



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 27: Afrofuturism

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Participants:

Trevor Parry-Giles
Reynaldo Anderson
Lonny J. Avi Brooks

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Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Hello, I'm Trevor Perry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association and I'm your host on *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. Thanks for joining us for today's episode.

Every now and then on *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*, we address particular themes or topics that are currently relevant to communication research, and today is one of those days. Our episode today focuses on the concept or theme or critical methods surrounding Afrofuturism. We're going to look at some definitions of what Afrofuturism is all about, examples of Afrofuturism, the importance of Afrofuturism, and particularly how Afrofuturism can be incorporated into the communication classroom. And we're lucky to have with us two experts in this particular domain of human understanding, Afrofuturism. Professors Reynaldo Anderson and Lonny J. Avi Brooks join me today to discuss this important topic. First, a bit more about today's guests.

Reynaldo Anderson is a communication studies and Africana studies scholar who currently serves as an associate professor of communication studies at Harris Stowe State University. Reynaldo is currently the executive director and co-founder of the Black Speculative Arts Movement or BSAM, an international network of artists, intellectuals, creatives, and activists. Reynaldo is the author of *The Black Speculative Arts Movement: Black Futurity Art + Design* and numerous other works on Afrofuturism including "Afrofuturism: The Visual Imagery of Kanye West," a chapter in a book entitled *The Cultural Impact of Kanye West*. Anderson is also the co-editor of *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* with Charles E. Jones and is the co-editor of *The Lovecraft Country Reader* which is forthcoming in 2021. Hi, Reynaldo and thanks for joining us today.



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Reynaldo Anderson:

Hello, how are you doing?

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Lonny J. Avi Brooks is an associate professor of strategic communication at California State University - East Bay. Dr. Brooks researches in the areas of Afrofuturism and futurist studies, is the co-principal investigator for the Long Term And Futures Thinking In Education Project and is producer and co-creator of *The Afrofuturist Podcast* with Ahmed Best. Brooks is currently working on a book titled *Working in the Future Tense at Future Land: Circulating Afro-Future Types of Work, Culture, and Racial Identity*. Brooks is the co-organizer of The Black Speculative Arts Movement - Oakland Symposium Film Festival with none other than Reynaldo Anderson. So hi, Lonny and thanks for joining us on *Communication Matters*.

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

Good to be here. Thank you.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Now for our listeners who may not know what Afrofuturism is all about, and I include myself in that category, I'm curious how you both might define this growing area of study. What do we mean when we use the term Afrofuturism?

Reynaldo Anderson:

Okay. I would say in layman's terms, a way of talking about it, I was just talking about this with the past president of NCA Ron Jackson last night. You can think of it as just a way for people of African descent to culturally locate themselves in time with respect to technology and society. And then within dimensions that include philosophy, aesthetics, social science, applied science, and community activities. And that's a real straightforward, simple way of thinking about it in terms of how it's explored in this current contemporary wave of Afrofuturism which we call 2.0 or the second wave that's emerged since its popular emergence in the last 25-30 years.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So how has Afrofuturism changed since the term or the concept was first coined in the 1990s? Have they changed because of technology? How they changed over time? I mean that's almost 30 years now.

Reynaldo Anderson:

Well, the first, what they coined back in the early 90s, two principal people that described what they saw in relation to black artist intellectuals were Mark Dery and Mark Sinker in the early 90s. And what they described and were discussing was actually a body of knowledge that had been



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existent since, at least in the United States, dating back to the middle of the 19th century which would have been black speculative thoughts which as a tradition emerges parallel to the emergence of modern science fiction. Whereas the focus of black speculative thought was much more concentrated and focused on the liberation of people of African descent in relation to their social circumstances in the mid-19th century. Whereas science fiction emerges as a body of knowledge and literature in relation to changes in the emerging modern science, modernity, the Industrial Revolution. So they kind of emerge on parallel tracks, kind of segregated each other with different missions and focuses but sometimes with a little bit of overlap. And some of the key figures that go back to the middle of the 19th century are people, like in its literary form, you're talking about people like Martin Delaney who wrote a book called *Hut* which dealt with the idea of a slave revolution in terms of the need for people of African descent to establish their own nation state. And in a way, that speculative idea of thinking about revolutions because for someone who's an enslaved African, freedom was like science fiction. So that's where that black speculative tradition is unique from the European model of science fiction.

Now in the last 30 years, Mark Dery coined the term Afrofuturism in an interview with Greg Tate, Tricia Rose, and Samuel Delaney, the science fiction writer. And he talks about it as a speculative production of African-Americans. But what's changed is one of the things that I wrote about several years ago was that as of 2005 because of social media, the social media revolution, that it had become a planetary paradigm in terms of transnational or pan-Africanism origins and I also added the caveat that its origins come out of Africana studies or what people used to call black studies. Because key contributors to this body of knowledge like people like Sun Ra famously gives lectures at the black studies department at Berkeley for a semester, teaching some courses and this is during the same time that the scholar Nathaniel Huggins establishes Africana studies at San Francisco State University around the same time in the Bay Area. So the Bay Area at that time, particularly interesting in terms of you had ideas from the Black Panther Party, ideas related to the space race, ideas related to music and philosophy that cross-pollinated, and there was a famous disagreement between Sun Ra and members of the Black Panther Party which some people have written about. But to say in the United States as an institutional expression, it starts out there in the Bay Area and now it is a planetary expression philosophically with several different dimensions. We wrote about 2.0. But other people, particularly in Europe, I've seen an article, I believe it's in one of the journals now where they take the concept that I develop and try to juxtapose it with Sheila **[Bemba 00:08:24]**, the philosopher's idea of Afropolitanism. And I debated some people on that a couple years ago during a tour of some schools in Europe. And you have other people that try and take it more recently or try and blend it with an LGBTQIA plus perspective in terms of how it deals with the future.

And one of the things I've always argued is that it adapts depending on social context, geography, to whatever people, their social circumstances are. For example, an Afro-Caribbean population



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might take a different twist on it than say an African-American would or people in Nigeria. And we have a chapter in Nigeria. They'll look at it from their perspective or South Africa with the scholars we work with in South Africa. So it's kind of a discussion that's going back and forth across what Paul Gilroy called the black Atlantic. What's exciting now is you're seeing Afro-Brazilians embracing the concept. But it's really picked up speed the last two and a half years, ever since the appearance of the Panther phenomenon. So whereas before Panther was more of a kind of underground thing and now the last 24 months has gone into several different directions in terms of how people deal with it in relation to technology, philosophy, and social movement.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

We did a *Communication Matters* episode looking at a special issue of one of our journals that featured essays about *Black Panther* and the Black Panther phenomenon and several of those essays made reference to the Afrofuturistic dimensions to the Black Panther narrative and complicating that and talking about how all that works. Are there other notable real examples, like specific text that people can turn to? I'm thinking of a speculative or alternative history that I read one time a while ago that sort of flipped the entire slavery narrative such that northern Europeans were the slaves and African plantation owners. I forget what it was called but—

Reynaldo Anderson:

Sounds like Steven Barnes' work.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yes.

Reynaldo Anderson:

Which is called—the name of the book escapes me. But that's Stephen Barnes there and that book is based upon an alternative history with the Moors had conquered Europe and North America was divided between the Moorish empire and the Aztec empire. And so it's an interesting alternative history that I think would be an interesting movie series. And there are other varying examples. Nisi Shawl has one out that really looks at a steampunk perspective of the Kingdom of Congo and what would have happened if they'd had modern weapons to deal with King Leopold in terms of what that might have looked like. And so there are a lot of different types of alternative histories that people are playing with now in relation to literature that have exploded the last several years using an Afrofuturistic modeling from this literary perspective. But in terms of I would strongly suggest for people that are looking at it from a scholarly perspective, there are about four or five books that I think have the best information on it. The special issue that *Obsidian* published about four or five years ago that won an award that was edited by Sheree Renee Thomas. She was a guest editor for that. Also, the *TOPIA* journal which is *The Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*. Tobias van Veen and myself co-edited that and it's in the introduction chapter for that



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that we make the argument, you can say that there's legitimately such a thing as a field of Afrofuturist studies now that that has emerged the last five years because of the body of work. And I think, as one of the scholars in Johannesburg brought to my attention, the co-edited anthology that we published five years ago, *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*, several of the south African scholars were looking at that book as kind of like it's comparable to what Alain Locke's book, *The New Negro* that came out during the Harlem Renaissance, making the argument that the 2.0 book is a one of the first serious academic expressions of the post-colonial, post-civil rights generation that has no memory of the Civil Rights Movement, no memory of the colonial movement. And so now it's going in certain directions and that's where Lonny, his chapter that he contributed, was one of the first ones that combines Afrofuturism with the training of someone that had been working in future studies.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And Lonny, that's a great segue because one of the terms or dynamics of all of this that you have coined is this idea of an Afrofuture type. And can you tell us what that means and what that's about and why Afrofuture types are significant or a significant approach to futurist studies and Afrofuturism?

