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Translated from German by Julien Topal

Recognition-signs, word-signs, Passwords, Solutions*

In recent years the representation of the model has become disproportionate in the Arts. This devotion of the artist to these 'model-sculptures' is connected to parallel developments in industrial manufacturing and the enhanced possibilities in Virtual Simulation. This thrust of technology in physics, engineering, architecture, design and industry are not linearly related to the growing number of *art-models* – this would imply that the artist uses the new technologies to an ever greater extent. In actual fact what we are dealing with is a complex causal principle. Both the developments of technological innovation and the flood of models produced in the visual arts are indirectly related to each other. Fundamental changes in everyday production have resulted in an almost complete extinction of handmade models. The 'freed' genre of the model could therefore be redefined by art - the model as a sanctuary for thought. The multiple qualities of the model that have been 'banalised' by a hundred years of industrial production are once again beginning to regain centre stage in the arts. The instrumentalized models were till now mostly seen as a pre-phase or an 'in between' phase, always referring to something bigger, more perfect and more useful. To a great extent this direct structure of reference has been deconstructed, with the result that the model has been able to become an art form in its own right.

The handmade model has been replaced by its virtual successor in the everyday production process. Even end-products can now increasingly be manufactured thanks to 'rapid prototyping': with 3D-plotting a collection of digital data is all that is needed to be able to produce an object. This process will also have a bearing on our living room in the near future. Neil Gerschenfield (MIT) described this phenomenon in his 2005 publication "FAB - The Coming Revolution on Your Desktop – From Personal Computers to Personal Fabrication": The 3D-printer will appear on our writing desks as the standard printer does nowadays. This kind of hardware is already obtainable for 20.000 USD.

Many engineers have already left behind the field of the traditional model. As in the case of abandoned neighbourhoods, where after a period of standing vacant the process of *Gentrification* can set in, for the model it now comes down to a creative transformation of the open structure. The different roles in which models can work are being utilized by artists. Roles that were always part of the model (analyses, reflection, vision etc.), but that were not on the foreground in the industrial operating process so far. This bandwidth is now being played by the great quantity of new *art-models*, with the effect that the new genre of models is far from homogenous. Only the increased presence of the model and the revolution that took place can be seen as connected phenomena. The survey-exhibition *post_modellismus* (Wien Krinzinger Projekte; Bergen Kunsthalle)¹ in 2005 illustrated this new phenomenon and arranges it in a historical order.

* *Note of the translator:* the original title reads 'Wahrzeichen, Wortzeichen, Losungen, Lösungen'. I choose to translate 'Wahrzeichen' with recognition-sign, instead of the more commonsense translation of 'symbol'. As shown in the title, the author plays a game of words. In the text itself an etymological trick is undertaken too. Both of which would be lost in the more commonsense translation. The same goes for the strange word 'word-sign', this translates though a word, 'Wortzeichen', that is a creation of the author.

Nick Ervinck is one such new model-artist. He creates landmarks and recognition-signs that do not aim for a spot within the city panorama, but he reflects upon de socio-structural use of city-, landscape and space markings with his models.

Who does not think of projected airport terminals or existing architecture, like the St.Petersburg pier in Florida, when looking at Ervinck's *Etebnozooy Dec2005*? To an ever greater extent recognition-signs of cities have become marketing tools. Industrial landscapes have been transformed by artists and striking investors' architectures will appear even more profitable thanks to star architects. Municipalities are impotent in acting against these trends because of empty coffers and show themselves delighted that without any public financial engagement new signs of recognition are created.

The word recognition-sign has consequentially lost its original meaning, since these contemporary landmarks are of transient nature and disappear when the substance of construction has been exploited. These quickly-placed signs are seldom real. The recognition-sign used to be a word-sign, a kind of password, by which wandering fellows could prove that they had been at these different places. Nick Ervinck makes these imagined recognition-signs mobile, for instance, by putting the Cluny Abbey on an enormous ship which – in a play of imagination – is put in Florence where the cathedral resides as a recognition-sign in reality. Another of his works, in which the contours of the continents rise as sculptured forms, makes one think of the artificial islands off the coast of Dubai that are being constructed in such a way that they will form a miniature world.

