



# **LOFT OUT**

## **THE CREATIVE VOID IN THE CITY**

**Loft-out**  
*adjective*

1. spaces with unique atmosphere, which have become abundant as a result of gentrification

**Gentrification**  
*adjective*

1. the process by which a place, especially part of a city, changes from being a poor area to a richer one, where people from a higher social class live



**“Terrain vague”** (Ignasi de Solà-Morales, 1995), **abandoned, leftover, derelict land** (Barr, 1969; Kivell & Hatfield, 1998; Oxenham, 1966), **“zero panorama,” “empty or abstract settings,” “dead spots”** (Smithson, 1996a/ 1967; 1996b/1968; 1970, as cited in Reynolds, 2003), **“vacant land”** (Bowman & Pagano, 2004; Northam, 1971), **“wasteland”** (Gemmell, 1977; Nabarro & Richards, 1980), **“il vuoto”** (“the void”) (Borret, 1999; Secchi, 1989/1984), **“urban wilds,” “urban sinks”** (Lynch, 1990), **“new, nameless places”** (Boeri, Lanzani, & Marini, 1993), **“dross”** (Lerup, 1994), **“drosscape”** (Berger, 2006), **“no-man’s land”** (Leong, 1998), **“dead zones,” “transgressive zones”** (Doron, 2000), **“superfluous landscapes”** (Nielson, 2002), **“spaces of uncertainty”** (Cupers & Miessen, 2002), **“le Tiers-Paysage,” “les délaissés”** (“the Third Landscape,” “leftover lands”) (Clément, 2003) **“brownfields”** **“in-between spaces,” “white areas”, “blank areas,” “SLOAPs”** (Spaces Left Over After Planning) (Doron, 2007), **“left-out spaces”** (Gordon Matta-Clark, 1973), **“non-places”** (Marc Augé, 1995)



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Figure1: Herzog & de Meuron, "Am Tacheles" (Render)  
<https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/439-am-tacheles/>

## KEY WORDS

TERRAIN VAGUE\_FUTURE VOIDS\_SPECULATIVE URBANISM\_REAL ESTATE\_\_ART IN A CITY\_PERCEPTION\_\_ PHENOMENOLOGY\_GENUIS LOCI

## BACKGROUND

*“Berlin shows how the identity of a city is not in its architecture but next to it (Cupers & Miessen, 2018, p.16).”*

The starting point for this research was my fascination with the abundance of spaces and the creative collectives that often occupy them. Berlin, the capital of Germany, is a perfect example of a city created by destruction, demonstrating the errors of urban planning and their consequences for our built and social environment (Cupers & Miessen, 2018, p.4). Having lived in Berlin for many years and now settled in Rotterdam, I have come to understand the importance of these occupied, “empty” spaces and the disturbing effects of their gentrification. Artists play a vital role in the social fabric of the city. They are often not recognised as entrepreneurs who secure the value of culture as an economic and social factor. The story is always the same. The building is used, then due to a variety of factors it becomes abandoned and forgotten, the artists take over the vacancy and form the creative universe in the space, which usually raises the prices of developments in the areas, creating the standard outcome of gentrification - the creatives have to find a new affordable place because the former one has been taken over by profit-seeking investors. Artistic areas in cities have an irreplaceable atmosphere, and when they are destroyed, the city and its inhabitants lose a great deal of value. This phenomenon can be seen in all major cities around the world. I experienced this for the first time in 2014, when the art house Tacheles in the centre of Berlin was closed and artists had nowhere to go. *“The former Tacheles building was nothing but a sad ruin overlooking the empty ground”* commented Herzog & de Meuron, completely contradicting my preconceptions of the place (439 AM Tacheles). For me, this building embodied a vibrant and colourful community that was not afraid to express itself. Herzog & de Meuron’s new revitalisation project, called “Am Tacheles”, involves adding new residential and office buildings and transforming the old Tacheles building to create a cultural district that claims to respect it’s past. (Figure1) It is up to us, as architects, to preserve the spirit of these spaces and to recognise the importance of a vacant land as a ground for the freedom of individual and collective dreams. This was my inspiration to look at the issue of forgotten spaces and other voids in the city, to understand how they are created, what possibilities they hold for the future and how architecture can help address this problem.

# INTRODUCTION

*“Architecture’s destiny has always been colonization, the imposing of limits, order, and form, the introduction into strange space of the elements of identity necessary to make it recognizable, identical, universal. In essence, architecture acts as an instrument of organization, of rationalization, and of productive efficiency capable of transforming the uncivilized into the cultivated, the fallow into the productive, the void into the built (Sola-Morales, 2002, p. 122).”*

The term “Terrain vague” was introduced by the Spanish architect Ignasi de Solà-Morale in his essay of the same name, where he describes it as “ambiguous space”, “strange places” that “exist outside the effective circuits and productive structures of the city”. (2002, p.120). The fascination with voids and negative spaces in our built environment had been with architects, urban planners and landscape architects long before Solà-Morales’ essay. In 1973, the architect and artist Gordon Matta-Clarck discovered a gap in the urban planning of New York, Queens and the Staten Islands and created a project “Reality Properties: Fake Estates”. He bought a total of 15 micro-plots at a steep price of between \$25 and \$75 per lot. These “unuslees”, often difficult to access and in odd shapes, didn’t have much real estate value. (Figure2)

*“They were a group of fifteen micro-parcels of land in Queens, left-over properties from an architect’s drawing. One or two of the prize ones were a foot strip down somebody’s driveway and a foot of sidewalk. And the others were curb-stone and gutter space. What I basically wanted to do was to designate spaces that wouldn’t be seen and certainly not occupied.” - Gordon Matta-Clark*

It’s almost certain that the architect had no particular idea in mind when he bought them. He was only interested in plots that had no market value. After approaching them, he documented, mapped, measured and photographed each site. Using his plots as an example, he questioned the meaning and worth of land ownership and explored its paradoxes. (Reality properties: Fake estates (Gordon Matta-Clark))

Gordon Matta-Clark’s inspiring approach to abundant space and the theme of void presents a new way of understanding this theme from many different perspectives, not only in the built environment, but also in a social and political context. His artistic vision would not be possible without a deep understanding of the property market from an architectural point of view. This analytical project is a gateway to this research, which will open doors to many topics, such as terrain vague in the context of politics, economics, urban planning, art, social life, photography, documentary, phenomenology, genius loci and perception.



