[MUSIC PLAYING]

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Oh, hi.

DARIEN CARR: Hi, everybody.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Hi, welcome, welcome. I'm Tara Oluwafemi.

DARIEN CARR: And I'm Darien Carr.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: And we are the hosts of the Nexus Podcast. The Nexus is brought to you by the African American Design Nexus. 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. Today, we're really excited to collaborate with Black in Design to do a little bit of an after show, I guess, a little bit of a Q&A, a little bit of a conversation.

DARIEN CARR: A little bit of everything.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: A little bit of everything. And we're just going to kind of go over some of our thoughts from the panels this morning. There were some really exciting conversations. I guess the titles of the panels, let me pull those up here. I want to make sure I got those right.

DARIEN CARR: And before we hop right into it, anyone who's tuning in who's a Harvard student, feel free to join us. We have a few students with us here right now. We're in Piper Auditorium. And we're just holding this space as a time to reflect and really talk about, candidly, how these conversations affect us as students at the GSD, and have the time to reflect. And audience, you're welcome to join us as well. Feel free to put comments, questions, any inquiries into the chat. And yeah, we could loop you in the conversation.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, we're super excited to get started. The first conversation was called Everyday Portals to Black Cultural Pasts, Presents, and Futures. It was with Emmanuel Admassu, Felecia Davis, and Dorothy Berry. And the second conversation was Designing for Black Queer Pleasure, Joy, and Intimacy with Ashon Crawley, Adam R, Leslie Wilson, Aneesah Ettress, and Malcolm Rio. So let's get into it.

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, yeah, so I guess the first thing I wanted to ask you, Tara, is how Everyday Portals kind of plays into your work in relation to both the African American Design Nexus and the podcast, but also in the stuff you're thinking about personally at school. And this is a question open to the audience, if anyone wants to join in.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, so what I found really interesting about the idea of the everyday portal was this idea of the accessible archive, what is archiving. This idea that something is kind of existing around you. And it's telling a story about your past. I mean, every day, we talk about how the Nexus and these sort of podcasts are this form of oral history. And it's important for us to create this oral history as a new form of archive.

But I found it really interesting that in this panel, they were talking about how certain things shouldn't always exist in certain institutions like Harvard. Certain documents shouldn't have to exist here to be considered a real archive. And then you start to think about the things that you have at home and that your parents have, like old documents, old-- I mean, they were talking about bibles, I mean, I come from a very Christian family, so old bibles, old photos, old documents, old clothing, even.

I mean, in Nigeria, we'd have a lot of fabric. And my mom would always be like, who knows where my old fabric is? Have you seen my fabric? Who touched my old fabric, stuff like that. Those are a form of like everyday portals. [INAUDIBLE] I remember this, because we bought this fabric for your birthday, the whole family all had the same fabric for your fifth birthday. And that's an example of an everyday portal, and things like that.

So it was very interesting to kind of have these conversations about-- and think about portals as things that take you back in time. One of my favorite examples of a portal that one of my professors years ago talked to me about was an elevator. And they were like, an elevator is a portal, because-- or a subway station or something like that, it's you get into it, and it transports you somewhere without you actually seeing the journey.

Compared to stairs, where you see, as you're traveling along the way, where you're going. In an elevator, you enter it, and you just magically appear somewhere else without seeing that journey. Same thing with the subway, you enter at one station. And then you just appear somewhere else. And you exit somewhere else without seeing any of the steps along the way that would have helped you transition to that new point. So in the same way, when you're seeing these objects, they're kind of like portals to different times and places that just kind of instantly transport you to somewhere without you seeing the steps along the way.

WANJIKU NARE: Yeah, this is Wanjiku chiming in. And I am a masters of urban planning student here at the GSD. And this conversation actually really challenged me, because right now, I'm in an option studio where we're talking about memory, and particularly collective memory. And our studio is focused on New Rochelle in New York. And for just like a quick background, New Rochelle has some of of the oldest Black communities in America of folks who were enslaved and folks who are also free, and lots of folks who moved up there during the Great Migration, and then many immigrant communities, Black immigrant communities as well.