Ervinck's computer simulations show marvellous constructions that are built up out of 'real' materials and purely virtual elements, while also feature, as an encore, the astonished observer at the same time. On his plotted presentation boards a simulated human-being reflects, as apparent reference point, upon the inconceivability of that which is represented before him. When for instance an opened, big brick building shows as its interior content only a huge egg-shaped structure, the featured individual joins us in astonishment, but creates additional distance at the same time. Though we identify ourselves with the alienation as the presented emotion, we, on the other hand, look as if it concerned an unknown cosmos, if it were inhabitants that might follow other rules, while at the same time they seem to resemble us to a large extent. It's an illusionary world that shows us how much our own world is an illusive one too. We create that illusion. The illusion, the image, the landmark becomes reality, and this phenomenon astonishes us. Nowadays, the London Eye is considered as a point of orientation as much as Westminster.

The opposition between the conventional architectural model (box) and the virtual designs (blob)² pervades the works of Ervinck. He chooses a third way: to synthesise both. Most architects are adherents of the one or the other school of design. Only a few, such as Wil Alsop³, choose hybrid design methods. Alsop made a cult out of his approach by conceiving of his buildings through painting, thereafter letting his assistants translate them into a somewhat convertible architecture-language. This method has been termed, somewhat ironically, *to alsop* in English.

With his middle way, Nick Ervinck serves the longing for the recognizable monumental, which he combines with familiar elements. He takes the observer on a journey through pictorial systems of signs. Capitalism has extremely accelerated the production of signs and meanings. Signs are carriers of meaning. We live in a world in which the creation of

value is an essential practice of economic and social life. The way Nick Ervinck produces signs is a mirror for our everyday sign machines of industry and investors.

All 'real' buildings, which can be compared to Ervinck's sculptures, are landmarks of an extraordinary kind. They mix tastelessness with boldness and tend to give the impression of being outside of time. They give an oddly antiquated impression in their apparent modernity. They are bygone, lightly utopian designs that are, however, always enclosed in their time of origin and easy to date. They have the appeal of an amphibic vehicle that surprises the consumer over and over again with its finesse, but that could never convince most of them to actually want to possess it. The amalgamation of different categories has a staggering, sometimes confusing effect. The unknown, the unseen, is built up from familiar elements and, because of that, seems to astonish us more than the atomic models of abstractions which are incomprehensible to our average intellect. It is the amphibic vehicle that shows us that theoretically all options are open. Creation is possible, even though the practical worth might be less than expected.

The human-being still has to understand that it may not be able to grasp everything, therewith astonishment arises, otherwise disinterest. Insofar something populist clings to astonishment, since it is only a semi-understanding, a propagating. In this sense, the work *GNI D GH clu29.tif sept2004* makes us think of the theory of the Geomantics. This semi-science, that falls within the range of the esoteric and is concerned with earth radiation and –forces, tries to make invisible relations of force intelligible through physical explanations. A favourite area of research for the Geomantics is the quest for models to explain why historical spiritual buildings have been built at a specific place. In relation to Gothic cathedrals in particular it is often asserted that the outer forms of the buildings are copies on the earth's surface of subterranean lines of force. The duplication of what is on this side as a counterbalance to the invisible subterranean is a fitting anecdote to the work of Nick Ervinck, which is itself not at all meant in that way. The possibility of this interpretation proves how re-chargeable, open and undefined sign systems are.

¹ Exposition-catalogue: Sabine Dorscheid, Krinzinger Projekte (Hrsg.): *post_modellismus*. Wien 2005. ISBN: 3200005416

² See the thematic issue of *arch+* „Von der Box zum Blob und wieder zurück“, 1999, Bd. 148

³ www.alsoparchitects.com