Container Podcast:
From Cyber Punk To Time Hunting - Transcript

00:00:04:20 - 00:01:22:01
Russel Hlongwane
Dear listener, welcome to the Container podcast. I am Russell Hlongwane and have the pleasure and the pressure of being host on this episode. And today I am in dialog with the Namibian creative technologist theorist and artist Mark Mushiva. This episode is born out of a collaboration between the Control Shift Network and Container Magazine.

Control Shift is an arts program from Bristol in the UK, bringing creative and critical approaches to technology. They develop programs of computational arts that question and celebrates the messy spaces in between humans, nature and machines. Control shift Bring people together to reimagine their relationships with technology through dialog and arts.

Container is an online magazine that takes a human look at technology, exploring how people use it for creative projects, community building and social justice. It focuses on process over products and community of a successful individual big tech and corporate greed.

00:01:24:15 - 00:02:02:10
Russel Hlongwane
Myself, I work as a cultural producer based between Durban and Cape Town, South Africa. My work sits somewhere between the overlaps of heritage, modernity, culture and tradition, as it applies to black life, specifically here on the continent and the African continent, as well as the diaspora. And I explore these questions through interest in, say, urbanism or urbanity, technology, as well as design broadly speaking.

00:02:02:23 - 00:02:33:18
Russel Hlongwane
And this allows me to kind of weave in and out of these questions through the modes of film installation work, performance curatorship, as well as writing. So this is kind of my introduction, and I've been in conversation as well as working with the Control Shift Network since about 2020, if I'm not mistaken. More recently, as of 2022 started conversing with Container.

00:02:34:17 - 00:03:13:24

Russel Hlongwane
So both organizations had extended an invitation to me to possibly convene or to be in dialog with a few artists that I'm kind of interested in or thinking with and thinking about. Shortly after I'd come across your work, so immediately it gave me an opportunity to manifest that desire to be in conversation and get to know more about

your background, your work, the impetus, as well as the political, choices and focuses that drive your work.

00:03:14:09 - 00:03:22:08
Russel Hlongwane
So with that said, perhaps I can hand over to you to give us an introduction of who you are.

00:03:23:14 - 00:04:05:04
Mark Mushiva
Yeah. Thanks for asking. Yeah. So my name is Mark Mushiva and I am a artist and computational researcher living and working in Berlin. My background is, of course, computer science, and I have a PhD in human computer interaction focusing on the design of low threshold pro-social games for intergenerational interaction in urban environments, which is just kind of like my very long dissertation title.

00:04:05:18 - 00:04:52:06
Mark Mushiva
So apart from that, I also have been active, I guess for the last five years, working as as a street poet and as a as a hip hop artist within my own individual capacity. And in the in the capacity of hip hop poetry group called the Black Vulcanite. And I think it is mostly through my sort of hip hop and street poetry kind of presence that I've been channeling, the sort of discourse of racial theory, postcolonial studies, cybernetics, the human computer interaction and how those two overlap.

00:04:52:06 - 00:05:05:19
Mark Mushiva
But presenting all of my ideas, mostly in the formats of the spoken word and in hip hop and more recently, sort of Afro cyberpunk film.

00:05:06:09 - 00:05:39:13
Russel Hlongwane
Beautiful. No, thanks. And and I think we might even start there because amongst other things, these are two kind of interests that we both share in hip hop and what it does to politicize a subject. So for now, though, allow me to to maybe quite literally again, read a prompt that I think might help us locate ourselves somewhere before we depart into these various tangents that our conversation might cover.

00:05:39:24 - 00:06:11:03
Russel Hlongwane
I have been meaning to construct or convene an enduring round table conversation across borders in the majority world around the topic of futurism and technology. Broadly speaking, my sense is that these conversations are often confined to a national scale. I consider the roundtable an important step that undermines borders and locality in some respects. It does this by way of holding enduring conversations between people of the majority world.

00:06:11:13 - 00:06:36:24
Russel Hlongwane

Too often this area of practice has hyper exposed the 'Afro', and in some respects making somewhat of a spectacle, if not reducing it to a fad in the same way that, say, art from Africa is most collected at the moment. And of course, we know that this is a dangerous game to play because it does not allow us the time to build a theory that is true to our own imagination.

00:06:37:10 - 00:07:06:10
Russel Hlongwane
You know, the roundtable seeks to slow down the pace of attention and of making work, rather focusing on building relations amongst others who are thinking about their deep past in relation to the emergence of futures in the same place. In short, it's basically weaving a network of thoughts. Some of the questions perhaps might be to think of what might be the grounds for us to convene?

00:07:07:11 - 00:07:37:05
Russel Hlongwane
What are the particularities of our contexts and how do these meet global discourse on futurisms. And what would form a reading list or a playlist for us to draw from? What materials should we engage with? And what does say, tools or creative technologies do? And how might they be used and put to work to work for this continent that is Africa?

00:07:37:19 - 00:08:06:22
Russel Hlongwane
And how might such a question apply to, say, people in the context of Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, for example? So this perhaps is the first step in trying to start this conversation. Yeah. So I'll come back and maybe ask how did someone in Namibia, someone such as yourself in Namibia, get bitten by the bug that is hip hop?

00:08:07:08 - 00:08:35:02
Russel Hlongwane
And how does hip hop kind of open up the set of cybernetic, cyberpunk, kind of racial, racist, racially biased technologies? And how has this informed your approach to making, theorizing about technology and its implications on race and racial matters? We can kind of take it bit by bit.

00:08:35:02 - 00:09:19:24
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, absolutely. So, I mean, if it's all right, I might just give you more of a stream of consciousness kind of answer. And it's quite strange. It's oh, it's always curious when I recount the story of my life, how I happened upon hip hop. So I think maybe to kind of prefix that, I would like to say that I grew up with a really political upbringing, you know, So I was born into the very edge of the Angolan Bush War, they call it, which was like the war between Namibian liberation, the Namibian liberation forces and the apartheid army of that time.

