

the

# Documentarian

Infra-structured

America in-progress



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# Letters from the editors

Disasters seem to stack upon each other like a deck of cards. Each week, as we work on this third issue, new events appear and add on to an accumulative list of disasters. I feel as though I am swimming amidst the clutter, and I am not sure when I will see clearly again. As I write today, almost 18 inches of snow accumulated in one night, on top of previous snow and ice, which caused our roof to cave in. They took apart our ceiling. Wood from the 1970’s is now exposed, and we wait for it to be fixed. The infrastructure of our apartment building reminds us that it will not last forever.

For this third issue, “Infra-structured: America in Progress,” we asked our contributors to think about this current time when everything feels “in progress.” We are still in the middle of a pandemic, climate-related disasters continue, and we face uncertainties. Those who wrote, illustrated, and photographed for this issue produced such incredible work which frames identity, cities, and infrastructures in progress. The myriad of complexities surrounding a city; the in-between, grey spaces, uncertain and shifting; thoughts on cities being built, or simply being, and their perpetual transitions caught in a glimpse of architectural possibilities.

My initial idea for *The Documentarian* was to publish text and artworks in progress, to bear witness to the world around us; taking notes, recordings, and photographs. We hope you will be inspired to do the same.

– Mána

2021 is a year I hoped we would get to. Back in November, I would stare at my calendar, at the date November 3rd. The warnings of election mishaps, coups, and electoral stealings kept me focused on that date. This particular calendar of the year 2020 in my kitchen, illustrated by artist Nikki McClure, was titled “Everything Depends on This Depends on Everything.” The month that shared the calendar’s title was November. Its illustration portrays the backs of a crowd, fists raised, with a backdrop of outer space, the Earth, moon, and stars. Walking into my kitchen in the mornings of November and seeing this image, would repeat the phrase in my head “Everything Depends on This Depends on Everything.” The phrase was striking enough with the backdrop of a near-failed US election, but adding in the pandemic, racial un-justice and a righteous uprising, massive wildfires, and countless other instances made it an even more fitting mantra. The words echoed in my head each morning. The cycle of this phrase can go on: Everything Depends on This Depends on Everything Depends on This Depends on Everything...

Before it was clear that we would be having a new president this year, us at *The Documentarian* were thinking about the idea of “America in progress.” The ways in which the last year has progressed us through time and new ways of living, both faster and slower than before. We knew that no matter what the results of the election would be, that 2021 would be a year of progressions and digressions, either leading us towards an unrecognizable society or towards a new stabilization. We also thought about how this last year had been for us personally; a patch-work of jobs, projects, missed opportunities, and days of quiet stress. We discussed with friends the challenges of creating work during this time, the difficulty of finishing ideas and the pressure for producing creativity. “America in progress” slowly evolved into an incredibly coherent flow of ideas, essays, photography, illustrations, and sound art. The name has changed course, becoming “Infra-structured: America in Progress” – as we found a particular common thread in the changes of urban landscapes, both physically and culturally, the present and past political challenges, and in the literal infrastructure of oil extraction in New Mexico.

We are thrilled with the outcome of this issue as we push on towards justice, hope, re-openings, and reuniting. As always, feel free to write us and submit your work. We are currently accepting submissions for the Spring/Summer 2021 issue. We are also selling print copies of our Fall 2020 Issue as well as this Winter 2021 issue. Please get in touch if you’d like a copy! They are each \$10. See you in the Summer.

– Telo

## Volume 2. No. 1 (Winter 2021)

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Poetry: Alex Zondervan

Photography: Isaac Sligh, Josh Zimmer, Alex Zondervan

Sound/Video: Friedrich Andreoni



## Collage

I cut up the White House today,  
pasting bits of the ceiling there  
besides the folds and other  
advertisements. And though  
I did not read the pamphlet  
yet, traveling across state lines,  
with a card in quadrants littered  
by vacancies and absence,  
this making of space bought  
back a tactile chance in joy now  
& again. When last in the house,  
below the corner opening, I  
would sign in creases sent  
into the air towards anyone—



## Correlations

The numbers of a body  
politic increase as  
non-language of any  
statistics speak any  
correlation between 5G &  
COVID or Cage films & sharks.  
I've read your constellation  
of major league base-bubbles  
& the affect in my power  
grid, I lost my words  
in a paper bag with one cat  
& nine-symmetrical lies  
at the top of the twisted stair  
case. Capital hill begins with S  
for surveyed land. That these  
complicate geographies enumerate  
government property  
floating through servers in  
Canada leaves a residue  
not unlike the taste of our own  
semi-baked conspiracy.





# Afterhours

The leaves already cast  
their outlines in arms above  
the house—bony bogus,  
you might say, these spooky  
figures vanished in the cul-de-sac  
when I rolled my stomach against  
itself, wondering how something  
intimate could become inanimate.  
Circling back, that old suit you called  
cats and often landed mistakenly  
named crept through the hallway,  
a stalking viewpoint from behind full  
circles. Skeletal impressions in blue  
and the scariest thing under the bed  
tucked in the underbelly of drawn maps  
and day jobs no less important than  
a map makers' strategy (hollow  
in the dark night, painted tigers  
beneath the mirrored trees.

Poems and photography by Alex Zondervan

*Alex Zondervan currently lives with his Riso in Connecticut where he writes poetry sometimes.*





# The Escalation of Policy and Tension Surrounding Roe v. Wade

By Nicole Mattea

N

New administration, new change. Maybe. The seemingly endless reign of Donald Trump has ceased. Many of us are looking to this new administration perhaps not with hope, but expectation. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris promised a lot of big change. One area to which much attention will be directed is how the Biden-Harris administration approaches abortion and pro-choice policies, as recent focus shifted to the Supreme Court following the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the national rise in anti-abortion sentiment.

*Roe v. Wade* has been a point of contention since its very inception. The struggle to maintain the right to a legal and protected abortion for those able to give birth is a fight we never seem to escape. The struggle has only escalated with the Trump administration — more forthcoming about their pro-life views and intentions than other administrations before them. Trump's campaign was partly built on these ideas, as he publicly stated his presidency would be focused on pro-life politics and laws, going as far as to create a 'Pro-Life Coalition.' Written in a letter to pro-life leaders, he committed to

Nominating pro-life justices to the U.S. Supreme Court, signing into law the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which would end painful late-term abortions nationwide, defunding Planned Parenthood as long as they continue to perform abortions [...] and making the Hyde Amendment

permanent law to protect taxpayers from having to pay for abortions [...]

