



MSc Urban Studies

Newsletter 2023

A message from convenor Andrew Harris

Welcome to the third MSc Urban Studies newsletter. Over fifteen years now we have been privileged to welcome a series of brilliantly committed, diverse and enthusiastic student cohorts. So it is an opportune moment to gather further updates on what past and present students have been up to. But also because the last three years of teaching have obviously taken some rather different turns.

It was poignant that several students attending the Graduation ceremony in the summer of 2022 were visiting UCL for the very first time—2020/21 was taught for many exclusively online. But it was great to meet them finally in person and return in 2022/23 to more-or-less how classes ran prior to March 2020. Julian Ehsan (2021), who has helped put together this newsletter, provides some [recollections here](#) on experiences of our return to in-class teaching during 2021/22.

MSc Urban Studies does of course thrive from us being together in-person in the heart of a busy metropolis, but it was impressive how adaptations were made to the circumstances we faced over the last few years—with the standard of student work remaining as high as ever.



The new normal? Our 2020/2021 cohort after their dissertation presentations on MS Teams.

Our choice of theme in 2020/21 and 2021/22, alongside that for the [UCL Urban Lab](#), perhaps unavoidably, was ‘emergency urbanism’. This not only helped us explore ongoing responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in class discussions and activities but allowed us to develop broader scope for thinking through past, present and future emergencies associated with disease, terrorism, climate-change, policing and catastrophic events, and more.

The ‘emergencies’ theme was explored primarily through the Urban Practices module which greatly benefited from the PGTA assistance of Martha Mingay (2011) and featured a really valuable session from Leyla Williams (2015) from [West London Welcome](#).

Student group projects included a prototype pitch for documenting emergency urban situations that are less dependent on certain levels of literacy and phone capacity, a [photo-orientated project](#) presenting distinctive visual blends sourced from pandemic ‘lockdowns’ across different cities, a strikingly designed Zine produced by a radical housing collective exploring feminist engagements around housing emergencies, a spoof email exchange [tracing communications](#) from a British mining firm following the discovery of lithium deposits in Hull, and a podcast, Cipher, sharing personal anecdotes during pandemic lockdown periods.

The unprecedented challenges of remote working sparked several students from 20/21 to initiate a [new curatorial collective and platform](#) called 'Urban Miscellanea'. Responding to the 'emergency' theme, they curated and launched an amazing online exhibition entitled [States of Apprehension](#) featuring submissions across a variety of artistic mediums such as art, photography, poetry and music (including a piece by Emilia Weber (2015)), with an incredibly uplifting launch event at Chiswick House in October 2021. Now a formal [UCL Student Society](#), the initiative continued last year with [another anthology](#) exploring not only emergency urbanism but urban rhythms.

As restrictions lifted last year we were able to once again organize more events and activities. In March 2022, we enjoyed an amazing sneak preview around the ongoing construction of the new Google HQ in King's Cross, kindly coordinated by Zen Mumtaz (2021). And in June last year, Rene Boer (2011) returned to UCL and ran a great workshop with MSc Urban Studies students around a book he is currently writing on what he calls the ['smooth city'](#).

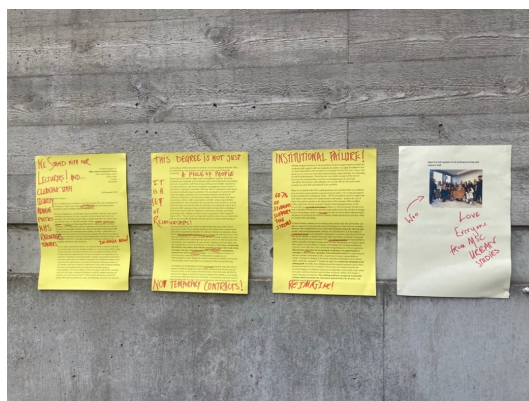
Since the last newsletter, the last four winners of the Frank Carter Prize for best dissertation in a Human Geography MSc programme have all come from MSc Urban Studies. Congratulations to Henry (Hin-Yan) Chan (2018), whose work, supervised by Alan Latham (Geography), examined the public routines through which migrant domestic workers inhabit Hong Kong, now published [here](#); Ollie Joseph (2019), supervised by Rafael Schachter (Anthropology), with a project entitled "A Permanent Statement of our British Values': the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial and the Politics of Instrumentalisation"; [Nikos Akritidis](#) (2020), supervised by Peg Rawes (Architecture), with work on 'Ruderal London: Imagining Urban Forest Futures on the Traces of the Great North Wood' and Julian Ehsan (2021), supervised by Caroline Bressey (Geography), on Bengali immigrant squatting, self-defence, and anti-racist activism in London's East End during the 1970s.