00:09:20:13 - 00:09:57:11
Mark Mushiva

And so I was born in a war camp. You know, to to put it bluntly, in the Angolan bush at the just a couple of years before the year ended. And I think living in an independent Namibia, I think I had sort of political, no I won't want to say upbringing but I was very from a really young age, socialized to struggle and and I guess even violent struggle in that way in terms of that leads people to take up arms and to challenge injustice.

00:09:58:23 - 00:10:00:04
Russel Hlongwane
And what year was this?

00:10:01:14 - 00:10:46:04
Mark Mushiva
We're talking about something from 88 until, I guess 1990. So more specifically, I moved to Namibia in 1990 during independence. So they literally flew us over the border in helicopters and not that I can remember, but this is how the story goes, but then I guess so I guess I wanted to say that because I wanted to highlight how you know, this kind of this adverse, subversive nature of like of one's socialization and political upbringing has always been a part of me.

00:10:46:04 - 00:11:34:10
Mark Mushiva
And so I guess it was always it was always natural that by one factor or the other, I would gravitate towards hip hop as a medium to express, you know, struggle quite specifically. I, I first encountered a Armenian-American band called System of a Down. They had this album called Toxicity, which a friend of mine had I think at the time, and he let me listen to some of it and I guess I was just kind of struck by how the artist Serge Tankian, of System of a Down, was kind of articulating part of like, I guess, I guess, the human struggle against capitalism and such things.

00:11:34:10 - 00:11:58:23
Mark Mushiva
And, and but more than anything, I think it showed me that, that I guess you could channel through some kind of writing and poetry in a musical form, which is why I kind of started to try to find a medium that that sort of showed that. And it's quite, it's quite strange because I was I was never aware as a young boy.

00:11:58:23 - 00:12:22:07
Mark Mushiva
I don't think I was aware of the deeply political nature of hip hop. And after this prompt by System of a Down, I started listening to music in a different kind of way, and I found that hip hop was the medium that that had more the most of an inclusive and distinct presence of this kind of struggle.

00:12:22:07 - 00:12:49:22
Mark Mushiva
And and I think that's what forms part of the kind of hip hop that inspired me to do what I do today. I think maybe while I'm riffing on that, I can also just say that I think it

was no surprise that my love for technology would somehow, would stand next to my love for hip hop, even though I thought that these were, I think, disparate channels.

00:12:50:07 - 00:13:25:06
Mark Mushiva
But if you look at the the history of hip hop and hip hop as as an art form, it's the very quintessential story of the appropriation of technology by some other kind of black presence. It's, you know, it's descendants of slaves or people who were stolen and sold off and shipped off the coast of Africa and their appropriation being themselves viewed as machines, their appropriation of Japanese beat machines that gave us hip hop.

00:13:25:20 - 00:13:35:09
Mark Mushiva
You know, so it's really beautiful how it comes full circle.

00:13:35:09 - 00:14:18:00
Mark Mushiva – Rap

We must learn to brace ourselves in that expectation. A drug fiend hurtles across the street. His name is etched into a register of abandoned children. These are the inner city stories of our heartfelt poems. Years from now, they will write poems about how we ended ourselves like thread. Does anybody know the Consumer Price Index of great free planets? Contaminant and say that niggas have been tripping dancing to the last rhythms of the capitalist system? I alone define the star as I start dialog with boss for this list of demands. She wants her innocence back. A TV…

00:14:18:20 - 00:14:57:15

Russel Hlongwane
Perhaps. What then drove you towards the area of of kind of computation? Computer science. Is there a moment that this happens or mean? I remember in South Africa, for example, around around the late nineties. Everyone wanted to do IT because it was kind of put forward as like this future making industry, you know. But in no way political of course, and IT was also very vague in my circles. That leads to what I see is some kind of wondering, yeah, what were the prevailing conditions in your upbringing that foregrounded this over other industries?

00:14:59:00 - 00:15:23:13
Mark Mushiva
I mean, to be quite honest, it's it's pretty much what you laid out. There are very strong economic motivations because and I guess at the time like you rightfully put out, in the nineties, IT was kind of like this futureproof profession, which was actually of interest, a great, great interest because, you know, Namibia was a newly independent state.

00:15:23:20 - 00:16:01:11
Mark Mushiva

I'm probably, I don't know, maybe second generation of Namibians who would essentially be allowed the kind of education to pursue, you know, some kind of education. And I think my parents very much in that moment thought that, you know, it would be possibly one of those majors or those fields of study. I started I started studying physics, but after failing my first year, I thought then maybe IT would be a better, better option.

00:16:01:11 - 00:16:28:20
Mark Mushiva
And I was allowed to change my majors. And it became IT. But apart from that, I think I also, of course, just like anyone, anyone else in the nineties, we were also being we were first we were interacting with all kinds of new technologies now like mostly video games and, and video cameras and, and things like that.

00:16:28:20 - 00:16:34:05
Mark Mushiva
So I think that also kind of sparked my, my interest in machines.

00:16:34:18 - 00:16:49:06
Russel Hlongwane
And at what point does a machine for you in your own practice if you recount your your childhood, at what point does this machine begin to have some political potential in your hands?

00:16:50:04 - 00:17:35:04
Mark Mushiva
I think firstly, it started out as a camera, a video camera, because I think in a way from my parents, we would sort of begin to chronicle like our own own lives as they were unfolding. But at the same time, we were also for the first time because, I mean, I never saw much of it because I was too young. But the grown ups in my family always said that there were only white people on television in the night before the nineties. And I think even when I was growing up for a big part of the time, like M-net or whatever you want to call it, there was still predominantly white. There was a predominant white presence on television.

00:17:35:20 - 00:17:52:12
Mark Mushiva
And so I think I think I would like to say as a maternal technology, it was always like a video camera because it it recorded history in a way, and it also recorded experiences.

00:17:53:08 - 00:18:25:22
Russel Hlongwane
Yeah, and so now sticking to the subject, which is the video camera, it's potential to record history and construct narratives that kind of self-reflection and representation. If one browses over your Instagram, you have quite a dynamic narrative existence, quite a narrative driven what you say, like a series of posts. It's almost like you. There's a character that you're building through your Instagram.

