases. Because of course, even after I've done many videos with communities who are "different" from myself, and have learned how my biases, stereotypes, and the ineffective interpersonal strategies they promote get in the way of good work, it's still very difficult to do anything but treat people like the visible traits they present to you when you initially begin a video project together. So beyond the mistakes I inevitably make where I assume I can figure all of a person out because of one noticeable component of their personality (education, race), I deal with my difference by asking myself difficult questions. What compels me to work with people who are less privileged than me? Why don't I work with my peers? Who *are* my peers? Am I motivated by liberal guilt? Am I motivated by a voyeuristic curiosity about others? Am I slumming?

I created the WAVE project (and others like it) out of a belief that although these questions are vital, their often scary answers should not invoke paralysis. Instead, I attempt to work from the belief that people who are different from each other can work together, get to know each other, strive to understand what they share in common; the belief that the access I have to funding, equipment, and knowledge is better shared than hoarded. So instead I supplement the first set of questions with another. How can I account for my power and privilege while also accounting for others' power and privilege which may take forms which are less obvious to me? How can a group of people see beyond their obvious differences to begin to acknowledge their similarities? Why would they want to? Why would people who are less privileged than me want to work with me? The answers to these questions support a new model of video production based upon an attempt to destabilize overt power imbalances while maintaining a sense of self-awareness about how and where power does exist.

I created a model for video production that attempted to learn from ethnographic films' failings, from cross-cultural film work that did not account for the power of using a camera, asking the questions or answering them, or getting to leave when the project is over. Thus I envisioned and then implemented a long-term, support group-based, collective form of production where everyone in a group would shoot, script, and edit, where everyone would be emotionally vulnerable, where everyone shared a political commitment to the video project. WAVE worked because we became coworkers and friends. Not best friends. Nor film and video equals (I was the teacher, I had the grant money, I was the project director). Not people who pretended that we weren't separated in important ways, but people who worked hard at getting to know each other so that we could respect each other, learn from each other, and produce something we could all be proud of. We so rarely struggle with how and why we can communicate with people who are raised and live differently from us. A video project can be a perfect forum to reach for this kind of revealing, if challenging, interaction because there is the potential of something tangible, respectable, and important at the end of the process—a video.

JUANITA: I believe this question should be, How do you adapt yourself to people who have backgrounds different from you? In fact, when I think about it now, I believe this question was written as an attack on you as being a "privileged person" versus myself as a "put-upon person."

There are many situations where I find that I have to adapt when involved in AIDS video production. I find that I need to adapt myself to the moods of the subject. My attitude can become aggressive or passive to match the situation. Sometimes I can even be myself when I feel in tune with the subject. I find that I adapt by putting on many different hats. The Juanita who goes after funds has to be one hundred percent confident and dress presentably. As opposed to when I go out to shoot on location with butterflies in my stomach.

When interviewing an HIV-positive person who wants to talk about AZT, I can become very political, yet interviewing an HIV-positive person who has kids can turn me maternal. I have had to adapt myself to thinking that it is not my right to argue with a woman who takes AZT, not my right to argue with the HIV-positive senior who is into radical therapy. I have had to adapt myself to the realization that I am dealing with real people and real issues, not just abstract ideas. When I am on a deadline but my subjects cannot make it due to personal reasons, I do not throw a fit but instead offer a helping hand.

Why do you think it's important to allow communities to tell their HIV/AIDS stories through video?

Alex: That's an easy question. I've thought about it so much. I didn't want to answer it. It's what all my work has been about.

Juanita: Right, you can't do this work without the community involved in it because no man's an island. Everything affects everything. It made me think of something Sharon said: "Alex ran the group, all the ideas were really hers." It was easy, really, to forget our different races and backgrounds, but it is much harder to forget the hierarchy of control.

ALEX: First off, it is important for communities to tell their stories through video because the mainstream media provides us with such a limited vision of what AIDS is, what it means, who it affects, how and why. Those of us involved with AIDS, and those who are not yet, need to understand the many experiences of AIDS and need to pass each other information.

People affected by AIDS are the best AIDS educators. They speak with the

words and images that their communities understand and feel comfortable with. Video is central to this task because it provides people who have little opportunity to imagine that their ideas count with a medium that organizes their thoughts into a recognizable, legitimate, and public form.

Finally, video provides a permanent archive of what we've done, what we've known, who was here, and how AIDS has taken so much away.

JUANITA: I think that it is important to allow communities to tell about their experiences dealing with HIV/AIDS because no one can understand or tell the real story better than those who see it happening every day. An outsider can only tell so much. There is much that I do not see when I produce a video on cultures different from my own. There is also a lot they do not tell me about. Take for example when I was videotaping one family. I showed them as carefree although they were dealing with the disease. It was only later when I was trusted in the community that neighbors let me know that this family was dealing with more than one person who was HIV-positive.

When AIDS videomakers come into a community, they have their own agenda which often does not correspond with that of the community. You have to grasp the concept that you can not tell the story without the community's involvement.

Conclusions to the Conversation

Juanita: One of the things I learned from writing this with you was more about the ways we see each other. The ways we figure that the other person saw us. I came to see you more as a person than a filmmaker. You can have insecurities. When I realized that you could have insecurities, it was okay for me to have them and then it was also okay to put forth my own ideas and advice. I had so many stereotypes about you. The biggest thing that broke them was that video you made with your college students with all the sex in it. I always thought you were a goody-goody.

Alex: I don't understand why you think that about me. It makes me uncomfortable. I think that you think too highly of me. It's a big burden.

Juanita: Well, here's something I didn't say during WAVE. Even though you were very committed to the project and the people, you took some things for granted. You didn't get releases, and some people turned out to not want to be in a video that was shown all over the country. Then you put Aida's picture on the flyer, and her boyfriend saw it, and it caused a big fight.

Alex: I felt vulnerable. It seemed to me that in many ways you all had the power. Like, for instance, what does "the white girl" mean?

Juanita: It's playful, teasing. It's self-effacing. We used it to bring us all together. It was a way for all of us, who didn't have so much in common, to talk and share. It kept you on the outside.

Alex: Did you stop thinking that that's who I am?

Juanita: Sure. After working with you you became "the dizzy girl with the weird clothes." We were more sure of each other and ourselves. We didn't need one person to get us all together.

Alex: Did you worry that this article, like WAVE, was ultimately my project?

Juanita: In the beginning I didn't want to do it. I thought you'd end up wanting to do it with a real video person. Then I was afraid to write my questions without seeing yours first. But I pushed myself and wrote mine before I saw yours. When I saw that yours weren't gigantic, I felt very good about mine. Two people who are supposed to be such opposites say pretty similar things. For instance, I also try to camouflage parts of myself to get along with others.

Alex: I was most interested to see that difference affects us in similar ways. What distinguishes us is simply that it is in different contexts where we feel different.