

Call for Abstracts

**OASE 126 Thinking through Models**

*Justin Agyin, Jantje Engels, Benjamin Groothuijse, Sereh Mandias and Mieke Vink, eds.*



Assemble - Granby Winter Garden (Liverpool, 2019)

*'Models are probes, essential parts of the human technique for confronting the future – but not as a passive encounter with something already formed. Rather, in a unique way in which human action is creative, such an encounter shapes the future.'*<sup>1</sup>

For a long time, the physical scale model was the only way to develop, test and show architectural ideas in three dimensions. Ever since the introduction of the model into the architect's scope of tools in the early Renaissance, the model has occupied a crucial space between thinking and building. Creating physical models enables the development of an integrated way of thinking on the spatial, material and structural interconnections of designs, which makes modelmaking a widely recognized tool for design, research and communication. Down through the centuries, the role of the model has continually shifted and evolved in response to shifts in architecture culture, available technologies, and changing responsibilities and agendas. What a model is, how and by whom it is made, and what it clarifies or enables remain open and relevant questions. Because of its direct three-dimensional appearance, the physical model also offers something other design and research tools do not: they can be touched, picked up and one can move around them. With the title *Thinking through Models*, we approach the model in this issue of *OASE* as part of thinking processes in and about architecture. This thinking is situated at the intersection of making physical objects and observing, reflecting on and discussing them to inform design choices.<sup>2</sup> The scale model thus forms a bridge between the physical world and the world of ideas.

Each model has its own context and timeline, encapsulating the choices, encounters, failures, insights, concessions and ambitions that emerge from the dynamics between designers, clients and users. A timeline in which the model maker makes choices about scale, materials, level of detail and techniques. By following the genealogy of specific models within a project or oeuvre, we can investigate how disciplinary and intuitive knowledge is developed or deployed. In Albena Yaneva's ethnographic study of OMA's working methods in the early 2000s, the everyday production of foam models in the office plays a central role. Yaneva describes how models from one project form the basis for design studies for other projects. For example, a model for an unbuilt villa in Rotterdam evolves into a model for the winning proposal for the Casa da Musica in Porto.<sup>3</sup> This example serves to illustrate how the model can be a reservoir of design ideas, but also how physical models contain values and tacit knowledge of architects regarding architecture.

### **The Resistance of the Material**

Due to the time consumption and material dimension, the use of the model is far from self-evident these days. Virtual possibilities and digital production techniques lead to hybrid production processes, which offer speed while simultaneously shifting parts of the thinking process from the physical act of making to the computer. The relationship with the material in the thinking process has thus become abstracted, altering the relationship between thinking in models and building them. We do not aim to position the physical model opposed to digital models and production techniques, but rather ask what the physical model can offer and has historically proven in light of technological developments and social challenges. At a time when architectural production is increasingly oriented towards ecology, circularity and social inclusion, the position of the model is also shifting. The focus on an ecological approach to architecture raises questions about the meaning of material, energy and circularity, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Marx Wartofsky, 'Models. Representation and the Scientific Understanding', in: Thea Brejzek en Lawrence Wallen (eds.), *The Model as Performance: Staging Space in Theatre and Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 277, 279.

<sup>3</sup> Albena Yaneva, *Made by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture: An Ethnography of Design* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 86.

how the influence of time on projects can be designed and researched through models. From a social perspective, participatory processes and changing forms of collaboration raise questions about the model as an interactive tool for design and discussion.

In the resistance of material, Lara Schrijver argues in *The Tacit Dimension*, lies the autonomy of architectural objects, their cultural values and design intentions. This resistance of the material determines the continued value and relevance of the physical model. In this *OASE*, the direct expression of models serves as a starting point for questioning their heteronomy in the forms, contexts and conditions of their creation: the model not as a representational, final and autonomous (art) object, but as part of places and buildings in becoming. For this issue, we are interested in how the model is deployed as an instrument to search and reflect, helping to shape the design process, both within disciplinary boundaries and in relation to broader political, ecological, technical and social contexts.

### **Contributions**

With this call *OASE* is looking for reflective contributions that discuss how physical models function as part of a thinking or design processes. Contributions include textual or visual reflections on physical scale models or model-driven processes in architecture, urban planning or landscape architecture. We are specifically looking for historical and contemporary examples that take concrete projects as their starting point, but in their reflections extend beyond the project itself and contribute to both architecture practice and the thinking within and about architecture. To discuss this we distinguish three loci and levels of interaction to discuss the theme of this issue. Submissions can focus on one or more of these lines of thought:

#### **1. The Office**

How does the model take shape within the architecture office as a vehicle through which architects, from partners in charge to interns, collaborate or individually work on a design? How can the role of the model itself, as a space for thinking, be recognized and shaped within an architectural project at the intersection of disciplinary knowledge and craftsmanship? What are the consequences of choices regarding scale, material, level of detail and model construction method? To what extent does the physical, slowing and reflexive nature of the model remain relevant as a space for chance, experimentation and reflection?

#### **2. The Meeting**

How does the model function as a means to organize design discussions and negotiations for the design realisation around? How does the physical presence of the model play an active role in the consultations between stakeholders and in the interaction with all those involved in a project? What does it mean when the physical model is not simply a presentation object, but a fully-fledged medium that structures the conversation?

#### **3. The Field**

What if the discipline itself expands? What happens to the role of the model in the field when we leave the architecture office, and consider the experimental use of models in, for example, education, research processes and at the fringes of the discipline? Where do we find the spaces, actions and moments where, through the use of physical models, architectural conventions are questioned and conceptual models are transformed?

We invite authors to submit an abstract of up to 300 words, supported by at least one image, as a proposal for an article. Because models are at the heart of this issue of *OASE*, we are interested in contributions that are significantly supported by images. Abstracts should be submitted no later than **January 18, 2026** by filling out the form on [extracto.invitado.nl/submission/cfa-oase126](http://extracto.invitado.nl/submission/cfa-oase126).

Proposals can be submitted in Dutch or English. Please include the name(s) of the author(s), email address, professional affiliation and a bio of no more than 150 words per author. The selected authors will be notified around **February 15, 2026**. The deadline for the full article is **April 12, 2026**.

QR-code to the submission form:

