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Stewardship and Legacy

An Interview with Clint Fluker

Kyle Joseph Patrick Flanagan, *Michigan State University*

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You can listen to this interview on the [*Scholarly Editing* website](#).



Dr. Clint Fluker

Clint Fluker is a multidisciplinary artist, curator, and educator whose work activates archives, museum collections, and community memory as sites of recovery, care, and imaginative practice. As Senior Director of Culture, Community, and Partner Engagement at Emory University Libraries and the Michael C. Carlos Museum, Fluker develops public programs, exhibitions, and partnerships that connect institutional resources with diverse communities. His work investigates how careful attention to historical and personal materials can produce clarity, wellbeing, and connection through origami, drawing, and video. Fluker's current body of work, *His Dope Materials*, provides a personal account of creating and remembering as a regular meditation practice. Readers of *Scholarly Editing* will recognize how his approach to the archive navigates the institutional and the personal, highlighting the

increasing pressures these institutions face amid technological change. At the same time, Fluker's perspective also outlines the dynamic possibilities of engaging the public with archives, offering forward-thinking ways in which institutions can engage with their communities in the future. These opportunities, from ways of surfacing stories to innovative research tools, require 21st century archives to think carefully about the humanity at the core of their collections.

Kyle Flanagan: I'm here with curator, writer, multi-disciplinary artist, Dr. Clint Fluker from Emory University. Thank you so much for joining me this morning. This is for volume 43 of *Scholarly Editing*, Voices and Perspective Section. So, I'm just going to jump in, kind of building off, y'know, the last time we spoke. How has your journey from Afrofuturism scholar to curator of special collections shaped how you think about time, how you think about memory, future of black cultural work?

Clint Fluker: First of all, thank you for having me. I enjoy the opportunity to talk about these things. And I'll be honest with you, it's all connected to me. And this is one of my great challenges. It's also one of the things that drives me, is that all the work kind of feels like it's in a web of connectivity. And so, my interest in black speculative fiction and in Afrofuturism generally is something that goes beyond a scholarly endeavor of consuming the content and/or theorizing about it, but also has become a practice of mine to really engage with what I call the history of the future through the archives. And one of the ways in which I interpret the world of Afrofuturism and Black speculative thought, this movement that we are witnessing and participating in, really has three moves to me.

One is first collecting the history of the future. And for me, that literally means doing that, going to the archives, going into the crates. And in one regard, because we're talking about archives generally, it's people's basements [laughs] and things like that. And recovering those stories, recovering those histories, recovering those artifacts that have a speculative element to them, that speak to a future for black people. And that has become one of the things that I do professionally, and have done professionally, when I was a curator specifically. That is one element. The second move is to wield that technology that you find there, you know. When you read these worlds, when you consume that content, there are artifacts that come about that might be rethought, reconfigured, played with in such a way that you can use them today to imagine a new world or a new space.

And that third move for me is conjuring a new world. So, you can do that by writing, if you're a great writer and you're a filmmaker or a curator, name it, you can create that world. But also in the real world, so to speak, it's like, what adjustments are you making with these artifacts to affect change? And that is the way I interpret the archival work that I've been a part of, and I continue to do that to this day.

Kyle Flanagan: Great. Now I've got a thousand questions.

Clint Fluker: It's all right.

Kyle Flanagan: You'd mentioned going into somebody's basement, right, because that's where the archive is. And if we think about the history of the future, as you say, I think it's important to think about the spatial orientation of going underground to get it, like you're digging it up as if you're pulling it up like a fossil, which then made me think about your spatial orientation and how that positions you uniquely to do this work. How does Atlanta play into that? What does Atlanta represent to you in terms of Black archival work, in terms of cultural memory, in terms of, like, the promise of Atlanta? How is Atlanta specially situated in your work?

Clint Fluker: I steal this from a woman named Sue Ross, who is a, you know, a celebrity here in the city, has worked for almost every mayor since Maynard Jackson, and is a photographer of note as well. She always likes to say, "Atlanta is a magical place." And that is the way that I feel about the city. When she's talking about it, she's really talking about, again, like you have these Black mayors that start with Maynard Jackson and kind of make their way consistently to the present day through the work of the educational institutions here, like the HBCUs, through the history of the Civil Rights Movement, Atlanta's role in that. There's one story to tell that kind of leads us to this popular notion that has been written about and discussed and debated and critiqued of, like, a Black Mecca. That's one story to tell. It's not the only story, but it's one story to tell. That's one way of interpreting that sense of, like, Atlanta as a magic place.

