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TARA Hey, everybody. I'm Tara Oluwafemi, a Master of Architecture student at the GSD. And this is The Nexus, brought
OLUWAFEMI: to you by the African American Design Nexus, an initiative from the Frances Loeb Library at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. The Design Nexus seeks to gather African American designers to showcase their craft, explore different geographies of design practice, and inspire design institutions to adopt new approaches toward elevating Black designers. The Nexus is produced in conjunction with a commitment by the Frances Loeb Library to acquire and create an open access bibliography of various media suggested by the community on the intersection between race and design.

Today's episode is going to take the shape of a slightly different format. It will be a conversation between myself, Amir Hall, and Marisa Parham. Amir Hall feels freest when dancing, writing, or dreaming up stories to tell. He tells them in whichever form they ask, always, always with the intention of sharing the feeling of freedom. He considers all his works to be love offerings to his people-- himself and his people. The poor, the Black, the queer, and the Creole. These days, you can catch him reading and writing books for his MFA in Fiction at NYU. When he's not studying, he works closely with artist Sonya Clark on the Solidarity Book Project.

Marisa Parham is Visiting professor of English at the University of Maryland, where she serves as director for the African American Digital Humanities Initiative and is the associate director for the Maryland Institute for Technology and the Humanities. She also co-directs the Immersive Realities Lab for the Humanities, which is an independent work group for digital and experimental humanities. Parham's current teaching and research projects focus on texts and technologies that problematize assumptions about time, space, and bodily materiality.

She is currently developing *Black Haints in the Anthropocene*, a book-length interactive project that focuses on memory, haunting, digitality, and Black environmental experience. Parham holds a PhD in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University. From 2001 to 2020, she served as Professor of English, Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Officer, and Mellon Mays program advisor at Amherst College. From 2013 to 2017, she was the director of Five College Digital Humanities, serving Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges, and University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Marisa and Amir, I'm so excited to be speaking with you today, and thank you for joining the show for this extra special episode.

MARISA Thanks for having us.
PARHAM:

AMIR HALL: Thank you for having us.

TARA The three of us are united by our interest in technology. So specifically, the digital and how it relates to identity.
OLUWAFEMI: So I want us all go around a bit and share where we feel this intersection lies for us personally.

AMIR HALL:

Yeah, I've just been thinking a lot about the digital as a place that approaches freedom. You know what I mean? So my work is about my own kind of questions around my gender and sexuality, around acceptance and community. Yeah, the digital becomes a place where I can portray that, where the self that I want to have, the self that I dream of-- the digital is often the place where that can live.

And when I say the digital, I mean something as simple as social media. Social media-- Instagram, I think Twitter. They're all, in my view, like versions of self-portraiture in the way that a lot of people use them, and particularly in the way that I engage them. And so I take that self-portraiture seriously. The captions I write take days to edit. You know what I mean? And, yeah, it's always intentional about, OK, what part of my body am I exploring in this moment? How can this thing serve my freedom thing?

And, yeah, it is personal. And I feel like it is communal, because people seeing that-- freedom begets freedom. And I think that world really importantly on social media lends itself really well to that, because we're engaging with each other. And once you encounter a work that has been freeing for somebody, you can tell. That energy reaches you wherever you are through the screen. And so, there's a spiritual component as well that I haven't even found the language for. So I might turn to you all for that part of it. But, yeah, that's how the digital comes into play in my work so far. Yeah.

MARISA

PARHAM:

Yeah, I guess I'm just all over the place in thinking about it. Thinking about the digital, thinking about, as Amir put it, the freedoms that it makes possible. In my work, I also have to think about the unfreedoms that it also upholds, right. That's the hard thing about digital stuff. Right, Amir, it's so beautiful the way you framed it, of thinking about freedom begets freedom. But that freedom that begets freedom is, by default, in certain ways like a powerful process. Right, like the digital in certain ways or digital spaces, digital platforms, in some ways are the opposite of freedom. They're deeply constrained.

But at the same time, I found something so amazing in that, in thinking about even what you were saying about portraiture. It's a constraint that I think so many particularly Black people have taken an almost poetic relationship to, right. It's like poetic form is a constraint. And what's the amazing thing you can produce within that constraint? It wasn't mean to take that approach, the poetry and poetics, right. And thinking about this in the digital I think is really, I don't know, something really compelling about that.

But, yeah, for me, I'm very much in between thinking about the kinds of freedoms and possibilities and expansiveness and capriciousness that we can produce out of digital space while also keeping an eye to the ways in which the spaces by default produces different kinds of technological and surveillance and state constraint as well, which is just some of the work of digital humanities and thinking about these kinds of questions. But I have to say, in my work, in our labs work together, Amir, so much of it was about, how do we find that freedom, and how do we make that freedom into an actual structure that can survive all these other pressures?

Because so much of what you're seeing people doing in the digital-- particularly, I think Black people or BIPOC people in general is, again, working against constraints, I already said. But also, very much bringing over structures from other spaces. Like in some of my writing, for instance, I talk about how Black Twitter is no different than Twitter. But the difference are the ways in which people use humor and urban legend and call and response to produce a different kind of space of a very static platform, right. So we make everything into what we want to be. But a lot of that is because of the habits we've brought to the platforms that transform them. And that, for me, is a lot of what's so exciting about the digital.

AMIR HALL: I have a question actually, Marisa-- and Tara. Is there any way that your personal identities are tied up in how you approach the digital? Or affected by, or-- I don't know.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: I wonder if-- and this is something I always struggle with. It's so hard to distance myself from the way that I've always been attached to the computer, just because we grew up learning how to use computers and all of that. So it became so much an extension of myself. I guess it really became the whole selfie generation kind of thing and needing to post everything and what you're doing all the time.

It's almost like a portion of my identity has developed as being one of the people who doesn't post that frequently, or something. I don't know if that makes sense, but there's almost two kinds of people-- the ones that are like, I don't post my life online, and then the others that are like, I post everything online. And that in itself has shaped who I am as a person and really forced me to think about what my ideas of privacy are or what is the image I like to present to others. And I'm not sure if I'm fully getting to your question in this, but--

AMIR HALL: Yeah.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: -- that's where my thoughts are going with that.

AMIR HALL: Thank you.

MARISA
PARHAM: That's really interesting. I mean, I've always had it, for me, as a place of just real-- it's interesting though, too. Oh my god. Oh, I'm feeling the difference of age. This is a place where it matters. I'm a lot older than both of you. But I've always been a computer person. But when you asked that question, Amir, I don't immediately-- even though I first responded thinking about digitality, thinking about that, my first response to that question, of course, is going to be maybe-- because it's so much in the current moment of thinking about social media. But from my perspective, social media is a subset of a larger range of computerized or digital experiences.

