

FOSSIL

ROTTER-
DAM

INDE

PENDENT

SCHOOL

FOR

THE CITY

05-08/10/2019 Research by Photography Studio

FOSSIL ROTTERDAM



Can a city ever escape its past? That is the question asked in this studio. In the city of Rotterdam, as in many cities in the west, the transition to a green economy fuelled by renewable energy sources, is advertised everywhere. At the same time Rotterdam is still the main hub for the import of coal, oil and natural gas of northern Europe. Its economy is mostly dependent on the import, export and refinement of fossil fuel. An industrial port city like Rotterdam has invested so much in the infrastructure of fossil fuel and its economy is so dependent on it, that a swift transition would make the city collapse, and also bring down large parts of the Dutch and even European economy with it.

The scale and depth of Rotterdam's addiction to coal, oil and gas becomes dramatically visible in the alienating landscapes of the coal terminals in the harbour area, in the wondrous skylines of the petrochemical refineries, in the immense tankerships docking at the harbour and the titanic scale of the pipes and installations pumping gas into the European mainland. The presence of the fossil economy is not limited to the port and industrial zones, but is also very much present in the daily life of the city itself.



Photo by Maarten Laupman

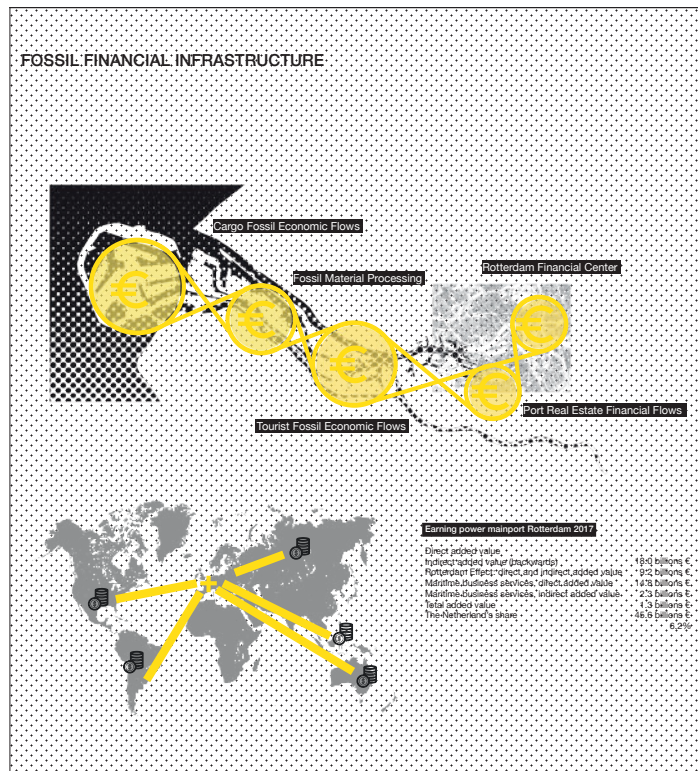
We see fossil in the hundreds of thousands of cars buzzing through the suburbs, in the office buildings filled with fossil fuel related service industry, in the riverboats poisoning the air and the water and in the short distance flights departing from the airport. This all stands in huge contrast with the promotion of the circular economy, renewable energy, green economy with which the city associates itself.

The incongruence between the landscape of a fossil city, and the imagery of a clean, green city signifies a worrying reality. Rotterdam is dependent on something of which the end date is swiftly approaching but the city has not yet invested in real alternatives.

The landscapes and signs of Fossil Rotterdam is the subject of a week-long studio. We want to make something that is invisible from the official imagery of the city visible again. We want to confront the city with its own reality, perhaps with its own impending demise, in order to force a debate. The artist Ruben Dario Kleimeer, who has developed his reputation and craft with his photographic reportages on the aggressive growth of Chinese cities, together with Crimson Historians and Urbanists, joined with the participants in documenting and visualising the landscape of fossil energy and economy in the Rotterdam area. The main result of the studio is a set of photographic images that complement a set of maps and statistics, that together will make an honest portrait of a side of our western European economy that, even if it is being obscured from view, still dominates the way we live and breathe.

