

PRAXIS

CREATING

TRUE STORIES

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14

5

Title

by Amanda Reeser Lawrence
and Ashley Schafer

6

Title

by Ana Miljacki

9-16

**Elegant Strategies for
Agonistic Architectural
Argumentation**

by FKAA

17-32

Film and the Museum

by Barry Bergdoll and
Reinhold Martin with PRAXIS

33-40

Living Machines

by Katie Shima

41-48

**Store of Science: The Milgram
Experiment/Small Worlds**

by Kazys Varnelis and
Robert Sumrell

73-88

**Freedomland: Speculation
on Another America**

by Keith Krumweide

65-72

The Romance of Systems

by MOS

49-64

Kindergarten Tales

by Jimenez Lai

97-104

Makin it...

A Situation Comedy

by John McMorrough

121-128

**Remember
the Nelsons?**

by Wes Jones

89-96

Rainy Sea

by Keith Mitnik

105-120

**The Absolute Skyscraper:
A Magical-Realist Epic**

by Carlos Tiexera



HERE'S THE STORY

ASHLEY SCHAFFER AND AMANDA REESER LAWRENCE

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 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 or analytical text carefully 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, but in the end we found that they could be 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. They also enabled us to conceptualize and graphically distinguish them within the space of this journal

Although conceptually 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. While the videos that accompanied the MoMA *Foreclosed* Exhibition are almost documentary in format, and are therefore represented through select images of the figures interviewed, MOS's film, with its slow-moving pans and subtle lighting shift 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.

Mark Wigley once described not just architectural theory but all architects and ultimately all architecture as telling stories. 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 a practice equal to building, 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. Almost twenty years later, with a re-emergence of architectural narrative in a vastly altered disciplinary landscape, what can these stories tell us? It seems to us that the stories in this issue suggest a new disciplinary moment when the stories no longer need relate to a building proper, when the telling of the story itself has become a legitimate or at least a recognized form of architectural practice. Perhaps we have exceeded, or perhaps circumvented, Wigley's provocation. (need one more sentence)

NOT EVERYTHING, NOT ALL AT ONCE

ANA MILJACKI

Recall for a moment the image of Charles Jencks's 1971 evolutionary tree—a hybrid of futurological prediction and trend assessment—one of those sexy images that circulates through architectural discourse via books, lectures, blogs, and, currently, flickr. It is a cognitive map, as Fredric Jameson might have wished for, not just for postmodern life in general, but for navigating the contemporary architectural plurality.

It still “sort of” works, as well as it ever did, its hilarious authority bestowed upon it via graphic connotations. The X axis presents history, and the Y axis a stylistic pulse that Jencks identifies in the projects, all rendered in the ultimate architectural history flowchart. It moves from big words on the left—Logical, Idealist, Self-Conscious, Intuitive, Activist, Unselfconscious—to ever-smaller ones (including some individual architects' names) on the right.

If you look closely at the retouched version (2000) you will find Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin in the category called Unselfconscious, a category that, Jencks will explain, comprises 80% of the environment. You will find Peter Eisenman in a special bubble within the Logical band, together with Norman Foster and Ernesto Rogers in the 1970s (high-tech and cardboard architecture made perversely intimate with one another), and then Eisenman again at a strange junction of Intuitive and Activist in the late 1980s. Around the same time, and hanging to the side of activism, Rem Koolhaas (qualified by Generic Architecture), Mack Scogin, and Zaha Hadid occupy a common (aptly) irregular blotch.

Eisenman's work did indeed change over time, and he has been the first one to try to explain its evolving meaning, so the fact that he occupies different spots in Jencks's flowchart is not totally random (surprising?), but it is hard to escape the feeling that the closer one looks at the chart, the further any sense of historical certainty recedes. What the “Evolutionary Tree” does accomplish, in direct opposition to its promise of rendering speciation visible, is an ultimate evacuation of meaning from the big words on the left.

Words pile up, patches of black unite them, patches of white separate them, and together they spatialize time. This intriguing drawing has to be seen as a symptom of postmodernism rather than as a tool for surviving it. Its contemporary appeal mirrors a collective nostalgia for a cognitive map, while it in fact actively performs (in its own way) the destabilizing destruction of meta-

narratives, not in a spectacular way, just simply by relying on the flow chart's scientificity rather than on any type of verifiable (and often not even conventional) history of twentieth-century architectural production. So then why start here?

