

Season 3.8 Sarah Ichioka

Fri, May 19, 2023 12:35PM 59:34

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

design, climate, work, regenerative, singapore, thought, term, read, feel, mindset, understanding, organizations, moving, year, called, consultancy, project, constellation, nature, flourish

SPEAKERS

Eric Benson, Sarah, Narrator



Narrator 00:00

This podcast is a project of the climate designers network.



Eric Benson 00:03

Hey, this is Eric. Welcome to Episode Eight of Climify this season. Thanks for continuing to tune in. The team here spends a lot of time on the show, all in hopes that more people listen, are inspired and take climate action in the design classroom or studio. And that reminds me to remind you that you need to stick around until the end of the episode. Don't just fast forward to it though. At the end, we have a design assignment that each of our guests provide for you. The assignments are also linked at climate-designers.org forward slash EDU forward slash clarify. There you can quickly find each assignment, copy and paste them into your syllabi and get rolling. I wanted to give a big thanks to our podcast manager and CO producer of this episode Bianca Sandiko. She's taking on a larger role that clarify doing a great job. Remember, teamwork makes the dream work. And speaking of dreams, our guest today is certainly the dream guest and came highly recommended by our last guests, Nisha Mary. I love that not only do I want this show to connect designers, with climate experts, but I also want our guests to find areas to collaborate. This show is all about connections. And Sarah Ichioka, our guest today, her work connects across many disciplines. She's urbanist, strategist, curator and writer concerned about helping organizations create positive environmental, cultural, and social impact. Two of the main things I learned from Sarah in our discussion was the possible list mindset. And her five principles of regenerative design. I found them both inspiring and practical, to things we need when we're facing such a looming and grave challenge. Sarah is hopeful however, and I hope you can see through her work. She is an example for us all to follow.



Sarah 02:23

My name is Sarah Ichioka. And I am a strategist urbanist curator and writer. I have the great joy of running a consultancy called desire lines, which is based in Singapore and active globally.

And you can find more about me and my work at [WWW dot Sarahichioka.com](http://WWW.dot.Sarahichioka.com). That's Sa ra h i c h i o k.com.



Eric Benson 02:59

Well, Sarah, welcome to Climify. Thank you for coming on the program and taking time out of your morning to be with me.



Sarah 03:11

Thank you, Eric. I'm so happy to be here. And congratulations on your new season.



Eric Benson 03:17

Thank you. Yeah, I'm really excited about it and happy that you accepted my offer because you were do a so much work. You're involved in so many initiatives, one of which is you're also a podcaster. So I hope you enjoy being on the other side of the microphone today.



Sarah 03:35

Thanks. Yeah, always happy to have the tables turned.



Eric Benson 03:39

It's not too stressful, hopefully.



Sarah 03:42

Oh, no, you're a total pro you make everyone at ease.



Eric Benson 03:46

That's good to hear. I try it is it is a lot of work. But it only is something I enjoy doing. And what I do think about first of all, just to put this in about you what you're doing is really impressive, right? You're doing so many things around climate and I'm wondering what led you to begin that career in climate?



Sarah 04:14

I think like a lot of your, a lot of your guests that I've I've heard you speak with I've had a long and winding journey. Which I think is actually one of the most exciting things about life is the potential to explore different things and then see how they you know, like tributaries to a river

how they all kind of lead in a different knowledge or a landscape. Yeah, and I, it's hard for me to pinpoint and if one moment when that the path of the river became explicitly clear, but I remember pretty early I think probably in school time,



Eric Benson 05:05

like when you were really young or college when



Sarah 05:07

I was pretty young, yeah. Reading probably high school, reading a quote from the writer, Alice Walker. And she says something like, a paraphrase my memory about something like activism is the price I pay for living on the planet. And I think that obviously, you know, when you think about price, that's a very transactional metaphor. But nevertheless, I think there's something about that sense of, it's just part of what you do. You can, I thought was a really interesting framing of it, a really powerful framing of it. And that has somewhat stuck with me through almost everything that I've done. In my career when it comes to the kind of more climate specific focus of it. That's a lot more recent, but I'd say that the emphasis on cultural transformation toward towards you could call it transition, call it sustainability, most recently looking at calling it regeneration. Yeah, I think that that impulse has always been there. But I think like, like many people, it's really been only in the last 10 years that the alarm signals on climate that they cut through all together noise and nonsense. Yeah, modern consumer culture throws in our way to distract us from that urgency. So I'd say to define it as climate work it probably only I could only credibly say that in the last decade.



