On Practicing—

As students of architecture, we usually speak of practice in the professional sense. Rarely do we use the word in its more common usage, which denotes repetition, process, and something unfinished. In a profession that so often demands perfection, it is easily forgotten that we are all trying — and often struggling — to get it right. We are all practicing.

This issue's focus is on what it is like to be a human at a school and in a field in which stoicism is prized. This topic seems particularly poignant at the start of the school year as incoming students search for guidance and those returning have had the summer to reflect. We ask: How do we get by? When did a lesson truly click? What have we realized now, in retrospect? When did we feel unstoppable? What humorous situations have we found ourselves in in the name of architecture? We want to illuminate the challenges and triumphs of student life at every stage, as a reminder that we're all in this absurd yet fulfilling pursuit together.

Volume 2 Issue 01 Margaret Marsh and Alex Thompson

Letter To My Deskmate

Hey Marge,

How did we get so lucky? This time last year, everyone was scrambling for desks and friends and the last cans of PBR and, oh yes, scrambling to show that their work was worthy of Yale. Who would've thought that we could have loosened our vice grip a little bit and everything would have shaken out more or less the same? That it would have shaken out quite well? That there was no need to rush because we had (and still have) plenty of time?

So many things that brought us close to tears or breakdown or at least emotional eating seem funny now. We spent last year sitting back to back, watching the struggle and the occasional triumph in each other's work. We were rarely on at the same time. When your project would be stopping passers — by in their tracks, I would be muttering four letter words, covered in laser soot, trying to get the one damned thing glued to the other damned thing. When my drawings were being drooled over, you found yourself laboring over a hunk of clay that was looking exactly like a....well, we all know what it was looking exactly like. I now have a working knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses, your quirks and verbiage, your preferred slice and what clothes you wear on Thursdays. And vice versa. You saw everything I did. I couldn't have hidden from you if I wanted to. Perhaps this is why you were one of the only people I felt I could admit weakness to, who could tell that I was grasping in the dark most of the time. Perhaps. But I was also just lucky that my desk partner happened to be my kind of woman. I know that nickname I gave you isn't your first choice, but I don't feel bad at all because now the people who call you Marge are the people who have your back. How did we get so lucky to find these people?

It's fitting that I'm editing this with you, Marge, because we've been practicing together for the past year, and here's another chance to practice. Our interviews could have dug deeper, been more critical, I'm sure. This issue of Paprika! barely smacks of academia. Touche. But we both relished editing this Paprika because these are some stories from some people who are dear to us and wouldn't have been if it weren't for YSoA. This issue is about being a twenty-five year old in a school and a field that demands a superhuman level of composure. It argues for embracing the contradiction and complexity of being human, of letting that mess show through a little bit more and trusting that everything will be okay, because who would have thought we could be so lucky to be here, in this perfectly flawed building, practicing this gorgeous tangle in the first place?

Dear Alex,

I know we both swear that we were at the front of the pack when we raced for our desks first year (yes, the very very front). But for the record, I still think it was me. Regardless, we sprinted, oblivious as to what it meant that our studio's desks were designated in the "Bridge" — it meant that we didn't need to race. These desks were all decidedly "cozy" or "charming" when compared to the rest of the 6th floor. Breathless, we chose singles next to each other and slowly embraced the concrete that enveloped us. This was just the beginning of our first year.

There were no windows, but we had the Mylar printer — where people from beyond the Bridge would sometimes appear. When the printer wasn't working you answered every mechanical question with the authority of a supervisor — "Press Select several times to choose Tray A..." — until the Mylar patrons walked away satisfied (even though I and our Bridgemates know that you have zero tech authority). Visitors passed our desks, going from one side of the studio to the other, noting the wildly changing temperature that we had become accustomed to. Foot traffic varied between bathroom goers, group member search parties ("he's in New York...we think"), and those on plotting pilgrimages, both calm and frantic.

While we didn't have the physical closeness of those double desks, we did find that our habits, advice, and late–night delirium created an alliance. I think it is because we weren't pushed together that we came together as needed. We definitely talked about Terry Gross too loudly and I could only see your forehead behind the monitor during most of our conversations, like the neighbor in Home Improvement. The separation granted to us by having "aisle–seats" gave us an independence that fostered a shared perspective.

We traded advice and observed each other's' desk crits, hitting the same benchmarks at different times. When one of us was trying to work through a certain obstacle, the other had guidance. You were the Photoshop wiz, but also walked me through soft boiling the perfect egg. And the roles consistently changed. We could sense when one of us needed space or needed direction. Most importantly, knowing that we were going through the same things made the difficulties that much easier.

This semester we're sitting on opposite sides of the studio, so I know that there will be things that we won't catch in each other's progress. While I may have to walk a little farther to make sure we're not wearing matching outfits by mistake (again), I think it's likely that our deskmate experience is forever built into the fabric of our life in Rudolph. There is a particular camaraderie that first year promotes, one that is hard to replicate. So while I'm glad we're through the woods, I will miss being able to borrow tape without having to ask.

Interview: Trattie Davies
with Margaret Marsh and Alex Thompson

First year critic Trattie Davies helped us both through first semester, and then some. One year later, we all got iced tea and talked about the joys of architecture. With the theme of Practice in mind, Trattie was kind enough to speak about working hard, teaching, clarity and balance.

MM: One of the qualities about you that we really appreciate is that you maintain perspective really well and you help your students do that too. Have you always been like this? We see you as getting straight to the point with your students and not buying into the stress around things. You are often able to narrow down the challenge to what actually matters.