When I think of computers and digital, social media is not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind. But I think it's so--

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, you're right. You're right.

MARISA
PARHAM: Right? But no, I think it's normal. I just think it's so ubiquitous, right. That there's a way in which-- and this is one thing I have to be interested in-- is that it's become a weird way where you say "digital" and you mean "social media," you say "social media," you mean "digital." But either thing doesn't necessarily even mean the other. So why do we slip between them so much? I've been thinking a lot about this.

And in terms of the personal, for me, the computer and the space of computing was always a space of possibility. I remember when having a computer was really special and really different. My family were early adopters of computers. And it's like a Black girl growing up in Chicago that was completely unheard of, right. And so there was a way in which, for me, it always marked a place of identity that was about difference. But when I'm learning through this project I've been working on is that there's actually a whole lot of 80s and 90s Black girls who had these computers. And it really changed our relationship so much about media and education today.

So I think thinking about where that history falls and thinking about the ways in which you've been transformed by a thing that's ubiquitous now but when you were growing up was completely rare is something that's interesting to think about as well. But, yeah, it's a super duper difference, because when I think digital, again, I'm thinking about games and computers and possibility and discrete programming and how things are different. But it's also interesting to think about something like social media, which again goes back to what I was saying in regards to even Amir's point of thinking about things about self-presentation in a social space.

AMIR HALL: Yeah. I just remembered that video games were my introduction. I mean, we were low income. So we had a Sega. We had a Sega, and that was sent from my auntie in America. And of course, there's all the implications about access and when we get certain things, because I was getting Sega mostly when Playstation was coming out. You know what I mean?

MARISA Got it, yep.

PARHAM:

AMIR HALL: And so we were, yeah, just time periods apart. And my cousins, they are middle class. And so they had more access than we had. So they had Nintendos and stuff like that. And we were all boys. And thinking about self-portraiture, it's interesting to me, because, I mean, people on Twitter or gay Twitter, especially gay Black Twitter talk about this all the time. But we always used to choose the women. *Mortal Kombat*, it's the women that we're fighting with. Even gender differences on nonconformity became present and was-- as I reflect upon it, those are my earliest like, yeah, those are my earliest kinds of choices of who to be, really. Yeah, so I feel like that's really interesting. Thank you for that reminder.

MARISA It's so magical to think about, that choice of who to be, right.

PARHAM:

TARA I actually was going to add that you're right because often-- and I think every time I talk about the digital, it varies on who I'm speaking to. So in architecture, every time we talk about digital and all that, I automatically assume we're talking about making stuff in Rhino, Rhinoceros 3D software. Or we're editing things in Photoshop. So I found myself, I realize, in this conversation as soon as I mentioned, the digital. Realizing that I was speaking to artists and researchers today, my first thought when I thought of digital was, oh, social media. That's the one ubiquitous digital thing that we all probably interact with.

Not really thinking that, yeah, we also all interact with games. We all use things like Microsoft Word. We use email. There's more to being a digital person than me dividing up the ways that I-- when I talk about the digital, always being cognizant of the audience. But we all understand what different aspects of the digital are, because we all are from this digital era. And with the video games and stuff like that, I remember that was how me and my sisters were considered tomboyish. We liked to play outside a lot, and we liked to play video games.

But then now that we're older, people ask us, what video games? And I'll be like oh, you know what, one of my favorite video games is *Mario Kart*. And they're like, that's not a real game.

MARISA Oh my god.

PARHAM:

AMIR HALL: Oh, wow.

TARA For me, it is, where I loved playing *Tetris*. When I finally got through *Tetris*, I felt like I was growing up.

OLUWAFEMI:

AMIR HALL: And *Snake*. Remember *Snake*?

TARA Exactly. On the old Nokia phones you were playing *Snake*, too. Those were some of the earliest phone games. But

OLUWAFEMI: I don't know, it's a very interesting relationship where somehow people, as soon as we were young, were like, if you're using technology to play games, you're a boy. It's like, does that make sense?

AMIR HALL: Yeah. That's interesting. And, I mean, thinking about gender and what technologies are gendered and how as well, yeah.

TARA Yeah. My follow-up to this is going to be, what aspects of the digital do you think allow it to function in these

OLUWAFEMI: ways for each of us? To be how we identify ourselves through gender or nationality or sexuality. I mean, you talked about-- Amir already really briefly, selecting women characters in *Mortal Kombat*. I loved selecting the girls because I thought they were super badass. But I love--

AMIR HALL: Yeah. You should.

TARA Right? But if I was playing like-- what's it-- *Super Smash Bros.*, I always chose Ness, the little boy with the

OLUWAFEMI: baseball cap. I loved it.

AMIR HALL: Cute.

TARA So I'm like, that's so weird, because, yeah, I could have chosen all the other women characters, but I was like, no.

OLUWAFEMI: And I still play using him now.

AMIR HALL: Right.

TARA And why is that? What about it?

OLUWAFEMI:

MARISA PARHAM: Yeah, that's super interesting, too. And I'm really relating. I mean, absolutely. My love of computers and video games was absolutely also the sign of me not being a girl in certain ways, right. In huge quote marks, right. Being a tomboy and these really complex things. Again, generationally there was much less-- I mean, one thing I've watched and I teach about this in my Girl Power class is watching the nascent opening up of possibilities for girls. But I'm definitely pre- that generation. It was not OK. I always try to explain to people from my generation even-- it's not that much older to be clear, but just to make the point.

I remember showing up to school with unrelaxed natural hair. A predominantly Black school. I got sent home, right. They were like, you're not ready for school. So that's my world.

TARA What?

OLUWAFEMI:

MARISA People-- oh, absolutely. This is the 90s. The 90s was a time of profound transformation of gender and race stuff.
PARHAM: But before that, 1990 was a hard pivot away from this previous moment that's hard to understand now, because so much of what we have today was really rooted in that moment. And so we lost the sense of that origin. But whatever. So, yeah, I mean, I was making the point earlier about social media and there being other kinds of digital experience like you all picked up. And at the same time, I do think we have something in this conversation that's been emerging around, the digital still-- even if we're just thinking at the level of video games and computing-- still became a place of identity expression, even just in the act of doing.

So if I'm playing with my little Commodore 64, this old 80s first home consumer computer, even my choice to do that was also a self-expression of identity that, I guess, is almost back to the sense of self-portraiture, no matter how intentional it is or not, right. And thinking about that is really fascinating, because I think there's something in all of this. And what I was hearing a little bit in what you guys were saying about what it means to be looking for place and looking for a space. In digital, it's always more space. Even when it's constrained in the ways I've mentioned, there's a way in which there's always a sort of aspect-- I don't want to say frontier, because I think that language rightfully is too overloaded. But a sense of newness and new possibility that we have to take really seriously.

