

URBN.

Edited by Sophie Blumenstein



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FROM THE DEPARTMENT

Letter from the Director

Hello URBN,

Happy Holidays! Hope everyone is bringing a productive semester to a close and looking forward to a restorative break.

This has been an eventful fall on the first floor of Maxcy Hall and in Urban Studies. We've kicked off our 50th anniversary this fall with two big series. First is the What is the Urban Now? conversations between prominent urbanists and Brown faculty, and the DUG has welcomed several Providence urbanists for informal lunch time talks about local urban issues. The whole university community enjoyed three conversations about the big conceptual issues facing cities today. Neil Brenner (University of Chicago) and I talked about climate change and planetary urbanism. Lauren Yapp and Aihwa Ong (UC Berkeley) discussed global citizenship and Asian global city forms, and Josh Pacewicz engaged Robert Sampson (Harvard) on the persistence of the neighborhood in urban life. If you missed these talks the video of each event is up on the

Media page of the Department website. Stay tuned for spring, when we'll be visited by Toni Griffin (Harvard-GSD), Ananya Roy (UCLA), and Tom Sugrue (NYU).

The DUG hosted Josh Saal (URBN '09), the Secretary of Housing in Rhode Island's Office of Housing and Community Development, as well as the "two Lizas": Liza Farr, the City of Providence's Curbside Administrator, and Liza Burkin, the lead organizer for the Providence Streets Coalition. Each of them shared invaluable perspectives on their educations, their careers, and their lives in urbanism here in Rhode Island with our students. Two more local urbanists –TBD, stay tuned!—will join the DUG in the spring semester.

We also hope to welcome any and all Urban Studies alumni back to campus on graduation weekend. Plans are still coalescing on that front, but we hope to host a public event and a reception to celebrate 50 Years of Urban Studies with all the people out in the world whose careers and urbanist lives have been shaped

by their time in our program. This event will be a great culmination of this year of celebration, and I hope all will be able to check it out.

I hope you are looking forward to a peaceful holiday season, and a Happy New Year. See you in January.

Thanks,
Sandy Zipp

Letter from the Editor

It's been an exciting semester in Urban Studies! The DUG is made up of six seniors—Sophie Blumenstein, Ava Schully, Nitzayah Schiller, Susan Tang, and Toby Arment. We found (or confirmed) a love for all things urban in Professor Carter's first-year seminar "Urban Life in Providence" and have been grateful ever since. Campus life is in full swing, and this semester it's been fun to reflect on the current state of Urban Studies as a discipline, as well as on the department itself, after 50 years at Brown. I'm honored to be your editor this semester—it's truly been a pleasure putting together your work, and I'm excited to share it with the Department!

All my best,
Sophie



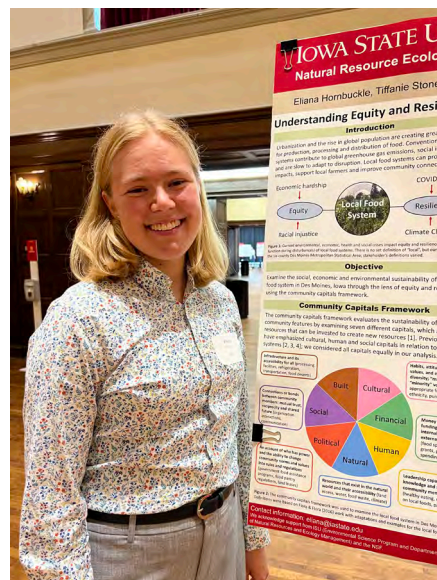
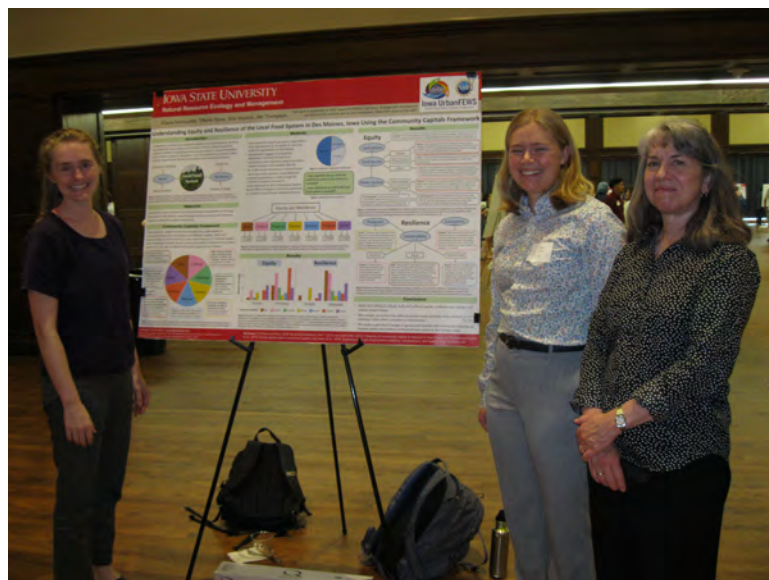
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INTERNSHIP HIGHLIGHT

