

Zeitschrift: Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Herausgeber: Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Band: - (2009)

Heft: 15

Artikel: Industrial roughness : reporting from the EASA workshop developing strategies for Zurich's Escher-Wyss-Areal

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-918937>

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Jurriën van Duijkeren

Industrial Roughness

Reporting from the EASA Workshop developing Strategies for Zurich's Escher-Wyss-Areal

It is a clear, early morning in August in a valley 1400 m above sea level in the south-east of the Swiss Alps, when a rather peculiar research team prepares for departure. A bright yellow exploration vehicle, shaped to look like a typical PostAuto bus, is being loaded with equipment: simple things like scissors, glue, and markers, more refined instruments like audio recorders, video cameras, and portable computers, topped off by large supplies of paper, foam, and cardboard. Team members use the field kitchen of the EASA base camp to prepare their familiar bread-and-cheese breakfast, not certain of the conditions of the days to come.

The research team appears to be composed of randomly selected EASA participants: young and restless individuals from universities all across Europe, without proper diplomas, fieldwork experience, or any knowledge of the area. Their vehicle seems to be heading north, away from the mountains. The mission is a fairly bizarre one: to conduct some sort of unscientific research, manufacture conclusions, and produce impressions of possible future conditions of the studied subject. Manned with the wrong people, carrying questionable gear, travelling in the wrong direction, provided with a scientifically erroneous brief; the rational mind wonders: is this expedition heading for disaster?

Amidst the industrial landscape of Escher-Wyss, an empty factory hall is used to set up a provisional 'laboratory.' Tables are put in place for the equipment, a projection screen is used for internal communication, the portable computers pick up signals and are able to communicate with the base camp. A coffee source is discovered and becomes the social gathering place of the puzzled researchers. A small group of natives, alarmed by the arrival of the foreign intruders, arrives on the spot. They seem well-informed, bringing ideas and an invitation to set up a night camp in the Ibis hotel. The young researchers, still confused about the purpose of the expedition and a bit overwhelmed by their new environment, are relieved when the natives take charge. Things fall into place.

This is not Discovery Channel. We are architecture students, not scientists. The brief is not a thesis, it is a scenario. Our architectural design laboratory will perform a short academic play. A play in three phases: paranoid critical¹ research, idiosyncratic² interpretation, and delusional³ designing. Our expedition is a well-organised workshop.

The Allreal real estate group has invited our 'research team' to shed its light on one of their properties: the Escher-Wyss-Areal in Zurich. They tell us that their property contains a large complex used by a turbine manufacturer, MAN-Turbo. It is still doing well on the almost inner-city location and will be offered a prolongation of its lease. They are starting up a project, under the supervi-



Empty factory hall used as 'laboratory' for EASA's 'Industrial Roughness Workshop,' Escher-Wyss-Areal, Zurich, 2005, photo by Jurriën van Duijkeren.



'Industrial Roughness Workshop,' students presenting their works, reviewed by Wiel Arets, Escher-Wyss-Areal, Zurich, 2005, photo by Jurriën van Duijkeren.



Panoramic collage of the *Escher-Wyss-Areal*, Zurich, 2005, photo by Jurriën van Duijkeren.

sion of the architect Wiel Arets, which will attempt to include this factory in a masterplan for the area. With the help of a communications office, they have labelled their concept 'Roughness.' Industrial activity is intended to support an interesting urban living and working environment. The concept attempts to distance itself from the typical process of 'gentrification' where often the industrial atmosphere is reduced to mere decoration for up-market apartments and luxury shopping. A competitor's development adjacent to Allreal's property, a complex called 'Puls 5,' may have served as a warning sign: it is apparently coping with vacancies in its industrial-chic shopping centre. The Allreal group hopes that a 'rough' city proves more stable in the long run.

They know that we will ask them for more information on the project and more data about the location, eager as we are to at least pretend to conduct 'proper' research, but they keep us guessing. They know how to play the game.

