

Vacant/Wild/Ruined: Feral Urbanism

ARCH/LAND 554C | Spring 2021



A house in St. Louis' Fountain Park neighborhood, summer 2019. Photograph by the instructor.

**Graduate School of Architecture, Urban Design, and Landscape Architecture
Washington University in St. Louis**

**Location: Hybrid
Time: Fridays, 8:30 – 11:30 AM**

Instructor: Michael Allen
Senior Lecturer in Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design
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Description

What urban design practices are needed in areas that have declined, are in decline or simply are not growing? What if we let the city decline or go wild? What if we look at decay, ruin, wilderness and depopulation as something other than a crisis? This seminar examines experimental urban land management and preservation practices - practices that embrace systems of emergent, wild and unexpected urbanism, but also raise questions of austerity and democratic rights to the land. Topics that readings and field work will illuminate include state landbanking and autonomous land trusts, demolition and building deconstruction, historic preservation, managed depletion or urban "rightsizing", wilderness conservation and greenway creation, urban agriculture, homesteading in vacant houses, experimental preservation, land art and more. Students will develop projects for actual sites on location in St. Louis. Course meetings will be hybrid, divided between online meetings and in-person field work.

Readings

Students should obtain copies of these books:

- Keller Easterling, *Subtraction* (Sternberg Press, 2014)

All other required and suggested readings are accessible on Canvas.

Aims

This seminar aims to cover an overview of practices and theories related to the development of cities, with an emphasis on those that engage decline, depletion, right-sizing, planned shrinkage, demolition, landbanking, re-wilding and historic preservation. Through study, the course will introduce ways of identifying land management problems and priorities in a declining city (such as St. Louis) and distinguishing them from those of a growing city. This understanding will support the evaluation of the appropriateness of different policies on land use, demolition and open space, and the development of place-specific hypothetical proposals of new best practices for St. Louis.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Explain and comprehend the concepts of abandonment, depopulation, right-sizing, shrinking cities, landscape urbanism, adaptive reuse, brownfields, land-banking and experimental preservation.
2. Develop practices that accommodate growth (development) and shrinkage (anti-development) as separate and sometimes simultaneous management regimes, not necessarily as an opposition;
3. Explain and comprehend how American cities have come to a point where they are shrinking in both built mass and population;
4. Explain and comprehend the differences in economics between shrinking cities and growing cities, and articulate the sets of design needs in both types of cities;
5. Develop an ability to harness abandonment, building ruin, vacancy and wilding as productive practices.

Schedule

Friday, January 29: Introductions

Introductions

Friday, February 5: Myths and Realities of Urban Decline

Reading:

Team Four, *Technical Memorandum 6B* (1975).

Patrick Cooper-McCann, "The Trap of Triage: Lessons from the 'Team Four Plan,'" *Journal of Planning History* 1.21 (2015).

Brent D. Ryan, "Rightsizing Shrinking Cities: The Urban Design Dimension," *The City After Abandonment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

Jason Hackworth, "Saving the City to Kill It," *Manufacturing Decline: How Racism and the Conservative Movement Crush the American Rust Belt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

Friday, February 12: City/Nature: Organization and Division

Readings:

Ann Whiston Spirn, "City and Nature," *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

Alan Weisman, "The City Without Us," *The World Without Us* (New York: Picador, 2007).

Michel Serres, Excerpt from *Malfeasance: Appropriation Through Pollution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Friday, February 19 – NO MEETING

Friday, February 26: Capital, Policy and Race

Readings:

Alan Mallach, "The Rise and Fall of the American Industrial City," *The Divided City: Poverty and Prosperity in Urban America* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2018).

Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, "The Urban Crisis is Over—Long Live the Urban Crisis!" *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Patrick Sharkey, "Neighborhoods and the Transmission of Racial Inequality," *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Friday, March 5: Field Visit #1: Old North St. Louis, Pruitt-Igoe Site

Reading:

Colin Gordon, "City of Blight: The Limits of Urban Renewal in Greater St. Louis," *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Future of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Anna Lownhaupt Tsing, "The Life of the Forest," *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015).

