Joshua Tan in Conversation With Eric Wycoff Rogers

In Paprika! Issue 01, Eric Wycoff Rogers (MED '15) wrote passionately about Major and Minor architecture, seeking to liberate the "spatial monopolies" that "hierarchical and planned institutions" have imposed on our use of urban space.¹ Almost seven years later, Eric is completing a PhD in American History at Cambridge after experimenting with several projects aimed to change the public perception and usage of space. This Dispatch discusses how their aspirations, challenges and beliefs have changed after working on these projects and joining academia.

> 66 Do you still see architecture operating primarily within the "Major"?

In many ways, it does seem like the overblown concept of the Great Architect is still with us. But it's also worth remembering that architects don't really design most of the spaces that we *inhabit*. Architectural culture is pretty insular. My interest in the Minor is very much inspired by Keller Easterling's writings on the various rules, dynamics and apparatuses that generate the built environment. So, in recent years, I've become increasingly preoccupied with the way that mainstream spatial styles and aesthetics (often witnessed on YouTube and social media platforms created by people who are not architects) dominate our imagination of what a desirable space should look and feel like, creating its own version of the Major. Here, Major exists not as architectural output, but as trends. Think, for example, of the "bohemian modernism" that, in the last decade, has replaced the beige suburban Pier 1 Imports look of the 2000s. Notably, it perpetuates itself without architects. It's a self-perpetuating style; an aesthetic; but also a shared ethos and sensibility. I think a lot about how these aesthetics limit how we think of ourselves, and how we feel our present and sense possibilities for the future.

> What were the successes/challenges of the start-ups/initiatives you created?

When I returned to San Francisco in 2015 from Yale, I split my time between three experiments: participating in the communal living subculture that continues to thrive in San Francisco and beyond; setting up an "urban hacking" eventsbased Facebook group called Spontaneum; and founding a space-sharing app start-up called Nookzy.

Spontaneum was a great experiment in the contingency of meanings and functions of urban interstitial spaces. We were really inspired by Jeremy Till's Architecture Depends, Douglas Rushkoff's Program or Be Programmed, and Andrew Herscher's Unreal Estate Guide to Detroit. We started inviting people to join us for communal dinner in alleyways in Chinatown and under freeway overpasses. We set up temporary plush evening lounges between stacked shipping containers on San Francisco's deserted Treasure Island, and in the negative space in the center of a spiraling pedestrian ramp near Twin Peaks. We found little interstitial spaces that we could inject functionality, excitement and culture into.

The goal was to emphasize the contingency of urban spaces, and to demonstrate the latent potentiality and abundance that saturated the city. In a world where anything can be anything, the drab, desolate scarcities and harshness of the urban environment suddenly appear as what they really are: contingent social constructs.

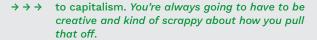
Lastly, Nookzy was a parallel experiment I did in collaboration with a friend, Justin Alameida. The idea was to create bookable microenvironments (which we called "nooks"), such as a small, tropical greenhouses; little sailboat hangouts; rooftop Zen gardens; waterfront saunas; tucked-away little hot tubs; little underground labyrinths that you can only access through an unassuming manhole; treehouses; etc (some of those are fictional). They would be created and "hosted"—much like Airbnb—by people who had formal tenure of these spaces.

The idea here was to make the user experience of the city more multi-faceted. We were finding with our spontaneous experiments that much of the city's potential just never gets tapped into. We initially set our sights on backyards, which are one of the least utilized urban spaces in existence, especially in the United States. This is especially so on the west coast where they're usable all year. So we rolled out a small campaign to get people to host bookable hot tubs with cozy lighting in a handful of San Francisco and Oakland backyards. The pilot experiment was moderately successful, but early on, we ran into the conundrum that we couldn't get a modular insurance policy when we only had five hosts and were just trying it out. Without this, it became ethically dubious because we would be subjecting our hosts to liability. And without hosts demonstrating in real life, it was difficult to demonstrate to angel investors that they should back us, so we pressed pause on the project.

