

[Lyr] 15:43:22 Alright, so... hi Carly. This is...

[Carly Schnitzler] 15:43:26 Hey there, how are you?

[Lyr] 15:43:27 Doing well, how are you?

[Carly Schnitzler] 15:43:29 We... we're... we're doing this. I'm a little bit nervous, but I'm excited to talk with you, and I've been so grateful for your work in, kind of, organizing everyone, this... this critical code studies working group.

[Lyr] 15:43:42 Oh, thank you, and I'm very great for just having been put in touch with you and the conversations we've had, and kind of excited to, get around to them in a recorded manner.

[Lyr] 15:43:51 And so, just to, contextualize today's discussion a little bit, so we're recording this video as a feature talk for, the Critical Good Studies Working Group. It's going to be for week 4, called New York... New... sorry, Work, and New Directions. I'll introduce myself real quick, and I'll let you do the same as well. So, I'm Lear Collin. People who participate in the group know me from my pesky emails, and little organizing work that I do this year. I'm a PhD student at the University of Southern California. I'm graduating soon-ish. My research sort of focuses on, how we exist in a digital-slash-virtual setting. the kind of relationships we build there to ourselves, to our virtual selves. Of course to others as well. And so I sort of tried to think about all of this. I... I used the context of gaming a lot to think about those things. So I'm excited to talk about these new works in new directions.

[Carly Schnitzler] 15:44:58 Boom. It's good to be here. I'm Carly Schnitzer, I use she, her pronouns. I am currently a lecturer in the University Writing Program at Johns Hopkins, and this is... probably the second or third critical code studies working group that I've had the pleasure of participating in. And I... I research... I'm a rhetorician by training, and my research focuses on... creative computation, and I work with a lot of artists and poets who use computational

methods in their artistic practice, and I'm very interested in how... those, methods are making and... critiquing, social structures and change in our world, mostly from, like, a North American context. I also run If Then with Lillian Yvon Bertram and our wonderful Community Advisory Board, and have, for the last 5 or 6 years, and that's a monthly working group and workshop series. or artists come in and share a little bit about their practice and work. And sometimes, if we're lucky, we'll get a live digital performance, and so if that's of interest to folks, there'll be a link probably somewhere under this recording, where folks can learn more. But I'm excited to talk with Lear today about, what we see as kind of, like, what's next in critical code studies? I was excited to... to do this and be asked by Mark to be in conversation with Lear, because I think... I think it's... it's like the hopeful, optimistic part of what we're thinking about in many senses, I think... where we are now, doesn't have to be where we are going, although there are always ripples, and it's always, like, lovely to learn from, like, historicizations of computational objects, as we have been doing. But Lear... Lear has a good idea to kick us off, so I'll kick it over to you.

**[Lyr] 15:47:14** Thank you. We had started talking about this subject a little bit in preparation of today, and threw a few ideas around and saw what sort of resonated to both of us. What I had said at the beginning was that the title, so New Work in New Direction, specifically New Directions, really brought to mind something, it's like this popular internet folktale, almost. conspiracy theory a little bit. It's called the Dead Internet Theory. as a conspiracy theory, it has become more and more popular over the time. as many others have. But also, as people are starting to notice more and more that the content that they absorbs, consume, listen to. Whether it's music, whether it's videos on YouTube or whatnot, comments on social media, images that

they see on the web. But even sometimes just people's texts or emails that they receive, all of those are starting to be more and more visibly the product of AI.

