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. 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 adaptions were made to the circumstances we faced over the last few years—with the standard of student work remaining as high as ever.
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.
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!
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 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.

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.
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, to an MSc co-led the production of an institutional-level implementation plan 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.

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


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.
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'.

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.
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 Drozdz (LATTS 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 Liatard 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.

*Alumni Picks* is 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](https://www.instagram.com) 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.*”


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.

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