I'm not going anywhere with this, I'm going to stop talking. But just something you all were saying was making me think about this as a sense of seeking. A sense of searching and looking and finding. That's really interesting to think about in relation to what digital can do for us.

TARA Yeah, so now I'm starting to think about the video game characters and the way they're represented. The women
OLUWAFEMI: are either princess, or they're this fighting girl and basically fighting in a bikini.

AMIR HALL: Yeah.

TARA And then the men show up in the subway of styles-- whatever. But I'm wondering if that has started to influence
OLUWAFEMI: the way that we approach fashion and the way that women present themselves on apps like Instagram. You either look like there's this cutesy baby doll aesthetic, or you look like you're going to the club. And I'm not going to lie, I'm not separate from that. But I'm wondering if those ideas that that's how women should present themselves in digital spaces started with these. Our first images of women digitally were always very sexualized and gendered. And I don't know. Yeah, if you are a woman that has autonomy and you can fight well in a video game, you're half-naked. But if you're the princess, you're fully clothed.

And so then, now that we constantly talk about reclaiming our bodies. I mean, you will always catch me in the winter in a tube top.

AMIR HALL: Come on.

TARA I dress however I want. But I'm like--
OLUWAFEMI:

AMIR HALL: Seen that, right.

TARA I'm wondering if maybe those earlier images of showing women who are fighters-- you have like, what, Chun Li
OLUWAFEMI: and all of them in these outfits-- made us associate like, I can be a strong woman, and in order to do that, I show how I'm claiming my sexuality and I'm still killing it. I don't know, I don't fully have the idea formed, but I'm wondering how much that kind of influence does subconsciously.

MARISA Yeah, it's really-- oh, god. When I think back to my Girl Power class, I mean, this is the dominant critique of post-
PARHAM: feminism, which was the reclamation of the body and sexuality as an expression of power in relation to other kinds of physical power. And the dominant critique, particularly from second wave feminism, the wave of feminism prior to that, was that you can say you're feeling powerful and we're doing all this stuff, right, but at the same time, we have to worry that all this is really doing is reintroducing the notion of a woman's value being attached to her being sexualized.

I was saying recently actually to a class that this is my half-baked theory-- half-baked, but I stand by it-- theory of thinking about women's boobs in video games and superheroes were always very prominent. And my argument is that in some ways, even in outfits that we get like in the Marvel universe now, where women are much more covered up than they used to be, we still get this weirdly prominent boob thing. But that the boobs, I think, are supposed to take the place of muscles, right. So the women are muscular, but the boob is like the prosthetic add-on. The way the men, for instance, will have a chest plate and they have rippled abs built into the chest plate, right, and the arms are structured in this certain way.

This notion of, this is the location of her feminine identity is also the place of her power comes up in this exaggerated chest. And so it becomes this weird moment, in other words, where we have to at some point make the call to figure out what is an authentic, huge quote marks, "self-expression," and what are the ways we're constantly turning to different kinds of representational technologies as prostheses for whom we imagine we want to be perceived as.

And figuring out how to empower that, I think, becomes extremely difficult because these media expressions are also our identity expressions, and they've produced us as much as we produced them. And so figuring out where to break those circuits or when to break those circuits or when we just don't even care I think is going to be a really hard and difficult thing to think about for the next few years, because at the same time I make this argument that we want to be careful about thinking about the oversexualization of video game characters and what it does to young fem-identified subjects. But on the other hand, the stakes of letting that go are probably too high and too painful, too.

So that was a long way of saying nothing, I guess. Sorry, you're in my wheelhouse-- some things I think about. I teach this class, I teach pop culture classes on things like girl power. And right now, I'm really teaching a video game class and we're taking up the question of what constitutes a proper heroine like in a game. Going back, Tara, to what you were saying about the princess versus *Bayonetta* or something, right.

AMIR HALL: Yeah. Even outside of video games. I'm thinking of X-Men. Jean Grey. Come on, Jean Grey is Category Five, right. Why Jean Grey fainting every two seconds?

TARA Oh my god. Girl, oh my goodness.
OLUWAFEMI:

AMIR HALL: Why she fainting? Why she can't stand up? All the sun-- she can move the sun, right. But she can't stand up without Cyclops' help.

TARA Make it make sense, you know.

OLUWAFEMI:

AMIR HALL: Right? Yeah, I think--

TARA That's the thing. It doesn't. Yeah.

OLUWAFEMI:

AMIR HALL: It doesn't. So, yeah. I mean, what I'm also thinking about-- so coming back to a point that Marisa made is the pivot that happened in the 90s. I don't necessarily know what that looked like, but I'm wondering-- I'm even sensing a little bit-- I'm wondering if you are sensing this too, that this is also a pivot. We talked briefly about this when Marisa mentioned that we're not going back to so much analog as we had before. The college experience will continue to look differently and would look more like it has looked in the past year because of COVID.

But I'm also thinking not only in terms of how we relate to digitality, but to identity. It's occurred to me recently, in my own journey, I had to find the beauty in these questions. Because questions around gender are particularly difficult, because there's so much shame attached to not playing your role well. But in the Caribbean, I think shame is weaponized in a particular way. Yeah, I've been learning in myself to embrace those questions more and to embrace those questions and the work. And a word that Marisa used last time comes back to me in that journey, which is "migratory," right.

I feel like digitality for a lot of people was-- and I'm referring now back to video games and back to X-Mex-- was in a way our first contact with something we could name in the spirit, right, or express in our bodies. Our bodies as analog and spirit as digital, right. The analog has always been limited for, I think, gender-nonconforming folks. And as I'm coming into my own gender nonconformity and I'm thinking about this question, it feels like, yeah, like these are some technologies-- TV, video games. Now social media are allowing us access to spirit, actually.

And we can talk very long about this, because Marisa and I worked on a project called Pray Daddy recently, which we describe as a digital j'ouvert. And j'ouvert is a ceremony in Trinidad. It's a festival where people drench themselves in mud and at sunrise, they parade through the streets and dance. And j'ouvert comes from the French word "I open." And so it's about the opening. It's about meeting the spirits, right, at the dawn of the day where they are.

And we describe this as a digital j'ouvert because it's where my late father, who passed away in 2016, it's where he and I meet, right. And talking about creating forms that could live beyond the story, we were able to work with Twine to create and also-- I forget the other platform we used to livestream the performance, but we found a way in which to do that work, right. At least represent and feel in the body what it means to create a meeting place for spirit and body across worlds.

I'm just holding all of those things in my mind. To respond to your question, Tara, about what about the digital does the work for us, it is this ability to access spirit, to make contact with spirit in a way that the analog of the body doesn't-- if that makes sense. I was all over the place a little bit.