FINANCIAL ECOLOGY

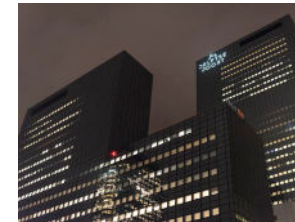
The inertia of Fossil Economy Flows - Stefano Pendini



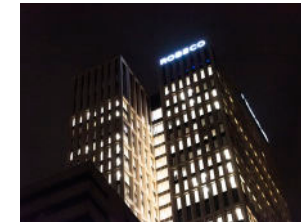
The Port of Rotterdam builds a distance towards the consolidated city center. Going to the Port now means passing under the river and discovering a completely different context, a jump-cut.

City is not indeed detached. It is closely connected as in a solid flemish bend knot. There are invisible relations that link the fossil economy of the Port with the central Financial Centers, the Port Authority and a series of economic and material flows. It is a sort of well-established «infrastructure» that define an inertia towards a circular economy of transition.

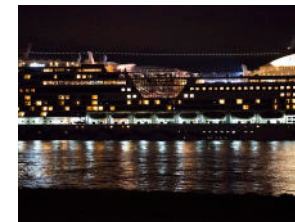
By making a cross section along the 50 km from the City center to the sea, we can identify three main interrelated interpretative frames within a story of the present.



Financial fossil flows



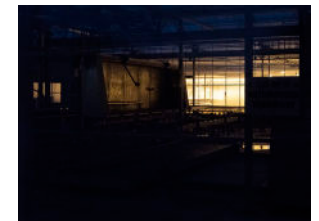
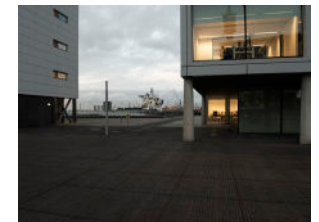
Tourist and real estate economic fossil flows



Fossil materials processing flows

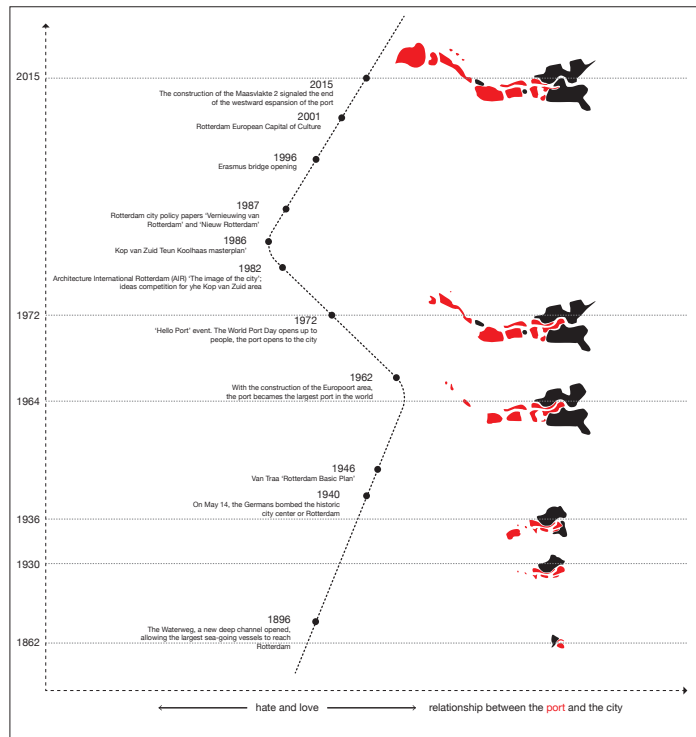


Financial fossil flows



A HATE AND LOVE STORY

The Port and the City - Giuseppe Pepe



In central station, from a gigantic screen, panoramas of the Port, at least its simulacrum, enter directly in the new Rotterdam *City Lounge*, to be celebrated, at the presence of thousands of inhabitants, city users and tourists.