00:18:26:02 - 00:18:33:14
Russel Hlongwane
I mean, this is my reading, right? Kind of not someone in your head could you maybe place us in the world of of this Instagram profile of yours?

00:18:34:09 - 00:19:14:12
Mark Mushiva
I think I think my Instagram profile has the kind of almost like shapeshifting schizophrenic character of my own life, you know, And and I think inherently that also comes from the fact as living in the diaspora or even moving in spaces of whiteness, black people are shapeshifters because you have to be, you know, it's like James Baldwin said, the thing about like about being in constant rage, of being, you know, being sort of split in two and so I guess maybe that locates it.

00:19:14:12 - 00:19:58:14
Mark Mushiva
But then I think what you're seeing on my Instagram is a journey into the the hybridization of, I guess my black being and computer machine constructs and the thing that you talked about which kind of sort of also made me laugh a bit is what did you say? Of course there's a character emerging there because in essentially this is kind of like what me and the homies are building right now is we're pretty much making a film about a time hunter.

00:19:59:12 - 00:20:35:23
Mark Mushiva
So not to say too much on this, maybe there's another opportunity for me to talk about it. This Time Hunter is both, he's a time traveler who travels from the colony to the capital, but of course, starts to suffer from a kind of time travel hangover, which of course you start to see. He kind of tries to make sense of it with these vignettes of a cyberpunk fictional reality as a response to a sort of temporal dissonance, if you will.

00:20:35:23 - 00:21:00:18
Mark Mushiva
He's trying to acclimate to the time. But of course, there's certain fragments of his his parallel life in the colony that bleeds through. And yeah, I think these are hints of what you can see on my profile these at once like hints of pedestrian life with some sort of and then hyper fictionalized cybronified black being.

00:21:02:19 - 00:21:43:01
Russel Hlongwane
So I really like I love I love this this metaphor in a way but in some ways, in other ways it's not. The shapeshifter, the schizophrenic kind of black entity that I mean, that's is shapeshifting in its own environment at times, right? It's not only shapeshifting when it enters other environments. And I wonder if this starts to become the Marxist bent that you had mentioned in our initial communication that you feel that cyberpunk allows you to explore and kind of undo and reconstitute.

00:21:43:08 - 00:22:03:05

Russel Hlongwane
Does this character carry some of those qualities? And if so, could you expand on how you are thinking of Cyberpunk as, as a productive tool to explore some of the ideas that perhaps are underexplored in the area of futurism and blackness?

00:22:04:15 - 00:22:42:17
Mark Mushiva
Right. Interesting. Yeah, I guess sometimes. Well, for instance, when I meet people and I say I'm more interested in cyberpunk than, for instance, say, sci fi, I don't know if a meaningful difference exists between the two, but the way I've read it is that sci fi is more fantastical and projects futures way more like beyond 2000 years and cyberpunk is more is more concerned with things that takes place in the near future, usually within maybe 200 years.

00:22:42:17 - 00:23:16:14
Mark Mushiva
If you sort of like consider the William Gibson stories that punctuate I think a lot of what cyberpunk is today. And so I think the reason for me at least why Cyberpunk is more interesting as a futurism lens than science fiction is because it one is inherently political. The very definition of cyberpunk again, there is no one literary or sort of epistemological sort of structure that exists for cyberpunk.

00:23:16:14 - 00:23:53:02
Mark Mushiva
But as it has been articulated, it is about high tech and low life, and how they conflict. And and if you look at that, it's essentially class struggle. It's an abstraction of class struggle that's endemic in Marxist critique. Right. And and so it almost immediately lays a stage for kind of very ripe narratives to spawn there because, one, it's kept within a very near future that makes the imagination more material and less fantastical.

00:23:53:10 - 00:24:26:20
Mark Mushiva
And two, it deals with a very strong dialectical, both high tech and low life, essentially Europe and Africa, the European and the other. So there's so many dyads that you can imagine there that are in constant contestation. And and I think for me, after reading much of science fiction, this is how I came to understand cyberpunk and how I mean to articulate at least what Afro cyberpunk could be.

00:24:26:20 - 00:24:59:06
Mark Mushiva
And I also think within that cyberpunk is more kind of relevant to Africa, Africa itself. And I don't so I mean, I don't mean to be, I always struggled to articulate this because I feel that sometimes saying it is less helpful and might be divisive to delineate futurism from the diaspora and futurism from main continent Africa, which in a way are two different kinds of voices.

00:24:59:13 - 00:25:24:03
Mark Mushiva

And I think Afro sci fi and Afro Afrofuturism is more interesting to perhaps diasporic futurism. And cyberpunk for me is more interesting to African futurism because it's very social, political and economical and very relevant in terms of the things that we're dealing with today on the continent.

00:25:24:11 - 00:25:57:18
Russel Hlongwane
So I tend to agree with you there, and I'm glad that you put that forward before I did, because I do feel that it can sound divisive, but it does also do the opposite on the opposite end of the spectrum, if it's divisive on the one on the other, to think that the interests and the material conditions of the everyday in the diaspora and the continent are the same, I think is blunt as a reading, right?

00:25:57:18 - 00:26:24:09
Russel Hlongwane
I mean, these two environments are very, very different. And the subjects that inhabit those environments are in some universal way kind of sharing the same principle, the same concerns, but are affected in very, very different ways on the everyday. So I do agree with you that we needn't meet the diaspora on the same grounds with the same kind of language and articulations of our struggles.

00:26:24:09 - 00:26:45:14
Russel Hlongwane
I think it makes it much more productive if we're able to take work from the diaspora and work from this continent and bring these two together and tease out what the differences and what the similarities are, I think it makes for a much wider and textured reading of what is blackness across spaces, across time, as well as class, I think, you know.

