TYLER WHITE: This is *The Nexus* brought 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.

Hi, I am your host today, Tyler White. I am a dual masters, a candidate of Urban Planning and Design studies at the GSD. And with us today we have Mr. Ryan Clarke, who is a tonal geologist from the northern rim of the Gulf of Mexico.

Ryan notices the passage of time as both a trained coastal sedimentologist and an artist researcher and editor and director of educational programming at Dweller Electronics, a group dedicated to providing astrological counterpoint within an otherwise neurologically dominant music industry. His individual works investigate local cultural objects and their metaphysical communications with their proximal geological landscape.

Knowing intimately the ways his home is at great risk of physical and social loss, he finds ways to not only document this loss quantitatively and scientific research, but qualitatively, with works that aim to articulate the vernacular knowledges his people share with the Mississippi River delta and its distributaries. By interpreting the various articulations of Black music as a depositional record, he views the progression of technology and culture at large as downstream of Black innovation in dialogue with their surrounding environment, under the proposition of geologic Blackness.

Dweller was started in 2019 by Frankie Hutchinson as an independently funded platform, and in 2020 grew to a three person team, adding our guest today, Ryan Clarke and Enyonam Amexo. Dweller is both an electronic music festival performing Black electronic artists and a blog highlighting Black perspectives. Hello, Ryan.

RYAN CLARKE: Hi, Tyler. How are you doing?

TYLER WHITE: I'm good. How are you?

RYAN CLARKE: I'm chilling. Happy to be here.

TYLER WHITE: Can you first give us a sense of the place you are from? Much of your work has been influenced by this spatial context, but more importantly, the ecology that is distinct to where you're from. What can you also tell us, then, of how music arises as a medium of inquiry and exploration for you?

RYAN CLARKE: Yeah, so I'm living in New Orleans. I'm from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, so I've lived in Southern Louisiana my whole life. And living down here, you quickly recognize and are also told that you are living on a wetland, which is to say, a sort of ephemeral piece of land that doesn't have bedrock underneath, but just layers and layers of compacted sediment and clay and mud. And I didn't really think too much about what that might quote unquote, "mean". But the more I went into my studies-- initially, I was really interested in film, but I quickly turned into geology.

I recognized how the Southern Louisiana landscape was constructed, seems to either be in conversation or implicitly, explicitly have a relationship with a lot of the cultures that also try to move with the sort of quick adaptation or necessity of survival that I think places, and not just people, but also animals and just the ecosystem tends to engage with as well. Living in the swamp is a pretty interesting and tough thing to do. And so you need to develop skills that are more so in relationship to your locality, rather than a more general sense of what the continental US moves as.

In terms of how music arises as a medium for that, I think I would say that music's played a prominent role just in my own family and surroundings for a long time. And I'm not just speaking about Mardi Gras, being in New Orleans, but also just going to church. I was raised in a Southern Baptist context and recognizing just how music was quite often the vehicle for understanding or transcendence, often beyond language or even the colonial language that is English, connecting the sciences into the social fabric of Louisianian culture felt like a no brainer. So that's the path I've found myself on for the past couple of years.

TYLER WHITE: That's so insightful. And I mean, one thing that I've found very interesting about the work that you do is that spirituality seems to always be coming up in a particular way. And I know that I've read from some other interviews that you've done with other folks of your own writing, that kind of notion of growing up in a Southern Baptist context.

Can you help us understand from maybe architectural understanding or maybe like a social embodiment experience, what does it really mean to be from a Southern Baptist context, and how does that reverence for a spiritual practice in a spiritual community? How has that influenced your notion of being from that place, and how has it reinforced your kind of love of pursuing the relationship between Blackness and space, ecology and spirituality?

RYAN CLARKE: Great question. I think the Black church historically has been a sort of site to experiment on the spatial relationships that we have with each other, ourselves and the space around us. So there's a bit of a very basic and a mundane kind of psychosomatic deal that I think Black people interrogate when they are having this charismatic, spiritual or religious relationship with themselves and this kind of collective imagination that I think can begin and continue both inside and outside of the church.

