

**POSITIONING IN THE ARTISTIC FIELD OF AN APPARENTLY CLASTIC WHOLE**iwert bernakiewicz/ architect-artist? <sup>1</sup>

My work is basically the recomposition, the rearrangement of reality. FRAG is the working title, on the one hand 'question' in German or an abbreviation for fragment. 'Frag' from the Latin 'frangere', to break, is also found in fragility, the breakable. In geology, we speak of clastic rock when rock is composed of several fragments. My work appears to be rather fragmentary and incoherent, hence 'a clastic whole'. <sup>2</sup>

There is inextricably a great connection to 'the architect's thinking' in my work. The making of series, variants and combinations, the passionate guarding and preservation of the process, rational motives. The 'promenade architecturale' during night walks for example. To make architecture is to become skilled in dealing with highly complex positive processes. After all, the architect wants to create a new and better reality. To bring together different actors, thereby realizing an idea and condensing it into a truly poetic habitable whole. My free work is based on this process, but turns it inside out, as it were. It is a quest to understand the often alienating reality we live in, but also to distort it, by making series, collages and reflections, or condensed fragile little realities, parallel worlds to experience.

My training as an architect took place in the pre-digital world where communication was mainly through two-dimensional drawings. These are always sections, be it in the horizontal plane (floor plans) or in the vertical plane (sections and façades).

This means that a two-dimensional representation carries the three-dimensional within it. Spatial thinking is highly developed during the course, so that a plan or section is not a pure 2d representation, but a combination of floor plans, sections, façades and models, to become a spatial whole. Plan reading is a complex process in which a mental drawing language creates a three-dimensional representation that allows us to communicate architecture. After all, it is an idea that originates in the mind of the creator, but is going to be inhabited and made by others. The architect is the imaginary creator. So we have to communicate very unambiguously from the invisible idea to reality. At a certain point, the architecture student starts thinking spatially and, in the mind, the existing context, ideas, 2d drawings, the model, the spatial thought model, merge into one inseparable whole around which you can move in all directions, as it were. This also means that this process is reversible. <sup>3</sup>

My artistic work is a reversal of the design process: transforming the real world into another reality. In this process, photography is the vertical section, the folding figures the horizontal section. In the nightwalks I project apparent feelings into inanimate objects. It is a coming to rest and externalizing of the subconscious. At the same time, it is a deep critical observation of my immediate surroundings, resulting from years of experience with context analysis, where-

by you question a location in depth<sup>4</sup> in order to be able to give an appropriate answer with an architectural project. Making interaction between elements, in human interventions, visible and comprehensible. In the process, stories are created between different images. In the series oco\*/nightwalks these are free associations, which in terrain vague come together to form one collage. In the kaleidoscopic images, the story is contained in the image itself. But the photograph is by definition two-dimensional, a cut through a slice of reality.

The folding figures show a section between a plane and reality. From the plan, a spatial figure emerges, leaving his or her shadow behind. It is the simplest action to move from the two-dimensional to the three-dimensional. Only by cutting and folding does space arise. In themselves, they are two-and-a-half-dimensional representations that are transformed by our human minds into three-dimensional possible scenes and interactions.

The figures have their origin in the early days of CAD drawing. As a draughtsman, you want to bring plans to life. Originally, computing power was limited so you went in search of the simplest representation of mankind to bring life in sections and façades. This search into extremes is at the same time very architectural. The architect is constantly looking for the limits of the possible, be it physically constructive, be it within a budget, be it human. This is also reflected in the nightwalks, where with almost no light an image is still sought. At the edges you often discover the most beautiful things<sup>5</sup>.

The folding figures arose from these CAD drawings, like tranquil short stories. Without loss of material, a spatial representation is created, in all its essence, but also fragility. In search of simplicity and humanity in the vulnerability: a conversation at the table, the person who climbs a ladder to gain an overview, the nocturnal hiker with his dog (who in turn makes the connection with the nightwalks). A transformation of reality and wanting to bring it to life in drawing, but ultimately taking on a life of their own from that drawing and gaining an existence in reality. The folding figures go from 2d to 3d, the kaleidoscopic images transform 2d to 4d, you can see them as how a four-dimensional being might see our world. Because as an architect you so often switch between 2d and 3d you also start thinking about what the switch between 3d and 4d might be. The kaleidoscopic image is like a four-dimensional section through the third dimension. Fractal-like reflections, images we can marvel at. In reality, such reflections are extremely rare, except maybe at microscopic level in crystal structures. Narcissus sees his own reflection in the water surface, but he sees himself only once. That we as humans can understand these kaleidoscopic images shows the power of our imagination and the human mind. That we can wander in them, search, recognize patterns. That is play. An incredibly powerful developmental tool. Architecture is also a game between dimensions, communicating between dimensions. Aldo van Eyck, for example, applied this magisterially in his playgrounds in Amsterdam, where play and architecture coincide in the development of free play for the child in its utmost simplicity.<sup>6</sup>

(Another dimension could be time, and then it's about collecting, holding on to memories as a grip for a future after a personal broken time line)<sup>2,7</sup>.