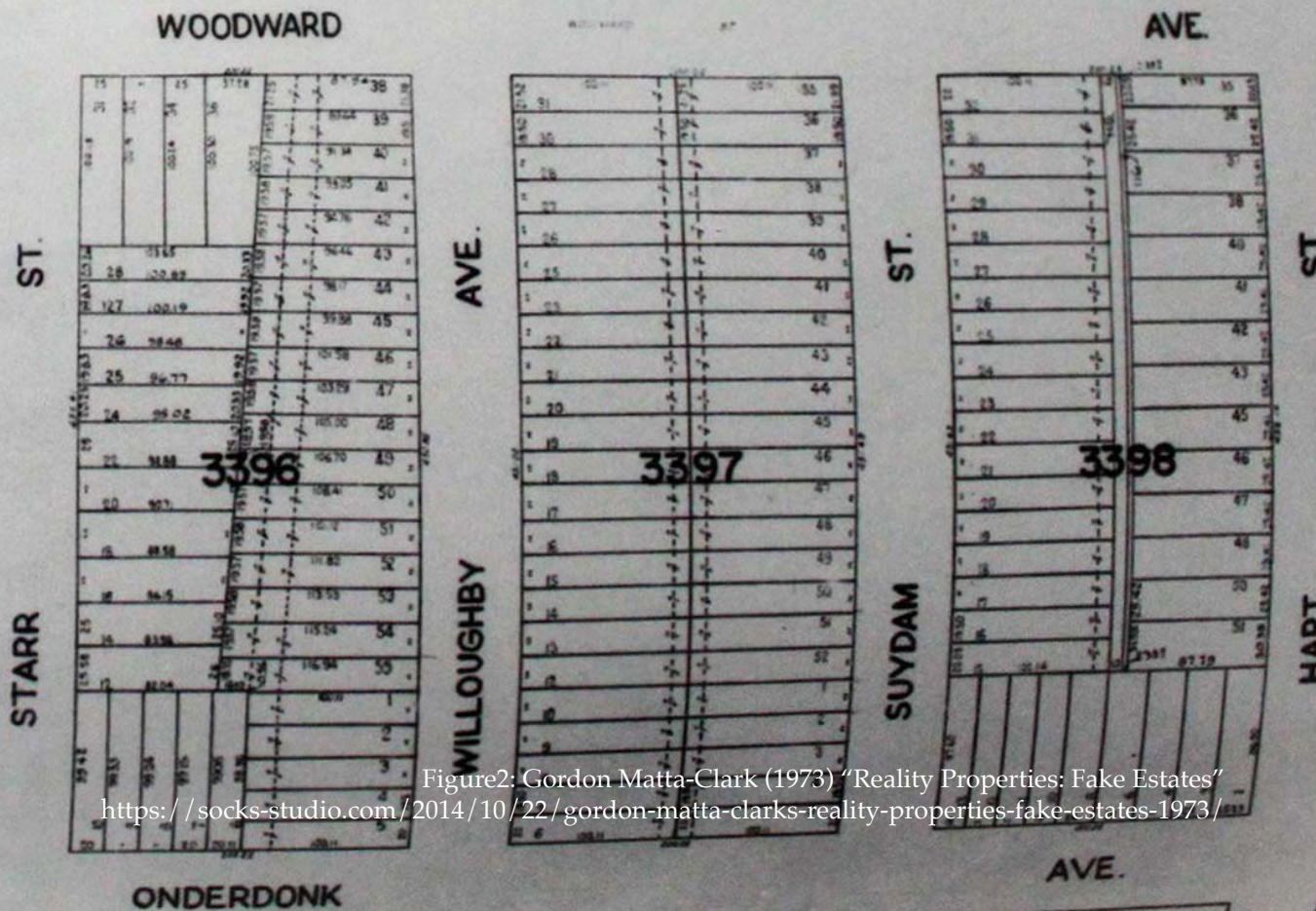
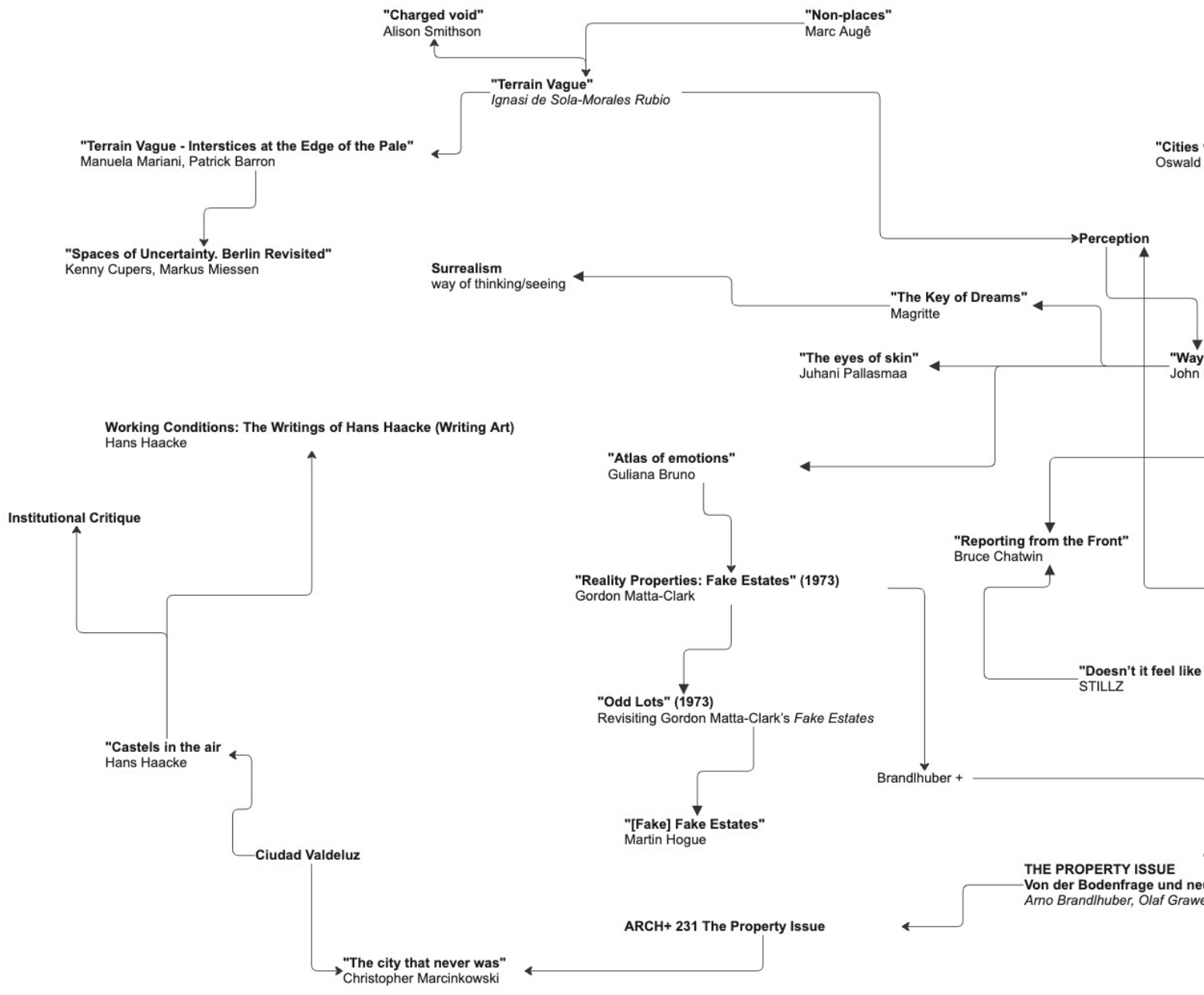


Figure 2: Gordon Matta-Clark (1973) "Reality Properties: Fake Estates"  
<https://socks-studio.com/2014/10/22/gordon-matta-clarks-reality-properties-fake-estates-1973/>