And growing up, I almost feel like-- without having the words, I felt almost very voyeuristic or taking this observer kind of role inside of the churches that I was in as a child, watching people speak in tongues or start going on these things that are called like victory laps, where during the peak moments of musicality in the sermon, it just becomes this sort of illegible blend of catharsis, of ecstatic in this.

And I just loved how music and the body just was the truth in those moments and less about what's being said, and how do we rationalize or make logical. A lot of these feelings, or the stressors that people have when they walk into these spaces, whether or not any of us knew it, it seemed like returning into the body and just almost moving in a kind of-- I want to say the word deterministic chaos.

So the phrase deterministic chaos is that there is a framework for improvisation, or as I said before, kind of catharsis engagement with your surroundings that I started seeing kind of everywhere, at least within Black culture, both the ones that I'm proximal to jazz or blues, but then also later iterations that then leave the American South, like techno from Detroit or house from Chicago, or the iterations of jazz, like free jazz when you get to Oakland or New York, or going back to Chicago.

So yeah, I think that spirituality is a sort of recognition that it's woven into the everyday kind of epistemology of Blackness and Black culture. And it's been a joy to speak to that and put my own thoughts in that ring.

TYLER WHITE: When you're talking about Victory Lab, I mean, I'm immediately conjured to being five and six and seeing my grandmother just running around the church, getting happy every single time. And it's so interesting because we grew up Pentecostal Church of God in Christ. And the thing, I guess, which I mean, as someone who's familiar, you know.

But the thing that's so interesting is that when I came back from school and I had taken this amazing course with this amazing professor at Swarthmore, shout out to her, it was called From Vodun to Voodoo, and we were of tracking the ways that Black ancestral worship and other kinds of Black forms of spiritual practice had been transferred throughout the diaspora. And I just remember watching like spirit possession, and then immediately thinking back to the church every single Sunday. And I was like, that is exactly what my grandmother was doing.

I don't know if it was the Holy Spirit. Someone was connecting with her and she was having that conversation. And it just makes me think of syncretism and how important syncretism has been for Black folks to have this kind of genealogical record of our own Indigenous slash sovereign slash-- like those practices that we would have had regardless of being transported to this context.

And that brings me to the second question, which I think is really the most important thing that your work really offers is this notion of geologizing Blackness. And I'm curious if you can break that concept down for us, but maybe through the work of understanding distinctly how geologizing Blackness is a different spatial investigation than maybe looking at other forms of the ways that Black culture has had an imprint or has been imprinted by their physical space.

RYAN CLARKE: Absolutely. And one I just want to resonate with you in being five or six and watching just this absolute bliss occur from family members, where normally you're just like sitting down and eating dinner together or watching the game, and then you see them just running laps in this space, this public area.

TYLER WHITE: Yes.

RYAN CLARKE: Oh my gosh, the capacity that we can all hold is just unfathomable. But to your point around getting a sense around what geologizing Blackness is really trying to interrogate, I think more than anything, it's trying to attribute organizational principles outside of colonial frameworks and basically introducing Indigenous forms of thinking and the structures that almost precede that thinking into certain fields of study, where we might understand them as like Western forms, many of the stem fields, particularly geology.

Thinking about the relationship that we can have with the land is quite often coming from a precondition of extraction or that's our desire. Like, to learn from this place is to ultimately take from it, which delves into private property or even private equity and extractionary tactics, like oil drilling and things like that, but really trying to embody and not mimic, but model a more generative sensibility in how we're in relation with the world by learning from the world. And so trying to do that from what I know, which is, again, the kind of Southern Louisiana landscape, is predominantly through deltaic forms.

And so looking at the mouth of the Mississippi River, many of the deltaic processes I seem to recognize or try to elucidate in a lot of my writing when it comes to New Orleans culture and Southern culture, processes of avulsion or channel shifting or meandering, or even, for an example, the sort of non-linearity of time. I'll just give an example.