Eliana Hornbuckle

Hello! My name is Eliana Hornbuckle and I am a fourth semester student from central Iowa concentrating in Urban Studies and Engineering. This past summer, I worked with the Urban Natural Resources, Ecosystems and Landscapes (UNREAL) Lab in the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Iowa State University (ISU). The lab group studies natural environments within urban areas, specifically through storm water management, food systems, and greenspaces in and around Des Moines, Iowa. I reached out to Dr. Jan Thompson, the lab's principal investigator, in January and expressed my interest in working with the lab during the summer. I was particularly interested in the research the lab was conducting on the environmental impacts of food systems.

Throughout the summer, I worked with two graduate students, Tiffanie Stone and Erin Huckins, to research the local food system in Des Moines. Tiffanie and Erin had previously conducted interviews with local food system stakeholders, so I assisted in analyzing the interviews to learn about the equity and resilience of the system. To do this, I first completed Institutional Review Board (IRB) training to learn how to ethically conduct human-centered research. Next, I conducted a literature review on equity and resilience of local food systems. We used NVivo, a qualitative





data software, to analyze the stakeholders' interviews. I spent time reading through interview transcripts, highlighting stakeholders' comments and classifying them within our framework. This process enabled us to identify common themes between stakeholders related to equity and resilience of the local food system. I used these findings to create a poster for ISU's Summer Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Working with the UNREAL lab was the first time I had been involved in research, and I learned a lot. First, I previously thought research was intimidating and required expert knowledge, but working in a lab group demystified research for me. While I spent a lot of time reading papers to understand the context, I was still able to meaningfully contribute to the research.

This experience was also my first time working with qualitative data, as our research centered around quotes from local food system stakeholders. I learned that while qualitative research can still include numerical interpretation, it mainly emphasizes ideas and concepts. Most of our analysis work involved identifying themes and key points in the stakeholders' thoughts. This was different from interpreting quantitative data, but I greatly enjoyed it.

Finally, I learned how to effectively communicate research findings to a general audience. I spent three weeks designing a poster to make our research visually intuitive and accessible to the public. It was exciting to share our research findings for the first time!

Partway through the summer, I talked with Professor Neumann about the Urban Studies concentration. I had previously been considering Environmental Engineering, but I found that I really enjoyed the human component of my research with the UNREAL lab. When Professor Neumann classified my summer work as Urban Studies, I knew immediately that it was an academic path that I wanted to keep pursuing. I have officially declared Urban Studies (along with AB Engineering) as my concentration. I've also continued to work with the UNREAL lab remotely this fall to write a paper focused on our research on the local food system in Des Moines. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work with the UNREAL lab and am excited to continue learning about types of research I want to pursue throughout the rest of my education.

URBAN ON CAMPUS

Lingering in the Subway *A Look at the New York City subway's tiling*

*Erik Guo, originally published in the Indy as part of the feature "Meditations on Infrastructure"
October 21, 2022*

I distinctly remember when I descended into Astor Place station. As the skyscrapers of Manhattan gave way to that musty, yellow glow of the subway, I began to see something new—a beaver plaque that adorned the walls of the platform. It was nothing impressive, but I could not help marveling at the way the beaver stood on its legs with its little claws wrapped around a tree branch, surrounded by a cornice with a decorative flower pattern, a style I had seen so often yet never had the words to describe. There was something touching about the ability of such architecture to submerge itself beneath the conscious gaze of the typical subway rider and reveal itself only when explicitly looked for.