Recent years have demonstrated just how pervasive pro-life politics have become, as more and more states have implemented heavily restrictive laws and pushed to implement state-wide bans, with the hope that any one of these laws will escalate to the Supreme Court and result in the overturn of *Roe*. Between 2011-2017 alone, 394 new restrictions were passed and implemented in 32 states. And with Trump's appointment of

*The struggle to maintain the right to a legal and protected abortion for those able to give birth is a fight we never seem to escape.*

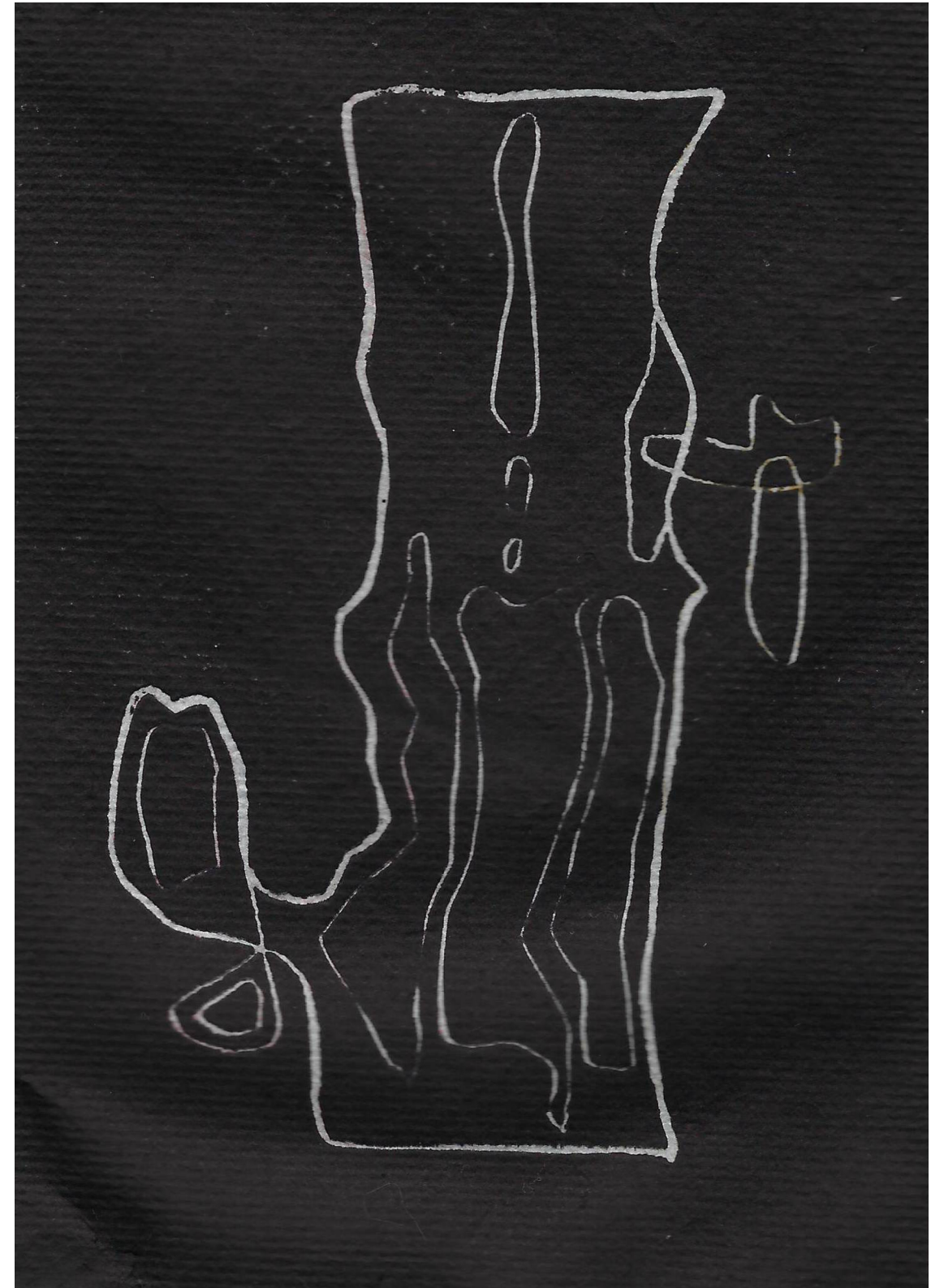
known pro-life advocate Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, such legal proceedings appear closer than ever.

While Trump did not succeed in overturning *Roe* during his time as president, he did oversee restrictions that limited an individual's ability to get an abortion. In 2017 he reinstated the Mexico City Policy or the "Global Gag Rule", which prohibits non-government organizations from receiving funding if they are in any way involved in the process of providing abortions, providing counseling regarding abortions, or advocating for the safety of abortions. He added even further restrictions in 2019. The majority of Trump's other actions as president were more discreet by comparison, as much of his explicit pro-life policies were blocked in court. He spent much of his presidency appointing

Supreme Court justices with known pro-life viewpoints, with the intention of having a pro-life and anti-abortion majority, should a court case come to fruition. Further, there is much to be said about Trump simply being open about his anti-abortion agenda. From his publicized words and actions — like speaking at the 2020 March for Life — he has opened and encouraged active pro-life discourse in a way that less forthcoming presidents did not, particularly on social media and other platforms. This discourse builds off of growing anti-abortion sentiment and policy, as demonstrated in the growth of abortion restrictions in the last decade, and will survive and flourish far past Trump's presidency.

Though Biden and Harris are open in their support of abortion and pro-life politics, we will have to see how much of their policy is aimed at making substantive change and how public they will make their viewpoints in the years to come. Already President Joe Biden has rescinded the global gag rule, which is as good of a start as any, and stated that he will be further nominating pro-choice federal judges to the Supreme Court. In a joint statement issued on January 22nd, President Biden and Vice President Harris declared that they would be working to codify *Roe v. Wade*, meaning that even if the Supreme court overturns the ruling, abortion protection will have been implemented into federal law. However, his presidency, potential future policies and actions, do not detract from the conservative federal judges already appointed in the Supreme Court as well as the growing anti-abortion sentiment nation-wide. It is difficult to predict if the Biden-Harris administration and their potential policies will be enough to diminish a decade's worth of building tension and upheaval, only exacerbated by the last four or so years of legislation and media attention. We, unfortunately, will just have to wait and see. ☯

Illustration by Malena Steelberg



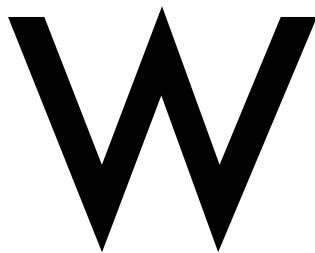
Nicole Mattea is a recent graduate of DePaul University where she studied Writing and Rhetoric, Political Science, and Women and Gender Studies. She is based in Chicago.



