

Studio Maria Conen

Guest Lecturer



Unuseless Rooms

Last semester we thought about the 'unuseless spaces' in Zurich, this semester we are concentrating on the 'unuseless rooms'. Interior spaces in existing buildings and built structures that stand empty and unused. Rooms that are waiting to be demolished or modified because they seem obsolete. We try to discover new potentials in these 'silent' spaces and to redefine the 'unuseless rooms'.

Perhaps these rooms could be compared to John Cage's song four minutes, thirty-three seconds, from 1952. This song was written for any instrument, or any combination of instruments. The idea was that the performers would not play for 4 minutes and 33 seconds and the piece would consist simply of the sounds of the environment. Cage's idea was that any sound could turn into music and said: "You know that I've written a piece called 4'33" which has no sounds of my own making in it... 4'33" becomes in performance the sounds of the environment." Where others heard noise, he heard potential. Cage composed a song that allowed an artistic space to develop, which would capture unforeseen sounds from the environment. In this way, the piece reacts differently to each context and reflects the different places through the sounds of the surroundings.

These empty spaces are like the 'silence' in the city and often have an unexpected potential because that same silence can be filled with different ideas. The work with silent rooms should allow different users and species to occupy these moments in the city in an open way - the emptiness or silence encourages thoughts, ideas or questions that wouldn't be noticed or would be left 'unheard' normally to develop - just as in Cages's piece.

In the first phase of the semester, we will study unuseless rooms in Zurich and approach them through performative interventions on site, that we will also document with the medium of film and photography. 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 rooms. In the second phase we will use the different analyses to develop projects that try to engage with the themes of the 'unuseless', to create a habitat that is as diverse and varied as possible.

We will work with performative interventions on site, as well as drawings, model and model photographs to illustrate the architectural 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.