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

Yeah, definitely. So I coined a couple of terms including Afrofuture types, but the first one is what I call future types that trace the circulating science fiction capital, that are filled with promises of the future, that can simultaneously constrain and unleash our imaginations. And Afrofuture types are what I call black signals of the future that find and reclaim the traces of black cultural visions alongside erasers of those signals. So for instance, I'd like to go back to this historical significance of the Tulsa, Oklahoma tragedy from 1921 where you had the black Greenwood neighborhood that was just a couple of generations outside of slavery and it had been a prosperous black community with its own stores, its own economy. And because of a trumped up charge of a black man assaulting a white woman, a mob descended on this neighborhood and basically obliterated it and bombed it from the air. I just learned about this a couple of years ago, and it's just shocking to see how the survivors were marched off to a concentration camp basically and the neighborhood never regained its glory. It came back a little bit in the 40s and 50s but never quite had the same veneer and glamour and innovation that it had had at the beginning. So I call that an Afrofuture type, a signal where you see this prosperous community ascending and then obliterated and erased. And it's similar to the film *Hidden Figures* that highlights these NASA black women engineers, mathematicians, computer scientists who we would never have heard about them unless you read the book. But then you see the film and then you realize wow, this was happening. They were charting the trajectory of our journey into space. Right? And so that's what I also call an Afrofuture type as well, tracing those signals. And also, kind of going back to Afrofuturism too as well is it re-narrativizes the middle passage journey where basically it's a



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science fiction horror story where you're taking folks from West Africa, their homeworld with the latest in apocalyptic bondage technologies, kidnapping them and taking millions of Africans to the New World in the Americas which is like an alien world where they can be killed if they spoke their language and then had this religion of Christianity imposed upon them where they had to innovate. They had to create, they took psalms from Christianity, transformed them into spirituals of liberation. Right? Those spirituals are what scholars call sonic utopias that speak to a future that's uncolonized, free, and like the Wakanda that we envisioned in the *Black Panther* movie. And I really go back to that too and also, the Black Panther Party itself to correlate with the *Black Panther* film. If we look at what the Black Panther Party was espousing in the 60s of free education, against the incarceration of black men, for universal education, for reparations and compensation, that doesn't seem so radical right now.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right, right.

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

And yet that's also an Afrofuture type signal to look into to, to reclaim and augment, and to juxtapose against the *Black Panther* film. It's a commoditized version of that vision to the Marvel Universe. Right? Problematic in the sense of its alignment with the CIA which has undermined several African governments.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right, right.

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

And the intelligence agency that undermined the Black Panther Party itself with the introduction of drugs into the black community. So these are what I call Afrofuture types. And just really thinking that black people have always been futurists. And I'm also contributing a chapter in *The Handbook of Social Futures: Imagining Queer Futures with Afrofuturism*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Oh wow.

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

And I'm really interested in how basically we augment our visions of the future using Afrofuturism, showing that queer people really owe a debt to the black legacy. The current **[inaudible 00:18:26]** owe their legacy to black traditions and things of that sort. Queer folks learned their tactics for peaceful demonstrations and otherwise from the black community. So there's a real connection



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and a history, a hidden history too, of black Afro queer liberation and alliances. So I think that's also part of Afrofuture types.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Do you think that applies to other subaltern groups as well or groups that have sought to achieve liberation beyond queer audiences? Like I'm thinking of the Latino, the farmworkers movement or the Chicano movement in the in the 70s, if they drew on a lot of those same resources or even the women's movement. There's all sorts of—Wonder Woman. Right? There's all sorts of futuristic visions of a largely matriarchal society. Yeah. Are there similarities, are there connections between these different kinds of futurisms I guess?

