留白：将城市虚空转变为公共空间
THE LIMIT TOWARD EMPTINESS: URBAN VOIDS AS PUBLIC SPACE

摘要
Cities are spatial aggregations of capital and culture that host and serve a vast array of different and often contradictory publics. For this reason, cities need spaces that accept and encourage multiple types of representations and forms of expression: planned and spontaneous, regulated and unregulated, permanent and temporary. This essay argues that emptiness is a spatial quality that can satisfy these needs and that urban voids are a paradigmatic example of empty spaces. The term "void" implies that these spaces are emptied of the value typically associated with cities as places of capital accumulation. But this emptiness (of capital, real estate value, efficacy, or production) is what enables other sensibilities and opportunities to emerge. In other words, a lack of value is what makes these vacant spaces appear as marginal, and this marginality is precisely what gives the urban voids the possibilities for publicness that other urban spaces do not have. Despite the social opportunities offered by urban voids, the evanescence of emptiness ultimately exposes the limits of urban voids.

关键词
Emptiness; Public Space; Urban Voids; Void; Terrain Vague

1 引言
作为资本积累的物质载体，城市具备吸引、吸纳并持有资本的能力。正如大卫·哈维所言：“城市发展依赖于剩余产品的地理与社会聚集。”[1]虽然其他学者也曾发表过类似观点，但哈维做出了经典总结：城市是持续的资源消耗与资本持有的时空载体。
1 Introduction

As fabrics of capital accumulation, cities are physical entities capable of attracting, absorbing, and holding capital. As David Harvey has argued, “cities have arisen through geographical and social concentrations of a surplus product.”[1] Following this line of thought—which has been discussed by many authors but is exemplified by Harvey—cities can be described as continuous resource-consuming and capital-holding spatiotemporal fabrics.

As fabrics of cultural accumulation, cities host and serve a vast array of different and often contradictory publics. Non-urban environments are mostly characterized by congruent publics with similar needs and desires. This coherent condition results in stable and recognizable social and urban fabrics (for example, dormitory cities, central business districts, suburbs, or villages). In contrast, urban environments are characterized by incongruent publics defined by a mix of different cultural interests and needs, expressed and satisfied respectively by different types of public space.

This dual condition as aggregators of capital and culture characterizes urban fabrics. While the tensions between both are experienced in many of the cities’ realms, public space appears to be where these pressures can be felt most evidently. Due to their role and meaning in the construction and definition of the public realm, public spaces are expected to embody a well-defined character and gravitas typically connected to a city’s economic stability and vitality. Due to the public’s diversity, however, these spaces must engage with temporary, overlapping, and often contradictory sensibilities and occupations.

2 Emptiness as a Synthetic Spatial Quality

There are different ways to engage with these overlapping realities. From my perspective, emptiness is an abstract spatial condition that allows me to work on this overlapping condition as both independent and interrelated realities. With the term emptiness, I am referring to both designed spaces that appear to be empty and to the process of emptying space from a concrete characteristic. This emptying process opens up space for unplanned or unexpected uses and meanings coming from different citizenries. To enable this simultaneous process of emptying and opening up space, the spatial imagination of emptiness must itself be kept empty. Summarizing, I use the term emptiness in this article to refer to this dual spatial condition that applies to both citizens and designers: emptiness refers to both empty space and empty expectations.
For this reason, while emptiness is usually understood to be an absolute condition, I argue that emptiness is better described as a useful horizon of possibilities for the imagination of the public realm. Accordingly, I propose treating emptiness as a mathematical limit, a condition to tend to, but that cannot and is never fully reached.

While there are different types of spaces that could be argued to satisfy this dual nature of emptiness, in this article, I briefly discuss urban voids as one of its most exemplary. The term void can project bad connotations when discussing urban spaces—as some people mistake void for vacuum—and, thus, the expression “urban void” could be misunderstood. People interested in redefining the city according to other ideologies or points of view that are not exclusively economic (ecological sustainability or social diversity, for example) might argue that these spaces are not empty. To them, these spaces are, in fact, full of alternative (non-economic) potential. Due to their marginality, these spaces offer opportunities (ecological or social, for example) that other public spaces do not—and cannot. Following this line of thought, it could be argued that another term should be used—even if it is only for practical reasons.

However, I do not use the term void to imply that these spaces are emptied of everything—in other words, a void should not be confused with a vacuum. The term void means that these spaces are emptied of the value typically associated with cities as places of capital accumulation. But this emptiness (of capital, real estate value, efficacy, or production) is precisely what enables other sensibilities and opportunities to emerge. In other words, a lack of value is what makes these vacant spaces appear as marginal, and this marginality is precisely what gives the urban voids the possibilities that other urban spaces do not have.

