

# A Term to Open Up the Field

Drawing on debates around *terrain vague*, but also on those of vacancy, liminality and in-between situations, this issue turns to the expression *Unscripted Grounds* in order to widen the field of attention. The point is not to replace one term with another, but to name realities that the figures of the void, the leftover or the wasteland alone do not always allow us to grasp: situations in which frameworks of access, use, value, legitimacy, responsibility or ownership are not, or are no longer, stabilised. In this sense, situations are not understood as mere sites, nor as isolated spatial arrangements, but as knots of material, social and symbolic relations, which only become legible through attentive, often situated forms of engagement with place.

The term *grounds* does not refer simply to soil or terrain, but more broadly to foundations, supports, and conditions from which things can still emerge, be negotiated, or unfold over time. By *script*, I mean here the set of both explicit and implicit frameworks that ordinarily organise a given place: its conditions of access, use, value, legitimacy, responsibility and ownership. As for *unscripted*, the term does not point to a pure absence of script, but rather to the loosening, rewriting, or coexistence of frameworks that remain unsettled, and at times competing.

The expression *Unscripted Grounds* is therefore useful for naming material, relational and temporal situations in which something is no longer fully settled, where several logics overlap, and where architecture can no longer intervene as if the ground were already given and fully legible in advance.

The call for contributions thus proposed to address environments left open, undefined, or held in suspension — often relegated to the blind spots of architectural practice and planning — as situations in which scripts of ownership, use and value loosen without yet being restabilised. It invited contributors to consider these *Unscripted Grounds* not only as objects of

observation, but as grounds for inquiry, experimentation, practice and pedagogy, where situated *care*, shared learning and commoning might be rehearsed or played out, while remaining attentive to dynamics of normalisation, instrumentalisation and, in some cases, gentrification. Finally, it sought to welcome contributions capable of articulating empirical knowledge and critical reflection, by making explicit their methods, positionalities and the ethical questions raised by these forms of engagement with uncertain contexts.

## WHAT THE CONTRIBUTIONS BRING INTO VIEW

The contributions gathered here do not simply illustrate the hypothesis set out in the call. They deepen and displace it.

In **Notes from a Ground that Refuses to Resolve**, Nadia Bertolino begins from Rione Scala, a peripheral district of Pavia, still inhabited and marked by structural vulnerabilities, informal uses and intermittent institutional visibility. Here, unscripted ground is not understood as a merely abandoned or vacant place, but as a situation in which scripts of ownership, use and institutional value are loosened, suspended or contested.

The article makes a decisive distinction between site and situation: the former can be surveyed, mapped, programmed and then reinvested through a proposal; the latter has to be traversed, experienced over time, and entails a transformation of the architect's own stance. The indeterminacy that characterises such places is not perceived as a problem awaiting an architectural solution, but as a condition from which architectural knowledge may be produced.

The text thus argues for a situated practice, grounded in sustained presence, ethnographic attention and a form of responsibility towards the place and its inhabitants. This

practice is not meant to “script” the ground; rather, any architectural engagement with it must remain present, accountable and conscious of the structural, institutional and political conditions from which such a presence proceeds. Bertolino also makes explicit the epistemic, political and temporal limits of participatory action-research in such a context: the persistent asymmetry between researcher and inhabitants, the risk of institutional instrumentalisation, and the difficulty of sustaining long-term engagement when academic realities are out of step with the precarious conditions shaping residents' lives.

Bertolino's contribution is to show that *Unscripted Grounds* do not refer only to grounds of spatial indeterminacy, but to inhabited situations that force architecture to rethink its stance: to be less intent on bringing a solution too quickly, to be more present, to engage over time, to remain accountable to inhabitants, and to stay lucid about the institutional and political conditions in which this presence takes place.

In **Micro, Meso, Macro**, Christelle El Hage approaches the disused railway corridors of Beirut, Paris and Queens not as mere voids or wastelands awaiting reconversion, but as infrastructures that remain operative in other ways. They are traversed by individual appropriations, collective initiatives and institutional strategies that coexist without resolving into a clear course of development. This condition, which she describes as active suspension, shifts attention away from transformation and finality, and towards persistence and process.

The inquiry relies in particular on walking, whether undertaken individually or collectively, understood as an embodied approach especially suited to the linear morphology of the corridors. It brings into view material details, forms of access, use and conflict, as well as a broader territorial reading. From there, El Hage develops a trans-scalar reading — micro, meso,

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macro — through which small-scale reversible appropriations, more collective forms of coordination, and larger competing narratives and planning visions can be understood as intersecting within the same spatial system. What the article brings into focus is that some *Unscripted Grounds* are less a matter of abandonment than of prolonged negotiation, where tactical uses, forms of collective organisation and competing visions for the future of these places remain entangled without settling into a single trajectory.