# GENTRIFICA-SIMS

## By Freddy Detchou

### Everything I Know About Gentrification, I Learned From *Urbz: Sims in the City* on Nintendo Game Boy Advance



When I moved to the city for university, I felt like I was out of my depth. I grew up out on the countryside with my uncle and had gotten used to living in a close-knit community with friendly neighbors, fresh air, and an easygoing lifestyle. In the city, however, my life became a rat race filled with odd jobs, running to classes, living in an unsafe apartment and working to save a struggling city facing entrenched classism and a real-estate magnate’s plans to accelerate gentrification to his benefit, regardless of the consequences.

As realistic as that (almost) sounded, I’ve actually just described the plot of the *Urbz: Sims in the City* video game (the Nintendo Game Boy Advance version), which was released in November 2004. Unlike most of The Sims games, where you simply create your character, build a house, get a job and let loose on the world; in *Urbz*, your created character follows a set story. As I recently discovered, this story may reflect realities and perceptions of gentrification, specifically in the North American context. Let me explain:

After moving to Miniopolis (the big city) your character works to stop Daddy Bigbucks, an archetypal immoral capitalist character who is planning to buy up all of the city’s buildings and tear them down in order to build the “most fabulous urban theme park the world has ever known”, displacing all of the city’s “undesirable” inhabitants in the process. The game’s solution is twofold. On one hand, your character needs to befriend the leaders of the game’s four social groups to unite the people, and on the other, they need to convince local entrepreneurs to invest in the community to build the city up equitably and affordably. Along the way, you organize protests, get arrested, take on a variety of jobs to pay for life expenses and university (and use your education to gain promotions) and impersonate dead sailors to convince their brothers not to sell their businesses (to be fair, this only happens once, but I thought that it was wild enough to warrant inclusion in this list).

When I first found the game in 2007, I was only 11, so I didn’t really think too much about it, but picking it up again in 2020, I couldn’t help but notice its themes and the blueprint that it lays out for real life. Gentrification is, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “a process in which a poor area experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses, often [resulting]

in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents.” It has its roots in the word “gentry”, which refers to people of a certain (read: higher) social standing. The term, as it is known today, was first used in British sociologist Ruth Glass’ 1964 book *London: Aspects of Change*:

One by one, many of the working-class neighborhoods of London have been invaded by the middle classes [...]. Shabby, modest mews and cottages [...] have been taken over [...] and have become elegant, expensive residences [...]. Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly, until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.

Over the past few years, this concept has been brought up all over the world – but few areas have experienced this phenomenon more acutely than Brooklyn, New York City. Once a mostly Black neighborhood known for its cultural renaissance in the 1980s, the borough is now seen as diverse, trendy, upscale and “cool.” Following a combination of disproportionate drug-related incarcerations within the borough’s predominately Black neighborhoods in the 1990s and the closing of businesses, among other things, new investors bought and engaged in developments around the area, leading to a rise in property values and quality of goods in lower-income areas, attracting investors and dynamic, creative (and mostly white) young professionals and contributing to the departure of established landlords, business owners and inhabitants.

Many have lauded the effects of gentrification, citing reduced crime rates, increased property values, regeneration of community and cultural spaces, and improving the overall quality of life of affected neighborhoods (including for low-income residents). Brooklyn’s Fort Greene neighborhood is often put forward as an example of gentrification’s positive effects – the area has seen an increase in new high-rise (and high rent) apartment buildings, cultural institutions and attractions, Starbucks cafés trendy businesses and dynamic young people. The demographic shift is worth noting as well – between 2000 and 2010, Fort Greene’s White population increased by 120%, and its Black population decreased by 30%.

Herein lies the problem for many. Legendary filmmaker Spike Lee, a Fort Greene native, summarized some of the prominent arguments against gentrification during a 2014 Black History Month speech at Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute:

I don’t believe that [gentrification has its good sides]. I grew up in Fort Greene. [...] Why does it take an influx of white New Yorkers in [inner cities] for the facilities to get better? The garbage wasn’t picked up every day when I was living [in Fort Greene] [...]. The police

weren’t around. [...] Then comes the Christopher Columbus Syndrome. You can’t discover this! We been here. There were brothers playing African drums in Mount Morris Park for 40 years and now they can’t do it anymore because the new inhabitants said the drums are loud. My father [...] bought a house in 1968, and people moved in last year and called the cops on my father [for playing acoustic bass]! [...] I’m for democracy and letting everybody live but you gotta have some respect. You can’t just come in when people have a culture that’s been laid down for generations and you come in and now [things] gotta change because you’re here? Can’t do that! [...] And what about the people who are renting? They can’t afford it anymore! People can’t afford to live here anymore. [...] It’s a scam!

Mr. Lee’s impassioned plea reflects a frustration and fear that is not uncommon in communities facing this kind of change: and with his reference to Christopher Columbus, he evokes the image of strangers coming to stake their claim on existing land and cultures with no regard for the people indigenous to the area. Sure – increased property values, more cultural institutions, increased outside investment and recognition sound good, but, especially in this context, who are they benefitting, and at what cost?

At the beginning of *Urbz*, Kris Thistle, your work supervisor, informs you that your boss, Mr. King, has sold his King Tower apartment building (where you live and work) to Daddy Bigbucks, who has promptly fired and evicted everyone in the building in order to get his big plan going. To avoid having to choose between homelessness and returning to your uncle’s farm, you convince Kris to let you keep your job and live in the building, as long as you stay hidden in the unfinished penthouse. A few days later, you stumble upon a holographic message from Mr. King, who explains that, although he let himself be seduced by Daddy Bigbucks’ big bucks (hehe) he regrets his decision and needs your help to make things right. When you get caught snooping around Bigbucks’ lawyer’s office, you get arrested by the town’s detective and thrown into jail.

Luckily, after some smooth talking, you convince the detective to let out on parole, on condition that you work to get back on your feet by getting a job and a house, and the game is truly underway. You start the game in Urbania, a sort of

stereotypical inner-city, “urban” neighborhood (and you can’t leave this area until your probation is over), and after every few missions, you gain access to the two, progressively more upscale areas, SimQuarter and Glasstown. Early on, your character is introduced to the city’s four main social groups (or “Rep Groups”, as they’re called in game):

The Streeties (Down-to-earth, stylish, and cool, the Streeties look like a combination of all of the pop and hip-hop styles of the 2000s and pride themselves on being plugged into the “real”, underground culture – they’re the “original” inhabitants of the inner-city area);

The Nerdies (As their names suggest, these are the brains of the city, operating at the top of Miniopolis’ scientific, tech and educational fields);

The Richies (These are the rich socialites and yuppies, always looking for the freshest new trends, biggest names and hottest venues);

The Artsies (Artists, creative professionals, eccentrics, hipsters: the free-spirited art makers).