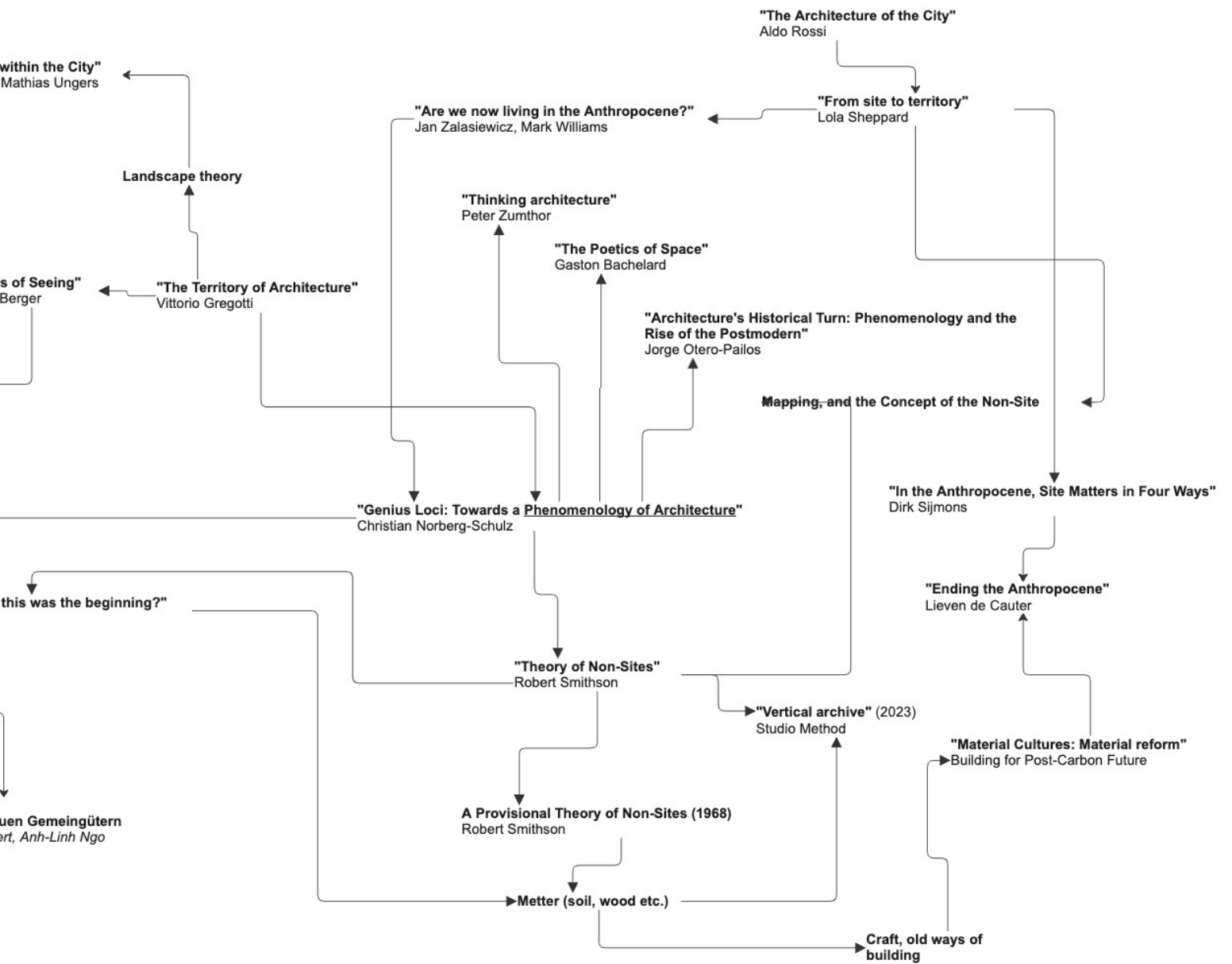


Figure3: Mind map

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## Left-out

*adjective*

1. excluded or omitted
2. remaining behind in an exposed, accessible, or visible place

The theoretical framework used for this research aims to provide a better understanding of the Terrain vague in the city, its origins and potentials that architects can envision. The main basis for the work is the essay "Terrain vague" by Ignasi de Solà-Morale. The text has been translated from his native Spanish, and many layers of context have been lost in the process. It is crucial for the research to go into the depth of his essay and understand all the hidden meanings behind it. First of all, it is important to understand the difference between the types of terrain vague to encode the theory and fully discover the hidden world of forgotten spaces that contain a unique atmosphere. (Figure4,5) As designers we must be aware that all our actions have a great impact on our surroundings and it must be clear that almost every act of architectural intervention in them is an act of violence. In order to better understand the spirit of these spaces and how to preserve them while exploiting their potential, it is crucial to base the paper on the texts on the Phenomenology of Architecture and "Genius Loci".

There are three main themes that are 'left out' in architecture: spaces, materials and people, which are interconnected.

From left-out spaces, overflow spaces, no-spaces to left-over spaces, etc. There are many places in our urban environment that are inaccessible or difficult to use, that function as urban wastelands and remain empty because we do not know how to arrange them. These left-behind spaces tend to transform naturally through the free expression of their users, gradually adapting to their needs, much like the vernacular architecture of an old Italian village. As mentioned before, many of the vacant spaces are occupied by artists because they embrace freedom. This gives them the greatest potential. Perspective changes depending on the perception of the space, and although they seem unusable, they hide a great promise for the future.

These spaces are often associated with "abandoned" materials that contain the history of these sites. Like Robert Smithson's project "A Nonsite" (1967), in which he transported an abundance of building materials from various sites in New Jersey and placed them in a white gallery. The piles of discarded materials were accompanied by photographs and maps taken from the sites. (Figure6) In 1970 Smith said: "...my art exists in two realms - my outdoor sites, which can only be visited and in which no objects are imposed, and indoors, where object exist...". The "non-sites" and the actual sites, although never seen together by

a visitor, complete each other. No matter how far apart they are, they cannot be taken apart. (Robert Smithson, "A nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)" (1968)) It is important to understand the meaning of the materials and to regain appreciation for them. Finding new uses for forgotten and unused materials can help not only to preserve memories and unique atmospheres, but also to address the global climate crisis and help to affordably rebuild our future. The 'Vertical Archive' project, which two of my colleagues and I built as a studio method in Weelde in Rotterdam this summer, addresses the issue of gentrification cycles in the city, new ways of reusing the materials found on site, and how deconstruction and collapse could be used as a design tool for architects. (Figure7) *"The aim of the project is to create an archive that shows the spirit of these places in their material stock, celebrating their layers, decay, patchwork and ad hoc solutions"*. (Method - the vertical archive).

Furthermore, the issue of being 'left out' is relevant in modern times. Where there are left-out spaces or materials, there are often left-out people. Using Actor Network Theory, the aim is to discover the network of reactions between the forgotten spaces and materials and the left-out citizens. The main focus will be on the social group of artists. The research is very similar to the experiences Jane Jacobs described in her book, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" after visiting Boston's poor North End neighbourhood in 1959, which was officially described by Bostonians as *"worst slum and civic shame."* As a journalist and theorist, J. Jacobs perceives her surroundings from a non-designer's point of view: *"The general street atmosphere of buoyancy, friendliness and good health was so infectious that I began asking directions of people just for the fun of getting in on some talk."* In a conversation with a Boston planner, Jacobs was shocked that while he understood the positive statistics about the neighbourhood's quality of life, he still saw it as a slum that needed to be destroyed for the greater good of the residents and *"take those people out of streets."* (Jacobs, 1992) Jacob's observation shows a clear connection to creative spaces where the beauty comes from a sense of community that creates a welcoming and open environment, where everyone is accepted. Our society has started to stand up for minorities and accept everyone equally. No one should feel unseen, unheard or unappreciated. In this research, I would like to focus on the creative class of Madrid as a theme of 'left-out' people, as they suffer from many factors related to the theme of urban emptiness, such as the problem of gentrification.