00:26:45:14 - 00:27:34:24
Russel Hlongwane
So I'm really grateful for for this articulation that you've just put forward. And I'm wondering if you perhaps feel that the area of cyberpunk on this continent has not been treated enough. Like, do you think that there ought to be a broader focus on this work? I mean, in my view, and part of the need to have these conversations is to allow us to break out of, say, the field of cybernetics, techno poetics and so on in Southern Africa, in, say, East Africa and so on and so forth, and try to find a way to converge all these interests and these preoccupations and allow them to bleed from the one to the other.

00:27:34:24 - 00:27:54:11
Russel Hlongwane
You know, so what you are bringing forward right now around cyberpunk, I think becomes really interesting to say bring someone else from another part of the continent to bring their preoccupations and what they're thinking about and see what's the sum total of these ideas which starts to be resolved.

00:27:54:22 - 00:28:29:10
Mark Mushiva

Mostly I'm just going to react to some of the things you said. If I do miss something that's really important, then maybe you can remind me. So I think the one thing I think about sort of building a collective aggregation of different sort of future narratives in Africa and around the continent and not so much looking at one future sort of narrative, I think as an exercise is something that's of really great importance.

00:28:30:21 - 00:29:13:21
Mark Mushiva
So I can only say that that's definitely something that I'm completely for and I think would be actually helpful in helping to articulate perhaps future opportunities, ideas and some semblance of original African future kind of sort of narrative or genre or those kinds of things. So in that sense, I agree, I mean, the other kind of question that to me felt like a more interesting provocation is would I think that the genre of like cyberpunk hasn't been treated enough in Southern Africa, which is what I know.

00:29:13:21 - 00:29:38:02
Mark Mushiva
You know I, I kind of I want to try to avoid speaking for the rest of Africa because like, I mean, it's such a huge continent. And I think that in southern Africa. I think we live in a microcosm of kind of the sort of European constructions, you know, So it always feels like a bit disingenuous.

00:29:38:10 - 00:30:11:06
Mark Mushiva
But I want to say that the reason I would think that maybe the genre is not as sort of treated well enough is because I think cyberpunk has always in the social political arena has always been more useful at myth making in the sense of asking important enough questions in the veneer of some kind of fiction that the echo, the social economic reality of today.

00:30:11:15 - 00:30:44:13
Mark Mushiva
And I think this is also maybe I would also like to say my sort of admiration for Cyberpunk is that cyberpunk features forms of technology and their effects on society as you might imagine them today. The effect of the Internet on society today, I'm not talking about a warp drive or a tractor beam or replicator machines. You know, I'm talking about real technologies like what is the Internet doing to society today?

00:30:44:18 - 00:31:49:19
Mark Mushiva
And someone seems to have forgotten that the future is also happening in Africa, that that future was happening in the past of Africa. And I think because we don't have stories on the continent that are talking about that, like there are kids hacking in in East Africa right now, there are kids hacking since the nineties in Nigeria. This is where we have Yahoo! Man and the domain of the Nigerian scammers and Yahoo! Is because they were appropriating technology. But we don't read stories like that. You know we read mostly like diasporic stories from from let's say the African American cultural milieu articulating Afrofuturism and I feel like those stories of cyberpunk are

the ones that could be, yes, I read Lauren Beukes' book Zoo City, which takes place in Johannesburg, which has a very strong cyberpunk, sort of like kind of elements.

00:31:49:19 - 00:32:13:16
Mark Mushiva
Yeah. And for me that was a very exciting book to read because present day Johannesburg, as crazy as it is, was being kind of read cast in this kind of futuristic notion, which made it very palpable and for me if I was a younger reader reading that I might find some heroes and characters to emulate, you know?

00:32:13:16 - 00:32:23:04
Mark Mushiva
So in that sense, I think would be more relevant as as mythmaking that spurs on real action.

00:32:23:16 - 00:33:06:20
Russel Hlongwane
Yeah, I totally get you I think what I'm drawing from, from what you're saying here is that there's something about the immediacy or the urgency of cyberpunk and the way that you've you've you've positioned the book is to say there's a certain kind of resonance that it has when the city that's being proposed is one that you will wake up and kind of drive to later that day or you were earlier that day, and the figures and the specificities is what starts to make this work that much more.

00:33:07:12 - 00:33:38:20
Russel Hlongwane
It just lands, it hits you in the guts and it pushes you to move somehow. And through that process is I think what you say is kind of starting to build and construct and kind of of see afresh this environment that you've kind of seen and has become mundane in many ways. Yeah, there's a different kind of speed in the imagination, a different kind of speed and in the urgency of the topics that are being explored and like this, you're not on a journey that is impossible to imagine. It's not 2000 years away.

00:33:39:03 - 00:34:07:14
Mark Mushiva
Absolutely. It's the Josie that's like, it's real like in downtown where like, you know, your proper downtown Jo'burg, you know, and all of those nuances are coming out and can be appreciated. I think the other thing that I kind of missed, which is so very important about Cyberpunk as a distinction, it is that it is actively dealing with this cyberizing of the human body.

00:34:07:14 - 00:34:52:12
Mark Mushiva
They're not imagining aliens. We're talking about people putting chips in their bodies, people augmenting their their bodies. And at the end of the day, it casts very interesting questions to humanity as a species in terms of like what is the next evolution of humanness in terms of the human body and our capabilities. But more importantly, it also kind of there's some arguments about what is the obsession with the Eurocentric view of the human black body as a naturalized entity, as a

biologically pure entity that should not be tainted or that stands in opposition to technology?

00:34:52:14 - 00:35:17:24
Mark Mushiva
You know, and I think it's part of the ongoing museumification of Africa to say that, you know, Africa should be a place where black bodies are pure because they're part of the flora and fauna. Right. And when you go into cyberpunk, you say, why do black people want to put chips in their bodies? Why do black people want to augment their shit with robotic arms?

00:35:18:06 - 00:35:43:21
Mark Mushiva
And then it extends that argument to say, like, why not? The black body has always been a machine. So what sort of new forms of social and biological revolution will come if melanin finally means silicon and says, you know, this is already being seen, whether that's hyper cybrownified and you know, and it it's kind of a form of resistance.

