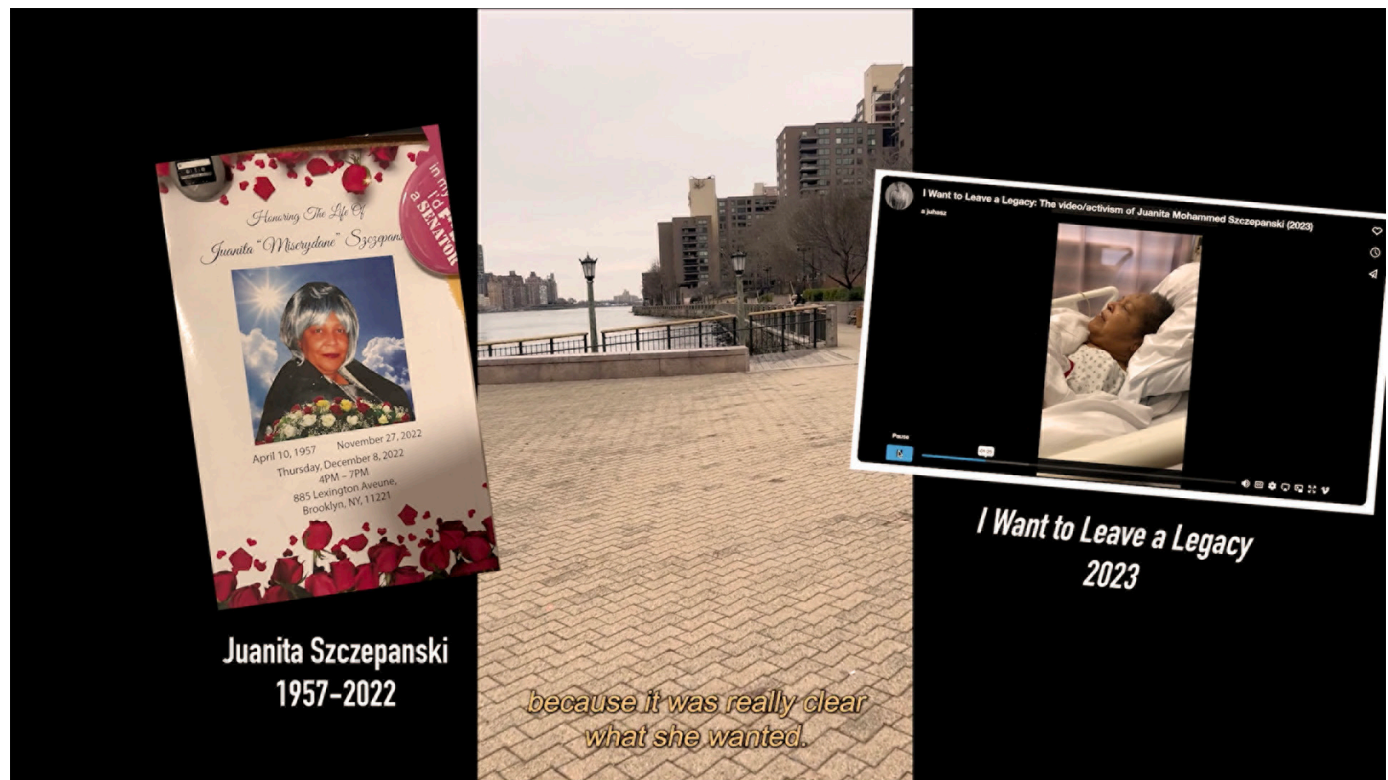


# ALEXANDRA JUHASZ'S *PLEASE HOLD*: TECHNOLOGIES OF MEMORY AND ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Broderick Fox



Multi-frame collage from *Please Hold* (Alexandra Juhasz, 2025) showing Juhasz's 2024 iPhone walk along the East River toward Coler Rehabilitation Center, flanked by Juanita Mohammed Szczepanski's memorial card and a frame from *I Want to Leave a Legacy* (2023), the deathbed/legacy video Juhasz created at Szczepanski's request. Courtesy © Alexandra Juhasz.