TD: First of, all, it's a lot easier when you're a teacher to see with some amount of clarity. As a critic, you are doing the same kind of thing at work as a student in studio, but it's a huge relief to be able to leave work, come into school, and look at work that's not your problem. I don't have anything personally at stake except that I want you guys to do well. I also think that studio gets a bit convoluted and if you just do things systematically and remain alert, the work will get done. I guess in terms of maintaining personal perspective, work is incredibly hard. I don't have a balanced life, I don't have any of those things worked out. What I've been hearing through school is that people have this aspiration for balance and I also think there's a lot of time being spent on quality of life issues. I was saying to a friend who is teaching this semester, 'I think you should write your schedule down to show [the students] what your quality of life is — it's insane, you're on a plane all the time.'

AT: I think we are only starting to realize that about our professors. One of the things we are trying to probe with this issue is the inherent difficulty in both the discipline and the lifestyle it requires and ask if that is simply there, if that is an undeniable part of it.

TD: Or, it's one of the beautiful things about the profession. Architecture's your life, because you love it. When I used to work for someone else I worked very hard, still, but I felt the hours, and the resentment that can come with the hours. When I started working for myself, it felt like I was more in control, and though there are low months when I give up, there are months where for whatever reason I don't give up, and I feel like I can do better and try harder. It's like a giant marathon.

MM: It sounds like interacting with your students helps in the effort to create balance. Did you always think you were going to teach?

TD: I didn't always think I was going to teach, but it does help my practice. It also helps balance out the parts of practice that, to me, aren't the most inherently fascinating, like invoicing. Having an architecture office takes a huge amount of stamina and there's a lot of forces that promote failure. Often just the human side of things makes you tired. But if you can be someone who does it well, maybe just by the time that you are seventy, then it's worth it. I think that's one of the things that gives me peace of mind, that I won't really know until I'm seventy whether I was really good or whether our office was really good. Once you open up architecture you find it has no edge. It's an infinite way into the world. When you buy into it that way, it can lead to late nights and weird lifestyles but it's why it's so incredible.

AT: Margaret and I were speaking about vacation a few months ago and both acknowledged that we're prone to getting bored during time off — that's just our personalities. So I think that if you want to call the architecture lifestyle something, you could call it a chosen lifestyle, rather than call it a bad thing. There are pros and cons to it, but it isn't inherently bad.

TD: I do think there's something about framing it negatively that made me more resentful than I needed to be, because I was so protective of something I wasn't actually interested in protecting. I've found that as long as it can be somewhat on my terms I am content. Graduate school is like step one of that process. If you're miserable, change something. You are in fact a grown up, you actually chose to be here, you went through all these steps —

AT: and there's never any shortage of architects telling you exactly how grueling the lifestyle can be, so it's not as though you're unaware —

TD: There are some people who love to stay up all night and they choose to do that. Me, I hated it, I have never stayed up all night. I had a best friend who I met every morning at eight, we had our coffee, had our cigarette, and we worked all day and left at midnight.

MM: What are some things about YSoA that strike you as different now from when you were here?

TD: When I was an undergrad school was a totally glorious freestyle paradise. My friend wrote a poem for her final project. So when I went to grad school I thought everything was very rigid, and now it seems even more structured. But the whole world has become more litigious and bureaucratic. It's not just school.

MM: Despite the structure, this is the one opportunity until much later in our careers where you know, you're your own boss, you're creating your own building in six months...

TD: No it is the ONLY time, because you don't have a client! It's not a bunch of homework, it's total joy and luxury. It doesn't happen again because life gets extremely powerful and it takes over. Things get really real really fast and this is a pocket.

AT: You took a fair amount of time off between undergrad and grad —

TD: — yes, eight years [laughs] that might be how I got that attitude about school being a joy —

AT: What was school like for you as someone who had been out for a while?

TD: I loved grad school. But I remember at the beginning trying to get out of everything and fast forward everything because I thought about it as something I should do and then get back to my life. I can definitively say I missed the point of everything first year. My second year my boyfriend of eight years broke up with me, and I was so sad that I didn't have the energy to be like I was first year, always jumping ahead. The result was I became less goal-oriented and more process oriented.

AT: Did the personal pain of that time make you more open to taking risks or pushing things further?

TD: Yes, absolutely. I had this friend who would say yes to everything. One day, I decided, "I'm just going to do what she does; she seems much happier than I am." In taking on that motto, I found that time is really strange, you can always find the time. You can do nothing for three hours or you can shove eight things into that time.

AT: What was your third year like?

TD: I had Peggy [Deamer] and I had Frank [Gehry]. Frank's studio was my last semester. That just changed my life. I felt like I was home.

MM: You've mentioned that you found architecture in college. Looking back, did you notice things about yourself that tended toward visual/spatial thinking?

TD: I liked art, but to generate it for myself I found I needed a problem. So I have a giant love for art and an envy and admiration for artists because they're more free. They can say what you really need to say. Having a problem helps me think of something to say, it's more like writing, where you have something you want to write about.

AT: What did you do in the 8 years between Yale undergrad and YSoA?

TD: I lived in Vermont and I was a gardener and I taught photography at a high school and I was a counselor at my socialist summer camp. Then I got laid off from high school [laughs], I was cut out of the budget, so I moved back to New York, where I was from, and started working for an architecture office there.

MM: I love that you gardened!