MARISA No, everything's really beautiful.

PARHAM:

TARA Yeah. And I think the funny thing is that all three of us just keep going, I don't know, un-fully-formed idea floating
OLUWAFEMI: around. But it's just because these are such new concepts because of the technology that we have. The technology is so new that we're finally analyzing it this way. But the things we're talking about, the way that your physical cannot match the spiritual, or the analog, is it's not analogous-- (CHUCKLES)-- to the digital. And those are-- in a sense it's like a glitch. And that's something I know we're all very interested in.

And when we think about the term glitch, it predates digital technology. So how do we see other forms of the glitch throughout history, through literature, through visual art? Even in the different ways that Black people have expressed their identities through Creole cultures. There's always been that shift before the internet. There were definitely other ways that people were trying to get there, trying to meet the spiritual and the physical. So I'm wondering what you guys are thinking about that and when and where and how these things have happened in history.

AMIR HALL: I'm having chills, but I'll let Marisa take over because the glitch is her bag.

MARISA Yeah, there's something-- first, I'm sorry, I have to professor lifestyle. I have to turn to citations.

PARHAM:

TARA OLUWAFEMI: please do. Please. We love a reading list.

AMIR HALL: We do.

MARISA There's this really fun book by this researcher, Jeffrey Sconce. It's from a while back. So pre-digital media
PARHAM: explosion moment. But it's called *Haunted Media*. And it explores the histories of different theories of-- particularly around electricity. So electricity and seance and contacting the dead and how the radio at first was like, well, clearly, this is what we've been waiting for, because this radio's going to get it done with electricity and I can talk to my deceased grandmother. And so it was really interesting, though, thinking about all these various interfaces through this book, all the different interfaces we imagine producing with technology between the body and other temporalities and other kinds of spaces.

Because we saw the media "defeat," quote, on some level, space. Like the telegraph, the telephone, right. And we also see it over time defeat location, like a recording. I can take my voice on this disk from place to place, right. So maybe this follows that alongside is the imagination that all these other kinds of what we think of as material boundaries can be broken or traversed by digital media. That's the first thing.

The other thing is I think there's something really interesting in all this for me always around the question-- so I was getting about Black Twitter and thinking about how so many things we think of as new in technology are actually quite old. That's not to say we've done everything already or nothing is new. But there's something really striking. I remember advising at one point an undergraduate thesis project that was really zeroing in on how augmented reality technologies really allow us to move closer to what he read as indigenous imaginations of time and space in a word. But the transportation that one sees through the word is a little transportation to a vision of something new. And in a way, technology was just now catching up with that, right.

Because technology is the thing we're making, and so what is the spirit world, right? The sense of j'ouvert, the sense of whatever, that we're actually producing these technologies out of, whether we realize it or not. Many of the people who are making it don't realize that the people like us who use it seem to get it, right. And so how do we think about that? I'm thinking, too-- and I'll stop, Amir, but there was something like-- I really want to pick up on this notion alongside the glitch of the beauty in these questions. I think there's a connection there, what you keep referring as the beauty in these questions, Amir.

And also this question of, where are these bodies, and where is this beauty that we're talking about? There's something about the glitch that helps us start to think about that, because it's interesting that our conversation so much started around this notion of standardized rolls around, for instance, gender identity. Then all the ways we fall into and fall out of that, right. So there's a glitch aesthetic there about a thing that can't quite stay on track because all these other things seep through. They're not supposed to be part of the representational code.

And so I just think there's something so interesting where we're in this weird place in our conversation where we're taking on these big things, but they do actually fit together. But some of us figuring out which thing begat which thing. Because we're not just responding, we're making things as well.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: So then this goes to the question that we've talked about before in the past, but it's something that we're all through our work trying to get at-- what does a glitch look like? You were just saying right now, it can look like me playing video games when people say I shouldn't. Or it can be literally I take a recording of my voice and I play it somewhere far away from my physical body. And somehow there's a disconnect between time and space, and that's like a glitch. We're getting to all these different ways that it takes shape physically, artistically, metaphorically. What are the boundaries that we are always trying to address, and then what does it look like inside of this glitch that we create between boundaries or over boundaries, across several boundaries?

Even when you make an image that's a glitch, it's the pixels that have all shifted. So you can still sometimes almost see the image, but it's not there anymore.

AMIR HALL: Right.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: It's like, what were the boundaries of the image that we've distorted? It's still the same image within the same confines, within the same amount of pixels. They're just displaced somehow.

AMIR HALL: I'm sitting with that question about what are the boundaries and the question of what does a glitch look like. And honestly, when I think of a glitch and when you asked the question, the first thing that came to mind was a funeral. I've been to two funerals for two very close family members-- my father and my uncle, and my uncle was like a second father to me. And both instances-- neither of them seemed real. I remember it so clearly. Ritual is a word that comes to mind. It almost felt like play. It literally almost felt theatrical.

Part of that is because I know that actually-- and this is a theory-- but I know that death isn't real. And it feels like we all know. And we do this because-- well, whatever ritual, you know what I mean. But a funeral is something that comes to mind. And another thing that comes to mind is when my father died, we didn't have camera phones or anything like that. But there are recordings of his voice. We had WhatsApp. And even that feels like a glitch, to know that they exist. You know what I mean. I still can't really listen to them.

And then for my uncle, it was like a step above. We had videos of him. Yeah, I'm trying to get at-- I'll try to answer that question of boundaries. It just feels like, yeah, prior to some digital technologies, there was this idea that with deaf voice stopped, image stopped, the body could not move. And now the body is moving on screens. We carry their voices in these devices as previously we carried them in our minds and in our memory. And so it feels like that boundary is extended a bit.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: I'm going to jump in here because I absolutely agree. I'm always obsessed with Proust and how he deals with memory and all sorts of things like that. I just think he does it so creatively. Attaching memory always to place and objects and sense. And I was at an Anicka Yi talk back at Amherst College, and one thing that she said that always stuck with me was, sense is presence through absence. And I'm very interested in ruins, and then I start to think of, well, can a sense almost be seen as a ruin? Because it's the fragment of what was left, or something like that.

And then I start to think about when we have images of people on screens, that frozen image of the person is so detached from reality. You know how every time you play a memory in your head, it's distorted. And you might remember somebody wearing a green shirt, tomorrow you remember it as blue, tomorrow you'll remember it as chartreuse. You'll start going through these things where the memory is always augmented. And then it just becomes the fragments. So when you have these very still images and videos of people that don't go through any sort of ruination-- our memories go through ruination, to me I think so. Because they start to deteriorate and they show time and distance and all of that.