**[Lyr] 15:48:20** And so that conspiracy theory, the dead internet theory, basically states that the internet's is already, or will be soon enough, populated, mostly by non-human agents, and so back in the days, before LLMs did their grand entry, it would be something like bots, like those spamming bots, or trolling bots, or whatnot that would try to, push us into specific cultural directions. But now I guess the idea is that, were drowned in this sea of bots and other AI, and I think the fear around it, what really creates this conspiracy to the conspiracy theory, is the idea that it would become very difficult, or even impossible, to find the actual humans in the sea of machines. And to me, it rings like a bit of an existential threat that starts... when I think in new directions, I think that that's kind of looming over the horizon, right? this sense of... you know, like, a sort of existential thing that we have even in real life, of what if I'm the only person who's real? What if I'm the only person who's the way that I am? And of course, when we find ourselves on the internet, and we start thinking everything's a bot, then that becomes a whole new question, because it becomes possible, somehow, that we are actually the only human in this environment, or we are the only... thinking individual in these environments. So it creates this whole new direction.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 15:49:52** Which is... which is sort of a horrifying place to be.

**[Lyr] 15:49:56** It really is.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 15:50:00** I just spoke about, like, optimism and hope, and then going immediately there seems like a real turn. But I think from that conspiracy theory, and from the real kind of anxieties about the, like, overwhelm of... non-human created and mediated content that we, like, see, and many of us see and interact with, like, on a daily basis. This, like, gives

rise to, kind of, like, the provocation that Mark and Jeremy started us off with for the first week of, like, where is the critical and critical code studies, which kind of got taken up in different ways during the second and third week of the working group. And in those conversations, like, the human is emphasized. And also, the sort of technological reality that the tools for producing code are evolving faster than the tools and methods for preserving the context of code production. became, like, very, very, dominant in those discussions. And I think kind of what is emphasized by both this conspiracy theory and the kind of conversations that we've all been having over the last, 3 weeks now. is the importance of understanding and documenting process and context, because I think what's so unnerving to me, at least, about thinking about a dead internet is, like, dead means sort of, like, context-less, and, like, intent lists and agent. lists, even though we're surrounded by this sea of, like, agents, in theory.

**[Lyr] 15:51:45** Yes.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 15:51:47** Right? one thing that I was really struck by was... I think it was in the third week, when we're thinking about software heritage, is this idea of, like, archiving context and how might one do that? Particularly like, code that's been vibe-coded, in a usually kind of, like, very idiosyncratic, and... private and ephemeral, personal interaction with an AI... with an AI chatbot. And I was thinking that brought... that brought to mind, one of my colleagues at Hopkins, Marisa O'Connor, has been archiving screenshots of language model interactions that have been posted on Reddit. And that project's called Preserving AI Voices. And the reason she's doing this is, like, the same reasons that many folks have mentioned, particularly in the software heritage introduction. These are ephemeral interactions, but they actually hold a lot of, kind of, cultural significance in what they're documenting in terms of intent and novelty and value and things like that. And I think there's a real opportunity, sort of related to this, like,

archival methodology that was pointed to in earlier conversations, that... in critical code studies, like, to find the humanity in what is, like, vibe-coded, or, like, critically coded, or some... confusing and lovely combination of both is these kind of qualitative archival methods, like, oral history and the documentation of, intermediate objects, like, I think David Berry was talking about things like tables and JSON files and prompts. as these kind of, like, context-giving intermediate objects. that I think we need to catch up to. And archives... archives always follow, which is, how it goes, but I think... I think we can do it.

[Lyr] 15:53:54 Absolutely. It's... what you bring up is really interesting to me, because it... sort of poses the question of all this, not just the AI content that's online, but also all the content that we make about AI, sort of like the second-hand content, you know? And, when you mentioned these, screenshots on Reddit of LLMs, you know, it brings so, mind, a lot of those people who are also, attached to their AI in some way, maybe some of them issue on the ChatGPT side, right? Specifically, a lot of them will end up mourning the departure of, like, 4.0 or something like that, and it creates this sort of... almost emotional story, that goes alongside AI of how... we, were attached to it, sorry, how he grew attached to it. But at the same time, there's also this whole criticism, right? of people who see that interaction and think of it as... I was gonna say unnatural, almost, but, you know, this sense that there's something... In other words, slut comes a lot, and we're probably going to talk about that, but there's something sloppy in those interactions, something... that is almost lazy in the way that, we portray these interactions with non-humans. As if somehow there was something easy, something that's not quite real in those interactions. And at the same time, of course, as you say, we need to still see this AI as, regardless of what it's gonna end up in a few years, being, it is a cornerstone of the time we're at right now, and one we need to think around about, and so, as a result, should we... it's always