Because indeed both the hope that one could map the field for the purposes of navigating (or teaching) it, as well as the dizzying swirl of words in Jencks's attempt to do so, equally haunt the bubble of US contemporary academic architectural discourse. It is hardly Jencks's fault, but his image did capture—indeed it predicted—the plurality of concerns that corresponds to our own (it is only fair to credit him with this). Commensurate with the complexity of issues that define our time, most architects today work on a million different platforms simultaneously—and some even articulate this as their project. But of course, things would be simpler, at least in architecture schools, if someone would finally enumerate, or resuscitate, one or two ideas about our disciplinary core (preferably ontological, but conventional would do as well, as long as it did not sound too much like NAAB).

The loss of certainty is not something to mourn (we are repeatedly told), and yet that momentous time when early postmodern theory was a bloodbath of meta narratives seems sufficiently distant to allow nostalgia for “grand narratives” and even harbor a suspicion about their ultimate disappearance. After all, we realize on a daily basis that gender, race, class, and religion shape the world we live in even if the discourse about them may seem more tentative and pedestrian than at an earlier point in time.

Once nostalgia is on the table, Jencks's flowchart gets reanimated not only as the mirror image of that contemporary want for clarity that was never experienced by those who mourn it (nor perhaps by those who appear to have had it), but indeed, as an allegory of dismantlement, and by the same token of the persistence of narratives, even if atomized, redistributed, repressed, and retooled.

In a more recent, and by many accounts more deadly, blow to modernism than Jencks's, Bruno Latour told us that “certainty” was always a contrivance of sorts. After critiquing modernism's legacy of reductive categorization, rigid binary oppositions, misguided supremacy of the rational, and egotistical supremacy of man (over nature), he concluded that the world was never modern, even as the moderns represented and intervened in it as if it had been. Now as much as one might agree with Latour (and I do)

on a number of points of his critique, here and elsewhere, the final twist of his argument knocks the wind out of modernism indeed, but with it, as inevitable collateral damage, also goes the necessary pairing of representing and intervening in the world. This pairing happens to be constitutive of all creative work, as some version of representation secures the authority (and grounds the hope) with which one intervenes in the world. The idea that modernist scientists, politicians, and architects imagined that some of their intellectual (and aesthetic) prejudices had the status of ontological truths is separable from the fact that the world has to be conceptualized and narrated—simply or complexly—in order for actions within it to have meaning. This is to say that the particular content, or values, of the moderns can be critiqued against our own contemporary concerns, but even if we accept that we are now far more conscious of the entanglements and complexity of relationships between humans and non-humans, things and systems, actions and abstractions then our modern predecessors, without some form of imposed hierarchy onto that complexity, a cognitive map of sorts, or at least a story, no form of intentionality registers.

At a time when the archives are vast and ever expanding—and by this I mean both our general access to information and our disciplinary archives (scholarly, blogged, and leaked)—histories are made and remade instantly, as plausible cuts through those archives. Storytelling then has to be seen as having particularly important navigational and propositional capacities. It might not require a full-fledged position, but it requires a point of view and commitment to produce and, even more, a commitment to produce well. So even when it remains deeply personal, a story comes closer to a position than our contemporary flashes of judgment delivered as “liking,” “pinning,” or “tumbling.”

The ambition of this PRAXIS is far narrower than the general predicament I suggest above. Instead of revisiting postmodernism and thinking about how to reconstitute if not meta- then medium-level legitimating narratives that operate on par with practice (such as activism, optimization, new beginnings) we decided to collect stories that propose alternative endings. We collected architectural stories that more and less comfortably meld fictional, projective, and critical elements with the hope that their synthetic storytelling is key for propelling us beyond the impasses of excessive information, fast recycling, and propositional emptiness. In each of these pieces different lines of criticality and projection coexist. Importantly, storytelling here allows, and demands, style: it is harder to farm out to a renderer; it offers resistance, although at times it might obscure things too (even dangerously.) But that is the point of storytelling. Not everything, not all at once. Even if one cares about many things simultaneously—and today it is hard not to —composing a story imposes order and judgment on all the pieces that went into it in the first place.