Eric Benson 06:53

Yeah. Well, you were talking to me before we started recording about a time you were in London. And you had to use ice cubes to cool down your computer because there was no air conditioning. And I'm wondering, is that was there moments like this, that were climate affected you to where those alarm bells went off? Or? Or was it something you were reading or what happened for you there.



Sarah 07:17

So obviously, I live in a place of, you know, come from a place of tremendous privilege. I've, you know, grown up in, I grew up in the United States in California, then worked for a large chunk of my career in the UK, and then now in Singapore. And if, you know, there are many things that those three places have in common in terms of being relatively insulated from the frontline effects of the climate emergency. But that said, we all increasingly are exposed, you know, the signal becomes clearer and clearer. And, and I certainly will, can see that in the region that I grew up in, in California, where, you know, my parents have had friends, displaced, and through fires. And similarly here, you can, in previous years, we have had very strong air pollution from the kind of free cutting and burning of forest in our region, to support

industries that completely benefit Singapore. So those loops of the loops, the feedback loops, I think, are becoming much clearer, and the signal becomes much stronger, that we kind of we can sense it at in a much more embodied way.



Eric Benson 08:46

Yeah, I can I have a friend in California, John, who he was working on, if you're familiar with the author, Octavia Butler, she has a couple books, parable, the sower parable, the talent that he's involved with adapting into graphic novels. And he said, Well, he was working on those which take place in the future in California, this dystopian apocalyptic future, where climate and all this other stuff is that is really affecting us. He was personally affected, in that he was seeing, you know, the fires near Riverside where he's from the flooding and he was like, he was living through Octavia Butler's book, which takes place, you know, in the future, and it hit him really hard and he had to stop and take breaks a lot from working on this project, because here's this dystopian future and it's there right now.



Sarah 09:46

Absolutely. I think that's this is such an important point, because I know that you know, part of the work of climate phi is thinking about climate narratives, right? And there are there are amazing artists you have Have that advanced sensing power, the activity of others or the world who could decades in advance, kind of foresee where that how things might play out. But I think for many of us who maybe are not as gifted with those with our future and 10, I, that really an even even, I think so many of us are not as deeply empathetic as we could be in terms of understanding these frontline communities who have been facing these risks of climate emergencies destabilization for decades. So, you know, someone like me coming from a position of, of insulated privilege, I can say, as I as I did to you earlier in our conversation, oh, I think my works, focus on climate more in the last decade. And I would attribute that largely to a lack of a human challenge of being able to truly feel embodied empathy, for situations that are outside our realm of lived experience. And I think that that's a huge area of work for all of us.



Eric Benson 11:21

Oh, I agree. Yeah,



Sarah 11:23

I mean, deal with how we break through that.



Eric Benson 11:27

Yeah, I totally agree with you on that. And I think there's also like, at least a little bit here living in the US with the amount of gun violence that happens here. Right. We, it's, I compare it sometimes to climate in that, you know, there's there's a sense of numbness when you read

that news, another shooting, and you empathize with that person, of course. But it's also like, you haven't experienced that kind of devastating loss, right. So it's a challenge to know exactly what they're feeling, but you can put themselves in your shoes, their shoes. Now, I think that's in the media a lot here where climate is. So that's what makes it I think, harder for a lot of us in the US. That's just my thought on it that. Yeah, but guys, we don't know what's going on. And, you know, Singapore, for instance, when it comes to climate. Yeah. US media does not cover that for sure. Yeah, again, yeah,

S

Sarah 12:31

we're all and where do we tend to be most interested in our own patch? People, people that we can recognize, I suppose. Yeah. Anyway, that's a big one. It's a big one.



Eric Benson 12:46

Yeah. Well, you're a writer. Just like Octavia Butler, you're a curator.

S

Sarah 12:50

Oh, gosh, I am a writer, but I am definitely not just like Octavia Butler, let's make that really clear. For the record. She has genius level versus



Eric Benson 13:01

high. I had to segue in some way. Well, you do a lot of work clarity. Yeah. Just for clarity. But you're a good writer. Yes. You do a lot of good work. You think I'm urbanist do? Do all of these happen separately in your climate work? Or are they more like overlapped and connected?

S

Sarah 13:24

I think everything happens in layers and in constellations, and different things emerge and come to the fore at different times or in different projects. But, you know, earlier on in my career, I felt I would feel a lot of embarrassment, I set the right word.