this kind of question of, do we want to see AI as this kind of sloppy, more... I don't want to say dangerous, but... perhaps more negative. in terms of impact, cultural artifacts. On the contrary, is it something more invaluable, something that needs to be archived, protected, that will help us understand, perhaps, like, the kind of... technological turn or cultural turn that we are at right now. And I really like what you're talking about, because in many ways, the best way to do that is perhaps not so much to look at the... just the AI itself, but also to look at the humans who are prompting the AI, so I really like that part of what you were saying.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 15:56:18** And I think I was going off that, I was really struck by... I can't remember who it was, but somebody in one of the... discussions this week, like, was refusing to use the word vibe in vibe coding, which I really respect, because... to put out a vibe means to put out an intention, and like, obviously that's something that a language model or, like, an AI code assistant can do in a way, like, without... and that is, I think, like, that's sort of... I think that the tension in what vibe coding is named and, like, that sort of wear vibe and wear intention kind of enters... enters the... like, output of... of a language model or an algorithm like that, where there is, like, a real opacity in how it works. Is kind of, like, at the heart of this. like, perception of, like, what we... what we... what we think is real is what we think is human, and this kind of, like, elision of reality with humanness, is, I think, kind of, ... like, it's at a critical juncture, and I think it's, like, not always a given, and it's a question that kind of needs to be, like, continually reexamined. And I have here, like, I think there's a... that elision, and I think we're sort of like, what is real is what is human, but that's not necessarily true. And, I think... I think that elision, though, and that impulse to combine the two is, like, something that I've seen in, creative computing circles, and there's been, like, a real concerted turn to the analog, which is something that I'm particularly interested in as, like, a trend. It's maybe an anti-trend, in a way. reversion to

the past in some way, but I... I did a quick Google Trend result, search for the word zine, or what is a zine, and because I had a hunch that, like, I've heard a lot about them, a lot of my friends are interested in making them, a lot of creative computational artists who I work with, like, are also... like, increasingly zine makers and, producers of print media as well. sure enough, searches for zine and what is a zine, rose, like, 50% in the last 5 years. There's an interesting, like, other sort of Google Trends data that kind of theorizes... this is... I found it on Reddit, that theorizes, like, the advent of social media kind of tanked interest in zines, and then since, the dead internet theory has kind of emerged as a conspiracy theory, there's been a correlation in the kind of, like, let me... I can share my screen, too. a kind of correlation in... interest here over time. If you can see that there, that's what I'm referencing. And I think this kind of... interest in, and... sort of... reverting to... analog media in combination with the digital is something that I'm really excited about talking. talking to you about, Lear.

**[Lyr] 16:00:09** To me, it's really interesting, because, of course, I look at these relationships online and whatnot, and it's interesting that this need for connection is there. whether, regardless of digital, analog, it exists here around this tension between, on the one hand, you know, you want to have this specialized conversation that come with a zine, right? Where zines typically have evolved in those, either fandom or very dedicated, sort of hobbyist, milios, I guess. So you want to find someone, who's you appear in that subject that you might not find, I think, in... in... real life, so to say. I feel like there's been a lot of the... of the appeal for us now is I think, with the internet, is that, we get to find a community of people who actually share interests. And so I think that's... you have this big parts... of... of detention, right? Like, something... you want to find a group you're passionate about, you want to find this community, and on the other end, with the internet, or with this fear of a dead internet, you also... wants for that other person to be sort