00:35:43:21 - 00:36:13:17
Mark Mushiva
And I think this is why there's such a fetishization, such a cheap fetishization of the black body. Because if you open up a really popular publication like Dazed or others, Hype Beast or any other popular cultural or pop culture magazine, you will see that subconsciously, you know, black people are considered least technological. But why do they feature so often with technology as a form of like exotica?

00:36:14:01 - 00:36:41:15
Mark Mushiva
You know, you take someone in some sort of Masai garb and you slap on a VR headset. And this for you is this it's again, it's cyberpunk because it's high tech and low life, low life being like, you know, a certain kind of primitivism in that sense that the black body is associated with and a VR headset, like the most cutting edge instance of lensing technologies and and 3D engines.

00:36:41:15 - 00:37:07:23
Mark Mushiva
Right. And I think cyberpunk, as a ritualistic prompt of what to think about, has to interrogate this idea of the black body as a pure thing, whether that it's not just an extension of a kind of scientific and cultural hegemony that, you know, the West simply says, okay, we're going to do whatever we want to,, but, you know, the black body needs to stay the same.

00:37:08:06 - 00:37:48:06
Russel Hlongwane
"You stay there" you know. Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure. So you work with technology and you work with machines. And this project at hand which you call the hip hop glove. Right. Which gives us a very kind of tangible and practical way, using this mechanism to perform and kind of obey your instructions in your hip hop work.

00:37:48:07 - 00:37:52:11
Russel Hlongwane
Yeah. Could you orientate us around project?

00:37:54:03 - 00:38:20:16
Mark Mushiva
So the conceptualization of the glove, I think came from a real material need when I was performing a lot of these tours, having to go to different places, traveling around Europe. And I found that, I mean, as mostly being a vocalist, you know, whether it's spoken word or just rap, is that I always needed a DJ to kind of like play some.

00:38:20:16 - 00:38:21:09
Russel Hlongwane
Augment

00:38:21:18 - 00:38:46:17
Mark Mushiva
Backing tracks. Yeah. To augment me. Yeah, exactly. And and of course, like, you can't have a traveling DJ, you know, so you'd have to find someone in that city all the time. And so I thought one thing is that hip hop, like in hip hop, you use your hands a lot. Yeah. They, they are what augment your your, your rap, you know, or your spoken word.

00:38:46:17 - 00:38:55:08
Mark Mushiva
It is it's like your hands, you know, and I think rappers are often looked down upon because you're like, oh, you don't play. You don't actually play an instrument. You know.

00:38:55:11 - 00:38:57:07
Russel Hlongwane
You're not a musician.

00:38:57:07 - 00:39:21:19
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, you're not you're not a musician really. You just rap, you know? And maybe they would throw in like a yo, yo, yo, whatever kind of handf gesture. I mean, it's super iconic because, I mean, not just for gang allegiance, it's like, whatever. There's so much shit that I feel like this kind of expressionism that rappers have that is not really tapped into.

00:39:22:09 - 00:39:46:11
Mark Mushiva
So I thought, like when I took a summer at the School of Machines where I was learning like physical computing, like how to make actual physical computers. And I had this idea that for that project in Berlin, I was going to make something that took the movements of my hand gestures and created a soundscape that I could rap over.

00:39:46:11 - 00:40:16:19
Mark Mushiva
And that's when like it's going back or now it's in the second version, second iteration, and it's basically it's just a data glove that's fitted with like lots of sensors like to detect the movements of the finger and the position of the hand in 3D space. And those sort of data points are used to manipulate a fundamental geometric curve, a sine wave, and manipulate that to create different sounds.

00:40:16:19 - 00:41:21:00
Mark Mushiva
So like a sine wave is of course, the most fundamental characterization of any kind of sound in nature. And if you multiply that sound wave or kind of quantize under different kinds of ways, in fact as you end up with different sounds. Yeah. So it is kind of born out of, out of that material need. But in a way it was also the first manifestation of two of my biggest loves, which is like hip hop and technology, which up until that point, because to be quite fair, I was, I was on so that longest time I was on the continent and on the continent we still think of technology against music as a science, computer science and music is two separate things or but they're very much the same. And in the end, I think that's how when I made that, I realized that I don't have to be a computer scientist on one half of my life and a hip hop artist the other that these two can find a way to coexist and even sort of optimize each other.

00:41:21:12 - 00:41:41:10
Mark Mushiva
And yeah, but of course it has, it has a really cyberpunk look. So, you know, I kind of just I leaned into it and I was like, What is this thing? And it just took on a life of its own after that. And, and that's been my has been my thing ever since, I guess.

00:41:41:20 - 00:41:47:13
Russel Hlongwane
Have you made other products that that extend human potential?

00:41:49:06 - 00:41:53:01
Mark Mushiva
Well, the only other thing that I've made is that kind of like a cyber suit.

00:41:53:01 - 00:41:55:03
Russel Hlongwane
And we see that on your Instagram.

00:41:57:10 - 00:42:22:06
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, it's is a kind of laser suit. But I think I'm working on a few things now that that will encompass some of my sort of experience and so around these kinds of political subjects and I think technology and kind of artistry... I want to say that I've made I've made some games and I've made some apps.

00:42:22:17 - 00:43:05:00
Mark Mushiva

One of them was called Culturehunt, and it was an app in the form of a game where you where people who used it had to capture like an indigenous artifact and they would, you know, they would gather points and they compete with like how many cultural items they captured. And this was a thing that I did when I was at Namibi's University of Science and technology as part of my my thesis, it also went on to win the best research prize and that was in response to cultural preservation, which I guess is still the big topic right now.

00:43:06:06 - 00:44:00:10
Russel Hlongwane
Yeah, for someone for me who has no knowledge of, say, computer and programing and so on, it seems to be quite a thing that you have to spend a lot of time tinkering and building. But to put that to the side over, I am wondering perhaps how how do we think of a technological making that is awake and can be deployed for the needs, the desires and frustrations, what have been some of the guiding principles in your own practice to make technologies that are that are responsive and and awake to your own material conditions.