And part of this conversation we're having is around how collective-- being part of collective memory gives you power in a city in a spatial place. And how when Black people are removed from collective memory, that helps that part of the process of disempowering Black communities. And this conversation really challenged me. Because I was like, well, if our pieces, our kind of memories, our real things, your mom's fabrics, my grandparents, my grandmother just passed away, so I've been thinking a lot about getting to go home to Kenya to kind of archive some of the things that are the story of our family from pre-colonialism to colonialism and post-colonialism, and if those things just aren't part of kind of the collective, then do we get erased even further?

And it challenges me. Because it's like, well, is it-- is that the only way for us to kind of gain power as Black communities, the power that we need in order to kind of make the changes in our communities that are absolutely vital? So yeah, I just found myself really pushed and challenged to think about how that could be different, instead of just what I've been thinking about and talking about in studio.

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, it's funny-- and that's not funny at all, actually, but it reminds me of kind of what I'm thinking about in studio as well. I'm in a studio called Highways Revisited. And it's thinking about how we can reimagine highways. And so much-- our first project was actually a board game. For my board game, I wanted to think through how highways were, oftentimes, so violent towards Black and brown communities.

And how oftentimes, when we're learning about highways and we're thinking about that violence, people-- there were houses that were displaced, there was culture that was displaced. But we don't have a way of knowing what that violence means, or knowing kind of what that displacement did. And it reminds me of the things I learned about the conversation from Felecia Davis's point about how history gets fractured.

And as a result, we have to go into the imaginative. We have to imagine things with a precision in order to kind of stitch together and suture together those histories of displacement, those histories of violence. And for me in my work, and kind of how I'm thinking, that's why I think the notion of a portal is so impactful and powerful. Because it is a way to kind of act as a suture between these, oftentimes, fractured histories that are tied into the built environment, tied into our memory, tied into the constant oscillation between the individual and the collective, and the collective outside of that, which is sometimes a consciousness that I could tap into when I'm listening to a song. But oftentimes, it's much more blurry.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: One of my favorite research interests on non-Western architecture, Western architecture is all about archiving, and things that are meant to freeze in time and all of that, is these-- they're called Mbari, they're are these Igbo houses designed, and that are intended to be designed during times of difficult calamities. So it could be if there was a natural disaster or something like that.

But especially around the time of colonialism, there was a certain group of Igbo people who would build these Mbari. And what you do is build these houses. And what you build into it is you embody whatever the calamity is. So during the time of colonialism, what they would do is build the house. And then they would build models of like the white people, colonizers, as well. And they actually started to build two-story houses, because that idea of the two-story house also came with the colonizer.

And what was meant to happen was as the house deteriorates, the community is supposed to heal from that. As the house deteriorates, the problem is supposed to go away with the deterioration. And I am always so interested in these projects, because there's so much embedded in that.

Because you also make figurines of deities and all that as well. You build those into the house and all of that. And it's supposed to be something that allows for communal healing. But it also is a historical signifier of at this point in time, we had a community calamity. Whether it was colonialism, so you'll literally see figurines of white men with guns deteriorating. And the amount of deterioration, it tells the story of how long ago that event happened. So they were kind of a record of when these things happened, and what the event was, and all that, in a sense, it's an archive. It's like a community archive.

And the practice has faded out over time. But there is actually a historian who still does them. And it was interesting, because at one point, he ended up building a version of one in a museum, I think, in the US. Which kind of is against the idea of it. But he's like, well, in order to do so, I had to-- in order to raise awareness and to continue the practice of it, I had to build it in a museum. So people would be aware of my culture. So that the idea of what this is could live on.

So he had to kind of make it in a space that would freeze it forever, which is in a museum. But the whole original concept of it was that he would-- is meant for it to deteriorate. So it was this weird thing where in this new society, in order for the practice to be continued, he had to kind of adopt this Western idea of freezing his culture. And I don't know, there was just so much behind it that I always think about that idea and that object.

I mean, because what architecture that is meant to deteriorate. Should we allow our architecture to be-- I don't know? There's a lot in there that I'm always. I always think about it in every single project that I do. I feel like there's so much embedded in it.