Throughout the game, the challenges that you complete help you gain notoriety within these groups, and you befriend a whole cast of characters who help to advance the plot along the way (special shout out to Grandma Hattie, a

sweet, elderly revolutionary who gets thrown into jail for leading the movement against Daddy Bigbucks). Using your connections, you convince the four Rep Group leaders to use their status and particular sets of skills to mobilize people and save the city: the Streeties help you to move through the different neighborhoods and make connections, the Nerdies give you tips on how to increase your skills and outsmart Daddy Bigbucks, the Richies buy and help reopen key attractions like the museum, and the Artsies work to start a carnival on a vacant lot and organize theatre premieres to criticize Bigbucks, create jobs and increase outside interest in the city.

Despite their differences, the groups rally around you to save their beloved Miniopolis, and all ends well enough - well, after seeing his legal routes blocked, Daddy Bigbucks tries to go back in time to build Miniopolis in his image, but you manage to stop him from doing that, too (is this a comment on revisionist history, or people stripping things of their historical context? Maybe, but that’s a theory for another day).

Gentrification is defeated by the creation of a rainbow coalition of different social groups, who come together to save the area that they call home.

In *Urbz*, the specter of gentrification is defeated by the creation of a rainbow coalition of different social groups, both established and new, who come together to save the area that they call home. In real life, however, things aren't as straightforward. In contrast with the wonderful image that *Urbz* paints, where all elements of a community come together to understand and respect their common and heterogeneous cultures, the reality can be grimmer.

In many communities, the process of rapid urban development known as gentrification often leaves a bittersweet end result, with the “upgrading in the social character of the neighborhood” often being linked to the erasure of culture and traditions and the stripping of the “soul” of a city, often leading to clashes on issues such as loud music, art, and more, in both peaceful and violent ways. In these cases, different groups can’t seem to find a common understanding, or their quest for understanding is bulldozed by government or investor efforts.

This is not to say that gentrification is a wholly evil process – nothing is black and white. For example, while it has been found that this rapid development did not significantly affect displacement in New York City between 1989 and 2011, the opposite was true for San Francisco and the Bay area. Also, while it is believed that gentrification benefits White people at the expense of Black people, college-educated Blacks often benefit from the changes as well, albeit not to the same extent. The issue here is the sense that there is not enough progress and positive change to go around, as the needs and wants of these more privileged groups often supersede those of previous inhabitants, who are often lower income Black families.

This is where *Urbz* comes in. The game exists as a direct challenge to this image of gentrification as a purveyor of inequalities and eraser of culture, people and places, and pushes for an ideal community where we all find ways to include and benefit everyone.

But in today’s day and age, how can we build on existing communities instead of building over them? How can we ensure that there is space for everyone? And can we truly build communities in an equitable way? Is it too good to be true?

As explained by Roderick Hall, the Director of Organizing at Abundant Housing LA, a social welfare organization that advocates for more, more affordable and more diverse housing in Los Angeles, context is important. This game, as many writers have done before and after it, presents a solution that does not “take into the totality of thought and lived experience within a community, how they arrived at that thought, and what their concerns are to move them towards the ‘right’.” Thus, when we consider the history of segregation, exclusionary and divisive housing policies such as redlining, the social divisions that they helped to propagate and the insular nature of many social groups, it does not seem like this *Urbz* model is scalable – especially in a day and age during which we have retreated further into our bubbles and often only exit them for “a cultural experience.”

Although *Urbz* is a game that features a fiddle-playing elf/demon, a teen-aged humanoid albino crocodile, a vampire and

the ghost of a civil war soldier in its cast of characters, its most glaring fault as a representation of gentrification is the lack of the historical and present-day contexts that directly impact the way that gentrification is presented and experienced in our societies.

For all of these limitations, however, I do believe that the ideal world that *Urbz* gives us holds some important ideas and may give us loose tactics that can be translated to real life. Of course, achieving an inclusive gentrification process that rivals the one found in *Urbz* would require concerted efforts, collaboration and significant research and understanding, but the idea of a more inclusive renewal is not an impossibility – and it has even been attempted. We’ve seen the creation of the City of London’s Creative Enterprise Zones, which aim to simultaneously support local artists and amplify the city’s creative spirit and attractiveness, for example, in collaboration with local businesses, academic institutions, and land developers. The zones are expected to leverage more than 30 million pounds of investment and create over 3,500 new jobs. And, in addition to the efforts of organizations like Abundant Housing LA, groups at various levels of government, and companies trying to take responsibility, there has been an increase in making sure that societal change does not happen at the expense of those who are most in need. These kinds of development initiatives help to set precedents for strategies that distribute benefits more evenly.

At the end of the game, you walk through a parade thrown in your character’s honor, as a thank you for saving the city. While the citizens of Miniopolis unveil your statue, Daddy Bigbucks languishes in exile on an island inhabited by gophers. After facing eviction, termination, imprisonment, and an attempted mass displacement, you mobilize the people to take back their city, and everything falls into place. In our world, however, nothing is that simple – the idealized vision of inclusive gentrification is not a realistic solution (and even if it was, every context is too different for it to be universally applicable), but, maybe, especially with the growing number of applicable precedents, this kind of fantasy can help us imagine and create societies that take care of everyone, especially those in need, and will motivate us to keep moving in that direction. *🌀*

*Freddy Detchou, also known as SUPER FREDDY, is a Canadian artist of Cameroonian origin who is currently based in Montreal.*

# Photography by Josh Zimmer

New Mexico has a long and storied history with the extraction of natural resources. Native Americans mined turquoise and other minerals long before European prospectors and settlers even set foot in North America. Ever since hydrocarbons were first discovered in the state in the early 1920’s, the land became a new frontier for oil, coal and gas extraction. As the bloody conquest of the American West played out, the appetite for natural resources only grew. Mining towns dotted the freshly drawn territories that had been forcibly taken from their original inhabitants. Oil wells were discovered sometimes quite by accident, such as when settlers dug in search of water in the dry landscape and found oil instead. These discoveries changed the history of the state, as well as the very delicate balance that exists in true wilderness areas, especially the desert.