00:44:00:17 - 00:44:07:14
Russel Hlongwane
I also want to escape the cosncept of an 'African technology,' quote unquote.

00:44:07:24 - 00:44:41:19
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, yeah. The good question is like I mean, early on I think we were talking about making the glove and in I the first prototype, the glove took a month. I made that in one month, I think not because, you know, there was something and I mean, it still required effort, but I think the only reason I was able to make is that essentially everything you would need to make the is available online.

00:44:42:09 - 00:45:02:10
Mark Mushiva
And I think all I had to do then was remix it because all of the other guys probably who have information or access to this are to be quite like maybe like just white or Asian, and they can maybe they don't conceive that maybe this is the thing that I need to make. But everything is there, you know?

00:45:02:10 - 00:45:27:12
Mark Mushiva
And I think all I had to do and all it had to be, all it took to create the glove is for someone to come to Southern Africa who had completely different means and a completely different way of thinking and say, I'm going to make I'm going to use these different disparate parts to create this one thing. So it's almost a creative endeavour then, ovrt a matter of access.

00:45:27:12 - 00:46:31:17
Mark Mushiva
And I think I say that to punctuate really the importance of open source culture and remix culture to my practice and I think to a lot of what the world has become right

now, those powerful tools in every avenue, I think of technology as far as critical mass goes, and open source. Blender, a 3D engine is open source.

Arduino is a hardware physical computing platform is open source in the sense that you could make anything you want if you have the passion for it and your own idea. And I think in terms of like economic disruption and future future me, if you could call it something like that, is open source hardware and software. And I think we talk about like material needs, you know, and we talked about, for instance, what would help places with, you know, the kind of socioeconomic character like Southern Africa to to realize some of their needs.

00:46:32:02 - 00:46:55:07
Mark Mushiva
And I think it's a kind of consciousness of open source technology because more than anything, I think it is such an empowering feeling to know that you can you can essentially make anything you want if you have that idea. And if you have the information about where to get. I mean, I don't want to glaze over certain subjects like access, because that's still very much.

00:46:55:07 - 00:47:15:17
Mark Mushiva
I think the only reason I was able to make the glove is that I could order parts off an electronic store in Germany and they could be at my doorstep the next day. I've tried to get those same parts in in southern Africa and it was like stuck at customs for like once. So we we're still dealing with those with those kinds of challenges.

00:47:15:17 - 00:47:45:19
Mark Mushiva
But I want to say that in terms of a cultural consciousness, the ability for us to make things, make things ourselves is already there and a big part of it is like just having that sort of conscious cultural shift to say that technologies and some specialized thing that exists somewhere in a far off land, it's a political force, it's a social political force that you can participate and and engage in.

00:47:45:19 - 00:48:05:18
Mark Mushiva
And so I want to say like, you know, I get I probably can't evangelize it enough, but like open source culture, open source technology, that's means of production type shit. You know, the 3D printers like means of production, you know.

00:48:05:18 - 00:48:50:09
Russel Hlongwane
So on other theory is, I mean, you put forward cyberpunk and increasingly I've, I've kind of been delving or at least now collecting material that is thinking around, say, feminist and queer theory as it relates to kind of digital culture and web consciousness in your view, are they're kind of other factors that help the intersectionality of a digital infrastructure or a technological making from this place that becomes a whole lot more sharp than the Internet as it currently exists.

00:48:50:09 - 00:49:16:06
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, I mean, I think that's a really good question. And I think I think it's a point that I reflect on a lot, you know, and thinking about what other influences of making could sort of come into play. And I have sort of been sort of dancing around, for instance, like cyber feminism as a subject.

00:49:16:06 - 00:49:59:08
Mark Mushiva
But I can't really say that it's been a part of my making in terms of in earnest or in that I've had like stark considerations of like cyber feminism in my heart. I think, you know, that kind of thinking has almost only been prevalent in my in interrogating my own, I don't know, masculinity where it has been like it has been more, more prevalent in me debunking my own masculinity as like as this cishet man that comes from a hyper masculine culture in southern Africa and interrogating some of these kinds of things.

00:49:59:08 - 00:50:31:00
Mark Mushiva
I think it's it's, it's such an ah, I don't want to say arduous because it makes it seem like I labour without the motivation. But it's such a lifelong theme of, of unpacking that I am probably, I have just begun really digesting the full extent of what it means and I think it hasn't yet made or at least in in the sense that I'd say hey I'm pretty much I'm drawing from this kind of thinking.

00:50:31:08 - 00:50:45:05
Mark Mushiva
But it is it's quite a I don't know. It's an interesting, it's an interesting question.

00:50:45:14 - 00:51:23:12
Russel Hlongwane
It's not a response to your points, but but it's adding to it. I was I was looking at drawing a scope of how this field is being mapped out by the majority world. And on the one hand, there's some really interesting initial ideas that say scholars like it Mbembe are kind of putting out around the post-human and then there's kind of archaeological work that's also being put forward that can be drawn into this world.

00:51:23:23 - 00:52:03:13
Russel Hlongwane
And then there's practitioners who are mostly orientated around the world of indigenous knowledge systems that old age old practices of this continent that starts to document Africa's technological past. Amongst other things. It's seeming to become quite a very textured and interesting field of thinking, of writing and theorizing that has a very strong loyalty to an imagination that's prevalent in this place, you know, so the need to kind of map a scope has come from the various kinds of readings that I've been making.

00:52:03:13 - 00:52:38:12
Russel Hlongwane

I read recently I came across a paper that was looking at a very particular syncretic religion, which is Maasain here in South Africa, to be exact. And it's the confluence of kind of religious thinking going from, say, biblical in the form of, say, Jesus, Christianity, you know, at the same time thinking of ancestral worship that had come from further up in the continent like Zambia.