We are very grateful to the alumni that return each year to talk about their dissertation experiences and pass on top tips. Most recently big thanks to Banlun Liu, Ellen Jukes, Dan Nicholson, Julian Ehsan and Michael Fleetwood-Walker from the 2021/22 cohort. Last year we had some great research including projects on post-War Birmingham road construction, platform real estate in Berlin, a North London alleyway, migratory experiences of queer Chinese international students, street traders in Abuja, and teenage diaries from Wartime Holland (1940-1945).

One aspect of UCL life that unfortunately hasn't changed since the last newsletter is ongoing UCU industrial action. But once again, students have been importantly supportive and understanding. During the strikes of February 2022, MSc Urban Studies students, unprompted, wrote this [very eloquent letter](#) to the UCL Provost. This was then reworked, annotated and posted outside 26 Bedford Way by students during further industrial action in November.



A view of Haringay Passage, the object of study for Dan Nicholson's research (2021). Image courtesy of Dan.



Letter of support from the 2021/22 cohort for striking UCU staff, reworked by the 2022/23 cohort.

It has been brilliant now having greater input from alumni in the teaching: the programme has hugely benefited from [Fabien Cante's](#) (2011) being appointed as a Lecturer in Urban and Development Geography, and we also have enjoyed [Jacob Fairless Nicholson](#) (2014), now Associate Lecturer in UCL Geography, making central contributions to the Urban Practices module.

Finally, we have recently started an [Instagram account](#) to share examples of student work and programme activities: please check out some recent collages created for the Urban Imaginations module. And follow along our alumni twitter feed, [@MScUrbanStudies](#).

And as always, please keep in touch!



All fun and some play—a serene moment during a Creative Cities visit to Hoxton, February 2022. Image courtesy Julian Ehsan.



I spy with my little eye.. Multitudes of change along the Thames, as experienced during Urban Imaginations. Image courtesy Julian Ehsan.



A view from the top? Students from London: Aspects of Change enjoy verticality from One Canada Square. Image courtesy Julian Ehsan.



RESONANT BODIES

A discussion about listening in museums

In his research and curatorial work, Eric de Visscher has been challenging the perception that museums are places for looking rather than listening. In his conversation with musicologist Gascia Ouzounian, the pair discuss sonic exhibitions, the noise of museums and how sound might make museums more inclusive institutions. This piece has been edited for length; the full conversation can be heard at [sonic.city](#).

Gascia Ouzounian As someone who works across the worlds of music, sound and museums, you have quite a unique profile. You've held positions as the artistic director of IRCAM (Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustic/Music) in Paris and as the director of Musée de la Musique in Paris. Can you tell us a little bit about how you started to work in this broad area between music, sound and museums?

Eric de Visscher It's a long story. My initial background is more in contemporary experimental music. I studied with the American composer James Tenney in Canada for two years. I also have an academic background in philosophy and linguistics and a very strong interest in arts in general. I've always tried to combine all these different things, and to make one in-between music, visual arts and culture. I always felt these domains were a little bit isolated from each other. I think what's been going through all these different positions that you mentioned is to connect these separate worlds, and of course connect audiences and people with areas from different areas.

Gascia Ouzounian and Eric de Visscher

This took some more concrete forms at IRCAM. There, we've been able to bring sonic content into exhibitions. In 2000, there was a big exhibition about time called *Le Temps, vite and I* curated the sound part of that with works from Heiner Goebbels, Alan Hovhaness and Morton Feldman. I really wanted to put music and sound on the same level as the visual works that were in that exhibition.