**heterotopia**\_\_strange or ambivalent places; places that defy the normal logic of ordering

**non-space**\_\_generic places such as bus depots, train stations, and airports which, however elaborate and grandiose, do not confer a feeling of place; opposition between space and place

**urban void**\_\_un-build space in the city

**dead zone**\_\_space that lack a clear definition, programme or function

**residual space**\_\_space in the built environment, that which is the left-over; left-out of the urban design process

**left-out\_gutterspace\_unuseless space**\_\_empty space create because of mistake or chaos in urban planing

**left-over**\_\_no man's lands; empty space created because of deindustrialization and fragmented spaces of infrastructure

**terrain vague\_aboundend\_forgotten**\_\_space ones being used, now not being used anymore

**intersital space\_ interstice**\_\_space between structures or objects; in between

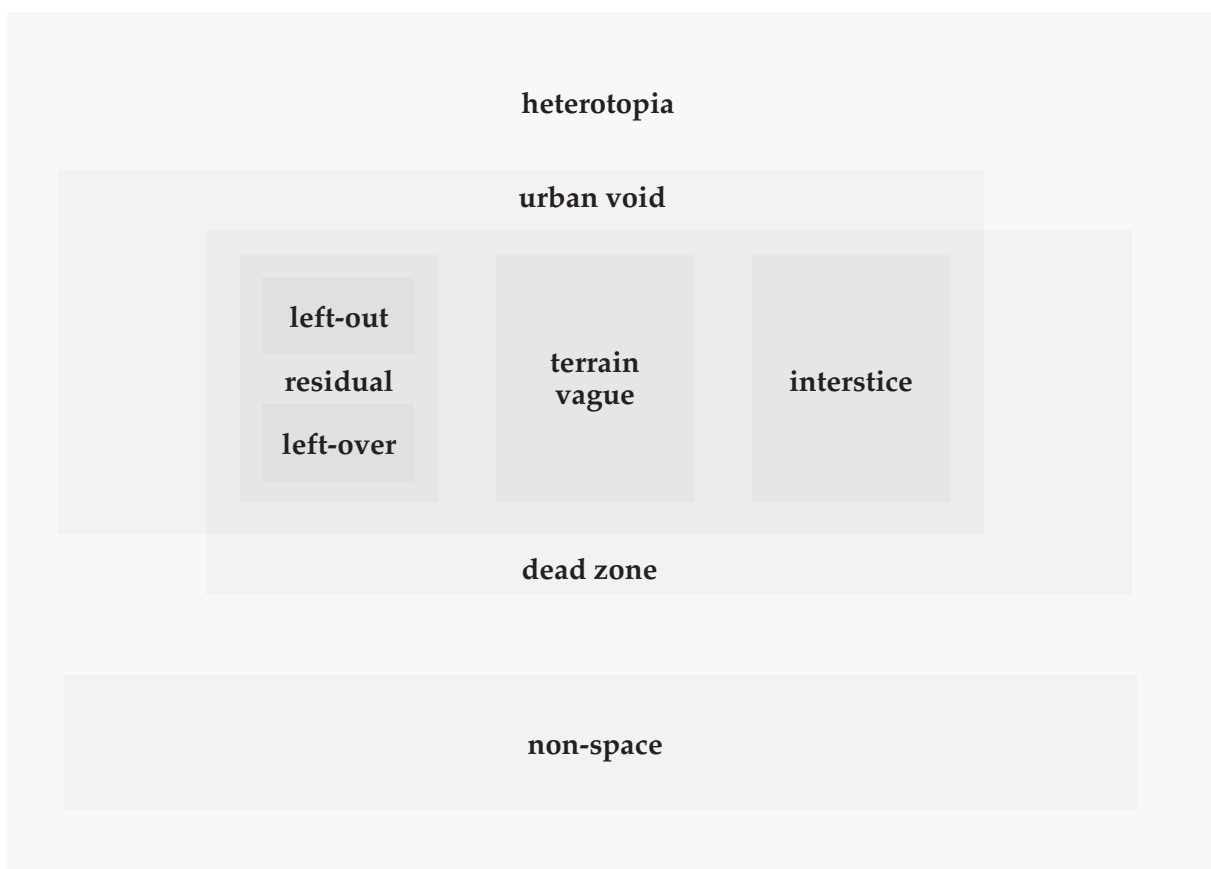


Figure4: Glossary of different types of terrain vagues

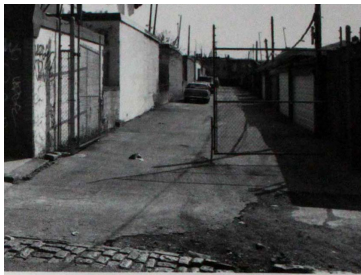


non-space

terrain vague

inter





justice

left-out

left-over

Figure5: Diagrams showing the relation between different terminology for urban voids.

EXIT

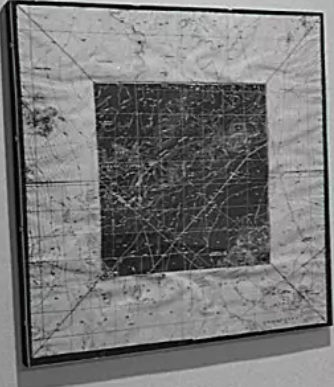




Figure6: Robert Smithson(1967), "A Nonsite"  
<https://mcacheicago.org/Exhibitions/1981/Robert-Smithson-Sculpture>





Figure7: Studio Method (2023), "Vertical Archive"  
<https://www.studio-method.xyz/theverticalarchive>

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

*“At its most basic level, speculative urbanism refers to the construction of new urban infrastructure or settlement for primary political or economic purposes, rather to meet real (as opposed to artificially projected) demographic or market demand.” (Marcinkoski, 2015, p.10)*

This fundamental knowledge leads to the main research interest - the topic of future urban vacancies. Through the research, I want to investigate whether it is possible to predict which part of the city, which system or which buildings will become the next scar in Madrid and, simultaneously, the next potential to change the fate of the creative class.

The first step of the research will be to analyse the growth of Madrid, which will be done by comparing old maps of the city. Although we will look at the history of the city and the different stages of its urban past, the main objective is to analyse the mechanism behind the creation of Terrain Vague. With each master plan, we will be able to understand how the current voids were created, which will help us to predict what kind of empty and forgotten spaces we can expect in Madrid in the future, and to speculate on their potential today.

Secondly, the era of the “master plan” is over. The new generation of architects is approaching design with a bottom-up approach, that is, creating greater impact by making small changes that respond to architecture as part of a larger system. This step will be to find the future projects of Madrid and approach them critically. On the other hand, the city of Madrid is promoting a new vision, “Madrid 360” (Madrid 360 2023). Slogans such as: “Metropolitan Forest”, “Better Cycle Routes”, “Easier Access to the Centre”, “Reducing the cost of public parking”, “Transition to non-polluting vehicles”, “Investing in new infrastructure” promise a bright future. At what point will we learn from the mistakes of the past and change the way we think, not just as architects, but as citizens?

