

Vacant/Wild/Ruined: Feral Urbanism

ARCH/LAND 554C | Spring 2020



Ruined houses on the 1400 block of Madison Street, Old North, St. Louis, Missouri USA. Photograph: Michael R. Allen, 2017.

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

**Location: Weil Hall 120
Time: Fridays, 8:30 – 11:30 AM**

Instructor: Michael Allen
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Description

What urban design practices are needed in areas that have decline, 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. With foundational readings as guide, students will explore topics of state landbanking and autonomous land trusts, managed depletion (including St. Louis' infamous "Team Four" memorandum), wilderness conservation and "greenway" creation, agricultural land reclamation, homesteading in and deconstruction of vacant buildings, tactics for fighting absentee owners and experimental preservation practices. Starting with grounding readings in principles of the American orientation to wilderness, ecological vitality and urbanism, the seminar explores the modern history of efforts to harness decline, vacancy, depletion and no-growth as productive forces. The seminar will root itself in Old North St. Louis, a neighborhood in St. Louis that lost over 60% of its peak population but has continued to thrive. Students will work on projects serving Old North's ongoing efforts to harness urban conditions for a sustainable, just and vibrant future.

The seminar will meet both in our classroom in Weil Hall and at Central Print, 2624 N. 14th Street in Old North St. Louis. Each session header on the syllabus denotes where that session meets. Students must provide their own transportation, and carpooling will be discussed in the first session.

Readings

Students should obtain copies of these books:

- Keller Easterling, *Subtraction* (Sternberg Press, 2014)
- Michel Serres, *Malfeasance* (Stanford University Press, 2011)

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 17 (Vacancy, Wilderness, Ruin: Defining Terms) – Weil Hall

Introductions

Friday, January 24 (The Myths and Realities of Urban Decline) – Weil Hall

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).

Reflection #1 Due

Friday, January 31 (Introduction to Old North St. Louis) - ONSL

Tour of Old North St. Louis – with Matt Fernandez, neighborhood resident.

Reading:

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).

Andrew Hurley, "An Experiment in North St. Louis," *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

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, February 7 (What is Blight? What is Ruin? What is Renewal?) - ONSL

Tour of Pruitt-Igoe and NGA sites.

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/>

Chris Naffziger, "A Day in the Life of a Doomed St. Louis Neighborhood," *St. Louis Magazine* (June 16, 2016).
<https://www.stlmag.com/history/st-louis-place-nga-neighborhood-harris/>

Reflection #2 Due

Friday, February 14 and Friday, February 21 – No Class, Instructor Away

Friday, February 28 (Rebuilding and Reusing) - ONSL

Tour of Old North St. Louis and St. Louis Place buildings – with Matt Fernandez, neighborhood resident.

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).

Eric Klinenberg, "The Other Side of 'Broken Windows'" (*The New Yorker*, 23 August 2018).

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-other-side-of-broken-windows>

Friday, March 6 (Current Trends in Policy and Practice) – Weil Hall

Panel discussion on vacancy policy and practice in St. Louis – with Jason Deem, Principal of South Side Spaces; Eltoreon Hawkins, Finest 15; Dana Malkus, Professor of Law, St. Louis University; Sean Thomas, St. Louis Development Corporation.

Reading:

Keller Easterling, *Subtraction*.

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

Reflection #3 Due

Friday, March 13 – No Class, Spring Break

Friday, March 20 (Property, Inhabitation and Land) – ONSL

Reading:

Michel Serres, *Malfeasance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Reflection #4 Due

Friday, March 27 (Hypervacancy and the Limits of Policy) – ONSL

Guest: Matt Fernandez, neighborhood resident.

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 3 (Open Space as Productive Urbanism) – ONSL

Guest: Matt Fernandez, neighborhood resident.

Reading:

Patricia Heyda, "Erasure Urbanism," *Architecture Is All Over* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

Michael Allen, "The Production of a New Urban Commons: Landbanking, Stormwater and Public Participation in St. Louis" [draft manuscript].