But for me, it's actually more personal. It's not about this specific history that people tell that leads to the present. It's more about the fact that my family has roots here. My mother's side, she is from Atlanta. She was born in Atlanta. We've lived in many different places. I'm the son of professors. So, we chased tenure all around the country until they found where they needed to be. And then eventually we ended up legitimately just returning to Atlanta where I spent a lot of my formative years and then certainly went to college and eventually grad school and made a life in the city. But everywhere I go kind of feels like an archival project to me because of my family's relationship to the city and my relationship to the city. So, while you can certainly go to the various civil rights-related spatial elements that you're talking about, the historical sites, and you can engage in the beautiful hip-hop and film culture, the music industry that's here, of course, all those things are true.

But the thing that gets me is my grandfather was the pastor of Liberty Baptist Church during the Civil Rights Movement, and he was there for a little more than 30 years as the pastor. And so, every time I go down Chamberlain and Edgewood, I am reminded of that. I also grew up at Friendship Baptist Church, which has a very special relationship with Morehouse College and Spelman College. And my uncle, my mom, everyone in my family on that side really had a relationship with the AUC, the Atlanta University Center where you have Morehouse, Spelman, ITC, Clark Atlanta University and Morris Brown. Like, that's my history. And so, when I go to these places, I am engaging in a memory project. That's just a truth about who I am.

Kyle Flanagan: I love that. I love that. You'd mentioned off the hop though, it's all intertwined. And it seems as though the cyclical nature of your experiences plays a big role in what you do. I'd love for you to talk a little bit more of that, in terms of maybe-in general terms. So, you're well situated in Atlanta being that you're from Atlanta and you have the personal connection as well as it being, kind of, the epicenter in some regards. I'm thinking more of migration in terms of Southern identity. I think a lot about, like, how my folks moved down to Charleston and I was disappointed that it felt like the Midwest because there's a lot of people from Ohio and Michigan there. How do migration, Southern identity and Black futurism converge in the archival immigration of the South? How do you see those things coming together?

Clint Fluker: You mean people coming to Atlanta, specifically?

Kyle Flanagan: People coming to Atlanta-

Clint Fluker: -Or leaving.

Kyle Flanagan: Well, that's a great question... Maybe that depends. I'll have you calibrate that question in terms of when you're working in the archive, you're-- my assumption is that you're working in a particular archive and not thinking outside of it. Maybe I'm thinking more of the influence on Southern identity, which doesn't necessarily get impacted by people leaving, but it does by people coming.

Clint Fluker: It's an interesting question. It's quite an international city and there's a lot of people from a lot of different places already here. And I think that the archives that I've participated in as a curator or in any other professional setting here in Atlanta, whether it's in- there's two in particular. There's the Stuart Rose Library here at Emory, in the African American collections, and then also the Woodruff Library at the Atlanta University Center, their archive and research center. These are the places where I've worked. And in each case, these are vast collections that really tell stories of black people all over the world. I mean, that's one of the fascinating things about it. And one of the things that I really enjoy about being there is that it's not one way of thinking about the South or one way of thinking about Black people. There's many ways that you can interpret the lives that African Americans have led, period. And so, you can see that through the archives, which is why I'm enamored with it.

I think that one way of kind of playing with that, which I think is fun, is we're talking about Afrofuturism and the ways in which a Black futurism, as you're calling it, is how this connects for me. One of the most obvious connections is, I learned about Afrofuturism by going to the archives and going to these university settings. The first gathering that I ever went to was at Spelman when Tananarive Due had a fellowship, like a two-year fellowship while she was there and she was teaching. And she started an Octavia Butler annual celebration. And at that event, I think it was probably 2012, 2013, somewhere around in there, Samuel Delaney, Steven Barnes, Tananarive Due, of course, Nalo Hopkinson, you name it. The whole crew was there. And the people I'd been reading about showed up in person.