In a physical dimension the Port has been pushed westward, away from the city, but at least from the late '80 has been brought back in a more clean, polished and clinical fashion, as an aesthetically reference, as a touristic theme, as a tool to convey a new *image of the city*.

A short circuit arises between imagery, fossil reality and city green ambitions.



The port



The port in the City Lounge

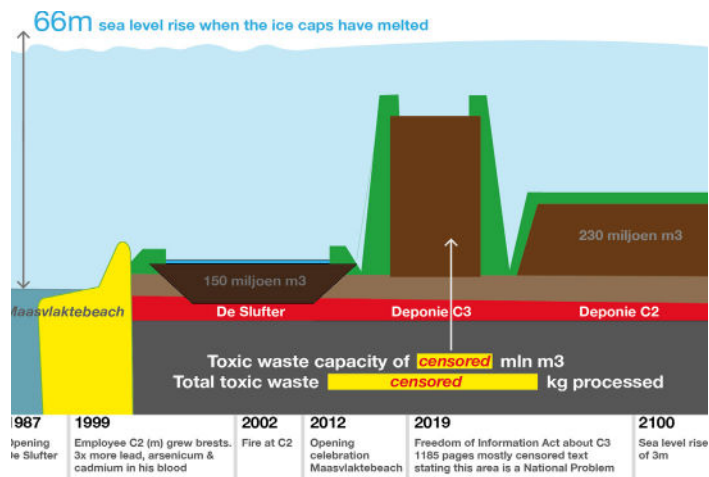


Maasvlakte Europoort Shipping, logistic and transportative school Port Authority Hotel: new York Schouwburggebouw SS Rotterdam

DUTCH MOUNTAINS

A “national problem” - Femke Slegers

Every hill in The Netherlands has something to hide. The C2 & C3 dump is the only place where fossil fuel industry can dump its heavily toxic and radioactive waste. So when C2 and C3 are full, fossil fuel plants would have to stop operations. Recently this was actually almost the case, we can read in documents and e-mails that were released because of a Freedom of Information Act. Between 1800 pages of heavily censored text, we can witness the panic this aroused. This “national problem”, as civil servants call it, never made the news. C2, C3 and The Slufter also present a mayor health and safety risk. In 2001 a geologist warned the toxic dump so close the acid sea will become dangerous over time. “It will turn into a concrete colander.” Sea level rise could cause a “national risk” in the future.

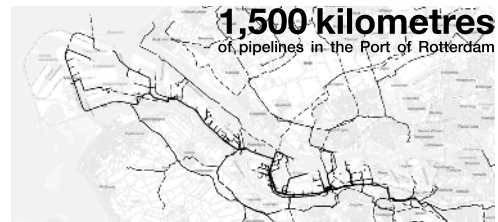


WATH THE EYE DOES NOT SEE.. The safety of the invisible - Fiona Steinert

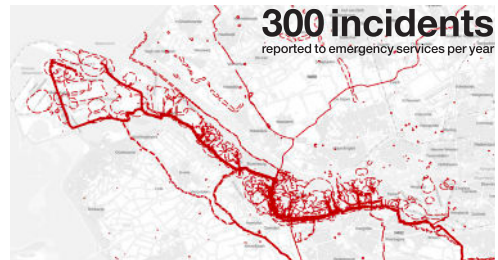
Every day, every night,
year in, year out,
the Rotterdam-Rhine Pipeline
transports crude oil
and semi-finished products
from Rotterdam Europort to
the Ruhr area in Germany.
It does this
silently,
safely
and invisibly,
with no impact
on its surroundings
or the environment.

Text source: Rotterdam-Rhine Pipeline website

Pipeline companies advertise the invisibility of their product as its specific quality. The absence above ground promises safety. The harbour of Rotterdam is one of the starting points of a network of pipelines crossing the European landscape without us being aware of it. The two main pipelines leaving the port have a capacity of 64 million tons of crude and semi-refined oil, gas and chemicals to be transported via these hidden routes on an annual basis. Is the invisibility of the constant flow a precondition of its all-embracing presence in our daily lives?