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

Well, particularly now what I'm involved in and probably because I'm also Native American is indigenous futurism. There is a whole renaissance of Native Americans reclaiming their voices. You see that even in the present with there's this ride to vote on horseback in Arizona, to vote for Joe Biden because the nearest post office was miles away and people were getting on horseback and riding. And there's a renaissance of indigenous native science fiction especially with the publication of Grace Dillon's *Walking the Clouds* that it looks at this notion of the slipstream which is similar to African and black diasporic notions of time where the past, present, and future slip into each other, are simultaneously and happening at once. And so I'm really inspired by those movements and certainly the Latinx and women's movement also found alliances and correlations with the black movement for freedom and speculative visions too. I mean I think there's a deep history there. I mean I'm a testament to that. I'm black, Jewish, Native American. My parents came together in the 60s when it was illegal to have that type of marriage. Right? So I owe my debt to their collective vision of what could be possible.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. How do students respond to Afrofuturism? What texts do you have them look at beyond the ones that you've mentioned? How can this work in the contemporary classroom? And I would just say real quickly, I think a lot of the folks, scholars and teachers of communication are looking for ways to bring anti-racism ideas and concepts into their into their classrooms and from across the spectrum. I'm wondering if you have any advice that you can give us.

Reynaldo Anderson:

In the 2.0 volume, there is a chapter there devoted to communication studies. So we do deal with communication and juxtaposing communicology as more of a dialogic kind of tension there in the scholarship, showing how communications can work with Afrofuturism dialogically. Now as I was talking with Alani, like if I take communication theory, my choice is to build upon Asante's meta theory of Afrocentricity which deals with dislocation, location and so forth and it works very well



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with Afrofuturists within that framework. And so other people have a tendency to adapt it to their own academic silo. I would say that one of the things I was talking about we're going to probably have to put something like this for communication scholars because in the last 24 months, a lot of people, two years ago, if you look at their CV, there was nothing related to Afrofuturism in it. And then the last 18 months, it's starting to kind of, and people like Lonny and myself have put almost a decade in this and there are a lot of people that need to do a little bit more reading. So we probably need to put some type of primer together that walks people through it because right now, I mean even though I'm at a small school, I've had to sit on several graduate committees at research level one as an outside expert because the faculty the school didn't really have a good understanding of what Afrofuturism was. And so I'm on a couple communities up in Canada also.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Oh wow.

Reynaldo Anderson:

And I'm excited about this development so far because, as I've told Lonny, I think some of the best communication scholars now are the young, emerging ones that either recently got their PhDs or their graduate students now. Lonny and I have to get it in while we can still do it because they're ready to get going on some of these concepts and further than what we've done the last several years. So it's there for those people and as a head nod to what you're saying, for example, now we even have a chapter of BSAM in Australia. So we're looking at the aboriginal people's concept of dream time in terms of what that looks like in dialogue with Afrofuturism. Last summer, we were supposed to have the event and COVID threw all of that off now. But it's kind of out there now. So it's just going to keep growing and I think the way it engages also with certain Asian perspectives around metaphysics and communication in an intercultural way that we kind of are looking at. There's a chapter looking at this Afro-Asiatic take on it, of time and space in relation to the Lovecraft Country series that was aired recently. That'll be in the Lovecraft Country Reader volume that's coming out. So we're excited to see. That'll probably be one of the first ones. But they are only about two or three scholars, Yung Kim and Alex—I don't know why I can't think of his last name—are probably the two best people doing the work of looking at this relationship between this Asian perspective and the Afrofuturist take on it in terms of how it engages other concepts of time and space culturally.

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

Yeah. I'm excited to announce too that Tobias van Veen with the support of Reynaldo Anderson who's on our advisory board for this, we're going to come out with a series with Lexington Books called *Afrofuturism and Other Sons: Studies in Speculative Cultures* which Lovecraft Country will be coming out of that series as well, as well as another anthology on imagining queer Afrofutures. And I have to say a couple of things about resources. I mean reading Octavia Butler's novels like