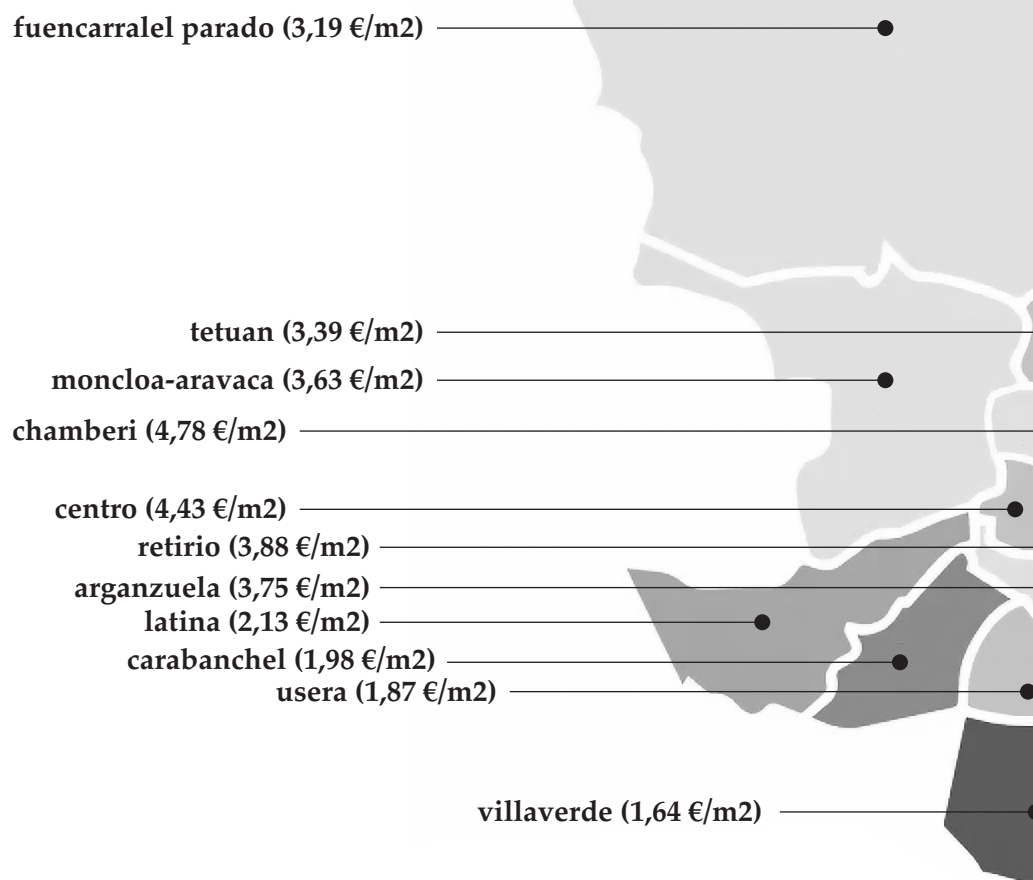
It is also necessary to understand the mechanisms of real estate and speculative urbanism. (Figure 8,9) In order to achieve this, I am going to use the book “The city that never was” written by Christopher Marcinkowski. In his book, Marcinkowski explains the history of speculative urbanism in the context of economics and sociology. He discusses the recent cases and issues related to them on a larger scale. In the second part of the book he focuses on radical urbanism in Spain between 1998 and 2008 and its economic and political background. Finally, he concludes the book with the chapter ‘Products of the Boom and Bust: Casa Studies from the Madrid Metropolitan Region’, where he focuses his interest directly on the current situation in Madrid. According to Mrcinkowski, 25 percent of the urbanised area around and in Madrid is neither fully urbanised.(Marcinkoski, 2015)(Figure10).

In order to better understand the issue of real estate and gentrification of creative spaces in Madrid, I will look into the existing information about them and create a network of systems in relation to the larger system of building environment to see the courses and find the existing gaps. (Figure11)

While researching these unfinished developments, I discovered the German artist Hans Haacke, the main representative of institutional critique, and his project 'Castles in the sky' (2012). (Figure 12) In 2010, Haacke found the partially completed Ensanche de Vallecas neighbourhood on the outskirts of Madrid. One interesting observation the artist made was that the streets were named after 20th-century art styles. As the artist explained, it should be an artistic centre with public buildings, art studios and museums that create a cultural environment. (Hans Haacke - Catálogo de Exposición) (Figure13) *"Artists need authentic locations. You know artists hate the suburbs. They are too confining. Every artist is an anthropologist, unveiling culture. It helps to get some distance on that culture in an environment that does not share all of its presuppositions, an old area, socially diverse, including poverty groups."* (Ley, 2003). This begs the question: for whom should this art space be built, if not for the artists themselves? It is common for large corporations to sponsor art exhibitions and museums in order to make the new developments more attractive. Between 2000 and 2012, 192 public museums were built, of which 75 per cent were built in small towns with less than a hundred thousand inhabitants. (Marcinkoski, 2015) With this knowledge, I intend to map the street art, art museums and creative spaces in and around Madrid, and the terrain vague, in order to discover the direct connections between them. (Figure14)

This research process will lead to a short documentary on these sites and filmed interviews with artists to capture, analyse and reflect on the spirit of these spaces.

The aim is to create a tool that will allow me to find the next voids in the city and create an inverted masterplan that fights the forces of a real estate system and allows more freedom and equality for the citizens of Madrid. My research will help me to define the critical parts of Madrid, whether in the historic centre, on the outskirts, in the areas in between, or on the waterfront that cuts through the city, to see where the focus of the design project could be to create the ultimate creative city.