But what I learned by going to the archives was that that wasn't the first time they had done that. The first time they'd actually done it wasn't in 2013. It was, I think, 1998 when Octavia Butler was still alive, at Clark Atlanta University's writer conference. And that's where Tananarive Due met Steven Barnes and everybody who was there kind of tells the story of how they could see the energy between the two of them. So in many ways, the Atlanta and the South, sometimes where you look at it in these kind of stereotypical ways, but this is really one of the primary spaces where Black futures were discussed, imagined, and really jump off, which is where you get these really beautiful gatherings like Planet Deep South that started at Jackson State University with Rico Chapman, plus some other really important figures in Afrofuturism, like John Jennings, Ytasha Womack, you name the folk. And it travels. We did it in Atlanta, too.

Like, these are the-this is what happens here, and it's always attached to an archive. So that's why I say they're mixed up for me. It's not one thing or the other.

Kyle Flanagan: It seems as though if Afrofuturism and the archive is this wonderful soup that Atlanta would be the broth, is that a fairly accurate representation? That it's truly collaboration, in a widespread scale, but the glue that holds it together would be the city in the south. Is that-am I getting that right?

Clint Fluker: Listen, I mean, you're talking to somebody from Atlanta, so I'm always going to claim Atlanta as being the spot. Now, to be fair, there are other locations throughout-like, I did mention Jackson State University, for example. I think that there are, again, many ways of interpreting Southern cities. And I do like the role that Atlanta plays, but it would be too easy for me to just take up all the space. But I do think it does have a special role, and that's why, you know, people come here, and that's why I continue to have these really interesting stories and intersections to tell that come from being here.

Kyle Flanagan: A hundred percent. Let me reshape my own language. I used to live in New York, and one thing I always said about New York was, "I won't say it's the greatest city in the world, but I'd be hard pressed to find a city that's greater than New York." That's maybe what I think of Atlanta. It's not to say that there's no other places, cities that are on par with or in the conversation with Atlanta. You'd be hard pressed to find someplace that's more influential. Would you say that's pretty accurate?

Clint Fluker: There's a wonderful shirt that people wear, and you can see the mayor wearing it from time to time, and it is by a company called Atlanta Influences Everything. It's literally, it just says that [laughs].

Kyle Flanagan: That's great!

Clint Fluker: And this is one of those places that has influence for sure. And it's not any different when we're talking about archives and we're talking about Black speculative thought either. This is definitely one of those places where we think together, we have our scholarly takes on things, but there's also action that's taken and that action often has great influence.

Kyle Flanagan: This may sound a little hokey. It's no coincidence that Delta is centered in Atlanta. I think there's something to the fact of so much movement in and out of the city as a hub, information travels physically as well. I want to shift gears slightly and talk about the imagining of worlds that you had mentioned. If you're interested in work that's focused on the history of the future, in that sense, the history of the future is the present, which means that we can create the foundation of the future, right? We can create worlds here in the now. I think one of the big questions that we face-in speaking of technology moving forward-you'd mentioned using the tools to make the archives accessible, whether that's in terms of exposure, whether that's in terms of individual access, whether that's in terms of just legibility translating in some way.

How do you see artificial intelligence shaping, or reshaping, archival practices, or influencing archival practices? And where's the line? I think of generative AI the same way that I do the internet. I was in school at the turn of the century and it was a lot of the same fears of "they don't even need to learn anymore. They're just going to go to the internet and get it." And it was learning to find the balance. There's a lot of good and there's a lot of bad. Where do you see the line being drawn for artificial intelligence?

Clint Fluker: To be honest with you, I don't really know, but I'm happy to play with the idea for a little bit. I always start with the fact that I'm not sure because, you know, it's evolving and I'm not an AI expert. I have used AI and in doing that, I can see some of the pretty clear benefits and how it could be helpful. I also spent a lot of time, particularly in grad school, but also as a professional afterwards, at the Center for Digital Scholarship here at Emory. And using technology with archival work generally is, like, "how do we use digital technology to reach new audiences? How do we use it to make these things more accessible?" like you're saying. And we've done a variety of different approaches to that. And I imagine that this will be no different in that respect, where there's definitely going to be opportunities to make things more accessible and to aid in certain areas that take a long time.