Eric Benson 13:48

I don't know what to do a lot of,

S

Sarah 13:50

I'd feel a lot of like, thinking it's embarrassed, I feel a certain hesitation in talking about how many different things I was excited about doing. Because somehow I thought that to be a specialist was the ideal and state. Okay, but now that I've had more time with it, and maybe

like been able to work with more people who, like me are really most energized by being engaged in multiple on multiple channels and multiple layers, that I realized that for me, at least, the calling is to think about the points of intersection or learning and the transference of effort conversation practices discourse between multiple fields is actually where I have the most to contribute Are you looking



Eric Benson 15:00

to grow? Are you That's it sounds like Yes. Okay. Yeah, that's



Sarah 15:04

a phrase. Yeah, saying that, actually, some people are going to do one color really, really, really well. But for me, I'm a lot more interested in kind of a mixed palette and how the different colors can come together in combination.



Eric Benson 15:26

That's a good way to describe it that I feel that that is a good way to also describe me and my interests in that. I also have a paper making studio were kind of hoping to me or be more of a regenerative practice. And at least here on campus, that's what people know me for, right? Because it's campus and they're asking me for a guy. Yeah, you I'm the paper guy. And then they mean, you're asking me about doing this stuff? And I'm like, Oh, I'm also wait, you're you're doing a podcast. Wait a second. I thought you were the paper guy. Right. And the paper boy and but I'm, I got to the podcast through these. These in between things that you described really well. So. Yeah, I like that. I like that color analogy, too.



Sarah 16:17

We just have to be careful that we don't mix them all together.



Eric Benson 16:19

Right. So buddy, it's a Monday? Yeah, exactly.



Sarah 16:22

More like different color combinations at different times from the Yeah, from a broader palette? I'd say all the work that



Eric Benson 16:32

you do, right, seems to come together in your consultancy called desire lines? And can you talk

to us more about the impact you're trying to create with this consultancy?

S

Sarah 16:44

Sure, I'd be happy to. I think it's important to frame this by sharing that, in previous roles that I had, that I've had, I've had the great privilege of leading or being involved in leadership of organizations or projects that were incredibly public facing. So we might have a strong public programs strand to what we did or might we might be making exhibitions. And that is all about how public your conversation can be. And, and with desire lines, we're taking a slightly different approach and that we are trying to help organizations, whether they are public or private sector who are in a moment of transition, it could be in a mergers and acquisitions situation, it could be in a change of leadership. It could just be I mean, we actually all of us by REITs are in transition right now as we try to think about how we serve face the future. And, and a lot of that work, I believe is best done. Not immediately in the public eye, that it's important to be able to create space where people feel safe to be vulnerable to share their wildest dreams, but also their biggest fears, and to share what the very real constraints they might be up against. And then where we can help them untangle what is an actual constraint and what is an imagined constraints. But I think that's an important important frame for what we do it is our lines in comparison with some of the other more public work I do true. Building exhibitions or writing or being involved in other organizations public programming, which I all cherish, but I wondered if you do you know, the term desire lines from landscape design and urban design? Because so many of our collaborators and clients and when they first connect with us, kind of scratch their heads and say, what does what is what is the desire line? What does it mean?



Eric Benson 19:03

Yeah, no, and I don't and I, when I first saw it, I thought about is this like, I don't know, it feels like it could be a dating thing. I don't know what to

S

Sarah 19:12

do. Oh, my goodness. So you are not the first I have actually if it's not oversharing I have actually had multiple encounters with with folks at you know, work networking reception. So when we first exchanged name cards, yeah, I have a very different impression of what it is. You do. hilarious because I was this is an example of how our bubbles can blind us to the possible interpretations because I see that happening. I you know, I'm trained as an urban designer and it's a really within urban design, you know, landscape architecture. It's a it's a pretty well known term, which is a desire line or a desire path is a path that is created on the ground. and through the footsteps of pedestrians who, when they choose, oh, short cuts that planners or designers might not have thought they would take?



Eric Benson 20:11

Oh, yeah, yeah. Okay. So there's a book out by the design organization, IDEO, and they, I think it's called like thoughtless acts or something like that. And it's looking at how exactly what you just described how people are actually using objects in space. Got it? Okay, that's actually a

really cool term, then.