In **Log and the Practice of Building-with**, Antônio Frederico Lasalvia starts from Topolò/Topolove, a border territory long held in suspension by the geopolitical logics of the Cold War. Charged with histories, traces and inherited forms of knowledge, the village has gradually been reinvested since the end of the Cold War through artistic, cultural and inhabitant-led practices, first through seasonal artistic encounters, and later through the more continuous presence of the Robida collective. The article shows how this marginality can become a productive condition when the place is approached not as a site awaiting a project, but as a situation capable of generating one. Through a practice of building-with, defined as a relational mode in which architecture emerges through negotiation with the site, available materials, inherited knowledge and techniques, and collaborative work, the worksite becomes a site of material production and knowledge exchange, where the separation between design and making is suspended. Lasalvia thereby extends the notion of *Unscripted Grounds* beyond the terrain vague by showing how a marginal or post-rural territory can become the ground for a relational, processual and situated architectural practice, not by imposing a project onto a site, but by building with what it still holds in reserve, including traces, resources, inherited knowledge and temporal layers.

In **Betweenness as Possibility**, Giulia Guadagnoli shifts the



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reading of terrain vague away from identifiable spatial objects and towards more diffuse qualities: betweenness, vagueness and centrality. Drawing on qualitative research conducted in Beirut through walking and the observation of dozens of sites, the article brings into view a series of interstitial micro-situations — openings in fences, improvised stairs and paths, places to sit, electrical connections, and so on — which testify to ordinary forms of adaptation within a context of fragmented governance. Guadagnoli distinguishes three types of centrality — joint, junction and hub — and argues that conditions of vagueness can enable forms of centrality to emerge from situations of betweenness. In doing so, the article opens up a reading of terrain vague not as an identifiable spatial object, but as a relational and diffuse quality of the urban fabric, traceable to varying degrees across the city, better understood here as a hypothesis for reading than as a stabilised model.

In **Architecture of Belonging**, Maycon Sedrez and Prashya Gosman bring the question of *Unscripted Grounds* into a primarily pedagogical framework, through a reflective analysis of a design studio based on *self-directed learning* (SDL). The ground in question is

Florianópolis, an island shaped by a colonial history that led to the erasure of Indigenous populations, but also by land speculation, contradictory planning logics and road infrastructure that have produced urban fragmentation and residual spaces. Indigenous communities appear here as displaced, scarcely visible, and still struggling to find a place within the urban fabric.

From this perspective, terrain vague is read above all as residual, vacant and neglected space, with both an ambiguous status and a latent potential. The notion of the productive city provides an operative framework for transforming these underused spaces into hybrid and multifunctional programmes, where productivity is not reduced to an economic dimension, but extends to knowledge sharing, cultural production, presence, visibility and forms of participation for Indigenous populations. Within the frame of this issue, Sedrez and Gosman's contribution is primarily pedagogical and project-based: it tests *Unscripted Grounds* through urban voids read through the lens of the productive city. It asks how design education might help reinscribe a long-marginalised population within urban space, whilst acknowledging the



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methodological limits of working at a distance from the communities concerned.

In **Weird and Speculative Interval**, Erdem Karaçay takes Sazlıdere, near Istanbul, as an unscripted ground marked by successive transformations: the construction of a reservoir that submerged earlier infrastructures and displaced parts of the settlement, the exploitation and abandonment of a quarry, and the more recent threat of the Kanal Istanbul project on an already fragile environment. The article considers this ground not as a passive background, but as an active and reactive materiality: one that records human interventions, resists them, and produces effects whose causes and consequences are not always immediately legible. In this sense, Sazlıdere appears as a ground of instability, memory and agency. The text then shifts the discussion towards modes of representation capable of making this condition perceptible. It explores speculative, unstable and “dirty” forms — dirty montages and radical geo-portraits — at a distance from smooth and controlled architectural representation, in order to document what the author frames as the weird and uncanny ecological condition of the site. The article shifts *Unscripted Grounds*

towards a reading of ground as an active archive, where successive transformations and ecological, political and territorial tensions are inscribed.

In **Unscripting from Within**, João Silveira Serejo examines a set of modernist summer houses in São Pedro de Moel, built from the 1950s onwards, as the trace of a moment of convergence between modern architecture and a shared inhabiting literacy: a capacity to recognise, understand and dwell within the spatial qualities that this architecture made possible. These houses are still occupied but have been partially transformed. What is at stake, therefore, is not the abandonment of the built fabric, but the progressive dissolution of its intelligibility. What comes undone here is less the architecture itself than the alignment between a way of inhabiting and an architecture conceived to endure.

Through the notions of systematic anti-repair and the human void, Silveira Serejo shows how successive material substitutions and so-called improvements, often drawn from models imported from elsewhere, gradually blur the original script by subjecting architectures conceived to age to accelerated cycles of replacement, without making them disappear

altogether.

Here, *Unscripted Grounds* are displaced: the unscripted no longer refers to a spatial void or to a ground held in suspension, but to a desynchronisation between architecture, cultures of inhabitation, desire and temporal rhythms. The question then ceases to be only that of the ground; it becomes a question of relation.

The diversity and singularity of the contributions gathered here make clear that *Unscripted Grounds* do not refer to a homogeneous spatial category.

From one article to the next, they appear instead as situations in which frameworks of access, use, value, ownership or responsibility loosen, are rewritten, or compete with one another. This shift broadens not only the range of realities concerned, but also the ways of engaging with them, being present within them, reading them, investigating them and rendering them legible.

What emerges across the contributions, then, is less a single definition than a set of converging questions about the forms of attention, presence, representation and responsibility that such situations call for. This issue makes unstable, often marginal conditions more legible and argues that they require corresponding shifts in architectural practice, pedagogy and research.

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