Earlier that day, I had stumbled across a book at the Strand that described the work of Philip Ashforth Coppola, who made it his lifetime goal to draw the New York City Subway. What does it mean to draw the subway? To draw,

to record, and to immortalize the decorative tiles that filled the stations of the subway system. This deliberate choice to draw rather than photograph, to replicate by hand rather than by camera, forces the observer to see all the



details. But as the reader, I was struck not only by Coppola's drawings but also by the sheer amount of detail around me I had never thought to observe. Flipping through the book, I realized that a new world—one of history, ruins, design, and art—was revealing itself to me. When one actively looks for these subway tiles, they are everywhere, and yet they were never hidden from us in the first place. The hidden is revealed to us, and we begin to closely read and listen to the language of the underground.

The beginnings of the New York subway system in the late 1890s coincided with a larger philosophy in urban planning known as the City Beautiful movement, which held that

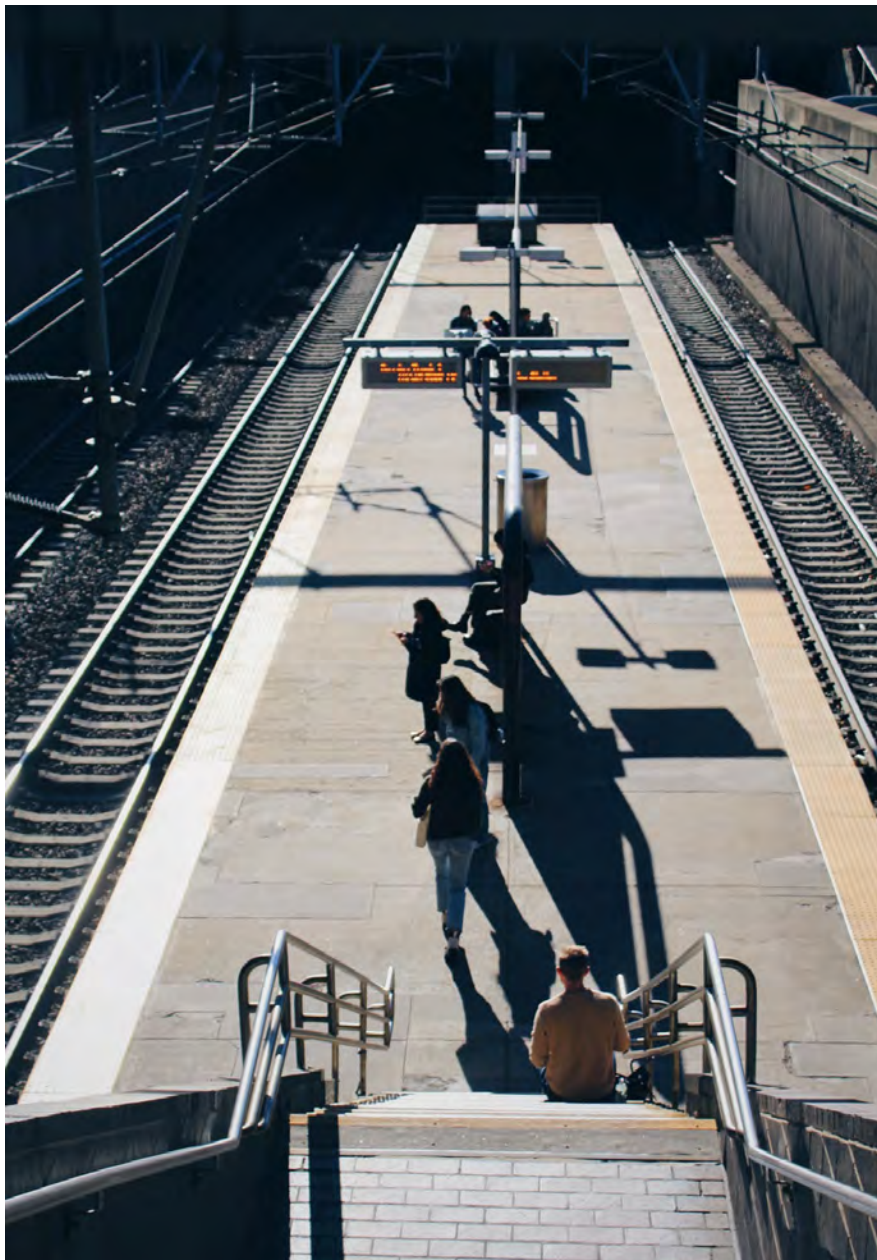
beautification of the city would inspire virtue in its inhabitants. As part of the city's infrastructure, the subway was intended to be not only a feat of public transportation but also an exhibit of the city's grandeur. Such grandeur was reflected in the decor of stations—most stations had a banal uniformity to them, but the various mosaic tiling and plaques gave each station its individual beauty.