So when it comes to identifying material and ensuring that you're getting the most accurate information in the metadata as you are processing, as you're trying to make sense of these large collections of images, photographs, of documents that have been digitized, digitized material generally, I can see AI solving for a lot of these issues. At the same time, one of the ways in which I am thinking about how it could shape the future is its effect that it will have on an important relationship in the archives, which I feel is the tangible, the analog, the ability to hold material in one's hand and to go through it piece by piece because that relationship that a human has with the object, with the material itself, I think is an important relationship. There's a scholarly element of it where just, sort of, as you're doing research, as you hold primary material, as you sift through the boxes, you go through the folders, you can notice things that you will not notice if it is purely digital experience.

It is not to say that AI has to only, you know, operate in a digital space, but for the purposes of this conversation, if it is primarily a digital experience, then I think you miss out on the ways in which you're in a reading room and, you know, touch, smell, the way in which you engage with the archivists who are working with you, the way in which you engage with other scholars who are also present, the very clear way in which one folder can lead to another or lead to another box while you're in person is just very, very important. And that's just from a purely scholarly approach. There's also an element that I discuss, which is very personal to me, but I think other people would have similar experiences, is in African American collections, I have a relationship to, often, the people that are in these archives. Sometimes I've known them, sometimes I didn't.

Either way, for me, it is a space that is filled with the physical manifestation of proof that ancestors were here, and now I'm connecting to them again with these objects. I've had real experiences like this. I've talked about it publicly where one of the reasons I came to Emory to do PhD work was because I had a relationship, through a Mellon Mays fellowship at the time when I was in college, with Rudolph Byrd who ran the Institute for Liberal Arts and was a major professor here at Emory. A lot of my trajectory as a scholar was because of that summer fellowship that was a two-year long experience really. And then he passed away. And years later when I came back to go to grad school, I chose Emory in large part because of my experience working with Dr. Byrd. My first assignment was to organize his personal library.

So, I'm going through the books that informed his mind space, engaging with someone I knew, but also someone that was really important to me and had a transformative effect on my life. And so, I think that these are the kinds of experiences that you can have in the archive physically, that I don't know how you translate that into AI. And when they figure it out, I'll be really intrigued to see how it works, but these are the areas that - as you were saying, how will it shape it? This is one of the areas where I wonder if it can, and I also wonder if it should.

Kyle Flanagan: Mmm. What do you imagine we can do? What do you imagine we can do as we move increasingly into a digital world to preserve an analog feel to the archive? What are some steps we-what are potential steps we can take? Dare to dream, dare to dream.

Clint Fluker: To preserve the analog aspect of it? Is that what you're asking?

Kyle Flanagan: Well, I mean, your experience with your first assignment going into that archive and having that experience, you know, sometimes there's something about like, you know, I was cleaning out my father's basement and the mold of the paper while I'm reading these documents. You know what I mean? It's why we pair red wine with red meat or why we do these things because certain things paired together fundamentally alter the experience. So, I'm curious if there's a way that we can carry this into a digital space where we don't-we're not afforded those things. And I don't mean specifically, "let's invent technology that makes smells," or "let's get us close to that experience." I'm more interested in, is it about anchoring back into the real world to make sure people have that tow line to ground themselves? Is it trying to replicate what we feel into what we take in with our eyes?

Like, what does that look like?

Clint Fluker: I like the idea of using technology as a tool to bring people eventually back to the archives. And so, I've done a ton of projects over the years playing with this. And this is one of my great driving questions is how do we introduce a new generation of people, whether they are artists or scholars or just interested parties, how do we introduce a new generation of people to collections? And because in a world where the physical, umm, experience is, continues to, feels like it's shrinking, how do you use the technology then to expand it? And so, for me, that's taken on many forms. One way in which I've done that digitally is through documentaries. You know, like short documentaries that are telling you about the archives or a particular collection, but are really also secretly, and not so secretly, trying to get you to come [laughs]. So, if you kind of watch the different documentaries I've done, one most recent one was on Valerie Boyd, a very important biographer of Zora Neal Hurston and editor of Alice Walker's materials; [I] called the documentary "Zora Head."

It's also kind of a tutorial on how she did research in the archives. So, it's not solely about her life. It's also, like, if you're watching this and you have any interest in these type of things, this is the path towards how she did it. Now, I know that, like, most people are going to see this documentary online. You know, they're going to not go to a film screening. They're going to send it to each other as a link on Vimeo or something like that. And so that's me acknowledging that this is how we're going to get this story across to as many people as we can, but the goal is to bring people in. I've gone as far as to work with comic book creators to generate, you know, kind of a modified virtual reality based off of physical material. It's like, how do we transform what we're seeing in the archive in such a way that it brings people, again, to think that like, "oh, we could use archive and material to do something like this?"