There is a structure in the deltaic construction of Southern Louisiana, where less dense sediment or mud that is on top of more dense sediment or mud will often get squeezed up from below through that younger but heavier mud to form these things called mud lumps or mud volcanoes. And that's a process called diapirism, which is similar to how if you know what a salt domes are, that's how salt domes form. This kind of salt, which is less dense than its surrounding environment, will get squeezed up in place itself onto the surface.

Well, doing so is-- when you're dating sediments, one of the tenets or rules or even laws of geology is one of superposition, meaning that the younger sediment will always be on top of older sediments. Similar to tree rings, where the closer you get to the center, the older you'll find wood.

Well, one, geology as a field of study was created in Scotland by this man named James Hutton in the late 1800s. But if you come down to Louisiana with those sorts of laws or rules, you'll quickly recognize that they do not conform to this environment, simply due to this one example, and there's many more, that there is already a sort of anachronism or the past inside of the present throughout Louisiana, physically or geologically.

And when I think about jazz and you're talking about voodoo and vodun and how West Africa can find itself in-- forms of West African sort of patterns can be found in Black music, both acoustic and amplified, in the electronic or in the guitar, or even in our own voices, in how we both organize through forms known as heterophony, which is basically everyone is performing a solo.

At the same time, that's a lot of what New Orleans jazz is mainly doing, which is then what free jazz ends up doing. And so we both have the past inside of the present. And so you just keep having these sorts of recursive gestures inside of our culture, but also you see this recursion going on inside of-- and on top of the land.

And so trying to mix that up and to share a new story of geology where we can introduce our culture as a vehicle of sharing knowledge and intelligence is something that I'm interested in. And so leaving the halls of academia in geology, I find myself wanting to reorganize those tenants into the culture, so we can share them in a way that feels grounded and contextual. That just feels like an important gesture that I wanted to be a part of.

TYLER WHITE: Wow. And Ryan, that's why we brought you here. You broke that down so seamlessly with so much specificity. I was imagining all the things that you were saying. And I think that's why not only are we at a design school, and this is mostly about designers, the idea of taking an expansive approach is really important to me.

Because I think that everything that you described about how geology functions, in terms of the way of it becoming this strict science, it being constructed and created, the way that it's had these afterlives and how it's worked to order and categorize certain kinds of people as a materiality, that is attached to the extraction and the proliferation of capitalism is so tangible and has a lot of overlaps with architecture as a field, and very much in the ways that architecture attempts to apply certain kinds of codes and project certain kinds of laws or precedents or norms onto the production of places and contexts where it just does not fit.

So building on this in your work, weeping between the porch and the altar, you explore the shotgun house as an emergent architecture to the development of New Orleans jazz. You were just speaking about how New Orleans jazz is unique in the way that all of the different instruments are playing a solo at the same time, and the way that it kind of turns into this beautiful symphony, in the same way that we see these strands or these afterlives or these kind of remnants of diasporic spiritualities and culture, showing up across landscapes that only have connection to each other due to the people that are there.

I'm curious if you could tell us more about that work that you're doing, or the work that you have done around the shotgun house in New Orleans jazz. And then, can you transition that into the work that you're doing with the Dweller, in the sense of helping us think through what are some of the architectures of electronic music that have also been emergent with the development of Black electronic music?

RYAN CLARKE: Yeah, absolutely. So weaving between the porch and the altar was a thesis that I finished around May of this year, where the full name of it, the subtitle, is a localized typological analysis of the ancestry, form and function between the shotgun home and New Orleans jazz.

And so what I basically am trying to get at is how-- in many sort of African logic systems, how design is often informed by social concepts. And so I'm looking at the working class becoming emergent African-American, which comes via the Caribbean, via West Africa. And they're bringing this social phenomena of displacement and negation of themselves as humans being stripped from their own context, and trying to reassemble a sense of self, both collectively and individually, from that negation.