Unfortunately, as I realized how much of a commitment and compromise the venture was going to need to be in order to get off the ground, I leaned more into academia, but I'm still hoping some aspiring CEO with a radical vision for better cities will come take the reins. It's going to take someone who's not just spatially savvy, but also has business know-how, and is committed to experimental place making and true radical sharing.

> After the challenges of working on Nookzy, did it make "hacking" feel like a strategy that was fundamentally disadvantaged?

It depends. "Hacking" is the basis of startup culture in general. Startups have proven to go from zero to a million quite quickly. That's what distinguishes them from small businesses. The hacker toolkit is a really valuable and scalable one. What's harder is when you have an intention other than making a shitload of money. That becomes trickier—when you are building things because the world needs it or because it's going to make the world more interesting, meaningful or fair. I think that's always going to be a smuggling operation—as in: smuggling other goals into the business enterprise form; perhaps even using business to accelerate alternatives 777



What are some contemporary examples of "flying under the radar" or "active forms" that you see being successful? And how do you see being an academic playing into this?

I was really inspired by Peggy Deamer's call to arms in her New York Times letter to the editor, where she says we are ready to "fly under the radar to infiltrate larger spheres of influence" (Peggy was my M.E.D. thesis advisor). One way I see this being done successfully is by creating frames through which we might think about and view architecture, urban space and socio-spatial behaviors. I'm thinking about terms like "sprawl" or a song about "little boxes" made of "tacky," that can catalyze a whole generation's feelings about suburbia.

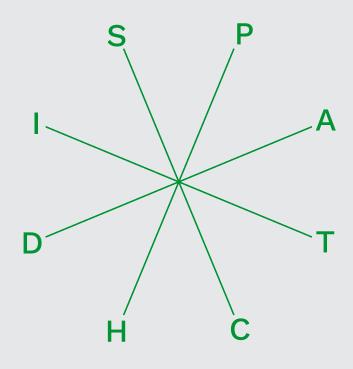
Lately, I've been interested in Mark Fisher's idea of the "weird," and imagining a spatial practice that seeks to create spaces and experiences that "defamiliarize"—in a Situationist fashion—the everyday, habituated built environment by injecting unexpected and jarring events, occurrences, and/or scenery in them. Suddenly, the everyday becomes pregnant with latent, radically-different scenarios and potentiality, and one seeks pathways and portals leading between the ordinary and the extraordinary. I love contemplating this.

Another way I think academia can be guite productive is through creating design prompts. I've recently teamed up with my friend and collaborator Andra Bria to host what we've been calling the "Post-Work City Project." It's basically inviting artists, architects, designers and lay people to imagine/design/represent what cities can be like in a future where production is automated, and people no longer need to work to sustain themselves. We're less interested in planning a future than unsettling the obvious givenness of the present which grips and limits our imaginations, and prevents us from feeling or believing that things could be otherwise.



We ended our conversation talking about the trailer park where Eric lives. Their unconventional choice of habitation seemed to be representative of their visions for a radically different spatial future. Their workspace was lit by neon lights and unsynced digital clocks, creating an aesthetic that was uniquely theirs. A variety of machines, monitors, cables and speakers surrounded them perhaps suggestive of what the interiors of Archigram's "Plug-In City" would look like. We jokingly made snipes at professors that have written critically about domestication and family, but have turned out to live in suburban houses with completely traditional gender roles. It made me wonder whether a different future—one that is more "interesting, meaningful or fair"-would first require architects and designers to examine how we perpetuate the conventions of today. Are we brave enough to go beyond the written and the drawn?