Growing up in New Mexico, I had little to no idea of the importance of the history that was playing out all around me. I had no idea that part of our state lies within the Permian Basin, one of the most productive oil producing regions in the whole world. As climate change shifted from a fringe political call to the most important issue of our time, I became fascinated with my own state’s role in pulling oil out of the ground. The extraction and burning of coal, so long a major industry in New Mexico, has also played a part in creating a planet that will soon be uninhabitable. This ongoing project is an attempt to get a closer look at how my hometown and its surrounding areas have contributed to the existential threat of climate change. I have been photographing both historical sites, (such as the now closed anthracite coal mines located near Madrid, New Mexico) as well as the construction of a new gas pipeline that runs from Bernalillo to Santa Fe. The new gas pipeline cost the state \$60 million to build, and is being quietly completed, even as the rest of New Mexico is on lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid 19.

Photo 1. Pipeline waiting to be assembled, near Santa Fe, NM.

Photo 2. Pipeline being laid out before final trench is dug. Waldo Canyon road, near the town of Cerrillos, NM.

Photo 3. Pipeline near freshly dug trench. Waldo Canyon road, near the town of Cerrillos, NM.

Photo 4. Deep trenches cut into the side of a hill, with pipeline waiting to be assembled. La Cienega, NM.

Photo 5. Pipeline near La Cienega, NM.

Photo 6. Equipment assembly yard, near Santa Fe, NM.

Photo 7. Oil storage tanks. Espanola, NM.

Photo 8. Mining equipment. Espanola, NM.

Photo 11 & 12. Tailings from a closed anthracite coal mine. Madrid, NM.

Photo 13 & 14. Large chunk of anthracite coal. Madrid, NM.

*Josh Zimmer (b. 1994) is a New Mexico based documentary photographer. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from The New School in 2017, where he majored in journalism and minored in global studies. His work focuses on issues of conflict, political upheaval and climate related stories. He has documented the conflict in Palestine/Israel and is currently working on a series focusing on climate change and the repercussions of extraction in New Mexico.*

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# Georgia / Sakartvelo: The Strength of Wood

Text by Vika Malik, photography by Isaac Sligh

O

One day, a relative wanted to send me a parcel from the United States to Georgia and spent fifteen minutes trying to convince a post office worker that there was indeed a country called “Georgia” in the world — not just a US state. The postal worker had a reason to argue — she actually couldn’t find any such country in her database. Yet, the country of Georgia does exist. Georgia, or Sakartvelo (საქართველო) — let’s rather use its original name to avoid any recurring associations with southern accents or peaches — has existed perhaps since the 12th century BC. It was known as Colchis to the Ancient Greeks, who ventured to its shores in search of the Golden Fleece in the legend of Jason and the Argonauts. A few centuries later, Sakartvelo was one of the very first countries to convert to Christianity.

Yet most of the world does not know what Sakartvelo or even the Republic of Georgia is. Perhaps this can be explained somewhat by its unfortunate history. Surrounded by states with expansionist ambitions since the Middle Ages, it has barely had a break from hardship. Ravaged by the Mongols, then by the Ottomans, and subsequently by the Persians, Sakartvelo



school in September 2001. Neither did it guarantee any job that would require me to stay in one place. My partner and I resolved to travel casually while working online on various projects. As a Russian, I’ve always had a vague image of Sakartvelo — Грузия or Gruzija, we call it—as a welcoming and exotic resort destination, formerly for the whole Soviet Union and today for the inhabitants of its former republics. The lack of a usual and comforting framework organizing my life felt disturbing, so the prospect of going to the land of semi-sweet wine and Caucasus mountains was somewhat soothing for both of us.

## Wood can’t hide the signs of its earlier uses as easily as stone or concrete.

nevertheless developed a habit of rising from its ruins to somehow move on. Then, when things finally began to look up in the early 20th century, it was invaded and forcefully annexed by the Soviets, thanks to its most famous compatriot, Ioseb Jugashvili, whom we now know as Joseph Stalin.

Among the recent highlights that have affected the country after the fall of the USSR are a civil war; a decade with barely any electricity; the election of the first pro-western anti-corruption president Mikheil Saakashvili (who eventually pulled Georgia into a war with Russia in 2008); and most recently, the exile of Saakashvili and rise to power of a semi-pro-Russian party, funded by a billionaire whose name can’t help sounding to me like the word for “oil” in Russian.

Back in December 2019, the upcoming year held no promise of school for the first time since I began primary

We came to Tbilisi, the capital of Sakartvelo, in February 2020, planning to Airbnb there for a month before heading to other cities and then to Russia. That winter, in one of its rare gray and drowsy months, Tbilisi welcomed us more warmly than we could have ever imagined. All our anxieties about the future, the pandemic, or money resolved on their own, smoothly and casually. We ended up living in Tbilisi for seven months, wishing we could prolong our stay for much more — or at least to return as soon as possible.

Now, as I’m far away from Sakartvelo, my memories of it gradually grow vaguer and more romantic. Perhaps even overly romantic and childlike in some parts, though I think childlike and romantic are good words for describing time spent in this country. Tbilisi is so abundant and lively that you lose all the words with which you try to capture it. Some kind of preverbal

condition engulfs you, and you just go with the flow, passively and silently, similar to everything else in this city.

I still can’t fully think of Tbilisi as a city. In some parts, it feels more like a relative’s house or perhaps one huge, connected communal apartment with wide stretching yards and overgrown gardens, regardless of the city’s signs of modernity, its grand scale, and its surprisingly well-kept infrastructure. Some inexplicable family-like trust and warmth towards any guest strikes you from your first encounter with it. Doors and windows stay wide open or at least unlocked, allowing anyone inside to pop out and see the newcomers every time they pass by. Thanks to the Soviet background or perhaps the climate, most of the physical and social divisions merge together, stretching living spaces to the size of whole neighborhoods. The indoors of people’s apartments and houses naturally transitions into the outdoors where all neighbors and friends eat and drink together, or perhaps gather to shoot a game of dice.

Since barriers are a rather relative concept in Tbilisi, you have a good chance of accidentally stumbling into someone’s apartment when, say, you’re looking for a small photo store or a cafe. Once, we popped into a 19th century tenement building, marveling at the still-visible doorbell signs, etched in Russian Cyrillic, of distinguished early 20th century residents, including doctors and professors who would accept visitors right in their homes. After we took a chance and rang one of these interesting

doorbells, we ended up having coffee by an old tiled fireplace with the apartment owners and the descendants of one of these names in Cyrillic. No questions asked — just sheer hospitality, trust, and kindness towards all people.

All over Tbilisi’s central old town, graceful, hand carved wooden lattices, pillars, and window frames hold up heavy balconies and the ceilings of buildings above. Wood can’t hide the signs of its earlier uses as easily as stone or concrete. That’s why, lavishly covered with thick layers of bygone cultures, tastes, and ideologies, the city’s architecture passively gives in to time and decay, inviting new witnesses to this everlasting natural struggle.

