

## Peripheral Centrality

¿What happens if we position the site, located in the district of Carabanchel, as at the core of the city?  
¿When the periphery becomes the center, what city do we get?¹

With 35.000 people living in 80 ha, this is an extremely dense urban chunk –one of the densest in the entire Madrid region. And yet, there are just a handful of buildings that raise above 6 floors. These buildings are host to a vibrant cultural scene, with several galleries, creative ventures and the highest amount of rehearsal studios in Europe. This is a diverse city too, with a fourth of the population coming from abroad; if it weren't for their lower incomes, we could perfectly be speaking about the 'actual' city center of Madrid.

1 Manolo Laguillo, *Razón y ciudad* (Madrid: Fundación ICO, 2013)

## Unconscious Places²

Unlike the center, this peripheral city has no gardens or historic parks. It is an impervious island, removed from the network of green areas of the region. At least, officially: the few public spaces that are defined as 'parks' in the municipal cartography present some trees, but are completely paved on the ground level. There are, however, many vacant lots –the scars of decades of second class planning and collective indifference, tenaciously established as a defining element of this and other cities that emerged in the periphery of the metropolis.

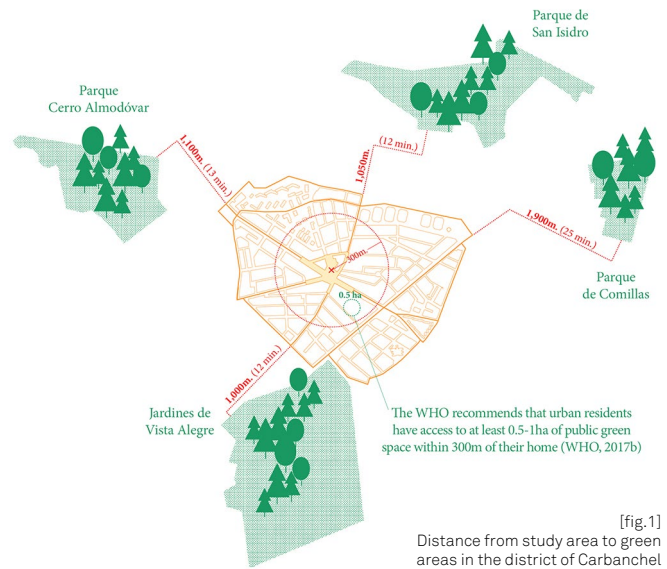
Can we think of them as a collective cultural marker of the peripheral city? Combined, all these lots weave an unconscious network spanning over **29,033 m<sup>2</sup>** of pervious, changing, and organic ground.

2 Thomas Struth, *Unconscious Places* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1987)

## The value of the wasteland

In the peripheral city, the vacant lot is a precious asset. But not because of its potential for being developed, but because of its potential to remain empty, pervious, fertile, green, porous, accessible. This project aims to harvest this potential, and poses itself to respond the following questions:

What happens if we turn wasteland into landscape?  
**Can we think of the vacant lot not as the ground for a future building, but as a unique kind of public space?**