of real, to be authentic. And to not just be this kind of echo chamber, right? Like, there's a... very big difference between going on Reddit and finding a bunch of people who are enthusiastic about the same thing as you are, and going on Gemini, and being like, I just watched this and it was cool, and Germany hypes you up, right? It just feels very different. There's a need for connection there. It... it sort of brings to mind, we hadn't necessarily brainstormed that as much, but... while you were talking about the love for analog as well, it brings to mind this, somewhat recent book by Jessica Pressman called *Bookishness*. she sort of talks about, like, the importance of books as a... as an item by itself, in, sort of, the digital age, and... I know when she presented the book, she talked a lot about, like, you know, on Zoom during the pandemic, a lot of people would have their backgrounds full of books. And sometimes there were pictures of a library that they would put as their background with a sort of, like, white... sorry, a green... green screen type of thing. And so there seems to be, like, this need for seeing that the other person is... almost, like, existing within their own world, within their own... universe, that they have their own references, that they have their own items. Their own cultures in some ways, that's... again, thinking about social media, one of the Reddits I love to look at is called *Bookshelf Detectives*. Where it's about those people who post a picture of their bookshelf, or they're the person they're dating or something, and they're like, what do you think? What kind of person am I? I feel like that's a pretty... important parts of the kind of interactions we have online, right? Like this... sense of, on the one hand, you find people with the same interests, right? Like, when I show my... my library, I want people who will recognize those titles. But I also want people who will have their own library, with their own tastes, who will differ from mine and that I can comment on.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 16:03:31** I was... I was just struck by, like, your... your bookshelf in your background here, and I just... I've, like, I'm just struck that it's, like, it's so many of these analog objects that, like, are not necessarily outputs of digital processes in, like, a direct way, but, like, are very, sort of, like, materially tied to them. But I see, like, the kind of what you're talking about as kind of, like, gestural. It's a bid for connection, and I think that's kind of what the analog, really offers... offers the computational in this moment.

**[Lyr] 16:04:07** It's interesting what you're saying, too, with the items, right, is that there ends up being this sort of material culture all of this, that... that we... we develop, you know, alongside this kind of digital identity that we have, where... on the digital, it might be something like my profile picture is this character right here, or this right here. in real life, it's just like I have more and more... sort of this need to re-anchor myself in those cultural... moments, and I think... well, you can see that some Funko Pops here, some other collectibles. I feel like that's the appeal of those collectibles, is that they are this kind of, like, manifestation of... of interest that we had somewhat forgotten to... I want to say embody, but put into objects, in a sense.

**[Lyr] 16:05:03** When... when we're talking about zins, especially, I feel like... something that's really interesting about Zims is how accessible they are. like, you know, you can be a group of friends and start your own zine, and I feel like that's how a lot of zines historically sort of started, right? is sort of a smaller community that really wants to produce something, and so they figure it out and slowly come up with these formats. But what's really interesting to me is that it's less... so I don't know if I should say less codified, because there are the, sort of, codes to producing a zine. But they're literally less... code, right, then the kind of things we deal with in the... in critical code studies, typically. And to me, that's part of the accessibility, too, that it's not just... a matter of, you know, anyone can pick up a zine, or you can mail it, and it's very easy, or

something like that. It's the fact that there's just something to a zine that's very... from... from the beginning to the end, very accessible, right? Like, I can follow the process of coming up with a zine, and I can talk with the people who made it. and go through their entire, sort of, functioning, and I'm sure you'll go into that a little bit as you... as you talk about the, if-then series and whatnot. But, it always brings me back to a text from Kitzler called The Truth of the Technological World. Where he argues, and I'm really paraphrasing here, but roughly, he argues that under the pretense of user-friendliness, or things like what we call user interface. we've basically come to estrange ourselves from... the tool that we use, which is the sort of digital computer, tool. to the point that it becomes this sort of weird mystery, magical box, right? Like, I have this box right next to me, I... couldn't tell you what it does. It lets me do this. But he argues that the operating code itself is becoming more and more inaccessible, precisely because we just think of it as useless. Because we have this user interface, we have all these different ways to make the digital tool more palatable to the human mind, or to the human communication with it. so, what he says is that we end up not really ever being able to find this sort of, like, deep source operating code, at the level... at its simplest level. I was mentioning that at a macro level, too, you even see it sometimes, I know it's a complaint that I have personally with operating systems like Windows and whatnot, as they... as they go through different iterations, is that I remember being a... kid slash teenager, and being able to go deep into the computers, sort of, like, nooks and crannies and whatnot, and... as Windows 10 or 11, etc. sort of came in, we have this user interface that sort of blocks us from these spaces and sort of give us just what we... supposedly need, right? Which can lead us to these frustrating moments where you're like, I just want to go deeper. But there's something really... important here about what zines do in terms of, not having this kind of, like, user interface, user-friendliness. Right? There's something about the material

