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 change our approach. For this issue, we invited Ana Miljacki as a guest co-editor, partly because of her interest in the idea of architectural narratives—which had been floating around our editorial meetings for a few years—and partly as a way to bring her intelligence back into the Praxis fold after a two-issue hiatus from her role as project editor. Ana brought to bear not only her expertise on the topic of architectural storytelling, but a mandate that the issue be an“unmediated”one. That is, that the articles—each its own architectural story—stand as autonomous tales: without introductions, without captions, without intensive image editing. The emphasis on storytelling as particular form of narrative created a unusual, radically different, and indeed “special” 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 that amount to a compilation of narrative techniques (fiction, comic, storybook, film). 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 standard article layout, with spreads carefully orchestrated and curated to educe particular aspects of a project, or frame a portion of the design process. This is how Praxis typically tells the story of a project, and it involves many months of editorial teeth-gnashing, back and forth with architects and our designer, tweaks and modifications. Instead, in this issue we’ve relinquished control and allowed the authors tell the stories themselves, so we hear their voices, rather than ours. Our aim is to focus on contemporary storytelling techniques across a range of methodologies.

(awkward transition??)

As we collected material four narratives types emerged post-facto: the novel, the comic, the storybook and the film. While architects tell stories in other ways these four resonated with the contemporary, experimental work we found, and with familiar genres. Each of these storytelling methods forms a part of our everyday, non-architectural lives, but when deployed in the context of the design disciplines, produces a new way of <producing architecture, designing?>

While conceptually we accomplished an unmediated issue, the mere translation of any story into the standardized print of a journal required some manipulation. As narrative types, the comics and storybooks combine both text and image on the page, and thus remain relatively close to a normative architectural journal article, even if the representations themselves are far from the conventions of architecture. Wes Jones’s Nelsons—resurrected after a long hiatus following their ANY demise—made popular and possible the comic form as an aspect of architectural critique. Lai and Shima’s work adopts and references the conventions of architectural representation—namely plans and sections—in their storytelling, while simultaneously critiquing them in the stories the representations tell. Keith Krumwiede’s story submits contemporary developer suburbia to the formal principles of the founding fathers' idealism, with plans of the absurd and totalizing Freedomland, assembled from developer homes.

The films and videos posed the greatest challenge to translate into print. As Bruce Mau’s ciné-roman La Jette captures a film of still images that becomes the book, MOS's this print version of MOS’s Romance of attempts to capture the temporality of the slow caress and allow the reader to focus on the narrative drama. Printed on high gloss paper, with a black background, this and the other film articles use different approaches to incorporate this non-architectural medium into print. While the videos that accompanied the MoMA Foreclosed Exhibition are almost documentary in format, explaining the architecture or the process of its making, MOS’s films stand as a fictional story of the architecture as protagonist. itself

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, even plagiarism, offer architectural strategies for “argumentation” so the article becomes a fiction about crafting fictions. (can you put in something about kazys??)

Mark Wigley once described architectural theory as a kind of “storytelling”—theory was a way of telling stories about architecture. Underlying Wigley’s polemic was a desire to assert theory as an equal to practice to legitimize the emergent field of architectural theory. He argued that all architects and ultimately all architecture was a form of storytelling—students are trained to tell stories about their buildings, buildings are “megaphones” telling their own stories. Wigley challenged the growing ossification of the theory/practice (we might also say writing/building) divide, calling for a more fluid definition and operation of both. Almost twenty years later, can we say that the re-emergence of architectural narrative responds to Wigley’s provocation, and what new questions do these stories provoke? At least we can tell the story of how w have partially arrived at a disciplinary moment when the theorists aren’t simply telling stories about architecture, nor are buildings trying to tell stories about themselves. The stories have become the architecture.