

# HOLD THIS FOR ME

## INTRODUCTION

*Hold This For Me* is an interactive sonic art installation tied to the production of *Everybody* at Illinois Theatre. The installation includes *Unsent Messages* - messages that people wish they could share with someone they may no longer talk to, or don't know how to say to someone, as well as *Letters to the Beyond* - messages people wish they could have shared with someone who has passed on. The project aims to create a sense of community and group understanding, as well as explore the themes of the show, such as the search for meaning and anxiety about morality. There are two different phones you can pick up to either listen to an *Unsent Message* or a *Letter to the Beyond*.

## THEMES & CONTEXTS

Connection regrets are one of the most common regrets that people have in life. Whether it's not saying "I love you" or thinking "I wish I had stayed in touch with this person." Most of our regrets in life are centered on missed opportunities for deeper connections to those around us and creating paths of authentic communication. Many people, thinking back on their lives, wish they had prioritized living a life that was more true to themselves or allowed them to express their emotions more openly, rather than worrying about what others might think. Releasing feelings or words that we have been holding on to creates a feeling of catharsis, providing emotional relief and offering a sense of closure to certain chapters in our lives. Hearing and sharing these difficult messages not only helps us but can help others more deeply understand other people through building empathy, trust, and social bonds.

The emotional release or catharsis that is felt when finally saying something out loud after having it bottled up can create a powerful cleansing of pent-up feelings. This is something that is shown in "Everybody" where there is a moment of catharsis after a large release of feelings after a long emotional journey. Releasing feelings that have been pent up can trigger the production of "feel-good" chemicals in our brains, like oxytocin and endorphins. Sharing these more vulnerable thoughts and feelings allows us to strengthen our social bonds and foster emotional intimacy. While unsaid words often leave situations feeling unresolved, articulating the feelings can lead towards a path of resolution, gain new insights, and move forward with intention and purpose.

# HOLD THIS FOR ME

## PROCESS & MATERIALS

Choosing to convey this project through a phone, I felt a bit conflicted since so much of our isolation comes from phones. Technology has caused a lot of social isolation, misinformation, division, and social disruption. On the other hand, I have a lot of fond memories of phone calls with family members or friends who are far away; my phone has allowed me to find communities I wouldn't connect with otherwise, and it allows for more collaboration. And even more so, I remember using the landline growing up to call my friends and make plans. I can still recite most of their home phone numbers today.

Although there has been a general shift away from landlines in the last ten to fifteen years, there is a new movement to bring back landline phones for young children to be able to call a friend's home. The resurgence of landline phones shows the connections they allow without the distraction of a screen, and even the generation(s) that never had landline phones tend to be very aware of the distractions that come from screens and are aware of their negative effects. As we all try to manage our screen time and find new ways to connect and communicate outside of the digital world, it felt like landline phones were a form of technology that was healthier than where we are now.

Landlines created a strong sense of community for multiple generations and were a central point of communication in many homes, prioritizing the human voice and immediate personal contact and connections. Calling on a landline generally meant giving the other person your full attention, as there were no screens to compete for your focus. It also meant that no one in the house could be using the internet while you were making the phone call in the age of dial-up. Landline calls relied entirely on human voice with transmitted emotion depth and intimacy that written communication often lacks. The emotional resonance of landline phone calls facilitated a genuine exchange and made people feel wanted, needed, included, and involved. Which is something that I hope each person who interacts with this exhibit can come away feeling.

## VIEWER EXPERIENCE

Overall, I hope that listeners are able to connect to others, whether it is someone they know or not. I hope that people can feel a little bit more connected and seen in a world that is so isolated. Maybe this will encourage you to reach out to someone that you haven't talked to in a while or remember to say "I love you" when you walk out the door. Maybe it will just help you find a sense of release hearing people say these messages out loud. I hope you listen to a few different messages and maybe add a message of your own to our google form found here. I hope that you can feel a little bit more understood.