Reflection #5 Due

Friday, April 10 (Demolition and Deconstruction as Productive Urbanism) – ONSL

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).

Emilie Evans, "Preservation and Rightsizing: Strategic Demolition in Detroit," *Preservation Leadership Forum* (July 26, 2013)

<https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2013/07/26/preservation-and-rightsizing-strategic-demolition-in-detroit>

Reflection #6 Due

Friday, April 24: Final Review – Weil Hall

Student Presentations

Thursday, April 30 (7:00PM): Final Exhibition - ONSL

Attendance is mandatory.

Friday, May 8

Final project is due by 11:59PM.

Assignments

Reflections

There are six required reflection papers. These should be no more than 750 words, and should be responding to seminar readings and activities. Each reflection should start with a core question prompted by the seminar – what is *not* fully explained by the readings and activities. Think of this question as the one you hope to answer the next week – something direct and immediate that you want answered. Use the reflection to work out why you are asking that, and what supports possible answers.

Midterm Project

The midterm project will consist of an essay relating course readings on one of the three themes (vacancy, wilderness and ruin) to a specific vacant site in Old North selected in seminar. The assignment will be distributed in the second week. The essay will be at least 8 pages in length. There will be a poster of 11" x 17" that accompanies the essay and draws its key content into a format that could be displayed at a public meeting.

Final Project

The final project will be a proposition for a specific site, building or condition in Old North and will be presented through a display board that will be submitted for final review and printed and publicly displayed at the April 30 exhibition. The assignment will be distributed after midterm. The assignment should be submitted as a PDF file via email to the instructor by the final due date.

Evaluation and Grading

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

Midterm Project	25%
Final Project	35%
Reflections	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

In addition to class time, course communication will occur through email. The instructor will send notifications of amendments to the syllabus and confirm field trip driving plans through email, so please check email before each class period to stay apprised of any changes. Canvas will only be used for a repository of readings and assignments.

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 facilitate, 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).

Inclusive Learning Environment: The best learning environment—whether in the classroom, studio, laboratory, or fieldwork site—is one in which all members feel respected while being productively challenged. At Washington University in St. Louis, we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive atmosphere, in which all participants can contribute, explore, and challenge their own ideas as well as those of others. Every participant has an active responsibility to foster a climate of intellectual stimulation, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, questions, personal backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, although instructors bear primary responsibility for its maintenance.

A range of resources is available to those who perceive a learning environment as lacking inclusivity, as defined in the preceding paragraph. If possible, we encourage students to speak directly with their instructor about any suggestions or concerns they have regarding a particular instructional space or situation. Alternatively, students may bring concerns to another trusted advisor or administrator (such as an academic advisor, mentor, department chair, or dean). All classroom participants—including faculty, staff, and students—who observe a bias incident affecting a student may also file a report (whether personally or anonymously) utilizing the online Bias Report and Support System.

1. ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is mandatory, and will be documented for all course meetings. Sam Fox School students are expected to arrive ready to participate and be fully engaged in the day's coursework during the entire scheduled class period. Participation in major critiques and reviews by all students is essential to the development of all of students. Failure to do so will have an impact on your final grade.

Following university policy, class will begin promptly with the start time listed. Students are allowed two unexcused absences. After two unexcused absences, students will receive one full letter grade penalty for each subsequent absence. Three late arrivals and/or early departures will equal one absence. If a student misses more than 20 minutes of a class, they are considered absent. Missing a review or critique equals two absences. If a student must miss a critique, please inform the professor beforehand. Any student who misses class is responsible for contacting a fellow student to find out what they missed, for making up all work, and for being prepared for the next class. In the case of severe medical or family emergencies, contact the Associate Dean of Students Georgia Binnington as soon as possible at gbinning@wustl.edu or 314.935.6532.

2. PENALTIES FOR LATE WORK and REQUESTS FOR EXTENSIONS

Late work will lose a half-letter grade for each week that it is late, after being graded (so a B paper turned in one week late is a B- paper). 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. POLICIES ON MISSED EXAMS, MAKE-UP EXAMS OR QUIZZES

There are no exams in this seminar.

