’People lived and they are making art. Who knew that that was the alternate ending.’

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Jih-Fei Cheng, Lucas Hilderbrand and Alexandra Juhasz discuss ALTERNATE ENIDNGS for Visual AIDS Day With(out) Art 25th Anniversary

Visual AIDS coordinated more than 60 screenings of our ALTERNATE ENDINGS video program on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Day With(out) Art. In Los Angeles, the videos screened at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, where a lively post-screening discussion between Alexandra Juhasz, Jih-Fei Cheng, Lucas Hilderbrand and the audience addressed the videos by Rhys Ernst, Glen Fogel, Lyle Ashton Harris, Derek Jackson, Tom Kalin, My Barbarian, and Julie Tolentino/Abigail Severance. Below is an excerpt from Alexandra Juhasz’s opening remarks, which started off the conversation.

I have produced a set of key words that I think are helpful for us to frame what we saw and our conversation:

Nostalgia, but I am going to think of nostalgia underneath affect, under a range of affects that are being deployed. So while some of them are certainly in that affective space, some of them are not. We might want to think of that as a generational problem--or a generational solution.

Mourning is always key. And I think it is complicated around the question of generation as I look out across this room. This room is really beautiful to me because I can’t decide why you all are here, what generation you are from. Some of us, from my generation--I am 50 years old this year, I was in ACT UP in New York and lost friends and that moment of activism--we often come out and mourn the people we lost. That is part of what we should do at these events. But many of you in the room haven’t lost people and didn’t and don’t experience HIV/AIDS as a mourning project. And I know you are respectful of our mourning so I appreciate that but it can’t be the only project in the room. And yet it needs to always have space. So we will think about mourning. There is a lot of mourning in this work. Many of the pieces are by people in my generation but many of them not.

We had the word Queer People of Color, but I would like to change it to Disidentification in honor of José Muñoz and the My Barbian piece and also because I think that as he theorizes disidentification it is always is a project for people of color.

Then we are going to talk about Video Tape. It was something we all study in relationship to HIV and pop culture. I think a lot of the pieces are working through disidentification and not disidentification relationships to popular culture. It is interesting to me to see how alive it is in the work.

Let me end this introduction with the word Activism. It is so interesting for two reasons. The large group of very visible and very beautiful and important documentaries that have been made in the last four or five years, some of which have even been nominated for Academy Awards (How to Survive a Plague) are about activism; that core moment that many of these videos point at as being about our activism fueled from our anger and our mourning. Yet there is no activism in any of these tapes.... There is history but deplete of activism. It is quiet stunning, actually. I wonder if you noticed, and if you guys want to talk about how that makes you feel, thinking about the 25 years not being remembering as that, not seeing that, not showing that...

Alexandra Juhasz is a professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College. She has been making, writing about, and using AIDS activist video since the 1980s.

Lucas Hilderbrand is associate professor of film and media studies and director of visual studies at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of the books Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright and Paris Is Burning: A Queer Film Classic.

Jih-Fei Cheng is completing his PhD in the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. Previously, he worked in HIV/AIDS social services and participated in queer of color community organizations addressing issues such as queer and trans youth homelessness and police harassment in New York City and Los Angeles.

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