[fig.1]  
Distance from study area to green areas in the district of Carabanchel



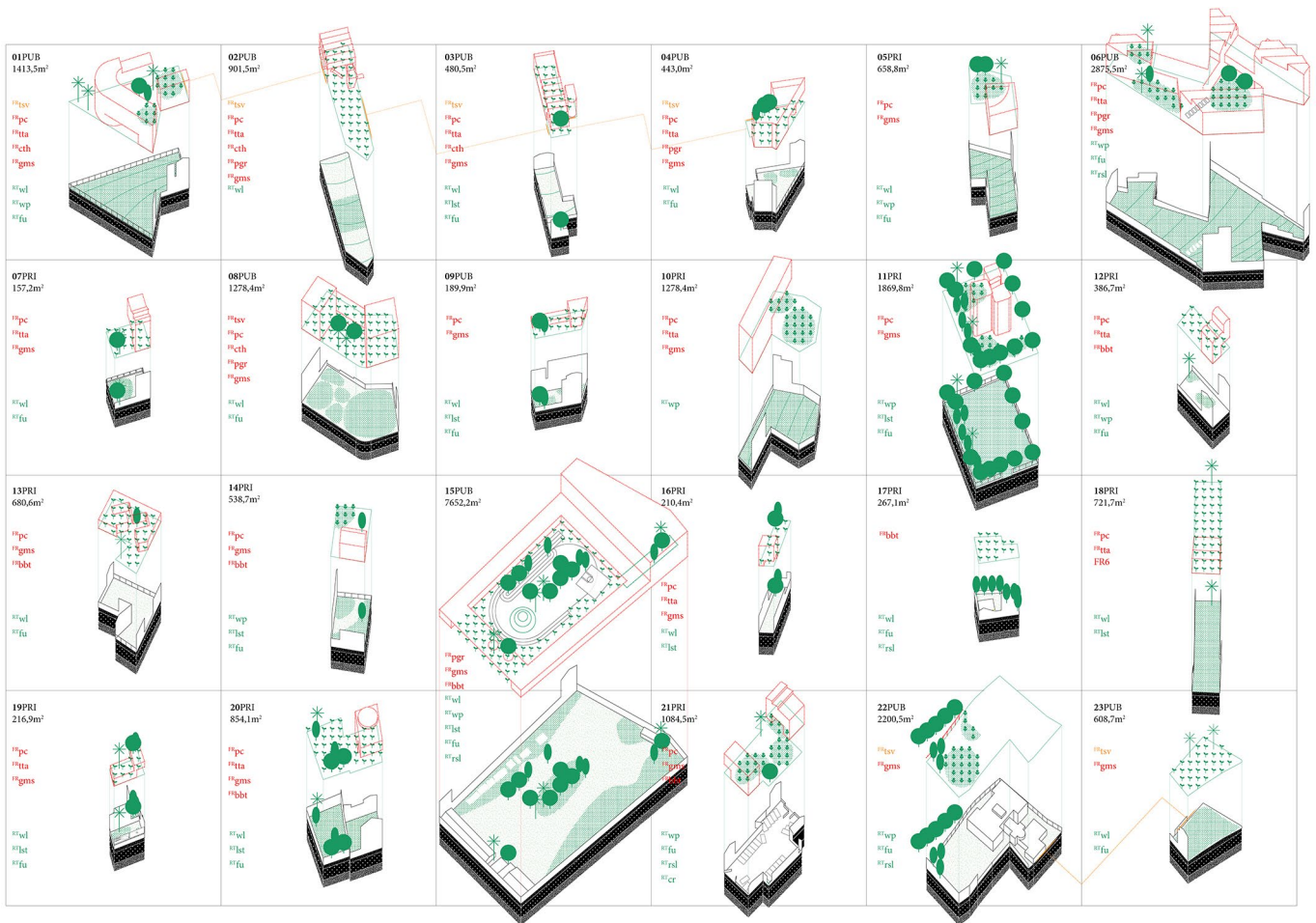
[fig.2]  
Vacant lots in the area of study



[fig.3]  
Digital collage: Manolo Laguillo, *Las Afueras*, 1992-1993;  
Céline Clanet, *Dam and Man in Savoy*, 2011

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## WASTELAND-SCAPES



[fig.4]

### Strategies of the void<sup>3</sup>

The fundamental purpose of this proposal is to preserve and enhance the empty spaces in the area. To achieve this goal, the built and the void establish a new kind of agreement, whereby the essential traits of wasteland – informality, fertility, strangeness, ambiguity, emptiness, opportunity, fluctuation – become tactics to dignify the vacant lots, as well as guidelines to develop them. These tactics are necessarily site specific, but the inventory above, with its abstraction, offers the possibility of extrapolating them to other peripheral cities.

#### REFITTING TACTICS

- RTwl WEEDLAND** Preservation and enhancement of spontaneous vegetation.
- RTwp WILD PARTERRES** Launching of seed bombs in cooperation with neighbors.
- RTlst LONG-STANDERS** Preservation and repairation of existing trees and other features.
- RTfu FENCES UP!** Repairation and 40cm. lift of the existing fence.
- RTrsil RE-SOIL** Cleaning of soils and regeneration of polluted areas.
- RTcr CRACKING** Ripping of asphalt and other impervious surfaces.

#### FITTING GUIDELINES

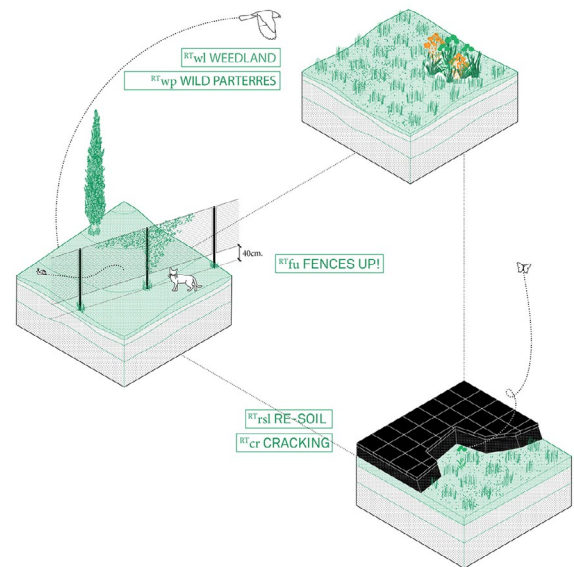
- FRtsv THE SUPERVOID** Expansion and connection of vacant lots. Pedestrianization.
- FRpc POROCITY** Visual and/or physical connection of internal areas and the street.
- FRtta TIPTOE ARCHITECTURE** 60% of buildable area – 60% pervious ground.
- FRcth COMMUNITY TREEHOUSE** Vertical development of public spaces.
- FRpgr PERVIOUS GROUNDS** Max. 20% of paved surface + use of SUDS
- FRgms GREEN MOVES** Landscaping based on weeds and spontaneous vegetation.
- FRbbt BACKBUILT** New constructions as party walls.