4. REGRADING POLICY

There is no regrading in this seminar.

5. REQUESTS FOR INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK ON DRAFTS AND REQUESTS TO REVISE

Students should make every effort to consult with the instructor before submitting work. The instructor is available during office hours, by appointment and by email to review ideas for the papers.

6. GRADE DISPUTE POLICY

The Sam Fox School aims to provide each student with a fair assessment of their academic work and studio. Students have the right to dispute their overall course grade (not individual assignments) if they believe that grade does not accurately reflect the quality of their work. A grade dispute must be submitted to the faculty member who assigned the grade within 30 days of receipt of the grade. The School stresses that every effort to resolve this dispute be made by the faculty and student involved. A student's eligibility for advancement in sequential coursework requires timely resolution of the grade dispute. For more information visit https://samfoxschool.wustl.edu/files/Greivance%20Policy_Update%202019.pdf.

7. TECHNOLOGY POLICIES

Computers or other electronic devices, including "smart pens" (devices with an embedded computer and digital audio recorder that records the classroom lecture/discussion and links that recording to the notes taken by the student), may be used by students at the discretion of the faculty member to support the learning activities in the classroom. These activities include taking notes and accessing course readings under discussion. If a student wishes to use a smart-pen or other electronic device to audio record lectures or class discussions, they must notify the instructor in advance of doing so. Permission to use recording devices is at the discretion of the instructor, unless this use is an accommodation approved by Disability Resources.

Nonacademic use of laptops and other devices and use of laptops or other devices for other coursework is distracting and seriously disrupts the learning process for other people in the classroom. Neither computers nor other electronic devices are to be used in the classroom during class for nonacademic reasons or for work on other coursework. Nonacademic use includes emailing, texting, social networking, playing games, instant messaging, and use of the Internet. Work on other coursework may include, but is not limited to, use of the Internet, writing papers, using statistical software, analyzing data, and working on quizzes or exams. The nonacademic use of cell phones during class time is prohibited, and they should be set on silent before class begins. In the case of an emergency, please step out of the room to take the call. The instructor has the right to hold students accountable for meeting these expectations, and failure to do so may result in a loss of participation or attendance points, a loss of the privilege of device use in the classroom, or being asked to leave the classroom. Visit <https://sites.wustl.edu/insidesfs/it/> for more information.

8. LICENSE FOR NON-EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO REPRODUCE AND DISTRIBUTE

Michael Allen has non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute work produced in this class as part of a publication or body of work, which may include products from this course or other works. Students retain ownership of all rights held under copyright. This permission is revocable for 3 months following the conclusion of this course via notification in writing to Michael Allen.

9. ETHICS/VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Ethical behavior is an essential component of learning and scholarship. Students are expected to understand, and adhere to, the University's academic integrity policy: wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html. Students who violate this policy will be referred to the Academic Integrity Policy Committee. Penalties for violating the policy will be determined by the Academic Integrity Policy committee, and can

include failure of the assignment, failure of the course, suspension or expulsion from the University. If you have any doubts about what constitutes a violation of the Academic Integrity policy, or any other issue related to academic integrity, please ask the instructor.

- Always cite sources when ideas are presented and/or language that was developed by another individual, including material from class lectures and discussions.
- Violation of this policy includes collaborating on assignments where collaboration is not allowed and/or utilizing notes, texts, etc. on any assignment where use of such materials is not allowed.
- 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. If a student uses a device in such a manner, that student's participation grade will be reduced by three points for each infraction. If a student has an urgent need to communicate, the student should leave the seminar room to call, email or text. There will be no penalty.

10. RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

The Sam Fox School recognizes the individual student's choice in observing religious holidays that occur during periods when classes are scheduled. Students are encouraged to arrange with their instructors to make up work missed as a result of religious observance, and instructors are asked to make every reasonable effort to accommodate such requests.