

Story

II unuseless spaces

In recent years, I regularly came across the term 'leftover spaces': in descriptions of students' projects, but also in my work in the office or discussions about urban spaces, most often revolving around the outskirts of cities or garden cities. Frequently this is used to describe places that are yet to be assigned a purpose, such as a playground, a vegetable garden, a vacant lot, a park, a square. These are usually places that, at first glance, show no potential for any good 'use' and thus appear to be leftover. They are often places along big roads, adjacent to infrastructural buildings, green spaces that do not have a clear function, or leftover spaces that are created by the parcelling and division of land. Precisely these spaces interest us this semester: the 'unuseless spaces'.

Artist Gordon Matta-Clark's work 'Reality Properties: Fake Estates' (1973) shows a similar interest. In this work, he bought parcels of land that could not be built upon or used for real estate, formed when the land was subdivided into lots. These were narrow strips, some even narrower than a person's shoulders, or inaccessible triangular remnants of land squeezed awkwardly between overbuilt lots. Matta-Clark was interested in these places which were worthless for the real estate market – land that had no value because it did not meet the demands of the market and was therefore technically useless.

Similarly, the landscape designer Gilles Clément writes about such spaces and their potential in his 'Manifeste du Tiers paysage' (2004). He calls these spaces the 'third landscape' and writes the following:

"When one stops thinking of the landscape as the product of an industry, one suddenly discovers a multitude of undecided spaces without function for which it is difficult to find a name...they form a refuge for biodiversity that has been chased away everywhere else. Through their content, through the need to maintain this biodiversity or to keep its dynamics going, the third landscape takes on a political dimension."

These spaces are frequently forgotten, overlooked and underdeveloped which is precisely what leaves room for freedom: freedom of experimentation for new ways of developing such spaces, emancipated from the constraints of the traditional market.

We want to think about these spaces which offer a potential for other creatures and plants: for biodiversity. In the first phase of the semester, we will study unuseless spaces in Zurich and approach them through the medium of film. At the same time, we will look at different architectural projects from history and analyse them through synthesis drawings as well as listen to presentations on possible potentials of unuseless spaces. In the second phase we will use the different analyses to develop projects that try to engage with the themes of these 'unuseless' land fragments, to create a habitat that is as diverse and varied as possible.

We will work with drawings, models and model photographs to illustrate the architectural and landscape ideas of the projects. We will also use synthesis drawings to summarise the different ideas of the projects. The work will take place in groups of two. The seminar week is integrated into the design studio.

Studio Maria Conen

Guest Lecturer