Transport of hazardous substances through pipelines, source: Atlas Leetomgeving and Port of Rotterdam



Location-specific risk, source: Atlas Leefomgeving and Havenkrant 36



PERNIS A fossil village? – Reuben Ross

The town of Pernis, on the south bank of the river Maas, was once just a quiet farming village. But today, it finds itself at a major intersection of the global fossil fuel economy. A few hundred metres away lies Shell Pernis, the largest oil refinery in Europe, covering a total area of 550 hectares. Crude oil is brought here from around the world, to be processed into a wide array of petrochemical products, such as gasoline, kerosene and diesel. And yet, little is known about the town itself, which has preserved a peculiarly provincial feel, despite the heavy industry that has surrounded it. Quaint farmer's houses, sheep grazing on picturesque fields of grass, children riding their bikes to school; these are the scenes of Pernis today.



The Pernis metro station, from which travel time to Rotterdam's city centre is just 20 minutes. In the background, the ominous pipes and chimneys of the Shell oil refinery rise high into the sky.



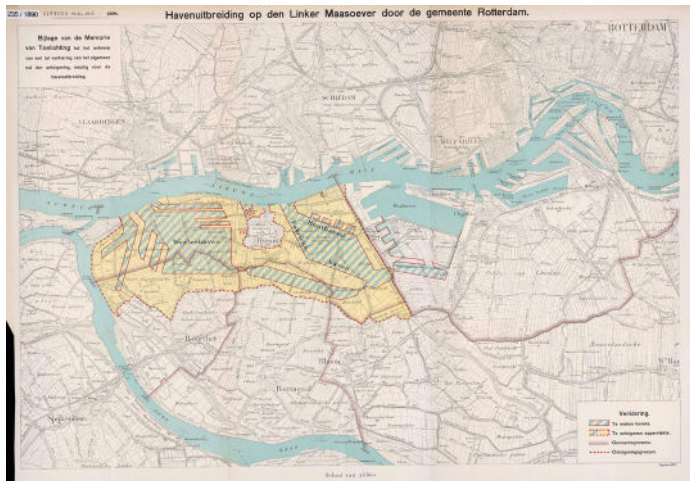
An employee of Hempel, a manufacturer of industrial paint and coatings, on his way to work. "One in six shipping containers in the world," he says, "is painted with Hempel paint."



A farmer's cottage stands on a quiet street in Pernis, a reminder of the town's provincial past. Today, Pernis has a population of nearly 5,000, most of whom work in and around the port of Rotterdam.



A small farmhouse perched among fields of lush, green grass. Just a few hundred metres away, 404,000 barrels of crude oil are processed every day at the Shell Pernis refinery.



A map of 1914, detailing plans by the municipality of Rotterdam to construct harbours around Pernis. Today, the Shell oil refinery is located to the west of the town, and Eemhaven and the Heijplaat district to the east.



A resident of Pernis, and employee of a locally-based tank and container repair company, takes his dog for a walk after work.



Shipping containers emerge from behind a dike on the outskirts of Pernis. With an annual cargo tonnage of 469.0 million tonnes, the port of Rotterdam is the largest in Europe.

A HEROIC SCALE?