item that's really... I won't say reverse engineerable in some ways, right? There's something really satisfying to looking at a zine and seeing, like, oh, this is how it was bound, and this is the kind of paper they used, and maybe this is how they printed it.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 16:08:51** I... I... and I can jump to that now, too, but I think... I think what really resonates to me about what you're saying is it reminds me of a lot of the distinction that Ursula Franklin makes between holistic and prescriptive uses of tools. And, the sort of, like, mystery magical box, and the very, very user-friendly, interfaces that we engage with on, like, a regular basis are all about kind of preserving the well-being of a system over... over kind of the, like, the control or agency a user has over... over the tool, and its way, and I think, like, this is kind of a point of exigency for critical code studies in general, is, like, understanding software and code as cultural artifacts, like, is a real literacy, and it's kind of like... a way to develop a more holistic relationship with the... with the tools and softwares that we use on a daily basis, or have created, and, like, as a way to comment on the world that we're living in.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 16:10:00** Lyra's mentioning, this is... this is a zine that is kind of an analog complement to an interactive digital performance by Kathy Wu. Kathy's work, like, never kind of ceases to amaze me here, and this, this zine, is made of a mylar balloon, that went up in kind of a analog and digital, performance as a res... as, like, a part of their residency at Culture Hub this past fall. I was, like, an online, observer of this, and in this work, it's sort of, using... audience questions to kind of prompt, cryptic answers that are modulated by a New York City weather API, and that are accompanied by NASA satellite imagery. And it's kind of a comment on this idea that despite the state attempts to kind of know and control the planet and the environment, we ultimately know that knowledge alone is not what can secure our climate future, and there were Mylar balloons used... used, as kind of, like, capture devices in the performance. And

they're actually made up the cover of this, and I think... and I think what really strikes me about this object in particular is the text that's inside this zine. are the audience, contributed and participant-contributed questions. so many of the analog kind of artifacts of computational processes that, have existed historically are, like, printed output, which is excellent, but I'm seeing kind of a move beyond that in more, in more contemporary work, and kind of thinking about like, the real... kind of elision of analog and digital, and kind of, like, this kind of radical... anti-binary take on the analog and the digital, and how... they engage with each other, like, in a cohesive work. really recommend checking out, like, Kathy's... Kathy's performance. There's... there's a video of it on her website, which I think we'll put... we'll put below this.

**[Lyr] 16:12:30** Absolutely. It's... it's really interesting because... and I love the piece you just showed, and I'm always so excited. I think it speaks to... the... how should I say? The needs, I guess, that we have to also... find our own voice, right? Because I think a lot of the... the dynamic that we have with those machines is that we prompt and they execute. in some ways, what you're describing with this little zine is... The opposite, right? The machine sort of gives us ideas, and we're the ones who execute those ideas and put them into something creative, something... those... to me, they read like poems, the little quiz that you had on each page. The last one you showed was, do clouds have memories? I love that. there is something about... I guess, like, putting the human... or finding the place that the human has in this chain, and I think you sort of answered that a little bit, which is everywhere, right? Like, the human has its place sort of, like, alongside the whole time as part of the... Ilug slash digital mix in some ways. and it reminded me a little bit when, for the week we're presenting, the featured book is going to be by, Moral Codes by Alan Blackwell. And he mentioned at the beginning, sort of, these two tactics. for winning the Turing test that he sort of, and largest to... to the question of LLMs and AI in

general. but it's very simple. Basically, he says, you know, to pass the training test, you can either make machines smarter, or make humans dumber. And it feels like there's this opposition, as you say, right? Like, this kind of binary between do we want to value the analog? Do we want to value the digital? I was talking about user interfaces, how those can sort of refuse very flatly access to... the depth of a program's functioning, or... how, it's almost like you're playing in a baby safe pen. You know, like those... those little, like, our dog safe doors, that there's everywhere.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 16:14:41** Sure.