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Parable of the Sower, *Kindred* and the graphic adaptations of those with John Jennings as the illustrator are tremendous resources too along with Nnedi Okorafor's books like *Binti* and *Akata*. And I think utilizing all forms of media is really great. In particular, I've co-created a game called *Afro-Rhythms from the Future* and it's a take on algorithms, R-I-T-H-M-S. So it's Afro-Rhythms. But the idea that we're immersed and surrounded by algorithms on our platforms and computers every day and that we need an artificial intelligence with African soul and that's where *Afro-Rhythms from the Future* takes that idea and envisions future metaverses that are populated with objects. So we have like a couple of tensions that define the universe, like what does the world look like with less white supremacy and more black storytelling and populate that universe with objects in the future. It could be from 2030, 2040, 2100. But the idea is to use this game to generate ideas with a more Afrocentric perspective and black, indigenous, and people of color perspective as well. So I really highly recommend using that type of game to illustrate some ideas of Afrofuturism. We have a website. It's AfroRhythms.com or AfroRhythmsFromTheFuture.org. And I'm just happy to say, so Ahmed Best, the co-creator of, is a co-designer of that game with me along with Eli Kozminski. So we're playing with various organizations right now including SUNY Buffalo upcoming as well. So that's a part of a curriculum. Because what Reynaldo has inspired in me too is with, especially another great exhibit that was in 2015 but that scholars should go back to and use for their classes, is *Unveiling Visions: The Alchemy the Black Imagination* that Reynaldo and John Jennings were the co-curators of at the Schonberg Center for Black Research in New York. And I mean I continually go back to that exhibition. Like I want to buy all the art of that exhibit. Radical black visions of the future and I keep going back to that exhibition. There's also one now Reynaldo should speak to called *Curating the End of the World*. And Ahmed and I are going to co-create the last exhibition in Spring for that. But I mean that's just really what I love about Afrofuturism is that it hits your mind, body, and soul. It's aesthetic in nature. The future is not going to be a Maoist gray jacket future. It's going to celebrate black joy. It's going to celebrate black visions of the future. It's going to put soul into that future. And if anything, that's what we need right now.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, no doubt. When Reynaldo was talking about looking backwards and you mentioned I think, Lonny, the Australians and dream time and all of that, several years ago I taught a course in classical and medieval rhetorical theory which as you might expect was designed to be sort of that dance through the Greeks and the Romans. But I wasn't really happy with that and found a little book on comparative rhetorical theory. And it drew on all of what you guys were just talking about. There's a whole chapter in there about what they called Australian rhetorical theory and it looked at dream time and dream world, and there's a lot of futurisms with all of that and the ways in which a lot of these ancient—they weren't really rhetorical theories but they were like communication theories—about how they played with time and space. And it's great because all of this pulls itself together, and I think our listeners will find that really interesting. And I know these podcasts that you mentioned that you're a part of, these exhibits, Afro-Rhythms—is that what you



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said a minute ago? We'll put links to that with the podcast episode when it drops so our listeners can go and certainly find all of those related materials because I think you're right. The really cool part of this for me, my perspective is how it really cuts across communication in so many different ways, literature, media, social media, old media, new media. It's everywhere you turn. Along those lines, Reynaldo, you've defined another term that might be of interest: dark speculative futurity. What is that about? Can you tell us how that's related to Afrofuturism and what that means?

Reynaldo Anderson:

Okay. Dark speculative futurity was a concept I first introduced at a conference outside of Tel Aviv. I was invited to do a talk over there. An Arab scholar had done a review on my anthology and talked about how the anthology made them think about Arab futurity. And so I fly over there at this conference with these young Arab scholars, young Jewish scholars at—I wish I could think of the name of the host at the moment so I apologize. But one of the things where I talk about dark speculative futurity, I'm saying that is a combination of people of what 30-40 years ago they used to refer to as the third world. Now almost a couple generations later, each of these cultures has their own concept of what they'd like their future to be like and how they project themselves into the future. And I'm saying a combination of forces like globalization, the collapse of liberalism as an organizing ideology in the world system, a resurgence of nationalism in the last 25 years as a response to things like NAFTA and trade which did not deliver everything it was supposed to deliver for these populations, and I always tell people it kind of starts with this, think about it like this. I've never seen anyone talk about this in a speculative way, but I'm sure it's out there. If they look at culturally so to speak, the first people that have a reaction culturally to what happens before Seattle happens is the desire for people in Scotland to break away from the United Kingdom which is immediately like within a year or two of the movie *Braveheart*. Okay? Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* and they start awakening, it brings about an awakening in the Scottish population about how they've been dominated. And so since then, they've had this Scottish independence movement. And so it's snowballed into all these other elements in other cultures. And one of the things I raised about dark speculative futurity are that it was the desire for cultures to culturally forecast their destinies or futures in relation to climate and even to pursue their own experience in relation to space. Because most people don't know that there's such a thing as space law in terms of how the way space is supposed to be used in this solar system. And so now, and America is going to get a lot of news how countries like India and all these other countries are launching their own satellites or china Caking its own plans to go to Mars and the moon. I mean because we're spending too much time here arguing over you Q-anon type nonsense. So one of the things, and I guess it was also my background being a former member of the United States Marine Corps during the Cold War, one of the things I observed in the late 80s before I came back to college was when we pulled into Hong Kong, you could get a desktop computer built for you in three days in Hong Kong for like about a hundred dollars. And my exposure in the American military serving aboard a flagship vessel for two years, I saw how



