



VISUAL SPACES OF CHANGE

Editors José Carneiro, Pedro Leão Neto

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Lorenzo Stefano Iannizzotto

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Urban Wilderness: A Journey through Lisbon Terrain Vague

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Abstract:

The new urban condition has generated ambiguous spaces within it: Terrain Vague or Urban Voids are spaces within the city, nameless and without clear boundaries, difficult to define. They are unpaved and vegetated spaces that are neither public spaces, nor gardens, nor agricultural fields, lying in a state of abandonment, suspension, and invisibility. With no specific function and temporarily outside the logic of the market, these spaces are appropriated and used daily by people and nature.

Indeed, they eschew traditional cartographic representation, where they are often represented as mere white spaces, or spaces with future destinations. For this reason, walking as a common action becomes the fundamental tool for approaching, getting to know, and studying these spaces, while photography and other visual media become not only a means of representation, but also of studying and understanding the dynamic reality of these spaces and the different realities that inhabit them.

With this visual essay, I do not aim to provide an unambiguous representation or definition of these spaces, far from it. Going along with the fragmentary and uncertain nature of these places, I have used photography as a means of urban research to understand and describe these places, and as a personal travelogue within these spaces, as if to take notes. Having chosen Lisbon as the privileged terrain of my research, this visual essay has the sole purpose of trying to represent these spaces in a disorderly and fragmentary way, following their nature, and in doing so, trying to unveil a hidden beauty and reveal their enormous potential for the city.

Keywords. Terrain Vague, Urban Voids, Lisbon, Photography, Urban

Lorenzo Stefano Iannizzotto is PhD student in the doctoral program Architecture of Contemporary Metropolitan Territories at ISCTE-IUL (Lisbon), a researcher at at DINÂMIA/CET-Iscte and a visiting researcher /scholar at University of Westminster, with a Doctoral Grant funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) for the Research Project "The Cartography of the In-Between: Rethinking Urban Voids Approach for New Urban Challenges", with the reference 2022.11783.BD. He completed a master's degree in architecture at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Florence in 2021. In 2018 and 2021, he worked as architect at Ventura Trindade Arquitectos (Lisbon). In 2021 he won an honourable mention in the competition *Un-locking cities. Nuovi scenari per l'abitare (Un-locking cities. New scenarios for living)*, organized by the University of Florence and in 2022 he worked in the project "SizaATLAS. Filling the Gaps for World Heritage".

"The man only noticed the reality when he represented it."¹

The ever-increasing expansion of the city, very often without design and planning, has generated areas between the city and the countryside, areas in which the urban, wild, and rural dimensions mix, hybridize and overlap without clear boundaries.

This new urban condition has generated ambiguous spaces within it: Terrain Vague² or Urban Voids³ are spaces within the city, nameless and without clear boundaries, difficult to define. They are unpaved and vegetated spaces that are neither public spaces, nor gardens, nor agricultural fields, lying in a state of abandonment, suspension, and invisibility. With no specific function and temporarily outside the logic of the market, these spaces are appropriated and used daily by people and nature. Due to their state of abandonment, neglect, and absence of control these spaces are often used for informal or unaccepted uses in the increasingly controlled and institutionalized public spaces⁴. Furthermore, despite the state of neglect, or perhaps precisely because of this, these spaces are the refuge of plant and animal species that are not allowed or do not exist in other spaces. The presence of all these factors makes these spaces particularly unpredictable, dynamic, and open to new encounters and experiments⁵. Because of their uncertain, ephemeral, and ambiguous character, these spaces are difficult to study and represent. Indeed, they eschew traditional cartographic representation, where they are often represented as mere white spaces, or spaces with future destinations. For this reason, walking as a common action becomes the fundamental tool for approaching, getting to know, and studying these spaces⁶, while photography and other visual media become not only a means of representation, but also of studying and understanding the dynamic reality of these spaces and the different realities that inhabit them.

In the first definition of Terrain Vague⁷, the propensity of these spaces to be represented through photography is already present, as is the mutual interest of photographers from the 1960s and 1970s onwards; for example, the work of Manolo Laguillo⁸ is mentioned. Together with photography, since the second half of the 20th century, these territories have been privileged

1. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Affabulazione," in *Teatro* (Milano: Garzanti, 1988).

2. Ignasi de Solà-Morales, "Terrain Vague," in *Anyplace, Anyone*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 118–23.

3. Sergio Lopez-Pineiro, *A Glossary of Urban Voids* (Berlin: Jovis, 2020).

4. K. Kamvasinou and Marion Roberts, "Interim Spaces: Vacant Land, Creativity and Innovation in the Context of Uncertainty," in *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale*, ed. Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron (New York: Routledge, 2014), 187–200.