So there's this kind of assemblage or reassemblage process that I feel like was happening at the same time, by the same people, undergoing the same conditions and the same space of New Orleans. And you see the shotgun as a design and as a form emerge at around the same time as jazz is also emerging in New Orleans.

And so going back to design, being informed by social concepts, I was trying to backstep a sort of list of characteristics or elements that can be found in the material cultures of early New Orleans kind of Black life. So I can see that one get formed in the immaterial and the music, but also in the material, in the shotgun. And so some of those I was actually pulling from some anthropological studies from Zora Neale Hurston in the 1930s.

I think in 1934, she was down here and she wrote an essay called The Characteristics of Negro Expression. And some of them, which I include in my thesis, are the Will to Adorn, which is ornamentation, aberration, absence of the right to privacy, and I feel like there's one more that I might be losing.

But basically a lot of those ideas, I feel like are present inside of jazz, one being the Will to Adorn. I'm thinking about syncopation or soloing, where you do have a sort of consistent framework in jazz follows, AABA or this thing called the head, which is the kind of melody that we can understand and get a clear sense of before aberrating on that melody and the chord structure through improvisation, improvisation also being an act of adornment or ornamentation.

And then also just thinking about how the absence of the right to privacy. I'm thinking about call and response as well. But also if you've ever lived inside of a shotgun-- I actually just moved into one a couple of months ago. So it's actually been really cool to live in a very sort of everyday way with this kind of process that I've been thinking through. It's been really exciting in the mundane.

But living in one is that, yeah, the absence of the right to privacy. If you were living with a roommate and you wanted to get to the kitchen, you have to move through your roommate's bedroom, for instance, where you are either being-- in an architectural sense, being pushed out to the front to engage in the community, which is also to say that most shotguns, if not all, have porches, which is the porch was also-- and the shotgun was the first introduction of the porch in American architecture. And so the porch is also a prime place of sociality, of sharing, of communal gestures, of further connection.

Or, you go the opposite way into the shotgun, which is to delve deeper into the family structure that you have in the home itself. And so this kind of sociality works both ways in a way that I think is exciting, both architecturally. But then I can also see, if not remnants, reflections inside of immaterial gestures in African cultures like jazz or the ring shout, for example, to go back to the more spiritual connections that I think the secular has with the spiritual in Black culture.

And then understanding that thinking about Claude Jacobs, understanding music as a liquid architecture, that it has this immaterial form, seeing how that liquid architecture both iterates and quote unquote, "advances" due to the proliferation of technology and the advancement of technology. I'm also looking at Detroit or Chicago, a more industrial landscape, as opposed to more rural landscapes in New Orleans, and how those are reflected inside of the music to see how assemblage and sequence plays a role inside of these ideas of recursion and ornamentation and aberration.

So those elements are still there, but they take on a different context due to the area that it is emerging out of. And so I think a lot of that work was me sort of trying to work my way into the present when it comes to Black musical characteristics and how they're in connection with the land that they emerge from. And so working in-- practicing inside of Dweller feels like the next step in this process, so I could bring my own thoughts into the contemporary as opposed to being stuck in the 19th century.

TYLER WHITE: That's so fascinating because-- first of all, congratulations to you being in the literal-- like, you're almost creating a laboratory of the work that you're studying by living in your home. And I'm both jealous of that and also love the maybe subconscious obsession.

But I'm curious too, in terms of thinking about Dweller as being both this music platform, a series of curated spaces, and this wonderful writing archive of which I would suggest everyone to please go read, which is how I actually found and came across your work, was through-- what I think you're explaining in a lot of ways, is how to reclaim what has been lost and how to hold and stay with it, but how to also see that a lot of things were never lost.