So do our tutors, Anna-Lena Heldt and Philipp Hauzinger from the architectural office h2c_zurich. They divide the team into four groups which, in retrospect, might have been called 'the chemists,' 'the sociologists,' 'the managers,' and 'the advertising agency.' Four task groups, each with its own special scale, interest, and working methods. Group "1:1_material" starts taking samples and polaroids of industrial materials, patterns, and colours. Group "1:100_organism" heads out with a video camera to study the life of the area and observe social and physical border conditions. Group "1:1000_context" studies the internet for precedents, and the system and morphology of the area and its surroundings to find ways in which living, working, and recreation can be combined in post-industrial areas. Group "1:10000_identity" studies Escher-Wyss in relation to the city, the region, and the country and sets off with a voice recorder to interview the locals, to get their views on the identity of the place. This is stage one; paranoid critical research.

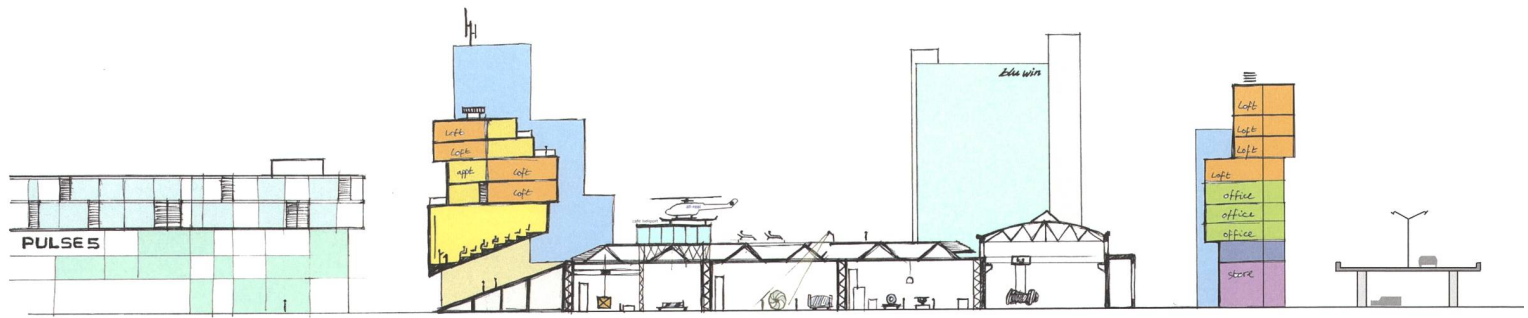
Whatever the difference in methods between the groups, what we share is that we have been dropped in an area which we know nothing about, in a city country, and society of which we have only a vague notion. Maps provide some morphological understanding, but it takes three days of 'fieldwork' in bigger and bigger circles around our 'laboratory' and a lot of talking to our tutors to get the feeling that we really understand the place where we are. Prejudices and pristine impressions are slowly replaced by an image which our minds accept as 'truth.'

The disappointing discovery is that there is not much industrial roughness to work with. The only time smoke can be seen coming from the factory is during the cigarette breaks of its small number of educated workers. The area is rather small, properly maintained, clean, and silent. Just like the people walking its



Group 'The Chemists,' *material samples*, collected on the Escher-Wyss-Areal, Zurich, 2005.