The work at the Cité de la Musique and the Musée de la Musique grew out from that. The Cité de la Musique, which is now the Philharmonie de Paris, was foremost a collection of musical instruments, the French national collection of musical instruments in fact. It is a museum that is also part of a performing arts centre. This whole ecosystem around musical instruments was something very important that we wanted to develop. To make this collection come alive in some way, to play the instruments and connect them with musical life, the performers, but also instrument making. Exhibitions were the public part of that. I re-launched and developed the exhibition programme where we could connect music and sound to various cultural areas, either historic or contemporary connections with other arts. Together with visual arts or film, for instance, we could cover a wide range of types of music, from classical to rock to non-western. So that was really the idea of connecting these different worlds.

Gascia Recently you edited a special issue of *Curator: The Museum Journal*, and in the introduction to that issue, you were writing with Kathleen Wiens about how sound has been diminished as an aspect in the museum, both historically

"Sonic Urbanism: The Political Voice," a new project from *Theatrum Mundi* and *Andrea Cetrulo* (2012). Image courtesy *Theatrum Mundi*.

Alumni News

Andrea Cetrulo (2012), programme curator at *Theatrum Mundi*, has been involved in organising events around the project *Sonic Urbanism*, such as the [live DJ set by Shannen SP](#), a London-based DJ, artist, and vocalist, known for her work with esteemed UK label Hyperdub. The *Sonic Urbanism* project has included a trilogy of publications: *Sonic Urbanism*, *Sonic Urbanism: The Political Voice*, and *Sonic Urbanism: Listening to Non-Human Life*.

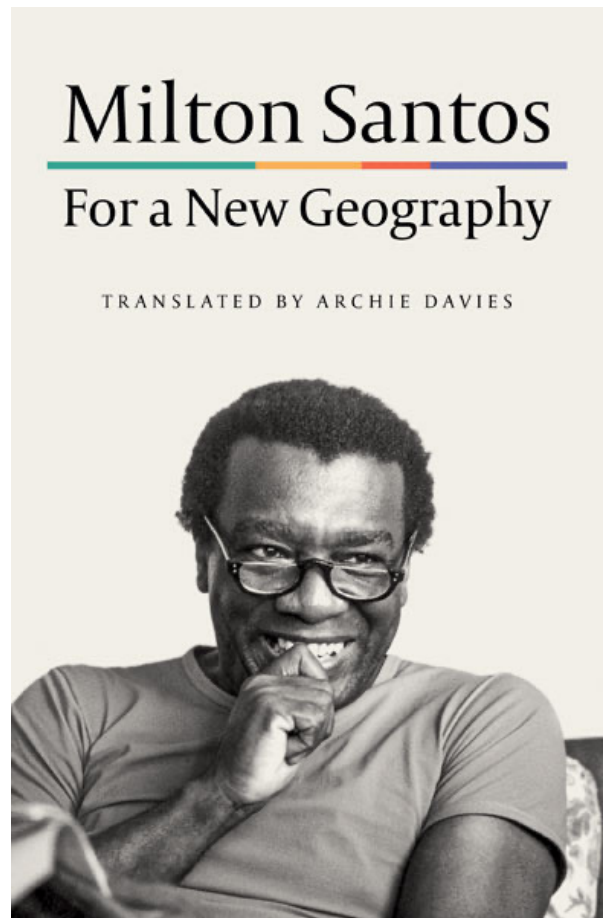
It has featured involvement from other MSc Urban Studies alumni, including George Kafka (2016), editor of the series with &beyond, and Fabien Cante (2011), who contributed to *Sonic Urbanism: The Political Voice* with the piece *Post-conflict soundings: noise and voice in Abidjan*. She recently launched the podcast series [Incantations](#), focusing on magic and esoteric practices as a lens through which to look at cities. She also hosts [À Rebours](#), a bi-monthly show on Noods Radio.

Eleanor Lowenthal (2013), founder of the [Pages of Hackney](http://pagesofhackney.co.uk) bookshop, reports that it is busier as ever as post-pandemic people continue to be spending more time in, and placing more emphasis on, their local communities. The bookshop has continued to host a series of events. A recent one of [particular urban studies interest](#) was with Leslie Kern and Vicky Spratt about the housing crisis and how gentrification is a political choice.