TD: Yes, gardening is very useful. Like in architecture, you start with something, and you kind of know where it might go, but the ultimate mystery of what emerges and the amount of care it takes for something not to die is very similar [laughs]...I've killed a lot of plants.

MM: Going back to balance, I think that's a great way to do it, to balance sound and quiet, even if it's just finding a moment of quiet every now and then. Are there any routines that you keep to carve out little moments for yourself to think, to have quiet?

TD: Well, coffee, I drink a lot of coffee, like five cups a day.

MM: That's a lot

TD: Well, I'm really tired.

AT: One last thing...sometimes we at YSoA feel as though we're secretly on a game show because of the ridiculous hoops we sometimes jump through for projects. Have you ever found yourself in an absurd situation in the name of architecture?

TD: I almost got packed in a crate at Frank Gehry's office!

Level Shelves
Luke Studebaker

If you're going to hang plywood shelves on the walls of your apartment, take the time to do it right. First, you want to figure out what the walls are made of, likely either plaster or drywall. Next, it's wise to survey your chosen wall to see if it is flat or bowed or wavy in any way. This affects what type of mounting system you will use. Then, choose mounts and anchors together to ensure their compatibility. If your wall sways out of plane much, you should probably consider a track and bracket system with greater tolerance. After that, cut down your shelf boards and use them to double check whether you have the correct number and size of mounting hardware. Once you've gathered all your material, begin the installation by marking a level line on your wall. This is key.

I would gladly keep going on and in finer detail about my fool-proof steps to perfectly level budget apartment shelves. You, dear reader, probably don't care. The point is that there was a time in my life when I was obsessed with the nuances of mounting cheap urethaned plywood boards onto warped walls with lousy sheet-metal brackets. It was the winter of 2015 and I had just moved to a new apartment in Brooklyn, a rent-stabilized two bedroom in a once—grand building now hidden beneath layers of paint and Spackle. It was this lumpy buildup that I was going up against with my carefully curated shelf brackets–the best of the bottom bin at the Home Depot.

I got the shelves up. Beautifully, I will add. Plumb, level, sturdy. And at some point in the course of my very banal DIY home improvement project, I realized that I wanted to go to architecture school. I am hesitant, even a bit embarrassed, to share this fact. Sure, this was an encounter with a building, and I concede that the tactile hand–making must have been a catalyst for me, psychologically. (I might even be pushed far enough to admit that the simple task engrossed me totally to the point of a deep understanding of my living room wall.) But I'm no Shop Class as Soulcraft type. I don't believe you go to architecture school because you like doing finish work.

Since graduating from college in 2011, I had been working at the New York architecture journal Log, which meant roughly that I got paid to read about architecture five days a week. It was a dream job. I was helping to shape the conversation, planning events as well as issues of the magazine and wielding editorial authority over writers much smarter, better educated, and more accomplished than me. It wasn't all that different from a college seminar, either. In fact, one of my greatest motivations in getting the job in the first place had been the chance to keep up my education beyond college in this comparatively academic context. I figured I would work there until I had read and seen enough to know what I thought about Architecture so that I could go to graduate school with purpose.

This was an illusory threshold. In four years of work, the urge to go to school still had not clicked for me as it did while drilling into the wall above my couch. The confidence I grew into through practice as an editor turned out to be more narrowly tailored to becoming a better editor. I am a decent editor by now. I'm familiar with the world of architectural discourse, too. Yet both of these are pursuits of infinite refinement, not projects to be completed in preparation for architecture school.

It was, rather, the frustrating process of trying to get my shitty shelves to at least look level that struck me with the wide-open messiness and discomfort of learning. My confidence as a professional was less effective in stirring my ambitions than the jogged memory of being a student low on the learning curve, especially when addressing the complexities of the built world–from precedents to publics to puckered walls. They say practice makes perfect, but at a point, the pursuit of perfection starts to be boring. In this sense, I came to school to practice, habitually.

The reasons I chose to study architecture at Yale fill a column of a pro/con list that I made this spring. Confidence in my skills and knowledge wasn't one of them. Level shelves wasn't either. But if you're looking for a cheap and easy way to hold your books off the floor, I would love to help. To tell the truth, I still need some practice.

Windows
Kieran Reichert

In fiction writing, fallibility can be a virtue; the word fallible itself comes from the Latin fallere, a verb meaning "to deceive." In a character, a flaw can lure the reader down into the crevasses of meaning that are often the author's true motivating interests. Similarly, in an author, peccadilloes make the inevitable interviews and pock–marked memoir all the more interesting; the impenetrable gloss of a faultless narrator provide no point of entry for a reader. Even if the author were to write a character and a story with more flaws than assets, a person somewhere could inhabit that reality. Habitation in fiction, as in architecture, demands ingress.

I'm reminded of Henry James' timeless Portrait of a Lady, to which he wrote prefatory remarks on the notion of writing fiction at all: "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million — a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will." It is through each of these windows that a particular reader might see a particular facet — an idiosyncrasy, a flaw — that they recognize and thus enter into that fictional world.

Though a staid favorite in literature courses, I imagine this quote might sound unfamiliar to most architects, despite its metaphorical allusion to that most fundamental of your first year projects. And rightly so — a house, in the architectural sense, will not have a million points of ingress: there should be, at least according to one notable former dean, a single front door. Therein lies the contrast between writing a house of fiction and building a house: realism, though more rigid than other schools of expression, is not reality, and the latter has many more requisite features. In designing and constructing a building, architects are called upon to work with that most unyielding genre: reality.

