

The Next Helsinki

Bird Boarding House

It all depends on what you understand by the word impossibility. It was only not about looking for something which was absolutely impossible, I was looking at situations as the distribution of positions. It means what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought of as being possible. A situation determines a set of possibilities, and the impossible is the limit. I was looking at the idea of the emancipated worker, where the question is always of crossing the borders of the impossible.

Jacques Rancière, Interview, Delhi, February 2009

Helsinki's "South Harbour" region is particularly known for its shipping traffic, joined by office buildings and apartment houses, parking lots and parks. My interest in an intervention into the structure of this area refers to the present architecture, the bird life, and the inclusion of local people. Architects have often been influenced by structures built by animals, some have even been inspired by the way spiders construct their webs. One can also find the structures of honeycombs on facades of houses, and the architects of the Olympic Stadium in Beijing were inspired by the form of a bird's nest. In the project "Bird Boarding House" this idea is reversed - nesting boxes for birds will be created, drawing upon the buildings one can find in Helsinki for inspiration.

Through the renovation of old buildings, as well as the increasing number of new buildings, and the cutting down of old trees in urban areas, the possibility for birds to find niches for their nests has been decreasing. It is becoming more and more important to ensure their opportunity to nest by providing nesting boxes.

'It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such. To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself.'

Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

The nesting boxes are meant to be designed, built and maintained by Helsinki locals who are interested in the project, hopefully people from different backgrounds and educations. Everyone is allowed participate! The group of participants should first investigate the urban spaces of Helsinki in order to conclude which buildings could serve as a suitable templates for the "Bird Boarding Houses". The Chapel of Silence? The studio of Alvar Aalto or the Auditorium of the University of Technology which he designed? Could the template for the boarding houses also stem from a detail in the urban architecture, for example from the lamps held by statues on the facade of the main station? The form of the "Bird Boarding Houses", as well as the fitting materials for their construction, and their exact installation locations in the South Harbour will be decided by the team of participants, as a group. The participants will be asked to inform themselves specifically about Helsinki's architecture and public space, materials, crafts and local birds. In the following years to come, the houses must be taken care of which includes annual cleaning and repair.

"Nothing disappears completely ... In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows ... Pre-existing space underpins not only durable spatial arrangements, but also representational spaces and their attendant imagery and mythic narratives."

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

Through the investigation of the public space and the architecture - both the urban environment and the animals can be studied, and the relationship between humans and animals in cities can be more closely considered - who enters whose district? The locals of Helsinki the public space? An artwork the nature?

In defiance to their openness, parks are areas where birds can hide. If one watches and listens carefully it is surprising how many different species of birds live in the middle of a city. Hopefully, if the project is launched, the birds of Helsinki will be able to access more niche spaces. Additionally the "Bird Boarding Houses" recall buildings of the city of Helsinki, this might be interesting for locals as well as for tourists. These boarding houses are not meant to be spectacular, and a modest amount of practical care and attentiveness is required. Maybe they will be not seen by every single pedestrian as they walk through the city and the parks, but still they exist and have an effect!



Bird Boarding House