Animals are another side of life that added to my romantic and antiquated image of Tbilisi. Stray dogs and cats, wandering through the cobblestone streets lined with old mansions and stone chapels, are an irreplaceable part of the city. They are almost all exceedingly well behaved. The presence of these animals, which one can’t help taking care of, completes my impression of the city as one big home. Once, exploring a ziggurat-like Soviet museum of archeology on a hill above the city, we met a frightened mother dog who brought us to her puppies. After that, we made weekly pilgrimages to this monumental temple of Soviet science, bearing alms of food and medicine to these dogs. We also scooped up a homeless street kitten, whom my partner eventually brought back with him to the States.





I think this submission to nature and, at the same time active coexistence with it, has preserved and formed Sakartvelo’s identity throughout the centuries. You come face to face with echoes of local history in every part of the city — a list of long-dead residents and their apartments on the first floor of a tenement building, a polyphonic choir’s singing drifting from the windows of a church, a medieval fortress perched along a cliff by a country highway, or a ruined monastery with trees growing on the roof. Probably, the ability to leave things alone and to let life and nature decide what shape a city should take, differentiates Sakartvelo from many other countries and civilizations whose citizens, with good but ignorant intentions, destroy their own history for the sake of gentrification and profit.

Yet some radical changes in the city’s outlook have still occurred in Tbilisi. During its time as the capital of one of the most prosperous Soviet republics, Tbilisi witnessed numerous daring and fascinating architectural experiments. Today, ironically, the most impressive Soviet monuments have turned into hubs of capitalist activity: a glorious horizontal skyscraper, built for the ministry of highways, is now the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia, and my personal favorite, the provocatively shaped Wedding Palace, which quotes both French modernist and Georgian medieval architecture, became the residence of a local oligarch. These have also submitted to time and nature, accumulating several layers of conflicting histories on their surfaces.

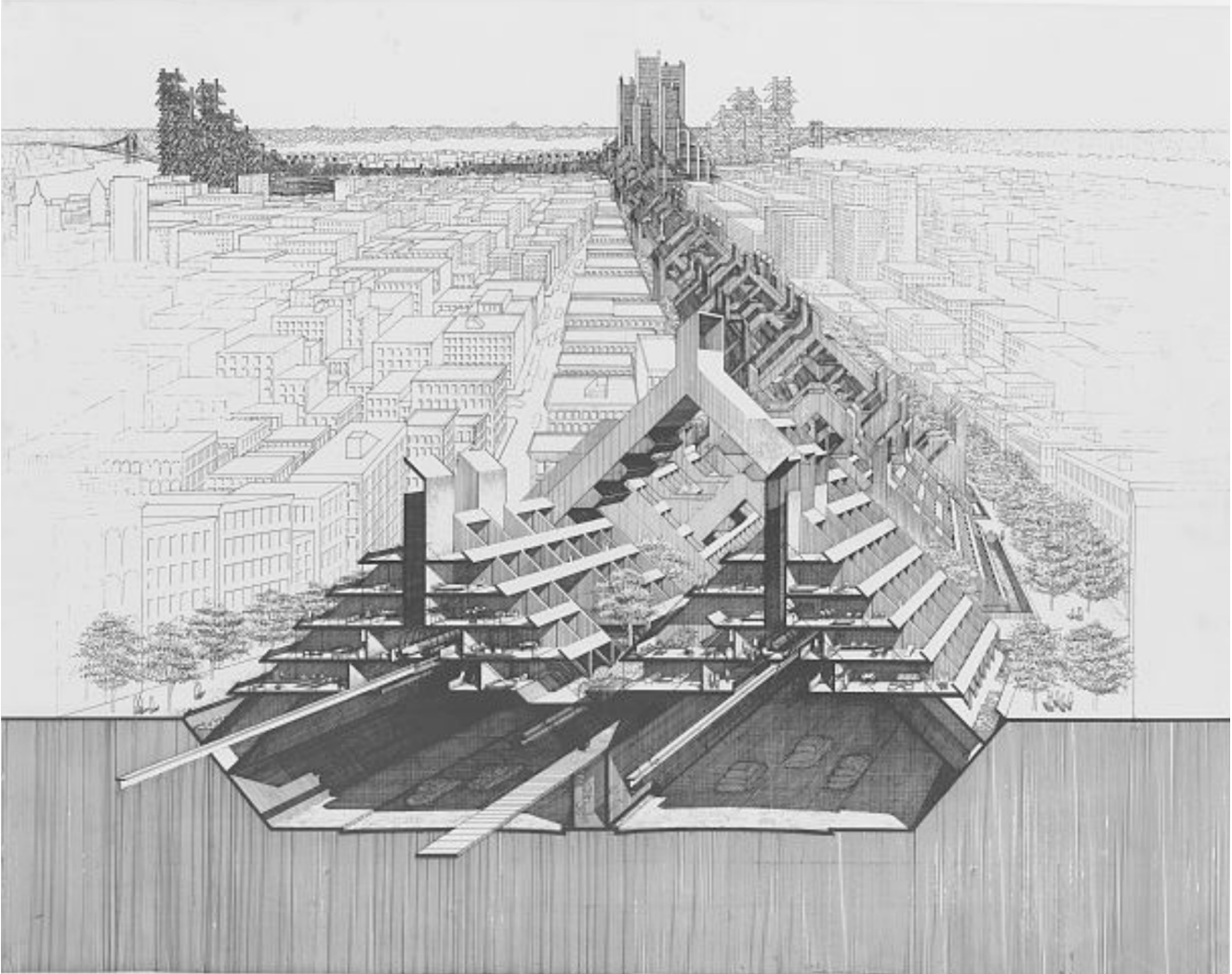
To not misguide anyone, I should stress that Tbilisi is still an up-to-date and vibrant capital. With its all-permeating hospitality, Sakartvelo now allows Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Iranian businessmen to force their glass skyscrapers wherever they want. These hallmarks of the new era have yet to become multi-faceted and mature with the context and passing of time.