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, and it also reminds me of the previous panel discussion, the notion of being down with time, which Leslie mentioned. And for me, I really enjoyed how that effort subverted the museum and subverted this time in the museum, and turned the museum to a place of reflection, turned the museum to a place of retreat.

Here at the podcast, we try to interview many different practitioners. And we interviewed Sekou Cooke, and it was just released on Thursday, which is a very apropos moment, because so much of his work started with the Black in Design conference. Anyway, that's an aside, check that out. But he mentioned the Black Reconstruction Collective exhibition at MoMA.

And thinking through making that exhibition, but then also thinking through the role of the museum, asking the question of to what extent do we rely on the museum to freeze work and make it seem important. And what models are there outside of that? Which I think relates so much to kind of how we understand the histories of objects and them being frozen, and then the connection that Emmanuel was making on the living archive and the living time. And how there might be something that culturally belongs in the museum, but we are-- it's being used. It's being live. And then we connect that to oral histories and a lot of other things. What are you all's thoughts around that?

TOBI FAGBULE: My name's Tobi. I'm a student here at the GSD in the MDes program. I prefer oral histories, because I think that's the history that I learned growing up. Most of our histories were from your grandmother growing up. They tell stories about your childhood. My parents experienced the Civil War. So they talk about the Nigerian Civil War and everything. So that's how it's been passed down.

And I think writing it down is good, but if we, as a culture, can keep up the tradition of passing down oral histories, or talking more to people, or just talking about it. I think it works out. Yeah.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, when we're talking about temporary things, like-- I know we were just talking about museums and the temporal. One artist that I also talk a lot about in my research, and she isn't Black, but I do love her work, Anicka Yi. And it's just because a lot of her work is meant to be temporary. And a lot of her work is meant to kind of-- she works a lot with scent. But she also works a lot with bacteria and stuff like that.

So she will make art that literally you'll see the bacteria growing. But she puts it in museums. And the she always says that museums always have issues with what to do with her work after it has been-- after the show is done. Because it's hard to store bacteria and stuff like that. They're literally like, it could actually get hazardous. This is kind of a biohazard. But it looks really cool, because it'll start to look like organic cities growing, and doing all this sort of cool stuff.

Because museums are not, they don't know how to deal with temporary stuff. And it's funny, because it's kind of is the same thing with oral histories. Museums are not yet built to know how to archive these things. How do you archive an oral history? You're just going to have a room full of tapes. But then also the technology change over time.

So I actually used to have this one professor, he was Nigerian. And I took several classes with him back at Amherst. And he's used to show us these old VHSes of footage that he or old researchers he used to know would record of oral stories or video recordings in Nigeria and stuff like that. And I remember, he'd be like, yeah, I keep always saying that I want to get a student one day to help me digitize these and all of that stuff.

And I'm like, bro, we got to do this soon. Because these VHSes, the more you play them, over time, they'll get damaged. We're going to lose this. And then, over time, with the changes of technology, we will actually start to lose a lot of these things. With oral histories, they're embodied in people. And people don't last forever, which is, how do you now start to preserve these stories.

And it's interesting, I guess, because through me, watching some of these videos, now I can talk about what I saw. So him showing it to us, I guess I can say what I saw. But I don't know. It's always so hard. But I do love oral histories. And I'm wondering if it's maybe having the mix of growing up in two cultures, where the oral history was valued. And then also growing up like in schools like this, where they're like, no, no, no, we have to archive everything.

I've work in an archive here. And then I also worked in the archive in undergrad. So I've always valued archives as well. So I'm always like, we have to archive everything. But why? And how do we find new ways of archiving that? Or go back to old ways of archiving that are non-Western.

WANJIKU NGARE: Yeah, so there's a comment here from Demetria Murphy. It says, makes me think that the community viewed the calamity as something to be eventually hidden or even temporary, which is, it feels so accurate. And it feels a lot like the-- I don't know about growing up in this particular context of the Western world, where everything is-- I felt a lot of shame growing up when they'd ask questions about like, well, how do your people archive things?

And on the African continent, museums are a thing, of course. But the way that they show up is different. And it's not always as kind of grand and fancy. So I'd go home to Kenya and go to the National Archives, and be like, oh my God, like this is real bad, what's going on here? And you realize that shame is coming more from not knowing your own history, and not knowing other ways of kind of memorializing, canonizing, living, and being beyond this Western canon.