In a technopolitical era that silos us, disconnects us from history, and buffets us in eddies of perpetual crisis, Dr. Alexandra (Alex) Juhasz builds upon her more than thirty-five years of community-based activism, documentary scholarship, and participatory videomaking to create

a new and timely project: a collaborative, transmedia work that recruits memory, remembrance, and grief as mechanisms for connection and change. *Please Hold* (2025) is a seventy-minute video documentary, released via a rich interactive web space, [pleaseholdvideo.com](http://pleaseholdvideo.com), and accompanied by a site-specific, adaptive installation piece, *Holding Patterns* (2025–), iterations of which opened simultaneously from October to December 2025. These exhibitions were held at two queer archives in the United States: the ONE Archives at the USC Libraries in Los Angeles, and the Pat Parker/Vito Russo Center Library at the Lesbian, Gay,

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Bisexual & Transgender Community Center in New York City. Each installation's run was accompanied by a series of virtual and in-person public programming initiatives designed by Juhasz in collaboration with the institutions' archivists and local community partners.<sup>1</sup>

Juhasz's merging of media practice and activism began with the AIDS crisis and, over the decades, has expanded to encompass an intersectional set of issues including HIV/AIDS; COVID-19; feminist, queer, and BIPOC visibility and activism; and the push for both democratized media-production access and expanded forms of documentary practice. The *Please Hold/Holding Patterns* project offers an opportunity to reflect on how Juhasz, both over the span of her career and through this latest work, has generated methods of media activism that challenge and transcend the binaries of theory/practice, maker/subject, and producer/consumer that organize (and arguably constrain) much of academia and media practice.

Through this innovative video and its web and installation presences, Juhasz invites us to explore and together mobilize what she terms "technologies of memory": the media (videos, photographs), things (letters, clothing, books, magazines), spaces (neighborhoods, bars, websites, archives), and conversations (always central to Juhasz's works and their dissemination) that both archive and transmit queer history, kinship, care, and activism. As we face compounding contemporary crises—forces of queer erasure, political authoritarianism, environmental plunder, technologized siloing, and the scraping and decentering of human creativity by AI, to name a few—*Please Hold* models how the technologies of memory, accessible to us all if we are willing to come together and mobilize them, offer routes for resilience, resistance, healing, and collective reimaging.

*Please Hold* is structured around two "walks" that Juhasz recorded on her iPhone as she traversed key parts of New York City in 2024. The video begins with the first of these: Alex walking from the Roosevelt Island subway stop to the Coler Rehabilitation and Nursing Care Center, where her friend and collaborator Juanita Mohammed Szczepanski (1957–2022) spent her final days. *Please Hold* "is holding a lot of things," Alex tells us as she walks and records on the East River footpath toward Coler Rehab, "but, most critically, some footage that I shot here with my dear friend Juanita Mohammed Szczepanski when she decided to stop receiving treatment for her diabetes and asked me to come out here and shoot a video because there were some things she wanted to say."

It was while engaging in her foundational participatory video work with WAVE (Women's AIDS Video Enterprise)

in the 1990s that Juhasz first met Szczepanski. Still a graduate student, Juhasz partnered on a community-based educational project with the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force, providing video-production training to a group of BIPOC women living with partners and family members who were HIV positive. Juhasz assisted the women in producing media content specific to their lives, experiences, and community needs, addressing intersectional aspects of the AIDS crisis that were poorly represented in mainstream media or by governmental public-health responses. The WAVE video work and Juhasz's associated dissertation writing became the foundation for Juhasz's first book, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*.<sup>2</sup> Szczepanski went on to become a prolific AIDS video artist, practitioner, and community organizer, precipitating three generations of video activists and artists: Juanita herself, her daughter Jahanara (Jazzy) Zzaman, and now her granddaughter Pharaoh (Pharah) Diaz, all of whose work appears in *Please Hold*.