00:52:38:12 - 00:53:20:13
Russel Hlongwane
Malawi as well as kind of pre-colonial kingdoms, you know, and those spiritual practices as well as biblical practices that meet indigenous knowledge systems that can be stretched across into the field of technology. So to seeing that, you know, and then you're going to take that place alongside Mbembe's theorizing of the post-human. I think it really starts to produce something super, super fascinating, dense, yet so very resonance and applicable to this place in a way that you could take some of those narratives that you can give it to, say, our grandmothers.

00:53:21:02 - 00:53:45:08
Russel Hlongwane
And there's an instant connection that they can make to some of these theories because they were either authors of these theories or kind of the vessels that passed over these theories, you know, So that's been quite exciting. And this is why I was asking if, say, for you, there's been other theories that we can add into this mix as a way of texturing and kind of building density in a beautiful nourishment.

00:53:45:08 - 00:53:54:08
Russel Hlongwane
So it's it's really for those reasons, I don't have any to offer at the moment. But you know, one is forming some kind of of bank of these things.

00:53:54:08 - 00:54:19:20
Mark Mushiva
Wow. Yeah. Thank you. I mean, in a way, I think you saying that has also kind of just reminded me a lot of recently. Firstly, I want to say that I think a lot of what it's like informing my practice right now is, you know, writers like, Kodwo Eshun who wrote like More Brilliant Than The Sun and Louis Onuorah Chude-Sokei, who kind of course who wrote black techno poetics.

00:54:20:02 - 00:54:49:17
Mark Mushiva
And I think in even though that I think they are a bit more removed from in the sense I say they are removed because they form part of like you know, Western and English like intelligentsia in a diasporic black intelligentsia. And I think but I think if they highlight that, I'm also kind of just having spent so much time in computer science in the way that I had, I am just arriving.

00:54:50:00 - 00:55:21:18
Mark Mushiva
So I think in my in my artistry, that sense and I think having read Black Technopoetics and also having delved into Kodwo Eshun where they chart the

development of of course, Caribbean Sound Systems and of course Detroit techno, these are like as readings where like I read that and I was like, you know, like tech, the black body or black being and technology, they don't stand in opposition to each other.

00:55:21:18 - 00:56:02:07
Mark Mushiva
Their marriage stands in opposition to I think white capitalistic hegemony. Yeah, but when you think about the fact that like in Black Technopoetics, Louis kind of riffs on this concept that the drum was the first kind of like over air communication of sending instructions and programing and things like that and this idea of like, you know, the, the kind of the black slave really being the first form of artificial intelligence in many more ways than one, because even in those books they give commercial examples of why why is a black presence still survive so, so vehemently in advertising?

00:56:02:20 - 00:56:29:21
Mark Mushiva
You know, it's exactly because of that nature of it being a product. And I think those have been helping me first to see that there's nothing untechnological about black being, there's nothing inherently untechnological about Africa at all. And it's really just the positioning because the examples of like black existence in technology, they're so much further than the first engineers.

00:56:30:02 - 00:56:34:14
Mark Mushiva
And so I've been reading mostly that kind of I.

00:56:34:14 - 00:56:34:23
Russel Hlongwane
I See.

00:56:34:23 - 00:56:43:06
Mark Mushiva
That kind of literature to help me get over this idea that you know, my blackness and, and technology.

00:56:43:20 - 00:56:44:20
Russel Hlongwane
Stand in opposition.

00:56:45:13 - 00:57:13:01
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, exactly. And to, to see because then in thinking it ritualized, this my practice is that I can be both black and technological. And as a matter of fact, in just being without any external effort, just interfacing with these machines is a way of black being, and is a it is a form of ritual. And I've been trying to ritualise, ritualise my life along these kinds of thinking.

00:57:13:01 - 00:57:54:24
Mark Mushiva
But at the same time, I've been lucky to be doing some interesting work. Now that is reading on things like Decolonial Ecology. And of course Achille Mbembe's Necropolitics in looking at, you know, for instance, in in framing ideas of repertory justice as it pertains to genocide. And I don't know if you know, but like they we had the first he say we had the first like it's something to boast, but like Namibia was the site of the first genocide of the 20th century by the country in which I now live in.

00:57:54:24 - 00:57:56:17
Russel Hlongwane
Now you're based in.

00:57:56:24 - 00:58:45:17
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, in the economy in which I contribute to. And we've been pretty much looking at different sort of data points like how land has changed, changed in the land grabs of the the 20th century by Westerners and how the landscape changes but we were we been doing all of that with technological tools and it's awakened me to thinking about like if we have satellite imaging of Namibia, and of I guess the world since 81, we can essentially take a look into the past with technological tools, and to retell some of these events with our own kinds of bias as these kinds of people.

00:58:45:20 - 00:59:19:14
Russel Hlongwane
And this is what it was I was talking about the making of of a technological consciousness that it's awake to the frustrations and desires this place. It's like when this this example that you gave of kind of satellite imaging as a way to start documenting and providing visible and tangible evidence of of how landscapes have transformed through a process of grabbing and kind of mass mass looting.

00:59:19:23 - 00:59:58:15
Russel Hlongwane
You know, the other point I, I wanted to make and again, it's not to kind of to be divisive, it's part of adding and texturing. What becomes available when we put those books away, like the authors and the theorists that we've just mentioned. Now, if you put those away and you turn to the continent and you say, what from this continent can we start to read and could we start with these materials and meet the diasporic figures with these books in hand with these writers in hand?

00:59:58:22 - 01:00:24:17
Russel Hlongwane
Yeah. So I think what it does then it again, I think it brings what you had mentioned about the proximity of the sites of imagination, the proximity of the reader to the place which this narrative is set right. And so we start and we turn when we turn to this continent and say, What's in my backyard? Can I take what's in my backyard to meet these other writers?

01:00:25:02 - 01:00:51:17

Russel Hlongwane
Meeting someone who is based in the U.S. or in a part of Europe with references that they would really need to do a lot of work, right, to access. I think in the same way that we've had to do similar kind of reading, right, like there's certain political figures, music movements, artistic movements that we've needed to understand as a principle before we fully comprehend what what's been presented in those.