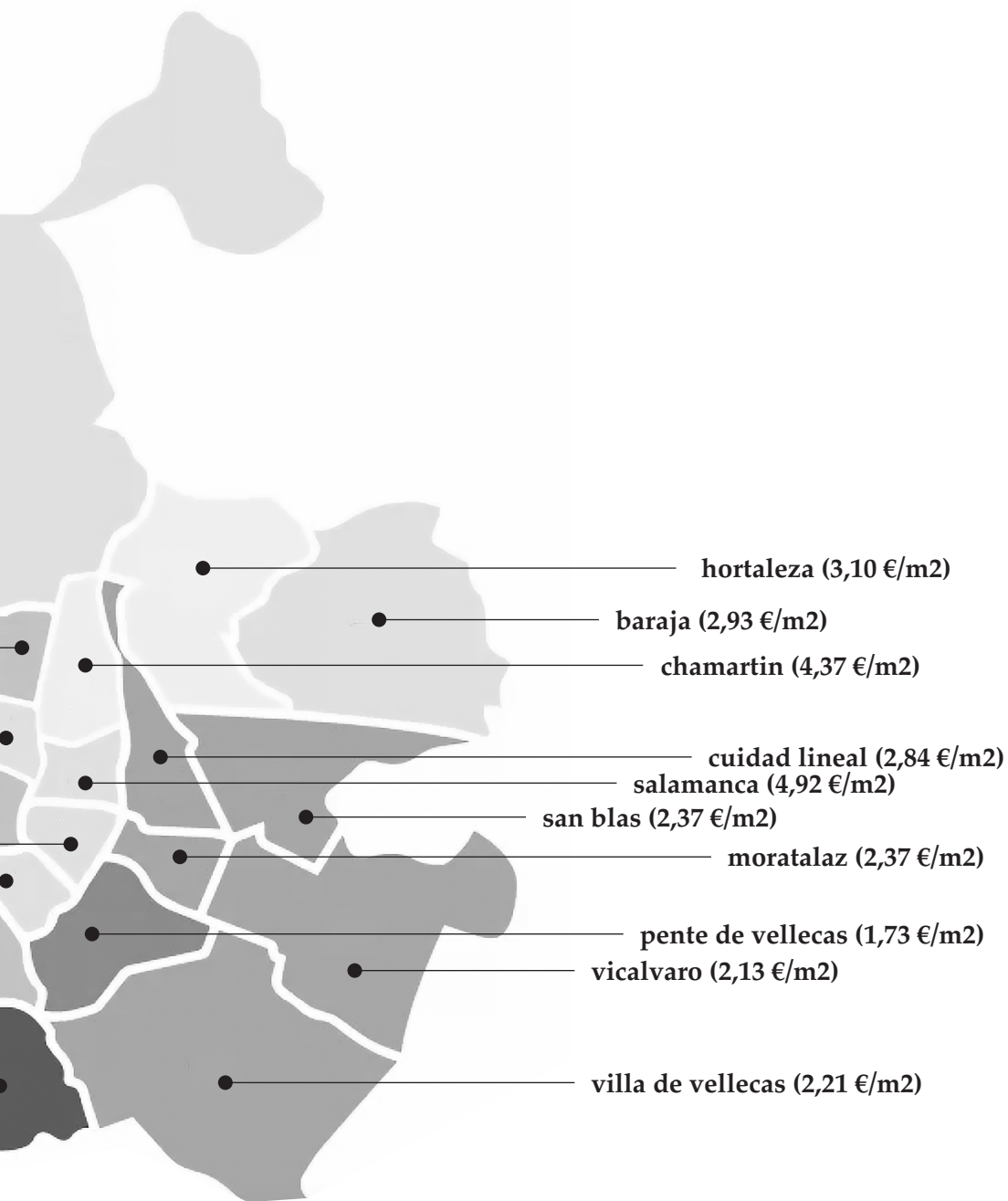
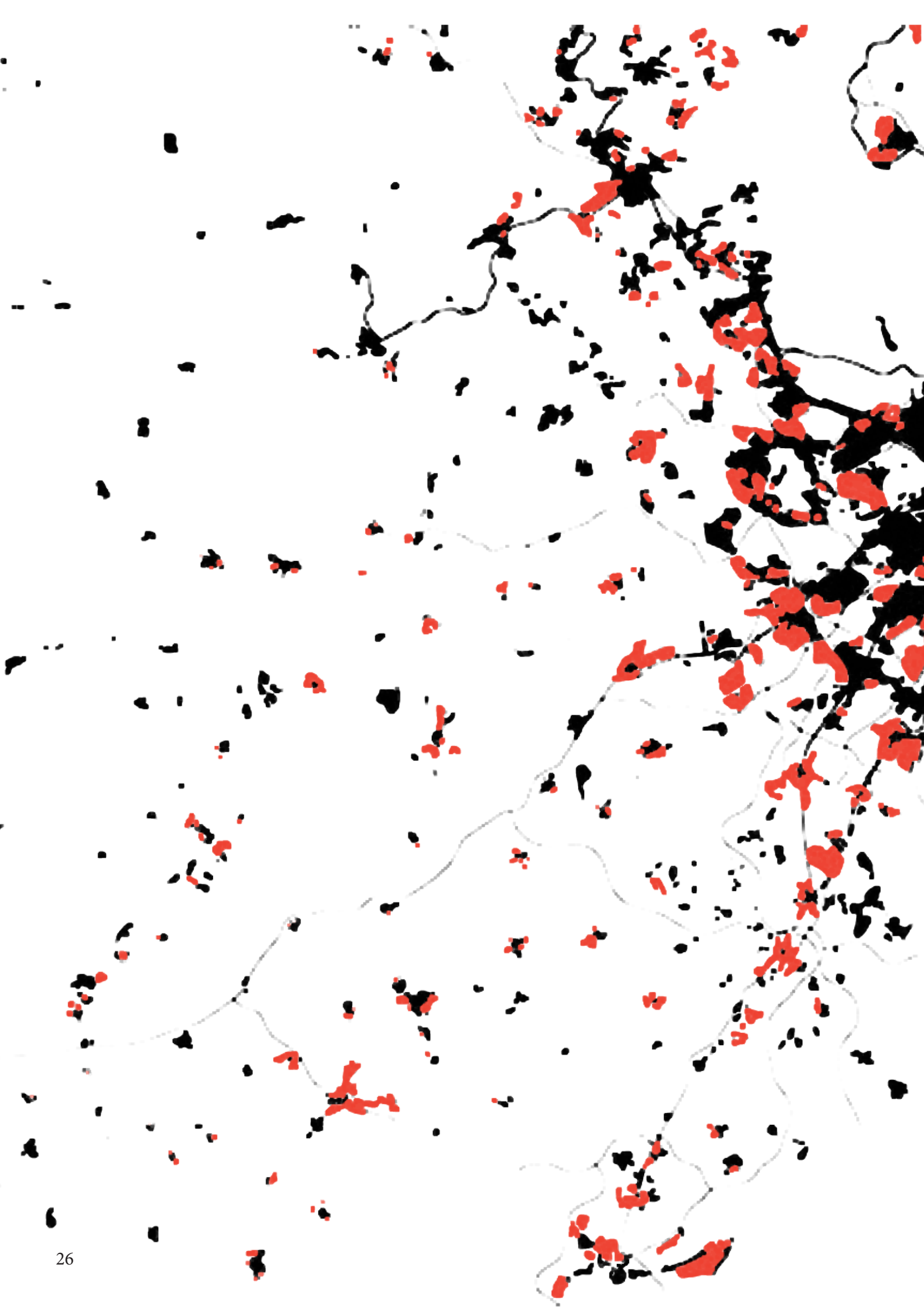