With the Coler Rehab footage recorded at Szczepanski's request, Juhasz made *I Want to Leave a Legacy: The Video/Activism of Juanita Mohammed Szczepanski* (2023), completing the video just months after Szczepanski's death from long-term COVID and diabetes-related complications. This request and undertaking, Alex relates to us in her 2024 iPhone walk back to Coler Rehab, summoned memories of her beloved friend and roommate, the artist and activist James Robert (Jim) Lamb (1963–93), who similarly asked her to record his thoughts in his final months while dying of AIDS. Juhasz titled that tape *Jim on the Beach* (1993) and ultimately produced from it the experimental documentary *Video Remains* (2005). Both Juanita's and Jim's "deathbed/legacy videos," along with a trove of other collaborative video works featuring each of them in conversation with Juhasz over the years, are woven throughout *Please Hold*, which, Alex explains to us as she approaches the doors to Coler Rehab, is "a meditation on how we collaborate to find the best of ourselves in the lives we live and how we continue to collaborate with the people that most matter to us, even in death."

The second organizing "2024 iPhone walk" in *Please Hold* finds Alex emerging from the Delancey Street–Essex Street subway station and traversing the now-gentrified Lower East Side neighborhood where she and Jim lived together in the 1980s and 1990s, on her way to a party at the Parkside Lounge (once a local gay dive bar, and also where Juhasz held the first public screening of *Please Hold* in March 2025).<sup>3</sup> The piece ends with Juhasz inside the Parkside Lounge of today, talking with Elizabeth Koke, who is speaking for her partner, Gavin Downie, the current

proprietor, who inherited many of the establishment's elderly gay customers as patrons and cared for one, Rick, in his final days, becoming the custodian of his vintage gay porn collection. As Elizabeth notes, "Gavin always says that it's not a real gay bar unless you've taken care of someone while they're dying."

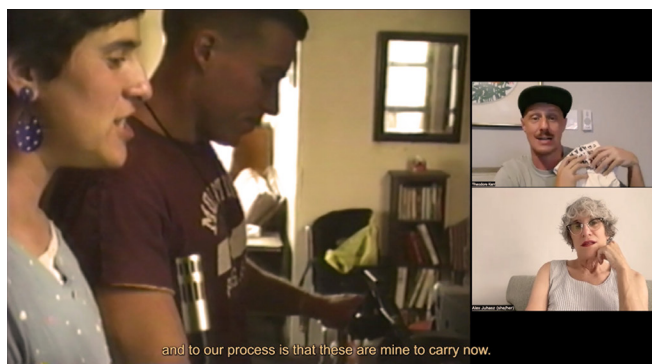
The participatory media practices of *Please Hold* are also evidenced by 2024 Zoom conversations woven throughout with four more of Alex's longtime collaborators: scholar and professor Jih-Fei Cheng; artist, teacher, and organizer Pato Hebert; scholar and professor Marty Fink; and educator, writer, and organizer Theodore Kerr.<sup>4</sup> Each appears in their own recorded conversation with Alex, reflecting on their past and ongoing collaborations with Juhasz and others around AIDS activism, memory work, and the affordances and burdens of holding those we've lost. Interestingly, while several of these four knew Juanita personally and considered her a colleague, none got the chance to know Jim firsthand, and yet all speak intimately of Jim as if they do know him, thanks to the opportunities for intersubjectivity offered through Juhasz's video works.

The technologies of memory Juhasz employs in *Please Hold* begin with the array of consumer video formats she has used over the years in her creative practice. The past video collaborations with Juanita and Jim featured include VHS and Super 8 footage from the 1980s, Hi8 from the 1990s, digital video from the 2000s, and iPhone footage from our current era. The purpose of Juhasz's 2024 iPhone walk to Coler Rehab, portions of which bookend *Please Hold*, is to visit Juanita's husband, Henry Szczepanski, who

is now a patient there himself. Another poignant instance of technologized memory facilitation occurs during this visit. Henry has written poems about his feelings since Juanita's death in a word-processing program on his computer, and wants to share these thoughts with Juhasz, but balks at the prospect of reading them aloud. Instead, he uses his computer's text-to-speech generator to vocalize his grief, the machine voice conveying his sentiments in a way that is at once disconcerting and itself documentary evidence of the limitations of language to convey the full spectrum of human feeling. These examples underscore a long-standing ethos of Juhasz's video work: seizing upon the accessibility of consumer media technologies while simultaneously reimagining their poetic possibilities as routes for expression and connection.