Like, could we bring them here and could we bring our students here and create something like that?" Yeah, this is a place where there's not just history. There's also content to be used and engaged with and learned from. So that is one of my driving goals is, again, to use technology to bring people to the space, ultimately. And I value the space. I guess that's the other point. I'm not a proponent of "everything should be digital and that's where it ends." It has a utility and it's one that does make things more accessible. And if you are doing research, yes [laughs], it's like, we should definitely digitize this stuff. We want to make sure it's accessible, 100%, but it does not replace coming in and seeing it and interacting.

Kyle Flanagan: That's a really important distinction to make. And I think that's the difficulty is really just logistical accessibility. I mean, every person who's gone through an English program has written about *The Canterbury Tales* and referenced editions of it that they didn't stand in front of.

And it doesn't mean that, "well, we shouldn't digitize it because then they're not coming to whatever city in England," but like, also, I can't hop on a plane for this 10-page paper. Something you said really struck a chord. It's difficult to make friends as adults, and part of that is we don't have the exposure to things we're interested in. You know, when you speak of your personal interest, your personal investment, your personal history, right? You're born and raised in Atlanta. You are really into this stuff, which makes it exciting for you. When we're doing things that we're excited about, if we're in a club, if we're on a team, whatever it might be, we're surrounded by people that are equally into that thing.

And when you mentioned about being in an archive and how it's not just the stuff you're interacting with, but, like, the people that are there, maybe you meet someone and start a conversation. Maybe, you know, someone who acts as a sounding board or you overhear a conversation or you fall in love or like, there's so many things that can happen. How do you - how do we - how does AI intersect or interfere with that human element? Like, I know we talked about perhaps being satisfied with interacting with the digital, you know, the digitization of the archive as being sufficient. I guess maybe I'm curious about your thoughts about technology and how that works with, like, the interpersonal specifically.

Clint Fluker: Well, I mean, you mentioned finding somebody you love in the archives, that's kind of a-unless you know what type of conversation we're having here though is like, we already like this place [laughs]. But that, you know, speaks to a particular way which AI is already being used. I mean, on dating apps, for example, they're already using and have been likely using AI as a way to help them find matches. So, as you kind of sort through all of the data at an alarmingly fast rate, you can very quickly discover if there's somebody out there for you or there's a good chance that you might be able to find a connection. I'm curious if you can use AI to do a similar thing with collections, like, are there research interests that you have if you're looking here? Certainly there are ways in which this might lead you to other similar, not just collections, but data that might be useful towards your research.

This already happens with algorithms to a certain extent, but the AI aspect of it certainly could be very affecting in a space like that. So, like, as you're going through archival collections, if you're not on staff, you don't have that capacity to kind of flip through the archival collections that are next to it, right. You have to go online, ask for what you want. You have to sift through the finding aid and go through these things. Might AI have a way in pairing you or helping you get to where you need to go faster? I'm sure the answer to that is certainly "yes." So that's interesting. I don't know how it works. Like I said, I'm not an AI specialist, but I am sure that there are people thinking about that. Now, to your point, while that might help in one regard, there is the, kind of, very human element of discovery where you are kind of just going about your human life, talking to people and working with a professor, or maybe you're teaching a class and a student raises an interesting question, and then that leads you to see what you are looking at differently.

Those type of things lead you to, you know, maybe different outcomes. If we are not doing that anymore because we're only doing it through an intermediary, through an AI intermediary, does that affect it? Certainly it's going to affect it. How? I don't know, but I know it will affect how we do what we do because anything that you put in between yourself and the primary sources will have an effect on your interpretation, certainly the way which you're accessing it and your relationship to it.

Kyle Flanagan: It seems almost counterintuitive or oxymoronic to do archival work and distance ourselves from other people. We go into an archive to get closer to someone we can't get closer to, so it makes sense that we'll try and get closer to other people too, right? That's really interesting. I'm curious, when we speak about accessibility in terms of being able to flip through, right, if you're working with archives, please forgive me if I'm loose with my language. I'm not sure what intimate-what the level of intimacy of being at the level of intimate with an archive means to you. Maybe that's something that happens once in one's life or it happens dozens of times, I don't know. But how many archives would you say in your career you've been intimate, like that you intimately are familiar with?