City Plan Commission, *A Comprehensive Plan for St. Louis* (1947).
<https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/archive/1947-comprehensive-plan/>

Midterm Proposal Due

Friday, March 12: Historic Preservation (Making Whole, Embracing Ruin)

Reading:

- J.B. Jackson, "The Necessity for Ruins," *The Necessity for Ruins* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).
- Daniela Sadler, "Counterpreservation as a Concept," *Counterpreservation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016).
- Charles Merewether, "Traces of Loss," *Irresistible Decay* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for History of Art and the Humanities, 1997).
- Jorge Otero-Pailos, "Experimental Preservation," *Places Journal* (September 2016).
<https://placesjournal.org/article/experimental-preservation/>

Friday, March 19: Field Visit #2: Two Vacant Churches

Reading:

- Dora Apel, "Ruin Terrors and Pleasures," *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press).
- Andrew Herscher, "'Blight,' Spatial Racism, and the Demolition of the Housing Question in Detroit," *Housing After the Neoliberal Turn: International Case Studies* (Leipzig: Spector, 2015).
- Raumlaborberlin, *4562 Enright Avenue* (St. Louis: Pulitzer Arts Foundation, 2016).

Friday, March 26: Landscape Urbanism (Making Sense)

Readings:

- Keller Easterling, *Subtraction*.
- Jill Desimini, "Planned Shrinkage to Formerly Urban," *Landscape Journal* 33.1 (2014).
- Alan Berger, "Drosscapes," *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).

Friday, April 2: Presentations

Student Presentations

Midterm Booklets Due

Friday, April 9: Public Policy Today

Reading:

- Alan Mallach, *The Empty House Next Door* (Lincoln Land Policy Institute, 2018).
- Asakura Robinson et al, *St. Louis Landbank Assessment* (2016).
- Keller Easterling, "Disposition," *Extrastatecraft* (New York: Verso, 2014).

Friday, April 16: Field Work #3 TBD

Reading:

- Emily Rosenman and Samuel Walker, "Tearing down the city to save it?: 'Back-door regionalism' and the demolition coalition in Cleveland, Ohio," *Environment & Planning* 48.2 (2016).

Friday, April 23: Field Work #4 TBD

Reading:

- Kevin Lynch, "The City Image and Its Elements," *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960).

Friday, April 30: Field Work #5 TBD

Reading:

Eric Zencey, "Some Brief Speculations on the Popularity of Entropy as Metaphor," *North American Review* 271.3 (September 1986).

Friday, May 6: NO FIELD WORK, STUDIO REVIEW WEEK

Friday, May 13: Final Presentations

Final Presentations – Location TBD

Final Projects Due

Assignments

Discussion Points

Each student will be responsible for leading discussion on readings in weeks 2-9, with a short presentation that presents key themes and sparks discussion. A worksheet and schedule will be distributed on the first day of the seminar. Students will double up on some dates.

Midterm Project

The midterm project requires that students develop a booklet on the readings from weeks 2-9, based on a key theme. This project will form the basis for the final project, and must be proposed before week 6. Students will present the midterm booklets and submit final drafts in week 10. The assignment will be described in a worksheet distributed in week 2.

Final Project

The final project will connect the theme of the midterm project to specific sites around the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, Old North St. Louis, St. Augustine Church, Pruitt-Igoe or another site. The project will propose and detail an exact intervention on the site that will demonstrate one of the approaches of the course: conservation, restoration or rewilding. The exact detail of this assignment will be distributed by week 6 of the seminar.

Evaluation and Grading

The required work in the seminar will include field notes, a midterm project, a final project, participation in discussion and attendance. The final grade will be based on this formula:

Midterm Project	25%
Final Project	35%
Discussion Points	20%
Attendance and Participation in Discussion	20%

Papers and work will be graded numerically out of 100 points. Final grades will be letter grades based on the following grading scale:

	Conceptual Considerations	Methodology	Craftsmanship	Integrative skills
A	New concepts are explored in original ways. Conceptual basis of project demonstrates clear grasp of complex issues (histories, social contexts, ecological issues). Project is fully developed and expresses a high level of investigative rigor.	Analysis demonstrates rigor and highly developed understanding of scope. Sophisticated and attentive design decision-making apparent throughout process. Logical, confident and iterative procedure generates design outputs that can be described and evaluated in terms of the process.	Clear connection between ideas and their investigation through careful manipulation of design representation and materials. Excellent craftsmanship displays thought and care. Clear demonstration of the importance of the artifact in design production. Attentiveness to the aesthetic of making.	New and complex issues are successfully integrated. Seamless integration of depiction and depicted. Comprehensive marshaling and conjoining of the physical, the conceptual and the representational.
B	Complex issues are adequately integrated. Project is well-developed and design outcomes show understanding of issues.	Process demonstrates adequate grasp of problems and issues. Clear use of iterative method. Source data employed throughout. Project process remains within the confines of the known.	Good quality work, with moderate appeal. Engagement with materiality of representation needs further work. Outputs would improve with greater attentiveness to quality of craft.	Design production shows real understanding of issues, problems, resources and process, but does not quite bring them all together in a unified articulation of design intent.