They just have to be uncovered, dust off. They may not be intellectualized in the way that we actually experience them, but are very clear and almost intuitive to us. And Katherine McKittrick, particularly in the interview that you had with her, who is a Black geographer, and once again bringing back together these notions of design, geology, architecture and geography, and she brings up something called imbrications, or what she says is being living with and reading and learning from many forms of knowledge.

And I'm really curious, how does Dweller kind of exist in that way in terms of the imbrications that it has? And how is Black electronic music as both a historical process that was produced out of these kind of urban centers where you see Black life very much flourishing in Black material culture being very distinct? But how do you see Dweller holding onto these imbrications? How does it live with these multiple different forms of knowledge? How does music and Black electronic music inform this? And why is it important for you all to also set up physical space as well?

RYAN CLARKE: For sure. I mean, yes, and shout out to Katherine McKittrick. And also, while I was talking about my thesis, I want to shout out my committee members Ana Ochoa Gautier, Courtney Bryant, and Matt Sakakeeny. Without their sort of openness for me to engage with architecture and geology and a little bit of music inside of a musicology department, very grateful for them to give me that sort of runway.

I love that interview that Katherine and I did together. I hope we can continue to talk in the future. But this idea of imbrication, I think, is, like you said, very much a sort of matter of fact and less a sort of intellectualizing, dare I say, like an elitist notion where I think the majority of Black culture seems to engage in the totality of life, and it's less about the indexation or compartmentalization of certain fields, where if you are, again, for instance, like a scientist or a writer or a painter or a sculptor, that is your field.

Again, going back to these sorts of metaphors that seem to place us in containers of plots of land. It's like, that's your field. It's like, no, we are all here together in this space and we can learn from each other. And so the "interdisciplinary", quote unquote, is not a recent contribution.

Well, it's definitely a recent contribution into academia in the West. But I think if you think about what Black Studies are, it's inherently pulling from different texts and quote unquote, "fields", so we can really recognize the sort of-- what's the word I'm looking for. If not a spherical, a sort of 360 degree understanding of ourselves and how we understand ourselves can be useful when pulling from various components and knowledge systems. And so from there, I think Black music has always reflected those sorts of sensibilities.

And so what I think Dweller is doing is recognizing that, one, reiterating and re-establishing a kind of history. So we can continue to move forward on a collective understanding, where we're not always having to rehash and unearth these narratives can be something that we can simply hold as self-evidence. So we can flourish and contribute whatever it is that we can contribute towards, if you are a writer, a scientist or whatever that leads towards self-actualization or hopefully the preconditions of collective liberation.

And going towards placemaking or making sure that congregation is incredibly important is thinking about Dwellers starting in 2019, and then sort of continuing inside and throughout the COVID pandemic and epidemic and as it becomes endemic and seasonal. One being mindful about and intentional about what congregation can even mean in-- not just in the wake of that, but in the midst of that, but also recognizing how Black space making has always been a liberation practice.

And so I think that is probably the most important thing, but it has to happen within a sort of mutually understood-- it doesn't have to be agreed upon, but a mutually understood understanding of the reasons why this is happening. And so why I thought the blog was important. And even introducing this context around what's ostensibly nightlife can make it sort of behave on what I hope to be a sort of higher order or higher level to where these ideas of transcendence and catharsis can find itself in the secular as it behaves, as we were both talking about earlier in our youth in these spiritual forms.

And again, watching like our parents and grandparents recognize that this catharsis is necessary to continue to find ourselves and to find each other is something that I wanted to attribute and contribute as people in Black electronic music have done before me. Most notably underground resistance with Mike Banks and Jeff Mills and Cornelius Harris, just to name the kind of pillars of that sort of group that were very much interested in making explicit the sort of Black logical systems that are woven inside of the music.

Especially a name-- I want to say nameless, but more so of a voiceless kind of music, how can we speak to these ideas in shapes and forms and sounds, while also when we do have the space to speak, it is going towards galvanizing those ideas. So that when you're listening to this wordless music, you might find yourself imagining inside of the structures that might be suggested in the liner notes or in the track titles, or even in the sounds.