Letter from the Editors

Dear reader,

As we enter our eleventh month of a (semi-)virtual Yale School of Architecture, we're no longer just thinking reactively but also looking to a future that requires even more endurance and patience. This is a future we find difficult to plan for amidst constantly fluctuating restrictions, provisional schedules, and uncertain access. For us, as the coordinating editors of Paprika! this semester, planning for the future begins with confronting the "now" within a long, slow pandemic. Working within a compressed semester schedule and at a distance from many of our peers, we hope to continue fostering thoughtful discussion and action within our school and beyond by grounding the Spring 2021 installment of Paprika! Volume 6 in the ideas of slowness and compounding conversations.

Slowness

Recognizing the psychological endurance required amidst an ongoing pandemic, we see slowness as a guiding principle for our work, allowing us to mirror the change in pace we've experienced over the past few months and expect we will continue to experience. By slowing down, we hope to offer editors, contributors, and readers more time to think, respond, and write-in contrast with the typically fast-paced nature of Paprika!. We believe slowness is an opportunity to look back and look forward, to act and imagine with intention.

In pursuit of this slowness, we are reducing the number of issues we will publish this semester and introducing a new format-the dispatch-that will be interspersed between issues. We envision the dispatch as a platform that compounds and prompts dialogues not only between issues, but also between contributors and readers. Each dispatch will be a curated collection including diverse formats (such as article responses, op-ed pieces, images, and videos) that hopefully captures thoughts and conversations that might fall outside the thematic boundaries of issues. As a complement to the issues we publish, dispatches will provide an opportunity for readers to review Paprika! retrospectively and re-examine its role within our school and beyond.

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Compounding Conversations

We also recognize the simultaneous exhaustion and opportunity that the physical scattering of our student body and subsequent multiplication of communication modes have created. As coordinating editors of a typically print-based publication, we are looking at creative ways to work within the print medium while also introducing new ways for discourse to be generated through Paprika!. We hope to use these platforms to engage our readership by not only looking outward beyond our institution but also by including and valuing our own students' varying localities and networks, which have become increasingly palpable for many during these times.

This semester, we're hoping to compound the conversations that happen amongst the student body and within the articles we publish in a few ways. Although we're reducing the number of traditional issues we're printing, we are introducing dispatches as a place to collect analyses, critiques, and responses to current events and past *Paprika!* content. By introducing a publication platform not restricted by the conceptual edges of a theme or topic, we hope that contributors will have more liberty to investigate and comment on the things they find most interesting and urgent. We are also continuing the "In the Pit" podcast series as a way to engage students, practitioners, and experts from both inside and outside the architectural discipline. Our intention is that these dispatches and podcast episodes will be a fertile ground for the debates and discussions that are critical to the spirit of pedagogical pluralism at YSoA.

Our vision for the Spring 2021 installment of Paprika! is to further the publication's aims of addressing ongoing issues in the school and within the wider contexts of a profession, an academy, and a planet. We see this semester as a chance to slow down and reflect, respond, and invent with empathy, criticality, retrospection, and imagination-to consider how we can use *Paprika!* to facilitate a rethinking of design practice, education, and what it means to be at YSoA. We're excited to be working towards this goal with a fantastic team of issue editors, dispatch editors, graphic designers, publishers, producers, and archivists this semester, and we hope that you, our reader, will join us in this adventure.

We are excited about the forthcoming Paprika! dispatches, issues, and podcasts this semester, and hope you'll enjoy reading, listening to, and thinking about these ideas and conversations.

Yours,

Gina Jiang, Jerry Chow, and Will Beck



YSOA Survey

What's one quotable line from a Fall 2020 course evaluation (either written for a class by you or the other way around)? Feel free to copy/ paste or paraphrase from memory.

Zoom University • "Very well done" lol • Won't direct quote but I'm always amused by the spelling and grammar mishaps—of which there are always several! • There are so many other ways to introduce students to the history of architecture without reproducing and revalidating this colonialist, white supremacist framework. It would be nice to get some feedback besides "make it weirder!" • I think our first-year core studio brief ignored all the essentials. Students are forced to take on a self-centered artist role and a formalistic approach where the physical and mental wellbeing of humans is repeatedly ignored by the obsessive search of forms; where big ideas and images come to deceive the complexity and diversity of life; where architecture came to be detached from the essential. I'd like to question whether these forms we made work at all without being tested in an essential context, and why this formalistic approach still remains in so many architecture schools across the States when it has clearly led to certain failures in our cities today.

