

Talking Cities' post-utopian pragmatism

ESSEN (DE) — In the past decade or so there has been an awful lot of talk about peripheries, sprawl, SLOAP, junk space, non-places or whatever you like to call those proliferating spaces that defy a universal label. But most of the attention has consisted of descriptive – often romantic – readings of the post-industrial and post-modern landscape that were of rather limited scope. Which is what makes the catalogue accompanying the *Talking Cities* exhibition such a good read. Disguised as a magazine, *The Micropolitics of Urban Space* brings together many of the loose threads on the periphery, the fascination of the commonplace, relational aesthetics and do-it-yourself activist architectural interventions that have been around for a while in an age of post-utopian pragmatism.

Behind the exhibition and the catalogue – which, with Teutonic planning, anticipated the opening by some three months – is Berlin-based Urbandrifft in collaboration with Francesca Ferguson, the same team who produced *Deutsch-landscape* for the 2004 Venice Biennale.

Talking Cities is a part of *Entry 2006*, a huge design/architecture/business event, which is very fittingly taking place on a prime peripheral location – the post-industrial Zeche Zollverein outside Essen. Today, Fritz Schupp and Martin Kremmer's modernist mining complex (1928-1932 with later additions) is number 975 on UNESCO's World Heritage list, but until 1986 it was a functioning part of the Ruhr coal industry. It has just been partly remodelled by OMA, who are also behind the new masterplan for the area. In addition to the main *Entry 2006* exhibition there are contributions by, among others, Vitra Design Museum (*Open House – architecture and technology for intelligent living*), MoMA (*Groundswell – on contemporary landscape*) and Cooper Hewitt (*Second Skin – about membranes in design*). (CLAES SÖRSTEDT)

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↑ The first new building on the Zeche Zollverein site is the Zollverein School of Management & Design. The Japanese architecture firm SANAA (in association with Böll & Krabel) designed a gigantic, taut concrete 35-metre-high cube. Square window openings are scattered across the facades in an apparently random pattern. The volume has four open-plan levels of different storey heights. On the roof is a garden by Agence Ter. The school is part of a large-scale redevelopment designed to turn this 100-hectare former mining area into Essen's new economic and cultural centre. On 29 September the new building will play host to the Talking Cities Symposium 'Entering the evacuated field', devised in cooperation with the Zollverein School of Management & Design. Speakers include Ole Bouman, Hubert Klumpner, Alfredo Brillembourg and Fritz Straub.