5. Gilles Clément, *Manifesto of the Third Landscape* (Trans Europe Halles, 2022).

6. Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes. Camminare Come Pratica Estetica* (Milano: Einaudi, 2006).

7. Solà-Morales, "Terrain Vague."

8. Manolo Laguillo, *Barcelona 1978–1997. Manolo Laguillo* (Impreso, 2007), <https://www.macba.cat/es/aprender-investigar/publicaciones/barcelona-1978-1997-manolo-laguillo>.

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spaces for cinematic representation. Directors such as Pier Paolo Pasolini⁹, Michelangelo Antonioni¹⁰, Paulo Rocha and Wim Wenders shot some of their greatest masterpieces in these spaces between the countryside and the city, between the empty and the built, between wild nature and human traces, such as *Mamma Roma* (1962), *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (1966), *Deserto Rosso* (1964) *Os Verdes Anos* (1963), *Wings of Desire* (1987).

However, the photographers and projects that have most influenced my approach are undoubtedly Gabriele Basilico's (1944 – 2013) perpetual search for unpublished urban spaces, recently published in *Territori Intermedi*¹¹ and the project *cittàinattesa*¹² ("In Italian, the title *cittàinattesa* conceals a pun between 'in attesa', in wait, and 'inattesa', unexpected"¹³) by Giovanni Hanninen (1976). The photographic project reveals an unseen, unexpected, waiting, often invisible Milan, revealing that "Negligence, failures, financial and political issues, projects aborted before even being completed; numerous are the causes that made these buildings invisible, and often, refuge of the invisibles."¹⁴

With this visual essay, I do not aim to provide an unambiguous representation or definition of these spaces, far from it. Going along with the fragmentary and uncertain nature of these places, I have used photography as a means of urban research to understand and describe these places, and as a personal travelogue within these spaces, as if to take notes. Having chosen Lisbon as the privileged terrain of my research, this visual essay has the sole purpose of trying to represent these spaces in a disorderly and fragmentary way, following their nature, and in doing so, trying to unveil a hidden beauty and reveal their enormous potential for the city. Armed with a camera and a willingness to walk, I went into these spaces, within the city and often in central areas, but with a very particular reality. In these spaces, sheep may graze next to cars, cultivated fields lie next to dumps, children play ball next to abandoned objects, domestic animals meet wild animals, rare species of plants and insects may feed on plants that are illegal or non-existent in the city.

9. Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron, "Cinematic Space in Rome's Disabitato: Between Metropolis and Terrain Vague in the Films of Fellini, Antonioni, and Pasolini," *Modernism – Modernity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2011.0048>.

10. Matthew Gandy, "Landscapes of Delinquency in Michelangelo Antonioni's Red Desert," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28, no. 2 (2003): 218–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5661.00088>.

11. Gabriele Basilico, *Basilico. Territori Intermedi: Territori Intermedi / In-between Territories*, ed. Giovanna Calvenzi, Filippo Maggia, and Luca Molinari (Milano: Skira, 2021).

12. Alberto Amoretti, "A City in Waiting," *Domus*, 2013, https://www.domusweb.it/en/photo-essays/2013/04/24/a_city_in_waiting.html.

13. Giovanni Hanninen and Alberto Amoretti, "Cittàinattesa," 2015, <https://hanninen.it/cittainattesa/>.

14. Hanninen and Amoretti.

These spaces are full of spontaneous appropriations, informal and alternative uses, innate encounters, but they are also changeable, undefined, with blurred boundaries. For these reasons, my photographic series is not simply a document or record of the moments and activities that take place in these spaces, but above all re-interprets and uncovers a new understanding of those spaces which are the artistic object and study of my work. Almost like an incomplete or undefined object, photography can reveal and make clear the nature of the object, but above all it can re-interpret, fill it with new meanings or create connections with collective memory. Thus, photography and representation is not a passive action, a mere register of events, but rather a continuous process between unveiling reality and reinventing it.

Through photographs, it is perhaps possible to represent this heterogeneous universe, so rich in life and unpredictability, and if you pay attention, you can see a great social and natural potential, as well as a great wealth: diversity.

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38°44'16"N 9°06'38"W, 2023





38°44'05"N 9°06'41"W, 2023

38°48'13"N 9°06'27"W, 2023



38°47'23"N 9°09'24"W, 2023



38°45'17"N 9°07'24"W, 2023

38°47'46"N 9°05'46"W, 2023



38°44'07"N 9°06'34"W, 2023

38°44'15"N 9°06'20"W, 2023