Designing for reality, an architect must toil for many nights (weeks? a lifetime?) pondering what comprises a house, how the inhabitants commune and scatter, enter and exit. Last year, I met many of you while living with one of your peers, and I observed precisely this toil of yours, between martini receptions and retreats to beautiful houses in distant Connecticut vales. At first, and even still to a degree, I couldn't quite figure out what was keeping you all up until sunrise with such a disturbing frequency. After all the crits, lectures, conversations, and (not) seeing my roommate sally to and from Rudolph Hall in the gray morning hours, I can say now with some certainty that I understand why you all work so hard.

Architecture, as observed by me, is a strict discipline, and perhaps the most rigorous of the arts that I've witnessed. Whimsy has no part to play in a CD set that will ensure that the cantilevered roof deck won't collapse under the eventual weight of the humans using it. Human weight — this is something no other medium can truly account for, or engage with. Sensory perception, sure — paintings are seen, music heard, food tasted — but none of those works will ever bear the weight of the very being experiencing them. As such, the architect, like the writer, must observe people and strive to know all those impulses, idiosyncrasies, and movements. Unlike the writer, and perhaps unlike any other artist, the architect must account for any of these possible inclinations, while the writer must only convey some in order to create a relatable verisimilitude. A building will be inhabited, its inhabitants will exert their physical and psychic weight on the structure, and thus all walls must be plumb, all joints concealed, and cladding covering true structure. Things that can be made perfect are made to be; things that cannot be made perfect are also made to be.

As a result, you all must practice, ad nauseum (perhaps literal nausea). Practice until you come home after your roommate is asleep every night; practice until you are so sleep deprived that you leave your keys everywhere; practice your breaking and entering skills to get in without waking your roommate (so much for a single front door). Practice until the unquantifiable, sometimes qualitative presence of a human being is imprinted in your mind, handy at every stage of the design process. I imagine it will become a tool akin to your T-square; a means to ensure your designs are human, in addition to being square and sound.

I recently visited the 2016 BP site, and was able to see the physical manifestation of an idea whose germ I also saw, all those months ago. Moreover, I was able to enter this idea–cum–reality, and in no time, I could sleep and live there too, had I the funds. These young designers, artists, and engineers had carried their idea from inception to (near–)completion, and while not exactly infallible in their construction, it was pretty close to perfect.

For those who don't know him, Kieran Reichert was an honorary first year and temporary New Haven citizen last year, when he willingly chose to live with Jonathan Molloy in their Dwight Street attic annex. You've probably seen him around, and if you haven't, we feel bad for you, but you'll definitely see him on the back of a book someday.

Interview: Steven Harris
with Alex Thompson

Alex Thompson spoke with Steven Harris to learn more about a show that he put together when he was organizing exhibits for the YSoA gallery in the early 1990s. The show was a collection of first projects done by notable architects, and in light of this issue's focus, we were interested to know more about it. As Steven is a longtime educator and the founder of the eponymous New York City firm, we also hoped that he would share some insights from these two practices, and he did not disappoint.

AT: First, can you give me a little bit of background about the "First Projects" show that you mentioned having organized?

SH: The idea behind the show was that often people's most interesting projects are the first ones that they do. And the underlying rule behind the exhibition was that it had to be a project that you did on your own within ten years of graduating. They turned out to be pretty much all houses — there was Norman Foster's first house, Charlie Gwathmey's, Turner Brooks's, everybody's.

AT: Where did you think of the idea?

SH: It occurred to me that an architecture career is a tricky thing; often, one's first opportunity to do independent work comes in doing a house for your mother or your cousin or somebody you know. It's often houses because you have to start with small things. I don't think anybody gets to do an airport as their first project.

AT: Was there something of note about the show once you saw it all assembled?

SH: What was really interesting about the show was that in most cases you would never be able to identify the later work of the architect. They were all experiments of a sort and very interesting. The one exception being Charlie Gwathmey's house for his parents, which he did fresh out of school and which is emblematic of his later work.

AT: I wonder if you, looking at this exhibition, took anything away from it regarding early, perhaps more uninhibited work.

SH: I found that early work is a product of what you're educated to believe is important. For example, in the 70s, the plan was the generator of form. And I think now, the primary generator of form is 3D rendering programs and the focus is on shape — making rather than space — making. One of the most telling things that happens as you get older is that you see things built. You inhabit your designs, which radically shapes what you think is important. Boring things like ceilings turn out to be the one thing you always see.

AT: You have designed several of the spaces you currently live in. Having been in a couple of these spaces, I have to say that they feel fresh, despite having been designed years ago. How do you achieve this timelessness?

SH: When I design a space for myself, I am highly conscious of the fact that I will keep that space for a long time. I am thinking about how it will look in twenty years and THAT gives one pause. It brings you back to prioritizing proportion and craftsmanship. I think a very useful exercise is to go back and read architecture magazines from 25 years ago and see what was considered the most interesting thing out there — more often than not it was novelty that, in retrospect, looks quite silly. On the other hand, going back to school, I think experimentation can be great. Architecture is a rather relativistic discipline and I have no problem with choosing to believe in one set of ideas for one semester and another for another semester. A willing suspension of disbelief.

AT: I love the freedom that comes with that idea. Students can be a bit loose and fast with "rules," at least while in school.