S

Sarah 20:32

Yeah, and I think if you, you can take that both literally, I mean, I do have a design background. But I think also understanding as a metaphor, particularly from the perspective of organizations, whether they're government agencies, or private sector businesses, or NGOs, who are trying to understand their position in relation to others that don't understand actually, that you can have these formal intentions of how things are going to work and how you're going to do things. But you also need to appreciate that other people are going to have their intention, their desires, the routes that they want to take. And so investing the time to understand your organization, your program, or even yourself as an individual in relation to all of those other inhabitants of the city or, you know, users of a particular service, etc. So we, I like it as despite the potential for that naughty. Yeah. I do, I think my team and I appreciate it as a sort of metaphor and thinking about how we work together with our partners to think about their transformation journeys.



Eric Benson 22:00

Oh, got it. Got it. You wrote once, in an article that I read online about the possible list to mindset is that something that comes up in your consultants work is because of the way that you're talking about transformation? I'm wondering if that's the possible list mindset?

S

Sarah 22:20

Yes, so I absolutely love this term. It's a term that my co author of my book flourish Michael Pollan, who's an amazing biomimicry, expert and architect based in London. And he and I borrowed it from a public health expert called Hans Rosling. And we've kind of borrowed it from him, and then taking it in our own direction, as happens with terms and culture as they travel. But essentially, the idea of a pastoralist mindset is moving beyond our standard binaries of being an optimist or a pessimist. So if you, you know, if you read yet another news story about gun violence, or you read yet another news story about climate breakdown in a different part of the world, or your own backyard? Do you think do you think the pessimist is Oh, my gosh, this is all going to hell in a handbasket? You know, there's nothing we can do. It's over. Or the optimist might say, Don't worry, Elon Musk and his buddies are going to come up with an amazing tech Vex, and AI is going to sort this out. And if we just hang in there, it's going to be great. And I think what a positive mindset, instead tries to do is to take a closer look at the actual realities of the situation. determine our position in relation to them. So how do we want this situation to resolve itself? Yeah, and then understand our own position in relation to both the realities on the ground and our desired outcome. So the constellation of those three things, and one of the reasons I am so so so excited that you have chosen to use the project drawdown categories of climate action to shape this season, is that I feel like Project drawdown is one of the best examples that one could point to in the climate space of that possible. It's mindset. You know,



Eric Benson 24:50



it'll be glad to hear that way home. So



Sarah 24:52

we do give them a shout out in our book flourish. Oh, good. But I think that it's, you know, it doesn't deny the severity of the challenge that we face. But it sets a very clear path, we want to get to the point of drawdown. And, and they assemble this amazing brain trust of experts from multiple disciplines to think about how each of us in our different categories of work or community or you know, all the different ways that we are human right, not just our professional context, can best contribute towards this shared goal. So it's not a just leave it to the experts. It's not a this is the end of Earth. So yes, so what we what we try to do at is to contribute to both parts of that I'd say that the envisaging what's actually possible. And so I could share one example of that. So some of the work that we do is pro bono, where we work with nonprofits or other and Community Interests organizations, to use our advisory skills to support them, much in the same way that we would with, with our private sector clients, but at a either highly subsidized or pro bono rate. And so one of those, one such project was fairly early on in the company's history and 2018 2019. That's, you know, a pivotal time in terms of climate with IPCC 1.5 degrees report, really, really, really, you know, what we talked about that the signal becoming so clear, and we organized and there was a time when there was large scale global mobilization by organizations like three fifty.org. In the context of Singapore, they sort of street level mode and street level mobile mobilizations that you would see on the streets of a London or a Sydney or at the time Hong Kong, due to our political context here, that's just not possible. And so what we did instead was work with the support of three fifty.org, to think about reorienting that impulse, like wanting to really wanting to be part of that global movement, to create a public art competition for young Singaporean residents between 12 and 25 years old, where we call them to creatively envision societies swift and just transition to a clean and green economy and away from fossil fuels. And this was a way of, I suppose, bringing other people into the conversation, which you could term activist who might not normally



Eric Benson 28:10

would say, so I feel like you're an activist within the system, right?



Sarah 28:13

Yeah, I'm saying for that for the, for the young artists, for example, some of them might never have considered this as a topic I see. Okay, to engage their creative skills. And similarly, we assembled I think, so much of what desire lines do is about pulling people into these different constellations of impact. So the group of people who we assembled to be the judges for the competition, equally, you know, some of them might see themselves as active in the climate space, but others might see themselves as active in contemporary arts or active in design. And so trying to bring so many more people into this conversation to envisage the positive outcome that we want, at the end. And, and not just focus on what we don't want, although obviously, that's a key part of it.