Clint Fluker: That's a hard question for me. It's challenging to me as well because if as a curator of particular collections, there has to be a relationship with the people or the estate or the people representing the estate, the family members, the friends, you name any collection I'm working with is something where I'm involved likely more than a, you know, your average researcher who's going in to look at the material. So, where it comes to, like, particular elements of the archives where it's like, "all right, so in folder 17, there's these pieces in there," that's one thing. In many cases, I haven't like gone through it in that kind of rigor, but I've talked to the sister about folder 17, you know. And so, we're going through it together and that's the job is to be intimately engaged with the archives [laughs] and to get the additional stories that go with it.

Kyle Flanagan: Basically, I just asked you, "so, how well do you do your job?" Let me, let me maybe reshape that. Think of it like a book and I'm someone who's like, "I really want to get into reading. Do you have any book recommendations?" I think about that with archives. What really sparked it was, like, say I'm a student, I'm a scholar, I'm whomever, whomever might be in the market for an archive for whatever reason. How many archives would you say you're familiar with enough to recommend it depending on the circumstances? And I'm asking you this for really my next question.

Clint Fluker: A lot [laughs]. I mean, because there's a lot, there's a lot of archives - the one I currently, you know, am attached to at the Stuart Rose Libraries, but also, there's hundreds of collections at the AUC Woodruff. And so, though you can't know them all in and out, again, part of the job is, you know, understanding them enough to be able to work with people on their interests. Yeah.

Kyle Flanagan: Okay. So then my next question is really, when we talk about, you know, you had spoken about using technology to - as a tool to, like, thumb through these things, right? So, this is a two-part question. The first is talking about categorization, because when I think about digital spaces, I think about the vastness of what that means. So I think about being a kid and my childhood pictures being on film, and my mother took hundreds, and I think about my camera roll, which has thousands of pictures of, like, cereal boxes and whatever else. Part of the problem with that vast amount of information, like in an archive, is it doesn't serve if we can't find it. If it's not categorized, if it's not organized, it doesn't exist. It's like knowledge. If you can't access it, you don't have it. So, the first part of this question is, how do you see technology impacting that process of categorization? What do you see as being kind of the steps we're taking towards that or things that you employ in your own practices of categorization?

And then the second part is, being familiar with many archives, I'm sure you've seen correlations or threads that run through multiple archives of, you know, a movement that was happening or a kind of thought process that's happening where it's being shown in these different ways. Do you think that technology can help us in that way of connecting different archives together to paint broader strokes of particular thoughts, ideas, movements, so on and so forth?

Clint Fluker: Yes. I'll start with the second one because that's the one that I readily answer-is "certainly." I mean, like that can already happen. And I don't think that some grand level of new processing has to occur to do that. When archives take in material, they go through a high level of processing that allows for them to not only know what's there, but also to write really good finding aids and descriptions of the material. And so, I can definitely see with that data, AI beginning to put some connections together that often is the role of the archivist or the curator or the director of an archive, whoever's responsible for it in that context. Often their role is to do that for people, is to know enough about it to be like, "Well, I can see that you're researching the Black Arts movement. You might be interested in this set of archives here."

Since we have the Benny Andrews collection, you might be also interested in the Samella Lewis collection. I see that you're interested in Jim Alexander's photograph collection. Perhaps you're also interested in Doris Derby's collection. Here's why. Here are the themes. Here are the movements. Here are the -." And so, while that is the job of a professional working within the space, I can see AI aiding in that and very quickly assessing data that often takes a person or a series of people a lot of, you know, hours to do. But I also think that there's that pre-work that has to be done anyway. So I'm just like, as you're processing the material, these things are generated. And from that data set, I could see certainly that the answer to your question being addressed there. Now, what was the one before that?