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traveling around Asia, that basically the United States was only really, the only thing that kept us competitively ahead of people was technology because a lot of times these other countries' soldiers were just as good as ours and we only had a technological advantage. And so what they're talking about in certain societies now whether it's in the Middle East or parts of Asia, they're like oh yeah, yeah, we're going to catch the United States or these other countries within 30 years because the United States is fundamentally a young country. China, when they think of time, their culture goes back 5,000 years so they'll reflect back to some period or whatever and adapt some idea from like 2,000 years ago and mix it with technology in the current moment to come up with their political strategy. And other countries are taking their histories along with science fiction and technology and coming up with these alternate perspectives. And that's why I coined that phrase dark speculative futurity. Most people don't realize why, I don't know, Ethiopia and Egypt might go to war because in the upper parts of the Nile and they build a dam, that's going to, Egypt would be thirsty and Americans won't understand why East Africa will blow up in a war that can destabilize half the continent over just building a dam. And so that's why it's intelligent for us to give foreign aid. We're not just saying the president of Pittsburgh. And so these are some of the things that dark speculative futurity deals with. And I mentioned right there, if you look at the tape, what I said, at the time, I talked about how the idea of building a wall was stupid because if a virus happens, you're walling yourself in. And now what do we get? I think now within two years of that talk, now there's a virus and now you have, and it's really, COVID is accelerating all the cultural tensions that the world and the media could hide and show the blatant disparities of treatment between peoples here, whether it's the Palestinians who get no shots or now disparate and unequal treatment of black and brown people in the United States as it relates to history of healthcare now. It can't be hidden anymore with political sophistry and media and sparkly things. It's really brutally brought out the social inequality that exists in the world right now, and right now, they're going to have a heck of a time trying to solve these problems quickly before some other darker forces overtake them.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I'm reminded of Steven Soderbergh's movie about—outbreak maybe. It's the Matt Damon, Kate Winslet movie about a virus. Jude Law's in it too. But that film in its sort of futurism didn't really confront the health disparities that COVID has made really palpable. If I remember correctly, I think it began in like Minnesota somewhere with very white Gwyneth Paltrow and very white Matt Damon. So yeah, that's interesting. Tell me a little bit more about the Black Speculative Arts Movement and what that's all about?

Reynaldo Anderson:

It started out as a series of meetings. John Jennings and I first presented these ideas for Second Wave Afrofuturism in Paris several years ago. And I make a joke about it. I write about it in the introduction to *Cosmic Underground* that we published a couple years ago. And in the



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introduction, I explicitly tell John, and I'm just realizing now, because an archivist pointed out to me that a lot of these emails that I exchange with people, with Lonny or John or whatever, need to be archived somewhere for scholars to look at the communication, that people will look at them as like letters. I sent to John, so this whole thing starts with an email from me to John. I'm like, how about let's go to Paris next summer and do this thing? And John didn't have anything to do. And so we both go and I present a lot of the stuff that would later become *Afrofuturism 2.0* and John presents a lot of the ideas there related to Black Kirby in terms of the influence of the comic artist Black Kirby on visual artists. And it was right after that trip that the paper, I presented a young lady I didn't know whose name was Ytasha Womack, who knew John, called me and I just talked for hours on the phone because she was finishing up her book on Afrofuturism and I sent her the paper that I presented in Paris and we had a lot of conversations about that. And her book was a hit. And then following that trip to Paris because my logic was, and I think this is where Ken Burns' documentary comes in and my travel in the military. I argued that if the people in France and Europe were impressed with what we did, that white Americans would be sold because they kind of take a lot of their cues from Europe because European people tell them jazz was a real thing, that kind of thing. So we get back from there and we have a series of meetings that we called Astro-Black meetings in southern California at LMU and then another meeting called Planet Deep South. And just picture this at an Astro-Black meeting. I think the first one there you had Steven Barnes, Tananarive Due, Nnedi Okorafor in that room of about 60 people, you had about 20 or 30 of them were people that were actors, writers, comic people, people now, you'd probably have to have like a Ford Foundation Grant to bring in on those meetings and then the subsequent meetings we had at Planet Deep South.