Eric Benson 29:09



ERIC BENSON 29:00

Well, it does sound like with the that particular example, and maybe maybe the others to you're doing, what drawdown Labs is advocating and that every job is a climate job. Right? Without the title or not, right, whatever you're doing, you're connected to this, somehow. Absolutely. And



Sarah 29:27

if you're, you're connected to it, if you if you think that you're not connected to it, you're connected to it, but in a different direction. Right. I think that that framing so positive, every job is the climate job, from a possible US perspective. What are you going to make of that prospect? I mean, another to share one other desire lines project that I can talk about publicly. We were competitively appointed last year to put together the sustainability transformation strategy for the Singapore Furniture Industry Council. And there have a number of trade associations who are active here. And this was a great example of the power of group of businesses from very, very different backgrounds, realizing that they had the power to come together, to think about the direction that they want their industry to move in, in, in alignment with that there's something here called the Singapore green plan for 2030. And that's trying to line up all of Singapore's different sectors towards building a low carbon future. And and this thing, our client, the Singapore Furniture and drink Industry Council, we're wanting to we're really an early adopter and thinking about okay, well, what can what can businesses of all sizes within our membership do to support this transition? And, again, the possible is mindset. We started with mapping and identifying members and stakeholders, tangible needs on the ground, and use that as an opportunity to distill what opportunities or gaps there, there were in current systems and capacities. And so it was really an end to the aspirational bid, right, we identified the key global and local sustainability trends for the industry, and then also looked to identify role models and success cases, from other markets that might be further along in their sustainability transformation journeys, but that have key relevance for Singapore. And I think, because we started by working with them, and they're, I mean, there's such a really, really beautiful client, because they were so willing to be their members as their members are, and empathize with the fact that they are, some of them would be super far along, you know, they could be cited as international best practice in their group green supply chains. And then others are innovative design and innovative materials. And then others are just, you know, a small third generation business who their, you know, their biggest objective for decades has been just like, making payroll. Basic thing Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And the fact that they were willing to work, we're very keen to prioritize understanding the actual profiles and where people's where the real opportunities are, the real gaps were amongst the membership, it's now really exciting a year on to see how they are moving to implement by, you know, really shining a light on those who are cutting edge leading, in terms of, you know, moving towards a green and decarbonize economy. And then, but they're not neglecting, or in any way, shaming those who need more help and investing in the fundamental skills and knowledge base and capacities, that those businesses need to move to the next level. So everyone kind of move together in this shared, shared goal of transformation, but starting from where they are really meeting them where they really were.



Eric Benson 33:33

Wow, okay, that, that sounds like a really well, that project to me sounds like something where you swap out the industry, right? Not not necessarily furniture to, but to something else. And,

and you I could see what you do desire lines, helping all these other industries, too, with that kind of same strategy? Is that kind of how you look at it?

S

Sarah 34:01

We would really, I mean, we would love to read because I think that there's so much more power when we begin to think of ourselves and constellation with others. And then I felt like there was so much more power for us to be engaged by the council than by say, if just one of their larger businesses had engaged us. I see.



Eric Benson 34:25

Well, I want to get to your your new book flourish. I love the title. full title is flourish design paradigms for planetary emergency. You co wrote it with Michael Pollan. And I'm interested in talking more about it because you talk about these regenerative principles to help designers and that's a topic for me that I'm very interested in the idea of regenerative design, and I'm wondering how you define that in the book and maybe that percolates into your consultancy too?

S

Sarah 34:58

Yes, so This was such a wonderful collaboration, I felt so lucky to be able to come together with Michael, again, we'd collaborated on one exhibition in London, before I relocated to Singapore. And then both of us we'd been in touch for, you know, for years. But I think the IPCC 1.5 degrees report really crystallized that thinking in the sense of urgency to think about knitting our ideas together, and then putting them out in the world. And, and it was also spurred on by the growing use of the term regenerative. So, kind of forward thinking practitioners, like the Regenes group, have been talking about regeneration and design and development context for years. But suddenly, we saw this efflorescence of the term being used in relation to fashion say, or very prominently in discussion of agriculture and food systems. And we thought that it was a really opportune time to examine that word and try to put some because we've seen the term sustainability, so devalued, since it first came into the comment, kind of common usage and the 80s. Just think, actually, this new term is gaining traction, is this a key opportunity to examine the mindsets that shape, everything that we do, and re define where we want to go. And based on this fundamental mindset shift, as opposed to a move towards making slightly better codes. Like slightly adjusting regulations. And so that's why that's why we have paradigms in the title that we've Michael and I have assembled, what we see is five key paradigms or mindsets that US embody Regeneration, we know they're not exclusive, we know that others will have have paradigms or principles that they want to contribute to conversation to, and we really welcome that. But for us, there were these five fundamentals. And our overall ambitious definition of regenerative practice is that which supports the flourishing of all life for all time, then this is taking a much more bio inclusive approach moving beyond just the human centric design as the ideal goal, and so designed for all life, and it's taking a much longer view. So for all time moving beyond the quarterly or annual reporting cycles, let alone the 24 hour news cycle, right. And so many of us are bombarded with right there or distracted by. And