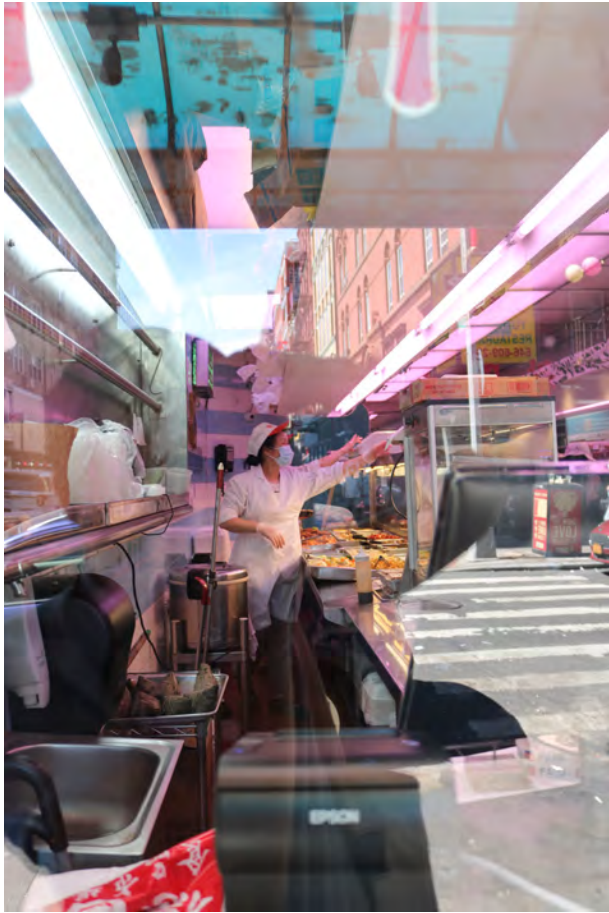
The city is full of signs and symbols for us to read. From the obvious and everyday Helvetica black and white signs that signal the stations and directions we wish to go (34 Street-Penn Station, Downtown & Brooklyn A/C) to the more concealed yet visible (the colorful tiling of Canal Street, the intricate ornamentation of Bleecker Street). We look toward the black and white signs to guide ourselves through the subway, and in our haste to find our way, we overlook the more detailed decoration of the stations: we do not observe the detailed ornamentation, we are not aware of the history that surrounds the tiling, and we do not fully appreciate the decorative individuality of each station.

What is revealed in such observations is not simply an aesthetic appreciation of the city, but an understanding and awareness of its various layers. The subway is like the city's respiratory system: people flutter in and out, dashing through turnstiles and rushing up and down stairs. As people move about the city, it changes. Layers are added, removed, filled in, erased as time passes, and the



subway system sheds and grows along with the rest of the city. The system of tiling, as a part of the city's infrastructure, extends beyond a visual representation of the city's material surface. Some tiles provide a direct indication of what lies above ground—the Alma Mater plaque at 116th Street–Columbia University station, the boat mosaics at the old South Ferry station—but the vast majority bear little resemblance to what exists above ground. And yet, could we not say that they serve as another form of infrastructure, a self-contained system that exists, guides, and signifies something separate from the larger system around it? They create a visual world underground, connected to, but not strictly reflective, of the world above. The tiles may provide some sort of aesthetic function in the subway system, but they contain so much more—a collection of images that speaks its own language.