And also just like feeling this sense that this is the only way and this is the right way. And so I really appreciate this point, because I think there are other ways of conceptualizing memory, conceptualizing time, that we are kind of breaking into during this particular version of BID. And I'm super grateful that there are people [INAUDIBLE].

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, and thinking about-- how do I say this? It's making me think about the things that Adam Rhodes was sharing with the Papi Juice Collective. Some of those images took me back to a club I've read about in New York called The Paradise Garage. And how that was a music venue. The DJ was Larry Levan. And it was so important for the Black space and the queer space in New York at the time.

And the conversation around the music venue and the club as this kind of ephemeral space. And how that's valuable, because the ephemerality of that space can span between different locations. And then thinking, continuing on this idea of oral history and continuing on how we've been discussing the museum, how the music venue presents a different type of museum, or a different type of archiving. What do DJs do if not just play different audios that are kind of abstractions of these oral histories.

But it is living. It happens. And then it leaves. And it has like an element of fugitivity to it. And it can't be tied down. Which brings me back to portals, and thinking of-- I guess, how we can start to discuss space using a measurability, using-- starting to subvert the representations and the tools we have to imagine and think about space. I really appreciated Asher's work about using section, but then transcribing sound into that section. So yeah.

WANJIKU NGARE: That was really cool.

DARIEN CARR: That was sick, right?

WANJIKU NGARE: Oh my God, that was so cool.

DARIEN CARR: Oh, man.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: You just said-- oh man, you said something. And it just kind of reminded me of something in Sekou's interview. It was about-- what was it? He said something about the death of hip hop was when-- and it was a quote that he said from somebody else, actually. It was like the death of hip hop was when they actually started recording it, or something. Because you got rid of the improvisation. You get rid of that-- the free styling of it all. I'm pretty sure I'm getting that right.

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, yeah.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think that kind of goes back to this whole thing of like our culture is all about this oral storytelling, imaginative, free flowingness. And when you try to freeze it, when you try to put it in place, it loses that essence and that power that it has. So it's like the improvisational abilities, because there is also something in the ability to be a good oral storyteller.

You have to be a world builder. And there's a lot of ways where-- when you're just, when you go to an archive, and you're just digging through files, I mean, once again, I've worked in archives. And it just boxes, and boxes, and boxes. And it's interesting to see the materials that they use and the technology behind the kind of paper you have to buy that doesn't have acid in it. So it doesn't wear away, things like that, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever, whatever.

But I'm like, look, the material does not care-- the way that you try to preserve the material will actually almost remove the capabilities of the original materials to show its properties. Every material has the-- it's meant to deteriorate. Or it's meant to transform in different ways. But in an archive, you're freezing material from taking on the many different traits that it's supposed to have.

We should let materials transform over time. We should actually let things be different. But they lose that when we freeze them. So we never got to see things transform beyond and to see what they could become. And I actually think that's very negative. One of the things I always found funny to when I was taking one of my Yoruba art classes was there was some artifact that Nigeria wanted for a parade, one of their Independence Day parades or something.

And they were like, hey, England, can we get it back for this parade? And England was like, no. Because the climate there is not conducive for this artifact. It'll fall apart. Nigeria was like, we've had this artifact for years, hundreds of years. So what do you mean? And they're like, well, if you take it back now, it's so humid there. It's going to fall apart.

And it's like, dude, it was meant to be in this-- it was meant to change over time and be used in these kind of ceremonies. Let it do what it's supposed to do. Let it show signs of wear and use. Let it show the signs of its history. That's the point. So it's just-- yeah, by freezing things, you don't really get. We need to show signs of life in things.

WANJIKU NGARE: I'm curious what you all might think of this. And this is me share my playing cards a lot. How does this particular kind of-- these different notions of time and wear, materiality, how does that settle with the fact that, broadly speaking, we live in a world where power is accorded by how much of your memory is alive and centered. And that's what archival, and that's what museums do, and archiving, and these sorts of techniques. But how do those two notions kind of settle for you all?