The varied aspect ratios of these media formats also open formal opportunities for multiframe collages of content on-screen that bridge space and time and destabilize formal documentary tropes in compelling ways. Subverting the performative nature of journalistic "walk-and-talk" sequences, Juhasz's iPhone walks function as generative acts, addressed directly to us, her anticipated viewers. In his Zoom conversation with Juhasz, Theodore Kerr notes, "The problem with memory in the body is that it calcifies; that it gets stuck. And walking unsticks the memory." Alex elaborates: "One of the things about walking, especially walking in places we've been before, is that they produce a well of thoughts and emotions that you can't anticipate. They're not scripted." Juhasz and Kerr identify both place and our physical navigation of it as technologies of memory. They underscore the capacity for locations to summon and hold multiple temporalities simultaneously, a propensity that Juhasz and her editor Matt Hittle formally enact for us in their continuous collaging and arranging of multiple video feeds on-screen at once. Further defying documentary conventions, the four Zoom conversations refuse the extractive sound-bite dynamic of traditional talking-head interviews. Both Alex and her conversation partner are always shown in their side-by-side Zoom-room windows, transforming video-conferencing apps into spaces for Juhasz's most prized technology of memory: conversation.

Conversation has always been at the heart of Juhasz's video production, distribution, and engagement strategies. Aptly, Juhasz and Kerr coauthored *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* (reviewed in *Film Quarterly* 78, no. 1), in which they reclaim the concept of "triggering" from its contemporary negative association as a trauma response, asserting the potential of AIDS activist videos to function as "trigger tapes" designed



Multi-frame collage from *Please Hold* showing the affordances of split-screening archival video with a contemporary Zoom conversation. At left, footage from Juhasz's *Clambake: A Tour of 145 Attorney Street* (1990), in which Jim Lamb and Juhasz provide a tour of their apartment. At right, via Zoom, Theodore Kerr shows Juhasz a T-shirt of Jim's that she once gave to Kerr, demonstrating how objects function as technologies of memory and the sharing of grief. Courtesy © Alexandra Juhasz.



Installation view of *Holding Patterns* (2025) at the ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, Los Angeles. Jim Lamb appears in the looping projection of *Jim on the Beach* (1993) on the gallery wall. Bryn Kelly's leopard print scarf hangs beside the installation text. The vitrine contains archival materials from three Los Angeles queer activists whose holdings at the ONE Archives were incorporated into this iteration: Mina Kay Meyer (1940-2016), Yolanda Retter (1947-2007), and Kenneth L. Wiederhold (1946-1995). Courtesy © Broderick Fox.

not only to cue affective emotional reactions but also to catalyze conversation.<sup>5</sup> Such work, though often difficult, can prove transformative when scaffolded and supported within generative spaces and contexts. *Please Hold* is made available at [pleaseholdvideo.com](http://pleaseholdvideo.com); but, rather than a mere distribution platform, the website functions as both a rich archive and a forum for ongoing conversation. *I Want to Leave a Legacy*, *Video Remains*, and *Jim on the Beach* are all streamable there, as are the four full collaborator Zoom conversations and links to sixteen online collections of AIDS media, history, memorials, and culture. A web-based iteration of the *Holding Patterns* installation is available, along with a *Holding Patterns* study guide—written by Chloe Buerghenthal and Shwe Ye Shoon Myat, graduate-student collaborators from the New School—that includes generative questions and activities.<sup>6</sup> The site also includes continually updated reflections produced by audiences and visitors in response to their experiences watching, visiting, and discussing *Please Hold* and *Holding Patterns*. In the spirit of conversation as a technology, the stream of *Please Hold* is not available as a simple clickable link but rather via a request form that encourages watching in a group and asks viewers to approach the work “with the time and space you need to attend to its commitments to community, conversation, legacy, and mourning.”<sup>7</sup> This process entails an insistence that audiences step out of the attention economy’s

stream and instead become active collaborators in the video’s knowledge production.