SH: Let's go back to the idea of the preliminary sketch. If, at the beginning of a project, you create some representation of your idea — a sketch, a model, a diagram — and can then find a way to distance yourself from it, you have the chance to look at it critically — almost as though it were your classmate's. At times, one develops a conversation — a dialectic — between your idea and your critical examination of it and something magical happens — the idea comes to have a life of its own and develops in ways you could not have anticipated. Painters sometimes use a mirror when painting a portrait — to de-familiarize the image so they can see it differently.

AT: You have a lot of lifelong friends who you collaborate with — you are all "creatives" but you think so differently. Do you think that watching them design has helped shape the way you work?

SH: I think that talking to anyone who thinks differently is the best thing that you can do. The most treacherous thing is to be trapped in your own head and your own design sensibility. I think that collaboration is fantastic. The reason I've been teaching for thirty-nine years is that I learn more from students than they learn from me.

AT: Having taught undergraduates and graduate students, do you find there's something that undergrads consistently do better than grad students?

SH: At least at Yale, my experience has been that the undergrads fearlessly ask questions that are apparently naive but are in fact very potent. They are also willing to try anything. And to be realistic, people in grad school ultimately need to get a job while undergraduates are simply learning how to think. I have found that grad students spend too much time obsessed with what the deliverable looks like, and not enough with how they are assembled intellectually, how they make sense, and what they mean.

AT: That's something we want to probe with this issue, this prioritizing of polished deliverables over the strength of the idea. We're trying to understand where in the field or in the school that priority comes from.

SH: I have a real respect for students who are willing to throw things out three days before the final review because they had a better idea. I'll support them till the end for that. I'd much rather that than someone who keeps polishing up a perfectly acceptable scheme when there is a great one that they really want to explore.

AT: I remember a guest lecturer in your class mentioning how she looks back at houses that she's done and sees the mistakes in clear focus. She explained that those blunders have become learning experiences and by no means made the projects that they belong to bad projects.

SH: Another way of saying it is that I've never designed a project that, given a chance five years later, I wouldn't change something about — no one ever does something perfect.

"Mr. Benny, how do you get to Carnegie Hall?... Practice, Practice, Practice."
Spencer Fried

The final review of Summer Viz will forever feel like the most important review of my life...not because it actually was the most important review, but because it was the first time I had ever worked so rigorously within architecture. The review felt like a climactic closure, a finale. Absurd as it seems in retrospect, I thought that everything I made for this review had to be perfect. When it wasn't, I left upset that I had not received the unanimous praise of the jury. Of course, the comments were constructive, and I wouldn't have learned anything if the review ended the way I wanted — with applause all around.

Regardless, I went into my first year motivated by this frustration. I sought to create "perfect" projects that succeeded in every dimension. A sisyphean task for a first year without a background and I found myself constantly frustrated throughout first semester. I was always afraid of making the "wrong" move, always staying up too late in search of the "right" answer. Out of that came intense stress and exhaustion, which only exacerbated the impossible task I had set up for myself.

As I enter my second year, I find this time ripe to contemplate the idea of 'practice'. The term is most frequently used in architecture to describe one's place in the discipline, one's "practice." It is used as a noun and is inferred to be whole and resolved. Here in school, however, practice is a verb, with all the motion, progress, and change connoted by that tense. Each project can be looked at as an exercise, a chance to practice. Through these exercises, we slowly develop a set of skills, perspectives, and positions. Although it often feels so, we are not here to create our opus.

I think MVRDV's Winy Maas had it right when he said in an interview that you should never put everything into your final project in school "because you will lose yourself. You can do one thing for one project, and for the next project, you can do another. This step — doing one thing after another — is what potentially leads to work on a wider scale, a wider agenda."1 I find this advice liberating, and in my experience, it holds true. Each project can be a singular exploration, building on (or perhaps contrasting with) the ones before it, together assembling a body of work and knowledge.

We might look to the way critics and historians speak about artists' early work or their mature styles, within which there is an idea of development, growth, and evolution. There is also the notion that a painting or a sculpture can exist as a single idea. Yes, our discipline's key differentiation from art is that we have to take into account the practical. This difference should not prevent us from creating a body of work that is, like Ruscha or Baldessari or Miro or Reinhardt, experimental, explorative, and iterative. Nothing should be considered precious. What you make now could inform what you make in the future. Indeed it will. Rudolph Hall is an incubator. It's here that we should spend more time experimenting. Better yet, practicing.

1. Designboom. "MVRDV Winy Maas Interview." Designboom. N.p., 08 Oct. 2014. Web. 06 Sept. 2016.

Practice/Perfect
Timon Covelli

I mull over this essay as Dimitri and I rush down the highway in a borrowed pick-up truck with a steel guardrail hanging out of the bed. It's the final week of the Building Project. Scheduled for a powder-coat that morning, the rail had broken during handling and needed to be fixed by the end of the day. For a moment, I feel like I'm rushing a friend to the hospital, a friend that I had injured. I'm anxious about every passing minute, guilty for the entire predicament, and embarrassed that something I had done was turning out so badly.

Then I take a step back. Everything is going to be ok. The guardrail will be fixed. The urgency is undue. After all, I was doing something I had never done before. We had cut, drilled, welded, and ground over 75 feet of steel bar, all of which was totally new to me. If this thing even came close to perfect it would be a miracle.

Experiences like this defined the summer. Building a house for the first time, making something I have a stake in, was basically a boot camp on how to deal with personal imperfections. Not personal imperfections like lateness or laziness, but rather imperfections in something I've made and then take very personally. As a BP intern (or YSoA student) you want to perform every task as quickly and efficiently as possible, all while producing outstanding results. It didn't take long this summer to realize that everything takes longer than you thought and nothing looks flawless up close. The good news is that after all these forays and their sub-perfect results, you realize that everything looks fine when you take a step back, and that when you're learning something, a perfect outcome isn't necessarily the most productive.