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Sorry, I just want to clarify. So you're saying like--

DARIEN CARR: It's a great question.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: You're validated by which institutions basically claim your archive kind of thing?

WANJIKU NGARE: That and the fact that if your story is preeminent, that does-- and if you're the one telling the story, there's a whole African proverb of the hunter's the one who's alive to tell the story, not the lion. And that's kind of the same thing that we live in terms of colonialism and white supremacy. White supremacy is alive to tell the story and continues to tell the story.

And part of the way that white supremacy is alive to tell that story is through memorial, and through elevating its own story in ways like this. So I wonder how that like kind of squares within this idea of we come from worlds and peoples that don't necessarily look at memory in the same way.

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, yeah, it makes me-- so at some point, we started talking about science in the first conversation. And I was reminded of Katherine McKittrick's recent book, *Dear Science.* And she makes a lot of great points. But one of them is kind of on method. And how in order to study Blackness, we need to have an interdisciplinary method in order to kind of tie together all these different things.

And I think that so much of-- to be interdisciplinary is kind of a way to subvert, I think, that tendency of institutions to memorialize white supremacist ideologies, to memorialize settler colonial ideologies. You mentioned the museum. I mean, I'm thinking of even something like a syllabus, it took me so long to realize that after reading bell hooks, that I don't have to-- because my undergrad was in social science.

So we learned a bunch of social theories. We had our Marx. And we had our Hegel. And we had all these people. So I'm like, oh, in order for me to say something that comes from me, I have to like know Hegel front and back. And I have to be able to make a critique on this argument. And I'm like, actually, no, I could just start from somewhere different. And it's quite a simple realization that took me so long to realize.

But then after that realization, realizing that, I guess I'm kind of bringing it to the academic institution. That so much of how academic life happens is enforcing that understanding that it's like, oh, you have to be grounding your argument with certain theoretical constructs that are promoting narratives that don't resonate with a lot of what I felt personally in my life, to use a graphical example. I think that so much of that tendency can be counteracted by the types of things that McKittrick is writing about in *Dear Science* and taking an interdisciplinary method to subvert to have a portal around that. Or maybe we need to start talking about orbits to really nail that down.

TOBI FAGBULE: I think the one thing that has been on my mind is the idea of culture is people. And people change, so then culture evolves in that sense. So how, especially with in African countries now, how we're changing culture, especially the younger generation, how we're bringing in like new limelights, talking about things more, showing it up in our cultures. And that might change how we freeze time.

I especially don't like museums or going to them, because it's very-- I can't imagine the place the thing was in. Especially most of the museums have a lot of collections of stolen art. That's what I call it, those things. So they're there. And if you go to a museum, especially when you're in architecture, you're like, everyone is like, oh I want to go to a museum to see this. And you're seeing like things that are if you're coming from that country, you're just like, well, this-- you see this every day in your country. And this is something that's there.

But they want to preserve it in time as a relic of something that was once. But the culture has changed. That's still there. But it's like everyone knows-- the way they impart your knowledge to you. Growing up, it's like you know what this is. And your parents will tell you. And they will tell you the history behind that use. So you know it. So it's in your brain. Then you pass it on to people.

But seeing it in the museum, it doesn't have the same reference for you, because you're like-- it's frozen. No one understands because unless you are from the country. Or if you read a blurb that they always put up, it's not the same.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, it's actually-- so a lot of my thesis work that I'm doing is going into like Yoruba and Efik mythology, but also Afrofuturism and tying them together because. When you go to Lagos now, people are not-- I don't know what people expect whenever they see Africa in the movies or when you go to the museum, but I'm always like, it changes. It advances with the world.

So my project is really about doing a combination of that with Afrofuturism. And taking a lot of the fabric, because I'm always so excited with the fashion, the way that people use our traditional fabrics. And they just are so stylish with it. And now, I'm like, let's do it. And let's make some really cool spacesuits and let's get into it.

And the wildest thing was as I was doing research for my thesis, some researchers in Nigeria were already looking at the electrical conductivity of some of the fabric or something. And I was like, now what's going on here? Why are they doing this? And I was like, they probably already have the same ideas I'm doing. Yeah, let's take this to space or something. I don't know what's going on there. But I was so excited to see that research.

