

A Tailored Reality: Inside In Here

Publishing, a discipline which encompasses the creation of both the content and form of a book, has played a central role in the development of architectural practice as we know it today. From antiquity, through the strange awakenings of the Renaissance and the innovations of the 20th century, the framing of books as generators of discourse, has been integral to a version of the discipline in which architects conceive ideas about architecture alongside architectural designs.⁽¹⁾ Night Kitchen is a practice that actively explores the production of books, particularly picturebooks, which are guided by postmodern spatial logics, made possible by the format's interplay of verbal and visual components, a condition which has intriguing implications for architectural imagery when utilized as a means of disseminating designs.

Conceived as a design research practice with dual home-studios in London and Athens, Night Kitchen defies conventional boundaries, encompassing architectural designing, publishing and collecting. Its studios serve as domestic-office-archives housing repositories of found artifacts and popular cultural ephemera. Established to explore the creative potential of the supposed gaps between binary understandings of fact and fiction, framed through the lens of imaginary picturebooks that both display and are displayed within the studio's speculative imagery, the work produced by Night Kitchen blends the tangible reality of the real-world with the fantastical realms of fiction, in order to explore the indeterminate exchanges that occur between narrative realms, designing and making. The incorporation of items acquired from other fictional worlds and related spheres, including screen-used cinematic props and the personal belongings of key inspirational figures, adds a hauntological layer to this practice, with this approach to design exploration allowing for stories and fabrications to be imbued with elements from the cultural past giving agency and value to the opaque relationships between the real and the imagined. These objects are incorporated into the act of storytelling, folded into the development of design and the production of words and images. The resultant imagery is often saturated with wider narratives and indeterminate relationships, acting as a mediating link between the mundanity of the studio space and more mythical realms.

These tales serve as repositories in a way that mirrors the cluttered spaces in which they are conceived, the picturebook being used as a site for the past to latently intermingle with the present, and for the real to overlap with the imagined. In doing so, the format emerges as an unexpected medium for exploring the implicit possibilities and spectral interplays of design representation. Key to this is a fluid mixing of the verbal and the visual, the spatial and the temporal, objects and images, and the magical and the practical, with this interweaving taking place in the gaps usually expected to sit between these criteria, engaging architecture not just as a collection of physical elements, but as an uncertain cache of histories and resonances. A key element of the studio's work are considerations on the significance of publishing for the history of architectural practice, and the implications of engaging in the production of a different kind of book in connection with the specifics of a different kind of practice.

IMAGE 1.

Reading space: The bookishness of books

The popularity of picturebooks gradually grew during the 20th century, with the format being defined by its interconnected visual and textual narratives. Notable figures in this history include Beatrix Potter, Dr. Seuss and Maurice Sendak, illustrator-authors whose work is likely to be familiar to any former child. According to Sendak, whose publications have since been studied extensively, the perception of these books as being for children resulted in their being undervalued as an art form. Consequently, the format was pigeonholed into the nursery until scholarship in the 1970s and 80s began to take their peculiarities as a focus of serious inquiry,(2) with key figures, such as Perry Nodelman asking 'what happened when words accompanied pictures and pictures accompanied words'.(3) An established literary scholar, Nodelman found himself perplexed when attempting to describe the interactions within the picturebooks he encountered after being tasked with teaching a children's literature course. The deeper Nodelman delved into the subject the more he observed unique relationships between words and images. In contrast to traditional illustrated tales, the imagery in picturebooks is not 'solely at the service of the image'.(4) Instead, the images convey something that words alone cannot communicate in the development of a narrative. The particularity of these relationships led Nodelman to conclude that picturebooks encourage a unique form of thinking.(5) Noted scholar Barbara Bader recognized the format's value as hinging on the limitless potential within its interrelated yet simultaneously independent words and images.(6)

The arrival of the fourth and fifth dimensions.