Still, Tbilisi feels so old that you can imagine it falling apart at any moment. The fact that it has lasted so long for so many centuries leads me to think that this won’t happen. The city’s internal strength lies in its external fragility, that same passivity which allows all the disturbances of history to take place until they inevitably disappear over time. Indeed, this has been a quality of Sakartvelo’s for the last thousand years: the ability to endure through tragedy, to be conquered, but still find a way through this to win. Perhaps this will allow Sakartvelo, like the bent but unbroken woodwork of its dilapidated beautiful houses, to endure for many more to come. *∅*

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# Robert Moses, Jane Jacobs, and the Ever-Changing Role of the Planner

By Christopher Moon-Miklaucic



Concept renderings of Robert Moses’ proposed LOMEX (Lower Manhattan Expressway), drawing by Paul Rudolph. Courtesy of Library of Congress



*Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs are two of the most prominent figures of 20th century urban planning. To this day, their half-century old debate about New York City's urban development continues to evoke a multitude of controversies in planning.*

The Moses and Jacobs debate begins as a disagreement over the future of New York City but ends up becoming a much larger representation of two divergent views of the fate of cities. If Jacobs saw in cities, life, diversity, and complexity, Moses saw infrastructure, efficiency, and the act of building. Robert Caro famously dubbed him the “Power Broker”, symbolizing a top-down, large-scale approach to planning, while Jacobs was seen as the “eye on the street”, in many ways epitomizing a much smaller-scale reading of the city as viewed from the handlebars of her bicycle. Despite looking at the city from different angles, and offering wildly different solutions to improving city life, both Jacobs and Moses were ultimately critics of utopian planners such as Ebenezer Howard, Daniel Burnham, Le Corbusier and other “order obsessed” types. Unsurprisingly, planners have long been fascinated by these two characters, who have been simultaneously celebrated and polarizing. Their disagreements have often served as a proxy of both the power and importance of citizen participation, but also its striking limitations. Today, the debate is being reassessed because despite the romantic allure of Jacobs, the efficiency of the planning process and its ability to strive for change while taking into account a wide variety of needs is still in question, and a longing for Moses’ adept ability to navigate bureaucracies seems to be resurfacing.

A DEBATE ROOTED IN FUNDAMENTAL PLANNING QUESTIONS

**Up until World War II**, Robert Moses was seen as a great reformer who was bringing a wide array of new projects to New York City. He was known for getting things done and was lauded for the number of infrastructure projects he was able to implement, particularly during the Great Depression. However, the Robert Moses tale takes a dark turn after World War II, when he starts to amass more power and becomes known more for what he destroys and displaces than what he builds. On the other hand, Jane Jacobs emerges as an advocate against the exact type of planning Moses was promoting. She observed that the very neighborhoods that embodied the true life of a city were the ones being targeted by planners for renewal. Indeed, planners often look to this debate because it evokes many different controversies in planning theory and epitomizes some of the professions’ polarizing views. As a result, it would seem rational for planners to root for Jacobs because she critiqued what is perhaps seen as the original sin of planning: urban renewal and technocratic modernism.

The Moses and Jacobs debate brings forth a wide range of different and important questions. One of the sticking points on which they disagreed was the scale at which the city should

be planned. Moses, on the one hand, worked at the regional scale. He viewed New York City as bottlenecked and isolated, and proposed to overcome this through new roads, bridges, and tunnels, which would in turn make the city appealing to the middle class who otherwise would flee to the suburbs. Moses’ planning leadership in the city catered to the modern middle class who wished to drive to parks and cultural centers. In contrast, Jacobs was much more interested in fine-grained neighborhoods, and experienced the city by sitting on stoops and riding her bicycle to truly have a small-scale read of the city. Furthermore, the role of the automobile was central to their disagreements. If planning came of age alongside the car, its role in the growth and development of cities would be hotly contested. At a basic level, planners understand that cities pose a great locational disadvantage as it relates to the car due to spatial limitations. One approach, and the one mostly posited by Jacobs and her view of planning for “city diversity, vitality and concentration of use”, is that the city must compete with the suburbs through other means, such as walkability and public transit. Moses argued that too many people would be left out if cars weren’t included in city planning and instead promoted the construction of massive infrastructure specifically tailored to automobility.

Despite their differences of opinion, both Jacobs and Moses were more profound than many of the largely performative planners that preceded them as they truly did advocate for better cities according to their ideologies. Perhaps the greatest difference between them lay in their view of the fundamental role of planning and its relationship with the communities within which they served.

DIFFERING VIEWS OF THE PLANNER’S ROLE

**Indeed**, planners are fascinated with this debate because it unearths many of the core issues at the heart of the profession. A key tension of the debate, and perhaps one of the reasons it is being reassessed today, is the question of who is in charge of planning or designing the city. The tension emerges from the inherently different philosophies both of them held about what it meant to plan a city. Jacobs saw the city as “an immense laboratory of trial and error, failure and success.” She argued that planners should observe the real workings of cities and not act mechanistically in the pursuit of efficiency gains. In fact, the inefficiency of cities is what made them appealing and informed the way Jacobs looked at planning. According to Jacobs, planners should let cities have a life of their own, and much of her advocacy was rooted in protesting the very top-down, institutional planning that Moses has grown to symbolize. In contrast, Moses had very little patience for citizen

neighborhood organizations. He believed in messy public works and felt that he was carrying the tradition of serving the public interest and advancing human progress in the great American city. The problem was his tendency to “glory in the devastation”, and his belief that destruction and displacement were prerequisites for development and growth.

This leads to perhaps a more complex issue than it may seem for today’s planners. If Jacobs calls for planning that allows for diversity and provides cities the space to change on their own, what is the role for planners? Furthermore, is it possible to plan for diversity, or do we expect the market to do it on its own? These weaknesses within Jacobs’ argument are some of the reasons why Moses seems to remain an important figure in discussions of the role of the planning practice. He represents the antithesis of Jacobs’ style of thinking when it comes to the societal role of planning and its relationship with citizens. Moses was productive in New York City specifically because he wielded much of the power to make decisions. In addition, his lack of interest in both aesthetics and citizen participation meant that he could shape the city however he wanted, perhaps leading some to think his leadership translated to municipal efficiency, despite long-lasting negative societal impacts especially on low-income communities.

If planning came of age alongside the car, its role in the growth and development of cities would be hotly contested.

ENGAGING THE DEBATE TODAY

It might be too simple to say that Jacobs’ view was ethically and morally correct. Clearly, planners should strive to ensure that the will of the people is represented adequately and equally in the plans put forth by developers and local governments. The issue, though, is that Jacobs criticized city planning, but not the “big economic and social forces” that originated many of the

projects she opposed. In other words, Moses wasn’t completely alone in his undertaking to shape New York City. There were powerful vested interests behind his actions as well, and his accomplishment was the ability to “get things done” in a manner that most wouldn’t expect of municipal government. If planning is often criticized for being too slow, and even when communities are involved the equity results remain suboptimal, Moses seems to represent an alternative, more efficient approach.

Skepticism of a perfunctory model of citizen participation, which still often rests in procedural and consultative arrangements, may be the reason behind the rehabilitation of Moses and the shifting of the narrative underlying the debate. Perhaps within a context of an ever-changing world that is obsessed with instant gratification, Moses as “America’s greatest builder” is seen as the type of planner needed in order to quickly and efficiently improve current conditions, whereas Jacobs is seen as the “champion of stasis”, content with the status quo and seeking to stifle inevitable change and progress. To some, the Jacobean ideology of community-based planning might represent a decline in the authority and influence of the planner, leading to a nostalgic longing for the golden age of Moses, when planners were considered masters of their domain and free from the bureaucratic shackles that often limit large-scale developments.