Sun shines in Lower Clapton, where Eleanor Lowenthal (2013) runs Pages of Hackney. Image courtesy Pages of Hackney.

Archie Davies (2014) I work as a lecturer in the [School of Geography](#) at Queen Mary University of London, and I have published two books in the last year: one a translation, and one of my own conception. In November 2021 I published a translation of the Brazilian Geographer Milton Santos' 1978 classic [For a New Geography](#). Santos' book is ambitious: he tries to construct a new methodology for geography and a new ontology of space. In November 2022 I published *A World Without Hunger: Josué de Castro and the History of Geography*. That book is sort of an intellectual biography of a wonderful Brazilian geographer, and sort of a history of geography. It is available [open access](#) worldwide through Liverpool University Press.



For a New Geography, newly translated by Archie Davies (2014). Image courtesy University of Minnesota Press.

Shuyun (Sheryn) Cao (2015) currently works as a feature editor at IDEAT China Magazine, covering arts, design, architecture and urban life. Her interests focus on exploring art/activism, sustainable design and guerrilla urbanism through curation, cultural events, and other community-based projects. For the past five years she has been deeply engaged in Dinghaiqiao Mutual-aid Society, a Shanghai-based commoning collective for alternative art, relational and social practices. In 2021, she attended the international workshop on [Spaces of Creative Resistance](#), where she shared her [experience](#) on reciprocity and commoning. She has also co-initiated a series of projects in the city, including PARK(ing) DAY Shanghai.

Jordan Rowe (2017) Since the MSc I co-led the production of an institutional-level implementation plan for race equity at UCL and co-edited an edition of the Urban Pamphleteer (#9 [Reimagining the Night](#)). In 2021 I left the university after 10 years of work and study to pursue a series of projects, from an Urbanist in Residence role with the Museum of London and a Research Fellowship with Theatrum Mundi, achieved Arts Council England and Historic England funding to create exhibitions at Stanley Arts in London and at the Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik in Berlin, and joined the [Constellations ° Cohort](#) of socially engaged practitioners run by UP Projects, Flat Time House and the Liverpool Biennial.

Interior of Doors of Learning exhibition, curated by Jordan Rowe (2017). Image courtesy Baubaus Dessau.





Michael Fleetwood-Walker (2021) and his teammates are primetime ready for University Challenge. Image courtesy of Michael.

This year I opened my third exhibition – ‘Doors of Learning: Microcosms of a Future South Africa’ – at Bauhaus Dessau and am currently working on the accompanying book due in Spring 2023 on Vector.

Michael Fleetwood-Walker (2021) Geography and Urban Studies were immensely helpful while on [University Challenge](#) this year - aside from the directly geographical questions, the broadness of the subjects (if you even want to call them coherent subjects) is so vital for the game. A massive part of the skill is in knowing the connections

between pieces of knowledge, allowing you to predict the course of questions and buzz in as early as possible. The interdisciplinary training from my degrees (and everyone’s degrees - all but Rachel Collier on the UCL team were studying/had studied outside of strict disciplinary bounds). Also, just the amount of trivia that comes up in 4 years of geographical education is incredible; a good geographer also has to be a good historian, or sociologist, or ecologist and so on.



A snapshot from a Night Walk at the UN-Habitat's World Urban Forum in Katowice, Poland. Image courtesy nighttime.org.

Diana Raiselis (2020) Since wrapping up the MSc, I've been serving as the Research Lead for [VibeLab](#), working on nightlife and urban nighttime-focused projects in North America, Europe and the MENA region. Highlights this year have been sharing my MSc dissertation research at conferences in [Leiden](#), [Paris](#), and [Lisbon](#), co-organizing [the first session](#) on the urban night at the UN-Habitat

World Urban Forum (WUF11), and taking part in [Salzburg Global Seminar's Public Policy New Voices Europe program](#). I'm working as a freelance researcher-writer on topics including queer arts leadership, awareness and ethics of community care, and festival and urban sustainability. Always happy to learn about new initiatives or connect with folks on [LinkedIn](#) or email.