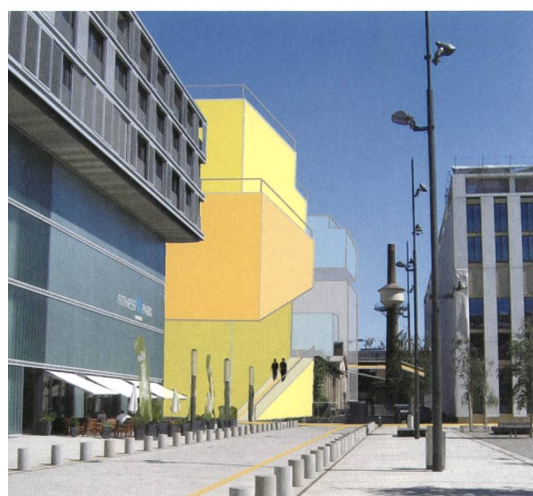
- 1 Creative method used by the surrealist Salvador Dali and his contemporaries: a state of self-induced psychosis was established to generate fantastic impressions, which afterwards were reinterpreted, from a 'sane perspective,' into a work of art. More recently it has inspired the design method of Koolhaas' office OMA.
- 2 A structural or behavioural characteristic peculiar to an individual or group.
- 3 A false belief strongly held in spite of invalidating evidence.



Group 'Advertising Agency,' *metropolitan approach*, section, Zurich, 2005.



Group 'Advertising Agency,' *metropolitan approach with walkways on roofscape*, intervention on landscape, Zurich, 2005, montage by Jurriën van Duijkeren.



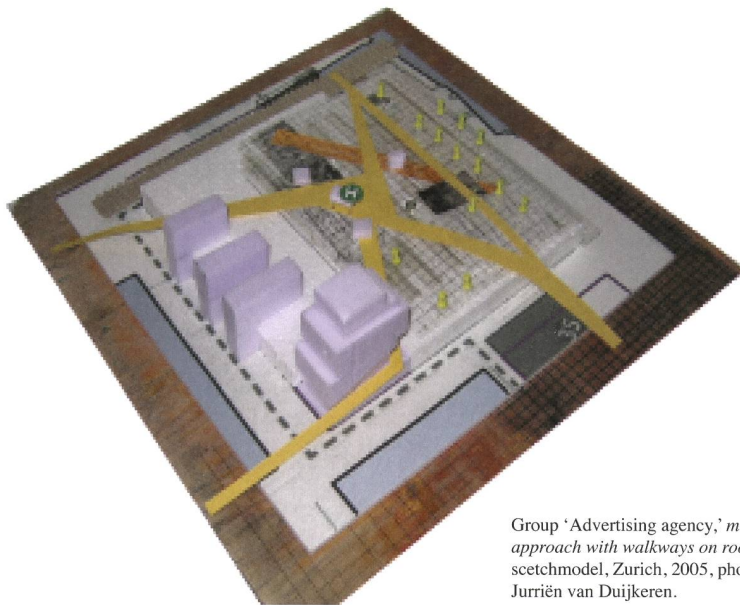
Group 'Advertising Agency,' *metropolitan approach*, Zurich, 2005, montage by Jurriën van Duijkeren.

streets. The cars are new, the bars are hip, the policemen are bored. Welcome to Switzerland! However, a chaotic urban composition, empty lots and an elevated four-lane highway are superficial 'rough' symptoms which do distinguish the neighbourhood from the generally classy districts of Zurich and give Escher-Wyss a certain metropolitan, super-national atmosphere. On the social level one might note the contrast between the urbanites in black suits and the MAN-Turbo employees in blue overalls, sitting around in separate groups during lunchtime. But how rough does a place get when everyone is silently eating their Gruyere-cheese sandwiches? Our neighbourhood turns out to be a friendly and well-functioning caricature of (post-)industrial areas found in other parts of Europe.