01:00:51:22 - 01:01:12:08
Russel Hlongwane
Some of those things are accessible merely or purely on the fact that you're black. And so you understand what's being portrayed here. I mean, these are some of the things that I've been thinking about, you know, and, and, and as a way to build pressure around my own thinking and how I show up in these conversations, you know?

01:01:13:04 - 01:01:42:21
Mark Mushiva
Yeah, that's very interesting. Definitely leaves a lot to think about. And it reminds me of a question that I often try to try to grapple with. Is this just this idea of like the master's tools, you know, and how far how far the masters tools really lend themselves, how far they can lend themselves into deconstructing the master's house.

01:01:42:21 - 01:02:15:12
Mark Mushiva
And really it also kind of makes me think about some of the neo liberal ideas or the debunking of neo liberalism that are prevalent in work like Mark Fisher's capitalist Realism. You know, how even even, I mean, as black academics or, you know, black people who want to contribute to thought, how far we interrogate our own abilities to keep the capitalistic ghost.

01:02:15:12 - 01:02:49:19
Mark Mushiva
GEIST at bay. You know, and I like what you what you said about, for instance, meeting the diaspora, You know, or any other form of like hemispheric internal intelligences with some of our own references and, and, and you know, and because it almost makes you think that… I mean the reason I think capitalist realism is such a powerful concept for me is because in a way it doesn't absolve everyone of a responsibility.

01:02:50:01 - 01:03:25:09
Mark Mushiva
This idea of saying that, you know, capitalism has taken on a form where it's like this self-replicating recursive ghost, or fiction, or magic that infects everyone who thinks that they might be doing the right thing, but in real are participating in a really special enclave that capitalism has made for them, where they can shout and they could do whatever, but really remain in this kind of island where their voices cannot travel and they think they're doing good, but in real…

01:03:25:20 - 01:03:49:07
Mark Mushiva
And I think the idea is the idea is so powerful to say that it is more of a magic spell that can infect anyone, and which also brings me back to what we were talking about. What we're reading and what we're practicing is the fact that often I find that sometimes because like you said, just because of the very fact that you're black, you think you think like these things are in access to your…

01:03:49:15 - 01:03:51:10
Russel Hlongwane
Your experience.

01:03:51:10 - 01:04:17:01
Mark Mushiva
Your. Yeah, but it also really for me, like having lived now been living in Europe now for just like a year now, I feel decolonial work as ritual is as important to black people, if not more important for black people than it is for non-black people. Because the ghost and the magic spell of capitalist colonial realism infects everyone.

01:04:17:12 - 01:05:31:18
Mark Mushiva
And I think and I think as I as a way of stopping ourselves from being possessed by this ghost, there needs to be a ritualization of habits like what you have suggested about looking in our own backyard, looking at the articulations of indigenous knowledge and lensing them through what we have come to know, or other forms of of epistemology, and really stretching the limits of Western thought and challenging, but it has to be ritual, because it's it's not a thing you can take for granted and say like a by virtue of being black
This is something I have access to. You have to can you decode, you have to decolonize, you have to depatriarchalise. These are things that are never, never done. You don't go to a boot camp, these are things you have to do every day in service of this greater ideal. And I guess this is some of my realization in terms of what I'm reading, and interrogating the ideas of Continental thought versus, I guess, Western education and blues.

01:05:33:14 - 01:06:00:03
Russel Hlongwane
This has been super, super dope, yeah, it's again like there was there's no level of preparation that would have allowed this conversation to go where it did. You know in a way like you kind of put forward some potential speaking points or talking points, but yeah, it's also amazing to see how a conversation that is loosely structured allows us to reach to other places, you know, that we did not think of.

01:06:00:03 - 01:06:24:03
Russel Hlongwane
So I'm really grateful for you coming to this with this open mind, you know, and to put yourself forward with and through your work, you know, for us to think about these questions, it feels like a conversation that's incomplete. It's it's only just started. So I want to I want to thank you for that. Hugely.

01:06:24:18 - 01:06:53:00
Mark Mushiva
No, thank you. It's been yeah, it's been really enlightening. And in a way, I think also very, at least for me, like, it just reminds me how much I miss engaging with other black people, to be honest and talking about these kinds of much loftier ideas in a way that concern us. It's it's always replenishing and it always makes me look forward to being on the continent.

01:06:53:13 - 01:06:57:10
Mark Mushiva
And because it's just different, you know, just it's just different.

01:06:57:24 - 01:07:11:02
Russel Hlongwane
And so on. A closing note, where do we catch your work? What what should we be looking out for? What are you currently busy with that's occupying your time?

01:07:11:02 - 01:07:39:23
Mark Mushiva
I'm currently working on an album, a hip hop album, kind of like an electronic hip hop album called Turbo Summation, where some of these some of my musings on, you know, blackness and technology, I think, would be found in the forms of hip hop, but also like spoken word. The other thing is that I'm currently working on a sci fi documentary film called Time Hunter.

01:07:39:23 - 01:07:41:00
Russel Hlongwane
So it's a docu film.

01:07:42:09 - 01:08:16:21
Mark Mushiva
It's a docu film. It's kind of like hybrid, though. Okay. It's a hybrid doc, verité mix. And so, I mean, that's also been exciting and I can't really say when that will be out. But I think the hip hop album, Turbo Summation and some of other technological experiments will probably be, I'll probably be releasing them this year and they will probably feature on my website, my personal website and my Instagram.

01:08:17:08 - 01:08:18:24
Russel Hlongwane
Which are?

01:08:18:24 - 01:08:47:22
Mark Mushiva
My Instagram is @thealltallest and then my website is Markmushiva.com. You can also find some of it on turbosummation.com. Yeah. I mean I have a sort of love hate relationship with social media right now, I've just kind of been wrestling to try to make it make sense.

01:08:49:10 - 01:09:03:18
Russel Hlongwane
All right. Thank you. That's greatly appreciated. I think that brings us to the end of the episode.