It's easy to lose sight of this during the academic year, rushing from one review to another, constantly churning out finished projects that are all expected to be provocative, attractive, and at the same time, anchored. To think a first year student is asked to propose a new paradigm for the public library before she/he can build a proper stud wall is a bit surprising. In our education, thinking big architectural thoughts and understanding simple building construction don't always go hand-in-hand, and they don't necessarily have to, but imperfection should be welcomed regardless.

The most celebrated aspect of the Building Project, and the reason I stayed on all summer, is that students can see a project develop from concept to construction. But in doing this, the Building Project also exposes how messy and improvised architecture can be. Looking back on first year as a whole, this was an important realization for me. Studio projects, since they aren't seen through to completion, can retain the illusion of perfection. By not always admitting messiness or improvisation, we pressure ourselves to produce (pseudo) pristine work. However, when an imperfect outcome is accepted, projects are more likely to be risky and students are more likely to grow.

On the last day of the Building Project, our repaired (and now powder-coated) guardrail was delivered to the site. It had more visible welds than we'd initially planned on, but it ultimately came out great, and was installed painlessly. This emotional arc of stressing over a project, seeing it pan out well, and then wishing I'd worried less happened over and over this summer and throughout the past year. First year is chocked full of rapid introductions to new software and new tools, which you're expected to use seamlessly thereafter. This is all happening while you're acclimating to a new place and new people. It's important to realize that during this adjustment process perfect expectations can hinder you, and that your larger development is more important than tomorrow's deadline. A year later, I've finally become comfortable with imperfect results, can work a bit faster, and am learning more along the way. Looking back, I wish I'd attained this looseness earlier, and hadn't let the pressure of a prestigious education weigh as heavily on me.

I gained so much practical knowledge from the Building Project, but equally important is my new outlook on my education, gleaned from this summer's countless imperfect incidents. At YSoA, whether we're shooting a nail gun or working in studio, we're trying to get better at something that's new and challenging to us. We're practicing. So although I love sexy drawings and positive reviews as much as the next student, I'll enter second year more willing to take risks; more concerned with my personal development and less obsessed with a perfect outcome.

"Oh Shit"
Jon Molloy

"Can you guys come up here for a second?" a concerned voice called down to us. As each of us bounded off the ladder and hurried toward the voice, we were met with anxious gazes fixed on the all-important bay window at the top of the stairs. "Oh shit..." we all defeatedly concurred, joining in the perplexed stare at a window that wouldn't let you look out of it. Your eyes simply couldn't make it past the header, which sat perfectly at eye level. It made you feel like ducking, like the window wasn't for you. It was eerily, but utterly uncomfortable. Three of the four windows were like that. That's probably why we found Adam (Hopfner: studio critic, contractor, and design/build guru) sitting down up there — on the roofless second floor of the quickly rising BP house — avoiding, from his lowered vantage, this frustrating spatial anxiety. The others were pacing nervously from window to window, each glance intensifying the discomfort. "They've gotta come up, right?" we, who had drawn square 4' x 4' windows with 24" sills without realizing it put the header at 6'0", inquired tentatively, and a little horrified, not quite sure what we had done.

It only made it worse that the windows were not without consideration. Indeed, these second floor windows and their sill heights were contentiously debated for hours in long, belabored design meetings — 55 students and 10 critics huddled around a TV screen on Thursday afternoons, which soon became evenings, and eventually nights. An architectural cacophony of opinions, expertise, preference, inexperience, passion, etc., the final design stages were not unlike a mad act of collective juggling: exhausted and slightly deranged students running towards the endlessly elusive finish line of first year, hurling above them an ever — expanding field of real, unavoidable architectural considerations that would soon compose a house, and, a little later, make a home. The critics, in their wonderfully staccato and uncoordinated manner, made sure it was all above us. "Did you try this yet?" became the refrain as critics would lob another flaming baton into the juggled mix. Or, "Okay, let's move on for now, but this needs more attention," in an instant forcing us to keep airborne things we had long hoped to catch.

For these windows, it was privacy, openness, light, internal/overall composition, and the technical requisites of fire code that we found overhead. But more, there were sixty five different versions up there: our ideas of a house and window were deeply informed by our individual senses of home and intimacy, and these preferences not simply pragmatic or aesthetic, but deeply felt, rooted in lifelong experience. "That's too much glass for a bedroom" — "there's not enough light" — "any sill higher than 30" feels like a prison" — "that's what blinds are for" — "squares work with the composition" — "do you want light behind a bed?" With no clear method of making these decisions, even the sill of a bedroom could, and did, become a question of real intensity, only finding resolution in cloudy and exhausted compromise.

And so we finalized the construction documents with second floor windows that only reached up to 6'0". Adam, as he would tell us later, saw this immediately upon reviewing them, but decided to make an enlightened pedagogical choice: he let us build it. Knowing full well they would need to be altered, he oversaw the framing of too — short windows — feeling, I imagine, a special teacherly mix of annoyance for building something twice and excitement for this moment of its realization. I'm sure he took solace in the certainty that we would never make the mistake again. Man, a 6'0" header is ridiculous! Herein lies the complex beauty of the BP project: it is both architectural education and architectural reality. It is a pedagogical experiment that seeks not just to make a beautiful house, but to, all the more beautifully, enlighten its students, invigorate the architectural field, contribute to a neighborhood, and empower eventual inhabitants. Sometimes that means framing a window twice. "Alright, I'll go get the sawzall."