> Who's a school faculty/staff member you'd like to give a shout out to?

Richard. Hey, Richard! • the one and only Tanial • Tanial!!!! • Aniket Shahane! • Professor Moon obviously
Prof. Moon for being emotionally invested in our well being

Miroslava Brooks and Nikole Bouchard
Calvin Yue. Best TF ever! Thank you, Calvin! ● The TF Alex Kim for being real with us first years—thank you for your patience & generosity

> What's something you wish you had said during one of the town halls?

No comment
Too late now but I really need to know what's happening with summer travel :') • "What qualifications does Bimal have for being the Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?"
Phil, teach us how to pay off our student loans! • Can the school formalize a class-rep system and help first-years hold an election? We need a better communication pipeline between classes and with the administration! I wish I'd attended one. But even then, I probably wouldn't have said anything anyway.

> What's an "On the Ground" from wherever you're currently based?

On the ground is 'di tanah'. That's an Indonesian translation of the word ● "I tell ya, this mask thing has gone too far," says every member of my family. Maskless people wander Winn Dixie, looking defiant. In a retrospective of the past semester before the official start of the new, students joined a particularly awkward 777 $\rightarrow \rightarrow \rightarrow$ virtual, "Fall 2020 Advanced Studio Show-and-Tell." Sunil and AJ urged participation from the attendees, who remained in the Zoom shadows with cameras off. A few third years, allergic to uncomfortable silence, appeared for frazzled commentary only to disappear again. • The bizarre tone of the event was underscored when an M.Arch II accidentally messaged "Everyone" with the profanity, "biotch." The use of the term, perhaps too millennial, went way over Sunil's head who later pondered aloud, "I'm still trying to figure out who Biotech is ... "

Share an "On the Ground" photo from wherever you're currently based.



Share a Zoom horror story or tell us about an experience you had at YSoA in 2020, whether in-person or remote.

Bcs I was based in Australia I had to wake up at 1am and stay until 7am for most days. This isn't so much a zoom story but more about the experience. I live right next to the train tracks. One night I was just slaving away with my windows closed but then I heard on the streets there were a lot of kids playing. It was so loud as if it was a crowd of children playing soccer. But when I opened my window to check it out there was nobody on the street. When I closed the window, again the children's noises came back. This didn't bother me so much bcs the thought of not showing up with work to the studio is more daunting. But I still don't know what those voices are. Some say it's the voices of the kids who got hit by the train. • Leaving my zoom class with audio on to work on my model in the studio. Yelled hi and chatted to people as they came in, came back (at the end of the class) to like 10 messages saying "YOUR AUDIO IS ON"
Always, always make sure your Zoom DMs aren't going

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to the whole class. Come on people. I got up to use the restroom during a class and midway through going realized I never took my airpods out. Did I remember to mute myself?!! Yes-but that brief moment of horror was *real* ● The real horror story is a lack of accommodation for remote students in different timezones.



Recommended Readings

With michelle-chang, (Michelle-generation of the source) https://secondelle-chang, (Michelle-generation of the source) https://secondelle-chang, for the sou * https://weiepaprika.com/folds/the-covid-yourselepaprika.com/fold View Chang (Michelle Chang, Chang, Control Chang, C ³²ti On - With - Michelle Chang, (Michelle Chang, (Mich Vish Michelle Chang" (Nichelle Change) unaling Econ x 100 • https the spirit of slowing s we spirit of slowing is se Conformation of slowing this we look forward to this sue is Cite A paprika-x-100 · For is the april 2. Cite Analysis) • https://yalep Cite Analysis) • https://yalepaprika.com/folds/home + hout 40 Super State Analysis) • https://yalepaprika.com/folds/home + hout 40 Super Builds