Kyle Flanagan: It's about categorization. I guess maybe I'm going to break this into different parts. So, one part is just what do we do with things that are hard to categorize? So, I think specifically, like, objects that resist easy categorization. It's like when you're trying to, you get a color that falls in between two colors and you've got to decide which color pile does it go into, or does it go to a new pile? How can technology step into that or what are some practices that you find yourself doing? And then the second part of that is really related specifically to the Black archive in the sense of how do we embrace the textured nature of the Black archive? It looks drastically different than the old white guy archive. What challenges arise when AI systems trained on standardized data engage with these kinds of archives? So, I think about Shirley cards or I think about facial recognition technology or hand dryers or "Malcolm 10 Boulevard."

What do we do with this technology that's embedded with bias? What do we do with technology that's based on a baseline of white?

Clint Fluker: Well, we already deal with this. So I guess the thing is we aren't done dealing with it already with existing technology. And so I don't see it getting any better immediately with an additional technology to now grapple with. And so, it's similar to the last question in one regard where it's like, I'm talking about things that we already do within an archive's space. Like, there are already initiatives to deal with grants that people have. There's specialists if you have digital archivists on staff that, like, they're already dealing with these concerns of facial recognition, of how do we describe this more effectively to account for the fact that this is a Black person in a particular context, in a particular era, and we want to make sure that we're sensitive to these issues, you know. It's like these are just the work of the archives already. So, I would think that when considering AI, the question is, how might this help that? And if it can't help it, we need to slow down.

So, I think that one of the things that's important to me is there's work by people dealing specifically with technology, like Ruha Benjamin, where we're looking at the algorithms, where we're looking at these new technologies and acknowledging the bias that comes with them. And before we decide to use one, really investigate that part first. So, I think what to do with the technology at this juncture, the thing that we can do is acknowledge the issue. To ignore the issue, I think, is to just sort of move forward and then have to play catch up after you've done the deed of describing it incorrectly, of making it less accessible than you intended because you didn't understand how the technology was actually working. This is a challenge for many archives around the world, let alone you know just in the US, because of staffing. Everybody doesn't have the money.

Every institution doesn't have the money, the time to have people assigned to be thinking about this stuff. And so often the technology is used, when it is used, to solve a problem quickly, to get something online or to get something to be more accessible. And then we have to go back and then address the issues that you're raising. It would be great if we lived in a world where everything could be slow and just sort of, like, one step at a time. But I think we're going to have a lot of continued issues with this, you know, for sure.

Kyle Flanagan: Yeah. And as we wind down, maybe my last question is a statement wrapped into a question or a question wrapped into a statement. You've spoken, you know, of slow scholarship and the idea of-there's a reason that Aesop talks about the tortoise beating the hare. We've recognized for a long time, even before current technology, that going slow is sometimes where it's at. It's wonderful that you have a focus on this. What do you do when you feel stuck in technology? When you have those moments of, you know, whether it's a lot of stuff to go through or whether there's a temptation to automate it, like, what's something you do to slow down?

Clint Fluker: We didn't talk about this, but I have children. So, basically, I spend my days really regulating my time because I don't have, you know, the most time in the world, as soon as I had kids it changed. And so, I know that any scholarship that I produce, whether it is-or any project that I produce through the archives or otherwise, is likely going to be an endeavor that is going to take me some time. I go into it knowing that, and I have kind of reoriented my way of approaching these things as "enjoying the process."

The process of spending time with not just the physical materials, but also the people and the staff and the folk related to it, because that's what an archives is to me. It's not just the material itself. It's like I stated earlier, it's the relationships. And so, when I do any of these initiatives, any of these projects, I'm very cognizant of that, that I'm not doing it alone. And because of that, I know it's going to take the time that it takes. Now, I happen to be in a space where I have that time, and so I can do that, but that's the way I've dealt with it. And I do love the process, and I do love working with material, physical material. I do love working with people. I'm not fighting against an inclination. I am simply doing what I think is the best for me and what I need to do in terms of my intellectual project.

Kyle Flanagan: That's great. I love that the first, you know, the first part of that argument was like, "well, I have kids, so I spend a lot of time self-regulating." Like, I get it. I get it. Listen, thank you so, so much for the time and for just, like, sharing parts of your thought and your work. And it's really-yeah, I love the way you come at the archive. It's just really, mmm, it refreshes hope. It refreshes hope. So, thank you so much for joining us and for answering these questions. Really appreciate you.

Clint Fluker: Appreciate you. This is fun, man.

[credits]