Play Faster But Slower
Matthew Bohne

There are no semesters and there are no jobs. Instead, we have a continually evolving body of work shaped by a process that requires us to look ahead and to look back at things we have drawn, made, read, and seen. Over the course of my time in school, I have become more willing and more accepting of the not yet known: drawing and writing my way around curiosities and musings.
Last spring in the post–FAT studio run by Sean Griffiths, Sam Jacob, and Jennifer Leung, I witnessed a beautiful moment in the arc of my colleagues' projects as well as my own. What emerged was the desire to explore. Our unique and sometimes polarizing sensibilities were drawn out by eleven distinct projects. The discord was, in part, due to the boggling array of open–ended briefs that made space for interests and authorship to emerge (even if found in a misprint or a ruptured mold). The opportunity was not absorbed lightly. Briefs that appeared simple grew more complex when we were asked how and with what one begins to design. It was a studio of unknown beginnings and articulate conclusions.

This peculiar practice of recognizing serendipitous moments helped me to recognize the latent capacity of my own work. The post-FAT studio was as much about self-indulgent creative exploration as it was about finding meaningful ways to communicate and contribute to a community, all the while challenging normative design. It was the daily practice, sometimes out of frustration, to turn something upside down or to ask, "what if it was hairy?" This practice was not limited to scale or site. It was limited only by our abilities to test ideas via images and material things.

It is the mission of the YSoA's lecture series to expose students to a variety of architectural practices. A glance at the upcoming series catapults 'social' and 'urban' discourses to the helm. Yet, the invited lecturers who I have heard speak at our school rarely revealed their own meditative design processes, nor how they translate design into thoughtful objects. What past lecturers have presented, in my opinion, are attempts to reduce design to little more than neo-liberal problem-solving. A valiant [if transparent] effort no doubt, but one representing an attitude that does not reflect my aspirations, nor those that I have observed among my peers. The lectures serve as one of our few opportunities for exposure to practice, as well as to public speaking. To this end, like many of my colleagues, I question how to situate ourselves outside of these walls.

My best work comes from entertaining spills, dreams, and glitches that are exhaustively explored and brought into a discourse that shapes my understanding of architecture and what I am able to contribute. I recognize the happenstance of this process and indulge in it.
A cornerstone of my work and education, akin to fine arts, is this conviction to make without paralyzing fear of what may come of a chance beginning. It is a great lesson that keeps the Post-FAT ecstasy afloat.

Reflecting on my own development, I spent a long time searching for professional models of practice that reflect my own desires. I found a few, but not enough to bolster the practice I believe in. I still feared the lessons that I may miss. In such formative years, I sought to learn under the immense weight of the discipline but to never be caught beneath it. The freedom of my colleagues in other practices (printmaking, graphic arts, and chemistry) is what continually bolsters my fledgling motivations. All the while upholding desires that cannot fit cleanly into architecture. It is only with these cursory activities that I keep energetically on the move.

At Yale, spaces for experimentation and authorship may best be improved by enlisting visitors to use lectures and studios to test methods rather than expound ideas (against the old master–pupil model). Indeed, in Post-FAT we were "sometimes happy and sometimes sad" but we were committed to following through with ideas that emerged in the things we made because our paper trail was the foundation for unforeseen theses. By way of Sean Griffiths and Sam Jacob, I'll share Factory Record's producer Martin Hannett's instruction: "play faster but slower." And if you haven't found your groove yet, try adding string lights to your desk.

Joint Degree Insights
With Jacqueline Hall and Tess McNamara

We sat down with two joint-degree students, Tess McNamara and Jacqueline Hall, to discuss research, the scientific focus of the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and how it all plays into architecture and their time at Yale.

MM: What drew you to FES? What intersections between architecture and environmentalism interest you most?

TM: I was working in New York at a small, structural engineering firm that had a side interest in coastal-resilience after Hurricane Sandy. It became very clear from working on these projects that there's a certain way designers present information and internalize data — and there's a totally different way that scientists produce and portray that information. Teams of scientists had trouble communicating with the designers and vice versa. There was a gap. My aspiration in coming to the joint degree was that by having one foot very strongly planted in the world of architecture and another planted in this scientific community, I'd be able to get hard, scientific knowledge about ecosystems, coastal issues, and climate change and be able to bring it all together in a future practice.

AT: We [architects] definitely have our own jargon and totally forget that there could be a gap.

JH: I've also noticed the way that architecture uses research in a narrative sense and we don't have conventions or standards about how we collect and present the research to support a design argument. It's interesting now being in a place where that research is so rigorous and there are rules about how to collect information. It's helpful to go outside of architecture school and remember that just because you have data doesn't mean it's good or right. People focus on the visual presentation of information in a certain way to support their arguments and might not really engage with people who are actually doing cutting edge research in ways that can change the way you think about these problems.

MM: In your two studios last year, you switched from the scale of a school to a city, and now you're switching from the scale of building to environment. How do you think your architectural skills and your understanding of scale are going to translate to your forestry studies?

TM: Well, the urban studio really solidified for me that that's the scale at which I want to work. Looking at systemic community problems or large scale infrastructure needs, and being able to solve these challenges spatially is what really makes me excited. And now, at FES, to be able to learn the technical skills that can just add depth and expertise to that passion is really energizing. I have no idea what an ideal job would look like for me right now, it might not be something that currently exists! And it's comforting that pretty much 80% of our classmates at FES feel the same way.