3 Urban Voids as Outsides to Capital and Culture

Urban voids are residues of capitalist processes of urbanization. They are leftovers, abandoned places that no longer yield the planned and desired output. As such, they are empty of value, productivity, and efficiency. The whiting out of capital turns urban spaces into a marginal state but, simultaneously, provides them with potential and opportunities. Therefore, urban voids are gaps, intentionally or accidentally left outside of the continuum of space, organization, power, representation, infrastructure, and control of the city. Urban voids are places where both capital and social management are no longer in existence.

In 1995, Ignasi de Solà-Morales published “Terrain Vague,” an article that launched widespread interest in the city’s vacant
areas within the design disciplines of the built environment (architecture, landscape architecture, and urbanism). He used the specific term "terrain vague" to refer to the kind of spaces that today are generically known as urban voids. In his now well-known article, de Solà-Morales argued that the terrain vague should be characterized as “internal to the city yet external to its everyday use... These strange places exist outside the city’s effective circuits and productive structures.”

He further described the terrain vague as “foreign to the urban system, mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city, its negative image, as much a critique as a possible alternative.” In other words, the terrain vague exists within the city but does not belong to it; the terrain vague is located “where the city is no longer.”

Following de Solà-Morales’ line of thought, it can be argued that urban voids are part of the city, but they are located outside of its everyday use. They do not satisfy any functional need, and as a consequence, they are not part of the city’s formal productive or playful tissue. While they are located inside cities, urban voids are separated from their surrounding environments, becoming spaces of seclusion located outside of cultural norms. Due to this condition as exteriors to urban space, urban voids can be described as places outside to both capital and culture.

Urban voids are both evidence and respite. They are evidence of the urban fabric’s capacity to dominate people’s lives, but they also offer a respite from this dominance. Devoid of urbanity, without apparent control, and appearing as open and available, marginal spaces allow for the emergence of individual spontaneity. Urban voids are both failures of collective will and becoming of individual spontaneity. Due to their categorization as failures, they are represented as marginal within the social and cultural imagination. As potentials, however, they become places of seclusion that can help unleash people’s imaginations. This simultaneous double perception is what makes urban voids an alternative to common public spaces.

**4 Emptiness as Spaces Framed in Time or Temporalities Enclosed in Space**

Urban voids have boundaries that are more defined and less porous than most types of public space. Because of their clearly defined containment, urban voids can be considered clearings of capital within the urban fabric. Due to both their marginality and containment, urban voids are localized bounded spaces that allow for unregulated sociocultural freedoms.

In their article on urban voids as nameless spaces, Stefano Boeri, Arturo Lanzani, and Edoardo Marini address urban...
“必须在两个极端情况下寻求集体身份的可能性。一种极端情况是，这种可能性会在可见的‘公共’空间中体现，在这种公共空间中，社会呈现出明显的集体身份，且这种身份正逐渐被对某些消费品的拥有或某些服务的利用来定义；另一种情况是，这种可能性体现在更个人化层面及更为隐蔽的地理环境中，这些场所的亲密关系由社区、宗族、种族或地域网络粘合在一起：例如，小型火车站的候车室，不同身份背景的当地居民在此相遇；或者是单栋住宅附近的空地，可以被用作临时性的橄榄球场。”[3]

城市虚空可以提供一种新型的公共空间，进而促进不同的集体和个体的临时流通。必须指出的是，这种可能性的产生主要缘于城市虚空的局限性，即其作为城市内部具有明确边界的空间。

在提到城市虚空的品质时，一些学者使用了具有时空双重特征的表述。例如，吕克·勒维克使用“空隙”(interstice)一词描述这些空间，并指出该术语体现了空间和时间上的双重维度。[4]此外，许多学者还使用了一些将时间和空间相结合的术语来反映时空品质。如德·索拉－莫拉埃尔最初使用的“模糊地块”就是早期的一个例子——正如他所解释的那样，从词源上讲，这一术语是指地表的振动性和波动性扩展。[5]其他类似的表述还包括城市触媒概念下所使用的“时间间隔”(time gap)一词，这一概念将城市虚空形容为“在先前的用地性质瓦解之后、在新的商业发展之前的停滞时刻”。[6]

除了空间限制外，临时性这一特点在城市虚空的构成中也起着决定性作用。正是由于这些特征，城市虚空将不仅仅是临时的一种空间，在这些空间中所进行的活动的持续时间也非常有限。因此，城市虚空也可以理解为被时间界定的空间，或被空间包围的时间。

5 未被充分认知的美学[7]