But when you have videos or audio that's one to one, never changing, is this almost like freezing someone in time? And then the boundaries of a glitch are always then when something that was formerly impossible becomes possible? I don't know. Or something that we always accepted as fact is suddenly changed. I'm wondering if we could come up with a general term that would address all the different ways we're approaching a glitch, right, now in this conversation. Like a general definition. But I don't even think that's possible, because the glitch takes so many shapes.

MARISA
PARHAM: That's super exciting. I have to say, again, Tara, the definitional work you just start to do in thinking. But the definitional work you were just doing around the question of what constitutes a glitch to the definition you just gave it is, in its framing and definitely in its spirit, almost exactly the same definition that Freud gives to the notion of the uncanny, right. So the uncanny, according to Freud, is the moment of discomfort that emerges when something that one thought was familiar emerges as being completely unfamiliar, or vice versa, right. So there's an expectation there and then a moment of emergence that reveals the opposite of the expectation.

But because there are actually two sides of the same thing, that's what produces the uncanniness, right. The real and the unreal become simultaneous. And it's more than the body can process. And so it can be apprehended, for instance, on the level of sensation, but it can't necessarily be, quote, "thought through." Right, and there's something really interesting in thinking therefore about what bodies can perceive and know, as you framed it, versus what we actually even have the language to talk about. And so the uncanny becomes really important, because it becomes a way of articulating the ways in which you can be right about a thing that you can't necessarily transfer your knowledge about to another.

And if you are to transfer your knowledge of it to another, you would actually probably have to do it in a different form. So the notion of the uncanny becomes really productive for thinking about the work of art, for instance. I can't tell you, but I can show you. A lot of the work I do around digital stuff and making digital projects is the notion that for a lot of, for instance, Black people, the deep unfairness of always asking me to tell you some things about certain kinds of, in my case, American experience. But I'm OK with showing you. I'm OK with allowing you to try to feel it. But don't make me try to explain it to you. Those are actually two different mandates, right.

So I just think there's something in this in thinking about the glitch. And again, I mean, as you already framed it, when things aren't quite right-- but even what makes them not quite right is that they're actually too much themselves, right. And with that as well, I'm thinking, Amir, about your point thinking about the dead. That was really beautiful, and thank you for sharing that. I'm thinking how in the early 20th century it was not uncommon for people who could scrape the money together to take pictures of their already deceased loved ones. It's a common genre.

There's this book called *The Harlem Book of the Dead*, where this author, James Van Der Zee, who I've written on, his essential bread and butter of his work was taking pictures of children and family, people who had died. But he would embed them as collages into images of the living.

AMIR HALL: Wow.

**MARISA
PARHAM:** Right. It's really intense. So there's one image I write about where, for instance-- he's not working with the dead, but it's a couple who's just been married, so a marriage photo. I'm stuttering, because I keep on to say Photoshop. But I'm talking about something like 1918, and it was not Photoshop. But it's interesting to think how that word's become a verb for me, if that makes sense. So he superimposes-- burns into the image, to use the right terminology, he burns into the image their future child.

TARA Oh.

OLUWAFEMI:

**MARISA
PARHAM:** But the future child appears in the same aura from the technology of burning in a photo manually as the pictures of the dead, right. So in this way, the image of the future and the image of the person who's literally passed on the level of technology actually look the same. And I think theoretically, there's something really interesting there. And all these with *The Harlem Book of the Dead*-- right, in *The Harlem Book of the Dead*, it's just really striking that these are all Black people. And this might be one of only two photographs they can afford in their lifetime, right.

AMIR HALL: I want to jump in there because chills, and it's reminding me of, I mean, again, Black people-- another thing that connects us. When I said earlier on that we know death isn't real, I meant we as in the people who were in the funeral home, which means Black and Creole Caribbean people. You know what I mean? That's one. And then two, I'm glad that Marisa brought that up, because I agree. We have always been engaging the other world. We've always known that contact was real and was possible, and that the thing in between was just a curtain that you could really open up at any point.

And then what I'm thinking of also is this Alexis Pauline Gumbs-- brilliant writer. She was on a podcast with the Brown Sisters called *How to Survive the End of the World*, and the episode is called *A Breathing Chorus*. And within that episode, she talks about along the lines of what Marisa was saying around reorganizing time and the digital making it possible to see other ways of representing time. She was saying if time is linear, you know what I mean, when we call upon our ancestors, we're actually also calling upon our descendants, right.

And she was using the example of Harriet Tubman. And she was like, for Harriet Tubman in the middle of slavery to say, yo, we are actually free. We're not enslaved. You know what I mean? To say that, she had to imagine us. You know what I mean? And I wanted to pass that along, because I've been using that kind of language around coming into my own gender nonconformity and even in my own questions about love. In order for me to even walk out in these streets in a booty shorts or in some tank top. You know what I mean? I don't see it. It does not exist here.

And so I have to imagine my children and children's children who are living their best lives, you know what I mean? And in a way, imagining them encourages me, because it says, I have to do this so that they can see it. You know what I mean?

MARISA So keep it in the present. Yeah.

PARHAM:

AMIR HALL: Yeah, brings it back to the present. And even in terms of queer love. I don't see that shit here. I do not know a queer couple here. I know one. I mean--

MARISA You mean at home?

PARHAM:

AMIR HALL: One isn't plenty. And, I mean, that's another way. I just saw this post on Twitter. This guy traveled the world to find queer POC couples. And so that's another way in which this aspect of my spirit and future, it's only possible through a digital archive, because it doesn't exist in the day-to-day world that I exist in. So I just wanted to bring those in, because that thing about ancestor and future just really resonated. And Alexis is talking to us as well.

TARA There's this episode of *BoJack Horseman* where Princess Carolyn is one of the main characters. And it starts off basically in the future showing one of her great-great-grandchildren or something reflecting on Princess Carolyn's life, going, she was so great, she worked so hard, blah, blah, blah. By the end of the episode, you find out-- and no spoilers for people, but whatever, the episode's been out for years. So, ha. You find out that Princess Carolyn is like, this is just what I do for myself when I'm feeling down. I just imagine how my future grandchildren will think of me or talk about me if they were telling their classmates about me.

OLUWAFEMI:

Because she was unmarried, didn't have a kid and all of that, and she was like, when I'm feeling hopeless, like my lineage is going to end with me, I try to imagine that it won't and imagine these future children in space. My great grandma was such a powerful working woman who still managed to have a happy marriage and a child and whatever. And watching that episode was just so sad because it was so relatable, because I feel like that's something that myself and my friends often do is you imagine these other versions of yourself to give yourself hope for the future. Where I go, oh, yeah, when I have my kids, or I want my grandkids to do this or-- if my mom gets mad about getting a tattoo or whatever, having multiple piercings, I sit there and I'm like, you know what? I'm glad I'm fighting this fight now so I do not have to have my own kids arguing with me over things like this. It seems arbitrary, right.