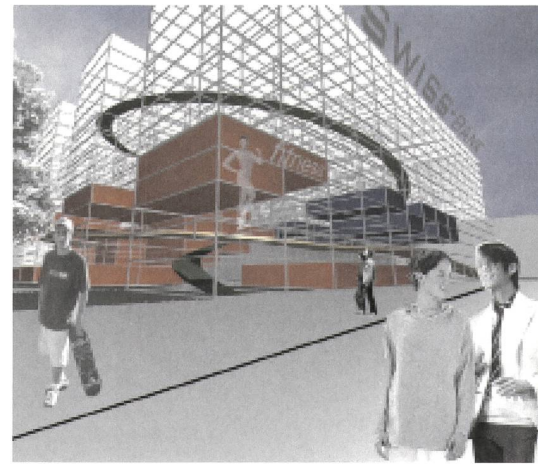
Stage two begins when we start to project new images of future situations over our newly found 'truth'. Coming from different countries and cultures, we can only work with our shared architectural 'culture' to recognise the potentials of the area. Agreements are reached on the basis of a code which might as well be blind or indifferent to the 'real' situation in Escher-Wyss. We don't know. After a while of this idiosyncratic interpretation of our manufactured reflection of the 'true' Escher-Wyss and its 'real' potential, it is time for stage three; we have to start designing our delusional proposals.

Four different approaches, yet very related results. 'Industrial roughness' has become 'industrial composition.' The proposals use industrial logic to add new functions to the area.

The 'Chemists' develop a formula to combine dwelling and industry by designing mobile housing modules which make use of the system of the industrial cranes in abandoned factory halls. The floor is kept free for various cultural activities, or to serve the factory when extra space is needed. The 'Sociologists' use the parking lots to casually introduce new social events, such as, for example, a drive-in cinema. The 'Managers' design a superstructure which follows the logic of machines in a production line, and which can be filled with different functions changing over time according to the needs of the investor and the city. The order of using the functions by the specific users creates the routing through the superstructure. The 'Advertising Agency' proposes to create an exaggerated metropolitan experience in order to distinguish the area from the already lively neighbouring district Kreis 5. Seemingly random con-



Group 'Advertising agency,' *metropolitan approach with walkways on roofscape*, sketchmodel, Zurich, 2005, photo by Jurriën van Duijkeren.



Group 'The managers,' *superstructure*, it can be filled with different functions according to the needs of the investor and the city, collage, Zurich, 2005.

frontations between the dwellers, visitors and workers are generated with a patchwork of housing, commerce and leisure on varying social levels and the different physical layers in the industrial city landscape. The elevated highway is lined by messy high-risers and billboards, and the roofscape of the factory becomes part of the public domain and exposes the activity inside the factory.

Rather than discussing the practicalities and relevance of the results, I would like to reflect on the value of the game. It is important to appreciate its pseudo-scientific approach. The scenario of a workshop can serve to analyze procedures in the real world. A condensed and superficial design process takes place in which there is simply no time for precision. Impressions and feelings must be treated as facts, interpretation as proof. A workshop is a special place, a bubble in which it is accepted that rules and procedures are broken and certain parameters misinterpreted or completely ignored. A blessing, one could say, in a world in which a quality is only generally accepted when it is considered 'measurable,' 'manageable,' or 'feasible,' and impulsive solutions are frowned upon.

Of course, it is hard to trust the quality of the ideas and solutions generated in this, or any particular design workshop. Naïve visions of a group of inexperienced students? Probably the answer is yes. But what happens when we turn it around? Instead of looking at a workshop as a condensed and fictional replay of the real, we could see reality as an unpractical, costly and time-consuming version of a workshop, a bad and tedious performance of the same scenario.

We can ask ourselves: how secure are the decisions made at the end of the real process? Risk is not necessarily eliminated by the amount of time spent on the process. We all know that data gets old, interpretations change, social and economical circumstances change, strategies change, good ideas get lost. Many 'real' masterplans do not work out the way they are supposed to. Still, we pretend to each other, over and over again, to understand and trust the qualities of the plans created in the real process. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad to play the game more often; taking the fast lane, overlooking certain aspects and feasibility studies in order to be more 'naïve' and, who knows, more successful.⁴



Group 'The chemists,' *mobile housing modules* make use of the industrial crane system, the floor of the abandoned factory hall is left free for cultural events, montages, Zurich, 2005.

Jurriën van Duijkeren studies architecture at the TU Delft. He is Netherlands' national contact for EASA.

⁴ Invite your own international team of naïve researchers on <http://easa.antville.org>.