The Praxis 14 stories are truly that...true stories. Parts of them are based on real facts and projects, and their effects may be very real as well, though they hardly hold the status of facts. Although some contain research, the findings are not presented didactically.

The most important takeaway from True Stories, is that telling a story requires commitment. Stories that were meant to be told,

that were constructed to be told, like the ones collected in this issue of Praxis, for a moment highlight a position. And finally, the ambiguity of the stories we collected (both gloomy and easy, free and unfree, pleasurable and damning) speaks not only to the impossibility of neatly resolving critique and projection, but also of a particularly contemporary comfort with their dialectical contradiction and coexistence. However retooled, post-produced, and mashed-up contemporary architectural narratives might be, it is in them that fragments of utopia still live, as points of view and as style. So perhaps “liking” and “pinning,” despite my earlier pessimism (regarding these contemporary judgement flashes,) may be the first step towards assembling around and consolidating new arguments. If a story can have a fan it can also have a following and provoke further stories into existence.

NOTES

1. This title is in direct conversation with MOS architects’ “Everything, All at Once.” For the record, I more than appreciate their qualification of their project in this way, and find it aptly contemporary. Underpinned by some of the same issues as “Everything All at Once,” its opposite, “Not Everything, Not All At Once” highlights the need to plot a specific path through contemporary complexity, even if momentarily, and for the sake of a clearer, even if affected position.
2. Original map appeared in Charles Jencks, *Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods* (New York: Praeger, 1971) and the most recent reworked version in Charles Jencks, “The Century is Over, Evolutionary Tree of Twentieth-Century Architecture” *Architectural Review*, July 2000, p. 77. See also the flicker presentation of the 2000 remake at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/archidose/3088862107/> (Last accessed, Sept 22 2013). The map has been recently discussed by Mark Wigley, in “Whatever Happened to Total Design” *Harvard Design Magazine*, Summer 1998, Number 5, and in Reinhold Martin, *Utopia’s Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
3. I am being ironic here.
4. See Bruno Latour, *We have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
5. This view is an impatient simplification of Latour’s entire body of work, in which he is consistently interested in a collective construction or re-construction of values (around various and overlapping matters of concern) and simultaneous preservation of complexities of interconnectedness between all things. At the risk of repeating some of the mistakes of the moderns then I invoke representing an intervening in order to highlight the need for even the most fleeting representational reduction of the real complexities that surround every action, precisely in order to act.

Contributors/Credits

BARRY BERGDOLL

Wes Jones is a partner in Jones, Partners: Architecture, an award-winning, California-based architectural practice known for technologically inspired design. Jones' work has been exhibited widely and can be found in the permanent collections of MoMA, SFMoMA, CCA, and FrAC. Princeton Architectural Press recently published their second monograph of his work, titled *El Segundo*. A recipient of the Rome Prize and Arts and Letters Award in Architecture from the American Academy of the Arts and Letters, Jones was recently named one of the Top 30 Educators in the country in the Design Intelligence Survey of Architectural Education.

Fake Industries Architectural Agonism (FKAA) is an entity of variable boundaries and dubious taste that explores the potential of Replicas for the advancement in the field. The ensemble, orchestrated by Cristina Goberna and Urtzi Grau, relentlessly questions the value originality while investigates productive disagreement as engine to open up discussions through architecture. Recent projects include the new National Velodrome in Medellin Colombia, the renovation of the Mining Village of Aldea Moret, Spain and the OE House in Alforja, Spain. Its work has been published widely including the magazines *Scapegoat*, *Studio Magazine*, *Spam*, *Bauwelt*, *Pasajes Arquitectura*, *Domus*, *Plot*, *Future*, *AV Proyectos*, *The New City Reader*, *Le Journal Speciale'Z* and it has exhibited in different international venues such as the la Biennale di Venezia, the Buenos Aires Biennial, The Shenzhen-Hong Kong Biennial, the 0047 Gallery in Oslo and the Architectural League of New York, Storefront for Art and Architecture etc.