And then these were the things that having stuff like *The Sims* and all those online avatars that you got to make, where I would be like, ooh, you know what? When I get older, I want to have this hair and live in this kind of house. And those games really helped us imagine these things, so much so that I'm like, I've seen it. I've been able to visualize and I've been able to visualize myself as this. So I want to be it.

AMIR HALL: Yeah.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: And I know I can't. And that's the freedom we got with the internet, but then I always wonder where the future of body modifications-- how far can we go to become these digital versions of ourselves. This is something I'm always straddling the line on, you know?

AMIR HALL: Yeah.

MARISA
PARHAM: Two things there is that longer conversation, Tara, where you're heading of post-humanism. But even before that, it's just so fascinating to hear you all talking about this. I mean, Toni Morrison in this article I'm often working with called *The Future of Time*, this essay, one thing she talks about are the ways that we tend to think about the improvement of the future vis-a-vis this notion of future generations and of children. And she just asked the question-- and then maybe you're getting at this too, of, what would it mean to think about that in the present? Right, to not put the burden on a future or a future child. But as you point out, Tara, I think of that as just almost an exercise that helps you be active in the present. But how do you center the present? How do you center even the self in that moment? But I think there's something really compelling there.

Also, full disclosure-- part of my response to that too is just from having children. And one thing you learn when you actually have children, of course, is that they're their own people with their own struggles in that the struggles they'll be facing are things that we can't even fathom yet prior to their arrival, right. Even about the world. I talk all the big talk, as you all can see about all of things. But I was going through my old photos and realizing in January 2020, I was not thinking about pandemic, and I had no conceptualization of what my life could look like.

And so just taking that as an almost exercise of the unexpected, speaking of glitches. So I guess my question then or thinking about this is, how do we take the lessons we know we've learned from thinking about ourselves as a kind of glitch aesthetic, as you guys have already noted? And how we put this alongside this real problem of what it means to use our longing for a new future to transform our present. Because it seems to be so much at stake, like we're living now. So how do we also just take responsibility. I think we have taken responsibility and you guys take responsibility. But how do we even more self-consciously think about the present and how tenuous those presents are and how important it is to take the present as a present and think very hard about what we want our worlds to look like and work towards that? That becomes a justice argument as well.

Not only glitch aesthetic, I guess we have a glitch justice we need to be working toward.

AMIR HALL: We stand

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: Yeah. So you know what? I think this goes into the conversations that we've had before about the relationship between play and glitches. Sociologically, play is the recreation of real life situations. And you sprinkle it with a little element of the imaginary. Right, kids are always playing mom and dad, right, and things like that. And this allows for a safe space for exploration. Because I feel like a glitch is something that happens almost organically, I would say. Not always. I mean, with computers now, we've learned how to make them. But the first glitches were like when my mom would be like, oh, the screen is getting staticy. Move the antennas. Clear up the picture or something like that.

And I'm thinking about now, how do we in our lives create these glitches purposefully through playing out the real life situations we want but understanding the boundaries of where the imaginary has to stop based on our present circumstances?

MARISA
PARHAM: That's really beautiful.

AMIR HALL: Yeah. What that's bringing out for me, Tara, is actually with COVID. If we refer to this moment as a glitch moment. I feel like there are things that you can see behind it. You know what I mean? So when the boundaries are displaced, like you said, Tara. And I love that language. You can actually see the structure of the thing, right. You can see that, oh, it's pixels. It's just little tiny squares that could reveal something about the inner workings of the thing. And I feel like COVID did that in some way. And you all can talk more about this, because I'm not American. But did that, in some way, for America in that particular way, and then I think for other countries in other ways.

So for Trinidad, for instance. We really had to step up, and we really learned that under pressure we are responsible for the most part and can hold this tension and succeed in a way. You know what I mean? And we are protective. And another thing, I was even surprised that those stimulus checks could exist. And I was seeing tweets about universal income. Even the potential of having a stimulus be possible says about the possibility of a universal income as well, right. And even the way that we have to do Zoom classes and Zoom events and how digital so much of our operations have become. We were forced into that. But it showed us that it was possible, right. That stimulus checks were possible. That it was possible for a small island to get down to zero within the first few months of the pandemic.

And even to work abroad, you know what I mean? To work away. It completely changes what's possible and shifts that boundary, to use your language, Tara, of what is possible. So Barbados is even offering visas for people who want to work remotely for extended periods of time. Of course, that will raise questions about citizenship, yeah. Politically, I think COVID as a glitch has revealed a lot about different structures. But it wasn't intentional is the only thing. And I love that idea of, yeah, of how do we--

MARISA Just processing. Also we're solving the whole universe and also describing it.

PARHAM:

AMIR HALL: Yeah. Very much that. Very much that.

TARA Amir, you were just talking about the ideas of citizenship. And I found I'm an international student, grew up in parts of Canada, US, all of that. And it's always hard when people ask me, where are you from? Or like whatever-- deciding somewhere to be. But on the internet, you have other forms of community. It's almost like you have other forms of citizenship. Well you keep talking about Black Twitter. And you know the joke of the white girl was trying to see the tweets like, whoo child. But she was like whoo Chile. And then Black people have now taken that, and when someone says something crazy or out of pocket, I was go, whoo Chile.

AMIR HALL: Yes, come on.

MARISA (LAUGHTER) I'm sorry.

PARHAM:

TARA No, but literally. And it's the kind of thing where it's like you're Black and you have this citizenship online. You have these new forms of community. And digital spaces are what have really allowed for these forms of humor that are compounding jokes in the Black community that before you knew just because you--

AMIR HALL: Yes.

TARA --grew up around all Black people. And now I'm on the internet and I'm making jokes with a girl from New York and stuff like that. And I'm like, ha, ha, ha, and all of that. So digital spaces have allowed for these new forms of community, which have become really important in our increasingly transient societies. All the countries I lived in it was to attend school. My mom wanted me to have a better life. We're broke-- school. And that sort of thing. So then through leaving your homes to go to school, then we started to see once I got to college there was an influx of channels about skin care and hair care and beauty that have become these new forms of oral histories and ways of passing on traditions for people, especially with a focus on Black people, right.

When people like me and my sisters, when we had to leave home pretty young where we were distant from our families for various reasons, I used to have my half-sisters help me do my hair. And then now, me and my sisters we knew braiding from some friends, but I really spent a lot of time on the internet learning this. And when we think about the fact that it's Black women who are the highest degree earners by percent in the country right now, it means that we are most often the ones who are leaving our homes and being distanced from our families to earn these degrees and then taking up and setting up roots in communities that are far away from these homes.