C	Project exhibits an inherent lack of conceptual engagement. The necessary components are gathered but are related and explored only superficially.	Clear and effective process never fully developed. Tentative and ill-defined methodology. Tendency to change from approach to approach without fully investigating any one method, suggesting uncertainty with respect to iterative procedures.	Crafted dimension of production distracts from design intent. Sloppy, ill-managed articulation of the artifact as an object. Ideas remain untransformed by the act of making.	Project remains on the level of a collection of disparate ideas and forms, weakly integrated or developed, and only marginally related to the singularity of the site, situation or program.
D	Project is inadequately developed in all areas. Heavy reliance on found materials. Project shows little or no regulation by means of conceptual thinking.	Inadequate development of project. Muddled thinking about process. Little or no clear methodological procedure utilized. No connection between design output and design process.	Poor quality or negligible craftsmanship. No sense of the development of an aesthetic. Outputs are uninspiring, timid and uncared for.	Little or no sense of the project as an interactive condition. Outcome does not relate to program, site or contexts. Failure of understanding with respect to the nature of design.

Course Communication

The course meetings will occur on Zoom, with materials posted on Canvas. Meetings with the instructor can occur on Zoom or other platform or by phone. All course meetings will be recorded with recordings posted on Box.

Field Work

There will be field work throughout the semester. These meetings will require in-person gatherings of all students who are able *and* willing. Students will be responsible for their own transportation, and instructor will distribute itineraries with meeting locations before these dates. Activities will adhere to practices of social distancing and masking. Students unable or unwilling to participate in field work will receive alternate assignments that will not require field research. Field work will be recorded for the benefit of students not attending.

Course Policies and Information for Students

This seminar operates on a pedagogical model of participatory inquiry, where all participants shape the research questions and experiential priorities of the course. The seminar requires a high degree of participation through verbal discussion while also demanding a robust schedule of readings to support exploration of themes. While the instructor will lecture and guide, the seminar is a venue for each student to present questions, findings and connections located in readings and field trips. For readings, students should make every attempt to complete readings before meeting, but if not possible, at least discern authors' key points and themes. The seminar encourages research as practice; that is, research not for memorization but for critical understanding of subjects to advance students' own educational goals. Design students should have no fear.

Seminar: *Oxford English Dictionary* definition 1.1: "A class at university in which a topic is discussed by a teacher and a small group of students." Origin: Late 19th century: from German Seminar, from Latin *seminarium* (see seminary).

Policies:

1. **ATTENDANCE POLICY:** All students should attend each class session, take notes and participate in discussions. *Only one unexcused absence is allowed. A second unexcused absence will result in automatic drop of one letter grade for the final course grade.* If a student cannot attend a session due to a conflicting academic requirement, that student should notify the instructor in writing one week prior to the session that will be missed. If a student has a medical or personal reason for absence, likewise the instructor shall be notified in writing at least prior to the start of class. When in doubt, please contact the instructor. Your grade will thank you. All field trips will occur during class time and are mandatory.

2. **PENALTIES FOR LATE WORK and REQUESTS FOR EXTENSIONS:** Late work will lose three points for each day that it is late. Requests for extensions must be made before the start of the class session before the assignment is due. No explanations submitted along with late work will suspend these policies. Always consult the instructor if in doubt.
3. **REGRADING POLICY:** There is no regrading in this seminar.
4. **REQUESTS FOR INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK ON DRAFTS AND REQUESTS TO REVISE:** Please consult the instructor if you want to receive feedback on writing before it is due.
5. **TECHNOLOGY POLICIES:** Computers and smart phones may aid course sessions by allowing students to pull up readings, websites, images or other materials to share. These devices should not be used for other purposes during class time. Absolutely no use of these devices for personal communications, web browsing or games is allowed.
- 6.