Figure8: Rent map of madrid (2018)  
25



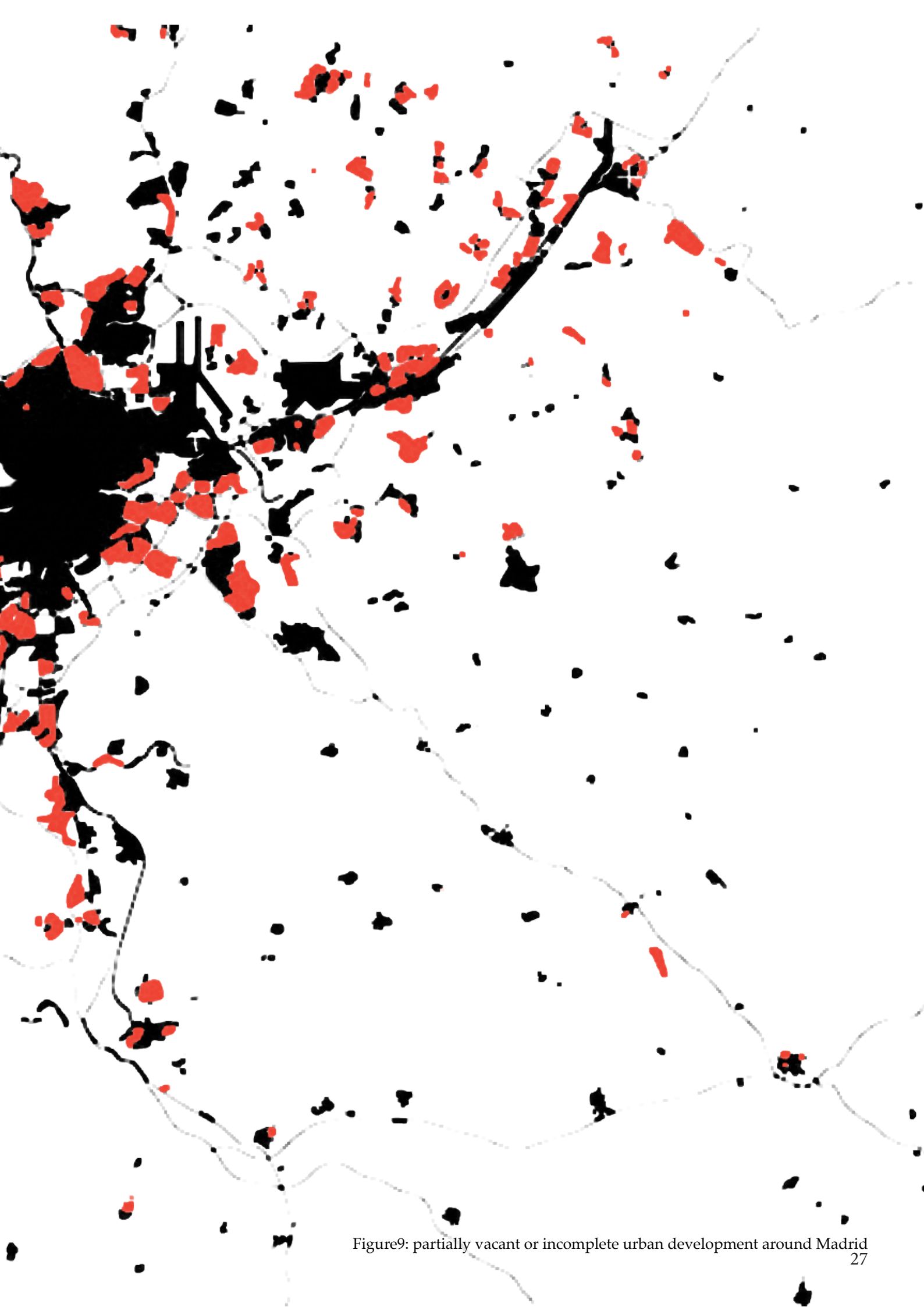


Figure9: partially vacant or incomplete urban development around Madrid

terrain

artists need to leave

rent gets

vague



creative universe

s higher







Figure11: Marcinkowski, M. (2014), "Overview of Ciudad  
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/spain-empty-cities\\_n\\_56ba6221e4b0b40245c47dff](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/spain-empty-cities_n_56ba6221e4b0b40245c47dff)



Madrid - Extremadura





Figure12: Hans Haacke (2012), "Castles in the sky"  
<https://www.contemporaryartlibrary.org/project/hans-haacke-at-museo-reina-sofia-madrid-7039>