To date, I have participated in three group screenings hosted by Juhasz: one online as part of Visual AIDS’s Day Without Art programming in November 2024, and two hosted in my undergraduate classes in documentary studies and documentary production at Occidental College in April 2024 and September 2025, respectively. At each, Juhasz began the sessions in the same way, posing two questions to attendees: “What are you holding?”; “What do you want to let go of?” These convening prompts, followed by personal introductions and shared initial responses by each attendee, leveraged the technology of conversation before the screenings even began. My fellow participants and I entered a space of shared vulnerability and openness from which each of us then received *Please Hold*. Whenever possible, Juhasz works to ensure that such conversations precede or follow screenings of *Please Hold*, visits to the *Holding Patterns* installations, and involvement in the adjunct programming events Juhasz and her collaborators continue to organize around both. These shared encounters become part of the project’s meaning making, challenging the traditional conception in artistic production and distribution that the video, exhibition, or event is itself the “product.”

Several of the most compelling exchanges in *Please Hold* are made possible via Juhasz’s final technology of memory: things. Standing in the Parkside Lounge, Elizabeth shows Alex (and us) a leopard-print scarf that belonged to her friend Bryn Kelly (1980–2016), a well-known and much-loved trans woman artist living with HIV who took her own life. She explains, as she dons it, that when wearing the scarf, “I think about Bryn, and night life and going out with Bryn, and being at bars with Bryn,” noting the queer-inclusive spaces that afforded those possibilities for connection. Alex, seen recording in the mirror behind Elizabeth, gestures to the cardigan sweater she wears: “So, this is my friend Jim’s sweater and, um, I wear it too, but it’s really full of holes now and it’s super scratchy and it’s really hot and yet, I mean, I just remember him in it so fundamentally. So, it is a kind of kick-starter to memory.” Shy Parkside proprietor Gavin then makes an appearance, bringing out a milk crate holding Rick’s vintage porn collection, unpacking and sharing a selection of the physical mementos that he has also assumed responsibility for carrying. At another moment in their Zoom conversation, Kerr shows us Jim’s T-shirt and sweatshirt, which Juhasz once gave him. He shares:

You gave me two objects of Jim’s, and it felt really important to bring these objects today. . . . And the whole

point of you giving these to me was, like, we were having a conversation about boxes and things and memory. And so, part of my commitment to our friendship and to our process is that these are mine to carry now. They're not mine but they're mine to carry with you, and with Jim, and with everybody who loves Jim, and who doesn't know Jim yet but will know Jim.

Later in the exchange, Juhasz responds:

Part of who I became as an adult is transformed through my love and living with Jim. And that you hold some of that, that you help me hold it, that it connects, that he connects us through those things? That's just so—I mean, you're one of those people to me too, so it's just beautiful for me. And I appreciate that you brought them. And if I need a “thing” to do that? You know, God bless those things.

All of Juhasz's technologies of memory—media, place, conversation, and, in particular, the catalytic power of “things”—are further mobilized via the site-specific *Holding Patterns* installations. As Juhasz offers on the website, “*Holding Patterns* is available for adaptive, community-based placement wherever memory happens: queer bars; archives, bookstores, libraries; feminist, queer, trans, and other community centers, and so on. It can be placed anywhere that houses books, records, and collections pertaining to AIDS.”<sup>8</sup>



Installation view of *Holding Patterns* at the ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, Los Angeles. Juanita Mohammed Szczepanski appears in the looping projection of *I Want to Leave a Legacy* (2023). The book cart contains samplings from Rick's vintage porn collection and books on AIDS memory and activism authored by Juhasz and her collaborators Jih-Fei Cheng, Marty Fink, Pato Hebert, Theodore Kerr, and others. Courtesy © Broderick Fox.