Academic Integrity

Effective learning, teaching and research all depend upon the ability of members of the academic community to trust one another and to trust the integrity of work that is submitted for academic credit or conducted in the wider arena of scholarly research. Such an atmosphere of mutual trust fosters the free exchange of ideas and enables all members of the community to achieve their highest potential.

In all academic work, the ideas, drawings, photographs, written texts and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged through citation, with the name of the author and full reference of the source. See <http://artsci.wustl.edu/~writing/plagiarism.htm> for more information on properly documenting any work or ideas that are not your own. Work that is presented as original must be, in fact, original. Faculty, students, and administrative staff all share the responsibility of ensuring the honesty and fairness of the intellectual environment at Washington University. Students must be the sole authors of their work from concept through production.

Graduate School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design students are currently governed by the Academic Integrity policy of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts: http://www.samfoxschool.wustl.edu/files/Final_12-6_Architecture%20Graduate%20AI%20Policy-1_final2.pdf. Students should become familiar with the guidelines and policies of the university and school regarding academic integrity and misconduct. Any questions or concerns should be immediately addressed. Your instructors, advisors and department faculty are available to help students understand the Academic Integrity Policy, how to avoid plagiarism and its serious consequences by learning to cite sources correctly and leaving plenty of time to complete assignments. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance with any concerns in these regards.

Intentional plagiarism may result in a failing grade for this class. If you are not certain what constitutes plagiarism, please ask your instructor.

Resources for Students

1. **DISABILITY RESOURCES:** If you have a disability that requires an accommodation, please speak with instructor and consult the **Disability Resource Center** at Cornerstone (cornerstone.wustl.edu/). Cornerstone staff will determine appropriate accommodations and will work with your instructor to make sure these are available to you.
2. **WRITING ASSISTANCE:** For additional help on your writing, consult the expert staff of The Writing Center (writingcenter.wustl.edu) in Olin Library (first floor). It can be enormously helpful to ask someone outside a course to read your essays and to provide feedback on strength of argument, clarity, organization, etc.
3. **THE UNIVERSITY'S PREFERRED NAME POLICY FOR STUDENTS**, with additional resources and information, may be found here: registrar.wustl.edu/student-records/ssn-name-changes/preferred-name-policy/preferred-name-policy-student/.
4. **ACCOMMODATIONS BASED UPON SEXUAL ASSAULT:** The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations to students who are victims of sexual assault. Students are eligible for

accommodation regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. Depending on the specific nature of the allegation, such measures may include but are not limited to: implementation of a no-contact order, course/classroom assignment changes, and other academic support services and accommodations. If you need to request such accommodations, please direct your request to Kim Webb (kim_webb@wustl.edu), Director of the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center. Ms. Webb is a confidential resource; however, requests for accommodations will be shared with the appropriate University administration and faculty. The University will maintain as confidential any accommodations or protective measures provided to an individual student so long as it does not impair the ability to provide such measures.

If a student comes to me to discuss or disclose an instance of sexual assault, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, or if I otherwise observe or become aware of such an allegation, I will keep the information as private as I can, but as a faculty member of Washington University, I am required to immediately report it to my Department Chair or Dean or directly to Ms. Jessica Kennedy, the University's Title IX Coordinator. If you would like to speak with the Title IX Coordinator directly, Ms. Kennedy can be reached at [\(314\) 935-3118](tel:3149353118), jkennedy@wustl.edu, or by visiting her office in the Women's Building. Additionally, you can report incidents or complaints to Tamara King, Associate Dean for Students and Director of Student Conduct, or by contacting WUPD at [\(314\) 935-5555](tel:3149355555) or your local law enforcement agency.

You can also speak confidentially and learn more about available resources at the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center by calling [\(314\) 935-8761](tel:3149358761) or visiting the 4th floor of Seigle Hall.

5. BIAS REPORTING: The University has a process through which students, faculty, staff and community members who have experienced or witnessed incidents of bias, prejudice or discrimination against a student can report their experiences to the University's Bias Report and Support System (BRSS) team. See: brss.wustl.edu

6. MENTAL HEALTH: Mental Health Services' professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends or family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression. See: shs.wustl.edu/MentalHealth

Disclaimer

The instructor reserves the right to make modifications to this information throughout the semester.