we've been really excited it came out a year ago, and I've just been overwhelmed really like it really exceeded both of our expectations in terms of engagement with it, and how it connects with other people's conversations and practices.



Eric Benson 38:34

Well, I like the idea of like these five principles and guests gonna have to read the book to find out but I'll send



Sarah 38:42

you a copy. Okay, yeah,



Eric Benson 38:44

I get the special treatment but or asked of you guys you need to buy. But we



Sarah 38:49

also have, we also have an audio version that's recently come out if I'm for those who



Eric Benson 38:54

do read the book.



Sarah 38:58

We did it. So because it's co authored. We debated this for a long time, but because we really do feel like all of the passages are, it's too you know, it's really our two hands are holding the mouse. Right. And so we went with a voice artist who is female like me, but in English like Michael. Right.



Eric Benson 39:25

Okay, that makes perfect sense. Good job. Yeah. Well, I was interested in the five principles, for many reasons, but one of them was that last season I had on the program, this soil scientists, Lane named Lainey Cygnar. And she proposed the idea of could designers take the five principles of healthy soil and apply that to regenerative design. And so that like, kickstarted tons of ideas for me So I definitely want to read what you two wrote. Because I want to see like, hey, we might be on the same page here about how this all could come to pass.



S

Sarah 40:11

That's so beautiful. And I think one of the really, one of that larger lessons is, how can we look to the rest of nature for new models, new examples, and these can be practical or applied lessons that we can learn in terms of how we design and develop, they can also be metaphorical, right? How we think about things. And I love that idea of looking at soil health because it's, it's it's a way of moving us beyond mechanistic metaphors that often can really hold us back. And but it's interesting, we actually, in the end, I wonder how this relates to in the book we have. We've adapted a matrix from Rodale and Rodale about tendencies towards regeneration, where they look at how tendencies so obviously, agriculture is the field of agriculture is where I think regenerative discourse first entered the industrialize. Yeah, that's what I heard. Yes, exactly. So many of the principles obviously relate directly to indigenous stewardship practices, but as presented, and in our industrialized world, but they wrote and Rodale talk about they kind of look at these different tendencies, whether it's pluralism or protection, or purity, it's all peace. I'll read it out pluralism, protection, purity, permanence, peace, potential and progress. And then they they show how that maps across agriculture, communities and personal life, who after and I think that looking at how we can find these threads of development running across all scales, or running across multiple fields, and of involvement is really, really powerful. So I'm so glad you raised that example of soil.



Eric Benson 42:21

Yeah. I wonder, then, you know, looking to nature is what you just said, and and is that what you want? Whoever reads the book, to be one of your main takeaways from from reading it?

S

Sarah 42:37

Certainly, I think I would want to see that. And embedded in an even deeper mindset shift, which would be understanding ourselves as nature. So we're not adopting an approach like a biophilic approach, which is great, but by a general general theory that biophilic design our nature is good for us. We humans love nature. So let's design more nature into everything that we do. But that still maintains the boundary between understanding ourselves as separate from nature. Similarly, if if interpreted, interpreted narrowly, you could say that biomimetic design so design that learns from and copies from nature, and you could still, again, if it's interpreted narrowly see that as the human is separate from nature? Yeah, that's yes. So the mindset shift that Michael and I are advocating for is actually designing as nature. So understanding ourselves humans, yes, human individuals and human communities as integrated parts of the rest of the web of life. And what does it look like to design when you understand that embeddedness and reciprocity?



Eric Benson 44:04

Yes, we are mammals too. Right. So we should?