Ultimately, the Moses and Jacobs debate remains relevant to planners today because it serves as a proxy for the power and limitations of citizen participation. If the planning sphere often links Jacobs’ life and work to a recently emerging style of communicative action planning, the criticisms of the approach are part of the reason Moses’ legacy is being rewritten. To some, Jacobs’ ideologies have led to a style of city planning that is too cautious and self-reflective, and Moses’ top-down methods symbolize planning that asserts itself in order to focus less on process and more on outcomes. If not slightly alarming, this shift in narrative should lead the planning profession to ask itself a difficult question which lurks within the shadows of this debate: what do we value more, the effects planning decisions have on communities and people, or the physical act of building and getting things done? *Ø*

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# Preparatory Study for SHIFT

By Friedrich Andreoni



“Preparatory Study for SHIFT” is a less than 4 minutes space related performative act, which serves as a preparatory work. Friedrich Andreoni performed this action in November 2020, in Skokie, IL, United States.

**This video can be found in the Sonic section of [documentarianmag.com](http://documentarianmag.com)**

*Friedrich Andreoni works across multiple mediums, with a focus on sculpture and sound. He graduated from Weißensee Academy of Arts Berlin with a Diploma in Sculpture and is continuing his studies in the MFA Sound Department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for which he has been awarded a fellowship from the DAAD and The German Academic Scholarship Foundation.*



# I

I had to look up how to spell grey. Is it Gray or Grey? Seriously, I didn’t know how to spell it. Wanna know what I found when I popped the question into Google? That in true gray fashion, BOTH Gray and Grey are true.

I believe in grey space. The perfect blending of opposites. White & Black fusing together to make a calm intriguing mystery. Not only do I believe in it, I live in it. Both by choice and by circumstance.

Fate put me in this gray space long before I had the chance to oppose its ambiguity. My mother was born in the US and my father in the Philippines. My dad immigrated to the states when he was a kid. Years later he met my mom, they fell in love, got married, and I assume you know where this is going. Poof! The stork shows up and delivers ME, a caramel lookin’ kid. A shaken, not stirred cocktail of my parents opposing genetic makeup. Put in less flowery terms I’m bi-racial. Mixed. Hapa. A third culture kid. Grey. Gray. Since birth I have always been in this grey space. But it wasn’t until recently that I started to believe in it. Well, it wasn’t so much believing in gray as it was understanding the truth in opposites.

People say the truth is black and white, but I don’t think it’s that simple. If you look hard enough and think about it long enough nothing is simply black OR white. Here’s how I like to think about it: Break it down into the atom of a moment. The smallest, most finite piece. Find the truth there. It is white. That is the truth of the moment. Great, now move to the next moment, look at that piece. It is black. It is also true. Do this a million more times until you have a matrix looking code of Black and White dots

# Grey/Gray

By Brennan Urbi

B BW
B
W WW
B W W
W BW
B BB B
B B W B W
BW B W W WW BW
BB W
B B W
BWB W B
B
WBBW BWWB
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B WW B WB
BBW BBW
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BBB WW

We are trained to search for patterns. When we examine this mess of moments, what we find seems inconsistent. Chunks of indecision and contradictory truths that pendulum between our ideas of right and wrong, good and bad. But zoom out and see the B&W dots blur together, mixing into a wash of grey. Think pointillism.

All of these moments are allowed to be true. The black is as true as the white. The fear is as true as the bravery. The harm is as true as the healing. It’s all true. And it is all within us. It seems that you have a whole bunch of conflicting truths because we believe that people are only allowed to be one thing. But we all know that “bad people” do some amazing things and “good people” do some terrible things. This idea of conflicting actions within people is frustrating, our brain doesn’t like to accept this inconsistency. We are trying so hard to slap a label and a timestamp to other people's actions and ideas that we lose sight of the balance that exists within us.

I spent so much time debating this balance in other people before I realized that I must start with myself. At first I was scared to accept my Asian side. Growing up in Iowa, white was always the majority. As a kid it’s easy to blend in, you are a kind of chameleon, taking on the qualities of the kids around you. So doing the white kid things like loving ranch and football and Olive garden and Target felt good, it felt right, it was all I was taught.

I didn’t have much understanding of what it meant to be Filipino other than I ate Lumpia and Pancit and instead of Grandpa and Grandma I use Lolo and Lola. As I got older I realized that was an entire half of me that I didn’t really understand, so I became more curious. I was ready to understand my Filipino side. In fact sometimes I would just say that I was Asian, trying on the label as if I was trying on a new hat. How does it feel to wear this hat? How do people look at me differently or treat me differently? Now with this hat on and an ever changing and advancing society, I found that claiming my Filipino half felt pretty good. So good that I contemplated

getting [F I L] tattooed on my neck (which still isn’t entirely out of the question). Until I realized that deep down, I have no clue what it means to truly be Filipino. I’ve never even been to the Philippines and even if I had I still can’t speak the language. I mean, it takes a lifetime of living somewhere to actually understand the tradition and customs of a country. And as much as I hated to admit it to myself, I speak English. I have spent my entire life as an American. I love ranch. So only wearing only the FIL hat would be completely rejecting 50% of who I am.

I realized that there is no point in hiding or rejecting my opposites, because whether I liked it or not I am just as American as I am Filipino. I can not accept my Filipino without also accepting my American. Just like you can’t accept the Good without the Bad. The Moon without the Sun. This is the truth I learned to believe, a dule truth. This is the space I reside in. That I have the privilege to see. I am made up of opposing bits. Scattered pieces of truth that seem conflicting or confusing, but by allowing all of my pieces to be true, I started to believe in the grey. This allowed me to understand and accept the contradictions of the world.

I challenge you to not seek out black/white, right/wrong, light/dark, republican/democrat, man/woman, sun/moon, gay/straight, happy/sad, but strive to understand both. You are more than one true moment, you are a blend of a series of conflicting moments. You are always allowed to be better in the next moment, no matter how permanent the last moment seems. As long as you are seeking the truth in moments you are gray. It is in understanding that we gain perspective, connection, empathy. You don’t have to agree with the opposite, nor should you, but you should understand the truth of it. By understanding the Black and the White you pull them towards each other. They fuse, untie, connect. For what else are we here to do other than connect? *🌀*

*Brennan Urbi is a Chicago based Actor, Writer, Director who believes that with honest writing, vulnerable performances and a heavy dose of empathy, we can make the ordinary seem magical.*

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