So it's become really important for us to be learning about things like our hair and acquiring skills about things that we would often get from home. I honestly only started growing my hair out natural-- my mom had been relaxing my hair since I was three or four. They used to have that Just For Me For Kids. Literally they were like, relax your kid's hair. And then I only became natural in college because my braids grew out too long and I couldn't find anyone to fix it for me for cheap. And so much of my natural hair had grown out at that point that by the time I took out the braids and finally got someone to do my hair for me around winter break, which was my sister, my natural hair had grown out I think an inch or two. And I was like, you know what? I might as well cut off the relaxed ends because they're falling off.

It was something that I didn't even have the choice. It just happened. And then I was like, and now I'm going to learn how to take care of this thing that has happened to my hair. But I love my hair now. And these are all things that happened from the circumstance of leaving home. And then I was able to accept the new state of my hair through the community I met online who were also like, I tried this product, didn't work. I tried this, that didn't work. If you're just starting out and you're broke, this is what you could use. So I don't know, what do you guys think about these communities? And Marisa, you've described before this kind of middle generation, your generation, where they sent you home for not having relaxed hair. How would you describe how this little generation either bridged this gap or was left in the trenches while the pre-generation and the post-generation figured things out?

MARISA
PARHAM:

Yeah, it's complex, and I think there's so many things tied to that. I'm thinking about what you were saying about Black women degree earners but also thinking about how some of that's about travel. But it's not always about going away. I mean, most people sneaking degrees don't leave home. They don't leave their home communities. It's actually not the norm of people at all levels seeking college degrees or anything else, right. People usually stay in their regions or in their more local cities, et cetera.

To be clear, I'm saying that actually in direct support of your point, because we also know that even that if you're saying, I'm from Chicago, if you're staying in Chicago and going to school, you're still leaving home. And so the question of staying and going is even more even existential than it is necessarily about physical movement. There's still a migration there. And I think in terms of thinking generationally, I mean, everyone loves their own generation. It was the kind of generation that really had to push ahead.

And you had to push ahead no matter what people thought. And that thing is really complex, because I think if you're thinking-- particularly I'm thinking around some of the stuff Amir was talking about in terms of even sexuality. In the Caribbean, thinking about sexuality, similarly in the United States, even from a heterosexual perspective, I think-- I have to look at the numbers again, but if you're even looking at Black women the United States even around marriage, I think that same generation I'm noting is also often the least married or married much later in life. Because there was also a cost and consequence for better or for worse depending on your perspective on all these things, but for better or for worse on trailblazing.

And I think it's rare to find people who are able to do the kinds of trailblazing that we're talking about and still remain intact. The example I always give-- I think I wrote about it in a blog post or something recently-- is thinking about how for my generation of, for instance, PhD seekers, doctoral candidates. You would go to these big national conferences. And there was always a big segment. We didn't have the language yet for self-care, but this is the point. Because such a high degree of women think about all those famous women that we all love so much like the Audre Lordes and Toni Cade Bambaras and all down the line. It's really Lorraine Hansberry. It's really important they all died young.

And so part of this gap-- I know I'm skewing a little bit maybe from you're thinking about Tara, but I think there's a there there in thinking about how those various kinds of migrations and forging ahead to this new world came at a deep cost. This generation directly preceding my own and a little bit into mine of much later marriage or relationship possibility for going children, even if that's something you wanted. Very high rates of illness. I can think of very few famous Black women intellectuals in the generation prior to me who lived past 50.

So there's a way in which the stakes of this are even different. So when you, believe or not, seg this back to thinking about hair, it's really important, because I think that part of what these YouTube and social media communities produce are opportunities to feel far less disconnected and to feel far more that you have a chance of finding people more like yourself than you otherwise would have when you're experiencing different kinds of isolation, be it physical because you live in a town where you've taken this job or you've gone to this school, or simply because you've made choices about your sexuality, your life that separates you out from your home community in traditional ways.

I think finding ways to have community online doesn't replace certain aspects of what we think of as physical community-- we're finding that in COVID. But it goes a long, long way towards people even having a language or caring about themselves and to be able to see themselves as valuable. We know that so much of what people see about themselves in the willingness to care for the self comes down to a sense of self-value. And anything that can uphold or make possible that sense of self-value becomes incredibly important.

One reason why I'm slightly dodging also a little bit on the middle generation hair question is I'm just thinking back-- there's been several recent cases of Black girls sent home from school for having braids, right. So there's a way in which this thing-- I'm going to be careful about not talking about it as a thing that's passed, because it's still a common occurrence, right, of so many kinds of schools where Black girls still can't have braids or still can't have locks or still can't have puffs. There's a whole thing in the military, because Black women wanted to have braids. Just because it's easy to maintain particularly when you're out in the field.

But instead, they were told they had to wear a bun. But if you have my hair type, my type four hair or whatever, a bun is just asking for catastrophe after a day. You get rain on that but, you've ruined your hair in a real way. You'll have to cut it out, right. I'm exaggerating, but you see my point. And so thinking about this-- maybe I'm not exaggerating, though. But so thinking about this, I'm really struck then about the kinds of sacrifices that people are asked to make in the interests of certain kinds of achievement and how we can use different kinds of digital communities to remake and reset the terms so that people feel more empowered to make their choices according to what they think is right, but don't have to go it alone, even if they're necessarily living in a place or existing or working in the place where they're the, quote, "the only one."

So I'm trying to have my cake and eat it, too. But I do think there is something there where on the one hand, again, I don't want to imagine by default that digital communities replace physical communities. But the huge quote marks we put around them both also show how people have opportunities through the digital to reach out and find themselves through others in ways they can't necessarily where they are actually placed. So where they live, where they do things, but where they don't necessarily thrive. The place of thriving isn't necessarily the same place as the place of living per se.

And then collapsing that is almost a glitch opportunity, because you say, I don't want to thrive and live in the same place. And what that's going to mean is going to be different for different people. Some people, it's going to be more digitality. For others, it means, I'm taking all this shit I see online and I'm bringing it home.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: I guess, Amir, how do you feel you've connected with these communities that we're speaking about right now?

AMIR HALL: Yeah. Sometimes in real life, but mostly queer communities you have found, that it's not any big group. It's about literally two or three people who've been able to support this work. And of course, the allies who have of been a part of this work. That's made this special, and at the same time I recognize this. I really identify with this language of the sacrifices that people have to make in order to achieve. You know what I mean? And the place of thriving not necessarily being the place of living.

A piece that I did recently called *City Gate* tried to just imagine just queer visibility in public space in Trinidad and what that could mean. And it was a reflection about how a lot of people, including myself, walk around less than themselves. Can you imagine a whole country, a whole citizenship-- you walking around with-- you have your own passport, you have your own ID, right, but you are called or expected to walk around as less of your self. And so what we did was we placed a queer character that I was modeling in three different-- I'm used to the metaphor of metamorphosis. So there were three different characters that we placed in the public space.