Staff News

Pushpa Arabindoo: It was refreshing to return to my field site (Chennai) this summer after a gap of 3 years, no thanks to Covid19. The city led me intuitively to investigate concerns around infrastructure - storm water drainage, in this instance, through the filters of runoff and recharge. I also did some 'poking around' on what everyday encounters with Chennai as a smart city might be, especially via the use of digital apps for civic governance. The former is being written as a journal article for a special feature submission to Somatechnics and the latter has been presented at a workshop in Delhi. Following my collaboration with UCL Creative Fellow (2019-20) and playwright Nicola Baldwin on the theme of wasteland (a priority research theme that I co-direct at the UCL Urban Laboratory), we published a co-authored article in the International Journal for Performance Arts and Digital Media titled '[City Dionysia: Narrating Wasteland in Urban Life](#)'.



'Infrastructural mess' in Chennai. Image courtesy of Pushpa.

Ben Campkin has recently completed [Queer Premises: LGBTQ+ Venues in London Since the 1980s](#) which is now in production for release in May 2023. He gave his [inaugural lecture](#) in February and is currently wrapping up the [NITE: Night-spaces, Migration, Culture and Integration in Europe](#) collaborative research project. Together with Lo Marshall (2013) he is a contributor to [Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places and Stories](#)



Audiences turn a peace-building show into a ball in Abobo (Abidjan North). Image courtesy of Fabien Cante.

Fabien Cante (2011): Over the last two years I've been finalising an article on radio encounters in Abidjan. Drawn from my PhD fieldwork, this is probably the writing I'm most proud of to date. The [article](#) draws on an ethnography of a local radio listeners' club to document everyday, fugitive forms of peace-making, and to argue that these represent a viable alternative to interventionist, neocolonial approaches to peace. I've also got involved in some more experimental collaborative writing about 'urban re-arrangements', which is now out as a suite of 5 'movements'; I've specifically been involved in pieces on [formalising](#), [navigating](#), and [sensing](#) arrangements. This has been a bewildering but fun experience of trying to generate new

concepts across very different cities/disciplinary vantage points.

Michael Edwards has been helping edit Just Space's grassroots [Community-led recovery plan for London](#). His most [recent publication](#) is a [chapter](#) on David Harvey's 1985 text, *Urbanization of Capital*.

Matthew Gandy, now at the University of Cambridge, has been the Principal Investigator for the ERC Advanced Grant [Rethinking urban nature](#). His most recent book [Natura urbana: ecological constellations in urban space](#) (The MIT Press, 2022) explores urban nature in an international context, and recent articles [include this](#) one on the Berlin Wall.

Andrew Harris: beyond convening MSc Urban Studies and compiling other recent [UCL newsletters](#), he has been continuing to develop work on the sociologist [Ruth Glass](#) with excellent assistance from Alexander Salem (2020) and Thomas Tzortzi (2020). He contributed a chapter to this superb book, [Landscapes of Detectorists](#) on the BBC TV comedy, and is currently developing an ‘urban pamphleteer’ alongside Martine Drozd (LATTTS Paris) and Nathaniel Télémaque (2014) entitled ‘Multi-stories: Estate interventions’. This will document and explore a range of experimental interventions in the way the everyday life of multi-storey social housing in London and Paris has been represented and understood.

Regan Koch (2008) is a Senior Lecturer at Queen Mary University of London and Director of the City Centre. His latest paper is ‘[Letting the stranger in: intimacy, digital technology and new geographies of encounter](#)’. Current research is a monograph with Alan Latham (UCL) on *The Public Life of Cities* and a

collaborative project with physical and human geographers at QMUL called *BlueGreenE17: co-creating a vision for a wilder Walthamstow*. He’ll be a visiting professor at Taiwan National University this spring.