A Woman Serves Lunch in New York City's Chinatown

*Leyton Ho, first place in Brown-
Providence Original Photography
(B-POP)'s 'Urban' category photo
competition*

Captured on June 5, 2022

DEPARTMENT EVENTS

DUG Series: Lunch with Providence Urbanists *Housing*

Susan Tang

The first event in the DUG's "Lunch with Providence Urbanists" series took place on October 18th and featured Josh Saal '09, the current Secretary of Housing for the State of Rhode Island. Over lunch, we were able to chat with Josh about his journey from finishing his undergraduate degree in Urban Studies at Brown to learning and gaining experience in New York before finally returning to Rhode Island and assuming his current position. We also had the opportunity to ask Josh about the ongoing housing crisis in the state and in Providence, and had a lengthy discussion about the provision of affordable housing in the city, state, and country.

DUG Series: Lunch with Providence Urbanists

Transportation

Sophie Blumenstein

On Tuesday, November 29th, the DUG welcomed Liza Farr, Curbside Administrator at the City of Providence's Department of Public Works, and Liza Burkin, lead organizer for the Providence Streets Coalition. Both Lizas are urban planners by training and work to support the goal of an equitable, sustainable transportation system with diverse mobility options. However, they have different roles and unique strengths, and approach shared goals from different perspectives. Liza B works with the public, pushing the conversation forward by organizing for better street design, while Liza F works from inside the municipal bureaucracy by targeting parking regulations and other often fine-grained city policies. Both emphasized how exciting it is to

work here in Providence where there is a (sadly) unique collaboration between advocates and the public sector. When asked about the efficacy of planning, Liza F noted that it's an interesting and dynamic time in the field as many planners are focused on achieving participatory processes in part as a reaction to the harmful, largely top-down missteps of the urban renewal era. Liza B agreed, framing this as a balance between process and outcome that's being discussed much more broadly, including by Ezra Klein, Jerusalem Demsas, and other urban journalists and thinkers. It was truly so fun to host Liza B and Liza F in conversation—we're grateful for their time and for so many students who showed up and asked questions!



What is the Urban Now?

Neil Brenner, University of Chicago

Sophie Blumenstein

On Tuesday, September 20th, the Department was thrilled to host Neil Brenner in conversation with Professor Sandy Zipp as part of the year-long series ‘What is the Urban Now?’ Brenner complicated our understanding of Urban Studies and urbanization itself—often defined as the growth of cities—through a radically relational look at the global web of transformations that enable the agglomeration processes that make up urban life. Brenner began with a video created in conjunction with his colleagues at UChicago’s Urban Theory Lab, entitled “Data-Spheres of Planetary Urbanization.” While urbanization is typically defined as the ‘pointillist’ growth of cities, the video provides a jumping off point for Brenner’s argument that the preconditions and consequences of city growth are in fact planetary (rather than geographically demarcated) networks of material and human resource extraction. This global production, circulation, and concentration is intrinsic to urbanization; in other words, we would likely not define a settlement as a city if it does not rely on resources from elsewhere.

When asked why we should think about this as urban rather than the study of globalization and late-stage capitalism, Brenner pointed out that the spatiality of this agglomeration should not be taken for granted. Space and the specific geographies of human settlement are dynamic, and a lot can be learned from the study of specifically urban settle-



ment patterns. Furthermore, understanding the global nature of cities and agglomeration does not preclude us from using a local lens—we can maintain the focused view of Urban Studies while understanding the relevant relational processes. Moreover, Brenner argues that we should always be looking for the relations between the local and the planetary—it’s in these connections that the urban is made. This, he says, is the city now—a space that is deeply dependent on broader relationships and geographies.

Some may have felt that the discussion was, as Zipp put it, “strangely anti-urban.” At one point, Brenner even claimed that an Urban Studies that fails to grapple with these global, metabolic supply chains is merely “spatial fetishism.” But Brenner was arguing for a more complicated urban rather than a shift away from Urban Studies as a whole.

Further, when thinking about how to address these issues, the city resurfaces in importance. We face troubling governance issues with respect to the climate crisis, and the city is a promising site of experimentation for both democratic governance and regenerative design. Furthermore, the lack of disciplinary bounds in Urban Studies proves helpful for understanding the global relational networks which Brenner argues are intrinsic to the city. It was a pleasure to have Neil Brenner, and if you didn't make it to the event, I highly recommend his video "Data-Spheres of Planetary Urbanization!"