**[Lyr] 16:14:45** Like, you go into those houses and you can't open anything because everything is baby-proofed. And it feels a little bit like that, somehow, where you have to evolve in this space where everything ends up being a little bit too tailored for you. And I think that's perhaps one of the ways that, we're doing the Make Humans More Stupid part of... I think the Turing test. is in creating all these safeguards and all this kind of environments that's... I think earlier you opposed holistic to prescriptive. And here, it's really prescriptive, right? You can do those things, but you cannot play with those sort of more fundamental parts of the digital tool. so, to me, that's what's really interesting with... this return to... Un-analog form, and as you say, it's interesting that it becomes sort of more hybrid. And I remember when we were talking about it the first time, I had floated this word, paper punk, that came to mind, and I don't know if it's an actual thing, an actual movement, but I'm wondering, you know, what would it be like, actually, to think of a world where, we apply this, solar punk, cyberpunk, everything punk, to paper, and to think, you know, what would... be this movement that tries to put the analog and the paper back into the center of everything. what would that aesthetic look like? And I, you know, I think what you just showed us in some ways, speaks to that, to this... notion of... blending together, pieces of

technology, right? This myiler balloon, with pieces of literature, trying to make something out of it, trying to... in some ways, we give new meaning, new poetic meaning to things that did not have it, or perhaps... were not meant to have one at the beginning.

**[Carly Schnitzler] 16:16:41** I'm really drawn to this idea, and I think... we're both not alone here, and I think... and I think that's kind of why I'm drawn to the Critical Code Studies Working Group, too, is because it's this resistance of, like, pure interface, and kind of a curiosity about what's... what's... what's happening underneath? And then I think... what I am really excited about in, like, Kathy's work, and then some other work, I have some other show and tell that I can, pull out. But it's this idea that the analog is a way to, complement the digital, not just enable it. Let's see, I'll pull out... Katie... Katie Giro, whose... whose work, if you don't research collaborator of mine, and... I have two sort of artifacts... that she is involved in. The first is... this book called *The Anxiety of Conception*. And it was published by Nothing To Say Press. this past year, and... one of the remarkable things about this text is it's, printed on demand. so... you'll see here, I have copy... 61 out of infinity. And with every reprinting of the text, the sort of ordering of the poems within kind of merge as kind of a comment on memory and, the passage of time, and I think... instead of being just sort of, like, a static artifact of output, the text itself becomes kind of a living analog complement to the digital actions that are happening, kind of, on the back end of things. And I really appreciate Katie's... focus on process in her work, and this is also kind of borne out, too, in another project that she and Kyle Booten work on called *Ensemble Park*. See if you can see it here. I've got... let me see if I can turn off my blur. this is a, like, it's a proper literary journal. It's like, I got it in the mail, Kyle sent it to me, and something that I think is really remarkable here is... they spend, like, equal amounts of time documenting process and kind of, like, how these things, how these words got to the page. As they do, outputs. And so, if

you flip through... if you flip through this text, you'll... you'll notice that, like, these sort of grayed-out bits here, like, are all explanations of context and process, two things that I think folks were really looking for in previous discussions, and... and I, like, would like to offer them up as a model of, like, what this can look like to sort of document, alongside, and not just kind of, like, print output and have it be static, which is valuable, too. Like, of course, of course, like, there have always been kind of analog complements to digital processes, like Christopher Stracke's Love Letters were, like, printed out and posted up all across the University of Manchester. in 1953. But I think moving beyond, understanding analog as a... like, just a, like, proof of life of a computational object, and in more as kind of, like, a real... material complement to the work that it's doing is what I'm excited about.