JH: I've always known that I wanted to do urban scale environmental work and that's always been the most important to me at the end of the day. Having the opportunity to go to architecture school and think about that spatially is what excites and drives me. It's the media and the way of thinking that gets me jazzed. And I'm excited now to have some concrete tools for design thinking but also to collect the skills to go into an urban environmental problem and at least know what's at stake environmentally; who the people are to talk to, what are the right questions to ask, and to have a network of people who are doing really amazing environmental work.

MM: Is there anything you expect to be particularly challenging or particularly easy in switching between architecture and forestry for the semester?

TM: I think we have a very different background from many of our classmates in that the last time I took a science class was in high school. A lot of people came in with strong science backgrounds or were working in policy.

AT: I think it must be nice to have people who have their own areas and that people are thinking all different ways.

JH: With environmentalists, there's this automatic gratitude for other people's presence because there's a sense that we're all in it together, which is part of why the sense of community is so strong at F&ES.

TM: I think it's also the reason why the field, by nature, is so inter-disciplinary. The faculty and administration at FES have stressed that they welcome different opinions and people with different specialities and skills because we're not going to be able to solve the world's most complex problems with one academic field. It's impossible. That mindset has been really inspiring for me.

Good Afternoon, Good Evening and Good Night
Anthony Gagliardi

The summer after graduation is filled with fiction. Films on your "must-see" list and novels shelved during Systems Integration patiently resurface after three years of collecting school dust and just in time for the dawn of architectural practice.

During this period I re-watched Peter Weir's 1998 cult classic, The Truman Show. The film follows a mild-mannered insurance salesman, Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey), who lives in a simulated and domed community, called Seahaven, engineered adjacent to Hollywood by an omnipotent television producer, Christof (Ed Harris). In retrospect, the film and my time at the Yale School of Architecture offer a few uncanny insights for the advancement into practice.

The first is the perceived binary between academia and practice, or in The Truman Show between inside and out, between Seahaven and the "real world." In Of Grammatology, Jacques Derrida states, "there is no outside text." One way to look at this statement is that our knowledge of a thing comes from what we know it is not. Therefore, a thing is separate from yet dependent on its context. In a similar way, the infiltration of practice — the outside=into academia — the inside — no matter how well-intentioned, should be heeded. Rather than the practice of architecture becoming a literal extension of the study of architecture, or the institution becoming a trade-school, the two worlds are more potent when conceived with maximal difference. The rough, corrugated walls of Rudolph should be reinforced.

The second parallel I see between school and the film is the needed omnipresence of constructed authority. Christof aptly states during the film, "we accept the reality of the world with which we're presented; it's as simple as that." Likewise, the Yale School of Architecture offers a protected environment with extensive resources to engage in the global discourse of architecture. However, just as Truman steps through the manufactured horizon from simulation to reality, the question facing many graduates comes to the fore: "what do I do now?" And the question is fraught; without a Christof, or an authority figure, to emulate, study, resist, or surpass.

Christof and the boundary of Seahaven inscribe dialectics between inside:outside, stability:disruption, and curation:liberation. Similarly, authority within graduate school intensifies the difference between the simulated and the real, academia and practice. By amplifying the boundary between these binaries, each side becomes more lucid and therefore more dependent on its other for definition. Academia is rhetoric without practice and practice is mere trade without scholarship.

1. Derrida, Jacques. Of Grammatology. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1998. p. 158
2. Maslin, Janet. "So, What's Wrong With This Picture?" The New York Times. 5 June 1998

Perspecta52
Patrick Kondziola and Charlotte Algie

Perspecta is a rich and exciting platform for ideas. As editors of forthcoming Issue #52 (2019), our work in the role matures and takes life and we continue toward a deeper understanding of the wide esteem in which the journal is held. Likewise, we grow in our appreciation for the many architects and writers who offer time to meet and talk to us about our ideas under the auspices of the journal.

In contrast, there are, internally, relatively compartmental relationships between other editorial teams and our own. In our experience so far, we feel that any such closed-off status limits the possibilities for cumulative and collective knowledge building from year to year — something we would love to see, and which we think could only enliven and enrich the project in which we now are part of a lineage. One pragmatic suggestion would be: a shared archive of notes and working materials. We imagine it possible that the journal take both a more accretive working practice, alongside a more collective big-picture ambition.Our original pitch for Perspecta 52 was something like this: "Perspecta 52, 'Empire', as in:

1. The architecture of empire — a story about architecture as the system of artefacts which always engineer, iconographically and infrastructurally, the administration of a system of control within a territory.
2. The Empire of architecture — that is, let's think about that same engineering in relation to architecture itself as a discipline."

We have repeated something resembling this pitch many times now, in several contexts over the summer, working to share, discuss and receive as much critical input as we can, in the USA and abroad.

As far as an update: We are in the process of evolving the work beyond the basic state that we started out with, essentially only a particular collection of authors. Our focus now is pushing toward a more productive thesis. That is, we want to actually suggest an answer to the question that goes something like: What should global architecture be (or become)?

Editors note: Following up on a piece from last week's issue on Perspecta 49, Charlotte and Patrick have offered insight into the preliminary stages of the editing process.

The views expressed in Paprika!! do not represent those of the Yale School of Architecture. Please send all comments and corrections to Paprika!.ysoa@gmail.com. To read Paprika! online, please visit our website, yalePaprika!.com

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