Aihwa Ong, UC Berkeley

Professor Sandy Zipp



In conversation with Professor Lauren Yapp, Aihwa Ong of UC Berkeley joined us in October by Zoom to discuss her work on the industrialization of Asian cities. These forces, she has shown, are resulting in new kinds of urbanization and urbanism. She has particularly investigated the attempts by Asian nations like China, Malaysia, and Singapore to raise their global profile through city building. In trying to upstage the old metropolises of London and New York, these nations use cities as instruments for shaping and projecting their national identity. This kind of "hyper building" sets up complex dynamics between cities and their hinterlands, as well as dramatic "spectacles" of global capitalism.

At the same time, though, she sees cities as dynamic experiments, not just passive sites produced by elites. Diverse actors, not just governments and corporations, shape urbanization. Cities are in constant motion, she shows, made by conversation and conflict between elites and ordinary people. Governments and elites are forced to deal with "cities as living systems," and with managing what she calls "the governance of precarity," due to the growing inequality of these new capitalist cities. As a result, citizenship is in a constant state of play—Asian governments are constantly tweaking the nature of citizenship, deciding who is in and who is out of the polity, and groups of citizens are constantly working to improvise new forms of belonging. For Ong, "urbanism" is about understanding a flexible, moving, changing system: a sociopolitical and cultural environment produced by people everywhere.

Robert Sampson, Harvard University

As this issue went to print, we were also joined by Robert Sampson, Professor of Sociology at Harvard.

To watch the recording of his talk as well as that of Ong and Brenner, please see the "Events" > "Media" page on the Urban Studies website.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Professor Rebecca Louise Carter

Sophie Blumenstein

Professor Carter is jointly appointed in Anthropology and Urban Studies at Brown. Carter's most recent courses include "Urban Life in Providence" and "The Just City" series, and she has been at Brown since 2011. In a December 1st interview, Professor Carter discussed her 2021-2022 sabbatical, from which she returned this fall. In the fall of 2019, Carter published the book *Prayers for the People: Homicide and Humanity in the Crescent City*, and she received tenure shortly afterward. She used her subsequent sabbatical to take stock of the work she had done to date, where she was in her career, and what she's interested in. Carter moved in two different but related directions, with one shorter and one longer project. Significantly, Carter's sabbatical was during the middle of COVID; among many impacts, this led her methods to be multimodal, experimental, and creative.

Did you notice changes within the disciplines of Anthropology and Urban Studies in the context of the pandemic? And how did the overlap in timing between COVID and your sabbatical affect your work?

There was a lot of conversation about what this moment means for the project of studying humanity. That's a big inquiry, right? So, what do we do? Do we ask the same questions? Do we use the same methods? Do we go back to doing business as usual? Do we research the same things in the same ways? Or do we understand the pandemic as a moment and therefore also an opportunity to think about current needs, current circumstances, and current conditions?... As researchers, as thinkers, as community-based practitioners—what can we do to try to effect change?

...I found that I became more visually and aurally oriented... and one thing that became really important for me in all of this was creative and artistic practice as a way to test ideas and imagine the

possibilities. In many ways the moment brought me full circle as I was actually an art major in college.

Wow, so cool. Is your shift toward a more visual and aural approach related to the discourse you described about how to respond to the current moment?

Multimodal and experimental approaches to ethnography are very popular in anthropology right now, these are buzzwords, but I think it does open up the door for various forms of knowledge production in ways that I think are long overdue.

... [The approach can help us] ...really understand the complexity of the world. And it's so complex right now, even at the level of everyday experience. And I think that to understand that complexity, we need access to different registers and tools, which then enable us to conceptualize and craft alternative ways of being and doing.

That's really interesting! Using multimodal approaches to grasp the complex and often hard-to-pin-down challenges of our

time also makes me think about how Neil Brenner described a need within Urban Studies to expand our focus beyond the neat bounds that we sometimes define. So, where did you take your research within this context?

So basically, the first project that I came up with is a “remix” of my book. I’m taking interview data, imagery, archival images, all the pieces of my ethnographic research from the research I did in New Orleans. And I’m looking at it again, although this time with a slightly different lens. For context, my book was an ethnographic and ethnohistoric study of black social and physical death in New Orleans, set in the years just after Hurricane Katrina.