Since the work of Bader and Nodelman, the interplays central to picturebooks have evolved, becoming more complex. Of particular interest is the influence of postmodernism on the peritextual, intertextual and spatial possibilities that arise from the nonstandard layouts and picturebook-specific spatial strategies which have been used to enable interplays between fictional and real space. Traditionally picturebooks relied on an approach where 'the words tell us what the pictures do not show, and the pictures show us what the words do not tell us',(7) the images and text occupied separate realms on the page, this is often still the case. This graphic segregation can also be observed, albeit differently, in the standardized format of contemporary architectural publications, which are indebted to the conventions of early European book culture, when a book's content was prioritized over its physical form.(8) However, in postmodern picturebooks, the realms of text, image and reader often meet in the margins and the in-between spaces of the layout, courtesy of a format-specific conception of the fourth dimension – 'the (liminal/marginal) space shared between the image and the audience,' and a fifth dimension – 'a spatial area that exists beneath the physical page of the book'.(9) The words that you, the reader, are reading right now have a direct material relationship with these realms.

Night Kitchen develop fictional publications which can only be found in the imagery that accompanies their academic writing. Examples such as *Solid Tinsel* and *Zero Carbon Judy Garland*, pages and spreads from which can be found in images 5, 7 and 8, explore the spatial logics at play in recent picturebook scholarship while rethinking the conventions of the domestic architectural project, developing an alternative approach in which the act of designing and the generation of architectural elements produce a form of content, with the layout and sequencing of these fictional books being an extended spatial concern to the spaces they appear within around.

Aspects of this extend architecture's 'entwined relationship between the physicality of built work and the immaterial'(10). An incorporation of the fourth and fifth dimensions explores depictions of the printed format as a mediating link between different realities. They allow textual and visual characters, and objects, to bleed between realms. Aspects of images sometimes transgress the frames they would traditionally be expected to reside in, being allowed to step out of a standardized page space and into a realm halfway between the story that constitutes their world and the book that contains them within ours. Whether in books or through the depiction of books, Night Kitchen's designs complicate various boundaries as part of the wild rumpus of the in-between, signalling a multiplicity of readings and meanings. They carry realities between realities, stories within stories, and issues of AD across issues of AD.

Fantasies grounded ten feet deep in reality.

Such work draws attention to its fictitious nature, and its own picturebookishness, through further strategies, with imagery often making intertextual efforts to make spectral allusions to the work of others through an appropriation of the places and elements from different tales. Also brought in are real-world objects acquired from other factual and fictional situations – the yellow cup and blue-green saucer that can be seen in *Solid Tinsel* were obtained from the café used for the filming of Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amelie*, with the copy of 'The Methods of Henry James' that appears nearby,(11) having been bought at auction from the collection of Maurice Sendak's personal library - its pages releasing the smell of his smoking habit when opened and referred to, the olfactory shadow and spectral visitation of primary source of inspiration.

IMAGE 7

IMAGE 3

Contained within an as-yet-unpublished manuscript titled 'The Available Stock of Reality: A Vade Mecum', intended to be developed in the imagery of future design research, is a catalogue of the various memorabilia that is gradually filling these studios - acquired through hours, months, and years on various auction sites. A fascination with letters and notes has given rise to something of an unusual epistolary — a reverie of intercepted correspondence and handwritten missives that embraces the written word of both real and fictional characters. Displayed on a wall, an 1860 letter from the sculptor Félicie de Fauveau resides

alongside a collection of handwritten letters sent by Muhammad Ali. A note from Janet Jackson can be found next to doodles by Maurice Sendak. The letters received by Adonis in a pivotal moment of Creed III are stored beside a cheque signed by the Tin Man from Oz. This collection resides at the confluence of fact and fiction, where the artifacts of actual individuals and events hold equal value to items from cinematic franchises.