And I was-- and it was funny, because Darien and I were in the same thesis and research group. So we were talking about this. And our professor was like, what are they doing? I was like, I don't know. But I'm so excited about it. But this is nothing that you would see in a museum, the interesting stuff you can do with our fabric, and the materiality of it, or anything like that.

Instead, they would be like, look at this mask that was made-- I'm like, there's so much exciting stuff happening. And we're so I don't know. It's just it's very frustrating sometimes to walk into the museum, and hear them, and see them show photos of stuff that I'm like, what is this? My culture advances like yours. Why am I not in the contemporary art section either? Like we are making art. I'm Nigerian. Put me here. So it's like very interesting. I don't know.

DARIEN CARR: Insert scene of Killmonger stealing the mask right here.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: From *Black Panther,* yeah, definitely. But it was-- it's interesting that you're talking about science. And science-- I really liked that note about scientists kind of getting more personal. I know she was talking about how the journals will still send it back and go, well, be a little less personal. Because my sister is in a PhD program and she was watching one of her friend's thesis defenses, and don't make fun of this friend, because his thesis was about being queer and interviewing queer people-- I'm sorry, I can't even remember where he's from, but in East Africa.

And they were like, oh but you know-- she's doing public health. And all her friends are all doing those kind of the-- they call theirs the hard science, with the statistics and all that. And they're like, yeah, but his is-- they're all about their feelings. And they were like, oh, it was so interesting going to his thesis defense, because they were all just talk about feelings, how they felt.

And I was like, that's a science. But they were like, yeah, but he didn't really have statistics. That's interesting, but it's still considered public health. But it was all about how they felt. And I was like, it's a science, though, it's weird. It's so weird when you talk to people in the hard sciences and they're like-- I was happy to hear that his program considered that a science.

But it's like even his own peers are still a little slow to come around to it, because they're like, but where is the data on your feelings? And I was like, I don't know, the many interviews he conducted about everyone sharing a lived experience? Yeah, I don't know, it's just it's just crazy to hear all of that.

TOBI FAGBULE: Interesting I think is-- for me to science is a very personal thing. And it's good that his program considered that as a science, which is something that we need to consider more. Science is, as much as you're researching people, sometimes data is like talking to people and gauging your feelings. It's very if you're sharing your stories, you're impacting more. You're making new things. There's still a science of making. You're doing something new.

And I think we're also very used to like the way that science has been painted to us as there's data to back up the facts. And if there is no data to back up the fact, what's believeable or not. So that's the whole idea of what's been ingrained in our mind. That we need to-- sometimes, we need to step out of our mind and think of something bigger and different than what it actually could be.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: No, exactly. And I think that actually goes back to a little bit of what we were talking about earlier about tracing family history, and the need for imagination, and this need for the autobiography, and inserting yourself in the work.

WHYTNE STEVENS I've had a lot that's about family ties. And Oh hi, by the way, my name is Whytne Stevens. I'm a second year urban planning student at the Graduate School of Design and a co-president of African-American Student Union. So glad to be able to participate today.

But kind of to your point about family ties and family history and just the importance of that, I've been thinking about that a lot lately. My father, for example, really traces our family history very deeply, as a kind of way to not only just know who we are, where we come from, but as a way of pride to an extent.

And I think we-- I guess it's a diaspora, we're always talking about [INAUDIBLE], like who's not like X Y and Z throughout history. But I think there's something to be said knowing your own personal family history. Because I think that's just as important as knowing it's like the history of our people as a whole. And I think having that personal connection as well, I guess it just, again, furthers that sense of pride in who we are, a better understanding of who we are, where we are in the world, what we've contributed, how we've been able to survive, and thrive, and still be here today.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, something that I've been exploring a lot in my thesis is this notion of exile, or feeling untethered. Because it's like almost when you're searching for a family history, also a personal history, and then also just a community history. And I think that it's something that a lot of the Black diaspora and people are, in general, are looking for And it comes from-- and that's why my project is creating this myth and this whole Afrofuturism, where it's like we just need to pick up and leave almost, and create a new story.