And of course, the first time Afrofuturism 2.0 was uttered was at a meeting at Emory University in 2013 when I had a dialogue with Alondra Nelson who was a part of the first wave of the Afrofuturist movement and came out with an important book called *Social Text*. And during an exchange in the auditorium, I asserted that we were in the era of Afrofuturism 2.0 because of the rise of social media. Because it had previously been theorized as a 1.0 concept with just the internet prior to the emergence of social media as a key component. And so out of those conversations, we decided to put on an art event, something that would be unusual in terms of we would take a lot of archival artifacts and put it in a public spot that the entire community would know about and become aware of. And we had a total of 80 artists contribute art, several writers. And it became known as the Unveiling Visions Project up in Harlem, and it opened up and stayed open for about 90, it opened the fall of 2015 and it's open until 2016 and during this time, we were thinking about man, this is so cool. It needs to keep on going. And it was during this time that I also wrote the manifesto for the movement of Afrofuturism 2.0 and the Black Speculative Arts Movement. I wrote the manifesto which was published at the close of the movement and published online with the assistance of a young Nigerian-British woman named Ifeoma Okoye and her group, Afrofutures UK. It was published. And so it becomes kind of like the guiding document for the movement and



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then it's expanded into a full, beyond that document and published and revised from that point afterwards. And that's how it ends up becoming networked around the world because I think then we had a meeting, the second one we had was in Philadelphia and that's when Molefi Asante and I had a meeting of the minds of talking about this relationship between Afrocentricity—and it was during the NCA conference in Philadelphia.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Wow.

Reynaldo Anderson:

And what is that? 2016.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

2016. It was two days after the election.

Reynaldo Anderson:

Yes. And I remember all the people from California weeping and at that time, I was just, and so during the time of Trump winning at the time, that's when we had the Black Speculative Arts over at Temple University. And after that meeting, we then went to Canada and it was such a massive reception in Canada that Fall. I mean I didn't know we were getting covered by the local news, people meeting me at the airport, the founder for BSAM or what we called BSAM, the real north as they say in Canada in Toronto. That's like the northern continental branch of the movement, of BSAM Canada. Since then, we've taught it and we've been in *[inaudible 00:42:23]*, Ghana, Lagos, Nigeria, Johannesburg, Berlin. And so it's become an international movement geared towards really thinking beyond the politics of Democrat, Republican, liberal, conservative, and some of the other ideas that we kind of frankly thought were kind of getting worn out like the personal is political or some other kind of things that were more from the 70s and 60s. We were like, I think we're engaging ideas such as accelerationism and we're looking at things, cryptocurrency, blockchain technology, VR, futures, future study in relation to engaging the futures community in terms of something that Kodwo Eshun wrote about years ago about Afrofuturism at the time he writes this 20 years ago, needing to have the tools that Lonny describes very eloquently in terms of developing the tools to forecast the future in our own interest instead of corporate interest. And so now, it's going to be announced shortly, because Lonny and I the last couple of years, we've been getting invitations, we've been dealing with think tanks here in North America. And as I pointed out to Ron Jackson last night in our conversation, most people don't realize communication scholars have been in a scholarly way at the head of the second wave of Afrofuturism that is spreading around the world now. People other than Lonny and myself, people like Tanisha Taylor, Amber Johnson and others are really pushing the stuff out here academically in journals and in other scholarship. And so I'm sure you all will probably talk about



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it after I've retired or something or after Lonny and I have retired from the game or whatever. Who knows? But it's been very really gratifying the way the movement is growing now and now we're just going in a lot of interesting directions with it. Lonny's idea of community futures that he's developing with Ahmed. We have people that are dealing with neurosciences. We have people that are dealing like Phillip Butler who's looking at this with Afrofuturism with AI. We're going way out there with this. And you have two different tracks I would say. You have the people who are the movement scholars, and then you have the people who are just strictly academics, trying to kind of plot out what's happening.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Lonny, you strike me as somebody in both camps. You're the academic but you're also out there doing the podcast, doing the arts in the East Bay and in Oakland and in that area. Is that true? And is there, a lot of I think, the younger scholars that Reynaldo talks about, I think they are looking for that broader community involvement beyond their own academic life. You know what I mean? Do you have any tips? Do you have any soothing words for those young scholars who are thinking about a kind of enriched experience as an academic?