## No Man's Land

The vacant lots are internal to the city yet external to its everyday use<sup>4</sup>. They remain unproductive, waiting for some economic attention to become *useful*. At least if we think of them from a human perspective. If we separate from that perspective, however, they appear to be extremely productive for other agents and functions. First and foremost, as the nodes of a neglected ecological network serving insects, birds and soils.

With some minor operations, we propose to draw a different kind of attention on these voids, just the right amount to provide this network with a sense of identity and public recognition. In so doing, the fascination they elicit as spaces of otherness may trigger appropriation and preservation.

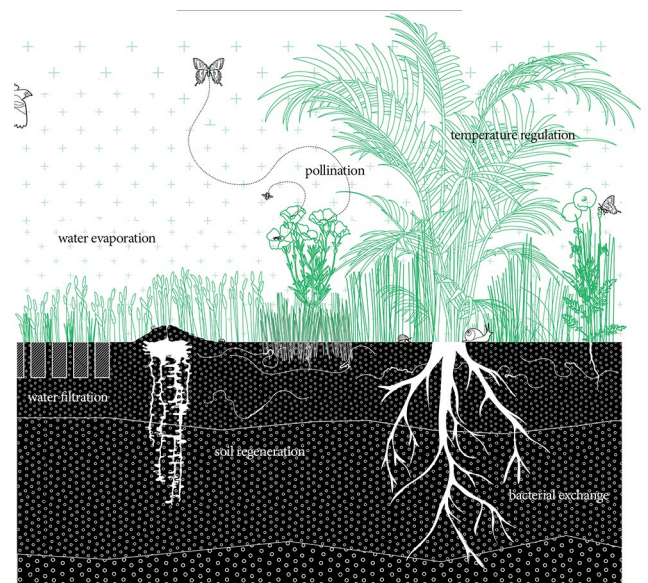
<sup>4</sup> Ignasi Solá-Morales, "Terrain Vague", in *Anyplace* (New York: Anyone Corporation, 1995)



## Deep Surfaces

This project is all about the surface. A cosmetic intervention of the vacant areas on and around the site.

Like all cosmetics, however, the intervention goes beyond what is visible: it moistures the skin –or, in other words, it hydrates the soil by using pervious paving solutions that filter water– it freshens the air around –the preservation and enhancement of big green areas mobilize air and humidity–, and it is eye-catching –the embellished vacant lots turn into seductive devices that aspire to gather both attention and collective activities. The shade of the intervention is terracotta: a range of red colors that connect to the brick facades that wrap most buildings in Carabanchel.



## Fit Architecture

The proposed agreement between the built and the void establishes clear conditions for the new constructions: they must get in shape, slimming down as much as possible in order to make room for the void. And yet, without renouncing its ability to repair the urban fabric and to catalyze public activities.

Inevitably, such agreement results in a compression of built cubic meters with important programmatic implications: different functions will need to coexist within the same spaces. Also, those functions typically associated with public space: playgrounds, courts, plazas... To facilitate this coexistence, the new buildings provide a variety of outdoor and indoor spatial conditions using a repetitive tectonic palette.

[fig.5, 6]

Wastelandscapes regeneration tactics



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Fitness Urbanity<sup>5</sup>

Generally, fitness is defined as the act of shaping the body through training and workout. If we think of it from an urban and architectural perspective, however, fitness invites us to consider the ways in which we engage the cities and buildings that we use on an everyday basis ¿How are the structures that shape our bodies? ¿To what extent do they contribute to enjoyable routines? ¿How do they influence our physical and mental health?

In an area booming with spaces that focus on the mind (art galleries, studios, workshops, etc.) the intervention focuses on the body: 50% of the proposed cubic meters are devoted to sports, leisure, play, seduction.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Runting and Maros Krivy, "Fitness Urbanism", *Platform Austria Blog*, 2020.