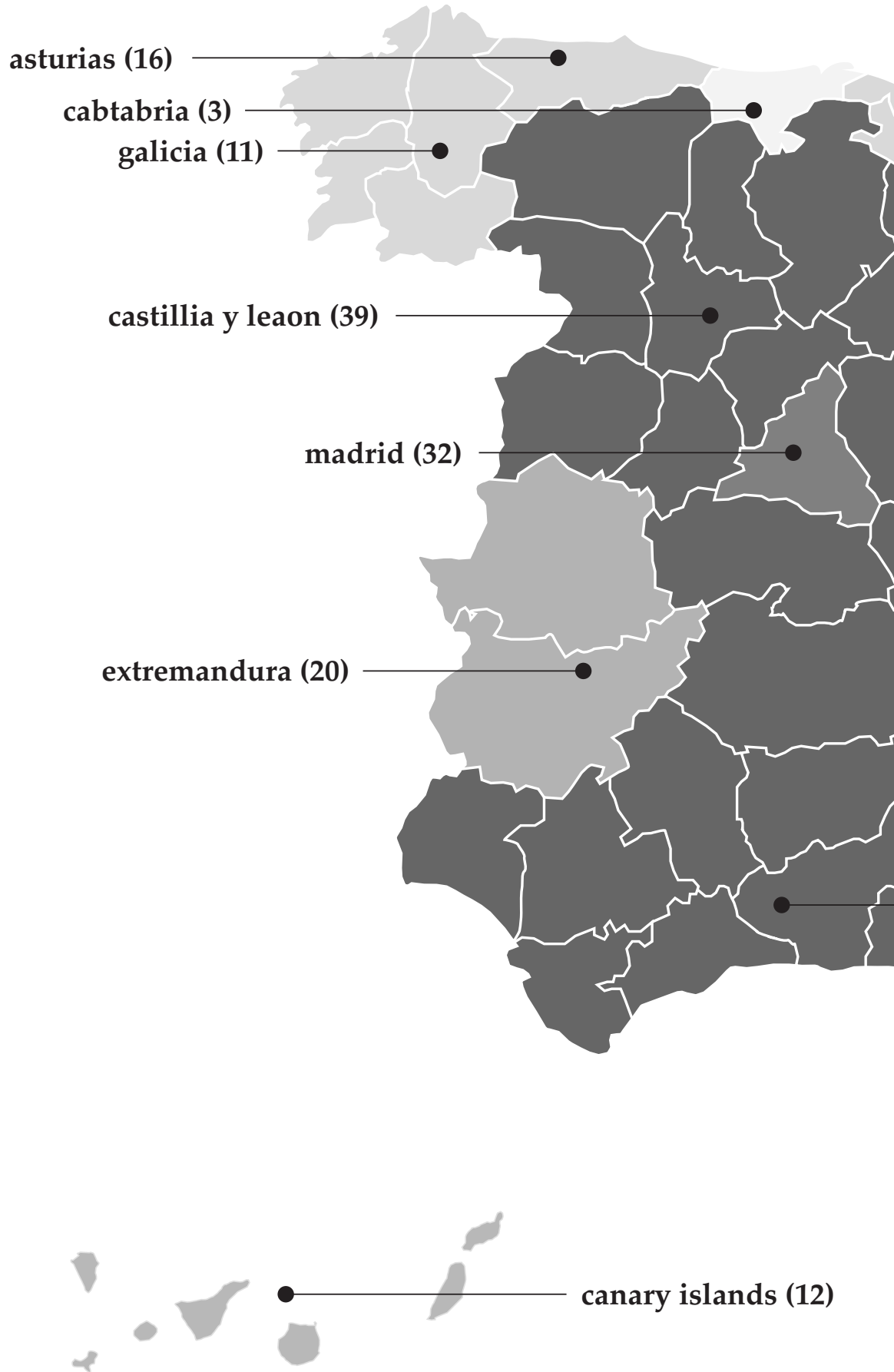


madrid

CALLE DEL

ARTE EXP

OPRESIONISTA



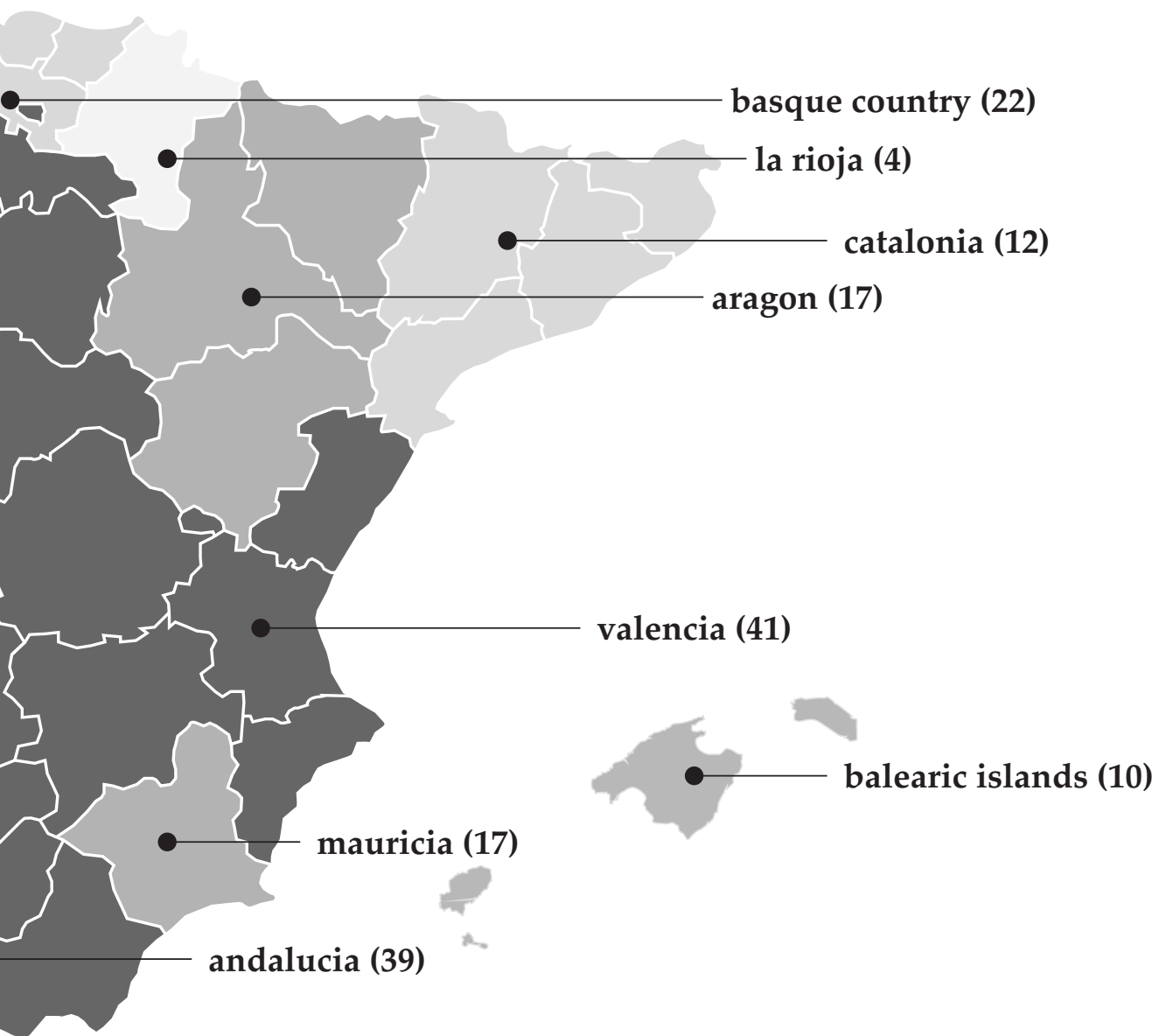


Figure14: map of museum built in SPain between 2000 and 2012

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Why are the city's current and future terrain vagues being created, and how can they help to revitalise Madrid's creative scene?

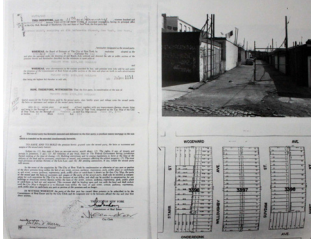
## RELEVANCE

*"Imagine a city where graffiti wasn't illegal, a city where everybody could draw wherever they liked. Where every street was awash with million colours and little phrases. Where standing at the bus stop was never boring. A city that felt like a party where everyone was invited, not just the estate agents and barons of big business. Imagine a city like that and stop leaning against the wall - it's wet."- Banksy (Banksy, 2006)*

Over the past few decades, the real estate industry and gentrification have taken over our cities. This has had a negative impact, resulting in empty spaces and frustrated citizens. By learning from creative communities, we can turn these voids to our advantage and change our future by creating spaces immersed in freedom of expression and inspiring art that surround each and every one of us. As architects of our built environments, we should aim for less of the elitist, capitalist instance of art and real estate, and more of the democratic version, aiming for a decentralised art world that is not tied to commerce, elitism or capitalism, and linking it to equal urban opportunities that welcome everyone.

# RESEARCH DIAGRAMM

## fascination



## problem statement

There are a lot of unused spaces in Madrid and a lot of artists who cannot afford the rent to create

## problematic

terrain vagues end up not being used and abandoned spaces are destroyed, and with them the spirit of these places

## causes

gentrification, real estate, speculative urbanism, leftover spaces due to infrastructure and industrialisation

## potential

terrain vague hide great potential for the expression of freedom (e.g. creative collectives) and the promise of a better future

## research

Why are the city's current and future terrain vagues being created, and how can they help to revitalise Madrid's creative scene?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### art in the city

+ types of art in the city

- + street art  
*Banksy; Bijvoet, M.*
- + creative spaces  
*Miles, M; Bruno, G.*
- + art institutions  
*Alberro, A. and Stimson, B.*

### terrain vague

+ types of terrain vague  
*de Solá-Morales; Mariani, M. and Barron, P.*

+ genius loci of left-out  
*Norberg-Schulz, C.*

- + spaces  
*Sheppard, L.*
- + materials  
*Dall, A; Studio Method*
- + people  
*Frichot, H.; Florida, R.*

+ origin

- + urban history of madrid  
*Parsons, D.L.*
- + speculative urbanism  
*Marcinkowski, M.*
- + real estate  
*Brandlhuber A.*

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

literature study, cataloging of street art, creative spaces and art institution in the city, selective mapping of discovered spaces

literature study, glossary, cataloging of terrain vagues in Madrid, selective mapping of discovered voids

literature study, territorial mapping, photography, documentary making, filmed interviews

literature study, territorial mapping, photography, video making, filmed interviews

+ gentrification  
*Ley, D.*

+ cultural institutions  
*Haacke, H. and Alberro, A.*

literature study, comparison of selected art in the city and voids

## design strategy - vision of a creative city

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Collage of future art in the city (2023); Anna Sujkowska

## **Appendix: VISION OF A CREATIVE CITY\***

*“Shall we consider everything as art? What if bridges, buildings, gardens, or public squares – in short: the entire built environment – had artistic value?”- Winy Maas<sup>1</sup>*

Imagine a creative city. A city that is vibrant, colourful and full of inspiring art. A city that encourages creative freedom all around and allows everyone to express themselves freely.

As architects and urban planners, we need to rethink the way we design our cities. As art has the incredible ability to improve people’s lives and change our surroundings, ultimately changing the quality of our lives for the better, we should embrace it and strive to create an absolute creative city.

There is still much to be done in the world of art. The first step is to de-industrialise art museums and change the perception of street art. When it comes to art institutions, as designers we should think on a more urban scale. We should open up museums so that the artworks on display become one with the urban texture. Wouldn’t it be great if art surrounded each and every one of us on a daily basis, rather than being enclosed in an intimidating building that only a small group of people visit. A city where art is easily accessible and well-known works of art would mix with street art, while also becoming it. Then the whole city would be transformed into an exhibition space - an urban museum.

Next, to create a creative city, we need to tackle the shortage of affordable studios and the gentrification of the creative spaces. By creating a dynamic, artistic interface stretching across the city, we can solve the problem of neighbourhoods being taken over by high society. The aim should be to mix different social groups and allow them to emerge, by creating an environment that allows them to do so. I am not necessarily against building new buildings, but it is important to think of everyone and not just one demographic group. If all neighbourhoods are equally inspirational, there will be no reason for gentrification. When designing an urban structure we should seek to meld the whole city together. I imagine it as a structure that organically expands in all directions, creating new housing to cope with the crisis, but at the same time creating porosity in the urban fabric, letting the sunshine into the densely urbanised city and maintaining the feeling of an artistic village. By adding an extra layers of housing and in between, free space for artists to create their own and unique working space, that is dynamic and easy to change, is firstly affordable but most importantly encourages creativity.

Just as art inspires, the vision of a creative city motivates to change. The goal is to create a happy city and create an environment that inspires.

To create a city that is art - a creative city.

\* Conclusion of my Theory Thesis paper at TU Delft submitted on 20 April 2023

<sup>1</sup> ArtCity. everything is art: Pan Amsterdam 2022 | (2022) The Why Factory. Available at: <https://thewhyfactory.com/news/artcity-everything-is-art-pan-amsterdam-2022/> (Accessed: 14 April 2023).