

**REVIEW OF 'TERRAIN VAGUE: INTERSTICES AT THE EDGE OF THE PALE' By Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron (editors). London & New York, Routledge, 2014, 256 pages, ISBN 978-0415827683**

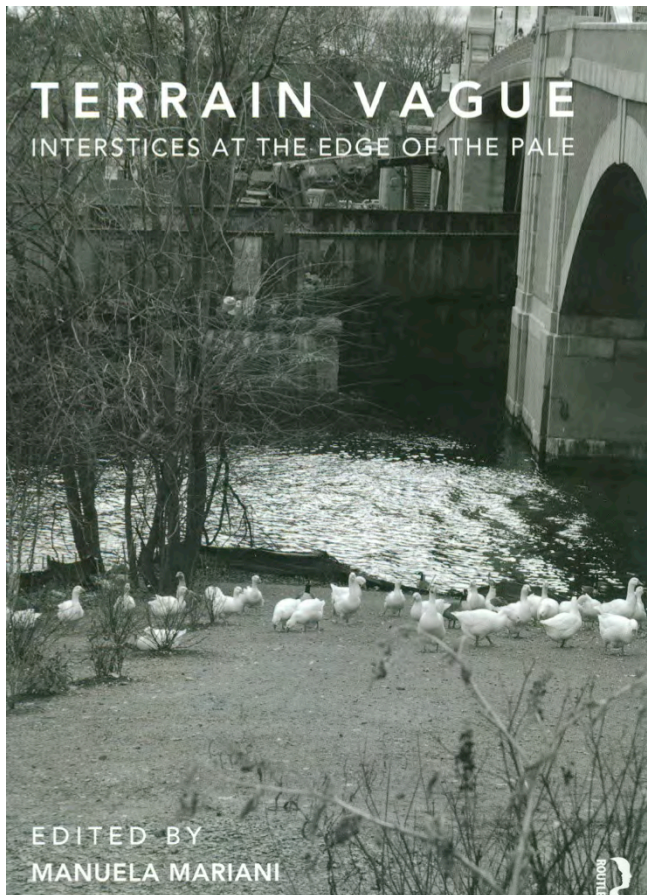
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The concept of terrain vague was first theorized by Ignasi de Sola-Morales in the mid 1990s as a contemporary space of project and design that includes the marginal wastelands and vacant lots that are located outside the city's productive spaces – which Morales describes as oversights in the landscape that are mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city. Around the same time, the artist and architect collective Stalker defined Terrains Vagues in the plural as spaces of confrontation and contamination between the organic and the inorganic, between nature and artifice that constitute the built city's negative, the interstitial and the marginal, spaces abandoned by economic forces, or in the process of transformation.

This book *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale* – edited by the architect Manuela Mariani and the professor of English Patrick Barron - seeks to expand on Sola-Morales ideas and to present the terrain vague through a taxonomy of urban empty spaces presented by the authors in the introduction – derelict lands, brownfields, voids, loose spaces, heterotopias, dead

zones, urban wilds, counter-sites. The book aims to collectively refine this notion as a central concept of urban planning and design, architecture, landscape architecture, film studies, cultural geography, literature, photography, and cultural studies, looking at possible positive alternatives to the negative images projected into them.

Through theoretical architectural and artistic approaches, the book includes studies of urban sites and projects worldwide, including Berlin, Beirut, Nicosia, Detroit, San Francisco, Tokyo, Fresh Kills in New York, and Clichy-sous-Bois in Paris, presenting a series of interstitial landscapes that are between urban and rural, that are open to possibilities and in the flux of natural transformations, that are emergent or in danger of disappearance.

The editors have organized the chapters of the book into three parts – Locations, Traversings and Applications. The first part - Locations - is an assemblage of case studies of terrains vague in different geographical locations, many of them are the remnants of conflict (the fault lines of Beirut and demilitarized zones of Nicosia) or the ruins of shrinking economies (the

wastelands of Detroit, the interstitial slots of San Francisco and the residual voids of Tokyo) that explore the socially interactive and spatially enriching possibilities of the urban spaces.

The second part – Traversings – considers the transformative and transitory nature of the terrains vague, with artistic and architectural collaborations on Transurbance in Rome, and reflections on terrain vague as a space for “Alternative Humanity” in Andrei Tarkovsky’s film “Stalker.” Photography is presented as a medium to question paradoxical spaces where planning logic is broken down, and layered histories are used to describe the transformation of a New York landfill wasteland the Fresh Kills Park. Additionally, the theme of Public Space is viewed through the lens of the Terrain Vague and its nature and limits.

The final part – Applications – looks more specifically at design interventions (or non-interventions) and how interstitial spaces, left fallow or encouraged to develop or re-naturalize as urban forests become havens for biodiversity building hybrid fabrics of wild and built lands in the city. Enriching interstitial spaces that are temporarily stalled in their developments through transitory projects or tending to these spaces often in disadvantaged neighborhoods with poor infrastructures are presented as important urban design opportunities. Preserving the memories – personal and public – of these abandoned spaces, through interventions such as trails, parks and monuments are ways to re-qualify and reactivate the connections to the past layers of histories of the landscape. The chapters in this book highlight how new approaches to intervening in these urban landscapes has influenced the evolution of urban landscape planning and urban ecology – looking at new ways to design with, and not against, the spontaneous, wild or “third” natures the emerge in abandoned sites, thereby increasing urban biodiversity.

One major contribution of the book is to demonstrate the *terrain vague* is not a blank canvas for design, and the design processes in these dynamic and multi-layered urban spaces are not linear or confined, but circular and multi-dimensional socio-political processes, often associated with a resistance to more conventional planning methods and landscape aesthetics.

As a cooperative effort to redefine these marginal spaces as a central concept for urban planning and design, the book *Terrain Vague* presents innovative ways of looking at marginal urban space, and focusing on its positive uses and aspects. It will be of interest to all those wishing to understand our increasingly complex everyday surroundings, from planners, cultural theorists, and academics, to designers and architects.

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