When I'm thinking about blues chords and things like that, sometimes we can actually engrave Blackness inside of certain sonic gestures, bass slides or turntable scratches or polyrhythms. Why do things and how do things sound Black? That doesn't just happen without us weaving ourselves inside of that traditionally, historically.

I just get excited when I think about how tradition is not something or necessarily something that we can only look back on, but tradition is also something that is always ahead of us. Thinking about techno as future music is something that I'm very interested and the tradition of something that we haven't done yet.

TYLER WHITE: Wow, bringing out so many pieces of that, that I think are so incredibly important. You mentioned catharsis and this kind of experience of ecstasy. It reminds me of the conversation interview you did with Kalela, which I'm sure you have to be a big fan to have been on her then. But it makes me think she's literally like-- I mean, dope is not even-- like I understand that you understand. But like for people that don't understand, dope is not even explanation.

How do we encode or how do we experience a sound as being a Black sound? There's something about it. And it makes me think of the song Hallucinogen, which is like maybe my favorite song by her. I think it's masterful. It's just a bunch of sounds that are brought together in this, like beautiful composition that feels-- like you said, it is techno because it's coming out of something that's artificial in a way, but the way that it's like composed, it just feels so natural that you could easily translate that to the composition of a classical music kind of set.

And I'm curious between this point, which I think is emerging from a lot of what you just said, between explaining Blackness and experiencing Blackness, and really how the academia tries to explain it and then the way that we practice it, particularly the way that dweller is practicing both in terms of its production of contributing to the literature and really talking about solidarity across Black and Palestinian communities, really thinking about geography in the way that it influences the ways that we know what music is. Because so much of Black music is conditional to the places that Black folks have been at. Which is why we have such a wide range of musical history is because we've been so many places and always contributing there.

I'm curious, how does Dweller approach this notion between translation and explanation and experience and mundanity and unspoken? Because I think that's really kind of at the core of where we are at this point in time, in terms of thinking about what is the next consciousness around Blackness. It feels like a tension between translation and explanation and also like experience and authenticity. I don't know if that's true, but that's what I was picking up from what you were saying.

RYAN CLARKE: I mean, I love what you're saying. It sounds super, super exciting. And I think you're right. I think we definitely do need to think about what the next steps are. And so we don't necessarily mindlessly reinvent the wheel, especially towards franchising Blackness.

That's definitely-- there's this phrase here in New Orleans where many of the New Orleans Indians or Black masking Indians, which if you've never been to New Orleans, there's this sort of Indian masking tradition that a lot of Black New Orleanians will take part of. And so on Mardi Gras, where you might go to Zulu or these events called Super Sunday, which during a certain season after Mardi Gras, you have these Mardi Gras Indians kind of do these performances of various tribes that they're a part of.

And there's a lot of beadwork. It's very extravagant. It's very ornate. And they call themselves guardians of the flame. And I love this idea or this image, because it feels like the Black people have a proximity to Blackness, but there is no authorship or ownership of it necessarily. It's just like right now we're the sort of guardians of this flame.

And I'm really grateful that you brought in the Palestinian context into this, because I also think that they are contributing to this word or this feeling or this phenomena that we've understood as Blackness, which has less to do about Blackness and more so has to do about this sort of if not an inherently colonial act, but definitely an act of negation, disenfranchisement, decimation, just all this control, and how does a people navigate and express themselves through encoding themselves outside of their bodies.

And think that choreography has something to do with that, but I also think art and art making has something to do with that. That's why I love, as an example, Africa. I've often heard that especially in West Africa, there's not necessarily a quote unquote "word for art". Art is a sort of another expression of just the functionality of everyday life. Art isn't something that you necessarily put on a wall and separate or bifurcate yourself from. It is as much as a thing as we are.