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

Well, like Reynaldo, and he's fantastic at this, but I'm a weaver of networks and folks. I'm a research affiliate with the Institute for the Future and a research fellow for The Long Now Foundation. So I think finding those types of think tanks to work with and also developing your own ideas and having the confidence to do that is really important. Like for instance, we are launching the Community Futures School with the Museum of Children's Arts in Oakland with the support of the Blue Shield Foundation grant for two years. It's a two-year grant. We hope to augment that. But we're going to teach 14 to 24 year olds how to become strategic future forecasters with the emphasis on Afrofuturism and indigenous futurism. And that is really exciting. So we're taking our game *Afro-Rhythms from the Future* and other games similar to it too, and these young people will do streams of creating their own game, speculative game, speculative art, and speculative fiction with the help of our local artists. See, I wish I was half the artist that like Stacy Robinson is or John Jennings is. But we have really tremendous local artists here in Oakland like Alan Clark, Malik Seneferu and his wife Karen Seneferu who did the Black Women as God exhibition. We're having artists like that come in and teach us, especially Nettrice Gaskins, who if you haven't heard of her yet, she's going to break out this year and has been breaking out already. She's doing homages to black culture and black futurity through the use of deep dream artificial intelligence tools. And she's going to come and teach a couple of sessions with our Community Futures School, and we are just so honored to do that. We're working with another group called Ancestral Futures that are going to teach our kids about black speculative fiction. We have Damon Packwood in Oakland who's created a whole curriculum around game design for young people to create their own video games around Afrofuturism. And so I think it's what Richard Iton talks



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about tracing the black fantastic, listening to the minor key sensibilities of the underground. And you got to put your ear to the ground because there's people around you doing all sorts of things. Calvin Williams with the Wakanda Dream Studio, he's joining us with creating an Afro-Rhythms live version in VR and AR with our game. So this is just really tapping into the resources around you. Now I admittedly I'm tenured now. I had the freedom to do these things. But you work up to that as an assistant professor. You make these connections, and you tap into a publishing network around these visions of the future for yourself. Pay attention to the folks around you. Create your crew. I mean the one thing about this too is that our visions of the future are located in the same regions of the mind as memory. And the idea is that we have the capacity to see into the future. When we see a scene, we look into it, and we see things that aren't quite there yet. We anticipate the future. And this is the way that we create alternative memories of the future to heal trauma. Things that are inherited or known about future studies with the help of Jake Dunagan and Stuart Candy and others and really taking this and combining it with Afrofuturism to heal the trauma of 400 years of oppression and to see more and anticipate more of the future. This is what the Black Speculative Arts Movement has done for me not just on an academic level but on a physical and spiritual level that has really emboldened me to create these connections and networks. And so if I have to say, Reynaldo, if I have another child, I'm going to be naming him after him. But it is those legacies where we're creating something just like the Niagara Falls, the creation of the NAACP, the Black Speculative Arts Movement and movements similar to it are filling that gap for what the 21st century can be and evolve into.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And that's a great place to wrap this up. I really want to thank you both. This has been illuminating, fascinating, and I think incredibly helpful for our listeners and for me and for everybody to have a greater sense of what Afrofuturism means and what it offers for the future and the ways in which we can inject and infuse our classroom experiences with an Afrofuturistic mindset. So thank you, Reynaldo, and thank you, Lonny, so much for being with us today on *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Lonny J. Avi Brooks:

Thank you.

Reynaldo Anderson:

Thank you.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

In NCA news, NCA has just published *A Profile of The Communication Doctorate Volume 8*, A report based on the National Science Foundation's survey of earned doctorates or SED. Of the doctoral recipients reported nationally in the 2019 SED, 543 received communication doctorates.



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Communication doctorates represented a variety of academic specialties including media studies, communication research, digital communication, and many others. You can read the full report on the NCA website at natcom.org/SEDReport2021, all one word. That's natcom.org/SEDReport2021.

Also, in NCA news, visit the NCA website to view free resources for online teaching and learning developed by NCA's Teaching and Learning Council in collaboration with the national office. The page includes advice and tips as well as free-to-access journal articles. The free-to-access journal articles will be unavailable beginning in March. So be sure to read these timely articles while you can. Visit natcom.org/Online-Teaching to learn more. That's natcom.org/Online-Teaching.

And listeners, I sure do hope you'll tune in for a bonus episode of *Communication Matters* on Valentine's Day. This special episode dives into the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our relationships including the differences in our use of dating apps and the acceleration of romantic relationships. Interpersonal communication scholars Liesel Sharabi and Stephanie Tom Tong will join the podcast to discuss these all-important COVID-19 issues about romantic relationships just in time for Valentine's Day. So be sure to tune in to this great episode of *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much *Communication Matters* in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Conclusion:

Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles. The podcast, organized at the national office in downtown Washington DC, is produced by Assistant Director of External Affairs and Publications Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.



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