Clare Melhuish, as Director of Urban Lab since 2018, has curated a number of cross-disciplinary research activities, including [At the Frontiers of the Urban international](#) conference (2019), comprising 192 speakers from 27 countries; the Black Urbanisms podcast series (2021), launched as part of The Bartlett’s Race and Spatial Justice Initiative; a two-day online event Covid and the Urban (2021), as part of our Emergency annual theme; and most recently our ‘State of the Legacy’ conference and [report](#), interrogating a decade of Olympic ‘regeneration’, in collaboration with the Institute for Global Prosperity (with a contribution from Jason Katz (2021)). She is the co-editor of [Co-curating the city: universities and urban heritage](#), London: UCL Press ([download here](#)).

Alumni Picks

Shani Haberman suggests *A Billion Black Anthropocenes* by Kathryn Yussof, as well as *London-rose* by Fanny Howe.

Marilia Kastrouni thinks you should read *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* by Federici Silvia, and *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-Made World* by Leslie Kern.

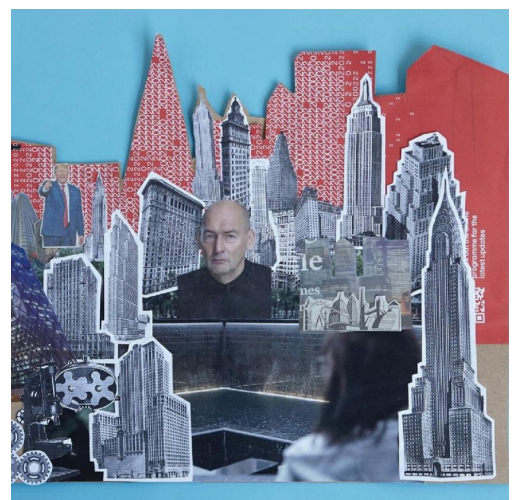
Josefina Mondion suggests *Acoustic Justice: Listening, Performativity, and the Work of Reorientation* by Brandon LaBelle. Laurie Anderson's [Norton Lectures](#) are also worth a listen.

If you are interested in American tribal perspectives about the management of natural resources, Audrey Robeson suggests reading *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Jim Hudson suggests not one but two titles from Owen Hatherley: *Red Metropolis* and *Artificial Islands*.

Movie night? David Roberts has just the thing for you: *Gagarine*, by Fanny Liard and Jérémy Trouilh (dir. 2020).

Jessica Cargill Thompson points to two podcasts you might like: [The Londown](#) by Open City and The Developer's [various shows](#).



A selection of collages about key thinkers on urbanity, produced by the class of 2022/23. Can you name them all? Head to [our new Instagram page](#) for more on these pieces.

Staff Picks



Michael Edwards suggests *The Dawn of Everything* by David Graeber and David Wengrow.

Pushpa Arabindoo is “really enjoying my architecture side of knowledge and always happy to check out the latest issue of *Architectural Design*.”

Matthew Gandy suggests *The Souvenir* (dir. Joanna Hogg, 2019).



Fabien Cante says Mercy Romero’s *Toward Camden* (Duke University Press 2021). Fabien says “it is a beautiful meditation on living through urban ‘decline’, weaving personal memoir and landscape writing.”

Regan Koch suggests *Guapa* by Saleem Haddad.

Clare Melhuish has very much enjoyed reading Stuart Hall’s memoir *Familiar Stranger: a life between two islands* (Duke University Press 2017). Do read alongside Urban Lab’s [Black Urbanisms](#) podcast!



Andrew Harris suggests *Pretend It's a City* on Netflix.

Jennifer Robinson suggests *Lagoon* by Nnedi Okorafor.

Alan Latham suggests *The Book of Form and Nothingness* by Ruth Ozeki, and *Mysteries and Conspiracies* by Luc Boltanski

A selection of staff picks. Images courtesy UCL Urban Lab, Penguin, and Hodder & Stoughton.

Text and Editing

Andrew Harris and Julian Ehsan

Design

Julian Ehsan

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Shuyun Cao

Back Image, “Teaching session, January 2023, in the new Urban Room at UCL East”

Andrew Harris

Contact

UCL Geography

26 Bedford Way

London WC1H 0AP

andrew.harris@ucl.ac.uk

urbanlaboratory@ucl.ac.uk



PHOTOGRAPH PROJECT
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