...But this new work explores a shift in orientation and method, to think about Black aliveness as a state of being but also a particular kind of an inquiry and practice. I am inspired here by the work of Kevin Quashie, a Brown professor in English who wrote a book titled *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being*. I read it at the beginning of my sabbatical and loved it. And so, I began to think about what it would look like to focus intentionally—as a point of orientation and return, a beginning and end—on black aliveness. So, I used all these products of my research to come up with some ways of exploring that shift as I both witnessed it in my research and as I am understanding it in the progression of my own work as a scholar. Creatively, this came together in the form of animation—stop motion animation based on drawing, painting, and collage, then putting together these short scenes that animate certain moments from my fieldwork.

And so far, I’ve created three or four of these scenes,

and I’ve also written some essays about the process of revisiting and remixing data in this way. I am hoping to turn this into a digital publication.

...Another project in development explores black aliveness in a more direct and autoethnographic way. In this research I’ve been traveling to my mother’s ancestral home, which is in the Piedmont region of South Carolina, and conducting some research on my great great grandmother who was born there in the mid 1800s (we’re not quite sure of the date). She was born into slavery, but then after emancipation, as a young married woman, she gave birth to and raised 15 or 16 children (there’s a discrepancy in the record about how many children she had). And this became my family. It’s remarkable to think about her life at that time period, a black woman who bore, kept, and raised all of her children... particularly in a period of extreme racial oppression and violence, including horrific living conditions and high rates of maternal and child death. So the project is a rather forthright consideration of black aliveness within the larger context (then and now) of forced migration and social, economic, and rural/urban upheaval. This is a very slowly developing project, but I am excited to explore a number of different methods including archival research, oral history, creative nonfiction writing, and portraiture involving some of my relatives. I’m also excited to bring some of these ideas into my teaching, for example my upcoming course on the Just City (installment III), a seminar that will explore animated and speculative urban futures (URBN 1936, Spring 2023)

This has been so interesting and helpful, thank you Professor Carter and we’ll look forward to following what you do next!

FROM THE DUG

Looking for something to tune into over break?

Reading

Gonzalez, Xochitl. “Why do Rich People Love Quiet?: The Sound of Gentrification is Silence.” *The Atlantic*, 1 Aug. 2022. *Sophie*

Martin, Michel. “Why a Writer Doesn’t Want a Quiet Brooklyn.” *NPR*, 14 Aug. 2022.

Kimble, Megan. “Can Anacostia Build a Bridge Without Displacing Its People?” *The New York Times*, 9 Aug. 2022. *Sophie*

Mask, Deirdre. *The Address Book: What Street Addresses Reveal about Identity, Race, Wealth, and Power*. St. Martin’s Press, 2020. *Toby*

Montgomery, Charles. *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012. *Nitzayah*

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright, 2017. *Ava*

Schmied, Andi. *Private Views: A High-Rise Panorama of Manhattan*. VI PER Gallery, 2021. *Nitzayah*

Watching

Atlanta. Created by Donald Glover, FX, 2016-2022. *Hulu*. *Ava*

Severance. Created by Dan Erickson, Red Hour Productions, 2022. *Apple TV*. *Nitzayah*

A League of Their Own. Co-created by Will Graham and Abbi Jacobson, Amazon Prime Video, 2022. *Susan*

Listening

Dubner, Stephen, host. “Should Public Transit Be Free?” *Freakonomics*, episode 513, Stitcher, 24 Aug. 2022. *Sophie*

Hall, Delaney, producer. “The Rights of Rice and Future of Nature” *99% Invisible*, episode 496, Stitcher, 21 July, 2022. *Sophie*

Valdivia, Pablo and Jasmine Garsd, hosts. *La última copa / The Last Cup*. NPR, 2022. *Susan*

Wilbur, Matika and Adrienne Keene, hosts. *All My Relations*. 2019-2022. *Ava*



*Pranav Gundrala, botanical illustration of
hamamelis virginiana*

*Specimen collected at Lime Rock Preserve
in Lincoln, RI on 10/07/2022*



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