Keith Krumwiede is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Architecture Programs at the College of Architecture and Design at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. He received his B.A. from the University of California at Berkeley and his M.Arch. from the Southern California Institute of Architecture. Current projects include *Gross Domestic Product*, a book about the recent history of the ultimate American consumer product, the single-family house, and *Freedomland: An Architectural Fiction and Its Histories*, a satirical settlement scheme that examines the competing goals and desires that define contemporary American culture. *Freedomland* has been exhibited at the Woodbury University Hollywood Gallery in Los Angeles and Pinkcomma Gallery in Boston. Recent essays include "The Bauhaus Tweets" in *Log 22: The Absurd* and "(A)Typical Plan(s)" in *Perspecta 43: Taboo*. Prior to teaching at NJIT, he was Assistant Dean at Yale University School of Architecture, where he was awarded the King-Lui Wu Award for Distinguished Teaching.

Jimenez Lai is the Leader of Bureau Spectacular and an Assistant Professor at University of Illinois at Chicago. Previously, Lai lived and worked in a desert shelter at Taliesin and resided in a shipping container at Atelier Van Lieshout on the piers of Rotterdam. Lai's work has been widely exhibited, including the White Elephant, which has been collected by the Museum of Modern Art. His first manifesto, *Citizens of No Place*, was published by Princeton Architectural Press with a grant from the Graham Foundation. In 2012, Lai is an award-winning architect, including the Architectural League Prize for Young Architects (2012) and the inaugural Debut Award at the Lisbon Triennale (2013). Lai will be representing Taiwan to build the National Pavilion at the 14th Venice Architectural Biennale in 2014.

REINHOLD MARTIN

MOS

Keith Mitnick works with Mireille Roddier. Favorite projects from their design practice include: a pavilion that joins split views of opposite directions in Tulsa; a garden that reflects itself to infinity in Chaumont-sur-Loire; and most recently- an empty space in Ohio that cast shadows in three directions. Mitnick's first book, *Artificial Light*, was published by Princeton Architectural Press in 2008, and he is currently finishing his second book, *Rainy Sea*, from which the article in this issue has been adapted. He teaches at the University of Michigan.

Katie Shima (MArch Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation) is an artist and designer based in New York City. Katie has had exhibitions, installations, and performances at Bridge Gallery, Mighty Tanaka Gallery, Charles Bank Gallery, and others in New York City as well as D.A.K. in Denmark. Katie is a founding member of the electronic noise art group Loud Objects and currently works as an architectural designer at Situ Studio.

Carlos Teixeira graduated in architecture and has a Masters Degree at the Architectural Association. He founded Vazio S/A in 2002 and published the books "Under construction: history of the void in BH" (Cosac Naify, 1999), "O Condomínio Absoluto" (for The ultimate skyscraper, C/Arte, 2009), and *Entre: Architecture from the Performing Arts* (Artifice Books, 2012). His work was already exhibited at the V&A Museum (London), Sao Paulo Architecture Biennial; Pavillion of l'Arsenal (Paris); IX Architecture International Biennial of Venice; the RIBA (London), Sao Paulo International Art Biennial, among other venues.

studioAPT (Architecture Project Theory): In the pursuit of "aptitude", studioAPT schemes at a variety of scales, combining the expeditious and the unexpected into efforts including architectural design, graphics, residential plans, and a variety of researches, diatribes and instruction sets. Julia McMorrough is Associate Professor of Practice at Taubman College at the University of Michigan, and has worked professionally since 1992 in architecture firms in Kansas City, New York, Boston, and Columbus, Ohio, frequently as lead designer on projects throughout the country. She is a co-founder of the research and design collaborative studio-APT, and is the author of *Materials, Structures, and Standards: All the Details Architects Need to Know But Can Never Find*, for which a second edition is forthcoming. John McMorrough is a cofounder of the design/research practice studio-APT and Chair of the Architecture Program at the University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. As an architect John has worked for design offices in Kansas City, New York, Boston and Rotterdam, and has taught theory and design at the Yale School of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Ohio State University, and the Institute of Architecture at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, Austria. His current writings on contemporary design include treatments of supergraphics, pedestrian malls, and the apocalypse.

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