HERE’S THE STORY

After editing, producing, and at times forcibly coercing every issue of PRAXIS into existence over the last fourteen years, we thought it was time to try a different approach. We invited Ana Miljacki as a guest co-editor to help us break our own mold, partly because of her interest in architectural narratives—a topic which had been floating around our editorial meetings for a few years—and partly to lure her intelligence back into the Praxis fold after a two-issue hiatus from her role as project editor. To this issue, Ana brought not only a keen interest in narrative? new perspectives and insights, but also a mandate that the issue be an “unmediated” one. That is, she insisted that the articles stand as autonomous tales: without introductions, without captions, without intensive image editing. The emphasis on storytelling as a particular form of narrative created a radically different kind of Praxis—one without buildings, but which, we would argue emphatically, does not lack architecture.

The “special” issue, then, contains a collection of “True Stories” told by architects. Missing are the conventional architectural representations or tropes that usually fill the pages of Praxis: plans, sections, renderings, detail drawings, photographs. Nor will the reader find our familiar format, with images and analytical text curated to educe particular aspects of a project or the design process. Instead, we relinquished control to our contributors, allowing them to author their own stories in their own voice. Their stories employ a range of techniques, that we discovered could be roughly categorized into four identifiable types: the novel, the comic, the storybook, and the film. While by no means a definitive or exhaustive taxonomy, these four categorizations resonated with the contemporary, experimental work that we identified and selected for the issue, as well as with familiar extra-disciplinary genres. Understanding them as types also enabled us to conceptualize and graphically distinguish them within the space of this journal.

Although theoretically, we strove to produce an unmediated issue, the translation of any story into a standardized journal format requires some manipulation. The comics and storybooks—including Wes Jones’s Nelsons, resurrected after a long absence following their life in the pages of *ANY*, and fantastical worlds created by Jimenez Lai and Katie Shima—combine text and image on the page, and in this sense remain relatively close to a normative architectural journal article, even if the representations themselves are far from traditional architectural conventions. The films posed the greatest challenge to print translation. All are printed on high gloss paper, with a black background, though they use different approaches to incorporate this non-architectural medium into print. The videos that accompanied the MoMA Foreclosed Exhibition are almost documentary in format, and are therefore represented through select images of the figures interviewed. Whereas with MOS’s film, with its slow-moving pans and subtle lighting shift, we attempted to capture a series of still images that focused on, fictionalized architecture itself as the protagonist . The stories we categorized as fictions seem farthest from conventional architectural storytelling methodologies, as they conjure images rather than actually employing them. Keith Mitnick appropriates the form of the novel as an architectural trope, while FKAA, in a more blatant act of appropriation, bordering on plagiarism, offers architectural strategies for “argumentation;” the article becomes a fiction about crafting fictions.

Two decades ago, Mark Wigley claimed storytelling as the territory of not just architectural theorists but all architects and ultimately all architecture. He pointed out that students are trained to tell stories about their own buildings, critics tell stories about other architects’ buildings, and buildings themselves are “megaphones” telling their own stories. Underlying Wigley’s polemic was a desire to legitimize the emergent field of architectural theory as an activity equal to a design practice, and to challenge the burgeoning ossification of the theory/practice (we might say writing/building) divide, calling for a more fluid definition and operation of both. Today as we find a re-emergence of architectural narrative in a vastly altered disciplinary landscape, what can these stories that don’t speak of buildings tell us and what can we tell about these stories? In a landscape where the more conceptual pursuits of history and theory are marginalized in favor of the more prosaic and demanding exigencies of practice (particularly software and sustainability) storytelling enables an experimental practice inhabiting a space between writing and building liberated from the weight of either. Storytelling itself is becoming a form of architectural practice. Perhaps we have exceeded, or perhaps circumvented, Wigley’s provocation. (need one more sentence)

Maybe we could say: Perhaps we have seen Wigley’s provocation taken to its extreme, but logical, conclusion. The end.