And I just think having that sensibility and that connection with not just things that we produce and create, but also just the world around us, carries a sense of Blackness. And so as I'm bringing up the Mardi Gras Indians, I'm thinking about how oftentimes fugitivity in Southern Louisiana would necessitate the connection and the sort of actual blending of both Native American Indigenous cultures and people and populations around enslaved or Afro-Caribbean or just African people.

And so this kind of act of maroonage is also a Black thing, but it is quote unquote, "Black that relates to maybe a certain phenotype or a demographic." It also feels like a sort of inexhaustible range of possibilities of how to perform and navigate inside of Western or colonial systems. Being made Black is like something that I don't know, might be a feeling that has less to do with a certain skin color. Now, it does have things to do with it, but it doesn't inherently, in my opinion, necessarily have to do with it.

And so when I see this kind of connection that on our Dweller library, on the blog, we start with Afro-Palestinian and anti-imperialism literature. I do believe that there is a sort of relationship that people being made Black and being forced to negate-- themselves being negated is something that is resonant inside of the current, but also historical plight of Palestinians. And so just making those connections that someone like Huey Newton might understand is like intercommunalism is something that I think is important.

Going back to the call and response, right now we're looking to Palestine, to Gaza, because there is a call. And many of us feel like we have this need to respond. And so that is-- this sense of call and response isn't internal. It's also how do we relate towards a more generative sense of life that doesn't need to happen only within a culture. I don't think there should necessarily be in groups when there is negation, disenfranchisement, decimation happening.

We have a knowledge system that goes back 400, 500 years of how do we navigate this decimation, this negation, this oppression, this imposition through colonial powers, both culturally, but also how do we embody those practices. And so as much as I think a lot of that knowledge is being shared, we're also always already listening to increase that knowledge share. I hope that made sense.

TYLER WHITE: That made so much sense. And I mean, I think the biggest thing I want to pick up on in terms of two things that you really dropped for us that are so necessary at this time is this idea of like-- you called it intercommunalism or this idea of solidarity not being enough. Solidarity is something that you can have regardless of your position. But in terms of thinking about before this idea that you brought to us earlier in the show of geological superposition, this kind of idea that we're all sitting on top of histories of injustices that have been allowed in a way.

So that this notion of intercommunalism becomes not only just a solidarity of being able to or trying to understand someone else's experience, but it's really just like this recognition of, oh, I see you because that is very much-- like I could go back into the geological record and point out when that was happening to me. And that has been fossilized in the same way that you're being attempted to be fossilized. And I think that that's so important because it does stem from, like you said, existing within an imperial system.

But I do think that there are ways that it can be-- which is what you were saying before, Blackness is being this conditionality, not necessarily of skin type, but really just of treatment, status, standing, the way that you are being like socialized, as you said, being made to be Black. I think that the thing that's so interesting to me about that is how do we secularize it in the same way that you're secularizing these experiences of spirituality, these experiences of ecstasy, these experiences of Blackness as culture through Dweller in both the writing and also in the spaces.

But my biggest question to you, and this will probably be our last question, is in terms of thinking about a future, what does it look like, or how can folks that are building space or responding to building space, how can they take on this perspective of understanding intercommunalism and understanding this kind of position of how people are being made Black, and how that's more of a condition of processes than it is a condition of your phenotype and your race? How can we use that in the way that we approach the work that we do in terms of shaping the future of what space looks like?

RYAN CLARKE: Wow. OK. I think what I would want to say is what comes to mind. I've been delving into ethnomathematics recently. And so there's this one book called *African Fractals* by Ron Eglash that I am and have been obsessed with for a really long time, but I'm now trying to weave it into my own kind of practice. And so I actually wrote like a small paragraph when getting ready for this conversation.

TYLER WHITE: Let's hear it.

RYAN CLARKE: Yeah, I feel like it might be a good answer, maybe.

TYLER WHITE: OK, let's hear it. I'm excited.