At the fall 2025 ONE Archives installation of *Holding Patterns* in Los Angeles, *Jim on the Beach* looped, projected large on one wall, with Juanita's *I Want to Leave a Legacy*, similarly projected on the opposite wall of the space. Within these parentheses of video memory sat a central table with iPads on which visitors could watch the full, unedited Zoom conversations with Cheng, Hebert, Fink, and Kerr. In one corner, an armchair and a book cart invited visitors to sit and experience samplings of Rick's vintage porn collection or to peruse books and anthologies on AIDS memory and activism authored by Juhasz and her broader network of collaborators. In another, a desk summoned visitors to sit and search online AIDS archives and to write reflections inspired by suggested prompts. Visitors were asked to add their reflections to the desk's filing-cabinet drawers after exploring others' contributions. Years of handwritten letters, notes, and postcards sent between Juhasz and Jim, along with photographs of the two of them, were displayed in vitrines. Hanging above these were Jim's sweater and, alongside the installation's welcoming wall text, Bryn's scarf.

The “adaptive” dimension of *Holding Patterns* comes in the way the installation also summons and incorporates these and other “things” of deceased figures from the host site's collections. In the case of the ONE Archive, Juhasz selected AIDS Healthcare Foundation cofounder Mina Kay Meyer (1940–2016), UCLA Chicano Studies librarian Yolanda Retter (1947–2007), and Los Angeles community organizer Kenneth L. Wiederhold (1946–95), and included these individuals' letters, appointment books, photo scrapbooks, work-ID lanyards, and legacy archival storage mediums (file folders, film reels, videotapes, floppy discs, and CD-ROMs) in vitrines alongside the *Please Hold* contributors' things. This curatorial choice to invite the memories and effects of local queer leaders into the *Holding Patterns* conversation vivifies two important aspects of Juhasz's works: first, that archives are themselves a technology that must be activated and utilized in order for their “things” to communicate; and, second, that AIDS/HIV memory work is not about containing the past within historical boundaries, but instead about recognizing how it continues to shape and drive strategies for resistance and queer world-mending.<sup>9</sup>

The study guide produced by Buergenthal and Ye Shoon Myat for *Holding Patterns* further scaffolds these kinds of activations, offering frameworks for facilitating conversations and for soliciting the “filing cabinet” additions and augmentations from those who continue to contribute reflections back into the work. Juhasz's distribution and engagement strategies—video released free online, installations designed to travel, communal framing programming,

Juhasz herself available in person or via Zoom to facilitate conversations—again underscore that the real “products” here defy the dominant frameworks of media production and distribution, resting not simply in the resultant videotape or file, or the things arranged in the installation, but in the intergenerational, intertemporal conversations the project continues to enact.

Such conversations and their rippling knowledge production were demonstrated for me during each of the three screening events I participated in and during the supplemental workshop on political grief, held in conjunction with the ONE Archives installation, that I attended on October 4, 2025. The workshop was facilitated by What Would an HIV Doula Do?, the collective that Juhasz and her collaborators initiated virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic to “doula ourselves, each other, institutions and culture,”

understanding “a doula as someone who holds space during times of transition.”<sup>10</sup> The workshop explored how the grief associated with HIV/AIDS operates simultaneously on three registers—personal, political, and cultural—and invited participants to “braid” these three strands of grief together by spending time and taking personal reflective notes within the *Holding Patterns* installation, followed by small-group conversations, and culminating in subsequent full-group reflection. The goal was to consider “anticipatory grief” as a new technology of memory, drawing from the examples of AIDS activism and extrapolating these strategies outward to contend with the broader, compounding political, environmental, and technological crises we face. Each small group created a folder of conversation notes to archive in the desk-drawer files. In my breakout group, we wrote, “Is anticipatory grief a trauma function or technology of liberation?”



Installation view of *Holding Patterns* at the ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, Los Angeles. The vitrine displays years of handwritten letters, notes, and postcards exchanged between Juhasz and Jim Lamb, along with photographs of the two of them from Juhasz’s personal archive. Above hang Lamb’s Armani sweater and the plastic beach bag Juhasz uses to hold her archive of their correspondence. Courtesy © Broderick Fox.