S

Sarah 44:09

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I



Eric Benson 44:10

think that is something that when I when I look at biomimicry, I'm inspired by a lot of the things that come out of that, and maybe it's just my misunderstanding of the full, holistic nature of it, but I always feel like they, the solutions I see don't really do what you just described as you're part of you are nature. You're not just mimicking it, right, because I think that mimetic is the key word that I see a lot in biomimicry.



Sarah 44:45

And this is where it's so important to not just take terms at face value, but also spend more time understanding what are common definitions, you know, what do we want this to mean? So Without we can live into that. Yummy. So something like biomimicry, I mean, you don't the amazing, early, early thought leaders in that space like Janine Benyus, or like my co author, Michael Pollan, who is a truly kind of holistic, biomimicry expert, they would always understand it as designing as a part of nature. But if the term travels, and is cherry picked, without that sort of holistic definition, but also the practice that goes with the definition, and carried through, then you end up with this incomplete idea that it's just about it's kind of a form finding exercise. And similarly, you know, we should we should have really clear eyes about, you know, in, in the climate space, that term can already be pretty actively misappropriated. Right. And similarly for regeneration or regenerative design. And you can see a lot of people being excited by the term, but not necessarily investing the time to really go through the necessary fundamental transformations. And so I, for example, don't call myself a regenerative designer, I don't call desire lines or regenerative consultancy, because we are not there yet. That is the that is the end goal. But just like I really love the the research, collective gesturing towards decolonial futures. I don't know if you're familiar with their work, but I think similarly, so far, I'd say that work that I'm doing is gesturing towards regenerative futures, what your your kind of we are living towards we are living towards and into this new way of being, but we have to, we have to avoid over claiming I'd say,



Eric Benson 47:03

Yeah, I agree. I agree with that. Because I even see that with, you know, people who are, like us, right, you know, interested in sustainability, included as part of our work and life and, but we're not, you know, we're not sustainable. We're still working towards that. And yeah, yeah, even in the design classroom, where I am most of the time at work. It is something where I think it's misinterpreted by the students to where it's they don't think of it as a mindset all the time. Some do, of course. But they say, Oh, I did this. And I collected rainwater. So I have a sustainable project. Well, yeah, you did one thing really good, good job. But yeah, there's a whole other thing here. So Well, I wonder too, like you were talking about what you hope to do, in terms of getting to that regenerative future for your work. So what's next, when your work? What's next for desire lines? And are you writing another book that we need to be aware of? Or? What's going on with you?



Sarah 48:09

Oh, thanks for asking. Thanks for asking. And I'd say we're developing in several directions. One is that necessarily during the pandemic period, we did. Our area of impact, I would say, did contract largely to Singapore. And I really, really, really enjoyed all of those initiatives that you've been involved with. But we do strongly ambitions to make sure that Singapore is situated within the context of its broader reach region. I mean, Southeast Asia is incredibly dynamic and diverse place which is also really going to be at the frontlines or is already at frontlines of impacts from the climate emergency. So but there are also so many amazing deep cultural traditions across the region that can help to form some of the basis for a reimagining of how things could be rather than just accepting a kind of industrialized, industrialized framework helicoptered in and dropped down. So we are very keen to build meaningful relationships and partnerships across Southeast Asia. And one of my colleagues is already investing time and in leading that work, and then I am beginning to come to that the space that a lot of elders who I really admire and have learned so much from have kind of they've they've walked the path ethnobotany but fundamentally understanding that the work that we want to realize out in the world is fundamentally interrelated with the work that we need to do. between ourselves, like, you know, between Eric and Farah, and also within ourselves, as individuals, and I have witnessed more times than I can now count how organizations or individuals who are so values aligned in terms of the conversations that they're having publicly they're doing such amazing work, are not really at peace with themselves or in right relation to their colleagues, members of their family, you know, other organizations like



Eric Benson 51:00

you're also like a therapist to,



Sarah 51:02

oh, goodness knows, I'm not sure that I feel called to doing that special work. But oh, my goodness, I have so much respect for for a professional to work in that space. Yeah. But because, you know, we're a small team, we always work in constellation in collaboration with others, that that is definitely an area where we want to forge strong partnerships, because I feel it will fundamentally strengthen that transcend organizational or program transformation work that we're called to, by bringing on board collaborators who can help create that space for people to be truly vulnerable, to really get to the crux of what might be holding back. That transformation that we all want.



Eric Benson 51:53

I think I need to go through your program. I think this sounds really interesting.



Sarah 52:00

Maybe you can join us on CO creating it, Eric. I don't think okay, goes through it.