Recent reappraisals of collecting as an art form have identified the practice as a complex realm of research, care and preservation.⁽¹²⁾ It has also been seen as an act of ‘world-acquisition’ with the philosopher Norbert Hinske describing this as *Weltaneignung*, which can be understood as meaning to allow oneself to be enchanted by the world.⁽¹³⁾ Unlike traditional collectors, who procure rather than create, Night Kitchen's approach differs. Objects are acquired for the sake of a creative integration, with the placement of such objects within the work using them as catalysts for the development of ideas and narratives, while hinting at unspoken connections, as an agency to explore myth, story and the imagined. As such, the studio's drawings and books serve as hauntological repositories for other fictions in a way that echoes the space these narratives are developed in. For those who see them, these elements bring the fictionality of the work to the forefront. Through this inclusion of real-world objects which encapsulate wider narratives, and the way the studio's rethinking of the domestic plays within and around the liminal spaces of their chosen format, Night Kitchen's twofold approach aims to narrow the gap between history, other fictions and the reader, as a critical exploration of where fact and fiction are expected to sit in relation to one another. The studio's work holds the traces of multiple moments, as further games take place in the fourth and fifth dimensions – this is a practice where being pushed into the margins might be no bad thing.

IMAGE 8

References:

- 1 - Mike Aling, ‘Publishing as Architectural Practice’, *Design Ecologies*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2017, p 86.
- 2 - Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz*, BFI Publishing (London), 1992 p. 18
- 3 - Naomi Hamer et al, *More Words about Pictures*, Routledge (London), 2017, p. 1
- 4 - Torsten Schmiedeknecht et al, *Building Children's Worlds: The Representation of Architecture & Modernity in Picturebooks*, Routledge (London), 2023, p. 3
- 5 - Hamer, op cit p. 3
- 6 - Barbara Bader, *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*, Macmillan (London), 1977, p. 8
- 7 - Lawrence R. Sipe & Sylvia Pantaleo (eds), *Postmodern Picturebooks*, Routledge (London), 2016, p. 9
- 8 - B. Cormack & C. Mazzio, *Book Use, Book Theory, 1500-1700*. University of Chicago Press (Chicago). 2005, p. 2
- 9 – ibid
- 10 - Marian Macken, *Binding Space: The Book as Spatial Practice*, Routledge (London), 2018, p.25

11 - Joseph Warren Beach, *The Methods of Henry James*, Yale University Press, 1918

12 - Kevin Melchionne, 'Collecting as an Art' in *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 23, Number 1, 1999, pp. 148-156

13 - ibid, p. 150

Image captions:

Image 1:

Night Kitchen, Beneath the Glitter, 2024.

Night Kitchen write, design and illustrate publications that can only be found within the worlds communicated by their imagery. Intermingled with such approaches will often be visual citations to wider academic influences.

Image 2:

Night Kitchen, Beneath the Glitter, 2024.

Night Kitchen confronts the mundane with the magical, reimagining the domestic and realities that coexist. Images such as this will often be developed within book layouts placed in further exploratory imagery, in an uncertain intertwining of fact and fiction.

Image 3:

Night Kitchen, A fictional picturebook for a fictional picturebook, 2023.

A spread from 'The Right Side of Paradise', an imagined work of fiction that regularly appears in imagery created to complement the studio's academic writings. A spread from 'Beneath the Glitter', a similar fictional title, can be seen in the reflection of the book stand's mirror.

Image 4:

Night Kitchen, An excerpt of a working process, 2023.

Night Kitchen often explores the design process itself within the development of narratives. The initial notes and studies for this scene are included here as a part the image they contributed to, with the image becoming an artefact haunted by its own process.

Image 5:

Night Kitchen, Zero Carbon Judy Garland, 2023.

Images and spaces act as repositories for various narratives and worlds. Here, a telegram to Judy Garland appears here next to mail received in Sc.90 of Creed III, intertwined with the development of a layout.

Image 6:

Night Kitchen, Beneath the Glitter, 2024.

Night Kitchen's reimagining of their studio environment serves as the backdrop for the development of their narratives. By way of making a direct appearance as characters, the designers themselves frequently become integral elements of these stories

Image 7:

Night Kitchen, Solid Tinsel, 2023.

Turning the page to reveal a fifth dimension, the elements of other tales appear in an image alongside a book on Henry James once owned and referred to by Maurice Sendak in the development of his own work. Sendak is often considered to be the 20th century's most seminal picturebook artist.

Image 8:

Night Kitchen, Zero Carbon Judy Garland, 2024.

'Just Landed', a frontispiece for one of the fictional books the studio have developed as a part of their design research. Here, a domestic scene is utilised for the placement of peritext.