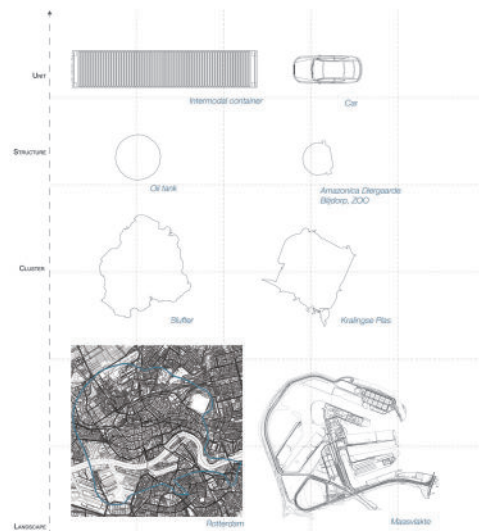
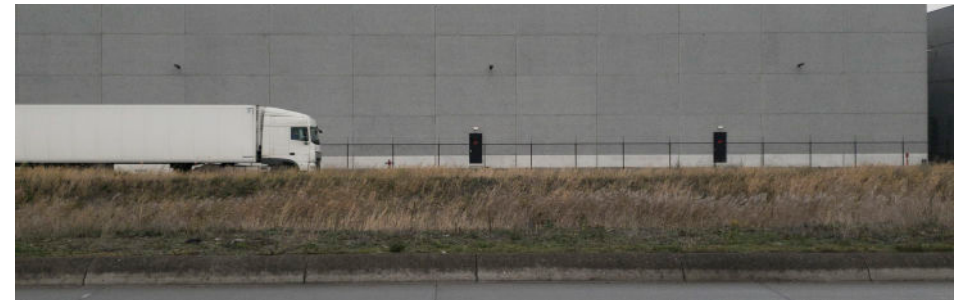
Urszula Sędziak

The “heroic scale” is a term that refers to models with exaggerated proportions.

Port of Rotterdam has for years been the busiest harbor in the world. With its most recent extension, Maasvlakte, area built on land reclaimed from the Nord See, it still remains Europe’s biggest port. The densification of different facilities related to fossil fuel economy in one place, such as oil refineries, bulk handling areas, distribution centers or innovative greenhouses is what makes the whole area a unique scenery.

Just like the numbers and units used to discuss energy consumption are difficult to comprehend (can we visualize how much is 1PJ of energy?), is eye-witnessing enough to understand the scale of fossil fuel-related infrastructure?

The following set tries to reflect on the perception of the physical volume of the ever-growing artificial landscape largely created to keep up with our society’s lifestyle.



WHAT IS THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL FOR THE CITY

The Independent School for the City is a post-graduate educational platform based in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The school is an initiative of Crimson Historians and Urbanists and ZUS (Zones Urbaines Sensibles) and is rooted in their practices of combining a critical and activist approach to the city with effecting real change through architectural and planning projects. The independent school for the City is founded on a strong belief in an incremental instead of a tabula rasa approach to city planning which blurs the lines between critique and practice on the one hand, and research and policy on the other.

The Independent School for the City is a school in, of, and for the city. It builds on the conviction that strategies for the city – architectural and economic, spatial and social – should be based on real, first hand, empirical research. Empirical because the reality of the city offers interesting conflicts and unpredictable synergies to learn from and build upon. The school is fully independent and has an unaccredited status by choice. Its research is rooted in the different disciplines teachers and participants have been schooled in. It will not be constrained by the formalities of academia or disciplinary boundaries

Participants and teachers form one team in which the advanced and less experienced will inform each other and contribute to the research. Research that is not necessarily solution-oriented or focused on final designs, and may not come to design as such, but will lead to a text, a film, an exhibition or an action. Our approach is open-minded but critical, inclusive but discerning, flexible but precise. This offers the participants and their international team of teachers the full intellectual freedom to research the city in the broadest sense. It will give us the chance to have seemingly coincidental encounters with parts or aspects of the city where clashes of various kinds take place, where otherwise invisible realities reveal themselves. These are, we believe, the instances that can teach us fundamental things about the city in all its complexity.

The educational programme of the Independent School for the City is composed of different stand-alone courses, ranging from a 4-day crash course on filmmaking in relation to architecture and the city, to an intensive 12-week programme on contemporary urbanism. The activist and multidisciplinary approach of the Independent School is strongly embedded in all activities, whether you participate in one single course or sign up for all of them.

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Independent School for the City is supported by the Municipality of Rotterdam, Creative Industries Fund NL, Job Dura Fund.



City of Rotterdam



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