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 Miljački 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. Ana brought 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. These stories employ a range of techniques that, we discovered after the fact, can 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 “The Nelsons”, resurrected after a long absence following its life in the pages of *ANY*, and the 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 defy traditional architectural conventions. The films posed the greatest challenge to print translation; the articles are all printed on high gloss paper, with a black background, but they use different approaches to incorporate this non-architectural medium into print. Just as Bruce Mau’s ciné-roman, *La Jetée* captures a film of still images that becomes the book, the print version of MOS’s “Romance of Systems” attempts to capture the temporality of the slow caress and allow the reader to focus on the narrative drama. The videos that accompanied the MoMA “Foreclosed” exhibition are almost documentary in format, and are therefore represented through select images of the figures interviewed. 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 taught to tell stories about their buildings, critics tell stories about other architects’ buildings, and buildings themselves are “megaphones” for their 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 prosaic exigencies of practice (particularly software and sustainability) storytelling occupies an experimental space between writing and building, liberated from the weight of either. Perhaps we have seen Wigley’s provocation taken to its extreme, but logical, conclusion. The end.