在资本积累和消费的过程中，诞生了诸如办公大楼、机场或高端购物中心等特殊而纯粹的空间形式，以至于其背景环境因素(如区位、气候等)都已变得不足为道。因此，无论这些空间位于何处，总会呈现出自我相似性，或者趋于雷同。从其在经济体制下所承担的目的来看，城市虚空的价值在于讨论公共空间的可能性。如果认为有可能建立一种集体身份，那就必须选择两种极端情况。一方面，这种身份可能在可见的‘公共’空间中体现，在这些空间中社会呈现出明确的集体身份，并逐渐通过对某些消费品的拥有或使用服务来定义。另一方面，这种身份可能在更个人化层面及更为隐蔽的地理环境中体现，这些地方的亲密关系由社区、宗族、种族或地域网络粘合在一起：例如，小型火车站的候车室，不同背景的当地居民在此相遇；或者是单栋住宅附近的空地，可以被用作临时性的橄榄球场。”[3]

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5 The Aesthetics of Underspecification[1]

The purest forms resulting from processes of capital accumulation and consumption—office towers, airports, or high-end shopping malls, for example—are highly specified spaces to the extreme that local circumstances such as site, climate, and...
In opposition to this condition of overspecification, urban voids are the purest form of capital dissipation and idleness in cities. They can be considered the residue of the processes associated with capital accumulation and consumption. As suggested by Michael Greenberg, Frank Popper, and Bernadette West in their article on temporarily obsolete abandoned derelict sites, “every city has them; scattered, random unused parcels of land of varying size and shape.” [7]

Robert Smithson recognized the duality existing between urban accumulations and their counterparts, urban voids. In his text “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” he surveyed Passaic’s overspecified and underspecified urban components—infrastructural elements and commercial spaces as well as abandoned and underused spaces. Smithson argued that, regardless of their nature, all these components share a similar fate and achieve monumental status through sheer ubiquity, anonymity, and apparent unavoidableness. This seemingly confounding situation—how can infrastructures and commercial spaces have the same status as urban voids?—leads him to ask if Passaic has, in fact, “replaced Rome as The Eternal City?” [8]

His response, stated even before he asked the question, is evident as “that unimaginative suburb could have been a clumsy eternity, a cheap copy of The City of the Immortals.” [8]

For this reason, we know what urban voids look like regardless of where they are located. This characteristic makes such spaces uniquely different from traditional forms of public space, which tend to pay attention to their circumstantial and local context—as it appears via cultural identity, neighborhood characteristics, or urban regulations. Since the urban void emerges as a residue, its character is not influenced by these local factors, and, as a consequence, they tend to appear as siteless. The surrounding urban and sociocultural context does not give the urban void a unique character; they all look quite similar regardless of location (Fig. 1–9). As argued by Christophe Girot, the urban void is a “universal artifact” whose “ambiguity is as pervasive as their ubiquity: culture-less and placeless, the ‘terrain vague’ looks identical no matter where it is found.” [9]

While this lack of specification usually tends to be perceived as a negative quality in the definition of public space, in the case of the urban void, however, it should be considered as the enabling and liberating factor for the emergence of an alternative
kind of public space. As a result of both unspecification and underspecification, placelessness gives urban voids a ubiquitous and anonymous appearance that further strengthens their public potentials.

6 An Opportunity for Citizens: Enjoying Emptiness

Due to their status as marginal spaces, these spaces offer freedoms distinct from and not found within traditional public spaces. The emergence of this alternative type of publicness can

共空间的原因。由于未被定义或未被充分认知，城市虚空变得随处可见，进而产生了巨大的公共潜力。

6 为市民创造享受留白的机会

由于虚空具备边缘化空间的特征，城市虚空便拥有了传统公共空间所没有的“自由”。这种另类的公共性发挥了清空功能，典型的公众面貌或发展期望在这里一概不见。丹尼尔·坎波对于城市虚空所带
also be considered a result of a temporary process of whiting out typical public decorum or expectations. Daniel Campo has richly described the experiences afforded by one such urban void, the abandoned yard of the former Brooklyn Eastern District Terminal: “It served basic recreational needs of some but not all local residents—including a place to experience beauty, solitude, play, or the company of others—but was no mere substitute for a city park. People could and did do what they wanted, whether it was to swim in the river, have a barbecue, build a skatepark, practice loud music, play with fire, or create art out of found rubble…. It was a place without explicit rules: You did what you wanted, but with the understanding that others would do the same.” [10]

7 A Role for Designers: Protecting the Void

Despite their emptiness, urban voids can have as much presence as built forms. Jason Young aptly describes this condition in his study of Detroit, “Density of Emptiness,” in which he analyzes the presence acquired by emptiness in a city that has undergone successive processes of unbuilding and decay. In this text, Young describes emptiness as the primordial spatial quality of Detroit’s urban experience, which stands in opposition to the typical congested experience of traditional urban fabrics: “Emptiness perforates density, countering the mental effects of congestion with a ‘fullness’ and a sense of expectancy all its own.” [11]