RYAN CLARKE: Yeah. So this is what I said. I said-- I'll just read the whole thing. I hold love for Blackness for this reason. There's no better teacher than the infinite charity of the poor. And I mean poor, as in what we're talking about to be made Black. And so to see our resourcefulness as an understanding of how the only way to produce infinity, which is to say something out of nothing, is geometrically, that is to acknowledge the spatial relationship among various objects, a mind body deal.

This cultural phenomena crosses the work, the play, the spiritual and the spiritual. Self-organization is key, meaning the spontaneous formation of pattern and pattern change in complex systems whose elements adapt to the very patterns of behaviors they create, or a process where some form of overall order arises from local interactions between parts of an initially disordered system.

And so this idea of geometry being ultimately a spatial relationship between objects, one, connects the rational with the somatic, again a mind-body deal. Also, if we're to look forward and we're talking about what does it mean to continue to organize Blackness both materially and immaterially, I think it has to be one of self-organization, which I gave the definition for. But inside that definition, what I think is important is adapting to the very patterns that we create.

And so thinking about recursion or self-similarity or even going back to fractals, practicality, which is ultimately a geometric arising procedure, is something that I think we've always been doing. I think musically it might be the most obvious inside of techno, or maybe architecturally most obvious inside of the shotgun, but also how do we behave almost geometrically between each other, which is to form a spatial relationship and then to adapt from the pattern that we're already starting off with.

So it can move with the sort of versatility that we will most definitely need in the coming decades, if not year, if not next couple of months. So I think that learning from Blackness, which in my mind is really a epistemology or non-western logic system, and contribute to that how we take care of each other, how we treat each other, how we entangle ourselves in each other's lives, is really important.

And if we haven't gotten there before or yet, as it might have been maybe extracted from us, because I know that often people have a sense of fraughtness when it comes to even the discussion surrounding community and what it means to organize or actualize collectively, I think music can really perform as a sort of prophetic tool where in this act of congregation might give us the clue to what this can look like in the mundane. How can we continue to self-organize when the lights are off and the music stops playing? Can we learn from those moments and phenomenas? I think that's my ultimate goal.

So yeah, I think Black design, in my opinion, is like a sort of fugitive organizational system that we can continue to build on top of. And I think one of those ways to do it is to maybe think about ourselves as a kind of geometry, again, a kind of spatial relationship among each other, so we can actualize and iterate and learn and navigate a very complex system that we found ourselves in.

TYLER WHITE: That's no better way to summarize in that. You also actually took the outro question, which is Black design is. So I won't belabor you with telling us that is the fugitive system that can be built on top of because you already dropped that knowledge for us. What I am curious about is, what are you listening to right now? What are in your ears? Just leave us out here with some gems that we can put on to.

RYAN CLARKE: OK. I'm listening to Model 500, which is really the originator, one of the pioneers of techno. Juan Atkins in '99, he made a down tempo record called Mind and Body, actually. Hilarious. And there's this one track called Everyday, which is really fun.

There's another one called DRAM. The group name is coming out of Atlanta in Dallas in the early 2000, but they were really inspired by Detroit techno. There's a really cool song called SRAM, which was really fun to listen to. And lastly, I was just listening to Desire As by Prefab Sprout. It was like a '80s like London pop outfit, and that's a really beautiful song. So yeah, some techno and I think it's called sophisti-pop from the '80s. So shout out to the--

TYLER WHITE: How about that, sophisti-pop. OK. Well, Ryan, it has been honestly such a pleasure. Thank you so much for this conversation. I mean, it couldn't have gone any better. We had so many questions, but I had new things that came to my brain just as you were talking. I feel like I could talk to you for a very long time. But as we're closing out, if you finish the statement, Black design is?

RYAN CLARKE: Black design is a fugitive organizational system that we haven't seen yet.

TYLER WHITE: Awesome. Thank you so much again, Ryan.

RYAN CLARKE: Thank you. This has been awesome, Tyler. This is really, really cool. I appreciate this.

TYLER WHITE: I am Tyler White. This is Ryan Clarke. 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. Godspeed.