But then through this whole idea of trying to create a new story somewhere else, you realize you can never leave the past behind it's the point of my thesis. Basically, you're always tethered to the past. So in this leaving, and always trying to go forward, you always have to still explore what's left behind and parse through that, and understand what's there, and learn from that, and glean something from that in order to advance forward. And there are so many ways to do that.

Like you're saying, your family history is always going to play a huge role in that. And you always really have to explore that. And then in filling in some of those gaps, you really do have to use the imagination and tap into the imaginary.

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, it makes me even kind of connect that to the spaces that we have these conversations. I know this is important for you in your work, but thinking about Sun Ra, which we've mentioned at the podcast. Before, I just thought about Sun Ra and kind of like his like Afrofuturist pioneering vision as something that just kind of happened.

But I was reading a book about Sun Ra. It was called *Sun Ra Chicago.* And it didn't just come out of the blue. He was meeting with El Saturn research group in the park. And they were kind of discussing a wide range of topics, ranging from theology, to music, to Blackness, to-- they really covered everything. It was a multidisciplinary research group.

And then from that vision, rooted in the everyday practice of going to a park to meet, all of a sudden, we eventually get to like this Afrofuturist ethos that's super imaginative and it's like, actually, I'm from the moon. But it's that connection between the imaginative and the everyday spaces, which I feel like is so-- is so interesting to think about and ponder on.

And I don't know, it almost makes me think of like our context now. We're sitting in Piper Auditorium at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and how, I really appreciate this conversation, because we're all being candid. And it's just a conversation that feels natural, and it feels every day. But how so often when we're in these very formalized, stiff-- stiff isn't the right word, but just restrictive environments, it almost feels like that invention can't necessarily happen. And I think the freezing of time, we talked about it, kind of goes into some conversations that, I think, we've been a part of before. Oh, is this conversation-- are we in 2021 right now?

WANJIKU NGARE: Just to kind of highlight that point a bit, and give you all a little bit of insight into what's-- when we were working on building the theme for Black in Design, we're talking about this behind screens, behind Zoom screens. All of us organizers never met until the beginning of the school year, because of the time we're living in. And honestly, we were just thinking about what do we personally need in this moment.

And a lot of it was like, yo, we need to chill. And we need space to just be mundane, to be normal, and to feel like that is enough, given the situation that we're in. And also at the same time, to your point, Darien, to celebrate those magical things that come from the mundane. And through a series of conversations, and thinking about our own personal needs as students, and also what we hoped could be a space to share with other people that [INAUDIBLE] other Black folks need it to. That's what came out of it, sitting in Piper Auditorium with y'all in our masks, and in the darkness, and having this conversation is kind of a blissful realization of that.

DARIEN CARR: So I think we have, I think, 5 or 10 minutes left of the conversation. I know that we've had a few comments in the chat. If anyone wants to chime in or add questions, we're happy to read things out. Just kind of a general call of the time. And if anyone else wants to contribute and stuff like that.

TOBI FAGBULE: You said living past history, for me, I see history as a means to learn more. Especially coming from a country that we don't have-- our history is not written. Or it's been erased, or there's a saying history is always told by the victors, and things like that. So it's how do we learn from our histories and use it to better inform our futures and what we do? And that's most of what my research is based on, especially in the African diaspora. So

TARA OLUWAFEMI: No, I absolutely agree. And the wild thing, though, is that you can actually read a lot of our objects as history. And you can read a lot of the clothing. So my favorite thing about fabric is that Yoruba people, or Nigerian fabrics, people will get custom prints that will have designs that are very timely.

So they'll get a whole shirt made that's covered in iPhone prints. And you can literally tell that's what came out with the latest iPhone. And they were like, I'm going to look so cool if I have a shirt covered in iPhones. And that is a very timely piece, that literally, you can look at 20 years from now, and be like, oh, she got that made in that year. So I'm like, you can read our clothing, you can read everything as history. But there's just so many different ways to read our history. And it's not being validated.

So what we felt like doing these last couple of moments is Darien and I, and actually maybe some of you guys here, if you want to do that, we're just going to scroll through and read some of the comments in the chat. Because we also want to have those recorded for posterity, because this conversation we're having right now, we're going to release as a podcast episode for this month of October.