As available land, urban voids can always be developed and thus re-integrated into the city’s fabric. In many instances, this might be the necessary line of action due to social or environmental circumstances. However, if the context does not require a complete reintegration, then urban voids should be protected to fulfill their potential as alternative public spaces. The question that emerges is, how can this opportunity be made physical without destroying the qualities that made it possible in the first place? As Stéphane Tonnelat succinctly phrased it, the question is: “how to retain in a built project the indeterminacy of the interstice that made it attractive in the first place?” [12]

Particularly, how can freedom and indeterminacy be enabled through disciplines that epitomize and generally require power and authority?

Several authors have expressed doubts about the ability of Architecture to exercise this change. For instance, Gil Doron has used the term “transgressive zone” to refer to the fact that urban voids are defined by the disciplinary limits of Architecture and Urban Planning. Rem Koolhaas has also expressed similar doubts when reflecting on the manifesto on the conceptual reframing...
and spatial re-imagination of the city of Berlin, *Berlin: A Green Archipelago*, which he produced jointly with Oswald Mathias Ungers: “Where there is nothing, everything is possible. Where there is architecture, nothing (else) is possible.”[13] It is worth noting that while these concerns have been explicitly expressed about Architecture, the disciplines of Urban Planning exhibit similar deficiencies. Out of the main design disciplines of the Built Environment, Landscape Architecture seems to be the only discipline that might approach this transformation with the right sensibility.

In many cases, the emptiness found in urban voids has not been accepted or appreciated. While some type of remediation might sometimes be necessary due to prior uses, the reclamation processes imagined by most authors to develop an urban void would inevitably destroy the void's emptiness. Consequently, the first role of any design process engaging with an urban void should be to protect its voidness so that it can retain its qualities as an opening in the capitalist continuum of the city that can allow for true publicness to emerge.

In *Colonizing the Void: Adriaan Geuze, West 8 Landscape Architects, Rotterdam*—a book published on the occasion of the Dutch contribution to the 1996 Venice Biennale—Hans van Dijk argues that architects and urban designers are beginning to realize that the void, rather than space, is the real concern of architecture and urban design. However, he points out that there are significant differences between both terms—one does not merely replace the other—and that the void presents new disciplinary contradictions that have not yet been thoroughly discussed. “The void points to the absence of intentions. The void is the absence of architecture. The void is the domain of unfulfilled promise and unlimited opportunity. It is the projection screen of our desire.”[14]

This lack of intentions is precisely what gives the void its characteristic potential. To take advantage of the opportunities they present, urban voids need to be protected in this specific state that precedes the formalizing of any intention. When voids are filled with intentions, their emptiness evaporates, as intentions will inevitably be materialized with design plans that prevent the appearance of other opportunities and possibilities. For this reason, the first step of any design act conceived for an urban void must be the protection of the void in its indeterminate and ambiguous state. Paradoxically, this first intention must absolutely ensure that the void lacks any other additional purposes.

8 The Limits of Emptiness

Despite the social opportunities offered by urban voids, emptiness also poses risks. As byproducts, urban voids are
not spaces originally designed through conscious acts and, therefore, are not endowed with permanent meanings. For this reason, urban voids can have different implications for different constituencies, and this fluid quality is what ultimately allows voids to become appropriated and used by heterogeneous publics in differing ways. For urban voids to retain their openness, then, the lack of permanent meanings—or, in other words, the emptiness of permanent meanings—must be protected, and, consequentially, urban voids should remain as spaces unable to retain or represent memories. Urban voids should remain amnesic.

Memory is an essential vehicle for the construction and definition of identity. Therefore, the inability to retain memory can be an instrument of power to prevent subjects and communities from maintaining and protecting their individual or collective identities. For this reason, urban voids can be an inappropriate or just unacceptable type of public space for particular circumstances or communities. However, this inadequacy should be considered an exception against the ruling usefulness that urban voids suggest in serving incongruous publics. Emptiness is an elusive spatial quality, an ever-escaping horizon of possibility that, if protected, can be genuinely public in ways incomparable to any other urban quality.

Despite the social opportunities offered by urban voids, the evanescence of emptiness ultimately exposes the limits of urban voids. And, consequentially, the unreachability of a limit toward emptiness.

NOTE

This article includes edited versions of texts from the book A Glossary of Urban Voids by the author, Sergio Lopez-Pineiro. They are reprinted here by courtesy of their author, Sergio Lopez-Pineiro, and publisher, JOVIS.