Eric Benson 52:06



ERIC BENSON 52:00

Yeah, I mean, we're always working on stuff. So



Sarah 52:09

yeah, yeah. Always, always learning. always learning, always transforming.



Eric Benson 52:14

Yeah, you have to, and that mindset that you hope to change. I mean, people have to go through that journey on their own. But having that guidance, clearly will help.



Sarah 52:27

Absolutely having the guidance and having the community to do it in. Yeah, and having having positive examples of the ways in which others have found other individuals or communities or organizations have found their way forward to live, to live towards and into the new mindsets, is always really powerful.



Eric Benson 52:53

I agree. Yeah. Well, I'm excited for you. And I hope this goes really well. And you continue to do great work there. And speaking of work, coming to my last question for you, and it's about my work my job, you are a designer. So you can jump into this question with a little bit more ease, right than maybe some others. But I'm, I'm asking you in this question to assume the role of design educator just for a moment, and you have the opportunity to assign students a project, or organize a whole class and considering all your work and experience, what would you do if I asked you to teach my class?



Sarah 53:38

Oh, my gosh, I have so much like therapist, I have so much respect for design educators, because it really is a it's a huge responsibility. And they have so much respect for my friends and colleagues. I mean, I guess the the easy version would be to say, to try to design it around threaded design, in a way that tries to address each of the five regenerative design paradigms that we identify in flourish. So the first one would be adopting a possible list position in relation to the situation that you're finding yourself in. And the second would be thinking about your role as a designer, as a steward of living systems who's fundamentally embedded within those living systems. So asking the question that Janine Benyus and her consultancy also always ask, what solutions already exist in this place. Then thinking about a longer now, so what is the timeframe? Beyond you know, what is the 10 year timeframe for your project? What is the 50 year timeframe for your project? What is the 100 or 1000 year timeframe for your project? And that doesn't necessarily mean can you perpetuate it for that long, but rather, what changes might we see within the broader system that you're designing into, that might have have grown in response to your design work? Then? How can we think about principles, mutualism,

collaboration, and citizen activism? And in the project, so, so much of design is has traditionally followed a format that's about cultivating competition? And this is about how can your design project benefit others? And how will you in turn, will in turn be strengthened by accepting or inviting the support of others? And then finally, orientating the design brief that you set for yourself towards the ambitious but really, fundamentally existential goal of planetary health? So, so much design is, you know, happens within a context of which we tend to think that what's of most value is contributing to economic growth measured quite crudely. And but how do we think about as we're designing in symbiosis with others, on a longer timeframe, as a part of nature, maximizing our individual capacity to expand our agency and make change in the direction we want? How is that all in service of a broader, thriving planet? So it's a really easy design brief? Eric? I'm sure how many people are gonna prop on like this.



Eric Benson 57:09

They're probably going to be on in a couple days.



Sarah 57:11

Yeah. Done by the weekend?



Eric Benson 57:15

Well, I mean, it's a question worth trying to answer, right. I mean, it definitely is. The was it? trillion dollar question at this point, right. How do we, how do we continue our, our lives on this planet in a way where we can flourish? Right? Well, we're out of time, and I really appreciated this conversation with you. And I'm gonna have to read your book. sooner than later. Now, after hearing all about it, and wanted to ask you where again, we could find you online to learn more about your consultancy and all your work.



Sarah 57:59

Sure, I'd love to hear your thoughts about the book, you can find links to my company desire lines, and also to Michael's in my book flourish, as well as my own personal professional social media accounts. at my website, which is Sarah each yoga all one word.com. So that's SAR H. i c h i O. k.com.



Eric Benson 58:25

Well, thank you again, Sara. It was a pleasure spending time with you today.



Sarah 58:30

Thank you, Eric. I can't wait to listen to the other episodes in this series.



Eric Benson 58:34

Oh, thank you. Well, stay tuned because they'll be coming out soon. Climify is produced, edited and engineered by me. A huge Special thanks to Season Two Ellen Keith Shaw and Christine Pilole for their gorgeous work on our new branding. Batul Rashik. And Marc O'Brien for their continued design how? Bianca Sandiko, as our new podcast manager, and Brandy Nichols and Michelle went for their strategic guidance, and always supporting me on helping to improve the offerings of this podcast. If you enjoy the work, we all do here and you have a spare minute or two. We would truly appreciate it if you left a rating and review over at Apple podcasts. The more folks that review our program, the higher the algorithm pushes up clarity in the search results, and in turn, the more likely we all can learn how to become climate designers.