So we want some of these amazing comments that we've also seen coming in to be preserved, even though some of you couldn't join us here in person. We want some of these to still be kept here. So that we can always remember the great conversation we've had. So I'm out, but I'll let Darien go ahead.

DARIEN CARR: OK, cool, yeah, so Samal has said speak-- can you scroll down a little bit? Yeah, sorry, speaking of hair braiding, Felecia Davis, one of our panelists for tomorrow-- Oh, is this from yesterday? This is definitely from yesterday. We definitely went really.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Went way too far my bad.

DARIEN CARR: So this is actually the behind the scenes, because we're going to edit this out of the podcast. Yeah, if you go down, I think.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: We're here we go, here we go. So Victoria says, thank you for this attention to oral histories. They are so necessary. And it's also beautiful our ways of passing down these knowledges. I love what the speaker just said, because so often, it's about the intergenerational connections and relations that we build through sharing and telling and retelling our histories.

DARIEN CARR: And then Gillian responded and said exactly, non-Western ideas of archiving, because the Western sector is hoarding, in many ways, performative, nonsustaining, in many ways, harmful. And that's gee-- I'm sorry, I said Gillian. It's Jihan Thomas.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Demetria says this reminds me of Mpho's discussion of temporal suspension. Time limits the spatial imagination. But Black epistemology thrives on the imprecise for both safety and creativity.

DARIEN CARR: Continuing, agreed, situating artifacts in the past feels like a tool of subjugation to disempower and it's thrivance in the present and future.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Wow, awesome, I love these.

DARIEN CARR: Yeah, and I guess kind of wrap. We could have a conversation on how we could bring this conversation or this energy to our studies and our practice as students of, kind of, broadly around the field of design. And thinking about how we could keep this going and not let this conversation-- if anything, not having this-- the podcast, the worst case of the podcast is freezing the conversation. We need to keep-- we need to keep going.

TOBI FAGBULE: Earlier on your background in social science and how you had to argue your theories with like Marxist or whatever. One thing I learned early growing up is that your ideas are you, and how you present them is you. Sometimes, it's like when you're-- some people are already talking about the same things. But how I move about my design work is I present my ideas as me first before arguing it against anyone.

And I try not to argue against someone's ideals or something else, because this is me, and this is how I view some things. So putting yourself first. And bringing in-- I always bring like my culture, and my background, and letting that show through my work as well.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Yeah, I've actually recently found out that this big architect, Pezo von Ellrichshausen, they say that none of their work is referential to anybody else. That they, everything they make comes straight off the dome, straight from themselves. Literally if you ask them, "Who are you referencing?" They will say, "We're referencing ourselves."

But literally, when you look at their work, you could say it kind of looks like this person's, kind of looks like that. But every aspect of their work, it's really original to who they are. And they're allowed to say that, because at this point, they've kind of proven themselves. It's funny, because we're students, everyone is like no, who are you referencing? Show us all your references, whatever, whatever, not just in design, but also what you say in class.

But I do find it interesting. That I think there are some professors, thankfully, who are starting to kind of accept this new form of making or producing, where you can kind of-- where they let you produce intuitively. Or they let you come to conclusions intuitively. And I feel like, as a people, in general, as a generation, we're moving towards that. And I really hope it lasts, honestly. Just kind of key into what feels right.

WHYTNE STEVENS: Yeah I think this question of how to bring this conversation into our practice and our work, both at the GSD and then afterwards, it's something I've been really trying to like toy with the past year. I think when I came to the GSD, I had all right, I'm going to do x, y, and z. And the pandemic happened. And now I'm trying to figure out how do I bring in these ideas-- Toby was saying, culture, cultural identity, I have Gullah Geechee ancestry on my dad's side.

So some ways I try to-- how do I incorporate that? How do I explore that through my work? Is it a direct thing where I just have direct projects I only focus on certain aspects, my culture, these topics that we're talking about. Or something that you just kind of naturally interweave no matter what that's always present in the work.

DARIEN CARR: Well, thank you all.

TARA OLUWAFEMI: Thank you. I'm Tara Oluwafemi.

DARIEN CARR: And I'm Darien Carr.

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. 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.