In the nightwalks, man seems to be absent. But the shown is always cultural landscape, consequence of human actions. It is there that the inquiring architectural mind, practiced in context analysis, searches for patterns as well as free connections, but certainly for be-wondering. It is about caring for oneself and each other. As random as it may sometimes seem, it is by no means random<sup>8</sup>. Play is often about other worlds, where things are better or different, it is empathy, but sometimes coping with a reality that is impossible to grasp.

As an architect there is the constant play between dimensions, of 2d & 3d, showing spatial complexity through 2d. As an artist, certain manifestations of my work are seemingly unrelated, they are simply different approaches from the same architectural methodology of making the world understandable by switching between dimensions. In this search for essence elements are highlighted, cars and people are deliberately avoided in the photography, in the folded figures the human is lifted from reality, as it were, and presented in short stories. It is a method that is also often used in the design process, the conscious isolation of elements in order to work out the process in sub-problems that will eventually converge. You could see people as elevated above everything else, but in the work they are scaled down to the very fragile 1 to 50, and I put people into perspective. Who knows, the bronze figures will be swallowed up by trees and nature and thus man will disappear again.

To sum up: the complex process of making architecture (e.g. designing a library: different users, stakeholders, makers, technology, etc... to unite complex questions while keeping architecture, form and meaning intact) and the artistic iwert are mirror worlds. By designing a lot and internalizing, the thought process becomes part and one with yourself. The artistic walkway is like the inside-out, upside-down process of the design process, using the same thought patterns and tools. I see things in reality, try to simplify them in an architectural way and thus make complexity understandable as an image. Different ways of cutting through reality, which also manifests itself diversely in visual work. The photograph as a cross-section, the folding figure as a floor plan. Thinking in sections through reality. This is often very understandable for fellow architects, but for people who think less about space it is more difficult to grasp, which makes the coherence less clear. Whereby that mystery is not at all problematic for me and I like to keep it that way. These reflections are an attempt to explain and understand that mystery and the diversity of manifestations. There are connections, but my creating expresses itself as naturally and indivisibly in different directions.

Every attempt in the past to arrive at one balanced direction has been bogged down in stagnation. The constant switching between different areas of work may seem to indicate a restless mind, but for me it is rather an expression of an active creative mind. I regularly get the reflection that I am unable to distinguish between main issues and minor ones. But in the mind of the architect everything is connected to everything else, there are so many connections within a project that have to be taken into account that we have learned to juggle a spectrum of conditions without feeling restless or nervous. You could call it holistic thinking. Architecture is in itself a positive process in which an equation with too many unknowns is nevertheless solved and through time you learn to trust the fact that through context study, variation,

working out different sub-problems, spatial thinking and composing questions, conditions of use and plastic possibilities and constructive considerations in the mind of the architect play a game, in which you have to respect that game and let it be game, directing and contemplating, evaluating, going back and forth and back again, but certainly trusting in a solution. Any attempt to limit and formalize that process leads to coercive and lifeless formalism. In this sense, architecture is certainly art, but not free. After all, as an architect you bear the responsibility for usability, durability and stability, as well as beauty, bound by the laws of physics in a strongly limited world while in the human mind everything is possible. The free work escapes that rough harsh reality with a great respect for the wonder that so often has to be abandoned during the design process.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps not as obvious as you might think.

<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, that also finds its background in a fractured history, in which the creation of parallel realities can be a coping mechanism for the child. That can be the subconscious trajectory of 'subliminal thoughts'.

<sup>3</sup> 15 years of making architecture with Jo Coenen in practice has only sharpened that process. How do you get the mental world, the ideal world, as close as possible to the real world?

<sup>4</sup> genius loci

<sup>5</sup> "I want to stay as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the centre." Kurt Vonnegut

<sup>6</sup> As an architecture student I analysed these Amsterdam playgrounds for my masters thesis.

<sup>7</sup> As in Jonathan Safran Foer's "Everything is illuminated" (playing in Ukraine even)

<sup>8</sup> Aldo van Eyck: 'niet om het even, wel evenwaardig' ('not even, but equally') and 'mild zijn de raderen van de wederkerigheid' ('mild are the wheels of reciprocity')... also duo-phenomena?)