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Models are real

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In order to understand, inhabit, and evaluate space it is crucial to recognize its temporal aspect. Space does not simply exist in time; it is of time. The actions of its users continually recreate its structures. This condition is often forgotten or repressed, as Western society is generally still based on the idea of a static, non-negotiable space. Commercial interests also nurture this idea, as people have realized that static objects and objective spaces are more marketable than their relative and instable counterparts. When surroundings are thought of as stable, we tend to lose a feeling of responsibility for the environments in which we move. Space becomes a background for interaction rather than a coproducer of interaction. But what takes place is, in fact, a double movement: The user's interaction with other people co-produces space which in turn is a coproducer of interaction. By focusing on our agency in this critical exchange, it is possible to bring our spatial responsibility to the fore.

In the last 40 years many artists and theorists have repeatedly criticized a static conception of space and objects. The idea of objecthood has, in part, been substituted with performative strategies, the notion of ephemerality, of negotiation and change, but today the criticism is, nevertheless, more pertinent than ever. It seems necessary to insist on an alternative that acknowledges the fundamental connection and interplay between space and time and ourselves. Because models are comprised of two fundamental qualities: structure and time, one way of drawing attention to our co-production of space is a close examination of models.

As objects in general are not static, neither are artworks. These exist in a manifold of instable relationships which are dependent on both the context in which they are presented, and the variety of responses by the visitors – or users, another word I use to draw attention to the activity of the viewer. Since the early 1990s, when I was a student, we have in artistic critical discourse considered the museum visitor as a constituent of the artwork, a conception that is essential to my practice today. To emphasize the negotiability of my works – installations and larger spatial projects alike – I do not try to conceal the technical means on which they rely. I make the construction accessible to the visitors in order to heighten their awareness that each artwork is an option or model.

Thus, the artworks are experimental set-ups, and experiences of these are not based on an essence found in the works themselves, but on an option activated by the users.

Previously models were conceived as rationalized stations on the way to a perfect object.

A model of a house, for instance, would be part of a temporal sequence, as the refinement of the image of the house, but the actual and real house was considered a static, final consequence of the model. Thus the model was merely an image, a representation of reality without being real itself.

What we are witnessing is a shift in the traditional relationship between reality and representation. We no longer progress from model to reality, but from model to model while acknowledging that both models are, in fact, real. As a result we may work in a very productive manner with reality experienced as a conglomeration of models. Rather than seeing model and reality as polarized modes, they now function on the same level. Models have become coproducers of reality.

Models exist in various forms and sizes: Objects such as houses or artworks are one variety, but we also find models of engagement, models of perception and reflection. In my artistic practice I work both with analogue and digital models, models of thought and other experiments that add up to a model of a situation. Every model shows a different degree of representation, but all are real. We need to acknowledge that all spaces are steeped in political and individual intentions, power relations, and desires that function as models of engagement with the world. No space is model-free. This condition does not represent a loss, as many people might think, deploring the elimination of unmediated presence. On the contrary, the idea that the world consists of a conglomeration of models carries a liberating potential as it makes the renegotiation of our surroundings possible. This, in turn, opens the potential for recognition of the differences between individuals. What we have in common is that we are different. The conception of space as static and clearly definable thus becomes untenable – and undesirable. As agents in the ceaseless modelling and remodelling of our surroundings and the ways in which we interact, we may advocate the idea of a spatial multiplicity and co-production.