And it was scary as hell, the looks that we got. It wasn't violent, thankfully. But, I mean, not everyone knows about it, you know what I mean?

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: Yeah. That's just not welcoming.

AMIR HALL: It's not welcoming. And this wasn't active imagining, right. And so we were doing a little bit of what you were asking, Tara, which is taking real life and the rules of real life and imagining a little bit, right. And it was powerful because people saw it, and they see the Instagram post and they're like, yeah, let's go. Boom, bang, bang. And that's lovely. And of course, the words give context to that feeling that I felt in that moment. And it's that thing of, again, showing. I can't necessarily show you what it means to want to imagine a thing and what it means to feel otherwise. To only have the imagination as your place of striving and freedom.

And as Marisa was talking, I'm also thinking about what the sacrifices of that are. And so there's another project we're working on, and I was really-- all of my work is in conversation with God. So I really sit down and I'm like, hey, God, what do you want me to do now? And sometimes I'm just like, really, God? That? Nobody else? Nobody else in this room? In this whole country? Right. And of course, there are other people doing similar work. But, I don't know. Yeah, I'm just getting to that point where I recognize that the work takes a toll. And I don't know how to answer that question of how we collapse that place of thriving and living. But it is a good question to have.

TARA So then, I guess, closing question. It's about, how did we all end up finding these spaces online? And I'm
OLUWAFEMI: wondering, it's like, how did we think-- is it algorithms? How has the internet managed to be these spaces that are still pretty racialized? For better or worse. Or there are queer communities online, and all of this that I'm like, how did we find these spaces? I don't know. I don't know. It's like--

AMIR HALL: Yeah.

TARA Is it the algorithms? Who's designing the algorithms? Then are those algorithms flawed? Is it by nature of who my
OLUWAFEMI: friends that are Black that they would send me a tweet? Then I follow that account, and then I see if that girl has an Insta. And then I just say then like, people will see it. And I've noticed-- I've called my friends out for it too, because I'm a dark-skinned Black woman. I'm sitting next to a friend of mine and they're Black or whatever and they're going through their feed, and it's all white women or skinny women or light-skinned. I immediately call them out, and I go, you don't look like-- or I go, why is this the only thing you like to see on your social media?

Would you hate to see photos of me? I'm like, the internet works sometimes because for me it works so much so that I follow so many dark-skinned Black people and thicker people, whatever, that I see more people that look like me, and then I feel great, because that's what the world looks like when I go outside. But I see some of my friends, and what they're seeing online is this weird idealized-- nobody looks like this.

MARISA Right. That's what's important.

PARHAM:

TARA Yeah. And so I'm just like, so how have we managed to find these spaces, and how do people going forward, if
OLUWAFEMI: they're looking for these spaces, find them?

AMIR HALL: I don't necessarily have an answer, but I was just writing down some of the ideas, and it feels like there's this spectrum between something about dream and memory that is parallel to future and past, that is parallel to imaginary and real. Right, and it feels like for all of us, one of the reasons that we're connected to the digital is because it allows us to access dream and future and imaginary in really powerful ways and. What's coming to me as you talk about these people who-- and they're-- our curated worlds digitally bring us closer to an ideal, in a way, right. And I think it's doing the same for them, right.

And I think this brings the question-- this notion of dream and future and imaginary, how it can be weaponized, right, to imagine worlds without us. What's coming up in terms of this webinar, I think, is just migratory things. And, Tara, you touched on this a little bit talking about compound the jokes and the way that language can now spread like wildfire. I think a similar thing is happening with culture is an intangible. It's within that world of dream, future, and imaginary, and it allows us to access culture. And what I, I think, fear for is, yeah, people who would misuse that. Because they've already stolen our bodies' beloveds. They will steal our spirits if they could. And, yeah, the more we participate in this freedom, how can we also maintain that freedom and also maintain it for the people who need it most? The marginalized. That's a question for me as well.

MARISA
PARHAM: It's difficult when your entire operational historical presence has been as an object of extraction or to be extracted from. It seems like so much of what you're saying very rightfully-- I don't see that changing any time soon. But how do we produce ourselves in ways that also inoculate us against the effects of that? Right. It goes almost back to whoo Chile, where it's on the one hand, it's like appropriation, on their hand, it's like, really? And you keep stopping, right. It's that comma, and you keep stopping is so important, because it's almost a moment of taking over appropriation, taking it back and commenting on it, right.

And that's so much a part of the playfulness even of Black language. There's something, I think, in the ways that Black people have always in the West used language that ties to so much of this, because it helps us understand this as a vast machine. I talk a lot about this writer, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, and how he gets us to think about all the parts of Blackness as being so, in certain ways, disconnected in complex origins. But when you put it all together, it's a beautiful fractal-producing-- almost like a computerized image, right. And there's a way in which it's so encompassing but also not reproducible.

And I think there's something about that not reproducible part that's so precious and so important. How do we make that an actual active space of safety for people, particularly when we're within our own communities? Thinking about it from the perspective of exterior forces we'll say, and thinking about the real problems we have of safety even within what we characterize as otherwise our own communities, right, that might be the harder nut to crack, because figuring out what's going to constitute the safe space of play is more complex when you're thinking about intraracial stuff, for instance.

AMIR HALL: Yeah.

MARISA
PARHAM: Right. Or thinking the real complexities of even within queer communities, right. And so, you see where I'm going with this. But that was all simply to say, how do we, again, on the one hand, continue, as you all pointed out, with the protective and think about what it means to protect our present and future? But also thinking a little bit about how we also make more freedom amongst each other.

AMIR HALL: Yeah.

MARISA
PARHAM: Now and later.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: Wow. Thank you all so much. Those are such great closing comments. I'm so happy to have both of you on the show today. I know that we will continue this conversation over and over again with one another because we love to talk.

AMIR HALL: We do.

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: And we love to talk about the digital and technology and Blackness and space and all those intersections and how they really mean so much for all of us. And not just in the sense for Black people, but the digital for all people and the ideas of analogy or the analog and the spirit and all of that. It's just so dense. Thank you guys so much.

AMIR HALL: Thank you, Tara.

MARISA Thank you. This was so great. Thank you, Tara.

PARHAM:

[MUSIC PLAYING]

TARA
OLUWAFEMI: I'm Tara Oluwafemi, and you've been listening to The Nexus, a product of the African American Design Nexus at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Today's episode was produced and edited by Maggie Janik. And we would like to thank DJ Eway for our theme music. To learn more about the African American Design Nexus, visit us online at aadn.gsd.harvard.edu.