Two of the participants in my breakout group were UCLA graduate students in their mid-twenties, who marveled at the physical letters, notes, and postcards between Alex and Jim displayed in the installation's vitrines. They explained that they had never produced or received handwritten correspondences themselves and rarely printed or produced tangible photographic prints; their entire epistolary and mediated lives were conducted via text message, email, and social media. But these students, along with my own undergraduate students, many of them aspiring media makers and activists themselves, seemingly have far more agency than Alex did at their age, with the recording and archiving capacities intrinsic to their phones and networked cloud storage and social-media accounts. In one of the postscreening discussions that Juhasz held with my undergraduate classes, she observed that *Jim on the Beach*, and the ensuing video works and engagements that legacy tape has precipitated, were a result of her ability, as a graduate student in media in the early 1990s, to access a video camera, something most of her peers and community-member collaborators lacked. And yet my own students expressed being overwhelmed at the immateriality and sheer excess of the personal stream of photos, videos, and correspondence they continually accrue. This paradox—nostalgic yearning for a materiality they have never known alongside digital overload—brings new resonances to Juhasz's initiating queries: "What are you holding?"; "What do you want to let go of?" And it also returns us to the question of whether anticipatory grief—the preparation to live with and through loss—is a condition or a strategy.

The titles *Please Hold* and *Holding Patterns* carry dual resonances: a direct request to hold something or someone (accompanied by the urgency and vulnerability inherent in that entreaty); and the suspended states of delay or impotence we find ourselves in due to external geopolitical circumstances of a scale beyond our immediate and individual control. Though some may be living with or alongside HIV, few of my students have directly lost someone to AIDS. Nonetheless, they carry tremendous new anxieties about political, technological, and environmental matters. Both as humans and as aspiring media makers, many feel stuck in holding patterns—caught between their simultaneous desires to mourn and to resist.

As Pato Hebert observes in his Zoom conversation with Alex, the central holding pattern that threads together Juhasz's career of participatory video works, beginning with

collaborators Jim and Juanita, "is that they trusted you. And in that trust and that care and love between you and Juanita and Jim, there was also an entrusting." As Juhasz walks toward Coler Rehab and sets out the intentions of *Please Hold* in her direct address to us, she models the very possibilities of anticipatory grief she's offering. Recording with a consumer video tool of our moment, Juhasz speaks intimately to each of us, strangers of the future who she trusts will be there to receive. Her entreaty to "please hold" invites us to draw from and build upon the legacies of mourning, collaboration, and resistance from previous crises, mobilizing them to approach the ones we face together now.

*Author's note: To screen or program "Please Hold," to request a local iteration of "Holding Patterns," to engage with Juhasz, or to keep apprised of upcoming events/activities, go to [pleaseholdvideo.com](http://pleaseholdvideo.com).*

## Notes

1. For more information, see Alexandra Juhasz, "Installation: Holding Patterns," <https://pleaseholdvideo.com/installation-holding-patterns>.
2. Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Duke University Press, 1995).
3. See Alexandra Juhasz, "Past Screenings & Activities," <https://pleaseholdvideo.com/past-screenings-activities>.
4. See Alexandra Juhasz, "Zoom Interviews," <https://pleaseholdvideo.com/zoom-interviews>.
5. See Tannon Reckling, "Review of *We Are Having This Conversation Now*," *Film Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2024): 102–3. See also Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr, *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* (Duke University Press, 2022).
6. See Chloe Buergenthal and Shwe Ye Shoon Myat, *Holding Patterns Study Guide*, 2025, <https://pleaseholdvideo.com/holding-patterns-study-guide>.
7. Alexandra Juhasz, "Technologies of Memory," <https://pleaseholdvideo.com/#technologies-of-memory>.
8. Alexandra Juhasz, "Installation: Holding Patterns," <https://pleaseholdvideo.com/installation-holding-patterns>.
9. See the proceedings of the 2023 Flaherty Film Seminar, "Queer World-Mending," for examples of how this term has been recently mobilized in relation to documentary practice, <https://theflaherty.org/2023-seminar-main>.
10. "What Would an HIV Doula Do?," <https://hivdoula.work>.