**[Lyr] 16:20:34** I really love this idea of trying to blend the two mediums and refusing to be binary in some sense, and... I think what you're describing is also... part of the joy of being in critical code studies, is to have this... explanation of the process, right? What you were describing of being able to share not just the outputs of what those codes artifacts produced, but also having this kind of more critical, context about their production, about, their reception as well, I guess. But having, sort of, like, all this documentation of the process, as you say, I think is part of the big interests that we have in, in what we do in Critical Code Studies. And it's interesting, it reminds me a little bit, when it comes to breaching the digital and analog. In my dissertation, I end up poking around the idea of, virtual reality, first and foremost. And I... I look at this game called VRChat, where, you know, you, so you're in VR, you have your headset, you have your... little handles, and... and you go around and you have your avatar that people see you in, and you just act like this, and it's just meant to be sort of a social space, but virtual reality. And I tried to think about, like, what does it mean when you give a hug to someone? on this

game. Because it's happened to me, you know, it's something that people will typically do, like, try to touch one another, or try to have some kind of... pseudo-physical interaction. what happens when you hug is that you're doing the motion, right? Like, you have those joysticks in your hand, so you have to move your hands appropriately. And you have to sort of stop midway through your hug, and not, you know, fully squeezed, because if you do, you're gonna... squeeze yourself. so it's this very kind of performative thing that you do where you're... trying to... perform a hug, and it's... it really is a performance at heart, because you're not actually hugging anything. so I tried to think about that dynamic between the two players, and what has to happen across the medium for it to work, right? Because you can imagine many situations in which it would be weird, like, if I hug an NPC, does it feel the same? Is it maybe a little... weird. If someone walks in on me as I'm hugging nothing, is that a little bit awkward, maybe? probably. person might wonder what...

**[Carly Schnitzler] 16:23:21** But you're not hugging nothing, is the...

**[Lyr] 16:23:23** Exactly, right? And so that's the question, like, if the person realizes that I'm hugging someone in virtual reality, does it make the situation maybe more understandable? Is it maybe more difficult to comprehend. what's really interesting for me is, especially between the two let's call them players, who, are hugging the kind of... sort of cross-media awareness that needs to happen, because on the one hand, of course, you need to be hugging, like, in the game, right? It needs to be visible, so you need to make sure that your avatar can do the actual motion, and that it is doing it, that, if you if you drop your joysticks, then you're not gonna be able to hug anyone, no matter how much your arms move. So, there's a really practical side to it. But on the other hand, you... what strikes me is that you can't really hug someone in virtual reality unless you know that they're doing it in real life, as well. You can't have the quantum vulnerability or

feeling intimate in that moment, doing this. If the person who is sort of across from you, you're not sure if they're doing it, right? It sort of falls back to that internet theory kind of thing. Where I have to know that there's a real human behind. And so, to me, in the same way, there's something in VR Hug, and a little of the work that you... that you shared as well, that shows this necessity to sort of bridge the gap between digital and analog.

**[Lyr] 16:24:55** And then the way to bridge that gap is somehow with, like, intentionality. to show that there's a real, sort of, feeling or a real... intention, behind the action that you do in the digital, and that seems to be where the analog sort of creeps in. It's not encoded, but it's there, you know?

**[Carly Schnitzler] 16:25:16** Be your own agent, right? I'm struck by this idea that the VR Hug is sort of, like, the, sort of digitally output complement of a lot of these analog works that I've shown, because it does the same kind of work of, like, a gesture of connection and process that, makes things feel real in, our kind of, like, context of a lot of... decontextualized, it's not really real AI slop, and so... That feels like something to double down on, that feels like something that makes critical code studies critical. So, I don't know, I guess we'll just end by, you know, give somebody a virtual hug. mail... mail somebody a zine. and find, like, these moments that, we see the digital and analog not as... kind of binary opposites, but as real complements to what can... what can make something feel real?